

A letter to my friend Francio Guadeloupe

Sandew Hira

January 1 2014

Dear friend,

Let me start by wishing you and your family a very healthy 2014.

I was so pleased to see that you did want to engage in a public discussion with me on such important issues as the struggle against racism in the Netherlands.

After our educative debate on February 27 2011 – which we both enjoyed, I think – I thought we were going to have a follow-up. Your central argument in the debate was that *"the classification of human beings in black, brown and white is the result of an agreement between humans."* Our debate concluded with the question I posed to you: *"Where are the facts that show that at some point in time in history an agreement was reached between blacks and whites to classify blacks as inferior and whites as superior?"*

Since then I have not heard from you. Other friends of mine suggested that this was a typical reaction of the school of scientific colonialism, where they go into deep silence when they are challenged and have no answer to my criticism. But I objected. *"Francio is not a scientific colonialist. He is digging deep into the archives to retrieve the documents that show when, where, how and who made the agreements he was talking about."* My other friends called me naïve, but I insisted that research takes time and we should start with a positive attitude towards our opponents in debates.

Then, more than a year later on April 24 2012, I rejoiced because I heard that you had published an article in which you mentioned my name. I told my other friends: *"Francio has not forgotten me."* But when I read the article I was astonished and disappointed. There was no mention of your research into the archives to retrieve the documents that substantiates your theory of the agreement between black and white to set up the system of racism. In stead, you called for a ban on 'race'. This call was not directed towards the government to ban racial discrimination in the labour market by introducing affirmative action. It was not directed to the education system that tells lies about racism. It was directed at intellectuals and activists like me.

I was shocked to read that you attributed some stupid statements to me about *"pink people who are guilty of racism until otherwise proven."*

My other friends concluded: *"Francio is telling you what white intellectuals from the school of scientific colonialism haven been telling you all the time: 'shut up about race'."*

But I still would not agree with them. *"You don't know Francio as I do,"* I replied. *"There must be a rational explanation for his behavior. He has the right to have a different opinion. If only we could have time and space to discuss our differences, than things will be all right."*

In my reply to your article I asked you for specific quotes from my works to corroborate your statements. I thought that I was mistaken. How could I be so stupid? I normally never use such language. I must admit that I work under quite some stress, so I might have made this mistake. After all, we are all human beings. I was now adamant that when I receive your quotes of my mistakes I would openly apologize for it and make the necessary corrections.

But much to my sadness I never received your specifications. I just could not believe it. A friend whom I hold in such high esteem is not helping me to correct obvious mistakes which I supposedly had made according to him. What a disappointment!

So when a friend of mine told me that you had published a very emotional, personal and sensitive article on Facebook in which you mentioned me again, I said to them: *"You see, I told you so. With Francio it takes time, but he does not forget me. He has made public the specifications of my stupid*

quotes. I will immediately put out a rectification." That friend replied: *"I suggest that you read the article first before you rejoice."*

And then I read that article. I was so moved about the story on Yusuf and his little baby. I learned more about your youth (you never mentioned it to me), your preferences for certain music styles (we have similar taste for music) and your love for fellow human beings. During the reading of the article I felt a deep and hearth-warming connection with you, my friend. Especially your eulogy for your friend Yusuf was so moving.

But then I came across a paragraph where you linked me to the murder of Yusuf. I was accused of framing the death of Yusuf in an Us versus them framework. I could not believe my eyes. I never knew Yusuf, who was a wonderful human being. I know what it is to lose a brother by murder. I could connect with the family of Yusuf. But here I was connected in a way I could never have imaged.

My other friends reacted: *"Sandew, you are naïve. This guy is the typical 'House Negro' who is pushed forward to attack the 'Field Negroes' like you."*

I reacted vehemently: *"No, no, no, other friends, not Francio! You don't know him as I do. I will write a reply and then you will see that everything will be all right and that you are mistaken, my other friends."*

So I wrote my reply and published it on Facebook and the website of IISR.

And very soon I got your reaction. My hearth was immediately filled with joy and sadness.

