Dutch racism is a complex, paradoxical, and contested phenomenon. It has its own legacy in the Netherlands and the (former) colonies, operates in and beyond the national borders, is shaped by European and global influences, and intersects with other systems of domination. The language of Dutch racism varies historically, but these changes are not necessarily signs of progressive justice. During the second half of the last century, racism had become more subtle and difficult to pinpoint. It seemed as though the explicit adherence to race hierarchies was disappearing and that racism had become more cultural in its expression, less in your face, if still insidious. However, as we will see later in this volume, old-fashioned biological notions of “race” never disappeared, and in the Netherlands are bluntly expressed, among other ways, in offensive contemporary representations of people of African descent. At the same time, historical circumstances also changed, and in the new millennium, particularly in the wake of 9/11, cultural violence based on gendered and racially inscribed imaginations of “the Muslim” or “the veiled woman,” became one of the most visible forms of racism (Boog, Dinsbach, Donselaar, and Rodrigues; Essed, “Intolerable Humiliations”; van der Valk, Islamofobie; Aouragh, and Ghorashi in this volume). The Netherlands echoes, if not leads, a wider European trend, where offensive statements about Muslims are an everyday phenomenon. Increasingly, politicians have come to use the argument of “freedom” as much as media representatives to dismiss accusations of racism. Moreover, in the new millennium, the moral rejection of racism seems to be losing ground in Europe.

Dutch racism reflects these broader European developments (Lynch) but also has its own characteristics. In the Dutch context, where no shared discourse was
developed to address racism, one needs a plurality of registers, methods, and disciplinary approaches to study the phenomenon: sociology and anthropology as well as history; literary analysis and art history as well as psychoanalysis; discourse analysis as well as personal stories and interviews. This volume was conceived to present the necessary plurality of perspectives to capture the layered nature of Dutch racism.

Reading the various chapters of this volume is like putting together pieces of the Dutch racism puzzle where, sometimes, contributors grab for similar parts. The volume is meant to function as a written documentary, each author using the camera in a different way to capture what is felt to be important. As editors, we do not necessarily agree with all the points of view, but that is exactly what we wanted to achieve: within the paradigm that acknowledges the systemic nature of racism in the Netherlands, there are different elements competing for relevance, truth value, and explanatory power. Together, these contributions offer a range of voices and visions that are not often acknowledged in the Netherlands. They reveal illuminating insights in the two closely related questions that organize this book: what factors contribute to the complexity of Dutch racism? And why is the concept of racism so intensely contested?

Let us begin to sketch the book’s response to the first question, that of complexity, with a concrete example, which will allow us to discuss one important, convoluted characteristic of Dutch racism: the intimate relation between ignorance and denial. Recently, Dutch official and social media served as the discursive battlefield for supporters and opponents of a highly popular novel-turned-into-movie featuring a white, Jewish young man obsessed with voluptuous “negresses” (“ negerinnen”), the still commonly used terminology in the Netherlands. In her newspaper column, journalist and longtime diversity advocate Harriët Duurvoort takes issue with the argument that the film was not stereotyping black women, but rather celebrating them: “The Americans have a word for this: ignorant. It cannot be translated unambiguously as uninformed or naïve. It refers to not knowing something, but also not wanting to know. Something that, perhaps with a bit of effort, you should know by now” (De Volkskrant 22 October 2012, transl. from Dutch, eds). Ignorance. In this volume, Halleh Ghorashi refers to the self-imposed ignorance of white Dutch people when faced with racism, and Dienke Hondius comments that the Dutch tendency to ignore “race” is the nation’s main strategy of dealing with it. It is an active form of evasion and denial. Denial. Virtually all contributors agree on this one overriding characteristic: Though not unique to the Netherlands (Wodak and van Dijk), one of the key features of Dutch racism is its denial. In the case of the novel and film, white debaters revealed themselves to be ignorant of the negation of the historical roots of the sexual exploitation of black women.

The tendency to reject colonial history as relevant for understanding contemporary sexually offensive representations of black women is not new. Decades ago, it was