

BOOK REVIEW

**Review of *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*
by Gloria Wekker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016**

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Gloria Wekker's *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* interrogates contemporary ideations of whiteness at the intersections of gender, class, religion, and sexuality. It examines denial of racial discrimination in the Netherlands while simultaneously juxtaposing it with centuries of historical and global colonial violence. Wekker analyzes how contemporary whiteness in the Netherlands (and arguably other nations that colonize) hides behind the guise of white innocence to continue social privilege, entitlement, and systematic violence, created and maintained through global colonialism, which perpetuates structural racism. Additionally, Wekker explains through embodied experiences, case studies, narratives, and interviews how the Dutch cultural archive is not a physical location of artifacts, but rather how the society thinks, engages in activities, views the world, understands attraction to others, its organization of affective and rational economies, as well as how memories, knowledge, and affect toward race within the culture is deeply embedded through systemic and institutional power hierarchies (p. 19). Finally, woven through each chapter is the Dutch representation of the self as constructed and enforced through a strict "us" (privileged members of Dutch society, i.e. white, male, middle- to high-class, and/or Christian individuals) versus "them" (any "othered" identity or body) mentality.

White Innocence is composed of five chapters. The Introduction establishes the various theoretical and methodological concepts Wekker uses throughout. The first chapter describes specific instances of everyday racism in the Netherlands and the tenacity of force that divides citizens' consciousness as being

without racism, juxtaposed upon centuries of colonial violence. The second chapter analyzes discursive patterns of systemic racism perpetuated in government agencies and higher education. The next chapter applies a psychoanalytical theoretical lens to a case study that forces conversations of both raced and gendered bodies to the forefront of academic discourse in Europe in the early 20th century. The discussion is well connected and brings everything together in chapter four, which focuses on the intersection of race, sexuality, gender, nationality, and religion, as white, gay men rose to power with the gay liberation movement under strong proclamations to assimilate into dominant Dutch culture, while simultaneously “othering” Muslims as barbaric and unwilling to assimilate into the dominant culture. The final chapter dissects discourses around Zwarte Piet (Black Pete), who is a traditional holiday character that exhibits blackface and multiple outdated, egregious stereotypes about Black people. The Coda collectively summarizes the book through an embodied experience Wekker had that solidifies how white innocence, the Netherland’s cultural archive, and national self-representation are all deeply interconnected.

This book is appropriate for anyone who is interested in critical interrogations of race, gender, religion, class, and sexuality explored through multiple and intersectional theoretical lenses. Integrating global interdisciplinary scholars, Wekker balances embodied, tangible examples with theoretical analysis in a way that is accessible for a wide variety of audiences. Immersed in the interrogation of Dutch culture, throughout *White Innocence*, Wekker specifically lays bare how whiteness and masculinity prevail as dominant identities that perpetuate imperialistic ideologies. Wekker does an exceptional job of providing historical context to better understand how the Netherlands grew to be and eventually collapsed as a colonial power. The colonial influence the Netherlands had on the global economy in the 1600s created the colonial framework that continues to infiltrate every sphere of life, including public policy, political parties, academia, as well as normalizing acceptance of systemic racism, among other areas.

As such, *White Innocence* offers a critical way of viewing contemporary interactions of whiteness with “othered” bodies. *White Innocence* challenges readers to think more critically and deeply about how we understand whiteness, as constructed and projected through colonial rule, as it intersects with other identities, specifically class, gender, and sexuality, in positions of both privilege and marginalization. Wekker carefully and ingeniously heightens a reader's awareness of everyday micro- and macro-occurrences of white innocence. It is only with this greater awareness of white innocence, the cultural archive, and cultural self-representation that possibilities to collapse and reconstruct the colonial systems begin to manifest themselves.