

Innocence in Baldwin and Wekker Compared

Different times, Same innocence

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Abstract

This study explores innocence from a two-fold perspective. The first chapter explores innocence from the perspective of James Baldwin and *The Fire Next Time*. It focusses on innocence in American society and the accompanying attitudes toward people of colour. The second chapter focusses on Gloria Wekker and her book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. This book explores the post-colonial attitudes of innocence in the Netherlands. In the final chapter the two types of innocence are compared.

Keywords: *James Baldwin, Gloria Wekker, Innocence, Post-colonial Studies, Psychoanalytical theory.*

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1. Introduction

Race and colonialism are frequently discussed topics in the Netherlands as well as in The United States. Both discourses have a mutual origin in the European colonial era and transatlantic slave trade. Although James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, and Gloria Wekker's *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* were published in different times and different countries, this essay proposes that it is still valuable and viable to connect the two in order to examine innocence in the context of both authors. James Baldwin's seminal work *The Fire Next Time* is still seen today as a valuable resource on the functions of race in colonial and racial academic discussions. Gloria Wekker stands at the forefront of the discussion of race and colonialism. She endeavours to further the comprehension of racial intolerance in the Netherlands.

Although Wekker makes no explicit reference to Baldwin many of the topics she discusses are directly relevant to several of Baldwin's topics. The term innocence appears in the works of Baldwin and regularly in Baldwinian academic works. Baldwin, being an American, focusses heavily on the use of innocence to explain American society. In *My Dungeon Shook*, Baldwin directly states his views on innocence. "But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime" (Baldwin 292). In the second part of *The Fire Next Time* he explains what this innocence is. He states that it is the unwillingness and inability to connect to reality that has shaped the horrible system of segregation. Furthermore, he explains that the fear of confrontation with the self is the main drive behind the continuation of the system (Baldwin 341). Wekker on the other hand "connect(s) this syndrome, white innocence, to the strong Dutch attachment to a self-image that stresses being a tolerant, small, and just ethical nation, color-blind and free of racism and that foregrounds being a victim rather than a perpetrator of

(inter)national violence” (Wekker 39). Wekker compares white innocence to a syndrome in order to emphasise the deeply rooted mental gymnastics both parties engage in in order to deny the existence of racism (Wekker 39).

Innocence in the Dutch perspective is, according to Wekker, associated with the size of the country and its cultural identity. The Dutch people have been deluding themselves with an unrealistic self-image that portrays them as colour-blind and anti-racist. The arguments of Wekker show that the self-image of Dutch autochthonous people is not rooted in reality nor supported by accurate self-reflection. This paper will examine both conceptualisations of innocence in order to compare the two. It will compare James Baldwin’s definition of American Innocence to Gloria Wekker’s definition of White Innocence in the Netherlands. The central arguments and key differences between both authors are valuable to posit opposite each other considering the re-emergence of the racial discussion in recent years. The main thesis will answer the following question: what are the differences between American Innocence and White Innocence as described by James Baldwin and Gloria Wekker respectively? Furthermore, what are the connections between the two, and what are the effects of innocence on the ongoing racial discussion

2. Innocence in James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*

In this section, I will discuss what James Baldwin called American Innocence. Starting out with Baldwin’s own words in *The Fire Next Time*, then moving on to the early academic discussion of innocence and following up with a review of more current academic discussions of innocence in the post-civil-rights-movement American perspective. This chapter will examine the most relevant elements of innocence as conceptualised by Baldwin:

innocence from a psychological perspective, innocence as childlike behaviour and innocence as a lack of knowledge and awareness.

