

# Drawing a Blank

A Content Analysis of Dutch Colonial Literature



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# Drawing a Blank

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A content analysis of *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* (1888), *De stille kracht* (1900) and *Rubber* (1931) on racial position and *blank*-ness.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes the ways in which skin colors are described in the three novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* (1888), *De stille kracht* (1900) and *Rubber* (1931). These novels were written by Dutch authors and are concerned with the Dutch East Indies. By studying descriptions of skin colors and the connotations that are attached to them, racist stereotypes can be uncovered. Furthermore, by investigating the Dutch white racial position, *blank*, it becomes possible to understand whiteness as a social performance that interplays with ideas about gender and class and needs constant application to have a meaning in society. This thesis therefore questions whiteness as an invisible and neutral presence and proposes a perception of whiteness as a performance through the constant pursuit of an unreachable ideal of whiteness.

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## Introduction

On the cover of this thesis, one can see several figures in a painting.<sup>1</sup> The painting seems to have gone through a filter after which the only colors left visible are black, brown, red, yellow and white. The viewer is forced to look at the scene through the filter of the colors that the painter chose to use. The faces of the figures are left blank. This blankness is very visible, although at the same time it looks like the painter did not finish the faces and left them to be colored in later. In my perception, this painting questions the visibility of colorlessness. Does it exist or is color always visible? I think it is. Even though the faces have no intentional color, they have a color nonetheless. This visibility is unlike the white racial position, which often seems to go unnoticed in Dutch contemporary society. As the dominant racial position in the Netherlands, being white, or *blank* as the Dutch call(-ed) it, is often not regarded to be worth mentioning, nor is it considered in most discussions on racism in Dutch society. In my opinion, whiteness should be noticed, like the blank faces in the painting. The white racial position should no longer be regarded as a blank position against which other racial positions stand out. Only once this racial position is acknowledged in society can measures be taken to problematize the privileges that people in this racial position enjoy in comparison to people in other racial positions. In this thesis, I will do this by going back to the colonial past of the Netherlands. I will uncover the meanings behind skin color in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies, a society in which ideas on race have been developed.

Even though color plays an important role in my thesis, I did not have a visual representation accompanying my research. I found this strange so I asked my stepfather to make a painting for the cover of my thesis. My stepfather gladly accepted my request and started to search for photos that he could use as an example. At first, he found photos that were immediately recognizable as colonial, showing indigenous servants next to white men in white suits presenting a hunting trophy. When I saw these photos, it became clear to me that by using a colonial photo that was recognizable as colonial, existing stereotypes about what the “colonial” is had to be reproduced. Since this thesis aims to engage critically with dominant discourse on the colonial past, I did not want a cover that reproduced colonial stereotypes. In the end, my stepfather chose to work with a photo that he regarded to have a neutral composition. This photo was taken in a Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> Paul van Os, 6 June 2019, *Blank-ness in a Discolored Street*.

street and consists of a group of white people. It made me realize that no photo is ever neutral because its viewer will always interpret it through their own cultural framework. To me, as someone who does a research on forms of racism and the role of the white racial position<sup>2</sup> in these structures, the whiteness of the people in the photo stood out. In this thesis I find it important to make the white racial position stand out and not perceive it as neutral.

The purpose of my thesis is to make racial structures visible as they were present in the cultural representations of the Dutch East Indies. By studying novels concerning the Dutch East Indies that were written by Dutch authors during the colonial period, I will analyze the racist structures that were present in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, I will investigate the ways in which the Dutch authors portrayed different racial positions. I have chosen to study the following three novels: *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* (How he became council of the Indies) by P. A. Daum (1888); *De stille kracht* (The hidden force) by Louis Couperus (1900); and *Rubber* by Madelon Székely-Lulofs (1931). The central research question of my thesis is the following: In what ways are skin colors and racial positions mentioned in the novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* (1888), *De stille kracht* (1900) and *Rubber* (1931)? In this thesis I wish to uncover the connotations and values that are implicitly and explicitly attached to skin color in the novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* (1888), *De stille kracht* (1900) and *Rubber* (1931). I will do this by examining the skin colors that are being mentioned in the novels, show instances in which skin colors change and discuss characters with a multiracial position to emphasize the fluidity of racial positions.

I particularly want to clarify the role that whiteness and the perception of the racial position of whiteness by white authors plays in structures of racism. I want to focus especially on the connotations that are being attached to the racial position of being *blank*. In Dutch, the term used for the white racial position that is commonly used, though increasingly problematized, is *blank*. *Blank* carries different meanings than *wit*, which is the Dutch term for the color “white.” However, this different meaning has not been researched extensively. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use ‘racial position’ and not ‘race’ to discuss the racial group that someone is regarded to belong to. The reason for this is that it is not self-evident who belongs to which racial group. Rather, it depends on one’s position in society. This social position is not fixed and can change if **factors** such as class change. I will argue in this thesis that analogous to social position, one’s racial position can change as well.

of the white racial position as a social construct that is maintained through a constant performance of norms and values that are attached to an ideal of whiteness by investigating the ways in which racial positions are described in three novels about the Dutch East Indies. Through the examination of skin colors that are described in the novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, *De stille kracht* and *Rubber*, I can argue that the *blanke* skin color is not an invisible color. I am using novels that were written during the colonial period in the Netherlands because they have been a factor in shaping ideas about race in contemporary society by reproducing existing ideas about racial categories and making these ideas available to their readers. I have chosen to analyze novels that were written in the last part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century because in this period racial positions became increasingly important for the division of groups in society.

### **Nationalism and Social Stratification**

At the end of the eighteenth century a period began in which scientific thought became valued over religions in the dominant culture of Western Europe. Furthermore, nationalist thought developed which involved the desire to distinguish one's nation from the other and meant that states were increasingly thought of as autonomous territories with a homogenous group of inhabitants that all shared the same culture and background (Benedict Anderson 1983, 6). Benedict Anderson (1983) regarded the nation to be "an imagined political community" (5-6), because even though the people in a nation may have many things in common, they will never be personally connected to everyone who is part of the nation. Instead, they have to imagine that they share an identity. These nationalist sentiments fed the longing to expand national territories and found colonies overseas. The Netherlands was no exception in this and like other Western European countries they started to conquer and rule extensive territories in Asia. The Dutch East Indies, an archipelago of over 17,000 islands had long been used for trade with the VOC, the Dutch East Indies Company (Petram 2011, 3). When at the end of the eighteenth century the VOC went bankrupt, the Republic of the Netherlands bought the company and developed a colonial administrative organization to oversee and expand the territory that the VOC had previously been trading with. From the island of Java the Dutch ruled all the islands in the Dutch East Indies. Because of permanent trading posts for the VOC, Dutch people had settled in many places in the Dutch East

Indies before it was an official colony (Petram 2011, 150). These families had sometimes been living in these territories for several generations and developed social and cultural relations without the influence of the Dutch government (Bosma and Raben 2003, 10). In these societies racial positions were not of great significance. Class differences, economic possibilities and family relations were of much greater importance to the stratification of societies in which Dutch colonial families were the top of the social hierarchy (Bosma and Raben 2003, 10). In this society, people with a multiracial background could make a career if they had the right name. Colonial society in the Dutch East Indies changed at the end of the nineteenth century. There were several reasons for this.

First of all, the make-up of the colonial population changed. Because of the innovation of the steamboat more Dutch people moved to the Dutch East Indies (Bosma and Raben 2003, 29). Furthermore, the Dutch government started to get more involved in the regulation of the colonial society because attitudes towards indigenous people changed. In the Christian discourse, non-European people were regarded as racial groups that bore no resemblance to the white race (Gouda 1995, 129). In this discourse, white men were understood to have been made by God as a reflection of God himself. Through the Age of Enlightenment a discourse was developed that was based on natural science instead of Christianity. With the help of Charles Darwin's evolution theory it was reasoned that non-white races were behind in evolution and could be helped by the more developed white race to become modern civilizations like the European people (Gouda 1995, 130). It was through this Enlightenment discourse that people in the Netherlands addressed the Dutch government on its moral responsibility to concern itself with the development of their colonial subjects in the colonies. Another important factor for societal change in the Dutch East Indies was the idea of degeneration of the white race. This idea was based on a fear that was present in many Western European countries at the turn to the twentieth century that the white race should remain "pure" because through miscegenation the white race would degenerate (Hobsbawm 1995, 108). This fear prompted the Dutch government to develop policies to keep races divided in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies. The policies discouraged interracial relationships because the resulting children would be multiracial and therefore be a degeneration of the pure white race. Furthermore, it was harder to regulate these children because they did not belong to one racial group (Bosma and Raben 2003, 171).

The Dutch government also favored Dutch newcomers over families who had been living in the Dutch East Indies for a longer period of time because these colonial families could not prove as well that they were pureblood Dutch (Bosma and Raben 2003, 213). The Netherlands also had colonies in the Caribbean and South America, but these colonies were never as great a source of pride to the Dutch as the Dutch East Indies were (Wekker 2016, 161). The colonies in the West were more regarded as a burden to the Dutch government while the Dutch East Indies was full of minerals and fertile soil and therefore was often referred to as the “pearl in the Dutch crown.”

The racist and hierarchical thinking that was developed during the colonial period did not end when colonial territories formally ceased to exist. As Philomena Essed (1984) writes, the idea of superiority has become such a taken-for-granted part of the socialization of white people, that many white people cannot even recognize racism in their own feelings, attitude, and behavior towards black people (17). The decades of biological racism during the colonial period have made racism a part of contemporary dominant Dutch culture. World War II played a decisive role in the way in which the West was regarded by its colonies. With the rapid capitulation of the Dutch army to Nazi Germany and the occupation of the Dutch East Indies by Japan, it became clear to the colonized subjects of the Netherlands that their colonizer was not as invincible as they had thought previously. After World War II, a war of independence started in the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch government had expected to take back control of the colony after the Japanese occupation, but the Indonesian people refused to be oppressed by a foreign ruler any longer and wished to have their own sovereign nation. However, racist thought that was developed in the colonies had already been incorporated into Dutch dominant culture by the time that the Dutch East Indies ceased to exist and Indonesia was officially recognized as a sovereign nation by the Dutch government in 1949.

### **Culture and Fiction**

An examination of the connotations of words such as *blank*, a word that originates from colonial discourse but that is still being used in contemporary Dutch discourse, can facilitate a critical discussion of racism in dominant Dutch culture. “The tensions of using racializing terms in a society that prides itself on the absence of racism are shown up, and the unearned privileges of whiteness are foregrounded.” (Wekker 2016, 77).

The study of racial terms that were common in Dutch colonial society and that are still used today, can help to eradicate the dominant self-image of the Netherlands that racism is absent in its society. Even though the usage of the word *blank* is increasingly problematized in Dutch dominant culture, so far, no scholars have examined its meaning thoroughly. By paying special attention to the usage of the term *blank*, I will be able to illuminate a racial term which is unique to the Dutch language.

For this thesis I have chosen to analyze novels that were written by Dutch authors during the Dutch colonial period. The stories of these novels all take place in the Dutch East Indies. It is relevant to analyze novels because in a novel, the author gives the reader an account of the society on which the story is based. In novels, it is necessary for the authors to provide their readers with references to the society in which the fictional story is taking place. Without these references, the link to the real society would not be understood by the readers. These references do not have to be based on reality as much as they should be connected to the cultural framework through which the readers of the story regard the real society. This cultural framework has been constructed through the collective memory of society.

Through fiction, a colonial past that has left its traces in Dutch contemporary society but which cannot be revisited can become visible. As a literary form that came into existence in the Europe of the nineteenth century, the novel is inherently connected to imperialism (Said 1993, 70–71). Through the novel, imperialist ideology was reproduced and made available to a broad public. Furthermore, even though novels have no obligation to the truth, they are able to form an image of insecurities and contradictions that history books that do claim to tell the truth cannot capture (Pattynama 2014, 53). They can express feelings and tendencies that are not easily caught in historical facts.

The colonial reality of the Dutch East Indies was of a constant, albeit indirect influence on many people in the Netherlands. Novels written by Dutch authors who had spent time in the Dutch East Indies were an easy way to get indirect access to life in the colony.

During colonialism, racism was a part of everyday life, it was part of the cultural framework through which people experienced social life. It is within this same cultural framework that authors produced novels. For this reason, it is possible to construct a

cultural framework of a society in the past by analyzing these novels. The Dutch East Indies were an inspiration for many Dutch writers at the time because of its vastness and strangeness compared to the Netherlands. Furthermore, as a colony of the Netherlands, the Dutch East Indies were a territory that was regarded to belong to the Dutch. This sense of belonging can be found as a reason for Dutch authors to feel that they had the right to form an opinion of the colony and write it down in the form of a novel. For many people in Europe, stories that were written down by travelling compatriots were one of the few sources for information about the lives of people in other parts of the world (Essed 1984, 23). Based on these stories, people in the Netherlands formed ideas and opinions about people they never met. It is for this reason that racist accounts implicit in the stories were taken on uncritically and incorporated into the cultural framework of the Netherlands. By analyzing these novels, I am going back to the source that left its traces on Dutch contemporary society.

The oldest novel that I am analyzing is *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* by Paul Adriaan Daum. This novel was published in 1888 under the pseudonym P.S. Maurits. *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* is one of his many novels about the Dutch East Indies. Since he grew up in the colony, Dutch literary scholar Rob Nieuwenhuys (1978) attributes him great knowledge of the structures of colonial society and its people (16). Daum has been accepted into histories on Dutch literature and schoolbooks (Nieuwenhuys 1978, 237). The second-oldest novel that I will examine in this thesis is *De stille kracht* by Louis Couperus. This novel was published in 1901 and is still widely read in the Netherlands. *De stille kracht* is part of the Dutch Literary Canon that was formulated in 2002 and is frequently mentioned on reading lists for students. Like Daum, Couperus spent some time living in the Dutch East Indies. He started writing *De stille kracht* during his visit to his sister and her husband. Her husband was a Resident, like one of the main characters in the novel, and it has been argued that the character Resident Van Oudijck was based on Couperus' brother-in-law (Nieuwenhuys 1978, 257). Couperus learned a lot about the governing structures of the Dutch East Indies from his brother-in-law and inserted into the story. The last novel that I will investigate in this thesis is *Rubber* by Magdalena Hermina Székely-Lulofs. This novel is based on her own experiences of living on the island of Sumatra as the wife of a rubber planter (Nieuwenhuys 1978, 349), it is therefore partially autobiographical. The novel was a great success and was translated into many languages. In her novel, Székely-Lulofs did not hesitate to criticize

the excessive decadence of the Dutch planters and for this she received critique from people living in the colony who were afraid that the international fame of the novel would result in a loss of prestige on the side of the colony (Nieuwenhuys 1978, 350).

The novels were written some decades apart and express the racial positions of characters in different ways because of changing attitudes towards the importance of race for the structure of social society. Though all three stories take predominantly place in the Dutch East Indies, *Rubber* is about the colonial society on the island of Sumatra. Sumatra was less densely populated than the island of Java on which the stories of *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* and *De stille kracht* take place. Java was the island from which the colony was ruled and which was the political and cultural center of the colony. Consequently, Dutch colonial families that had established themselves over generations were more common than on Sumatra. I will take this difference into account when discussing changing attitudes regarding race in the last chapter of this thesis.

I will do a content analysis of the three novels in this thesis. This means that the content of the novels is my main focus. I will analyze the meaning of skin color in relation to the storylines of the novels. I will make use of the literary tool of *focalization* to clarify the thoughts and opinions of different characters in the stories. Rimmon-Kenan (1983) explains focalization as a character from the story that has taken on the position of the narrator (73). The character becomes the narrator of the story when they are the focalizer. Through focalization, the reader is allowed to take a peek into the head of the focalizing character since the reader can follow the thoughts and emotions that the character does not actively express. In all three novels there are several focalizers in the story. The narration constantly shifts between the focalizers, only to occasionally be interrupted by a narrator who describes situations and spaces. This form of narration is not connected to a specific character. It therefore has the ability to be in different places and know things that the characters are not aware of. It overlooks everything and everyone and claims to be an objective spectator. However, like all characters in the story, this form of narration is a product of the imagination of the author. It is thus subjected to the cultural framework through which the author perceives the world they are describing.

My first chapter is a theoretical framework in which I explain a wide array of concepts considering racism. In doing this, I lay the theoretical foundation on which I will build

my analysis in the following chapters. I discuss the invention of race and how it is connected to the ideology of imperialism. In this part, I stress the importance of the idea of whiteness in the construction of race. I explain my understanding of concepts such as biological and cultural racism, imperialism, colonialism, performativity and whiteness. I will argue that if race is a social construct, race needs to be performed constantly to exist.

The analysis of the novels will be divided over four chapters. Each chapter will examine a theme concerning skin color that is present in the novels. I am focusing on descriptions of skin color because by looking at the ways in which connotations are being attached to skin colors, it can become clear what racial position characters in the novels are regarded to be in. I have chosen not to discuss one novel per chapter because it is my aim to uncover interconnections between the ways in which these authors portray skin color and racial positions in the novels. Therefore, I think that it is more useful to show the re-occurrence of themes in the novels. In the first chapter of my analysis, chapter two in this thesis, I will discuss the *blanke* skin color. By analyzing the characters that are described as *blank* in the three novels, recurring connotations to the *blanke* skin color can become clear. In the third chapter I will analyze descriptions of brown characters and discuss brown spaces that are present in the novels. By paying attention to the ways in which spaces are used for certain events of the story, racist stereotypes can be uncovered. These first two analytical chapters will allow me to map racial positions as they are described in the novels. In chapter four this will help me to analyze instances in which the skin colors of characters change and argue that it is possible to shift from one racial position to another. I will problematize the racial categories by analyzing instances in which the skin colors of characters change in concurrence with the storyline. These changes of skin color help to illustrate how subjective the connection of skin colors to racial positions are. In relation to this, I will discuss characters that are not part of one racial position because of their multiracial background in chapter five. Furthermore, I will explain in what ways the different periods in which the three novels were written becomes prevalent through the discussion of these border cases of racial positions. I will end my thesis with a conclusion based on all chapters in which I connect the theoretical foundation of chapter one to the analysis of the novels in chapters one, two and three. I will now proceed to the theoretical framework of the thesis.

## **Chapter 1: The Performance of Race and Racism**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will draw on the field of critical race theory to discuss racism. I will demonstrate the historical connection that racism has with imperial practices. Then, I will explain racism as it was prevalent during the colonial period of the Netherlands. After this historical context I will explain the contemporary understanding of race as a social construct and how the concept of performativity is applicable to race. Lastly, I will argue that the white racial position has oftentimes not been taken into account in discussions about race and why this is a problem. In order to examine racism, I will define my understanding of the concepts of race, racism, performativity, whiteness and white innocence. These concepts will assist me discuss the invisible position of whiteness. During the analysis of the novels, the theories of critical race, critical whiteness, and post-colonialism will allow me to identify racist accounts and views that are prevalent in the stories. To define the concepts of race and racism as they will be used throughout the thesis I base myself on the academic field of critical race theory and post-colonial theory. Through the mapping out of the origins of racist thinking, it becomes clear what role imperialism played in the developments of a racist discourse.

### **Racism and Culture**

Critical race theory is an area of study that was developed amongst scholars in the United States. The aim of these scholars was to challenge the racism as it is prevalent in the North-American legal system and in North-American society as a whole (West 1995, xiii). Critical race scholar Alan Freeman (1995) describes the common understanding of racism as an “intentional, albeit irrational, deviation by a conscious wrongdoer from otherwise neutral, rational, and just ways of distributing jobs, power, prestige, and wealth” (xiv). This understanding of racism is the most prevalent in the North-American legal system. Racism is then only identifiable if the person committing the racist act is being racist on purpose and there is no room for acknowledging that racism is often implicitly or unconsciously performed. Furthermore, the assumption is made that the structures and institutions in society are based on a neutral, non-racist framework. Theorists of critical race argue that this understanding of racism is too

narrow (Essed 1984; West et al. 1995). They wish to include a form of racism that is more structural but often implicit. Charles R. Lawrence III (1995) states that “most of us are unaware of our racism, we do not recognize the ways in which our cultural experience has influenced our beliefs about race or the occasions on which those beliefs affect our actions” (237). This implicit form of racism is so ingrained in our cultural framework that we are unable to recognize it when occurs. Implicit racism often presents itself in the form of biases against certain groups. People have been socialized into understanding these biases as the truth and discriminate groups of people based on their bias without being aware of it. This form of racism is the hardest to confront, but the most necessary to unpack because it is present in many aspects of dominant culture. In this thesis I will focus on the racism as it comes forward in three novels about the Dutch East Indies.

According to Essed (1984), racism is based on the ideology of *ethnocentrism* (18). Central to this ideology is the idea that one’s own ethnic group is better than that of others. In ethnocentrism, people are categorized according to what is believed to be their ethnicity. Ethnicity is, just as race, an imagined social construction that divides people into groups. In Western Europe, the groups of people that are placed in racialized positions with negative connotations are the same groups that are seen to belong to non-Western European ethnicities. These groups are “others” in the Western European perception of race.<sup>3</sup> In racist societies, the group of people that is ethnically perceived as white-skinned is considered to be superior to other ethnicities or races.<sup>4</sup> This way of thinking attributes positive characteristics to the white racialized position and carries negative prejudices towards other racialized positions. “Racism is a complex whole of prejudice and discrimination based on an ideology of racial domination and oppression.” (Own translation; Essed 1984, 21).<sup>5</sup> Historically, the racist ideology

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<sup>3</sup> This Western/non-Western binary is also present within Europe. Even though Slavic and Jewish people are formally considered to belong to the white race, they are often ‘othered’ and assigned a non-white racialized position in society. Because of the ambiguity of what race is, groups of people can change racialized positions according to their culture, behavior, and class, and so on. This fluidity of race makes it possible for the dominant groups in Western societies to decide who is considered to be white, and who is not.