Through the Facebook chatroom you sent me the following message on December 29 2013 (I will never forget the day): *"Bon jour. Keep awakening the better angels in others and thyself. Seasons Greetings. I read your reply. Unfortunately I can't really reply thoroughly as I am leaving the Netherlands in January for 3 years. Walk Light my friend...."*

As you have seen, I immediately sent you a warm message, my friend: *"Take care and all the best in your new ventures...."*

I sent your reply to my other friends (I felt like walking light on clouds in heaven) and added: *"You see, that is my Francio! He wants to take up all the points in our conversation of the last two years. He will come up with the documents from the archives to prove his theory. He will come up with the citations where I made stupid statements so I can correct them. But unfortunately he as an anthropologist has to do field work and will leave for a place where there is no internet to do participatory observation for three years."*

My joy was mixed with grief when I was picturing you deep in the Amazone rain forest learning the language of undiscovered indigenous people and living without electricity, laptop and internet. What a sacrifice for science! *"But that is who he is, everything for science,"* I told my friends.

My other friends are cynical (I don't like cynicism at all). They said: *"He is not going to the Amazone rain forest for participatory observation among the indigenous people. He is going to the sun, sand and beaches of the Caribbean where they do have Internet. He just has no answer to your reply and your questions."*

Sometimes I doubt whether to label my other friends as 'friends'. I can not stand their cynicism.

And you proved me right. Because you did not keep me waiting for long and send me a reply through Facebook. Again I felt encouraged by you. You do want to set an educational discourse with me.

On December 30 at 23:37 you send this message via Facebook: *"Dear Sandew Hira. I do not know how to thank you for alerting me that there is some sleek scoundrel out there pretending to be me. This impostor that you rightfully attack in your diatribe uses my name and even writes essays that strongly resemble mine; essays that you find it your duty to attack as they endorse anti-black racism. I do not know how he has done so, but seemingly he has managed to hack your computer and send you his distorted writings. I am sure you can find the originals. So one example will suffice."*

Now my essay *"geloof in ras is onuitroeibaar"* (the indestructible belief in race) was an intervention in the debate on secularism versus religion in the Netherlands. My argument there was that "the religion" to which all of us (those promoting secularism, post-secularism, and religion) ought to do develop an anti-religious attitude was that of race; the religion of our inherited transmodern condition (a condition that emerged due to the colonial adventures and anti-colonial struggles). It makes us believe that we need to use race (for it is seemingly indestructible) in order to speak and tackle racism. Here is what I wrote (originally in Dutch): *"Nederlandse intellectuelen vragen me vaak waarom ik zo weinig belangstelling toon voor het debat over seculiere versus religieuze identiteit. Mijn antwoord luidt elke keer hetzelfde. De verdedigers van beide posities zijn onwetende aanhangers van één en hetzelfde geloof: de religie van de moderniteit. Deze religie staat voor de algemene overtuiging dat we de demon "ras" niet kunnen uitbannen. Ik zie het als mijn taak om dit*

geloof – deze handelingsgewoonte – te vernietigen en ik wil mijn 'mede-intellectuelen' oproepen om hieraan bij te dragen."

Now the impostor seemingly sent you, Sandew Hira, a truncated version of this essay in which he argues that (and I quote you here, or is it him!)"[the] usual strategy to point at racists, so-called racist and victims of racism is not that we have to deal with race in another way. We should stop altogether with this thing."...You can imagine my surprise! For in the original essay this is what I wrote "niet dat we anders met ras om moeten gaan. We moeten er helemaal mee ophouden! Wat we moeten doen, is de mechanismen onklaar maken die leiden tot een 'seconдарisatie' van delen van de Nederlandse bevolking in sociaal en economisch opzicht. Alle verdedigers van secularisme en religie die dit onderschrijven, zijn van harte welkom om aan dit politieke project mee te werken. I claimed thus that we needed to develop anti-religious attitude towards race in order truly tackle the symbolic and economic secundarization of downpressed sections in the Netherlands. So again check the originals.