James Baldwin is known as a social activist for equality during the civil rights movement. This relates directly to his attitude toward white people, one not focussed on a quid pro quo treatment, but one of understanding and mutual growth (Baldwin 346). In his most lauded work, *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin mentions the word innocence in a certain context. Within that context innocence is seen as part of the white consciousness, and in relation to the attitudes white people have towards African Americans. The first mention of the word happens in the letter to his nephew in *My Dungeon Shook*: “But it is not permissible that the authors of devastations should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime” (Baldwin 292). The transgression Baldwin speaks of is not, as most fellow black activists of the time would say, the continued oppression of the black citizens of The United States. Instead Baldwin goes one step further, “and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, ... that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it” (Baldwin 292). The refusal of acknowledgement, conscious or unconscious, and thus the ignorance of the crime is, according to Baldwin, an integral part of the systemic racial problems of The United States. Not just the continued oppression and exploitation of the non-white populace of The United States, but the attitudes towards African American people propagated by slavery and the system of segregation in American society. The system that on the one hand enforced specific damaging characteristics of non-whites through propaganda, in the form of stereotypes and caricatures, and on the other hand made it impossible for people in the affected population to change the perspective by means of laws and social regulations. Innocence then is not just something that exists on a personal level, but also something that can be found within

government and legislation, indicating that the entire nation is suffering from some form of innocence.

One of the main arguments Baldwin uses to form his analysis of white people, is based in psychology, or more specifically, in psychoanalytic theory (McIvor 77). He argues that being part of an oppressive system has a clear effect on the oppressor as well as on the oppressed (Baldwin 334). It is important to understand that both parts of such a system are shaped by it, knowingly or unknowingly. Those in power determine the direction of that system, and as such also have the means to shape the way that system is perceived by others. Baldwin argues in the following quote that the American system is skewed to give white people an advantage over African Americans.

These tensions are rooted in the very same depths as those from which love springs, or murder. The white man's unadmitted—and apparently, to him, unspeakable—private fears and longings are projected onto the Negro.... How can one respect, let alone adopt, the values of a people who do not, on any level whatever, live the way they say they do, or the way they say they should? (Baldwin, 341)

Innocence in this quote comes from the inability to admit to having fears and longings, and it shows how these unexpressed emotions, by means of projection, lead to oppression and racism. Furthermore, Baldwin argues that the issues present in white society are not internally reflected on and dealt with, but are projected onto others, thus alleviating the direct need for self-awareness. In this manner problems are always the fault of someone else, enabling a certain part of society to be blissfully ignorant of their own impact on that society. Ignorance is also innocence in a way. A lack of knowledge and understanding is a form of innocence. The ignorance allows, in this case white Americans, the option of not having to clean their own table, instead they have someone to do it for them.

Interestingly, Baldwin has major issues with the psychoanalytic method, even though he uses its underlying theorems frequently in his arguments (McIvor, 78). McIvor's *The Struggle of Integration* goes on to make some very valuable and interesting comparisons between Baldwin's arguments and Melanie Klein's contributions to object relation theory, which due to Baldwin's resistance to psychoanalysis are difficult but nonetheless valuable. The main point of interest for the perspective of American innocence is the comparison of object relation theory itself against Baldwin's style of commentary on race relations in the United States. Object relation theory focusses heavily on analysing the psyche from the perspective of family experiences during childhood (Buchanan). In other words, the effect one's upbringing and direct social surroundings has had on their identity as an adult. This is then very valuable information in conjunction with Baldwin's expressions on the state of the American psyche, because in a system of denial and illusion it is easy to mistake the attitudes around oneself, as the right one, because they are the only one. As an adult, people are expected to be able to examine issues from different perspectives, whereas this ability is not expected of children. The absence of differing perspectives during childhood, can lead to a lack of understanding and awareness in adulthood. This, in turn, can lead to an isolated form of innocence and ignorance that can be very toxic to the rest of society. In combination with positions of power, a singular perspective can lead to unequal treatment and oppression of people who do not share that perspective. Baldwin equates the white American to child-like adults. "Infantile" is the word he uses to describe white Americans' perception of love (Baldwin 341). He compares the infantile perception, namely that of being made happy, to an inclusive state of mind where one is willing to engage with their problems in order to grow (Baldwin 342). This leads to a different form of innocence, one that resembles the original meaning of the word much more closely. The definition of innocence in the Oxford English Dictionary reads the following: "Freedom from sin, guilt, or moral wrong in general; the state

of being untainted with, or unacquainted with, evil; moral purity” (Innocence, OED). Being free of sin or guilt would indicate that there are no problems to deal with and no reason to grow in that direction. The set of attitudes described by Baldwin lead to an underdeveloped or childlike sense of morality in certain areas, due to the lack of confrontation.

