WHITE INNOCENCE

PARADOXES OF COLONIALISM AND RACE

Gloria Wekker

WHITE INNOCENCE

WHITE INNOCENCE

Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race

Gloria Wekker

Duke University Press
Durham and London
2016

© 2016 Duke University Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan
Typeset in Quadraat by Copperline

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Wekker, Gloria, author.
Title: White innocence : paradoxes of colonialism
and race / Gloria Wekker.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2016. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015042542 |
ISBN 9780822360599 (hardcover : alk. paper) |
ISBN 9780822360759 (pbk. : alk. paper) |
ISBN 9780822374565 (e-book) |
Subjects: LCSH: Racism—Netherlands. |
Netherlands—Race relations. | Sexual
minorities—Netherlands.
Classification: LCC DJ92.B53 W455 2016 |
DDC 305.8009492—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015042542

Cover art: Hand-painted Delft blue plate,
Holland (details). © Christine Osborne
Pictures / Alamy Stock Photo.

To future generations of antiracist activists

To Robin, Rosa, Minne, Finn, Milan, Ceriel, Ravi, Josephine, and Lucy

To my brother Paul (1959–2011)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1 "Suppose She Brings a Big Negro Home": Case Studies of Everyday Racism 30

2 The House That Race Built 50

3 The Coded Language of Hottentot Nymphae and the Discursive Presence of Race, 1917 81

4 Of Homo Nostalgia and (Post)Coloniality: Or, Where Did All the Critical White Gay Men Go? 108

5 ". . . For Even Though I Am Black as Soot, My Intentions Are Good": The Case of Zwarte Piet/Black Pete 139

Coda. "But What about the Captain?" 168

Notes 175

References 193

Index 215

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

. . . and on the other side, the bright
look of innocence, the white dove
of peace, magical heavenly light

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

This book has been a long time in the making and thinking through. In the course of the past two decades, after coming back to the Netherlands from Los Angeles in 1992, where I had done my PhD, looking at the Netherlands with fresh eyes regularly sent frissons of discomfort and alienation up my spine. My anthropological eyes, making the familiar world strange, received strong, new impulses to make sense of the Netherlands, where I had grown up after I was one year old. After my return, I often had the feeling that I was involuntarily seeing the emperor, the Netherlands, without his clothes on, in his most detestable nakedness. It now often struck me that interracial situations, conversations, and phenomena that would be totally unacceptable in a U.S. context would pass without any frowns or critical comments in the Netherlands. Starting from the 1990s and into the first decade of the twentieth century, this process was intensified by an unprecedented turn toward a neorealist discourse (Prins 2002), when the murders of populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 gave rise to an exceptional bluntness in the interracial domain. The evasive attitude around race that had been customary in civilized circles—somewhat like our impulse, as Toni Morrison (1992a) remarked about the United States, "not to talk with the hunchback about his

hump"—virtually disappeared. Many Dutch people, never shy in voicing their opinions, now felt justified in uttering statements, especially toward Muslims, one more offensive and willfully humiliating than another. It is worth recollecting that in the 1970s and 1980s, it was Moluccan and Afro-Surinamese Dutch people who were thought to be the unassimilable Other. Meanwhile, what remained the same was that in the avalanche of publications attempting to understand society and the resentment afflicting the white Dutch population, there was an avoidance of race as a fundamental social and symbolic grammar orchestrating affect and understandings, a glaring omission that induced me to write this book. It is also one of the ways in which I am realizing the program I had in mind when I formally accepted the chair in gender and ethnicity, Faculty of the Humanities, at Utrecht University in 2002, to study whiteness (Wekker 2002a).

We are living in hopeful times: a second wave of antiracist activism is taking off. It is very heartening to see that a new generation of brave antiracist activists has stood up in the past years both outside and inside the academy. I dedicate this book to them, and to a generation after them, my grandnieces and grandnephews: Rosa, Robin, Minne, Finn, Milan, Ceriel, Ravi, Josephine, and Lucy, a rainbow-colored tribe. May they all live in a world that recognizes them for who they are and that will let them live in active solidarity or without having to carry the burden of their skin color, thus without "white innocence."