<sup>4</sup> I am aware that racism is closely connected to other forms of discrimination, such as discrimination based on class, sex, ability, and gender. In this chapter, I choose to focus on racist structures. However, I will discuss other forms of discrimination in relation to race when they emerge during the analysis of the novels in the following chapters.

<sup>5</sup> Original: ‘Racisme is een complex geheel van vooroordeel en discriminatie gebaseerd op een ideologie van raciale dominantie en onderdrukking. Racisme betekent het definitief *toeschrijven van inferioriteit* aan een bepaalde raciaal/etnische groep en het gebruik van dit

implied that people who were regarded to belong to a non-white racialized position were thought to be less evolved than people in the white racialized position. It was assumed that non-white people were more closely related to animals and lacked the mental capacity that white people possessed. Non-white people were ascribed a social position of inferiority through which their unequal treatment in society was justified (Essed 1984, 21). From this assumption, a racism developed that regarded non-white people to be inherently less valuable and skillful than white people.

When during the Age of Enlightenment racialized positions became an important social marker in Europe, it was reasoned that people with a white skin color were more civilized than other races. Their “modern” civilizations and cultural practices were seen as signs of the moral superiority of the white race. Particularly the black race was believed to be primitive: their behavior was deemed near to that of animals (Gouda 1995, 122). In the racist discourse, the black race was perceived as the link between apes and the white race. “Civilization and culture were [...] the names for the standard of measurement in the hierarchy of values through which European culture defined itself by placing itself at the top of a scale against which all other societies, or groups within society, were judged.” (Young 1995, 94) This hierarchy of values was constructed by dominant European culture and ranked European societies at its apex. Racism is based on this hierarchy of values. Western-European people formulated the hierarchy in such a way that they would stand at the apex of this hierarchy. Through the racist discourse, Europeans tried to find a shared identity and formulate a definition of what it means to be European. The actual concern of the division of people into groups with a certain typical appearance is the association of racial groups with specific properties and a certain kind of behavior (Essed 1984, 19). Race is thus a social construct which aims to organize people into groups according to the race that they are believed to belong to. It focuses particularly on the skin color, but it has developed historically to define characteristics that are regarded crucial for this division (Essed 1984, 19). The historical context of the invention of race illustrates the reasons behind dividing groups of people according to their skin color. The novels that I discuss in this thesis express biological racism through the cultural framework in which they were written.

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minderwaardigheidsprincipe om de ongelijkwaardige behandeling van die groep te propageren en te rechtvaardigen.’

## **Imperialism**

Imperialism is the ideology that motivated Western European nations to form empires by subjecting the inhabitants of distant territories to their rule. Imperialism made use of a racist discourse that based itself on what were presumed to be biological differences between groups of people. The discourse around this social construct of biological race functioned as an ethical justification for the subjugation of other groups of people. “Racial theory cannot be separated from its own historical moment: it was developed at a particular era of British and European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century.” (Young 1995, 91) The nineteenth century was part of the Age of Enlightenment in which ideas took hold among Europeans that positioned themselves above all other people in terms of development. Imperialist behavior and actions, such as the occupation of other people’s territories, the exploitation of their labor, and the ignorance, rejection and destruction of existing cultural practices in these areas, were legitimized through the racist assumption of white supremacy and the idea that Europeans had the duty to enlighten others with Western modern culture. During European colonial expansion, it was useful to be able to differentiate the people belonging to imperial powers from other people. During the height of imperialism in the nineteenth century, the dominating metropolitan centers were all located in Western Europe. Colonialism was made possible through the ideology of imperialism. Said (1993) calls colonialism the almost inevitable consequence of imperialism, namely the implanting of settlements on the distant territory that is being ruled (9). According to this argument colonialism is understood as a consequence of an ideology of imperialism. In the process of colonization, a racist discourse functioned as a justification for the oppression of non-European people. The white race was equated with Western-Europeans, so in the imperialist racist discourse, all other people were inferior to Western-Europeans. More and more Western-Europeans were convinced that they, as the superior race, had the moral duty to civilize their subjects. In the Dutch East Indies, too, colonial policy was increasingly directed towards “civilizing” its inhabitants during the second half of the nineteenth century. It is in the course of this last part of the colonial period that the novels that I will analyze were written.

During the imperialist period, biological racism was prevalent in all layers of society. Laws and policies were constructed around it, the access to space was organized according to biological race, and race was regarded to be of significant importance to

one's identity. Edward Said (1993) states that the "era of high or classical imperialism" which formally ended with "the dismantling of the great colonial structures after World War II, has in one way or another continued to exert considerable cultural influence in the present" (7). The discrimination of non-white people has continued through the cultural influence that imperialism has on contemporary post-imperial societies. Nandita Sharma (2015) argued that a new form of racism emerged after World War II because it had become easier for antiracists to challenge "racist arguments based on biological superiority/inferiority" (p. 108). The atrocities that were committed by Nazi Germany against Jewish people and other minorities had been justified through biological racism and other forms of discrimination. Because biological racism was challenged, the post-war form of racism focused more on cultural differences between groups of people than on biological distinctions. In this new form of racism, biological difference was no longer a valid reason for the discrimination of groups. Instead, groups were divided according to what practices were believed to inherently belong to a certain culture. In practice, the division of groups in this new cultural racism was not in any way different from the divisions made in a discourse of biological racism. The same groups of people that had formerly been subjected to biological racism were still discriminated against. However, it became more difficult to trace the discrimination back to racist ways of thinking because the groups of people were no longer explicitly ascribed an inferior racialized position. In cultural racism, the original ideology of biological racism is present in the sense that the same devaluative attributes are assigned to people who are not white. The justification for this discrimination is less clear because its origin (biological racism) has become socially unacceptable. In both forms of racism, a process of domination and marginalization occurs. The notion of a hierarchy in the concepts of culture and race developed at the height of imperialism (Young 1995, 91) in the context of Western-Europe. The aim to clearly define culture and race was to find a shared identity marker that made a distinction between Western-Europeans and other people. Robert Young (1995) states that because the formulation of the concepts coincided with one another, "an implicit racism lies powerfully hidden but repeatedly propagated within Western notions of culture" (91). This implicit racism is present in the cultures of all former colonial powers. In the following paragraph, I will demonstrate this by discussing explicit and implicit racism in the Netherlands.

## **The Performativity of Race**

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (2011) explains gender as performative. She uses the concept of performativity to argue that gender “has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Judith Butler 2011, 173). In a manner similar to social expectations around gender behavior, to be in a racial position means that one has to act according to what people in that racial position are supposed to behave like. As social constructs, gender as well as race do not exist outside of the minds of the people who believe in its existence. Race is thus what these people believe it to be. “It is only the continual reenactment of racial norms that retroactively produces the appearance of race as a fixed essential truth.” (Ehlers 2012, 70) It is necessary for race to be understood as a fixed essential truth to make it possible to structure a society around it. The racial norms mean that people in certain racial positions are allowed to enter spaces and behave in a way that people in other racial positions are not. It also means that all people have to constantly perform their racial position to reaffirm its existence and their belonging to it (Ehlers 2012, 70). Given the white privilege that people in the white racial position have, it is important to constantly differentiate themselves from people in a non-white racial position. By making this distinction, white people can maintain their privileges. The group of white people that is at the apex of the hierarchy in a racist society has the most to lose, so values the constant performance of racial positions more than people who are negatively affected by their racial position. For this reason, the novels I choose to analyze are all written by people with a white racial position.

## **Dutch Colonialism**

In my delimitation of the Dutch colonial period, I follow Gloria Wekker (2016) in seeing its beginning at the exploratory maritime journeys in the 1600s (161). Since I refer to Dutch authors who wrote about the Dutch East Indies, I make use of the date 1949 which in Dutch national memory is regarded as the end of the colonial period of the Dutch East Indies. During the colonial period, Dutch physical anthropologists tried to categorize groups of people according to what was regarded to be their biological race. “Thanks to these studies, by now it is [...] well established that physical anthropology contributed to racist and hierarchical thinking both in Europe and its colonies.” (Sysling 2013, 106–7) Physical anthropology looked for scientific

explanations of cultural preconceptions of race. By categorizing people according to all kinds of biological features, physical anthropologists hoped to find what made races biologically different.

Throughout the whole of the Dutch colonial period, racial positions played a role in structuring society. However, within this period, the make-up of the society of the Dutch East Indies changed significantly, most notably at the end of the nineteenth century when the inflow of Dutch people, both men and women, searching for wealth in the colony increased. It is especially then that divisions between racial groups were implemented bureaucratically and legally (Bosma and Raben 2003, 30). It is during this period that the novels that I analyze were written. In *Dutch Culture Overseas*, Frances Gouda (1995) sees a shift in how indigenous people in the colonies were regarded during the Age of Enlightenment which covers the whole of the nineteenth century (130). In this new understanding of the colonial other, their minds were like those of children that were unable to rule a land on their own. “Childlike natives could not yet comprehend the nature of the enlightened world of adults even if, in due course they possessed the capacity to absorb the rules of civilized conduct and to embrace the benefits of rational thought.” (Gouda 1995, 130) In the discourse of Enlightenment, the colonial ruler had a moral duty to educate their colonial subjects. At the end of the nineteenth century, Dutch people started to develop policies that would allow indigenous people in the Dutch East Indies to receive education. Their aim was to educate the inhabitants by introducing Dutch schools and to economically develop the territory that the Dutch had colonized (Sysling 2013, 15). This mindset came up around 1870, when the distance between Europe and the Dutch East Indies became shorter through the opening of the Suez Canal and the invention of steam boats (Bosma and Raben 2003, 29). The colonial society and culture started to focus its attention more on Europe than before. It became more important to be able to show “European-ness” through culture as well as through race (Gouda 1995, 191). In colonial novels from the last century of the colonial period we will find that race was more important as a marker of social position than previously had been the case.

Before the way of thinking of Enlightenment, the view that Dutch people had of the indigenous people in the Dutch East Indies was one of inherent otherness from themselves. They were regarded to be of a different race with characteristics contrasting to their own. Where Dutch women were seen to be sexually passive, indigenous women

were often portrayed as seductive and sensual (Gouda 1995, 182). The subjects of the colonial ruler were regarded to be as different from white people as “monkeys and apes, skunks, lapdogs, or draft animals and other beasts of burden” (Gouda 1995, 138). In the nineteenth century during Enlightenment, a view of indigenous people developed that understood them to be in the childlike state that the Dutch people had been in hundreds of years ago. “Often, all non-white peoples, whether female or male, were identified with infantile helplessness, rendering everyone instinctually dependent on ‘patriarchal tutelage.’” (Gouda 1995, 177) The idea developed that the Dutch could be the patriarch to indigenous people and in time educate them to become as civilized as the Dutch themselves. On the other hand, there were people who were afraid that by educating the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies, they would lose their closeness to nature and become spoiled by civilization. The indigenous people were regarded as noble savages, “natural and unaffected,” in a balance between “primitive bestiality and the petulant activity of our vanity” (Gouda 1995, 131). These noble savages should be allowed to remain in their ignorance of the sorrows of the world instead of being forced to partake in the modern world. Even though “noble” implies a positive regard towards “savages,” a form of racism towards “noble savages” is still at play. The noble savage remains an “other” that redefines the “us” as developed and civilized. This idea of the noble savage was present in the perception of colonial subjects of other European countries as well.

In terms of colonial history, Dutch people generally regard Dutch colonialism to be different from the colonialism of other Western-European countries such as Britain and France (Bijl 2012, 449). Regarding the strictness of racial positions in society, interracial relationships were more accepted in the Dutch East Indies than in colonies that were ruled by other European countries. “In contrast to the British Empire, where English authorities rarely endowed Eurasians with “European” civil status, this was a normal practice in the setting of Dutch colonial society in Indonesia.” (Gouda 1995, 163) In this way, people with a multiracial background were able to function in the society of the Dutch East Indies without being condemned for their hybrid racial position. However, these *Indos*, as they were called, became a problem when in the nineteenth century the colonial government wished to emphasize differences between racial groups. The large group of Indo-Europeans that interracial unions had spawned, regardless of the gender configuration that sired them, started to present a political

quandary to the most reactionary *totok* residents of the Indies (Gouda 1995, 170). *Indos* could be found in the environment of the European rulers as well as in the poor neighborhoods of the indigenous people. This made them a hybrid group that did not fit into the racial categories of *blanke* and brown people.

The society of the Dutch East Indies was based on a racist framework, but the norms of racial positions were less strict for women than for men. “White racial identity of both Dutch and Indonesian women was inherently fluid because legal classifications could shift as a result of marriage, white men’s racial status [...] was indelible and permanent.” (Gouda 1995, 163) For women in the Dutch East Indies, their racial position was not based on their complexion or their looks, but on their husbands. By marrying a man with a different racial position than their own, women’s racial positions changed into that of their husband. This change of the racial positions of women in the Dutch East Indies shows how flexible understandings of race are.

### **Dutch Post-Colonialism**

After World War II, racist practices based on the idea of biological difference were challenged. At the same time, the slow decline of colonial territory commenced. The argument that the colonized people were inferior to the superior race of the colonial European powers was no longer valid. Instead of dividing people according to the racial group that they are perceived to belong to, groups of people became organized according to “cultural habits.” Racists asserted that white people were inherently different from other people because of their norms and values. Culture became the main denominator for the divisions of groups of people. Through the perspective of this cultural racism, culture is perceived as static and hereditary. Someone’s norms and values, which are related to the concept of “culture,” are seen as such an important identifier that they cannot be disconnected from the person’s identity. Cultural racism thereby gains the same qualities as racism which is based on the perception of biological racism. Cultural racism is a manifestation of biological racism in a society in which it has become problematic to talk about racialized positions as natural. The problematization of biological racism has not resulted in the eradication of the injustice, but in the re-branding of it. In neo-racist societies, discrimination against minority groups did not diminish. However, it did become less visible as a structural part of society. When discussing racism in the Dutch context, Philomena Essed and Sandra

Trienekens (2008) assert that “whereas race was a common category in early twentieth-century school textbooks and scientific work, it disappeared from the discursive scene after the Second World War” (p. 55). Essed and Trienekens see a shift concerning the visibility of racism taking place after World War II and continuing until the present. The current relative invisibility is a problem because challenging an occurrence in a society is ineffective if it is not noticed by the people who are part of this society and who are complicit in sustaining this social structure. “The systemic nature of racism, everyday racism, is being denied, and with that the acknowledgement that white skin color is one of the criteria of inclusion in the community of ‘real’ European nationals.” (Essed and Trienekens 2008, 68). Europeans use culture as a tool for differentiation<sup>6</sup> and a white skin color is a way for Europeans to distinguish themselves from others. Many white people in the Netherlands deny the existence of structural racism in their society: “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” (Wekker 2016, 1). This dominant discourse is in accordance with a national self-image that claims the same and is constantly being reproduced. The dominant Dutch discourse is blind to the structural racism that is based on the perception of culture as static and hereditary to people.

## **Whiteness**

The problem with discussing whiteness in the context of structural racism is that white people are not used to being included in discussions about race. They are not used to questioning their own complicity and privileged position in racist structures in society. “A difficult problem is that white people are inclined to (consciously or unconsciously) disguise or deny their own racism.” (Own translation; Essed 1984, 8)<sup>7</sup> This is an issue, since racism cannot be challenged if it is disguised and denied. In discussions about race and racism, the focus is predominantly directed to groups of people in racialized positions. The white racialized position is often invisible in these debates. “As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm.” (Dyer 1997, 1) The

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<sup>6</sup> This cultural racism is not a phenomenon that is exclusively present in Europe or the Netherlands, but I am focusing on Dutch racism specifically, so I will not discuss other places with similar structures of racism.

<sup>7</sup> Original: ‘Een moeilijk probleem is, dat witte mensen geneigd zijn het eigen racisme (bewust of onbewust) te verhullen en te ontkennen.’

normalization of the white skin color prevents challenging the position of power that white people have in society because of white privilege.

In this part of the theoretical framework I will explain concepts that have been formulated by scholars from critical whiteness studies. Critical whiteness studies aims to create more visibility in society for the racialized position of white people.<sup>8</sup> “The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world.” (Dyer 1997, 2) In order to talk about whiteness, structures of racism have to be acknowledged. It is important to discuss whiteness because it helps to illustrate in what ways the colonial histories of former colonial powers leave traces in the national memories and self-images of these countries. It is the people in power in society who are capable of changing discriminatory structures. “Whites as a group have the *position of power* and the means that makes racism possible in society.” (Own translation; Essed 1984, 16)<sup>9</sup> It is thus white people who have to make an effort to engage in practices of eradicating structural racism in society.

Scholars have proposed several concepts to explain why whiteness remains largely invisible in discussions of race. In *White Innocence* (2016), Dutch post-colonial scholar Gloria Wekker discusses whiteness as it is regarded in the Netherlands. She argues that white Dutch people are not capable of critically investigating their cultural archive of colonialism and its influence on “historical cultural configurations and current dominant and cherished self-representations and culture” (Wekker 2016, 2). Instead, they rely on an attitude of simulated innocence in order to keep their progressive, anti-racist self-image in place. Wekker (2016) formulated the term *white innocence* for this attitude: “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

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<sup>8</sup> Critiques have also been formulated on this academic field by scholars from critical race studies because they were afraid that the studying of white people would be nothing but more of the same. Historically, white people have appropriated the dominant position in academic research. Critical race theorists argued that something like ‘white studies’ could be used as a way for white people to again direct the attention away from non-white people. I, however, think that critical whiteness studies is indispensable to critical race studies since it focuses on the principal role that white people play in structures of racism. I believe that this has to be acknowledged before societies can put an end to racism.

<sup>9</sup> Original: ‘Witten als groep [hebben] de *machtspositie* en de machtsmiddelen die racisme in de samenleving [...] mogelijk maakt.’

and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light to other folks and nations” (2). This self-image of white innocence was present during the colonial period and was a useful ethical disclaimer for the oppression of other people. White innocence has survived in the Netherlands to this day where it justifies ongoing discrimination of non-white Dutch people. Dutch white innocence is produced through several means. Internationally, the Netherlands have the image of a progressive country. It is regarded as a country with a relatively gender equal society and fair treatment of minorities. Furthermore, the national narrative on colonialism neglects to address past and ongoing struggles with their (former) colonies. Because of this positive representation of the past, Dutch people are not encouraged to criticize their own perception of history and dominant culture. In a similar manner, the structural racism that is present in this history and culture is not challenged. By unpacking the attitude of white innocence, Wekker opens up the discussion about the fundamental role of white people in the perpetuation of structural racism.

In order to achieve that white people take responsibility in challenging racist structures and become aware of their complicity in these structures, “white people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange” (Dyer 1997, 10). Whiteness has not yet become strange to white Dutch people. In the perception of most Dutch white people, whiteness is not something that defines them or is an important part of their identity. Contrastingly, it has for long been clear to Dutch people of color what position of privilege white people have in Dutch society. “From everyday experience in the Netherlands, most black people have known for a long time that racism is present here, manifold and widespread.” (Essed 1984, 15) White people are able to deny the ubiquity of racism because its existence does not affect them negatively and the denial of racism permits them to remain in their advantaged social position and allows them to keep enjoying their privileges and not engage with anti-racism.

Peggy McIntosh (1990) is a women’s studies scholar who wrote about whiteness and racism in the United States and formulated the concept of white privilege to discuss the racialized position of whiteness in American society. “White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.” (McIntosh 1990, 31) Through white privilege, people who are regarded to be white are treated in a manner that is advantageous to them. This

coincides with a disadvantageous treatment of people in non-white positions in society. According to McIntosh (1990), the ideology that the United States is a meritocracy helps to keep white privilege invisible to the people enjoying it (35). The idea of a meritocracy is that all positions of power in society have been obtained by people solely based on their merit. In a meritocracy, prejudice and discrimination are non-existent. In a “true” meritocracy, privilege, and hence discrimination, cannot exist.<sup>10</sup> McIntosh (1990) calls the idea that the United States is a meritocracy a myth (35). The American meritocracy is, like white innocence, a falsehood which is complicit in the racist structures of its society because reference to the meritocracy, like white innocence, inhibits a productive conversation about racism. The acceptance of the existence of white privilege in racist societies goes hand-in-hand with the acknowledgement that no society will ever be truly meritocratic.