One of the most acute and most recent reflections on innocence and ignorance in Baldwin academics comes from *My Dear White Sister*. Written as an inversion of *My Dungeon Shook* and published in the *Baldwin Review* of 2018, it is written in free verse, and it revolves around the younger sister of the author. Keely Shinnery supplies us with reflections on the life of her sister and accompanies these with quotes from many of Baldwin’s works. The main argument in this piece of free verse is that the same personal identities, namely the attitudes of childlike innocence and ignorance, still exist in 2019. The same exact innocence, or inability to critically self-reflect, which Baldwin spent most of his career exposing, has not changed.

My dear sister, it is time to free yourself into love. Love will tear you from your mask.
 For when you love, there is no longer a strange, foggy abyss between you and
 Brandy’s Cinderella, between you and Whitney’s fairy godmother, the trees in the
 park and everyone and everything between their shadow and their light. No separation
 between you and Ida, you and the taxi driver, Baldwin’s mother and all the people
 from Seventh Avenue to Fifth. (Shinnery 100)

Shinnery brilliantly exposes this inability to self-examine through clever use of Baldwin’s own writing by means of refocussing on the white perspective instead of the black perspective. She shows that the attitudes Baldwin so vehemently railed against during the civil rights era, have not really changed. The sister still does not engage with the history of America because it does not seem relevant to her personally. Separation references the segregation in The United States and, as the sister is still separated from the wider society,

some form of that system still exists. Shinnars uses a poignant metaphor to express this in the following quote.

“Blue, a false trap, because no real eye is blue. “Neither blue nor green pigments are ever present in the human iris or ocular fluid.” Cut your eye open, my dear white sister, and you’ll find your pretty, big, beautiful blue eyes have always been swimming in blackness. Blue eyes refract light, like the sky, nothing but a scattering” (Shinnars 94)

The blueness of the eyes equates to the history of The United States as presented and experienced by White people, because the sister has blue eyes, and in this metaphor, she represents the white population. The cutting open of the eyes equates to the social struggles that have taken place and are still present in society, and the blackness becomes reality hidden behind the refracted light. The truth of the story as it were. She follows up by rephrasing a sentence from Baldwin’s *My Dungeon Shook*: “ They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it” (Baldwin 294) to the following: “Until you understand this, you cannot be released from it” (Shinnars 94). But, instead of an external perspective, Shinnars internalises the necessity of comprehension and awareness, by writing from a white to white perspective, and contrasts it to the realities of social pressures. In particular the Cinderella story hits the mark; the 1997 multi-ethnic version that was present in their home is used as a base for racial perception and awareness (Shinnars 95). This version casts Brandi, a black R&B singer as Cinderella, as opposed to the traditional white woman. The sister in the story dresses up daily as Cinderella, showing that race was not something she was aware of, as the Cinderella the sister identified with so much, was a woman of African American descent. The learned behaviour that is racism is not part of children’s perception. This is contrasted with the adult perception, where the sister no longer identifies with that version of Cinderella. It is implied

that this is partially because adults are not expected to still identify with a fairy tale character, and partially because the Cinderella in this version is black. Shinnars states: “What is even more worrisome, however, is not that you have grown out of Cinderella but that you have stopped recognizing her in your own face” (Shinnars 96). This indicates that somewhere between childhood and adulthood, the ability to accept otherness, and thus to some extent the ability to reflect on personal identity is altered. Because the sister grew up in a “nearly-all-white neighborhood in our tiny town in northern Illinois” (Shinnars 93), she remained ignorant of the multi-ethnic nature of the United States, meaning her perspective was skewed toward white people.

The reintroduction of Baldwin and his perspective to a broader audience and academic discussion, came in the wake of the Baltimore riots in 2015. After the death of Freddy Gray, due to a spinal injury during his arrest, racial tensions flared in Baltimore and The United States. According to Joyce and McBride, Baldwin was immediately connected to the incident by one of the demonstrators who held up a sign with a quote: “Ignorance allied with power is the most ferocious enemy of justice” (McBride Joyce 2). The essence of the message was always change. Protestors insisted that the white populace of The United States needed to engage with their innocence and become aware of the implications and consequences. They needed to recognise that they have been lied to and are lying to themselves by the perpetuation of the attitudes created during the slavery and Jim Crow era. According to Joyce and Mc Bride, The United States “are in the grip of our continued dedication ‘not to change a situation but to seem to have done it’” (McBride Joyce 6). This is, essentially, a declaration that the civil rights movement has failed, or at the very least, is not yet completed. The ignorance and innocence exposed by Baldwin have not disappeared. Baldwin’s final words from *The Fire Next Time*: “If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or