I want to thank my colleagues at the Department of Women's Studies, at Utrecht University, with whom I worked so hard for so many years: Rosemarie Buikema, Rosi Braidotti, Berteke Waaldijk, Sandra Ponzanesi, Iris van der Tuin, Marta Zarzycka, Babs Boter, Eva Midden, and Kathrin Thiele. We would not have gotten anywhere without the steady support of Trude Oorschot. I think with fondness of the many talented students in the one-year master of arts program, of which I was the coordinator until 2012, and whom I have had the pleasure to teach and see grow. I am always amazed to get news from them and find out where they have wound up and what each of them is doing to make a difference in the world. Especially dear to me are the students I have supervised through their PhDs, Cassandra Ellerbe-Dueck, Sabrina Marchetti, Lena Eckert, and Shu-yi Huang; and the students that I am still supervising, Heather Hermant, Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki, and Yvette Kopijn, from whom I learn so much and who keep me on my toes. I also thank Shu-yi and Heather for inviting me to their home

universities, Shin Hsin University in Taipei, Taiwan, and York University in Toronto, Canada, where a tribute to Audre Lorde, "The Contemporary Urgencies of Audre Lorde's Legacy," jointly organized with the University of Toronto, took place in March 2013. I received much-welcomed responses from Jin Hariwatorn, Enakshi Dua, Anna Aganthangelou, and Honor Ford Smith on an early version of chapter 4. I thank Maayke Botman for the many conversations about the way that race works in the Netherlands that we have had in the course of the years. My student assistants have been very helpful. I especially want to thank Erin van de Weijer, who helped me out on numerous occasions with making PowerPoint presentations, and most recently I have depended on Mirna Sodre de Oliveira. Mark Hazeleger has been indispensable to solve my "computer blues" at a moment's notice, and I thank Gon Buurman for her fine photography.

I want to acknowledge my colleague Philomena Essed for her courage in putting "everyday racism" on the agenda in the Netherlands at an early stage. I also thank her and Isabel Hoving for their initiative to bring out the edited volume *Dutch Racism* in 2014, after three decades of silence on racism. I also wish to thank professors Nina Lykke, Cecilia Åsberg, Berit Starkman, and my fellow scholars at GEXcel International Collegium for Advanced Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at Linköping University, Sweden, where I spent a two-month sabbatical in November and December 2009. In addition, this book was also made possible by a year's sabbatical at NIAS, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies, in Wassenaar, in 2011–2012. I have given many talks in the Netherlands and abroad in the past years, too many to mention here, but I would like to collectively thank the people who invited me and my audiences for their feedback and allowing me to put my ear to the ground in so many different places, from Paramaribo to Tallinn to Cape Town.

Thanks to historians Rosemarijn Hoefte and Alex van Stipriaan for commenting on the introduction. An earlier version of chapter 1 appeared as "Diving into the Wreck: Exploring Intersections of Sexuality, Race, Gender, and Class in the Dutch Cultural Archive," in P. Essed and I. Hoving, eds., *Dutch Racism* (2014) and is reprinted here with permission of Editions Rodopi, b.v. A special thank you goes to Frances Gouda and to the excellent editing work done by Isabel Hoving. I want to thank the organizers of the George Mosse lecture series at the University of Amsterdam, especially Gert Hekma, where I presented a very first version of chapter 4 in September

2009. Furthermore, I thank Mari Hermans for our productive collaboration in writing the chapter "Aisha Is Cool" in *Lesbo-Encyclopedie* (Hermans and Wekker 2009), Juul van Hoof and Hanneke Felten of Movisie in Utrecht, Glenn Helberg of OCAN, and Stefan Dudink for his insightful comments. A very early version of chapter 5 was delivered as a presentation at Feministisch Verzet (Feminist resistance) in Utrecht, on November 15, 2013. Thanks to research MA students at the time, Annette Krauss, Gianmaria Colpani, and Katrien Smiet for inviting me. Thanks to Dineke Stam for her comments on the coda.

