Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016. xiii + 226 pp. (Paper US\$ 23.95)

In *White Innocence*, Professor Gloria Wekker undertakes an exploration of what she terms a paradox in the Netherlands that lies “at the heart of the nation”: an interaction between the concept of race with gender, sexuality, and class, passionately manifested in the beliefs and actions of the white population alongside “denial, disavowal, and elusiveness” on this subject (p. 1). The book’s central thesis is that the white Dutch sense of self is a major source of the paradox, while study of this is complicated by the fact that the dominant view in Dutch society rejects the designation of whiteness as a racial or ethnic category, viewing it, rather, as an unspoken norm devoid of such characteristics. Those affirming this invoke the longstanding reputation of the Netherlands as a society remarkably tolerant toward racialized “others” such as Blacks in earlier times, and more recently Muslims. They also deny any significant legacy from Dutch colonial history.

Wekker acknowledges influences on her analytical framework, especially from Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and refers throughout the book to his concept of the existence of a “cultural archive” that provided European imperialists in earlier centuries rationales and language for their subjugation of other peoples. Citing as well Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972 [orig. 1950]), and focusing on the period of the past two decades, her book holds that ongoing societal unrest shows that the four-century-long Dutch colonial experience did mark Dutch society in ways that are still evident. She asserts that the Dutch cultural archive is located “between our ears and in our hearts and souls” (p. 19). In addition to primary and secondary literature from relevant disciplines, her research drew on popular media and her own experiences as an Afro-Surinamer whose family moved to the Netherlands before the end of the colonial period. The structure of the book revolves around selected case studies treating its main themes, with special attention to combining racism with gender studies. One chapter, devoted to gay politics, also points out how the arrival of a Muslim population of significant size has complicated the issues surrounding both race and gender, for example producing considerable political support among gays and some women in general for extreme anti-Muslim party leaders like Geert Wilders, out of fear that Muslim gains may undermine hard-fought progressive victories of gays and women in the Netherlands in recent decades.

Wekker presents three specific illustrations of paradoxes in Dutch self-representation. The first is an allegedly strong tendency to avoid being iden-

tified with migrants, even though one in six native Dutch has migrant ancestry. The second surrounds a self-image of innocent victim stemming from the German occupation during World War II, without any admission of what recent studies have shown to be limited resistance by the Dutch to the removal of Jews to concentration camps or of Dutch use of excessive violence against the struggle of their Indonesian colony for independence after the war. The third and most consequential, she submits, is deliberate omission from the educational curriculum of the considerable history of Dutch imperialism and participation in colonialism and the slave trade. On this subject Wekker is among a very few academic scholars in the Netherlands who have viewed the colonial experience as an integral part of Dutch history and culture.

The closing chapter examines the beloved, and now increasingly controversial folklore figure *Zwarte Piet* [Black Pete] as a veritable icon of the Dutch claim of innocence that inspired this book. The tenor of this chapter and a brief *Coda* that follows entitled “But What About the Captain?” offers little common ground for reconciling opposing views on the main issues this volume raises. Wekker reports an experience at a public lecture she gave that caused her to feel deep outrage: a white sociocultural worker said she was reluctantly prepared to suffer the pain of giving up this cherished Christmas tradition (which no more than 3 percent of Dutch people consider racist); but she wished at least one protestor would tell her that, while they acknowledge her pain, she was doing the right thing. The *Coda*, which further underscores the rejection of differing perspectives, recounts an abolition commemorative reading Wekker attended in Amsterdam detailing the brutal flogging to death on a slave ship of a girl the captain had already severely abused, and his exoneration by the court. It was a middle-aged white politician known to be prominent in support of ethnic minorities who asked the question that inspired the *Coda*’s title, and once more infuriated Wekker, who could only imagine that the interrogator was somehow empathizing with the captain. The curious reader is not provided with enough evidence to rule out the possibility that he, like they, might simply have wanted to know if the captain ever received his just reward.

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