create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now,..., and change the history of the world” (Baldwin 347), resonate heavily in the final paragraph of Joyce and McBride, “Beyond direct confrontation and demonstrations of outrage,..., systemic change cannot be marshalled without collaboration... the *James Baldwin Review* seeks to nourish the already blossoming worldwide attention Baldwin’s life work continues to inspire, thereby providing a collaborative venue for our own time’s necessary metamorphoses” (Joyce, McBride 6) Baldwin’s work is not done.

3. Innocence in Gloria Wekker’s *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*

This section will discuss Gloria Wekker’s book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* in order to examine the Dutch perspective on innocence. Starting with a discussion of Wekker’s observations on innocence in the Netherlands, and then moving through the academic discussion of the topic in the same nation. The focus of this chapter is to elicit Wekker’s understanding of innocence in the Netherlands and to give some insight into the academic research underlying her arguments, in addition to setting out points of comparison with Baldwin’s concepts of innocence as discussed previously.

In the introductory chapter of her book, Wekker provides some insights into her motivation for writing. She is, as an immigrant, “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 colour-blind and antiracist” (Wekker 1). This is, as the title of the book suggests, a paradox. A nation cannot at the same time profess to be colour-blind and anti-racist, while also having immigrants that regularly encounter racist behaviour in their daily lives. Wekker posits that this paradox is

part of the Dutch sense of self (Wekker 1), i.e. a part of the national and personal psyche. One of the examples she presents in support of this claim is in the form of a television program called *Verborgen Verleden*. In this show, Dutch people attempt to find their ancestors and try to find out where these people originated. “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” (Wekker 7). This indicates that the Dutch identity is skewed towards an internal image. This is an image that is focussed solely on the Netherlands within continental borders and forgets that at one time it had a considerable presence and impact outside of the continent. This frame of reference is centred on the Netherlands as a nation and Dutch culture as primary vehicle of identification. This is innocence in the form denial and forgetfulness, either conscious or unconscious.

This example is based on statements in several key works within the field of post-colonial studies. The first is Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*. Wekker uses Said’s concept of the cultural archive to frame the discussion of paradoxes in the rest of her book. The cultural archive of a nation becomes the tool for interpretation, because it can be positioned in opposition to other national cultural archives in order to identify cultural borders (Said 51). Said states the following on this process: “Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native” (Said 51). As the isolated communities from which these archives were born no longer take up the same dominant position as they did at the time of creation, the concepts and attitudes that flow from them are also no longer as acutely relevant as they once were. The existence of these cultural archives still has the same explanatory effect on the culture it originates from. However, it still presents itself as the dominant and superior culture, even though they no longer are, or a lot

of nuance is needed in order to place them in the proper perspective of contemporary society. Among these effects are isolation and the alienation of the culture from unwanted aspects or influences, to affect the safety of the culture of population in the homeland. Wekker continues to argue that this body of culture does not have significant links with the outside world, more specifically, it has no meaningful links with the Dutch sense of self and the effect colonialism has had on it (Wekker 2). The internal cultural archive carries little to no reflection of the external attitudes. Wekker names this effect displacement or splitting (Wekker 4). Splitting is a psychoanalytical term linked to object relations theory. It describes a defensive mechanism that infants, who are not yet able to integrate both good and bad attitudes into a single person, use. For the purpose of this paper it is interesting to note that the use of the object relation theory resonates strongly with the innocence described earlier by Baldwin, as it shows a continuation of the attitudes of innocence, ignorance and unwillingness that were present when Baldwin wrote his perspective on American Innocence, and it shows the continuation of the process.