I also want to thank the Amsterdam branch of SIT, the School for International Training, under the directorship of Yvette Kopijn and her team, including Nancy Jouwe, who gave me the opportunity to present work in progress on chapter 3 to the students. I want to thank my (imagined) community of black American, British, German, Swedish, and Caribbean feminists (f/m) with whom I stand shoulder to shoulder, among whom I want to mention some by name: Audre Lorde and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, the chair of my dissertation committee at UCLA and first black female teacher. I want to thank my friends and colleagues M. Jacqui Alexander, Gail Lewis, and Ann Phoenix, who although they are objectively farther and far away, never feel that way. I feel fortunate in knowing all three of you, by the sustenance of your work and for making me feel less lonely during the process of writing. Phone and Skype conversations with Jacqui, often past my midnight, always bring up new angles and insights. I am happy to be a small part of the launching of the Tobago Center for the Study and Practice of Indigenous Spirituality. May Yemanyá and Oshun continue to bless us.

Several people have discussed chapters or ideas in the book with me and I want to thank Saskia Wieringa, Halleh Ghorashi, Nancy Jouwe, Fenneke Wekker, Rosemarijn Hoefte, Alex van Stipriaan, Christien Brinkgreve, Dineke Stam, Toke Hoppenbrouwers, Alexandra Miller, Patricia Schor, Geertje Mak, Annette Krauss, Mikki Stelder, Polly Wagenaar, Ama Koranteng-Kumi, Stefan Dudink, Michael Haman, Rodney Wekker, and Lindsey Louis. A special thank you to Alex Miller for editing a chapter. Of course, I remain responsible for any judgments in error, despite their incisive comments. Furthermore, there are people who would never let me forget the book and urged me to finish it: Jennifer Tosch, Dienke Hondius, Guno Jones, and Nancy Jouwe. Fellow members of the Scientific Council of NiNsee—the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy—Alex van Stipriaan, Guno Jones,

Dienke Hondius, Kwame Nimako, and Francio Guadeloupe have jointly created an atmosphere in which the urgency of this study always remained crystal-clear. A special mention is due to the Collective of Transcultural Therapists in Amsterdam, Anna de Voogt, Glenn Helberg, Urmy MacNack, Kitlyn Tjin-a-Djie, Hermine Klok, Dirck van Bekkum, Fariba Rhmaty, and Pui Fan Yip, thanking them for the important work that they do and for collectively brainstorming with me over chapter 3.

I want to thank my family and my in-laws in the Netherlands, Suriname, and the Dominican Republic for their support and their warmth. Last but not least, my friends Diny Zanders, Twie Tjoa, Claudette van Trikt, Andrée Douglas, Thea Doelwijt, Marijke van Geest, Rachelle Tjin-a-Djie, Anita van den Berg, Sheila Arthur, Tieneke Sumter, and Marjan Sax, whom I saw less often than I wanted to, for their insights and patience.

Finally, I want to thank my loves Maggy Carrot and Altagracia Ramirez Felíz, who light up my life with laughter, lightness, and adventure and who help me to realize the best and most generous self that I can be, in this unorthodox but exciting life that we have chosen, in which the personal cannot help but be political.

INTRODUCTION

All the energies poured into critical theory, into novel and demystifying theoretical praxes—have avoided the major, I would say the determining political horizon of modern Western culture, namely imperialism.

Edward Said, "Secular Interpretation"

"A Particular Knowledge . . . "

This book is dedicated to an exploration of a strong paradox that is operative in the Netherlands and that, as I argue, is at the heart of the nation: the passion, forcefulness, and even aggression that race, in its intersections with gender, sexuality, and class, elicits among the white population, while at the same time the reactions of denial, disavowal, and elusiveness reign supreme. I am intrigued by the way that race pops up in unexpected places and moments, literally as the return of the repressed, while a dominant discourse stubbornly maintains that the Netherlands is and always has been color-blind and antiracist, a place of extraordinary hospitality and tolerance toward the racialized/ethnicized other, whether this quintessential other is perceived as black in some eras or as Muslim in others. One of the key sites where this paradox is operative, I submit, is the white Dutch sense of self, which takes center stage in this book. I strongly suspect that with national variations, a similar configuration is operative in other international settings that have an imperial history. It is my—admittedly ambitious and iconoclastic—aim to write an ethnography of dominant white

Dutch self-representation. In a Dutch context this is iconoclastic because whiteness is not acknowledged as a racialized/ethnicized positioning at all. Whiteness is generally seen as so ordinary, so lacking in characteristics, so normal, so devoid of meaning, that a project like this runs a real risk of being considered emptiness incarnate. My main thesis is that an unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self, taking place in Dutch society.