### ***Blank***

The term English *white* as well as the Dutch term *blank* are traditionally associated with words such as “good” and “pure” (Essed 1984, 23). *Blank*, however, carries extra connotations since the term is also associated with neutrality, unsoiledness, and the absence of color. In this, *blank* differs from *white*. Because of the double meaning of the white skin color and the absence of color, *blanke* people can perceive themselves as the basis of the Dutch nation. Furthermore, the colorless term used for Dutch people who are perceived to belong to the white race results in the making invisible of the role that the racial position of whiteness plays in structures of racism. In contrast, all Dutch people with a different skin color are understood as “others.” In the Dutch language, there are two words to refer to whiteness. For the white color, the word *wit* is used. To talk about the white skin color, the word *blank* was historically the correct word. “The Dutch word ‘blank,’ translating to ‘white,’ as opposed to *wit*, a political term, carries strong, positively evaluative overtones.” (Wekker 2016, 76) *Wit* is increasingly used by anti-racists for the white skin color because, as opposed to *blank*, *wit* is, like *white*, a term that is used for an actual color. By making the white racial position more visible, anti-racists aim to address the complicity of this position in the racist structures of society. By paying attention to the white racial position in the novels I will analyze, I wish to add to this visibility.

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<sup>10</sup> I put ‘true’ in between quotation marks because I think that meritocratic societies are an illusion and fantasy since people will always be guided by preconceptions and prejudice.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have mapped the fields of critical race and post-colonial theory. I argued for the relevance of studying whiteness in discussions of race. Furthermore, I showed in what way imperialist attitudes are connected to racism and that race is a social construct that needs constant affirmation and performance in order to exist. In the context of the Netherlands, I looked at the racist practices of physical anthropologists during the colonial period and at how these practices contributed to making the racist discourse a part of Dutch dominant culture. I explained how ideas that were developed during Enlightenment changed opinions about race in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, I argued that racism is still present in the Netherlands through language. I illustrated this by discussing the Dutch word *blank* which is used for the white skin color but also carries connotations of being neutral, pure, and unsoiled. This keeps the racialized position of white people in place as neutral. From this neutral position, all people with non-white skin colors are othered. By explaining the concept of *white innocence*, I illustrated why structural racism is not regularly challenged in Dutch society.

In this chapter, I showed the interconnections between biological racism in the colonial period and contemporary cultural racism by combining the fields of critical race theory with post-colonial theory. By showing the connection between the two forms of racism, it becomes clear why it is relevant to study the colonial period. In my view it is of critical importance to explicitly consider the position of whiteness in discussions on race, because there is a general unwillingness to solve problems of structural racism that particularly concern this racial group. When focusing on the Dutch context, it makes sense to discuss the meaning of *blank* because it plays a crucial role in the Dutch understanding of whiteness. In the following chapters, I will analyze three novels that were written during the colonial period. I will use the concepts on racism that I discussed in this chapter to analyze the ways in which racial positions are mentioned in the novels. These concepts will help me uncover the implicit meanings that are attached to the racial positions that come to the fore.

## Chapter 2: The *Blanke* Skin, That Milky Complexion

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss descriptions of the *blanke* skin color the novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, *De stille kracht*, and *Rubber*. As *blank* is the skin color that is mentioned most in the novels, I will begin my analysis by looking at the context in which *blank* is used. I will examine the connotations that are assigned to it through the repeated linking of certain virtues to *blanke* people. By doing this, I will be able to uncover the multiple semantic layers of *blank*. Since *blank* is mainly used in relation to characters that are described as innocent or beautiful, I will focus my attention on these characteristics. Regarding beauty, I will illustrate the correlation that the novels offer between the *blank* race and ideals of femininity. Most characters that are described to be *blank* are women. I will look at the connotations that are ascribed to these women and to their *blank*-ness. In the next chapter, I will pay attention to the few *blanke* male characters that are mentioned in the novels.

### “A Real Dutch Woman, Pink, *Blank*, Naïve and Good”

In the novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, *De stille kracht*, and *Rubber*, *blank* is used multiple times to describe the skin colors of Dutch characters in the story. Sometimes the narrator describes a character as *blank*, and other times characters are described as *blank* through the focal point of another character. On numerous occasions, the description of a character's *blanke* skin color is related to their cheeks turning red. In these instances, *blank* is used as a way to describe the color of a white skin. In relation to descriptions of female characters, it is often stated that the translucence of the women's *blanke* skin makes their cheeks red with excitement. This blushing is never described to happen to people who are not *blank*, nor to men.

In *Rubber*, Annet Walendijk is a young woman who newly arrived in the Dutch East Indies with her husband. She is expecting her first child, and Anne Terheide, the wife of a highly-ranked inspector, organizes a baby shower for her in her honor. Annet is described as a shy woman who is constantly blushing.

Annet bloosde, keek met een schichtigen blik naar mevrouw Terheide, antwoordde, als een H.B.S.-meisje: “Fijn.... en ik ben het feestvarken....” Anne

glimlachte er om, dacht, terwijl ze haar oogen over Annet's blozend jong gezichtje liet glijden: “Wat een kind nog.... Hoe oud zou ze zijn?” Ze bracht haar gedachten ook in woorden. Annette [sic] bloosde nog dieper: “Ik ben twintig jaar, mevrouw....” Ze hield haar adem in, alsof ze nog wat wou zeggen, weifelde, bracht het er dan tóch triomfantelijk uit: “En Jóóp.... ik bedoel.... mijn mán.... die is twee-en-twintig. En als het kindje geboren wordt.... dan zijn we met zijn allen, sámen twee-en-veertig jaar.” Anne ving een geamuseerden blik van Marian op. Ze wisten, dat ze beiden precies hetzelfde dachten, met een beetje verteedering voor dat tengere blonde vrouwtje: “Annet wordt nooit groot-mensch!” (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 148)<sup>11</sup>

Annet's innocence and inexperience because of her young age cause Anne Terheide and Marian Versteegh, two older women, to feel endearment towards her. They feel she will always remain childlike and never fully grow up. Her innocence is emphasized by her cheeks that are constantly red from blushing. However, in the eyes of another women, Renée van Laer, Annet is considered an annoyingly typical *blanke* kind of woman. After a social call to her close friend Marian Renée reflects on her visit.

Ze was naar Marianne geweest, had er wat gebabbeld. Annet Walendijk was er ook. Dikke vriendschap was dat met Marian.... Renée trok met haar mond. Zoo'n écht sinkehvrouwtje!.... Of néé, eigenlijk: zoo'n écht hollandsch vrouwtje, roze, blank, naïef en goed. En ongeloofelijk dom.... meende Renée. Ze nipte de asch

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<sup>11</sup> I have chosen to use translations made by my sister into English of the original Dutch versions of the novels. This allowed me to ensure that the connotations that are attached to certain Dutch words concerning race were incorporated. In a revision of Teixeira de Mattos' translation of *De stille kracht* by E. M. Beekman, Beekman states that “the reason his [Teixeira de Mattos] translation was kept is chiefly due to his congruence of *tone* with the original and to a similar, somewhat archaic, diction. But there are many lapses, however, mostly due to his ignorance of English idiom, and to startling mistranslations of Dutch words and phrases” (Couperus 1985, 40). I therefore did not want to work with De Mattos' official translation.

Annet was blushing, glanced at Mrs. Terheide, replied, in a governess-like manner: ‘Great.... and I am the birthday girl...’ Anne smiled, thought, whilst absorbing Annet's rosy cheeks and young face: ‘Such a child.... How old is she?’ She put her thoughts into words. Annette's blush darkened: ‘I am twenty years old, madam....’ She held her breath, as if she would continue, hesitated, but then exclaimed: ‘And Jóóp....I mean....my husband.... is twenty two. And when the baby is born.... we shall be forty two together.’ Anne caught Marian's amused expression. They knew that they were thinking the same, with a hint of endearment for that skinny, blond thing: ‘Annet will never grow up!’

van haar sigaret. Ze had geen contact met zulke vrouwen. Bah! Nee. Wat een vervelende morgen was het geweest! (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 154)<sup>12</sup>

Renée describes the looks of Annet Walendijk as pink and *blank*, and her personality as naïve and good. From Renée's focal point these looks and personality traits are typical for certain Dutch women. Renée dislikes that kind of woman and is annoyed that she had to spend a morning in the presence of Annet. The childlike naïvity that causes endearment with Anne Terheide and Marian Versteegh, irritates Renée van Laer. According to all three focalizers, Annet Walendijk is an innocent woman, whether this is appreciated, or not.

Similar to Annet Walendijk, Nanni is a young girl and a new arrival in the Dutch East Indies. She is also described as *blank* and as innocent. When Nanni hears that her sister and brother-in-law, do not have much money spare, she intends to start working to earn an extra income and no longer be dependent on them.

“Ik heb een advertentie geplaatst.” “Een advertentie? En waarvoor?” Nanni bloosde verlegen. “Ik wou piano-lessen geven.” Een oogenblik keek Louise haar aan stom van verbazing en niet in staat een woord te spreken. Toen zei ze met gefronste wenkbrauwen. “Wil je zoo goed wezen dadelijk die advertentie te laten terughalen. Of liever ik zal zelf wel iemand den jongen nazenden.” “Doe geen moeite, Wies. Mijn besluit staat vast; ik wil niet ten laste van jullie blijven.” “O zoo, is dat de zaak. Hebben die praatjes van van den Broek je zulke dwaasheden in het hoofd gebracht. Is het dáárom dat je ons die schande wilt aandoen.” “Schande? Is het....” “Schande voor van den Broek een schoonzuster te hebben, die muziekllessen geeft, - ja, dat is het. Ik zeg niet voor andere menschen, maar voor hem, die zulk een carrière moet maken, is het schande.” Het zusje was boos geworden. Zij had bij haar vroolijke onschuld, een zeer beslist karakter. “Als het schande is op een eerlijke en fatsoenlijke wijze zijn brood te verdienen, dan zal ik

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<sup>12</sup> She visited Marianne, they chatted some. Annet Walendijk was also present. She considered Marian one of her best friends.... Renée pulled a face. Such a *sinkeh* woman.... Or even worse: A real Dutch woman, pink, *blank*, naïve and good. And incredibly dumb.... in Renée's view. She flicked the ash of her cigarette. She didn't entertain contact with such women. Pooh! No. What a horrible morning it had been!

jou en van den Broek die schande aandoen.” “Je zult het niet.” “Ik zal het wèl, en ik wil het.” (Daum 1888, 260–61)<sup>13</sup>

Like Annet Walendijk, Nanni blushes shyly when she is directly confronted, in this case by her sister. Furthermore, she is described to be cheerfully innocent. Nanni is stubborn and has a temperament, but is nevertheless a girl of good virtues. Through the blushing that is visible on the cheeks of both Annet and Nanni, their feelings are expressed. The honesty of their innocence is therefore guaranteed through the translucent quality of their *blanke* skin color.

In *Rubber*, there is a rare instance where the narrator wonders what the Chinese servants think of the drunk behavior of the *blanke* people around them. One evening at the clubhouse for the rubber planters Terheide, the inspector, is so drunk that he falls asleep in the middle of a party:

“Ik wil hier.... hik.... ik wil hier blijven....” hakkelde Terheide. “Ik wil.... hik.... hik.... ik wil hier slápen!” verkondigde hij dan, met opeens een dwaas vertoon van gezag. Toen vouwde hij zijn handen in elkaar en viel in slaap. Bloemstra hield een chineeschen bediende aan. Hij wees op Terheide: “Breng den toewan besar naar de kleedkamer.” De Chinees vertrok geen spier van zijn gezicht, riep een anderen bediende en samen droegen zij den inspecteur naar de kleedkamer. Ze liepen vlak langs Anne’s bloote beenen. Even keken hun uitdrukkingsooze spleetogen neer op dat blank-rozevleesch. Maarook ditmaal vertrok hun gezicht niet. Dachten zij iets bij dit schouwspel?.... Of meenden zij, dat zóó nu eenmaal het blanke ras is, dat zich hooger en beter vindt dan wélk gekleurd ook?.... (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 173–74)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ‘I placed an advertisement.’ ‘An ad? For what?’ Nanni blushed shyly. ‘I wanted to teach piano lessons.’ For a moment Louise gawked at her, unable to speak. Then she said with a frown. ‘Would you be so kind to revoke this ad. Or better yet, I will send someone after the boy myself.’ ‘Don’t bother, Wies. The decision has been made; I don’t want to keep being a burden to you.’ ‘Oh, is that how it is. Did Van den Broek’s ideas get to your head. Is that why you want to bring shame on us.’ ‘Shame? Is it....’ ‘Shame for Van de Broek to have a sister in law that teaches music lessons, - yes, that’s shameful. I’m not talking for everybody, but for him, who is making such a career, it is shameful.’ The sister had gotten agitated. For besides innocent, she was also determined. ‘If it’s shameful to make an honest living, I shall bring shame to you.’ ‘You shall not.’ ‘I will and I want to.’

<sup>14</sup> I want to... hic.... I want to stay here....’ Terheide stuttered. ‘I want.... hic.... hic.... I want to sleep here!’ he proclaimed, with a sudden foolish display of authority. He then folded his hands and fell asleep. Bloemstra stopped a chinese servant. He pointed at Terheide: ‘Bring the *toewan besar* to

In this scene, the narrator suggests that the Chinese servants would be right to feel contempt for the behavior of the *blanke* people they are serving. Terheide's drunkenness is embarrassing while his wife Anne's bare legs are indecent. The narrator wonders whether the Chinese servants regard this behavior to be natural to this *blanke* race that finds itself superior to any other race. By posing this question, it is implied that the superiority of the *blanke* race is not self-evident, but a perception of the *blanke* race itself. The actual opinions of the Chinese servants remain unclear because unfortunately they are not focalizers. Furthermore, their faces do not express any emotions, the first servant is described to not even flinch at the site of Terheide lying on the floor intoxicated.

It is explicitly stated that it is not possible to read the opinions from the look of the faces of the Chinese servants. In contrast, the emotions of the *blanke* women who are described as innocent, are easily deciphered through their cheeks that color red. Their *blank*-ness prevents them from hiding their feelings. Because of their *blank*-ness, the innocent women are forced to be honest about their emotional status. It is noteworthy that no *blanke* man in any of the stories is ever described to blush. Therefore, this form of blushing *blank*-ness is unmistakably associated with a feminine disposition. The descriptions thus reinforce ideas that women are emotional beings, who act not based on reason like men, but rather are led by their emotions.

Blushing in the novels is connected to *blank*-ness because all the characters who blush, are described as *blanke* people who are also female. However, another reason for this may be that in the novels no character in the brown racial position is developed as thoroughly as these blushing *blanke* people. They are no frequent focalizers. Their emotional status is not deemed to be of great importance. *Blanke* characters take centre stage in the stories. It shows the racism that in these Dutch novels *blanke* people are regarded to be more developed than brown people and presumably more interesting to explore in terms of thoughts, emotions and actions.

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the dressing room.' The Chinese servant stoically called another servant and together they carried the inspector to the dressing room. They passed Anne's bare legs. For a moment their expressionless slits looked down on that *blank*-pink meat. Their faces remained motionless. Did they think anything of this spectacle?... Or did they think, that this is how the *blanke* race is, higher and better than any other color?....

### **“Calm Like a Marble Statue Was her Face”**

In two novels, a connotation to *blank*-ness that is frequently mentioned is beauty. In *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, Louise is the *blanke* woman who is described as very good-looking. In *De stille kracht*, Léonie van Oudijck is the most attractive woman. The beauty of both these women is constantly connected to their *blanke* skin color.

Louise's beauty is an attractiveness that seduces men. However, this does not include her second husband, Kees van der Broek.

Voor ieder ander man, zou zij een vrouw zijn geweest met groote aantrekkelijkheid. De wit-blanke teint harer huid, waarop de blauw-zwarte haren prachtig afstaken; de fijne haast kinderlijke schouders; de ronde, delicaat gevormde armen, - 't maakte alles tezamen een schoon geheel, in staat om gansche legers heeren der schepping in lichterlaaie te doen slaan. (Daum 1888, 283)<sup>15</sup>

Her sex appeal is said to be able to seduce entire armies of gentlemen. Lousie makes good use of her seductive good looks during her two marriages. During her first marriage to Willem van der Leeuwen, Louise commits adultery with Kees van der Broek. Willem and Kees are old friends, and they meet each other again when both are on their way to Europe. Kees is going on furlough, and Willem travels to Europe accompanied by his wife in the hopes of recovering from an illness through the mild climate of Europe. Kees and Louise become attracted to one another and after their first sexual intercourse, Louise elopes from her husband with Kees.

Hij [Kees] schoof twee rieten stoelen dicht bij elkaar op een tamelijk verdekt plekje. Toen zij er zaten, zij met haar hoofd op zijn schouder, hij met den arm om haar heen, fluisterde hij haar iets in het oor: een verzoek. [...] “Als je me belooft, dat je me meêneemt.” [...] De drukking van haar lichaam zoo dicht op het zijne, haar warme adem, die hij in zijn hals voelde.... er kwam een oogenblik, dat hij het beloofde; er zijn eerewoord op gaf; het zwoer. Toen stond ze op, even beslist in het toestemmen, als in het weigeren, en volgde hem naar zijn klein kwartier op het groote schip. Een paar uren later stond ze langzaam en stil haar koffertje te pakken

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<sup>15</sup> For any other man, she would have been a woman of great beauty. The white-*blank* complexion of her skin, on which her blue-black hair stood out; the fine almost childlike shoulders; the round, delicately shaped arms, - it added up to a fair total, capable to set armies of lords of creation ablaze.

in haar eigen hut; zij deed er haar kostbaarheden in en eenige kleederen; zij was niet gejaagd of zenuwachtig; de zwakke man, die daar lag te slapen, telde niet meer mee in haar leven; hij mocht doodgaan of niet, - het was haar onverschillig. (Daum 1888, 197–98)<sup>16</sup>

Kees and Louise both take care of Willem during the long travel by boat. Through this, they become attracted to one another. Eventually, Kees and Louise elope and leave Willem to die. After he has passed away, Louise and Kees get married, even though they are not interested in one another anymore. They decide to allow each other to have intimate relationships with others to make their marriage more bearable. Even though Louise is described as *blank*, she does not behave in the innocent and honorable manner like Annet Walendijk and Nanni do. Her *blank*-ness is not to be connected to innocence.

Louise refuses to support her first husband in his illness and after her marriage to Kees van den Broek she has many adulterous relationships that she uses in order to manipulate her lovers into furthering her second husband's career. Even though Louise is described as being *blank*, she is not a respectable and morally upright person and does not conform to the idea of the ideal *blanke* woman because she commits adultery, lies to people and schemes to advance her husband's career. Her *blank*-ness signifies more the beauty of a femme fatale than virtuous character traits.

When Nanni finds out about Louise's adultery, Louise follows after Nanni to talk with her and persuade her to come home. She does this by telling Nanni that the adultery was a lie made up by a woman who is half insane.

“Kom, Nant, wees nu verstandig. Ik ben daar net te vèr gegaan, dat beken ik. Maar zooals je toch ook tegenover ons handelt.... Het is waarlijk te gek!” “Zeg dan, dat het gelogen is.” “Nant, het is eigenlijk te dwaas. Moet ik nu zeggen, dat wat die half krankzinnige vrouw schrijft, in een bui van jaloerschheid misschien, gelogen is?” Het meisje hief het hoofd op en zag haar aan. Bleek zag Louise

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<sup>16</sup> He [Kees] put two chairs close together on a reasonably concealed spot. When they were seated, she with her head on his shoulder, he with an arm around her, he whispered something in her ear: a request. [...] ‘If you promise me, that you will take me along.’ [...] The pressure of her body so close to his, her warm breath, that he felt in his neck.... there was a moment, when he promised; he pledged his honors; swore it. Then she rose, as determined in agreeing, as in refusing, and she followed him to his small quarters on the big ship. A few hours later she was slowly and quietly packing her suitcase in her own cabin; she put her valuables and some clothes; she wasn't agitated or nervous; the weak man, that was sleeping there, no longer mattered in her life; whether he lives or dies, - she was indifferent.

gewoonlijk; thans wat erger dan anders. Maar kalm als een marmeren beeld was haar gezicht en glad en wit als marmer haar voorhoofd, waarop de gitzwarte krulletjes zoo rustig lagen, en haar oogen zagen zoo onbeschroomd en open in die van Nanni.... Een gevoel van diepe schaamte rees op in het gemoed van het meisje, en teekende zich in een lichten gloed op haar wangen. (Daum 1888, 292)<sup>17</sup>

When Louise lies to Nanni by telling her that she and Kees never committed adultery, Louise's face looks like it had been made of marble. In contrast, Nanni turns lightly red because of the deep shame she feels for not believing her sister. Louise's *blank*-ness is made of cold stone, like a mask behind which she hides the truth while Nanni's shame becomes instantly visible on her flushed face. The *blank*-ness of Louise is thus very distinctive from Nanni's innocent form of *blank*-ness that glows red easily because of its translucence in showing her inner feelings. What is interesting to note, is that in this passage Louise is described as pale, like a statue made of marble, smooth and white. Her *blank*-ness is not explicitly mentioned. When Louise's beauty is emphasized, her *blank*-ness is remarked on, but when she acts in a morally objectionable way, such as lying to her little sister to make herself look good, her skin is pale and white like marble. When lying to Nanni, the skin color of Louise is thus a different kind of whiteness.

Like Louise in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, Léonie van Oudijk is the most beautiful woman in *De stille kracht*.