In addition to this sense of innocence from a cultural perspective, is the difference in levels of awareness between the effects of the Second World War in the Netherlands on the continent in and rest of the Dutch empire. Wekker argues that the Holocaust has taken such a prominent place in the national identity as the ultimate atrocity, that there is little room left for reflection on other similar atrocities, like transatlantic slavery practices (Wekker 12). This attitude combined with a lack of external perspective as described above, often leads to anger and disbelief from the white population (Wekker 4). Feelings of betrayal and ungratefulness are commonly associated with differing perspectives.

Innocence is linked to several key associations according to Wekker. The first is the association with Christianity: "Jesus is the iconic innocent man. He does not betray others; he shares what little he possesses; he does not use violence nor commit sins; he lives in poverty;

he cures the sick, turns the other cheek, and is goodness incarnate” (Wekker 16). These characteristics, even though the church is no longer part of the official apparatus of state, as the Netherlands is a secular nation, are still desirable attitudes for the Dutch to strive towards. These attitudes are desirable because they embody the good of man in a general sense and because the Christian heritage still forms a large part of the Dutch cultural archive. This creates a cultural frame of reference for identification with innocence and selflessness that form core features of the Dutch self. Furthermore, Jesus is traditionally portrayed as a white man, which eases the process of identification considerably.

Secondly, Wekker mentions the association of the size of the country with innocence (Wekker 16). Children, who are small of stature, are, in western societies, seen as innocent. This comes from the perception that children are not yet of age and are thus not fully responsible for their actions. The Netherlands is a small country in terms of surface area but is not small in terms of influence or impact on the international political and economic field. This implies that as a nation, the Netherlands is not, and does not consider itself to be a large country, like The United States does. The main parallel here is that the size of the nation makes the Netherlands less responsible for its actions. Furthermore, as children are not yet fully grown, they are less capable of defending themselves from harm. The attitudes of protectiveness can be seen in effect when the Dutch feel like parts of their culture are under scrutiny or attack, like in the case of the Sinterklaas celebration, described later in this chapter (Wekker 143-144).

Wekker continues by linking innocence to a certain degree of licence (Wekker 17). Licence, belonging to white people, which allow them to make racist remarks with impunity. Wekker specifically mentions “the safe position of having license to utter the most racist statements, while in the next sentence saying that it was a joke or was not meant as racist”

(Wekker 17). Licence in this context signifies agency. The ability to act in a certain way in certain situations. Wekker expresses the essence of innocence in the Netherlands succinctly:

“Innocence speaks not only of soft, harmless, childlike qualities, although those are the characteristics that most Dutch people would wholeheartedly subscribe to; it is strongly connected to privilege, entitlement, and violence that are deeply disavowed. Loss of innocence, that is, knowing and acknowledging the work of race, does not automatically entail guilt, repentance, restitution, recognition, responsibility, and solidarity but can call up racist violence, and often results in the continued cover-up of structural racism” (Wekker 18).

The Dutch act from a position of innocence, a position that incorporates ignorance and not knowing, and one that absolves them of guilt. The previous quote summarises the paradoxical nature of this kind of behaviour.

The most apt and relevant example of the above quote in practice, the loss of innocence, and its corresponding reactions is the continuing national discussion of Zwarte Piet. Wekker gives a short description of the phenomenon. “This figuration, a black man with thick lips and golden earrings, clad in a colourful Moorish costume, and wielding deplorable grammar, is imagined to be a servant of a white bishop, Sinterklaas, who hails from Spain” (Wekker 28). This description, short as it is, sketches the innate problems with Black Pete excellently. The stereotypical representation of black people both in skin colour and spoken accent, the unavoidable association with slavery due to the gold rings and the white man leading the procession, the archaic Moorish costume that was given to slaves, make Black Pete a racist figure. However, this paper is not about the details of racial stereotypes, but about innocence. The reactions to criticism of Black Pete are telling. The reactions were taken from responses to an article published in *The Telegraaf*, a Dutch newspaper. Wekker has collected and categorised a plethora of responses to a Black Pete protest that she was

intimately associated with. Wekker states “I distinguish ten themes in the about 1,500 messages” (Wekker 148) and focusses on what these messages say about the Dutch identity in relation to Black Pete (Wekker 148).