In this exploration, I am guided by the concept of the cultural archive (Said 1993), which foregrounds the centrality of imperialism to Western culture. The cultural archive has influenced historical cultural configurations and current dominant and cherished self-representations and culture. In a general nineteenth-century European framework, Edward Said describes the cultural archive as a storehouse of "a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference . . . [and,] in Raymond Williams' seminal phrase, 'structures of feeling.' . . . There was virtual unanimity that subject races should be ruled, that there *are* subject races, that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its own domain" (1993, 52, 53).

Importantly, what Said is referring to here is that a racial grammar, a deep structure of inequality in thought and affect based on race, was installed in nineteenth-century European imperial populations and that it is from this deep reservoir, the cultural archive, that, among other things, a sense of self has been formed and fabricated. With the title *White Innocence*, I am invoking an important and apparently satisfying way of being in the world. It encapsulates a dominant way in which the Dutch think of themselves, as being a small, but just, ethical nation; color-blind, thus free of racism; as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light to other folks and nations. During the colonial era, the match of the Netherlands with the Dutch East Indies, its jewel in the crown, was in self-congratulatory fashion thought of like a match made in heaven: "The quietest people of Europe brought together with the quietest people of Asia" (Meijer Raneft, cited in Breman 1993). I attempt a postcolonial, or rather a decolonial,[1] intersectional reading of the Dutch cultural archive, with special attention for the ways in which an imperial racial economy, with its gendered, sexualized, and classed intersections, continues to

underwrite dominant ways of knowing, interpreting, and feeling. I argue that in an "ethnography of dominant white Dutch self-representation" (cf. Doane 1991), sexual racism turns out to play a prominent role. I offer an exploration of the ways in which race, which by dominant consensus has been declared missing in action in the Netherlands, became cemented and sedimented in the Dutch cultural archive, and how race acquired gendered, sexualized, and classed meanings during more than four hundred years of "colonialism of the exterior" (Brah 1996).

In a U.S. context, where decidedly more work has been done on the cultural archive than in Europe, Toni Morrison has insightfully addressed what slavery did to the white psyche.[2] In an interview with Paul Gilroy, Morrison states, "Slavery broke the world in half, it broke it in every way. It broke Europe. It made them into something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy. You can't do that for hundreds of years and it not take a toll. They had to dehumanize, not just the slaves but themselves. They have had to reconstruct everything in order to make that system appear true" (Gilroy 1993, 178).

I, too, am interested in "the dreamer of the dream" (Morrison 1992a, 17), what the system of oppression did to the subject of the racialized discourses constructing blacks as inferior, intellectually backward, lazy, sexually insatiable, and always available; that is, I am oriented toward the construction of the white self as superior and full of entitlement. I offer my reading of the consequences of slavery in the western part of the empire, Suriname and the Antilles, on white Dutch self-representation. The bulk of the book is dedicated to an investigation of how these complex configurations have become intertwined with current dominant regimes of truth, with an emphasis on cultural productions in the past two decades.

The book's main thesis is thus that an unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and feelings based on four hundred years of imperial rule have played a vital but unacknowledged part in the dominant meaning-making processes taking place in Dutch society, until now. This insight has already been ominously and forcefully formulated by one of the forefathers of postcolonial studies, Martiniquan Aimé Césaire (1972) in his much-overlooked *Discourse on Colonialism*. Césaire, writing immediately after World War II, courageously chastised Europe: "What am I driving at? At this idea: that no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—

and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased, that irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another, one repudiation to another, calls for its Hitler, I mean its punishment" (1972, 39).

