

# **Martin Luther King Lecture**



**7 December 2022**

**Civil Disobedience**

Dear guests,

Thank you for attending the Martin Luther King Lecture 2022 on Civil Disobedience.

In this booklet you can find the English translations of tonight's performances.

On behalf of the Martin Luther King Lecture Foundation, The Hague University of Applied Sciences and the Free University of Amsterdam, we hope you will be inspired and empowered tonight. We are all change makers.

Kind regards,  
Justice & Peace

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**Speaker: Clarice Gargard**

Title – Why, Resistance?

Ahmed, the friendliest and most erudite activist I've ever seen, and his neighbours, are resisting the gentrification of Rotterdam Zuid, a working-class neighbourhood where a majority of people with migrant background live. As is shown in my documentary *Ga Terug en Haal Het* or *Remember What You Forgot*, that I worked on with many others, he is forced to watch as the homes around him crumble back to dust and to see his neighbourhood change - to accommodate the new, rich, and often white inhabitants.

He puts himself through so much.

“Why?” I asked him. “What is the point of your resistance?”

It's the same question Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about in the Birmingham Jail letter that inspired today's lecture. Why is resistance or civil disobedience (as these are interchangeable to me) necessary? Why do we or should we do it?

I wouldn't dare pretend to know the exact answer for MLK. However, inspired by him, as most of us who are in search of a better world, I can make the case for resistance.

Why, resistance? It's what I've based a good portion of my life's work on – I know it sounds like I'm really old, but I started pretty young.

WHO AM I

Firstly, what I've learned is that to be able to achieve anything in this world, you must know who you are. Some of you might know who I am, but it's still bad manners to not introduce yourself properly.

I Am Clarice Massa Dequin Gargard.

I come from a lineage of warriors, survivors, shamans, and healers originating from deep in the lustrous rainforest and rolling hills of Liberia. From the Vai, my mother's people, and the Bassa, my father's. As the legend tells it, my grandfather was a fierce dragon king who taught my father what it meant to be a ruler and survivor. My father studied in the United States where he had to deal with segregation and xenophobia. My mother fled alone from the war (and my father) to the United States, where I was born, to create a new life for herself. My sister fled from the second part of the war, with me, and made a home for us here in the Netherlands.

I Am A –

Survivor

Truthteller

Seeker

The Found

A Flawed human being

And Divine Creation

A Fighter

Lover

And Creator

Who Are You?

Now, we are all living in this age of resistance, revolution, change together. You can tell by the movements that have not only arisen but are being continued, as there is usually nothing new under the sun, only different ways and other levels to view it.

#### ERA OF REVOLUTION

I'm thinking of those who fight against neoliberal white supremacy – which includes islamophobia, Asian hate, and antisemitism. It is not enough to call it 'racism', because it's about a whole system and structure that uphold the value of one life, whilst they devalue another. Those of Black, brown, and other people of colour of the majority world.

I'm thinking of those who are fighting for climate justice. Not just groups like Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for Future, who, by the way, get so demonized, that their punishment for violating art in pursuit to save the earth (whether you believe it a violation or not) is extremely disproportionate to other similar 'crimes'. I'm also thinking of those looking to abolish Shell, a corporation that not only has consciously been one of the world's leading polluters for decades but is also a major violator of human rights. What they've done in Nigeria alone should be considered crimes against humanity.

I'm thinking of the Indigenous Stewards of Land whose old ways have been ridiculed, but who are the ones we can learn from the most, when attempting to restore and heal our planet and keep it inhabitable for us.

I'm thinking of the disability justice activists, who are quite literally making the future more accessible, which eventually benefits and levels the playing field for us all.

I'm thinking of those fighting for the right to exist, be and love as they are, whilst under attack, the violence at Colorado Springs being proof of that.

I'm thinking of teachers and health care workers, who have taken to the streets to ask for what they're worth, in this country where we value money more than our own well-being and those who provide it.

I'm thinking of brave resisters worldwide, like Ukraine, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iran. As the world is still watching how one person, Mahsa Jina Amini, can ignite a revolution.

Jin, Jihan, Azadi.

Resistance leading to revolution is everywhere. Yet it's important to know that these are not isolated incidents. To paraphrase writer, poet, academic and visionary Audre Lorde: 'Revolution is rarely a one-time event'.

#### KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM

This is why it's also important to know where we come from and to reckon or reconcile with the past. As you cannot be fully present, nor move forward, if you haven't retrieved what you have lost, forgotten or what was forcibly taken from you.

Sankofa.

That is perhaps one of the reasons why the Dutch government has chosen to apologize for some of the atrocities in the past, hopefully working their way up to those in the present. It is a major step forward in the struggle for liberation.