Zij was een groote vrouw, blank, blond, over de dertig, met die loome statigheid van in Indië geboren vrouwen, dochters van geheel Europeesche ouders. Zij had iets, waarnaar men dadelijk keek. Het was om haar blanke vel, haar teint van melk, haar heel licht blond haar, hare oogen, vreemd grauw, soms even geknepen en altijd met een uitdrukking van dubbelzinnigheid. Het was om haar eeuwigen glimlach, soms heel lief en innemend, en dikwijls onuitstaanbaar, vervelend. Men wist niet bij een eerste zien, of zij achter dien blik iets borg, eenige diepte, eenige

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<sup>17</sup> 'Come on, Nant, be wise. I went too far, I admit it. But the way you're treating us.... It is truly mad!' 'Tell me, that it's a lie.' 'Nant, it is truly foolish. Do you want me to say, that what that half demented woman is writing, in a fit of jealousy perhaps, is a lie?' The girl lifted her head and looked her in the eyes. Pale was Louise usually; at present more than otherwise. But calm like a marble statue was her face and smooth and white like marble her forehead, on which jet black curls lay so quietly, and her eyes saw fearlessly and open into Nanni's.... A feeling of deep shame rose up in the girl's mood, and drew a light blush on her cheeks.

ziel, of dat het maar was kijken en lachen, en beiden met die lichte dubbelzinnigheid. (Couperus 1993, 17)<sup>18</sup>

In *De stille kracht*, Léonie is the symbol of attractive elegance. The narrator emphasizes her beauty, making it an indisputable truth. However, her smile and her eyes are ambiguous; it is unclear what she hides behind it. Like Louise, Léonie does not show her feelings in her facial expression. Léonie carries the smile on her face like a mask to hide her thoughts and secrets. Even though she does not have any special personal traits, Léonie succeeds in winning over people with her looks. Even Eva Eldersma, a woman who is described as smart and sophisticated, is persuaded by her charm.

Zelfs Eva liet zich winnen door de vreemde bekoring van deze vrouw, die niet geestig was, niet intelligent, nauwelijks wat vroolijker werd en gewekt uit haar vervelende saaiheid, en die alleen won door de lijnen van haar lichaam, de vorm van haar gelaat, den blik van haar vreemde oogen - rustig en toch vol verborgen passie - en die zich bewust was al hare bekoring, omdat zij van kind af aan er den invloed van had opgemerkt. Met hare onverschilligheid was die bekoring hare kracht. (Couperus 1993, 176)<sup>19</sup>

Léonie learned at a young age how to manipulate the people around her by using her *blanke* beauty. However, she is far from innocent. She frequently commits adultery with many men in her surroundings and is not concerned with anything else but clandestine lustful pleasure.

Hoe brutaal ook, zij was altijd correct, de liefde was altijd geheim; voor de wereld was zij niet anders dan de innemend glimlachende rezidentsvrouw, een beetje indolent; en die iedereen overwon met haar glimlach. Zag men haar niet, dan sprak men kwaad van haar; zag men haar, dan had zij dadelijk overwonnen.

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<sup>18</sup> She was a big woman, *blank*, blond, over thirty, with the lethargical stature of women born in the Indies, daughters of full European parents. She had something, that made you turn your head. It was her *blanke* skin, her milky complexion, her very light blond hair, her eyes, strangely gray, sometimes pinched and always with an ambiguous expression. It was her constant smile, at times sweet and captivating, and often unbearable, annoying. You did not know at first sight, if she concealed something behind her look, a depth, a soul, or that is was but looking and smiling, and both with that slight ambiguity.

<sup>19</sup> Even Eva let herself be persuaded by the strange charm of this woman, who wasn't witty, not intelligent, hardly cheered up nor woke from her tedious dullness, and only won through the contours of her body, the shape of her face, the look in her strange eyes - calm yet filled with a covert passion - and who had been aware of her charm, for having noticed its influence from childhood. With her indifference was her charm her might.

Tusschen allen, met wie zij het geheim van hare liefde deelde, was als een vrijmetselarij, als een mysterie van eeredienst: nauwlijks, even met elkaâr, fluisterden zij een paar woorden, bij eene zelfde herinnering. En glimlachend, melkblank, rustig, kon Léonie zitten in een grooten cirkel, om een marmeren tafel, met minstens twee, drie mannen, die wisten van het geheim. Het verstoorde niet hare rust en het bedierf niet haar glimlach. Zij glimlachte tot vervelens toe. (Couperus 1993, 75)<sup>20</sup>

She lives many secret experiences that she keeps hidden and that only some people know vaguely about. Her husband is not aware of any of her adulterous activities and his knowledge about it later on in the story is never based on anything else but rumors. She manages her scheming to keep her extramarital sexual conduct a secret to such an extent that she is successful in hiding it throughout the whole story. Even though Léonie is beautiful and *blank*, her behavior is neither honorable nor innocent.

In *Rubber*, Renée van Laer is described as *blank* and beautiful, but not as frequently as Louise or Léonie. Similar to the last two, Renée commits adultery. However, Renée's adultery is explained through her falling in love with Ravinsky, a man to whom she is not married. Unlike Louise or Léonie, Renée feels guilt towards her husband John for cheating on him.

Soms steeg een haat in haar op tegen John.... bijna onmiddellijk gevolgd door schuldbesef... John, die daar maar zát en praatte.... en tusschen háár en Ravinsky dat geheim..... Dan walgde ze van zichzelf.... van Ravinsky.... Had een melancholisch verlangen naar vroeger.... toen er niet anders was, dan dat ze zich ongelukkig voelde.... Maar dan, als Ravinsky naar huis ging, als ze zijn auto náluisterde.... het geluid al zwakker en zwakker hoorde worden.... dan tóch weer de storm van verzet: dat ze met Ravinsky had willen méévliegen en bij John moest blijven, omdat ze zijn vrouw was.... Nachten lag ze wakker, met haar handen aan haar slapen. Uren zat ze te verdroomen.... áltijd haar denken om dat

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<sup>20</sup> No matter how audacious, she was always proper, the love was always hidden; to the world she was nothing but the captivating, smiling resident's woman, somewhat indolent; and who conquered everyone with her smile. If not directly confronted with her presence, one gossiped; when seen, she conquered all the slander. Between all, that she shared the secret of her love with, was as freemasonry, as a cult's mystery: barely, briefly with each other, they whispered some words, in a same memory. And smiling, milky *blank*, calm, could Léonie be sitting in a big circle, around a marble table, with at least two, three men, that knew the secret. It did not disturb her calm and it did not spoil her smile. She smiled tirelessly.

zelfde.... in voortdurenden, nooit ophoudenden tweestrijd.... (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 219)<sup>21</sup>

Through the focalization of Renée the reader shares in her feelings of guilt and this encourages an understanding for her position. This empathetic understanding makes her action less condemnable than the adulterous relationships of Louise and Léonie.

In all three novels, the beautiful *blanke* women commit adultery. However, this does not affect their *blank*-ness negatively. They remain *blank* even if they do not conform to ideas of innocence with *blanke* women. Louise van den Broek and Léonie van Oudijck hide their dishonor behind a mask of beautiful *blank*-ness.

## Conclusion

In my analysis of the novels I have found that there is a division into two types of *blank*-ness. This chapter enabled me to show that the *blanke* racial position has no strict definition and is connected to other ideals like innocence, honesty and beauty. The first is the *blank*-ness of Annet Walendijk in *Rubber* and Nanni in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*. This type of *blank*-ness only concerns women and it is connected to ideas of innocence and honesty. Here, ideas about race and ideas about gender intersect. The ideal of innocence and honesty is related to ideas of *blanke* femininity. In contrast to people who do not have a *blanke* skin color, the inner feelings and true intentions of the *blanke* women become visible through their blushing.

The second type of *blank*-ness is that of Louise van den Broek in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* and Léonie van Oudijck in *De stille kracht*. This *blank*-ness is connected to beauty and is not associated with virtuous character traits. This form of *blank*-ness remains in place in spite of immoral conduct such as committing adultery, scheming and manipulating. Even though both Louise and Léonie are adulterers, keep secrets, and tell lies, they are still described as beautiful and *blank*. This form of *blank*-ness contradicts the other form of *blank*-ness because through their *blank*-ness, these women can keep

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<sup>21</sup> At times, a hate arose in her against John.... almost immediately followed by guilt... John, who was only sitting and talking.... between her and Ravinsky the secret.... She would feel disgusted with herself.... with Ravinsky.... Had a melancholic desire to befóre.... when there was nothing but unhappiness.... But then, when Ravinsky went home, when she was listening to the sound of his car.... listening it die away.... a tumultuous resistance: she would have flown away with Ravinsky and had to stay with John, because she was his wife.... She was awake for nights, rubbing her temples. She was daydreaming for hours.... always thinking about that same thing.... in a continuous, never ending battle.

their bad behavior a secret. Louise and Léonie use their beauty and *blank*-ness to manipulate people and getting away with dishonesties that are unacceptable in their societies. This type of *blank*-ness is permanent and is not lost through behavior that is deemed disgraceful and dishonorable. It is a *blank*-ness that is worn like a mask behind which they hide dishonor. However, like the first form of *blank*-ness I discussed, it intersects with an ideal of femininity. In this case the ideal concerns beauty. The *blank*-ness of Louise and Léonie is connected to their beauty which makes them desirable to men in spite of their misconduct. In the next chapter, I will examine in what ways characters with a brown skin color are described in the novels.

## Chapter 3: The Tiger Temptation and Obscure Spaces

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze instances in which the brown skin color is mentioned in the novels *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, *De stille kracht* and *Rubber*. My critical analysis of the narrative in these instances will bring the implicit meaning of the brown skin color to light. By exposing its implicit meaning the characteristics of characters with a brown skin color, I will identify the forms of racist thinking in the novels. Here, the concept of the noble savage, which I explained in the previous chapter, will be illustrated through paragraphs from the novels. In relation to the brown race, I will also discuss sexualization and exoticization. Furthermore, I will examine the occasions in which a yellow complexion of the skin is mentioned. By examining the characteristics attached to this skin color that is neither *blank* nor brown, I will be able to illustrate the connection of skin color to other social constructs that divide society into groups. I will specifically focus my attention to the connection of race to class. Then, I will analyze instances in which descriptions of the brown racial position of certain characters can be interpreted as positive. Lastly, I will discuss a brown space in which morally reprehensible events occur. This will allow me to argue that space can also reproduce racial stereotypes in a story.

### “Like the Eyes of an Animal”

During the colonial period Europeans regarded people belonging to non-white races to be underdeveloped and inferior compared to the Europeans themselves. They considered these races as closer to animals in their behavior than the white race (Essed 1984, 23). I refer back to the theoretical framework in which I explained the racist perception of white people towards brown people of which many of them were not aware (West et al. 1995, 237). This perception is clear in the novels when the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies are described to have animal-like traits. I will illustrate the concept of positive racism by discussing the possibility of reading the accounts of the brown locals in the novels as *noble savages*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In this part of the chapter, I will only discuss paragraphs from *De stille kracht* and *Rubber*. The reason is that in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, no brown character has a role of significance. In the last chapter on border cases I will explain possible reasons for this.

In *Rubber*, Joop Walendijk, a young Dutch newcomer, goes into the *pondok*<sup>23</sup> together with Kassan, the supervisor of the plantation, because Toekimin, one of the coolies, refuses to leave his house and go to work. Kassan humbly requests Joop to come to the *pondok*, because it is not usual for white people to go in there. Kassan warns Joop that Toekimin is dangerous and that he may react if Joop hits him. Joop tries to reason with Toekimin to make him go to work, but Toekimin refuses and kills Joop.

“Ga onmiddellijk aan je werk.... en nu, verdomme! is het uit met dat gedonder!.... Heb je me begrepen?!! Vooruit....! Naar het werk!!....” Dreigend deed Joop een stap naar den koelie. Toekimin deed een stap achteruit. Joop deed nog een stap.... Toen, met een als een bliksemstraal uitschietende beweging, dook de koelie in mekaar, trok zijn mes, sprong op Joop toe. Kassan gaf een schreeuw. Maar het was al gebeurd. Zonder een woord zakte Joop in elkaar. Een breede golf bloed spoelde uit zijn mond. (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 186–87)<sup>24</sup>

The refusing coolie kills Joop Walendijk with a knife in the *pondok*. Joop Walendijk is framed as not being to blame for being killed. Joop Walendijk did not beat Toekimin, so Toekimin’s aggressiveness is not justified by Joop’s behavior. Rather, the reason given for Toekimin to kill Joop is that he was *mata gelap*, that his eyes had become obscured because he was driven by a primal instinct:

Het oerinstinct had zich uitgevierd. Hij was “mata gelap” geworden en hij had gedood. Dat was alles! Dat hiermee de oertijd en de twintigste eeuw in botsing kwamen, dat was een andere zaak. Hij had alleen maar een medeschepsel het leven ontnomen. Of dat nu toevallig de assistent was of de mandoer, dat maakte voor hem geen verschil. Dat hij den man van Annette had gedood, den vader van een nog ongebooren kind.... dat alles lag buiten zijn besef. En dat hij zich met zijn

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<sup>23</sup> *Pondok* means cottage in Indonesian, and is used to refer to the neighborhoods that the indigenous people on Sumatra were living in.

<sup>24</sup> Get to work.... now, I say! no more messing around!.... Have you understood?!! Go on....! To work!!....’ Joop threateningly stepped towards the coolie. Toekimin receded. Joop took another step.... Then, with a move as quick as lightning, the coolie drew a knife, and jumped on Joop. Kassan screamed. But it was too late. Without another word Joop collapsed. A wide stream of blood gargled out his mouth.

daad een doodvonnis had bereid, daaraan dacht hij in het geheel niet. Hij wist dat ook nauwelijks.... (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 188)<sup>25</sup>

Toekimin is described as descending from a primordial time while Joop is placed in the twentieth century. The narrator provides an understanding of Toekimin's way of thinking. By explaining the minimal reflections of Toekimin on the consequences of the murder, the narrator implies that Toekimin's mind is not able to process the magnitude of his actions in the way that people in the twentieth century can. The perceived primitiveness of the coolie is explained as the reason for the killing. His primeval way of thinking puts the coolie literally in the past. This reproduces to the perception of Enlightenment that the brown race was uncivilized and needed help from the white race in order to develop into a modern civilization. It implies that in time, his race can develop up to the level of civilization of Joop van Walendijk's white race, but that his race is far behind in this development. The perceived primitiveness of the brown race is also shown through the close proximity that they are described to have to nature:

Honderden bruine, half naakte lijven bogen zich tien uren lang in denzelfden regelmatigen, eentonigen arbeid naar de bruine aarde. Hun ruggen glommen, nat van zweet. Hun breede, naakte voeten zonken weg in den rullen grond. (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 7)<sup>26</sup>

The bodies of the coolies in this passage are the same color brown as the dirt. Their naked feet sink into the dirt, connecting them to the dirt directly. The coolies are connected to the earth through color and through touch. The coolies perform physical work, no educated mind is necessary to accomplish their repetitive task. The labor of the coolies physically exhaustive but does not demand a great mind to be performed. Their labor thus also reproduces the idea that coolies had no developed mind of their own needed leadership of white people in their work.

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<sup>25</sup> Primal instinct had prevailed. He had become '*mata gelap*' and he had killed. That was all! That with this prehistoric time and the twentieth century collided, that was a different matter. He had only taken a fellow creature's life. Whether that had been the *mandoer's* assistant, didn't matter to him. That he had killed Annette's husband, father to an unborn child.... that was outside his awareness. And that with this deed, he had imposed a death sentence on himself, he didn't think about that at all. He hardly knew....

<sup>26</sup> Hundreds of brown, half-naked bodies bend ten hours long in the same repetitive, monotonous labor towards the brown soil. Their backs shining, wet with sweat. Their wide, naked feet swallowed by the rough ground.

The comparison of people in the brown racialized position to animals is also made concerning Saïma, the housekeeper of Frank and Marian Versteegh:

“Saïma heeft ape-ogen,” had Frank eens gezegd. Het was waar! Ze had kleine, bruine, ronde oogjes, zonder wimpers en de oogappels gleden met een ongelofelijke snelheid van de ene ooghoek naar de andere. Ze konden zich verscherpen tot een venijnige felheid en zich verzachten tot een bijna ontroerende aanhankelijkheid, zoals in de ogen van een dier kan zijn als het goedvertrouwend in mensenogen blikte. (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 78)<sup>27</sup>

Saïma is compared to a monkey and an animal in looks and indirectly in behavior. Saïma's eyes are compared to that of a monkey in the way they look and move around. Their ability to change from an expression of ferocity to one of devotion is compared to an animal that looks into a human's eyes trustingly. As the housekeeper, Saïma has to take care of the house and cook food and it seems to be taken for granted by Marian and Frank that she does so. However, there is a remarkable instance where Saïma's caring qualities are valued over those of white people:

In de stille kamer was, onhoorbaar, een schim geslopen. Saïma. Haar eerste schreden waren naar het wiegje. Voorzichtig deed ze het gordijntje op zij en bleef turen op het kindje. Toen verschoof ze iets aan de luier. “Een jongen,” zei ze constateerend en knikte goedkeurend. Ze deed het wiegegordijntje weer zorgvuldig dicht en kwam naar Marian. “Saïma, pidjit.... ja? Mim beenen moe.” Met langzame bewegingen begon ze Marian's beenen te masseeren. “Mim niet zeggen, zuster, ja?” zei ze, “zuster boos! Zuster niet weet, als niet pidjit, straks mim niet kan lopen. Zuster dom. Dokter ook dom. Dokter alleen altijd snijden. Alle koelie's altijd snijden. Saïma liever dood. Als Allah zeg: Saïma moet dood.... Saïma dood! Maar Saïma niet contract-koelie. Als contract-koelie, éérst moet snijden.... dan dood.” Marian glimlachte. Bij Saïma begon en eindigde alles bij het feit van contractant zijn of niet. Ze keek naar Saïma's stil gebogen hoofd, terwijl haar lenige bruine handen met steeds dezelfde regelmatig rhythmische bewegingen Marianne masseerden. Over het bruine, verwelkte gezicht lag een

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Saïma has monkey-eyes,’ Frank once said. It was true! She had small, brown, round eyes, with no lashes and the eyeballs flicked with incredible speed from one corner to the other. They could sharpen to a fiery ferocity and soften to an almost endearing affection, like the eyes of an animal looking into a human's in complete faith.

toegewijde, aanhankelijke uitdrukking. En ineens voelde Marian: hier was eindelijk de mensch, aan wie het niet onverschillig was hoe zij zich voelde. Hier was een schepsel, dat werkelijke belangstelling getoond had voor Bobbie. Een schepsel van een zóó andere wereld, dan de hare, maar toch een, dat bij haar hoorde; dat een deel was van haar leven, een deel van haar huis, daar op Toemboek Tinggih. Een weldadige rust overvloedde haar en onder de slaapverwekkende streeling van Saïma's vingers sluimerde ze in. (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 87–88)<sup>28</sup>

In this passage that is told from the focal point of Marian Versteegh, Saïma's reasoning is shown to be simple, since to her, everything begins and ends with not being subjected to a contract, like the coolies. Even though her thoughts seem unsophisticated, it is explicitly stated that Marian thinks of Saïma as a human. She is grateful for Saïma's presence because Saïma cares for her and her newborn. On the other hand, Marian describes Saïma as a creature from another world who nevertheless belongs to her. This suggests that Marian thinks of Saïma as her property. However, it is also possible that Marian regards Saïma as belonging with her in an equal manner. Saïma expresses knowledge of massaging that the nurse and the doctor do not have. Saïma states that her *pidjit* massage would ensure that Marian will be able to walk the next day. Saïma's speech is simple like that of a child, but her knowledge of non-Western healing practices indicates a know-how that may be preferred over the disregard for the well-being of Marian of the doctor and the nurse. This indigenous expertise denotes the idea of the noble savage. Saïma is depicted as a savage, since she is similar to animals and does not have a developed mind, but she serves Marian with dedication and has

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<sup>28</sup> In the quiet room had, inaudibly, crept a shadow. Saïma. Her first strides were towards the cradle. Carefully she opened the curtains up and stared at the child. Then she moved some of the diaper around. 'A boy,' she stated and nodded in approval. She carefully closed the cradle's curtains and came to Marian. 'Saïma, *pidjit*.... yes? Mim legs tired.' With slow movements, she started massaging Marian's legs. 'Mim not saying, nurse, yes?' she said, 'Nurse angry! Nurse not knows, if not *pidjit*, later mim no can walk. Nurse dumb. Doctor also dumb. Doctor only always cutting. All coolies always cutting. Saïma rather dead. When Allah says: Saïma must die.... Saïma dead! But Saïma not contract coolie. If contract-coolie, first must cut.... then dead.' Marian smiled. With Saïma everything started and ended with being contract or not. She looked at Saïma's quiet, bowed head, while her agile, brown hands with the same rhythmical movements massaged Marianne. The brown, wilted face had a committed, affectionate look. Suddenly Marian felt: here was finally the human, who wasn't indifferent to how she felt. Here was a creature, that had showed a genuine interest in Bobby. A creature of such a different world, than hers, but yet one, that belonged to her; that was part of her life, a part of her house, there on *Toemboek Tinggih*. A salutary calm overflowed her and underneath the somniferous touch of Saïma's fingers, she snoozed off.

knowledge that the nurse and the doctor, white people who have strayed too far away from nature, do not have. The idea of the noble savage is ambiguous because it is a form of racism of white people that ascribes positive characteristics to the other race.