But of course a more thorough account of my ideas on racism can be found in a radio interview I gave on the matter in 2012. Just before the organization of the "Whatever Happened to Racism in Netherlands conference" in which we invited Paul Gilroy of LSE and had contributions of anti-racists activists of the first hour such as Patricia Kearsenhout, Paul Mepschen, Knoledge Cesare, Peter Geschiere, Jordi Halfman, Amade McCharek, Raul Balai, Dorien Nagler, Stasjafari, etc. Though it was initiative of the University of Amsterdam it developed into a cooperative venture involving Tine Davids of the Radboud University and Yvon van der Pijl of Utrecht University with the New Urban Collective contributing from out of Free University of Amsterdam. Since I do not wish that these persons, and the many others who work with me, be socially scarred by the impostor pretending to be me, I advice you to listen to the interview. And once again thank you Sandew Hira, your sincerity is much appreciated.

Finally you clarified a lot of misunderstanding that existed in my mind. It was not you, who put forward the theory of the mutual agreement between black and white to institutionalized racism. It was this scoundrel you are talking about. It was not you who attributed the statement about "pink people" and framing the murder of Yusuf in an Us versus Them framework. It was this scoundrel. You can image my relief when I read you clarification.

But then you came up with a surprise. I was the one attributing false statements to you! Well, my dear friend, let me start by apologizing. The last thing I want to do is to put false statements in your mouth. If I have done that unknowingly (I would never do it knowingly), let it be known that I should not have done it and should correct it, so that people know it was never my intention to misquote you.

Now here is the Dutch text I used from the article of this scoundrel you mentioned from "Het geloof in ras is onuitroeibaar". The Dutch tekst reads as follows: "Dus mijn antwoord op de reactie van de Actor Network Theory op de gebruikelijke strategie om racisten, vermeende racisten en slachtoffers van racisme aan te wijzen, is niet dat we anders met ras om moeten gaan. We moeten er helemaal mee ophouden!"

My truncated translation was that your answer to the "usual strategy to point at racists, so-called racist and victims of racism is not that we have to deal with race in another way. We should stop altogether with this thing."

I argue against your proposition that we should stop altogether with talking about "race". That proposition is what scores of Dutch scholars are saying. I don't agree.

Now I have to admit that my English is very poor. But in your English translation which you provided me at my request you use the same terms: "*We should not do race differently, but we should not do it at all.*"

Now this is where we have fundamental disagreements, my friend. I do think that race matters very much in this society.

I do think that we need to attack the racist infrastructure in this country by talking about the nature of race and racism, the legacy of slavery and colonialism. I think that abolishing terms will not lead to the abolishment of social reality. If our children are not getting a job because of the color of their skin or their religion, than we should attack that ideology of racism that makes this possible. Teaching our children that using another term will get them a job is in my opinion a fruitless and naïve strategy.

Of course we have our differences, but we can still be friends. Finally I know that there is somebody out there using your name, publishing articles that attack me and using your Facebook account. It does clarify my confusion. Thank you so much for this clarification.

As a final point, my dear friend, I have a small and insignificant request. I need urgent advice. I have seen in your eulogy of Yusuf that you have linked me to his murder. You are a learned man, humble and modest, who does not take his social status too seriously. You must have heard of the theory of Stuart Hall regarding encoded and decoded messages. One aspect of the theory is that messages can change in content in the process of its transmission. So it can go like this.

Message 1: "Have you heard? Yusuf is murdered!"

Message 2: "Sandew Hira is linked to his murder. He uses an Us versus Them framework."

Message 3: "Who is Sandew Hira?"

Message 4: "He is the man who killed Yusuf..."

This is how things can go according to Hall's method of communication. Now my question is: "Should I take his model as a serious theory of communication" and ask the scoundrel who wrote the eulogy in your name to explicitly denounce the link between Yusuf and me, or should I consider it as irrelevant and leave it like that. I appreciate your learned advice on this unimportant matter.

So my friend, you will be leaving me. I wish you all the best in your new ventures. I am still confused whether you will be in the Amazone rain forest or the sunny beaches of the Caribbean, but I will soon find out via Facebook.

I do hope you will find time to send me the documents from the archive regarding the agreement on instituting racism. As for the other articles that falsely attributes quotes to me, I consider it my duty to help you to find and unmask that scoundrel that poses himself as Francio Guadeloupe, my dear friend from the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

With extra black greetings

Your brother and trusted friend

Sandew Hira