Césaire drew intimate connections between the racist methods used in the colonies to discipline the "natives"—the Arabs in Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa—and the Nazi methods later used and perfected against the Jews and other others in Europe. The memory of the Holocaust as the epitome and model of racist transgression in Europe erases the crimes that were perpetrated against the colonized for four centuries. This excision coincides with the representation that the history and reality of Europe are located on the continent and that what happened in the colonies is no constitutive part of it. This frame of mind—splitting, displacement, in psychoanalytical terms—is still operative to this day, for instance, in the way that the memory of World War II is conceptualized. It is the memory of what happened in the metropole and of the many Jews who were abducted and killed, not about what happened in the colonies at the time (Van der Horst 2004). Trying to insert those memories into the general memory often meets with hostility and rejection.[3]

At the same time, this regime of truth has enabled Europe to indulge in the myth of racial purity, as homogeneously white. The statement "no one colonizes innocently; no one colonizes with impunity either" points to the deeply layered and stacked consequences colonization has had for the European metropoles and their sense of self, which also forms my point of departure. It is noteworthy that while the concept of race finds its origin in Europe and has been one of its main export products, still it is generally the case that race is declared an alien body of thought to Europe, coming to this continent from the United States or elsewhere. In *European Others*, Fatima El-Tayeb powerfully states, "To reference race as native to contemporary European thought, however, violates the powerful narrative of Europe as a colorblind continent, largely untouched by the devastating ideology it exported all over the world. This narrative, framing the continent as a space free of 'race' (and, by implication, racism), is not only central to the way Europeans perceive themselves, but also has gained near-global acceptance" (2011, xv).

Discussions in different disciplinary areas, including gender studies,

about the appropriateness of race as an analytic in Europe often reach untenable conclusions that other categories like class are more pertinent to the European reality or that the supposed black-white binary of U.S. race relations makes it unfit as a model for studying European societies (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999; Griffin with Braidotti 2002; Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011). In this introductory chapter, I first sketch three long-standing paradoxical features in dominant Dutch self-representation, which collectively point to white innocence (Wekker 2001). Next, I outline the three central concepts I use in this study—innocence, the cultural archive, and dominant white Dutch self-representation—and subsequently I lay out the theoretical and methodological stakes of the project; finally, I map the chapters.

Paradoxes in White Dutch Self-Representation

In trying to capture some significant features of white Dutch self-representation, a good place to start is three paradoxes that immediately present themselves to the eye of the outsider (within).[4] The dominant and cherished Dutch self-image is characterized by a series of paradoxes that can be summed up by a general sense of being a small but ethically just nation that has something special to offer to the world. Current exceptionalism finds expression in aspirations to global worth, which are realized in The Hague being the seat of several international courts of justice, such as the Rwanda and Srebrenica tribunals. Just as during the imperial era, Our Indies, that vast archipelago of Indonesian islands known as "the emerald belt," were what set the small kingdom of the Netherlands apart and made it a world player, now the Netherlands prides itself on its role as an adjudicator of international conflicts. Thus, the mid-twentieth-century trauma of losing Our Indies,[5] which fought for their independence from the Netherlands during two wars, finds a late twentieth-century parallel in the fall of Srebrenica (1995), in former Yugoslavia, when at least six thousand Muslim men and boys under the protection of a Dutch UN battalion were killed by Serbians under the command of General Ratko Mladić. Together with his superior, Radovan Karadzic, a Bosnian-Serbian leader, Mladić has been on trial in The Hague since 2012, with various postponements and reopenings of the tribunal. The two events, thoroughly different as they are, have significantly shaken the cherished Dutch self-representation.