But like in any kind of relationship, an apology must be followed by action. Some sort of restoration of the harmdoing of the past or of change of behaviour in the future. Or else it's just a political performance to be absolved of guilt, without actually taking responsibility or accountability.

Rumour has it that the Great Apology will take place on the 19th of December. Nobody knows why, exactly. What I find interesting is that in Suriname some organizations have demanded a different date, Keti Koti for example, but also that King Willem Alexander be the one to apologize. And they've expressed that they'd rather not receive the apology from one of the few government officials who himself is a descendant of enslaved people. Again, this is what you risk happening when genuine gestures become political performances.

The response of some of these Afro-Caribbean organizations is an example of how resistance, civil disobedience, can reside in the grandest of movements, but also the smallest of refusals.

At times just resting (shout out to Tricia Hersey from the Nap Ministry) can become resistance. Or anything that doesn't fit into the agenda of this capitalist, white supremacist, patriarchal, queer- and transphobic, ableist oppressive system.

When your pain is rampant, sometimes even your joy becomes resistance.

Yet, people often think that you must be a hundred percent good, whatever that may mean, to resist or contribute to change. Or they adhere to the 'De meeste mensen deugen'- gospel, which tells them that everyone is already good, so it makes them avoid individual responsibility. Those are both an oversimplification of what it means to be human.

None of the great resisters, not even Martin Luther King, Jr., were flawless human beings, nor should they be. That right is reserved for Queen Beyoncé, and Queen Beyoncé only.

#### WHO IS AFRAID OF WOKE

We are all capable of great good and horrendous evil, depending on the context. Whether or not one can contribute to change is not about the performance of 'good' by the individual, but about how the individual can contribute to the collective.

You should however be willing to face your own human flaws and realize that despite or maybe because we're all flawed, you decide who you want to be and how you want to show up.

This is also why I think there is a lot of resistance to true positive change. Because it asks of you not just to question your views, but who you are, how you are showing up in the world and in which way you're contributing to its destruction or reimagining.

People fear change because of what they think they're losing, which prevents them from seeing what there is to gain.

Which is also where I believe the fear of 'woke' comes from. I don't necessarily like adhering to labels. I would say I'm anti-oppression and pro-love. But the word 'woke' stems from the Black community and means nothing more than the process of awareness around systemic and institutional justice issues. I guess if you're afraid of change because you're on the wrong side of it, being woke would scare you.

However, that doesn't mean that there isn't a darker side to the struggle for justice. It is what some call 'cancel culture'. But others with more insight would label 'accountability' or 'call out' culture.

Because we have no examples of what a just, kind, equal and sustainable world would look like, we tend to mirror the same punitive systems in search of it. Practices that tell us one must adhere to certain unspoken rules - I'm not referring to laws or occurrences of misconduct -, or else be punished and penalized disproportionately for it. Sometimes done by people in the back who shout commands at those standing directly in the line of fire.

This is something to unlearn, both in how we treat ourselves and how we treat others. 'The master's tool', as Lorde states, 'will never dismantle the master's house.' Just as self-awareness without political awareness can become narcissism, so can political awareness without self-awareness easily turn into rigid self-righteousness.

This is why I'm ultimately not impressed by who knows all of the right words, is the most vocal on issues of justice, who is the best at following the new rules and checks all the boxes. Because change is not about anything symptomatic or external.

It is not a performance to get a reward like capitalism teaches us. It happens in us and radiates out to permeate all systems of oppression – if we want change to last, at least. It tells us not just what you think should be in your mind, but what is present in your heart.

## TURNING POINT

In my documentary I try to answer the question of whether the Black Lives Matter-protests from 2020 – one of the, if not the largest antiracism uprising worldwide ever – were a tipping point. I searched feverishly for answers, in the Netherlands, Suriname and Curaçao. By telling a story about Black lives and Black resistance that isn't centred in narratives from the US, I wanted us to remember our own memories, and not just those that are most prevalent in media and Western society.

So, I spoke to and depicted Marian Markelo, Rachel Winter, André Mosis, Konrad Babel, André Reeder, Ahmed Abdellahi, Tarim Flach, Lulu Helder, Jeanne Henriquez, Gina en Lucien Lafour, Inez Liem, Malique Mohamud, Zenzy Blindeling and Dorenia Babel. Names of resistance fighters, mothers, fathers, artists, futurists, spiritualists and change makers with which we should all make acquaintance. And we should add more to the list that is already extensive, but not a part of our cultural archive, which make us forget and doomed to repeat the same mistakes.

The violence that Kick Out Zwarte Piet faced when they were in Staphorst, for example, was horrific, but it was not the first time in history something similar happened. And simultaneously, portraying the Zwarte Piet is Zwart Verdriet movement in my documentary, who started these anti-Pete protests in 1996, also shows us that we have come a long way since then.