The first response Wekker mentions is “This is Our culture, our tradition” (Wekker 148). This is a divisionary perspective. It indicates that the Dutch self-perception already has, ingrained in it, a mechanism for othering. Wekker also argues on this point that Dutch culture is something that needs to be defended (Wekker 149). Innocence, or in this case ignorance comes from the lack of acknowledging the fact that the Netherlands is no longer a mono cultural or mono ethnic nation. To assume that one culture speaks for everyone in the nation is backward at best.

The second response is that it is a celebration for children (Wekker 150). Although Sinterklaas is indeed a celebration that centres around children, it does not dismiss or diminish the racially oriented nature of the stereotypes involved in it. This links directly with innocence and the self-perception as described earlier. Innocence is inherently linked to childhood. When this is related to the Netherlands being a small country, and the focus is placed on the childlike, and thus innocent, properties, a very dangerous pattern begins to appear. This perception allows transgressions to go unpunished based on internal assessment, and it does not consider the perception of the other.

Another aspect of the innocence mentioned in this strand of thought is that “children do not see color” (Wekker 150). Wekker makes the following statement on this topic “Here a white self-image is presented that insists on seeing itself and children as innocent, small, inherently good, colour-blind, and antiracist” (Wekker 150). All the previously mentioned aspects of innocence are incapsulated in this one perspective. In conjunction with the limited space for these arguments in the cultural archive, Wekker’s closing argument is a powerful statement on the need for discussion and a re-evaluation of the dominant perspective. “Thus,

to symbolically attack children is not only perceived as an inhuman act, it also attacks the operative principle that “the child, like us, is good and innocent.” I argue that it is this benevolent, self-flattering self-representation as inherently good, tolerant, and nonracist that, as the most cherished cultural good, is felt to be under attack, giving rise to a neurotic form of aggressiveness” (Wekker 151-152).

4. Different Times, Same Innocence

This final section will compare the innocence in the Netherlands as described by Gloria Wekker, and James Baldwin’s description of American innocence. The main goal of this chapter is to compare different aspects of the innocence as described by both authors, with the purpose of comparing the insights into the mechanics behind these attitudes surrounding personal and national identity.

Wekker and Baldwin both describe the general attitude of the white populace regarding innocence. Baldwin describes “the chorus on innocents” (Baldwin 292) when writing about the conditions African Americans were born in. He makes a comparison to London during the height, or depth if you will, of the industrial revolution and the comments Charles Dickens makes on the deplorable conditions the people were living in (Baldwin 292). Baldwin refers to segregation and the general lack of interest, understanding and knowledge white people had at the time of the conditions black people were living in. A situation that would continue, if not fought by a positive force of awareness.

Wekker describes a confrontation she has personally had with member of her audience while speaking about Black Pete (Wekker 141). A woman in the audience speaks about how hurtful it is for white people to be confronted with the fact that a loved tradition is experienced by people of different ethnic backgrounds as racist (Wekker 141). The woman

wants her opinion to be heard and acknowledged, regardless of the pain this opinion causes others. Wekker uses the term Entitlement Racism here (Wekker 141), referring to the innocence of the speaker on the one hand, in the sense that she does not know, or is ignorant of the hurt the expression of such opinions causes, and on the other, to the modern sense of freedom of expression, which has devolved to the right to offend (Wekker 141-142).

The comparison of both examples shows that in the 60's in the United States, as well as in contemporary Dutch society, there is a lack of knowledge and empathy towards people of different ethnicities. These attitudes specifically relate to the Dutch heritage within the cultural archive that has historically not engaged with non-white cultures. The realisation that something like Black Pete is experienced as racist by non-whites, can come as quite a shock, which is a direct result of the awareness, or lack thereof, in Dutch society when it comes to racism. The idea of being colour-blind and non-racist is so ingrained in the Dutch sense of self, that having different views on these topics is regularly seen as insulting.

Both Wekker and Baldwin make use of psychoanalytic theory in order to assess and explain the innocence encountered in their respective nations. Both authors make use of object relations theory in one way or another: Baldwin does so implicitly, but Wekker makes overt references to splitting (McIvor 77, Wekker 4). Splitting, in terms of object relation theory is defined as follows: "Instinctual objects that evoke ambivalence and therefore anxiety are dealt with by compartmentalizing positive and negative emotions, leading to images of self and others that are not integrated" (Splitting of the Object, Oxford reference).