FIRST PARADOX: NO IDENTIFICATION WITH MIGRANTS

A first paradox is that the majority of the Dutch do not want to be identified with migrants, although at least one in every six Dutch people has migrant ancestry. Whether it is Spanish and Portuguese Jews, Huguenots, Belgians, Hungarians, people from Indonesia, Suriname, Antilleans, or Turks and Moroccans, the Netherlands is a nation of (descendants of) migrants. Of course there are different ways to identify for elite migrants—Huguenots, Sephardic Jews (among others, Spinoza), Flemings, English, and Scottish—who came with capital and know-how and who helped launch Dutch prosperity, and for other, lumpen migrants, especially Germans and Scandinavians. But my point is exactly that the class positionings of one's migrant ancestors are less significant than their places of origin, specifically whether their heritage in terms of visible difference in skin color could be shed as fast as possible. While several migratory movements, mainly from surrounding or nearby countries, such as Germany, France, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, occurred from the sixteenth century on, the country remained overwhelmingly white until the middle of the twentieth century. Postwar migration to the Netherlands consisted of three major groups: postcolonial migrants from the (former) empire,[6] labor migrants from the circum-Mediterranean area and recently from Eastern Europe,[7] and refugees from a variety of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. All in all, of a total population of 16.8 million people, 3.6 million (21.4 percent) are allochthonous (i.e., coming from elsewhere), 2 million of which are "non-Western" (12 percent) and 1.6 million (9.4 percent) Western (CBS 2014, 26). If one goes back further in history than three generations, probably the percentage of migrants would be even higher. The specific use of the term "migrant" is problematical in a Dutch context, because, depending on the country of birth, interpellating especially the four largest migrant groups—Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans—the children and grandchildren of migrants remain migrants until the fourth generation. I return to this and related terminology in the section on theory and methodology.

The ubiquitousness of migrant pasts is, however, not the dominant self-image that circulates in dominant Dutch self-representation. Whereas in the private sphere stories may be woven about a great-grandmother who came from Poland, Italy, or Germany, in the public sphere such stories do

not add to one's public persona; they are rather a curiosity. There is a popular TV program *Verborgen Verleden* (Hidden past), in which well-known Dutch people go in search of their ancestry. Almost invariably, foreign ancestors show up, as well as the other way around, ancestors who went to Our Indies or Suriname. Invariably, this comes as a great surprise to the protagonists. I read this phenomenon as saying something significant about Dutch self-representation, for instance, in comparison with North American self-representation, where everyone knows and seemingly takes pride in their ancestry: in the Netherlands there is minimal interest in those elements that deviate from Ur Dutchness, which might mark one as foreign, or worse, *allochtoon*, that is, racially marked.

Belonging to the Dutch nation demands that those features that the collective imaginary considers non-Dutch—such as language, an exotic appearance, *een kleurtje hebben*, "having a tinge of color" (the diminutive way in which being of color is popularly indicated), outlandish dress and convictions, non-Christian religions, the memory of oppression—are shed as fast as possible and that one tries to assimilate. For new immigrants, for instance, the test for entrance into the Netherlands, the so-called integration exam, turns "the right of citizenship into a demand for cultural loyalty" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2014, 339), whereby cultural values, such as gender and gay equality, which are at least contested in Dutch circles, are presented as normative and nonnegotiable to newcomers. In the public sphere the assimilation model of monoethnicism and monoculturalism is so thorough that all signs of being from elsewhere should be erased. Of course, those who can phenotypically pass for Dutch, that is, those who are white, are in an advantageous position. It is migrants with dark or olive skin who do not succeed in enforcing their claim on Dutchness or have it accepted as legitimate. The main model for dealing with ethnic/racial difference is assimilation and those who cannot or will not be assimilated are segregated (Essed 1994). Thus, notwithstanding the thoroughly mixed makeup of the Dutch population in terms of racial or ethnic origins, the dominant representation is one of Dutchness as whiteness and being Christian. This image of Dutchness dates from the end of the nineteenth century, with the centralization and standardization of Dutch language and culture (Lucassen and Penninx 1993).[8]

AN EXCURSION ON SELF-POSITIONING

My own family migrated to the Netherlands in December 1951, when my father, who was a police inspector in the Surinamese force (Klinkers 2011), qualified to go on leave for six months to the "motherland," where we eventually stayed permanently. I admire my parents for having made the decision to migrate, both of them twenty-nine years old, with five children under eight years of age, because migration at the time, given the price of passage by boat, meant that they would most likely never see their families and country of birth again. The regulation for leave in the motherland was of course meant for white Dutch civil servants only, who should not "go native," losing their sense and status of being Dutch, but my father had risen to a rank where he qualified for that perk. He had already started to learn Latin on his own in Paramaribo, wanting to study law in Amsterdam, which was not possible in Suriname. The highest secondary educational level in Suriname at the time was MULO or more extended lower education (Gobardhan-Rambocus 2001), and he had to pass an exam in Latin, *colloquium doctum*, to be admitted to the University of Amsterdam. In one of our family albums, there is a photo of the five Wekker siblings in Artis, the wonderful zoo that we lived practically next door to (figure I.1). It was only decades later that I realized that the reason why we found our first house in the old Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam was that 70 percent of Jews in the Netherlands were abducted during World War II.