In *Rubber*, one scene describes a group of indigenous *Batakkers* when Renée and John van Laer are driving into the mountains away from the hot climate. Like Saïma, the characteristics of this group are valued in an ambiguous manner:

Batakkers liepen, achter elkaar aan, in kleine groepen. Ze leken op zigeuners. In hun breede gezichten was de dreiging van den menscheneter, die zij een halve eeuw terug nog waren. Maar hun oogen waren intelligent en namen daardoor van het afschrikkende in hun gezichten iets weg. De gehuwde vrouwen liepen met bloote borsten, niet kennend het schaamtegevoel der ándere oostersche vrouwen van deze kolonie; zij droegen hun kinderen in een langen doek gebonden op den rug. Prachtig was hun fiere, kaarsrechte houding; de lijn van rug en hals en van het trotsch gedragen hoofd onder den geweldigen hoofdtooi van een breed úitstekenden opgerolden doek. En het meest eigenaardige was misschien de roode kleur, die de frissche berglucht door het matte bruin van hun teint tooverde. Renée beschouwde dit alles met levendige belangstelling. Er kwam een blos op haar wangen en tinteling in haar oogen. Ze haalde vaak en diep adem. (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 204)<sup>29</sup>

From the focal point of Renée van Laer, the *Batakkers* are described as similar to gypsies. To Renée, their faces seem to enunciate the threat of the cannibal that they were only a short while back in the past. However, their eyes are described as intelligent and Renée finds their posture to be proud and magnificent. The description of the *Batakkers* as gypsy-like and cannibalistic puts them in the position of a dangerous “other.” At the same time, their otherness is exoticized through the description of their posture as magnificent. The women of the group of *Batakkers* are described as different

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<sup>29</sup> The people from Batak walked, in a row, in small groups. They looked like gypsies. In their broad faces lay the danger of a human-eater, which they were only half a century back. But their eyes were intelligent and this took away some of the threat in their faces. The wedded females walked bare breasted, not knowing the sense of shame of other oriental females of this colony; they wore their children in a long cloth tied at the back. Beautiful was their proud, upright posture; the line of back and neck and of the proudly worn head underneath an awesome headpiece from a wide rolled up cloth. And the most curious was perhaps the red color, that the fresh mountain air weaved through the mat brown of their complexion. Renée witnessed this with vivid interest. A blush appeared on her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes. She breathed often and deeply.

from other Eastern women in the colony because they do not have the same feeling of shame for nudity. The *Batakkers* are described as indigenous to the territory. The skin color of the *Batakkers* is said to be brown and their nativity to the territory of the colony implies that they are a part of the brown racial position. Nevertheless, their skin color is not merely brown. The fresh mountain air conjures up a red color through the dull brown of their complexion. The mountain climate thus changes their brownness.

### **“The Strong Scent of a Tiger Temptation”**

In the novels, *blank* is often used in contrast to non-white races. It is particularly present in the relationships in *De stille kracht*. Through the focal point of Léonie van Oudijck, the contrast between her *blanke* stepson Theo van Oudijck and her new love interest the Javanese Addy de Luce is made clear:

Maar zij zag hem [Theo] aan, en zij zag hem blond, breed, groot, haar man in het jong, zijn Indische bloed alleen zichtbaar in de zinnelijkheid van zijn mond, en zij wilde hem niet verliezen: zij wilde zijn type hebben naast het type van den Moorschen verleider. Zij wilde hen beiden; zij wilde proeven het verschil van hun beider manne-bekoring; dat even ver-Indo'schte Hollandsche blond-en-blanke, en het wilde-dierachtige van Addy. [...] O, de Verleider! Nooit had zij hem, den oppersten, zoo gedroomd in haar roze uren van siësta! Dat was geen charme van cherubijntjes; dat was de sterke lucht van een tijgerbekoring: het goudgevonkel van zijn oogen, de spierlenigheid van zijn sluipende klauw... En zij glimlachte tegen Theo, met één blik van zich-geven: gróote zeldzaamheid in den cirkel van rijst-etende menschen. Zij gaf zich anders nooit, in publiek. Nu gaf zij zich even, blij om zijn jalouzie. Zij hield ook razend van hem. Zij vond het heerlijk, dat hij bleek en boos zag, van ijverzucht. [...] En zij had tegelijk hen beiden willen omhelzen, Theo en Addy, in eene omhelzing, in éene mengeling van verschillende lust, ze beiden drukkende tegen haar lijf aan van liefdevrouw... (Couperus 1993, 77–78)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> But she looked upon him [Theo], and she saw him blond, broad, big, her husband in his youth, his Indies blood only visible in the sensuality of his mouth, and she didn't want to lose him: she wanted to have his type besides the type Moorish seducer. She wanted them both; she wanted to taste the difference of their manly temptation; the Dutch blond and *blanke* with a hint of the Indies, and the wild animal in Addy. [...] O, the Seducer! Never had she so dreamed about him, the supreme, in her pink hours of siesta! That was no charm of cherubs; that was the strong scent

By emphasizing the perceived racial difference of these two men, the narrator implies that it is the racial distinction that makes Theo and Addy interesting to Léonie. In this passage blond and *blank* is contrasted with being like a wild animal. However, this animal is a majestic tiger, a strong and agile predator. In Addy's likeness to an animal, there is for Léonie a form of appreciation present.

Illustrative of Addy's otherness is the fact that Léonie constantly makes a contrast between the primitiveness of Addy and the Dutch-ness of Theo van Oudijck, her stepson lover who is described to be *blank*. Léonie is attracted to Addy because he is so different from her other lover. The beauty of Addy's otherness is different from the beauty of the *blanke* women. Where the reason for Léonie's infatuation with Addy, namely Addy's difference from Theo, is repeatedly mentioned, the beauty of the *blanke* women is provided as an objective truth that the reader has to accept from the narrator. The narrator plays the role of setting the scene in the story. Léonie's beauty is stated as a fact. In contrast, Addy's beauty is explained through his exotic otherness.

Similar to the cases of Louise and Léonie, Addy's beauty condones his behavior because all women are blinded by love for him.

De Raden-Ajoe-douairière glimlachte en zag naar haar jongsten zoon, verliefd op haar kind, haar lieveling; achter haar, op den grond gehurkt, gluurde met groote oogen het gouden pleegkindje uit; de zusters keken uit, de nichtjes keken uit, en Doddy werd bleek, en Léonie van Oudijcks blanke melktint tintte zich met een rozen weêrschijn, die weggled in den glans van haar glimlach. (Couperus 1993, 74)<sup>31</sup>

All women who are in his presence, among which are his family members and a golden foster child for a poor noble family that serves the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran, agree that

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of a tiger temptation: the gold sparkle of his eyes, the flexibility of his creeping claw... And she smiled to Theo, with one look of surrender: a rarity in the circle of rice eaters. She never gave herself, in public. Now she gave herself a little, happy for his jealousy. She loved him fiercely. She enjoyed his pale and angry shades of jealousy. [...] And she had wanted to hug them both. Theo and Addy in one embrace, in one cocktail of different lust, pressing both against her body of a love woman.

<sup>31</sup> The *Raden-Ajoe*-dowager smiled and saw her youngest son, in love with her child, her favorite; behind her, squatted on the ground, peeped with big eyes the golden foster child out; the sisters looked out, the cousins looked out, and Doddy turned pale, and Léonie van Oudijck's *blanke* milky complexion tinted with a flush of pink, that faded into the radiance of her smile.

Addy is beautiful and charming. Léonie is likewise struck by his radiance. She knew him as a boy, but now she sees him in a new light:

Maar nu, terwijl hij kwam in den aureool van den zonneshijn, oordeelde zij hem nog eenmaal: zijn mooie, slanke dierlijkheid en het gloeien van zijn verleidersoogen in het schaduwbruin van zijn jonge Moorengezicht, de krullende zwellung van zijn zoenlippen met het jonge dons van zijn knevel; het tijgersterke en lenige van zijn Don-Juanleden: het vlamde haar alles tegen, zoodat zij de oogen knipte. (Couperus 1993, 77)<sup>32</sup>

Through the focal point of Léonie, Addy de Luce is extremely attractive. But unlike the other characters that are described to be beautiful, Addy does not have a *blanke* skin color. His is brown like a shadow and have the face of a Moor.<sup>33</sup> Through the descriptions of Addy, it becomes clear to the reader that beauty does not belong exclusively to *blanke* people. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Addy's beauty is a different kind of beauty than the beauty of the *blanke* women because his beauty is constantly connected to an exoticization of his body. His beauty lies in the contrast to what is normal to Léonie, namely *blanke* people. His value to Léonie lies solely in the perfect embodiment that he is regarded to be of his strong and beautiful race. This superficial regard for him also becomes clear in the following episode:

Iets van verbeelding of intellect scheen Addy niet te hebben, onmachtig twee denkbeelden te vereenigen tot één groep van gedachte; voelen deed hij alleen met de vage goedhartigheid, die neêrgezeefd was over de héele familie, en verder was hij als een mooi dier, in zijn ziel en zijn hersenen ontaard, maar ontaard tot niets, tot één groot niets, tot éene groote leêgheid, terwijl zijn lichaam geworden was als een wedergeboorte van ras, vol kracht en mooiheid, terwijl zijn merg en zijn bloed en zijn vleesch en zijn spieren geworden waren tot éene harmonie van fysieke verleidelijkheid, zoo louter dom mooi zinnelijk, dat de harmonie dadelijk sprak tot een vrouw. (Couperus 1993, 73)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> But now, while he came in the areola of the sunshine, she judged him once more: his fine, slender animalism and the glow of his seducer's eyes in the shadow brown of his young Moorish face, the curling plumpness of his lips with the young fluff of his moustache; the tiger strength and suppleness of his Don Juan members: it flamed against her, it made her blink.

<sup>33</sup> *Moor* refers to a group of people with a brown skin color that lived in and around Europe.

<sup>34</sup> Some imagination or intellect seemed not to be present in Addy, unable to unite two views in one group of thought; feeling he only did with a dim kindness, that had been sifted down on the

Addy's beauty does not correspond with intellect. When Addy is described through the focal point of Léonie, the focus is on Addy's animal-like grace. It is a primitive kind of beauty that attracts Addy to Léonie in the first place. The beauty of Addy's brown race is distinct from the beauty of Léonie's white race. It is important to note that in this case the beauty differentiation along racial lines coincides with gender: brown is connected to masculine ideals while *blank* is equated to feminine ideals. Both forms of beauty attract other people and enable multiple pre-marital (in the case of Addy) and extra-marital (in the case of Léonie) love affairs. However, the beauty of white people is regarded as objectively true by stating it through the focal point of the narrator, while the beauty of brown people is linked to their animal-like primitiveness.

In *De stille kracht*, Addy de Luce is categorized as a person in the brown racial position even though he is of mixed French-Japanese descent. Unlike other brown people, Addy is a character that is of importance to the storyline. Even so his character is not developed throughout the story. He possesses an underdeveloped mind. When Addy is the focalizer, the main thoughts that go through his mind are those of appreciation for Léonie's sex appeal. Addy is the focalizer when he is being admonished by Léonie for getting romantically involved with Doddy, Léonie's stepdaughter. This is the first time that Addy is struck by Léonie's beauty:

En zij verweet en zij waarschuwde, en zij zeide, dat Doddy een kind was, en dat hij geen misbruik mocht maken... Hij haalde zijn schouders op, hij verdedigde zich, met zijn blague: als stofgoud vielen zijn woorden op haar, terwijl als van een tijger zijn oogen vonkelden. Hem overredende toch voortaan arme Doddy te sparen, vatte zij zijne hand - zijn hand, waarop zij verliefd was - zijn vingers, zijn palm, die zij dien morgen, in hare verwarring, had kunnen kussen - en zij drukte die hand en zij weende bijna, en zij smeekte hem genade voor Doddy... Hij merkte het eensklaps, hij zag haar aan met den bliksem van zijn wilde-dieren-blik en hij vond haar mooi, hij vond haar vrouw, melkblank, en hij wist haar priesteres vol geheime kennis... En ook over Doddy sprak hij, haar dichter naderende, haar

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whole family, and besides that he was as a beautiful animal, degenerate in his soul and mind, but degenerating into nothing, to one great nothingness, one grand emptiness, while his body had turned into a renaissance of race, filled with strength and beauty, while his marrow, blood, flesh and muscle had turned into a harmony of physical temptation, so purely stupidly beautiful, that the harmony instantly spoke to a woman.

aanvoelende, drukkende tusschen zijn handen hare beide handen, haar doende begrijpen, dat hij begreep. (Couperus 1993, 81–82)<sup>35</sup>

When Addy is the focalizer, he is attributed traits similar to an animal. His thoughts are not those of a human, but more one of an animal that is guided by its instinctual desires. This becomes clear through his wild animal gaze and the beautiful animal that he is described to be. The focal point of Addy is thus solely used to emphasize Léonie's manipulative manners, and, unlike the focal point of Léonie and other *blanke* people, not to explain his character and show his hidden thoughts.

### **“Her Yellow Complexion Was Whitened up”**

In *De stille kracht* the Javanese Raden Ajoe, wife of the regent, the original ruler of Laboewangi who had nothing more but a symbolical role in the colonial system, is a princess of Solo. She is of highborn noble descent from the Central Javanese court. Her mother-in-law, the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran is the daughter of a prince of Solo, and is always treated with reverence by others. Nevertheless, the narrator states that the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran no longer resembles the young princess who once married a French nobleman.

De moeder-en-groot-moeder was een dochter van een Soloschen prins, getrouwd met een jongen, energieken avonturier en bohémien, van een adellijke Fransche familie uit Mauritius, Ferdinand de Luce, die, na eenige jaren zwerven en zoeken zijn plaats in de wereld, als hofmeester op een boot naar Indië was getogen, na allerlei levensverwisseling gestrand was te Solo en er beroemd was geworden om een gerecht van tomaten, en een van gefarceerde lomboks! Door zijn recepten verschaftte Ferdinand de Luce zich toegang tot den Soloschen prins, wiens dochter hij later huwde, en zelfs tot den ouden Soesoehoenan. Na zijn huwelijk was hij grondbezitter geworden, volgens den Soloschen adat vazal van den Soesoehoenan,

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<sup>35</sup> And she blamed and warned, and she said, that Doddy was a child, and he shouldn't take advantage... He shrugged his shoulders, he defended himself, with his biggity: his words landed on her like gold dust, whilst his eyes sparkled like a tiger's. Persuading him to spare poor Doddy from now on, she took his hand - his hand, which she was in love with - his fingers, his palm, that she this morning, in her confusion, could have kissed - and she pressed that hand and nearly wept, and begged his mercy for Doddy... He noticed suddenly, he gazed upon her with the lightning of his wild animal look and he thought she was beautiful, he thought she was a woman, milky *blank*, and he knew her to be a priestess filled with hidden knowledge... And he spoke about Doddy as well, drawing her near, feeling her, pressed between his hand both her hands, making her understand, that he understood.

wien hij iederen dag rijst en vruchten voor de huishouding der Dalem zond. Toen had hij zich gelanceerd in de suiker, radende de millioenen, die een goedgunstig lot voor hem verborgen hield. Hij was gestorven vóór de crisis, in allen rijkdom en eer. (Couperus 1993, 68–69)<sup>36</sup>

The Raden Ajoe as well as the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran are indigenous to Java, the territory of the Dutch East Indies, and therefore belong to the brown racial position. Interestingly, they both are described as having a yellow facial complexion instead of a brown complexion. They are not used to performing labor due to their aristocratic status, so it makes sense that their skin is a lighter shade than those indigenous people who have to work on the land to survive. Nevertheless, this yellow complexion seems to be in correlation with their noble descent.

Ook de Raden-Ajoe, gezeten naast Léonie, antwoordde zoo: - Saja... Maar zij lachte telkens even na, zacht verlegen. Zij was nog heel jong, misschien even achttien jaar. Zij was een Solosche prinses, en Van Oudijck kon haar niet uitstaan, omdat zij Solosche manieren, Solosche zeggingen invoerde te Laboewangi, in haar laatdunkenden hoogmoed of niets zoo voornaam en zuiver aristocratisch zoû zijn als wat gewoonte was en gezegd werd aan het hof van Solo. [...] Hare gele tint was nog lichter opgeblankt door een lichte laag van bedak, vochtig opgelegd, de wenkbrauwen waren even opgebogen met een streekje zwart; in hare glanzende kondé staken juweelen spelden en in het midden, een kenanga-bloem. (Couperus 1993, 48)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The mother and grandmother was a daughter of a prince from Solo, married to a young, energetic adventurer and bohemian, from a noble French family from Mauritius, Ferdinand de Luce, who, after several years of wandering and looking for his place in the world, had been raised a steward on a boat to the Indies, after all kinds of life changes had stranded in Solo and had become famous for a recipe of tomatoes and stuffed *lomboks*! Through his recipes Ferdinand de Luce gained access to the prince of Solo, whose daughter he later married, and even to the old *Soesoehoenan*. After his marriage he had become a landowner, according to Solo's *adat vawal* of the *Soesoehoenan*, to whom he sent rice and fruit every day for the housekeeping of the *Dalem*. Once he had launched himself in the sugar business, foreseeing the millions, that had hidden a fortunate faith. He had died before the crisis, in all wealth and honor.

<sup>37</sup> Also the *Raden-Ajoe*, sitting next to Léonie, answered: - Saja... But every time she laughed after, gently shy. She was very young, maybe only eighteen. She was a princess in Solo, and Van Oudijck couldn't stand her, because of her manners from Solo, sayings from Solo reached *Laboewangi*, in her self-conceited pride as if nothing would be as honorable and purely aristocratic as what was a custom and a saying at the court in Solo. [...] Her yellow complexion was whitened up by a light layer of *bedak*, applied moistly, the eyebrows bent up with a stroke of black, in her shiny *kondé* jewel pins stuck a *kenanga*-flower in the middle.

The yellow skin color of the Raden-Ajoe is made even lighter by *bedak*, a traditional face powder made from rice, and, as already noted, one can assume that her skin color is considered to be light in the first place. In the case of the two Solo princesses it is evident that race and class intersect and there is a connection between upper-class nobility in Javanese society, and having a light skin color. The foster child of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran also comes from a noble family. She is described as “golden.” Like the yellow skin color of the Raden Ajoes, the golden skin color seems to be exclusively ascribed to indigenous people with a noble background. I will now expand on the supposed incompatibility of the Dutch people on indigenous territory by discussing an interpretation of racism that I argue is anti-colonial.

### **“He Denied Mystery. It Was Not There”**

In several paragraphs in *Rubber* and *De stille kracht*, the brown racial position can be interpreted as one that is different from the white race, but which is not valued as the lesser race in the racial hierarchy. Race is thus described as a differentiating factor, but more to explain the perceived belonging to a certain territory of a character than to explain that character’s being. One example is a paragraph in which Salim, an indigenous servant of Marian Versteegh, knows more about the murder on a Dutch man than Marian herself:

“Nee, laat maar.... het gaat regenen.... En haal dan de kisten uit de goedang.... ik moet inpakken.... mijnheer is overgeplaatst.... naar Boekit Pandjang....” Op Salim’s gezicht vertrok geen spier. “Zeker in de plaats van toewan Johansen.” Zijn stem was laconiek. Marian keek hem even aan. “Weet je dan, dat toewan Johansen vermoord is?” “Saja, mim.... ik wist het vanmorgen al.... Er was een kabar angin in de pondok.” “En waarom heb je het dan niet verteld?” Salim keek wat verlegen, grinnikte toen en zei: “Ik dacht, dat mim het al wist.” Marian haalde ongeduldig haar schouders op. “Stom, onbegrijpelijk volk,” dacht ze wrevelig en haar stem was kortaf, toen ze hem orderde om het theewater te brengen. (Székely-Lulofs 1984, 109–10)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> ‘No, don’t bother.... it will rain.... And bring the crates from the *goedang*.... I have to pack... mister has been transferred.... to *Boekit Pandjang*....’ Salim’s face didn’t move. ‘To *toewan Johansen*’s place, I bet.’ His voice was laconic. Marian briefly looked at him. ‘So you know, about *toewan Johansen*’s murder?’ ‘*Saja, mim*.... I already found out this morning.... There was a *kabar angin* in de *pondok*.’ ‘And why didn’t you say anything?’ Salim looked a little shy, grinned and

Marian is annoyed to find out that her servant was informed about the murder of a Dutch employee before she was and that he failed to tell her as soon as he heard about it. But the paragraph also shows that Salim and his people have more effective ways of exchanging information than Marian and her people do. Salim refers to this source as *kabar angin*, which literally means “wind message,” which means that he knew about the murder because people had been gossiping to one another about it.

In *De stille kracht*, accounts on the superstition of indigenous people can be read as primitive habits of these people because they lack the scientific knowledge to understand events. However, these accounts can also be interpreted as a way to show that the indigenous people have a better understanding of the world around them than the Dutch people, who after all do not originate from the territory that they are living in. In one of the first paragraphs of the novel, Resident Otto van Oudijck, a *blanke* man, goes to the seaside after sundown. He is accompanied by an indigenous servant.