At the end of my search, I realized the answers to my questions, as with almost everything, reside within us. That we are the ones who decide what the tipping point is, depending on the action we take and the intentions that accompany our actions. But it also depends on how well we can deal with all of the wounds and pain that is afflicted on the turbulent and obstructive road to freedom.

## THE ROAD TO TRANSFORMATION

At the end of my search, I was also reminded of the late feminist and revolutionary prophet of love bell hooks who tells us that healing must be a part of liberatory movements: love as a political act. Even in anger, love can dwell, if it is a rage that propels and not solely destroys. In the chapter Love as the practice of freedom, from her book *Outlaw Culture* (1994), she references King.

“To heal our wounded body politics, we must reaffirm our commitment to a vision of what King referred to in the essay ‘Facing the Challenge of a New Age’ as a genuine commitment

to freedom and justice for all. My heart is uplifted when I read King's essay; I am reminded where true liberation leads us. It leads us beyond resistance to transformation. King tells us that "the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community."

The moment we choose to love, we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love, we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom."

Resistance is the gateway to transformation, as hooks states, the transforming of this world. And 'another world is possible', as writer and thinker Arundhati Roy writes in *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*. "On a quiet day I can hear her breathing."

#### A DROP IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS

It can easily seem like resisting has nothing to do with you. But, if I have learned anything in my life, career, or whilst making this documentary, it is that the individual matters, but does not exist separately from the collective. That there are different forms of resistance that lead to transformation, carried out by different people who are linked, through all time and space. And that as certain as the stars in the skies linger, before and after our existence, we are all responsible and connected in our desire for change, justice, self-determination, and love. And we can all have impact.

We are but a drop in the grand scheme of things but also: We. Are. A. Drop. In. The. Grand Scheme. Of. Things.

"Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. There is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth." – Martin Luther King Jr., 'Letter from the Birmingham Jail', 1963

This is something that was true in 1963 and remains true today in 2022. Because when in history have liberties that threaten the dominion of the elite, oppressive and dehumanizing systems ever been recognized freely, when asked nicely?

Those who resist do not see what they are losing, because they are so much more focused on what there is to gain, that they remain inspired by the whispers of those possibilities, the promise of growth, change and what we can create together.

That is what has, does and will propel those who strive for freedom in whichever way they can.

Why, resist? With all of this in mind, ask yourself: how the hell can I afford not to?



**Artist: U-Shine (Uchaidani Watson)**

Title – Civil Disobedience

*We shall overcome*  
*We shall overcome*  
*We shall overcome, someday*  
*Deep in my heart*  
*I do believe*  
*That we shall overcome, someday*

If you truly love me  
You have a reason to stop hurting me

It is written love your neighbour  
And by loving you  
I fight against injustice  
Without violence  
But I do create a tension  
A tension that forces you to listen to me  
I want you to understand the world I live in  
I want you to listen  
That you show empathy  
And make steps to change the world

There is no time to wait  
The time to bring change is now  
The contractions have started  
Recognize that change is coming  
And that there is no way back

The weapon I have cuts without wounding  
It heals the body

I don't back down when water is fired upon me  
Which is meant to kill the flame inside of me  
My goal is to make the world a better place  
For me, my environment and my children

I don't mind if you call me an extremist, I'm an extremist with a good cause  
I'm here to bring justice  
To make straight what is crooked  
To heal what is broken

With my words of hope  
I ignite the fire in the hearts  
And awaken the ones who are asleep

Hand in hand  
Arm to arm  
Side by side  
We march  
The peace march  
Where we make clear that unjust laws  
Are no longer valid  
Together we sing that we shall overcome  
Together we sing that we shall overcome  
Together we sing that we shall overcome

**Artist: Soraya Shawski**

Title – Describe Liberty for Me

Describe liberty for me.

Is it the wind blowing through your hair?

The sun beams that kiss your skin?

Is it dancing through the entire night?

In a stranger's bed you come to your senses

Describe liberty for me.

Because that's what you're craving, right?

If you don't do it for me, my saviour, I will be trampled under the patriarchy

Describe liberty for me

Liberate me! Because you know exactly what I'm missing..

A world without values, like a play

Mummies for people, we will follow

With controversy, we are silent

I prescribe what freedom means to me.

because we are all writers,

not only freedom fighters.

In your eyes, we do not have any names. The crux, that you don't get – I do. Striving for what is right is done together.

There is so much to strive for, together

We will own this game, together

Stumbling over the norm, together

Getting up... looking for redefinition

Free, are we when we can be, 'we can breathe' is its fundament.

Free, are we when we don't believe that progress is coupled with the demolition of ourselves.

Growth of the community is near, when we can all harvest

So I write,

I search

and I find

It says the following:

Do not attend to the approving silences. The shrinking spaces,  
without chairs,

at tables,

for people like yourself.