Baldwin uses this in the perspective of integration, i.e. the merging of white people and the segregated communities in the U.S. at the time and uses it as a tool for analysing racial stereotypes. McIvor shows quite clearly that Baldwin and Melanie Klein, the psychologist that expanded on object relations theory, use the concept of splitting in the same

manner, but apply it to different perspectives and fields. Baldwin applies it as a tool for the understanding and deconstruction of racist attitudes, Klein uses it to explain behaviour in children. Wekker mainly applies the psychoanalytical mode of thought to the white self-representation (Wekker 4). She makes an analysis of the Dutch national identity and identifies the presence of the splitting process in contemporary Dutch society (Wekker 4). She argues this on the basis of three paradoxes in the sense of self within the Dutch identity: The lack of identification with immigrants (Wekker 6), the experience of victimhood of the Second World War (Wekker 12) and the misrepresented position of the Dutch imperial presence in the Dutch cultural archive (Wekker 13).

McIvor, a political theorist teaching at Duke University, describes the innocence used by Wekker and Baldwin quite clearly. “Innocence, then, is both a psychological state of mind and a historical inheritance, reinforced by a political and social environment crowded with myths of overcoming, transcendence, and rebirth” (McIvor 85). Innocence is clearly associated with what Wekker calls the cultural archive, and the attitudes of innocence and choosing to be ignorant, present in the Netherlands. A clear example of this is the way in which the Dutch government decided to let the social field handle the Black Pete issue, and not to adopt a more active policy despite international pressure (Wekker 146). It is also part of the reason why Wekker argues so vehemently against Black Pete. To let a caricature like Black Pete exist reinforces the already existing prejudices against black people. The scope of these prejudices and the prevalence of the caricatures can be seen from the body of reactions Wekker has compiled in Chapter 5 of her book. Over the past decades, Wekker argues, Black Pete has been the first encounter with a person of colour for many children and in some areas of the country this is still the case (Wekker 166). Wekker compares it to the cowboys and Indians game in The United States and it is accompanied by very similar racial prejudices (Wekker 166). Wekker and Baldwin, although they are from different times and different

countries, and argue from different perspectives, have noted striking similarities in the functioning of innocence in their respective nations. Both nations have a warped idea about non-white people, one in the form of segregation, one in the form of Black Pete. Both authors use psychoanalytical theory as a means of accessing and explaining the dominant white psyche.

Another important comparison to make between Wekker and Baldwin is the way in which both authors associate white or American innocence to childlike behaviour. Innocence is intimately associated with childlike behaviour by both authors, although the argumentation for both perspectives differs slightly. Baldwin argues, as described earlier in this paper, that the attitudes white Americans have towards love are childlike in nature. They are not willing to deal with the consequences of love, and are only interested in having the benefits, not the deficits. The consequences in this context would be feelings of anger and betrayal, which we see represented on both sides of the discussion (Wekker 166). In relation to racism and innocence, this translates to not dealing with the consequences of slavery, segregation and post-segregation racial issues in the United States. Shinnars argues in her paper *My Dear White Sister*, that these issues are still present in contemporary United States society, and that contemporary American culture is still conducive to othering, i.e. the alienation and stigmatisation of non-whites in a dominantly white society. Wekker's argumentation shifts away from Baldwin's assessment of American innocence as a personal characteristic. Instead she argues that the idea of innocence is ingrained in the Dutch national identity and pervades throughout it. As explained previously the Dutch cultural archive focusses mainly on the Dutch culture as present within the borders of the continental Netherlands. Within that continental culture the attitude of innocence is mainly conveyed through identification with Christian culture, and the qualities that are attributed to Jesus Christ, and associations with the size of the country. Both forms of innocence enable whites to disengage with racism in

general. Wekker argues that whiteness through the existing lens of the cultural archive, is a non-entity, the unmarked group. The dominant majority sees themselves as normalised and is thus less able to evaluate their position in society. The lens focusses on a largely white canvas, an empty canvas, and adds to it specks of different colours. This metaphor is an apt explanation of the functions of innocence within the larger racial debate, and it shows why it is important to have a different voice speak out. It is also an argument to engage in the larger discussion about race and listen to what is being said.

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