In dit oogenblik, moê van het cijferen, opademende in den wind, ademde hij tegelijk met de frischheid van de zee den weemoed van de zee in, den geheimzinnigen weemoed der Indische zeeën, den opspokenden weemoed der zeeën van Java; de weemoed, die aanruischt van verre als op suizende wieken van geheimzinnigheid. Maar zijn natuur was niet om zich over te geven aan mysterie. Hij ontkende het mysterie. Het was er niet: er was alleen de zee en de wind, die frisch was. Er was alleen de walm van die zee, als iets van visch en van bloemen en zeewier; walm, die de frissche wind uitwoei. [...] De hoofdoppasser, neêrgehurkt, met zijn gloei-vuurtouw in de hand, gluurde aandachtig op naar zijn heer, als dacht hij: wat doet hij hier zoo vreemd te staan bij den vuurtoren... Zoo vreemd, die Hollanders... Wat denkt hij nu... Waarom doet hij zoo... Juist op dit uur op deze plek... De zeegeesten waren nu om... Er zijn kaaimannen onder het water, en iedere kaaiman is een geest... Zie, daar heeft men aan ze geofferd, pisang en rijst en dèng-dèng en een hard ei op een vlotje van bamboe; onderaan bij het voetstuk van den vuurtoren... Wat doet de Kandjeng Toean nu hier... Het is hier niet goed, het is hier niet goed... tjelaka, tjelaka... En zijn spiedende oogen gleden op en neêr langs den breeden rug van zijn heer, die maar stond en uitzag...

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said: ‘I thought, mim already knew.’ Marian impatiently shrugged her shoulders. ‘Stupid, incomprehensible people,’ she thought resentfully and her voice was blunt when she ordered him to bring water for tea.

Waar zag hij naar toe...? Wat zag hij aanwaaien in den wind...? Zoo vreemd, die Hollanders, vreemd... (Couperus 1993, 10–11)<sup>39</sup>

This passage represents the inner thoughts of the servant, but an uncertainty is expressed about his exact thought. Nevertheless, through his thoughts it becomes clear that while Otto van Oudijck refuses to acknowledge the existence of the mystery, the servant is well aware of the spirits that are present in the area at that time of the day. It is not clear whether the narrator values the servant's superstition over the disbelief in superstition of Otto van Oudijck. However, throughout the story, things happen that are inexplicable from the perspective of the white people but make sense in the cultural framework of superstition of the brown people:

- Hoort u niet? In de hoogste twijgen kermen de kinderzieltjes. Het waait nu niet op het oogenblik. Hoor, hoor, dat zijn geen loeaks! Kriauw, kriauw doen de loeaks, als ze krolsch zijn! Dat, dat zijn de zieltjes...! Zij luisterden alle drie. Werktuigelijk drukte Léonie zich dichter aan tegen Theo. Zij zag doodsbleek. De ruime achtergalerij, met de altijd gedekte tafel, strekte zich lang uit in het sombere licht van een enkele petroleum-hanglamp. De plassige achtertuin schemerde nattig op uit den nacht der waringins, tikkende van druppels, maar onbewogen in ondoordringbare fluweelige looveren massa's. En een onverklaarbaar, nauwelijks waarneembaar gekreun, als een zacht geheim van gekwelde kleine zielen zeurde hoog boven, als in de lucht, als in de heel hoge takken der boomen. Nu was het een korte kreet, dan was het een steunen als van ziek kindje, dan was het zacht snikken als van gemartelde meisjes... - Wat voor beesten zouden dat zijn? zei Theo. Zijn het vogels of insecten?... Het gekerm en gesnik was heel duidelijk.

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<sup>39</sup> In this moment, tired of the figures, breathing in the wind, he breathed the freshness of the sea and the melancholy of the sea, the mysterious melancholy of the seas in the Indies, the shaking melancholy of the seas of Java; the melancholy, that that rustles from afar like on whizzing sails of mystery. But it wasn't in his nature to surrender to mystery. He denied mystery. It wasn't there: there was only the sea and the wind, who was fresh. There was only the sea's scent, something like fish and flowers and seaweed; scent, that the fresh wind blew. [...] The main keeper, squatted, with his glowing wick rope in the hand, blinked up to his master, like he thought: what is he doing here so strangely standing near the lighthouse... So strange, those Dutchmen... What is he thinking... Why is he being like this... At this hour on this spot... The sea ghosts are around... There are caimans under the water, and every caiman is a ghost... See, over there is where people made a sacrifice for them, *pisang* and rice and *dèng-dèng* and a hard-boiled egg on a bamboo raft; at the bottom of the pedestal of the lighthouse... What is the *Kandjeng Toean* doing here... It is not good here, it is not good here... *tjelaka, tjelaka*... And his spying eyes slid up and down over the broad back of his master, who was just standing and looking... What was he looking at...? What did he see blowing in the wind...? So strange, those Dutchmen, strange...

Léonie zag spierwit en zij trilde over haar lichaam. - Wees toch niet bang, zei Theo. Het zijn natuurlijk beesten... Maar hijzelf was krijtwit van angst, en toen zij elkander in de oogen zagen, begreep zij, dat ook hij bang was. Zij klemde zijn arm, perste zich tegen hem aan. De meid hurkte diep, nederig, ineen, als duldende alle noodlot van onverklaarbare geheimzinnigheid. Zij zoû niet ontvluchten. Maar in de oogen der blanken was als één denkbeeld, één denkbeeld om te vluchten. (Couperus 1993, 153–54)<sup>40</sup>

Theo van Oudijck tries to explain the weird sounds that he hears coming from the trees by saying that it must be made by some kind of animal, but they can clearly hear that it is the sound of crying children. The servant explains that the sound is made by the souls of children. Even though the narrator does not make clear whose interpretation is correct, it is implied that Theo is not convinced of his own statement, because he is scared of the sounds. It may therefore be the case that the cultural framework of the brown people that acknowledges the existence of spirits and superstition may be the correct perspective in these events. The explanations of the *blanke* people are insufficient to explain everything that happens around them. It can therefore be argued that their cultural framework does not work in the colony, whereas the cultural framework of the brown people does.

There is thus an understanding of different races, but these races are not ordered in a hierarchical manner. Instead, there is a focus on the idea of races belonging to a certain territory and not functioning when they leave this territory. The *blanke* people are not in the right place in the Dutch East Indies. They belong in the territory of the Netherlands and do not function in the Dutch East Indies. This form of racism can be understood as

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<sup>40</sup> - Can't you hear? In the highest twigs children's souls are moaning. It's not windy at this time. Listen, listen, those are not *loeaks*! Criow, criow, *loeaks* do, when they are in heat! That, that are the souls...! All three were listening. Automatically, Léonie pressed herself closer to Theo. She looked as pale as a ghost. The spacious back gallery, where the table was always set, stretched itself in the gloomy light of a single petroleum hanging lamp. The puddlely back garden glimmered moistly in the night of the *waringins*, drizzling with drops, but still in the impenetrable velvety masses of foliage. And an unexplainable, hardly perceivable moaning, like a subdued secret of tortured little souls whining above, like in the air, like in the highest branches of the trees. Now a short shriek, that meant the moaning of an ill child, then the smothered sobs of tortured girls... - What animals could that be? said Theo. Are they birds or insects?... The moaning and sobbing was clear. Léonie was pure white and shaking all over her body. - Don't be frightened, said Theo. Of course it's animals... But he himself was chalk white with fear, and when they saw into each other's eyes, she understood, that he was frightened too. She clamped his arm, pressed him against her. The maid squatted deeply and humbly, as if she was accepting all the doom of the unexplainable mysteries. She would not run. But in the eyes of the *blanken* was as one notion, one notion to run.

anti-colonial racism because it implies that it is unnatural for racial groups to rule territories that are not their own. This form of racism explains the issues and misunderstandings that are perceived to exist between the races. They are understood to be based on the unnaturalness of a *blanke* race to be living in the territory that originally belonged to a brown race. It implies that a territorial segregation of races, where each race resides in the territory it originally belonged to, is the solution to a dysfunction of the colonial society. This segregation would mean the end of colonialism because foreign rulers would no longer reside on colonial territories. In the following part, I will discuss a space that is commonly only inhabited by indigenous people, but which is entered by *blanke* people in specific instances in the stories.

### **“The Bamboo Houses Were Lurking”**

In this last part of the chapter, I will analyze the instances in which a *blanke* person enters the space of the *kampong* or *pondok*, spaces that are not commonly entered by *blanke* people. In *De stille kracht* and *Rubber*, there is mention of *kampong* and *pondok*. These spaces are poor neighborhoods that are solely inhabited by lower-class indigenous people. For that reason they are not commonly entered by whitepeople. There are instances in the novels in which white people enter the neighborhoods of the poor indigenous people. In these moments, the differences between the living spaces of upper-class white people and of poor indigenous people become well-defined. Furthermore, it shows that this space is used in the two novels for particular events that I will discuss in this part of the chapter.

In a description of the *kampong* when Theo visits accompanied by Addy de Luce to meet his half-brother, the atmosphere of the *kampong* is mysterious. Addy is not an uncommon visitor which is explained as the reason for the women not to become alarmed at the sight of a *blanke* man in the *kampong*.

En Addy, vroolijk, nam vlug zijn bad, kleeedde zich in een frisch wit pak, en zij gingen over den weg, langs de rietvelden de kampong in. Het duisterde al onder de zware boomen, de bananen hieven hun bladeren als frisch groene roeispanten op, en onder het statie-baldakijn der klapperboomen, scholen de bamboe-huisjes, dichtertlijk oostersch, idyllisch met hun atap daken, de deurtjes dikwijls al dicht, en zoo ze openstonden, het zwarte verschietje naar binnen omlijstend, met de vage

lijn van een baleh-baleh, waarop een duisterende figuur hurkte. De kale schurftige honden blaften; de kinderen, naakt, met belletjes aan den onderbuik, liepen weg en gluurden uit de huisjes: de vrouwen bleven rustig, den Verleider herkenkend en vaag lachend, knippend de oogen als hij voorbij ging in zijn glorie. (Couperus 1993, 88)<sup>41</sup>

In the *kampong*, it is darker because of the trees, the shacks hide underneath the trees, there are scabby dogs and naked children. This description evokes an image of uncleanness and poverty. An atmosphere of mystery is connected to the *kampong* through the obscure figure who is crouching on a bed of bamboo and the children peeking at the visitors.

Addy invites Theo to the *kampong* to meet si-Oudijck, someone who claims to be Theo's half-brother. When they arrive at the place where si-Oudijck is staying, Theo sees him quickly shuffling away some papers. Later, Theo realizes that those papers are the anonymous letters that Otto van Oudijck frequently receives. He finds the anonymous letters that Léonie forgot on the porch of their house out of disinterest for them.

De anonieme brieven, die Van Oudijck nog dikwijls haar voorlegde, ontroerden haar niet meer; zij raakte aan ze gewoon. Zonder een enkel woord gaf zij ze hem weêr terug: een enkelen keer zelfs vergat zij ze; liet zij ze slingeren in de achtergalerij. Eens las Theo ze door. Hij wist niet in welke plotselinge helderheid, maar plótseling, meende hij te herkennen enkele letters, enkele strepen. Hij herinnerde zich in de kampong bij Patjaram het huisje - half bamboe, half petroleumplank - waar hij si-Oudijck had opgezocht met Addy de Luce, en de met een Arabier haastig bijeen geschoven papieren. Hij herinnerde zich vaag, op een

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<sup>41</sup> And Addy, happy, took his bath, got dressed in a fresh white suit, and they went the way, along the cane fields into the *kampong*. It was getting dark under the heavy trees, the bananas raised their leaves like crisp green oars, and underneath the canopy of *klapper* trees, the bamboo houses were lurking, poetically oriental, idyllic with their *atap* canopies, the doors mostly shut already, and if they were open, the black outlier framing inward, with the vague line of the *baleh-baleh*, on which a dark figure was squatting. The bald mangy dogs barked; the children, naked, with pot bellies, walked off and lurked from the houses: the women stayed calm, recognizing the Seducer and smiling wryly, blinking the eyes when he passed in all his glory.

snipper op den grond die zelfde letters, die strepen. Het ging vaag en bliksemsnel door zijn hoofd. (Couperus 1993, 176–77)<sup>42</sup>

Theo recognizes the shreds of paper that were lying around in the shack where si-Oudijck lives. This makes him understand that si-Oudijck must have been writing the anonymous letters to Otto van Oudijck. These letters inform Otto van Oudijck about the secrets that Léonie keeps from him. The spread of these rumors thus started with si-Oudijck in the *kampong*.

The *kampong* is the space where Addy de Luce and Léonie van Oudijck have their secret encounters/meetings. In the *kampong*, they do not have to be worried about people morally rejecting their extramarital relationship. Generally, no people of the white community venture there, and the indigenous people do not care about what by white people is or is not regarded to be morally good behavior. By the standards of white people the adulterous relationship of Léonie with Addy is regarded as immoral behavior. Their meetings take place in the *kampong*, so in a place where the moral standards of white people are not being reinforced. By meeting in the *kampong*, the need for Léonie to be secretive about her behavior is no longer there. It is thus much easier for her to commit adultery in the *kampong* than in spaces where many white people venture, such as her own living quarters.

The events that take place within the *kampong* in *De stille kracht* are events that are morally rejected by white people. The same applies to the scene about the killing of Joop Walendijk by a coolie in the *pondok* in *Rubber* which I analyzed previously when I discussed stereotypes on people with a brown skin color. Joop Walendijk was asked to come to the *pondok* to talk to Toekimin, a coolie who refused to go to work. When he enters the *pondok* with Kassan, the supervisor of the plantation, the description of the *pondok* emphasizes its messiness in the morning after the coolies had a free day.

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<sup>42</sup> The anonymous letter, that Van Oudijck often brought to her attention, did not move her anymore; she got used to them. Without a single word she returned them: one time she even forgot them; left them about in the back gallery. Once Theo read them. He did not know what stroke of clarity came over him, but suddenly, he thought he recognized some letters, some stripes. He remembered in the *kampong* of *Patjaram* the house - half bamboo, half petroleum board - where he had visited si-Oudijck with Addy de Luce, papers assembled hastily with an Arab. He vaguely remembered, a shred of paper on the floor with those letters, those stripes. Vaguely and fast as lightning the memory went through his head.

Ze liepen het pondok terrein op. Het was dag geworden. De heele omgeving van de pondok droeg de sporen van den vrijen dag: overal lagen vruchtenschillen, stukken pisangblad, klapperdoppen, leege blikjes, papieren, leege lucifers-doozen en omhulsels van sigarettenpakjes. De beide pondok-koelie's waren bezig al dit vuil bij elkaar te vegen. Kippen en honden zochten naar etensresten tusschen de pisangblâren. Naakte kinderen speelden in het droge stoffige zand. Bij de speelloodsstonden een paar zwangere vrouwen met elkaar te babbelen. De laatste maand vóór de geboorte van hun kind hoefden zij niet te werken en nu luierden ze naar hartelust.... Toen de kinderen Joop zagen, voegden zij zich tezaam en liepen achter hem aan, in koor zingend: “Tabeh toewan! Tabeh toewan!!....” (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 184)<sup>43</sup>

The *pondok* is a mess, chickens and dogs roam around freely looking for leftovers, naked children are playing in dusty sand and some pregnant women are chatting lazily. Joop's presence in the *pondok* is noticed as a rarity by the children so they follow him around singing. A few moments later Joop is killed in the *pondok* by the coolie Toekimin. The murder happens in a space where white people do not often venture, a place where the indigenous people live and the coolies gamble away their wages.

These morally reprehensible events all took place outside of the white space. However, in the case of the anonymous letters that were sent to Otto van Oudijck in *De stille kracht*, it can be argued that whereas the topic of the letters is regarded as morally objectionable, namely the affairs of Léonie van Oudijck, they do profess a knowledge of the truth that Otto van Oudijck refuses to recognize. It can be regarded as morally superior to acknowledge the truth and be honest, than to refuse to believe the truth and choose to stay blissfully ignorant. The murder on Joop Walendijk in *Rubber* is a crime committed by a coolie against a white man in an indigenous space. Joop would not have entered the *pondok* if he had not felt it was his duty to try to persuade the coolie to go to work. In the paragraph I analyzed when discussing stereotypes on the brown racial

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<sup>43</sup> They entered the *pondok* grounds. It had turned day. The entire surroundings of the *pondok* carried traces of a day off: fruit peel was everywhere, pieces of *pisang* leaves, *klapper* pods, empty cans, papers, empty matchboxes and cigarette wrappers. Both *pondok*-coolies were already sweeping the rubbish into piles. Chickens and dogs were looking for scraps between the *pisang* leaves. Naked children played in the dry, dusty sand. Near the play shed a few pregnant ladies were chatting. The last month before the birth of their child they did not have to work and were lazing around to their heart's content.... When the children saw Joop, they assembled and marched behind him, singing in unison: ‘*Tabeh toewan! Tabeh toewan!!....*’

position, the coolie Toekimin refused to go to work and instead killed Joop in a surge of his primal instincts. This murder is explained as unjust and takes place outside of the white space. However, in the white space of the club in *Rubber* reprehensible events such as adultery and extreme drunkenness take place. Nevertheless, these acts are not condemned as much as the murder on a white man by a coolie.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I investigated the connotations that are attached to people with a brown skin color. Unlike the *blanke* characters, characters with a brown skin color are not developed in great detail. They are ascribed animal-like behavior and it is stated that they are guided by primitive instincts and desires. This is a racist way of thinking on the part of *blanke* people who feel themselves superior and consider all people with the brown skin color "other." In the case of Addy de Luce, Léonie finds a fascination in his likeness to a wild animal. Léonie experiences this in contrast to Theo van Oudijck, her other lover, who is the exact opposite with his *blanke* looks. Addy's beauty is of the exotic kind, it attracts Léonie in its difference from her *blanke* standard.

By discussing the yellow skin color I showed the intersection between racial position and class in the case of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran and the Raden Ajoe. As indigenous people, they would be in the brown racial position if not for their noble class position. As descendants of a Javanese noble family their skin color is described as yellow, implying a difference from other indigenous people who are described as brown. The yellow skin color overturns the simple duality of the white racial position and the brown racial position because the class of the two Raden Ajoes influences their racial position.

Brown people are often described to be superstitious in the novels. This superstition is generally regarded as a lack of scientific and rational knowledge. However, there are several passages in *Rubber* and *De stille kracht* in which this superstition of brown people seems to be implied as the correct cultural framework to look at events that are inexplicable through the cultural framework of the *blanke* people. This interpretation of the brown race can be an expression of a form of racism that is not necessarily hierarchical. Instead, I would call this form of racism anti-colonial because it implies that the *blanke* race should not rule over brown territory. Reason for this is that the territory is unfriendly to *blanke* people and forces them out. Furthermore, the cultural

framework of the brown characters is able to explain events that happen in this territory that the *blanke* cultural framework has no explanation for. In this sense it is also through cultural difference that races are made distinct from one another.

The analysis of descriptions of characters in the brown racial position allowed me to illustrate how the brown racial position is contrasted to the *blank* racial position as an “other.” Through “othering” the *blank* racial position is confirmed. By investigating the ways in which brown space is used in the novels I could show how space is a décor for particular events and thereby reproduces racial stereotypes. In the following chapter, I will discuss instances in the three novels in which skin colors are not static or permanent. Furthermore, I will examine *blank*-ness when it is connected to Dutch men.

## Chapter 4: The Significance of Change

### Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the ways in which the *blanke*, brown and yellow skin colors are described in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, *De stille kracht* and *Rubber*. I discussed the meanings that are attached to the *blanke* skin color and the brown skin color. Furthermore, I discussed the yellow skin complexion as a signifier specifically for female indigenous aristocracy. I argued that while these women still belong to the group with the brown skin color. Their position within the racial hierarchy is elevated above the brown racial position but still inferior to *blanke* Europeans.

In this chapter, I will discuss instances in the novels in which the skin color of characters change and affect their appearance. In some cases, the skin color change is temporary and has no long-lasting impact, in others, it has far-reaching consequences. I will analyze in what context these skin color changes take place because it allows me to illustrate the correlation of skin colors to the changing personalities and social positions of the characters. Studying the changing of skin colors shows under what circumstances a character can disrupt their racial position.

I start my analysis of skin color change in the novels by looking at changes away from *blank-ness*. First, I will look at changes from *blank* to suntanned red. Similar to the blushing of *blanke* women as described in the previous chapter, this form of color change is temporary. Then, I will proceed to analyze a color change that has a more persistent result, namely towards a yellow skin color. In the last part of this chapter, I will discuss an instance in which a character with a *blanke* skin color changes his life around to adopt a brown racial position.

### “A False Appearance of Excellent Health”

There are two instances in which a color change occurs of *blanke* characters into a red skin color. The first change that I will discuss is Frank Versteegh’s in *Rubber*, the second is Nanni’s color change in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*. In *Rubber* the racial position of Frank Versteegh is never explicitly addressed. The lack of clearly naming Frank’s racial position, is an indicator that he is considered to be *blank*. It demonstrates that the main problem of whiteness is its taken-for-grantedness, as Richard Dyer (1997)

has argued. The racial position of characters in these Dutch novels is white unless mentioned otherwise.

Frank and Marian Versteegh move to the Dutch East Indies as a last resort to earn an income because Frank's career in the Netherlands has ended in failure. They plan to stay on Sumatra for a few years to save up money, but the work on the plantations is hard. After Frank has been employed at the rubber estate for a while, Marian notices that his looks are changing.