On a sunny day in the summer of 1952, the Wekker siblings, of which I was the youngest at the time,[9] were sitting on and standing by a donkey in Artis. At the edges of the photo are postwar white, Dutch people, in simple summer clothes, looking at us, enamored because we were such an unusual sight: "just like dolls." My mother, in later years, would often speak of the uncomfortable sensation that wherever we went, we were the main attraction. She drew the line at curious strangers touching our skin and hair. My mother was deeply disillusioned about the fact that, having come to the motherland, we did not have an indoor shower and had to bathe in a tub in the kitchen, as was usual at the time. We had had an indoor shower in Suriname and now had to go to the communal bathhouse every Saturday (Wekker 1995). We were one of the first Afro-Surinamese families to migrate to the Netherlands, where previously mostly single men and women had come to seek opportunity in the motherland. My family became subject to the same postwar disciplining regime that was meant for

Figure I.1 The Wekker siblings in 1952.
Photo from the collection of the author.

"weakly adjusted," white lower-class people and orientalized Indonesians (Indos) coming from Indonesia in the same period (Rath 1991). Indos are the descendants of white men and indigenous women, who formed an intermediate stratum between whites and indigenous people in the colony, and for whom it was no longer safe, after World War II, to stay in Indonesia, which was fighting for its independence from the Netherlands. The postwar uplifting regime consisted of regular unexpected visits from social workers, who came to inspect whether we were duly assimilating, that is, whether my mother cooked potatoes instead of rice, that the laundry was done on Monday, that we ate minced meatballs on Wednesday, and that the house was cleaned properly. I imagine that if we had not measured up, we would have fallen under the strict socialization regime meant for

those postwar, working-class families, who failed the standards and were sent to resocialization camps. Clearly, a gendered regime was operative, where, as in all families at the time, men were supposed to work outside the home and women were good housewives. What has remained firmly in our family lore of those early years is that the Dutch were curious but helpful; an atmosphere of benevolent curiosity toward us reigned (Oostindie and Maduro 1985).

Let's briefly fast-forward and juxtapose this situation to an event five decades later in May 2006, the fateful night when Minister Rita Verdonk of Foreigners' Affairs and Integration, white and a former prison director, representing the VVD (the conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), repeatedly told Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a black female member of parliament for the same party and a former refugee from Somalia, that since she had lied about her exact name and her date of birth in order to obtain Dutch citizenship, the minister was now forced to revoke it.[10] Playing on the time-honored expression *gelijke monniken, gelijke kappen* (equality for all),[11] this could also mean that Hirsi Ali would lose her seat in parliament. This night has etched itself into my consciousness and that of many others, as a traumatic wake-up call to our precarious existence as people of color in the Dutch ecumene. For many white Dutch people, the event was shocking and deeply unsettling, too, because it brought the German occupation back to mind, of being witness to a frightening display of authoritarian rule that brought back the *Befehl ist Befehl* ethos of the war years, that is, rules exist to be obeyed (Pessers 2006). Thus, the differing cultural imaginaries—World War II for the white majority versus an existential feeling of being unsafe for people of color as eternal foreigners—that different parts of the population experienced were brought home forcefully that night. Although race was not mentioned at all, Verdonk was frightening in her lack of imagination and lack of intellectual agility in presenting her arguments for the decision to revoke Hirsi Ali's citizenship.[12] She just read out loud, over and over, what her civil servants had written down for her. A deeply existential fear overtook many of us, sitting mesmerized through the televised spectacle, which went on all night: For if this could happen to Hirsi Ali, who was then seemingly at the top of her game, having injected the debate on multicultural society with her radical anti-Islam positions, seeing Islam as basically incompatible with a modern society and with women's and gay emancipation (Ghorashi 2003), then what about the rest of us? Who among