

Subtheme 1: 5. Tensions between employer and employee interest in society arising from HRM  
Subtheme 2: 15. Career decisions: hireability, talent, and employability

**Drs. Sandra Bogaers**

SEIN, Faculty of Business Economics, Hasselt University, Belgium  
sandra.bogaers@uhasselt.be

**Prof. dr. Koen Van Laer**

SEIN, Faculty of Business Economics, Hasselt University, Belgium  
koen.vanlaer@uhasselt.be

**Prof. dr. Patrizia Zanoni**

SEIN, Faculty of Business Economics, Hasselt University, Belgium  
patrizia.zanoni@uhasselt.be

**‘They’re always watching’:**

**the (re)production of ethnic and class dominance through HR assessments**

Although the business case classically locates the value of ethnic diversity in its potential for superior creativity, customer service capabilities and problem-solving skills (Robinson & Dechant, 1997), critical studies have documented how in many organizations, efforts concerning ethnic diversity mainly aim to achieve superior compliance of the (ethnically diverse) workforce (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). The main value connected to compliant ethnic minority workers is their willingness to carry out jobs that ethnic majority workers refuse to do, due to the bad working conditions and low wages (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). While these explanations shed an important light on how capital-labour relations are particularly unfavourable to ethnic minority workers, more insight is needed in how employers use HRM practices to maintain such compliance in ethnic minority employees.

This research is based on an extensive qualitative research in a major international warehousing company with its headquarters in Belgium. With high labour costs and increased pressure from customers, warehousing companies try to continually devise the most effective and efficient

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work processes for their workers, leading to strong organisational pressure on the employees. Due to the precariousness, low-skilled and low-paid nature of these jobs, these jobs are often performed by ethnic minority workers. As organisational control and the construct of a compliant worker is inherently linked to the process of colonialism (Mir et al., 2003), this paper will use a postcolonial perspective to explore the modes of control and regulation on ethnic minority workers through the HR practice of assessment. As such, this research shows how assessment policies and digital monitoring tools subjugate and control the ethnic minority worker, as to (re)produce the capital-labour relation, while upholding ethnic inequality.

## References

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