Naast haar woelde Frank. Ze stak voorzichtig een hand naar hem uit, streek over zijn gezicht. Hij gooide zich om, maar werd er niet wakker van. Ze moest hem wekken, dacht ze. Het was bijna wreed hem te storen, hij sliep nog zoo vast. En hij was zoo doodmoe, wist ze. Zich wat opheffend keek ze op hem neer. Hij was erg vermagerd. De donkerroode kleur door het buitenzijn, den heelen dag in den fellen zonnegloed, gaf aan zijn gezicht een valschen schijn van stralende gezondheid, maar de jukbeenderen staken sterk naar voren; kringen waren onder zijn oogen gegroeid en in zijn oogen wist ze den vroeger opgewekten blik meer en meer verdoffen tot een grenzenlooze moeheid.... (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 73–74)<sup>44</sup>

Because of his work on the plantation, Frank has to be outside in the sun all day. This has caused the color of his skin to change into a dark red. Marian reflects on how the sunburned dark red color gives his face an appearance of radiant health, while in actual fact his energy is being drained by the hard labor in an unforgiving climate. Frank's work in Sumatra is much more physical than what he did previously in the Netherlands. The radiant health that his dark red face seems to allude to, is thus false. In all reality, the red color masks the fatigue that lies behind it. Like the case of Louise and Léonie that I discussed in the previous chapter, Frank's skin color masks his true state, namely his exhaustion and his bad health. However, the tanned red-ness veils his true state. If the sun would not have made his skin red, Frank's *blank*-ness would have shown his endless exhaustion. In addition, Frank is not intentionally hiding behind his skin color.

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<sup>44</sup> Besides her Frank tossed and turned. She stretched her hand towards him, stroked his face. He threw himself over, but did not wake up. She had to wake him, she thought. It felt almost cruel to disturb him, he was still fast asleep. And he had been exhausted, she knew. She pulled herself up and looked down on him. He had lost a lot of weight. The dark red color from being outside, spending the whole day in the radiant sunshine, gave his face a false appearance of excellent health, but his cheek bones stood out; circles had grown underneath his eyes and in his eyes she knew the former cheerful smile to dull down more and more into a fatigue without end....

The necessary exposure of his skin to the sun due to his work assignments is the reason that his skin color does not reflect the real physical condition he finds himself in. The mask of radiant health is thus involuntarily caused by his move from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies. Frank therefore seems to be *blank* in the way that Annet Walendijk and Nanni, who I examined in the second chapter, have an honest form of *blank*-ness. It is interesting to note that the perception of Marian that a red skin color expresses health does not seem to be a perception common today. Suntanned red-ness is nowadays much more associated with skin cancer and therefore has gotten an unhealthy connotation.

### **“The Fire That Plays in the Sky”**

In the previous chapter some forms of *blank*-ness were analyzed as forcing one to be honest while other forms allowed one to hide their dishonest behavior behind it like a mask. In *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, a skin color change occurs that moves away from this first form of honest *blank*-ness. When Nanni arrives in the Dutch East Indies to live with her sister Louise, she is portrayed as having a temperament, but being innocent and honest. Through a letter that was sent to her by Mrs. Van Olm, a woman who strongly dislikes Louise and Kees, Nanni finds out that before marrying Kees van der Broek, Louise left her dying husband, eloped with Kees and married him shortly after her first husband had died. At first, Nanni refuses to believe that her sister would do such dishonor to their family, but when she acknowledges the truth, she resolves to run away and angrily walks out into the hot sun.

Want Nanni, die een onwankelbaar vertrouwen had in haar zuster, en die haar zou verdedigd hebben met den gloed der overtuiging tegen ieder, die haar ook in 't minst verdacht zou hebben gemaakt, - Nanni twijfelde geen oogenblik of elk woord van den noodlottigen brief, dien zij in haar hand had, was waar; die eenvoudige brief zonder heftigheid of toorn was ver boven elke verdenking. Haar zuster was..... O, Nanni kende het woord heel goed, al stokte ze nu onder het denken, en al kon ze het zelfs niet in gedachten uitspreken. Niet dat ooit iemand haar over zulke aangelegenheden difinities had gegeven, maar op de kostschool hadden de meisjes wel eens de hoofden bijeengestoken en dat leelijke woord opgezocht in de dictionnaire, en dan had ieder er een uitlegging voor, die wel dikwijls zeer onjuist was, maar die toch altijd daarin overeenstemde, dat zulk een

schepsel het summum moest zijn van 't geen er verachtelijks en gemeens was op deze booze wereld. En dat was haar zuster! Ze ging voort langs de rivier, die er uitzag om zich er zóó in te verdrinken. Maar dat was óók slecht. Zonder *pajong* was ze doorgelopen en 't scheen dat ze geen last had van de gloeiende zonnestralen, die haar blank gezichtje verschroelden. Alleen had ze een *heimweh* om onderdak te komen. Hier op de straat kon ze het onmogelijk uithouden. Naar huis terug... nooit! (Daum 1888, 289–90)<sup>45</sup>

In this scene it is stated that the burning sun beams that scorch Nanni's *blanke* face do not seem to bother her. Through this statement, it is implied that the sun beams ought to bother her. As a young girl from a well-off family, Nanni is not supposed to walk in the sun. Instead, she should have used a *pajong*, a parasol to shield her from the sun. The scorching of her face will turn her face from *blank* into red. This change of color collides with Nanni finding out that her sister is a dishonorable woman. Through Nanni's focal point it becomes clear that Louise committed a serious transgression that, to Nanni, is the worst crime imaginable. To find out that her own sister committed adultery, shames Nanni to such an extent that she even considers drowning herself. Nanni loses a part of her innocence when she discovers that her sister is an adulterer because she becomes aware of the sinful acts that have been committed by a woman she regarded to be virtuous. The loss of innocence coincides with losing *blank* skin color. Nanni's face is burned red by the sun and concurrently her *blank*-ness is scorched away.

The intensity of the revelation to Nanni is emphasized by the color change. The revelation causes a partial-character change, since Nanni is no longer Louise's ideal younger sister who adores her older sibling and is somewhat stubborn, but rational. Nanni decides that she does not want to see her sister anymore under any circumstances

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<sup>45</sup> Because Nanni, who had an infallible faith in her sister, and who would have defended her with an ardent conviction against whoever, that would make her somewhat suspicious, - Nanni did not hesitate for a moment or every word in the ill-fated letter, the letter she had in her hand, was true; that simple letter without fierceness or wrath was far above suspicion. Her sister was..... O, Nanni knew the word very well, although she choked thinking, and couldn't even say it in her thoughts. Not that anyone had ever given her definitions for such matters, but in boarding school the girls had put their heads together and looked the ugly word up in the dictionary, and everyone gave their own explanation, often wrong, but always agreed, that such creature must be the paramount of everything despicable and evil in this angry world. This was her sister! She went forth along the river, who looked ready to drown in. But that was bad too. Without *pajong* she had walked on and it appeared that the glowing sunbeams did not bother her, whilst scorching her face. She only felt *heimweh* to find shelter. Here on the streets she couldn't possibly last. Back home... never!

and that she will go live on her own in a hotel. Directly after the revelation, Nanni loses her *blank*-ness together with her naivety, which was, as explained in the previous chapter, part of her original character. The loss of innocence of Nanni can be interpreted as a positive development because Nanni gains knowledge about Louise's true personality and is no longer clouded by naivety in her judgment of Louise.

When Louise learns that Nanni knows the truth and has cut off contact with her, she tries to restore the old order by coming for an unannounced visit to the hotel where her sister resides. After Louise convinced Nanni that the source of the rumor was not trustworthy, Nanni decides to believe her sister that the rumor was a lie made up by a mad woman. Nanni joins her sister and returns home. However, when at home, Nanni has a fever which develops into a long-lasting illness.

Lachend liep van den Broek zijn huis binnen, maar zijn vroolijkheid ging in ernst over, toen hij Nanni in een gemakkelijken stoel zag zitten in de achtergalerij. Dat zij bezig was den tol te betalen aan “'t vuur dat aan den hemel speelt,” maar bij den Europeaan heel iets anders dan “'n dubbele groeikracht teelt,” wist hij. Zij had al 'n dag of zes, zeven geheel haar kamer gehouden. Hij vroeg telkens naar haar, en dan luidde het: nog koorts, nu weer meer, dan weer minder - maar toch geregeld beterend. 't Was de eerste maal, dat ze er weêr “uitkwam” en hij schrikte, toen hij haar zag. 't Vermoeide gezicht van Louise scheen bloeiend van kracht en gezondheid naast de geelbleeke lijdenstrekken van haar jongere zuster. Het pakte hem geweldig aan; hij werd zelf haast even bleek en de tranen schoten hem in de oogen. “Dag, Nant,” zei hij op den ouden, goedigen toon. “Je hebt een heel rokje uitgetrokken. Hoe gaat het nu?” “Och, 't is nu wat beter. Ik ben koortsvrij maar erg zwak.” Ze behoefde het waarlijk niet te zeggen! Haar afgefallen gezichtje, haar vermagerde taille en haar zwakke, toonlooze stem spraken luide genoeg. (Daum 1888, 314–15)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Smiling Van den Broek entered his house, but his cheer swiftly changed into earnestness, when he saw Nanni sitting in a comfortable chair in the back gallery. That she was paying the price to ‘the fire that plays in the sky,’ but does something different for an European than ‘grow a double vigor,’ he knew. ‘She had kept to her room for a day or six, seven. He had asked for her, and the answer was: fever, now more, then less - but often on the mend. It was the first time, that she came ‘out’ and he jumped, when he saw her. Louise’s tired face looked blooming with strength and health besides the yellow-pale suffering traits of her younger sister. It hit him hard; he almost paled up himself and tears filled his eyes. ‘Hey, Nant,’ he said with a solemn voice. ‘You managed to take off a whole skirt. How are you now?’ ‘Oh, it’s somewhat better. I’m fever free

As the focalizer in this paragraph, Kees cites a Dutch poem of Bernhard ter Haar that lauds the island of Java and its fertility. In the poem, the sun ensures that the island of Java is fertile and strong. However, as reflected upon by Kees, this same sun is too strong for Europeans because it burns their skin. Kees regards Nanni to be paying the price to the Javanese sun through her illness.

First, Nanni scorches her face red through a sunburn. This alters her *blank*-ness for the period of time that it will take her skin to recover. This loss of *blank*-ness is a temporary one and coincides with Nanni's newly gained knowledge about her sister. However, Nanni takes on the attitude of innocence again by naively believing the lie of Louise. After the scorching the deterioration of Nanni's health causes marks of yellow-pale features of suffering on her face. Through Kees van den Broek's focal point, the significant change of Nanni from being *blank* to having yellow features is emphasized. In a description of the contrast between Nanni and Louise, Kees notices how different Nanni looks compared to her sister. While it is because of Louise's immoral conduct that Nanni ran into the sun, Louise is not negatively affected by her own actions. Instead it is Nanni who physically suffers from them. Nanni recovers from her illness when she moves away to the cooler climate in the mountains. The yellow-pale facial appearance as well as her red sunburned skin color are thus not permanent and she reinstates her *blanke* racial position. The temporary loss of her *blank* skin color coincides with Nanni gaining knowledge and losing naivety. This reinstates the connection of Nanni's skin color to her innocence.

Nanni does not recover from her illness until she leaves Louise and Kees and moves to a cooler climate in the mountains. Mrs. Van Olm, the woman who told Nanni the truth about Louise's conduct visits Nanni in her new residence and proves to her that she is not a mad woman. Nanni believes her anew and refuses to return back to Kees and Louise after her recovery. Instead, she chooses to stay in the mountains with the couple that took care of her during her recovery. Here, the place where Nanni recovers from her illness is also the place where she again learns the truth. Furthermore, the recovery of Nanni's health coincides with her knowledge of the truth. In the mountains, Nanni is no longer yellow-pale or ill and she knows the truth about Louise. Eventually, Louise becomes a devout Christian and ends her adulterous relationships. It is then that Nanni

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but quite weak.' She wouldn't have had to tell him! Her slender face, wasted waist and her weak atonic voice said enough.

returns to her sister and Kees. Nanni reasons to Kees that by her Christian devotion Louise proves that she would never have behaved in the way that Mrs. Van Olm claimed she did.

“Ik kon niet nalaten eens naar jullie te informeeren,” zei ze met haar gewone openhartigheid, “en toen ik hoorde, hoe hier alles ging, kwam wederom twijfel bij me op aan de verzekering van dat ongelukkige mensch.” “En toen?” “Toen heb ik mijnheer en mevrouw gevraagd, hoe ze er over dachten.” [...] “Ik wil toch weten wat “meneer en mevrouw” zeiden,” ging hij voort op een toon, die tegen bedoeld echtpaar een onuitgesproken bedreiging inhield. “Dat het alles leugen en laster moest wezen; dat het niets was dan nijd en afgunst, die zulke praatjes in de wereld strooiden en de menschen opzetten tegen elkaar. Kortom ze hebben me zooveel verteld van de kwade tongen hier, dat ik maar besloot voor de tweede maal terug te gaan en mijn excuses te maken, vooral...” “Ga voort.” “Omdat mijn informaties zoo zijn meegevallen.” Kees van den Broek beschouwde, terwijl ze sprak haar frisch open gelaat en hoorde haar heldere prettige, nog haast kinderlijke stem. De oude vaderlijke genegenheid kwam boven en werd hem te machtig; hij nam haar hoofdje in zijn groote handen en kuste haar teeder op het voorhoofd. (Daum 1888, 339–40)<sup>47</sup>

In this paragraph Nanni explains to Kees and Louise why she has decided to eventually believe their story regarding the rumors on Louise’s conduct. When Nanni refers to her “informations” she means that she received information that Louise started to go to church frequently. By understanding Louise’s Christian behavior as proof that all the rumors about her past cannot be true, Nanni returns to her original state of ignorance about her sister. Through Christianity Louise hides her past behavior. In this, she is using her Christian devotion to mask the same conduct she previously masked with her *blank*-ness. Christianity has the same function as *blank*-ness here in providing an

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<sup>47</sup> ‘I couldn’t help but inquire about you,’ she said with her usual candor, ‘and when I heard, how everything was, I once again doubted the assurance of that unfortunate man.’ ‘And then?’ ‘Then, I asked mister and misses, what they thought about it.’ [...] ‘I still want to know what “mister and misses” said,’ he continued in a manner that held an unspoken threat to the couple. ‘That it was all lies and slander; nothing but hate and envy, that allowed such talks to roam free and create divisions between people. In short, they warned me about the scandalmongers, and I decided to go back for a second time and apologize, especially....’ ‘Go on.’ ‘Because my informations weren’t so dreadful after all.’ Kees van den Broek regarded, while she spoke, her fresh, open face and heard her clear, pleasant, almost childish voice. The old fatherly dearness came over him; he took her head in his big hands and kissed her gently on her forehead.

external appearance of good conduct. In the following part of the chapter I will analyze a color change from *blank* to yellow that takes place in another novel.

### **“He Saw Himself, Changed”**

In *De stille kracht*, there is also character whose skin color changes from *blank* to yellow. In this case the effect is long lasting. The character of Resident Otto van Oudijck is that of a Dutch man entirely conform the ideal of a *blanke* civil servant in the colonial administration. He is a hard-working man and a strict but fair administrator who cares about the Dutch East Indies and its inhabitants like an older brother who guides his younger sibling. Through the perspective of his son Theo, the Resident is described as impeccable, high, honest, noble. Theo has never been able to live up to the standards of his father and he enjoys finding out that his father had a sexual relationship with his housekeeper before he was married. He hears this from a man who claims to be the unacknowledged son of this housekeeper and Otto van Oudijck. In the eyes of Theo, the discovery of this past breaks down the ideal image Theo had of his father.

Van zijne kinderjaren af, had Theo zich zoo gevoeld, ver van zijn vader; en later was die antipathie een sluimerende haat geworden. Het deed hem genoegen te hooren afbreken die onlaakbaarheid van zijn vader: edel mensch, hoog intègre ambtenaar, die zijn huisgezin liefhad, die zijn rezidentie liefhad, die den Javaan liefhad, die hoog wilde houden de Regentenfamilie - niet alleen omdat zijn instructie hem in het Staatsblad voorschreef den Javaanschen adel in aanzien te houden, maar omdat zijn eigen hart het hem zeide, als hij zich den nobelen Pangéran heugde... Theo wist wel, dat zijn vader zoo was, zoo onlaakbaar, zoo hoog, zoo intègre, zoo edel, en het deed hem goed, hier, in den avond vol geheim aan de Brantas, te hooren tornen aan die onlaakbaarheid, aan dien hoogen, intègren adel; het deed hem goed te ontmoeten een verstooteling, die hem in één oogenblik die hoog tronende vaderfiguur vuil gooide met slijk en smerigheid, hem neêrtrok van zijn voetstuk, hem laag deed zijn als ieder ander, zondig, slecht, harteloos, onedel. (Couperus 1993, 91–92)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> From an early age, Theo had felt this way, distanced from his father; and later on that antipathy had turned into a slumbering hate. It pleased him to hear the untouchability of his father break down: noble human, high placed integer civil servant, who loved his family, who loved is residency, who loved the Javanese, who wanted to put the family of the regent on a pedestal - not only because his instructions in the statute paper prescribed to maintain respect

Otto van Oudijck is multiple times referred to as a *blanke* man who is perfect in every way. His personality underscores his *blank*-ness because it is conform to the ideals that are attached to the white racial position. However, his past is shameful and does not follow these ideals. In the next chapter, I will discuss Resident Van Oudijck's relationships in the light of changing attitudes towards intimacy with indigenous people in the Dutch East Indies.

Later in the story, Van Oudijck's character changes. Regularly events happen in and around his house that are inexplicable to Otto because he does not believe in ghosts and spirits. His family starts to fall apart, he no longer has a close domestic circle because everyone goes their own way. When on top of that he catches his wife Léonie cheating on him with Addy, Otto becomes superstitious and starts to believe in a force hidden in the ground of the Dutch East Indies that slowly drives out its European ruler.

En Van Oudijck, die nooit was bijgeloovig geweest, die koel, kalm gewerkt had in zijn vereenzaamde huis, waar het onbegrijpelijk spookte rondom hem heen, die rapporten had doorlezen terwijl het hamerde boven zijn hoofd en zijn whiskey-soda okerde in zijn glas - Van Oudijck, voor het eerst van zijn leven, nu hij de sombere blikken van Theo, van Doddy zag, nu hij zijne vrouw, brutaler iederen dag, met den jongen de Luce eensklaps vond hand in hand, haar knieën bijna in de zijne, nu hij zichzelf zag, veranderd, verouderd, somber spiedende, - werd bijgeloovig, onoverkomelijk bijgeloovig, geloovende aan eene stille kracht, die school waar wist hij niet, in Indië, in den grond van Indië, in een diep mysterie, ergens, ergens - een kracht, die hem kwaad wilde, omdat hij was Europeaan, overheerscher, vreemdeling op den geheimzinnig heiligen grond. En toen hij zag deze bijgeloovigheid in zich, zoo nieuw in hem, man van praktijk, zoo vreemd ongelooflijk in hem, man van simpel mannelijken eenvoud, schrikte hij voor zichzelf, als voor een opkomende krankzinnigheid, die hij diep in zich begon waar te nemen. En hoe krachtig hij geweest was tijdens het vreemde gebeuren zelve, dat hij nog met een enkel woord van dreigende kracht had kunnen bezweren, deze bijgeloovigheid, als de naziekte van dat gebeuren, vond in hem

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for the Javanese nobility, but because his own heart told him so, so untouchable, so high, so integer, so noble, and he liked, here, in the evening filled with secrets on the *Brantas*, to hear that untouchability, that high, integer nobility slandered; he liked meeting an outcast, who in one moment threw dirt and filth at that high ranking father figure, pulled him down from his pedestal, made him like every other, sinful, evil, heartless, common.

zwakte, als een kwetsbare plek. Hij was zoo verbaasd over zichzelf, dat hij zich niet begreep, vreesde gek te zullen worden, en toch, toch tobde hij. Zijne gezondheid was ondermijnd door eene opkomende leverziekte en hij bestudeerde zijn gelende tint. (Couperus 1993, 180)<sup>49</sup>

Otto van Oudijck feels that his superstition is strange to him and that it is as an external power that forces itself into him like a virus that spreads. It finds his weak spot and his health is undermined by an emerging liver disease. The superstition that has taken root in Otto changes him and he senses that he is slowly becoming insane. When he suspects that his wife commits adultery, he begins to believe that there is a hidden force in the Indies. He becomes indifferent to the work that he used to care about and he gets sick. During the period that Resident Van Oudijck's life is falling apart, he develops a liver disease that gives him a yellow skin color.

Throughout the story, superstition is connected to the beliefs of indigenous people. Superstition is described as a way of thinking for those who are uneducated, uncivilized and inferior. The focal point of Otto van Oudijck, previous to the development of his own superstition, illustrates his view on the superstition of the indigenous people.