Do not attend to the mundane racism hidden in small jokes. Well-meant, of course...

Disobey in your resistance. As long as equality is radical, exclusion is normal and you have the feeling that you're up against it on your own.

Make space for the doubts that will strike you. Do not give in to the discomfort, but embrace it.

Then it creeps up on you, the uneasiness.

You are 'too sensitive, so easily offended'

And yet you choose justice. Even when you struggle with your 'hypersensitivity': you are determined and confident.

In private and in public.

Sometimes you're confrontational.

Never a withdrawal when you're met with disapproval

You revolt!

Even though you're low on courage.

Even when you're sick of it

Still, you speak up:

In the beginning: softly.

Often: LOUDLY

And you'll say: although standing up for what's right is rare. Don't bother, because from now on we will call the shots and take care.

**Artist: Kershawn Rijssel (KMR)**

Title – I Make Sounds

Hiding turns into crying  
Although, that's what you'll see  
If there are social problems  
The government won't see them

With or without Islamic headscarf  
Kept in slavery or freed  
In countries where the people will listen  
They keep going through the motions

You'll see where they go through the motions  
What isn't acknowledged, does not exist  
Oeygurs in the camps, human trafficking in African Nations  
Suppressing the women, exploiting the men

A land is being ruled by corruption  
But what if you don't see corruption as corruption?  
If you're trapped daily within the stream of disfunction?  
If you're only getting dragged down and don't see your way up?

Your feelings of self love crushed in the ground  
Because your feelings aren't the same as those of your country of birth  
But what if, we just let those feelings go  
And just talk with each other

It's hard if you constantly face each other in a harsh way  
And also the unknowing have their part in this  
The game of going left and right but who'll end up in the middle  
If we can't do nothing else but hope and dream  
We see the images and the belligerency  
We feel the pain and despair  
But why would you still fight  
If your flame gets extinguished anyway?

Women have to wear the Islamic headscarves  
Or else they'll rocks at them  
Men are separated from the families  
And will never be reunited

Putin starts a war  
And breaks with peace  
Countries who don't want to  
Give their stolen treasures back

An excuse for slavery  
Doesn't get signed  
We don't actually see  
What the word 'good' really means

There is too much going on  
Within the borders and outside  
Where we see everything within a glimpse on our phone  
Forming arguments

We're supposed to be with each other  
Matter of fact, we're the world together  
The world is for everybody  
And the world will keep turning even if we stop turning around each other

So let's come together  
And let's turn hope and dreams  
Into promise and fulfilment  
Because sharing words is more important than committing violence

So I make sounds  
Today  
Because I don't know  
What tomorrow will be

I make sounds  
For the suppression  
Convincement and trading  
So the vibrations will cause commotion

I make sounds  
But not alone  
Because talking together  
Is stronger than yelling alone

I make sounds  
For who  
Doesn't want to hear  
For whose power and voice wants to lend ears

I make sounds  
So you don't have to  
And we'll unite  
In ups and downs

**Singer songwriter: Jhilani Wijsman**

Title – I Wasn't There to Witness It

So many thoughts, so many questions have been asked  
No wonder because it has barely been told,  
About seas, about land and about fields.

And now people worship the wrong heroes,  
The VOC (*United East India Company*) and the WIC (*Dutch West India Company*) were  
honoured,  
And the story of de Ruyter (*Dutch admiral*) is romanticized.  
But about slave trade the curtain falls,  
A mere one page in your history book.

(Chorus x 2)

I wasn't there to witness it,  
but I do still feel the pain.  
How degrading must that have been.  
It is not strange that this hurts,  
the grandpa of my grandpa's grandpa has experienced this.

2022, yes, even in the present,  
people can't see the link between the present and the past.  
Denial of racism, hate and discrimination,  
in a country of ethnic profiling.

Because there are also heroes,  
like Martin Luther King who told us his dream,  
and Rosa Parks who made her point without swearing.  
So do the math,  
and don't forget Anton de Krom (*resistance fighter and anti-colonialist author*).

Who used his voice,  
Joined the resistance because his skin tone did not count.  
He got accused of telling lies,  
People continue to be stubborn,  
but every story has a different side.

(Chorus x2)

I wasn't there to witness it,  
but I do still feel the pain.  
How degrading must that have been.  
It is not strange that this hurts,  
the grandpa of my grandpa's grandpa has experienced this.

So do not envy me,  
if you don't see it,

I teach about history in the form of a song.  
and really, you don't need to believe it,  
but the truth will reveal itself.

No I don't accuse,  
but look at Zwarte Piet. (*Black Pete, servant of Saint Nicolas*)  
A couple years ago he wasn't there yet,  
it may feel as if I want to confront you,  
but it's not hard to put this into perspective.