Hoe dikwijls Van Oudijck ook al te doen had gehad met het bijgeloof der Javanen, steeds maakte het hem razend, als tegenstrijdig aan wat hij noemde de wetten van natuur en leven. Ja, alleen zijn bijgeloof kon een Javaan afbrengen van het correcte spoor zijner ingeboren hoffelijkheid. (Couperus 1993, 107)<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> And Van Oudijck, who had never been superstitious, who had worked coolly, calmly in his lonely house, which was incomprehensibly haunted, who had read reports while it hammered above his head and his whiskey soda turned ocher in his glass - Van Oudijck, for the first time in his life, now that he saw the gloomy looks of Theo, and of Doddy, now saw his wife, bolder every day, suddenly with that boy De Luce holding hands, her knees almost in his, now he saw himself, changed, outworn, gloomily spying, - became superstitious, insurmountably superstitious, believing in a hidden force, who hid where he didn't know, in the Indies, in the Indies' ground, in a deep mystery, somewhere, somewhere - a force, which had bad intentions for him, because he was European, imperialist, foreigner on the mysterious, holy soil. And then he saw this superstition in him, newly developed in him, a man of practice, so strangely incredible in him, a man of straightforward manly simplicity, startled of himself, as of a sudden insanity, that he witnessed deep inside him. And how powerful he had been during the strange happenings, that he was able to defuse with a single forbidding word, this superstition, as the after sickness of that event, found weakness in him, like a vulnerable spot. He was so surprised with himself, that he did not understand, feared to go mad, and yet, yet he pondered. His health had been undermined by a emerging liver disease and he studied his yellowish complexion.

<sup>50</sup> No matter how often Van Oudijck had dealt with the superstition of the Javanese, it still made him furious, as it was in contradiction with what he called the laws of nature and life. Yes, only superstition could dissuade a Javanese person from the righteous path of his inborn courtesy.

Van Oudijck feels a strong dislike towards the superstitious beliefs of the indigenous people of Java. In his opinion, superstition prevents the people from acting in a civilized manner. His character that values reason over mysticism makes it all the more unlikely that Otto van Oudijck will develop superstitious beliefs himself. When he becomes superstitious himself, he adopts the way of thinking of the indigenous people that is different than his own. At the same time, Van Oudijck gets a yellow complexion because of his failing health, similar to Nanni.

Resident Van Oudijck undergoes a character change. He changes from the ideal *blank* character, to a person who is European by descent, but indigenous in mind through his superstitious way of thinking. He realizes that he changed when he gladly declines an offer to a promotion in the capital Batavia. He knows that it is unlike his old self to refuse an opportunity that would increase his status. Otto blames his mental change on the climate in the Dutch East Indies.

In zichzelf - verborgen voor zijn vrouw, die spijt had om die vervlogen illuzie: Batavia - lachte hij er stilletjes om, dat hij had weten gedaan te krijgen op Laboewangi te blijven. Maar om dien lach voelde hij wel zich veranderd, verouderd, verminderd, niet meer blikkende langs die opwaartsche lijn van telkens onder de menschen in te nemen een hogere plaats - die altijd de lijn van zijn leven ge-weest was. Waar was zijn eerezucht gebleven? Hoe was zoo zijn heerschezucht verslapt? Hij dacht, het was alles invloed van het klimaat. Goed zoû het zeker zijn als hij zijn bloed, zijn geest verfrischte in Europa, en er een paar winters doormaakte. Maar oogenblikkelijk knakte die gedachte willoos in een. Neen, hij wilde niet naar Europa. Indië was hem lief. (Couperus 1993, 184)<sup>51</sup>

Otto van Oudijck feels that the transformation happening inside him is not a positive one. Yet, he refuses to return to the Netherlands to withstand it because the Dutch East Indies are too dear to him. There is thus a certain unwillingness to repress the change that is dominating him.

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<sup>51</sup> To himself - hidden for his wife, who had regretted the bygone illusion: Batavia - he quietly celebrated, that he had managed to stay at *Laboewangi*. But for his laugh he felt changed, worn out, lessened, no longer part of the upward path of taking a higher place among people - which had always been the path of life. Where had his ambition gone? Had his imperialism gone limp? He thought, it must be the climate. It would be good if his blood, his mind freshened up in Europe, and went through a few winters. But immediately that thought snapped apart. No, he did not want to go to Europe. The Indies were dear to him.

His character change is absolute when he resigns and moves away from Laboewangi, the place where he served as Resident for many years. He chooses to live with an indigenous woman and her whole family of siblings and old mother. Van Oudijck's new life reflects his altered position and status because he relocates to a village, far away from the civilized world of the *blanke* people in the urban areas of the island of Java. Eva Eldersma, a former neighbor from Laboewangi goes out of her way to visit him and say farewell before her journey back to the Netherlands.

De koetsier reed langzaam een stijgenden weg op. De liquide sawah's traptraden als spiegelterrassen naar boven, ijl groen van de voorzichtig geplante padi-halmpjes; toen, plotseling, was het als een varen-allee; reuzevarens, die hoogopwaaierden, en groote fabelkapellen fladderden rond. En tusschen de ijle der bamboe's werd zichtbaar een kleine woning, halfsteen, half bamboe-vlechtwerk, met een tuintje er om, waarin enkele witte potten met rozen. Een heel jonge vrouw in sarong en kabaai, zachtjes goudglanzend de wangen, nieuwsgierig spiedend de koolzwarte oogen, zag uit naar de verrassing van het rijtuig, dat heel langzaam aankwam en vluchtte naar binnen. Eva steeg uit, en kuchte. En om een schutsel in het middengalerijtje zag zij eensklaps iets van het gezicht van Van Oudijck, gluren. Hij verdween dadelijk. (Couperus 1993, 206–7)<sup>52</sup>

His new house is surrounded by nature and Van Oudijck has completely adopted the indigenous way of living. It becomes clear that Otto van Oudijck has gone native and takes on the racial position of indigenous people through his way of thinking and life style. He has completely abandoned his previous *blank* racial position and shifted towards the racial position of the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies. By no longer performing the *blanke* racial position through his job, his family and the place he lived, Otto van Oudijck starts to lose *blank*-ness. His yellow skin color, his belief in indigenous superstition and his new housing situation all conform the performance of a brown racial position. If race is understood as the performance of a racial position, Otto

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<sup>52</sup> The coachman slowly drove up a climbing road. The liquid *sawahs* stacked up like mirror terraces, thinly green from the carefully planted *padi*-halms; when, suddenly, it was like a boulevard of ferns; giant ferns, blowing high, and big fable chapels flew around. And between the thin cover of bamboo, a small residence was visible, half stonework, half bamboo wickerwork, with a garden around it, in which some white pots with roses. A very young woman in a *sarong* and *kabaai*, soft golden glossy cheeks, curiously spying eyes as black as coal, looking at the surprise of the coach slowly approaching and fled inside. Eva disembarked, and coughed. And through the shack in the mid-gallery, she suddenly saw something of Van Oudijck's face peeking. He disappeared immediately.

van Oudijck could be argued to perform the brown racial position and therefore changed into having a brown racial position. It is unclear whether or not Otto's liver disease is chronic, but his yellow skin color remains throughout the rest of the story. Therefore, both his performance and his skin color reflect the shift away from the *blanke* racial position.

### **“All Shades of Brown”**

In the previous chapter, I argued that because only indigenous people of noble descent are described to have a yellow skin color in *De stille kracht*, yellow is a signifier at the intersection of a brown racial position and a high social class status. In this part of the chapter, I will discuss in what way the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran with her yellow skin color has children who are described to have a brown skin color. She had married a French nobleman, Ferdinand de Luce and therefore her children are of mixed Eurasian descent. In spite of their noble lineage, the children of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran and Ferdinand de Luce are not described to have a yellow skin color like their mother neither are they *blank* like their French father. Every one of them is mentioned to have a brown skin color. This becomes clear in a scene when all attendants of a dinner at the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran's house are described:

Vreemd was het te zien die verschillende types; de mooie melkblanke Léonie naast de geel gerimpelde Raden-Ajoe-douairière; Theo, Hollandsch blank en blond met zijn volle lippen van sensualiteit, die hij van zijne nonna-moeder had; Doddy, als een rijpe roos al met hare vonkel-irissen in de zwarte pupillen; de zoon-administrateur, Achille de Luce, - groot, fors, bruin, - wiens gedachte alleen ging over zijn machinerieën en zijn bibit; de tweede zoon, Roger, - klein, mager, bruin, - boekhouder, wiens gedachte alleen ging over de winst van dat jaar, met zijn Armeniaansche vrouwtje; de oudste dochter, al oud, - dom leelijk, bruin, - met haar volbloed Hollandschen man, die er uitzag als een boer; de andere zonen en dochteren, in alle nuances van bruin, en niet dadelijk uit elkaâr te kennen; om hen heen de kinderen, de kleinkinderen, de baboe's, de kleine gouden pleegkinderen, de lorre's en de kantjil - en over al deze mensen en kinderen en beesten als uitgeschud éene goedhartigheid van samenleving, maar ook over alle de mensen één trots op hun Solosche stammoeder, die achter hun aller hoofden een bleeken aureool van Javaansche aristocratie deed glimmen, waarop niet het

minst fier waren de Armeniaansche schoondochter en de boersch Hollandsche schoonzoon. (Couperus 1993, 72)<sup>53</sup>

The De Luce family has lost all their wealth because of a crisis in sugar. The younger generations have neither wealth nor nobility. Their skin color is brown in various shades, thus darker than the skin color of their mother and their father. Therefore, the yellow skin color that denoted aristocracy to the racial position of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran has vanished in the brown racial position of her children. Nevertheless, the children and the other people around the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran are considered to have a pale halo of Javanese aristocracy shining behind their heads because of their proximity to the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran rather than their noble lineage. This pale halo shines for family members of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran and others alike. The children are not described in a positive light. Apart from their brownness, character traits such as big, skinny and ugly are also mentioned. Furthermore, they are described to be difficult to discern from one another. Even though their skin colors are all different nuances of brown, they are described to look the same. In contrast, the differences between the *blanke* characters are described. Because of the small descriptions made of the characters with a brown racialized position they seem of less importance than the *blanke* characters.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed instances in the novels in which characters are subjected to a change of skin color. In the case of Frank Versteegh in *Rubber* and Nanni in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, a color change from *blank* to sunburned red occurs. Both color changes happen because of an inability to withstand the strength of the sun in the colony. Frank Versteegh is seen by Marian to have a deep red color because of his

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<sup>53</sup> It was a strange sight; the fair milky *blanke* Léonie next to the yellow shriveled *Raden-Ajoe*-dowager; Theo, Holland *blank* and blond with his full sensual lips, from his Eurasian-mother; Doddy, like a ripe rose with her sparkling irises in the black pupils; the son-administrator, Achille de Luce, - big, hefty, brown, - whose thoughts only consisted of machinery and his *bibit*; de second son, Roger, - petite, skinny, brown, - bookkeeper, whose thoughts only consisted of yearly profits, with his Armenian wife; eldest daughter, fully grown, - dimly ugly, brown, - with her pure-blood Dutch husband, who looked like a farmer; the other sons and daughters, in all shades of brown, and hard to tell apart; around them the children, grandchildren, the *baboes*, the small golden foster children, the parrots and the *kantjil* - and over all these people and children and animals spread out one kindness of society, but also over all humans a pride of their founding mother from Solo, who shined a pale areola of Javanese aristocracy, out of who weren't the least fierce the Armenian daughter in law and the hillbilly Dutch son in law.

exposure to the sun. The skin color change in the case of Frank Versteegh has to do with a change of space from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies. Frank cannot cope with the strong sun. However, he does remain a faithful and hardworking *blanke* man. His energy recovers when he returns to Europe for a while. The sun discolors his skin and gives a false appearance of health. It is thus Frank's redness that masks his true state, namely his exhaustion. If his skin had remained *blank*, the exhaustion would be visible. This makes his form of *blank*-ness that of honesty and transparency. However, he recovers his *blanke* skin color and his energy when he returns to Europe or a time so his discoloring is not permanent.

In the case of Nanni it is implied that someone in her social position ought not to be out in the sun. After Nanni's color change to red, she develops a disease that causes her skin to become yellow. This disease is caused by her sunburn. The sunburn is indirectly caused by the knowledge Nanni gains about the infidelity of her older sister Louise. The gaining of this knowledge coincides with the temporary loss of Nanni's *blanke* skin color. Here, the intersection of the feminine ideal of innocence with *blank*-ness is again emphasized. In the mountains she is again visited by Mrs. Van Olm which incites Nanni to break contact with Louise and Kees until she learns of Louise's Christian behavior and again decides to reject Mrs. Van Olm's story and once more ask forgiveness to Louise. Here, Nanni takes on her original innocent character and her ignorance of the truth. Like Louise hid her immoral behavior behind her *blanke* beauty, she hides this past immoral behavior behind her Christian devotion. She thus uses Christian piety in the same way that she used beauty. Like Frank Versteegh, Nanni's health deteriorates in the first instance, but gets better once she moves up into the mountains and spends a period of time in the fresh air.

In *De stille kracht*, Otto van Oudijck gets a yellow skin color because of a liver disease. For Frank Versteegh and Nanni, the skin color change is temporary. For Otto van Oudijck, the color change coincides with a mental crisis that results in a permanent life change. It is not mentioned in the novel whether Otto van Oudijck's illness is chronic, but the yellow skin color does remain.

Even though Nanni and Otto van Oudijck shift from *blanke* skin colors to a yellow skin color and both are caused by an illness, their shifts are different. Otto van Oudijck transforms his life completely at the time of his yellow skin color: his mind and his

living situation are close to the brown racial position of indigenous people. Furthermore, Otto van Oudijck's skin color stays yellow, even though he keeps the white privileges of a *blanke* man because he is able to support a family to fulfill his desire of a domestic circle.

Through the correlation of skin color change with character change, I have exposed the performativity that is needed for racial positions to be sustained. This emphasizes that a racial position can be performed in multiple ways. In the case of Otto van Oudijck I argued that his racial position changed when his social position changed. He lost the high social status when he quit being a Resident, started to believe in superstition, something which he regarded to be typical to indigenous people, and he moved in with an indigenous family far away from the cities where the *blanke* people roam. Otto thus no longer performs the *blanke* racial position but instead behaves as a person with a brown racial position. Through the change in performance, Otto has taken on the brown racial position.

I have shown that the yellow skin color is connected to the indigenous upper class by discussing the skin color of the children of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran. Even though their parents have a yellow and a *blanke* skin color, none of their children are described as yellow or *blank*. Instead, they all have a brown skin color. Reason for this is that even though the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran and her husband Ferdinand de Luce were of noble birth, their children grow up without wealth. In the case of the De Luce family skin colors and racial positions are not inherited but dependent on wealth. Since they are not able to perform the wealth of the racial positions of their parents, the children of the Raden-Ajoe Pangéran and Ferdinand de Luce dropped in the class hierarchy as well as the racial hierarchy.

This chapter showed the fluidity of racial positions by showing storylines in which characters shifts from one racial position to another by changing their racial performances. In the following chapter I will discuss changes regarding attitudes concerning multiracial positions that are noticeable between the novels. Furthermore, I will discuss the relationships of Otto van Oudijck in *De stille kracht* to explain the connection of racial positions to class positions. Lastly, I will discuss characters with a multiracial background.

## Chapter 5: The Hybrid Position of Multiraciality

### Introduction

The mingling between people in different racial positions in the Dutch East Indies was accepted and regarded as useful during the development of the colony in its first period. Dutch men who were working in the colony for a period of time often had relationships with indigenous women. These women functioned as housekeepers but also had intimate relationships with the Dutch men (Bosma and Raben 2003, 42). Because of the extent of these interracial relationships, many children with a multiracial background were born in the Dutch East Indies (Bosma and Raben 2003, 33). People with a multiracial background were able to navigate between the racial groups in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies (Gouda 1995, 171). The fluidity of their position in society made it hard for the colonial government to regulate them. During the nineteenth century the bonds of the colonial government to the Dutch government became closer because of technological innovations such as the steamboat (Bosma and Raben 2003, 29). It was easier for the Dutch government to be involved with the governance of the Dutch East Indies because the distance was bridged faster.

The impossibility to regulate people of multiracial descent in society and the tighter bonds with the Netherlands resulted in stricter regulations on intermingling between people in different racial positions in the Dutch East Indies at the end of the nineteenth century (Bosma and Raben 2003, 32). Apart from one statement by Otto van Oudijck in *De stille kracht* which I will discuss in this chapter, this policy change of the colonial government is not formally mentioned in the three novels. By focusing on the references to characters of multiracial descent in the stories, I will show the importance of race to one's social position in the Dutch East Indies and how this changed over time.

### “A Strange Rage to Appoint Strangers”

I will first explain the importance of the different time periods in which the novels were written. This is necessary because there was a shift regarding the importance of racial positions in the way colonial society was structured during the time in which the novels were written. In correspondence with the time periods, different positions on race are noticeable in the novels.

The earliest novel in my analysis is *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, which was written in 1888. As explained in the first chapter, a transition from a racially hybrid society towards a society that was strictly divided according to racial position started in this period in the Dutch East Indies. The society that had been extraordinarily mixed-race before, started to gravitate towards a colonial society in which each race has their own position and social rules in society. People in the white racial position in Dutch colonial society were always able to get more comfortable and better paid jobs than people in the brown racial position. However, the increasing importance of one's racial position meant that official regulations were formulated in order to prevent people with a multiracial background from taking on positions reserved for white people. As explained by Bosma and Raben (2003), race was not a social organizing principle in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies before the end of the nineteenth century (13). It is therefore not surprising that race is not a prominent signifier to describe characters in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*. This novel was written before migration from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies increased and therefore the society described in the novel consists solely of people who were born and raised in the Dutch East Indies. I want to underline that even though the early society of the Dutch East Indies was structured through a racist framework, there is not a lot of emphasis on the racial position of the characters in the novel. A possible explanation for this is that the understanding of racial positions in that period was more static. One was born in a certain racial position and would remain in that position throughout their life, no matter how one behaved in this life.

Regarding the racial backgrounds of the characters in the three novels, a shift is noticeable. All Dutch families of significance in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* are families that have a long history in the Dutch East Indies. Most of its members were born and raised in colonial society. In *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, not one character is described to have been born and raised in the Netherlands. The colonial society in the Dutch East Indies is thus portrayed as fairly cut-off of the motherland in Europe. In the novel, Dutch families like the Rivières do take a return to the Netherlands into consideration, but the colony is mostly portrayed as a society on its own where one can spend an entire lifetime. In the following paragraph, the old Mr. Rivière reflects on his career in the Dutch East Indies.

De oude heer Rivière had den tijd gekend, dat hij van een voor Indië klein inkomen, als ondergeschikt ambtenaar had moeten leven, in een klein huisje in een der achterbuurten. De tering moest erg naar de nering worden gezet. Maar Rivière had in den Oosthoek een suikerzuster, die weduwe was van een koopman. Juist zou ze naar Nederland teruggaan. De Rivières waren wanhopig, toen ze het hoorden. Corrie weende bittere tranen, want al was ze nog jong, haar erftante was voor haar altijd de stille hoop der toekomst geweest. En nu zouden daar in Holland alle andere neefjes en nichtjes zich wel van de erfenis meester maken. Dát sprak vanzelf! Maar de tante kwam er niet toe. Een week vóór haar afreis stierf ze aan de cholera, en de Rivières erfden twee ton. De oude heer begon met zijn ontslag te nemen uit 's lands dienst. Toen kwam de vraag of men naar Holland zou gaan of niet. Maar dan moest men Lodewijk van de militaire school nemen, waar hij zulke goede vorderingen maakte! Bovendien kwamen, nu Rivière zooveel geld geërfd had, lieden, die hem vroeger uit de hoogte behandelden, met hem een praatje maken zoo familiaar, alsof ze sedert jaren zijn intiemste vrienden waren. Corrie kreeg allerlei invitatie's; het leven zag er vriendelijker uit; de oude lui besloten het geld solied te beleggen, en eerst te wachten tot Lodewijk officier was. Vervolgens raakte Corrie geëngageerd, en trouwde, wat toen weer een andere reden werd om in Indië te blijven. Intusschen woonde men nu in een goeden stand en gevoelde zich behaaglijk. Waarom zou men ook naar Europa gaan? (Daum 1888, 46–47)<sup>54</sup>

During his life, Mr. Rivière obtained wealth and a status, and his children started a life in the Dutch East Indies. He does not see any value in returning to the Netherlands because the Netherlands does not have anything to offer to the family that the Dutch

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<sup>54</sup> The old gentlemen Rivière had known the time, that he had to make do from a small income for that time in the Indies, in a small house in the slums. The belt had to be tightened. But Rivière had a sugar aunt in the east, a widow from a merchant. She was about to return to the Netherlands. The Rivières were desperate, when they heard. Corrie wept bitter tears, because although she was young, her inheritance had always been the hope in the future. And now all the other cousins in Holland would get priority to it. That was obvious! But the aunt never got to moving. A week before departure, cholera got to her, and the Rivières inherited two grand. The old gentleman started by quitting his job on the fields. Then came the question whether they planned to go back to Holland. But that meant leaving military school for Lodewijk, who was making such progress! On top of that, now that Rivière had inherited so much money, gentlefolk, who had treated him with arrogance before, now chatted to him, as if they had been the most intimate of friends for years. Corrie was invited everywhere; life looked good; the old folks decided to invest the money, and wait until Lodewijk made officer. By that time Corrie got engaged, and married, which was another reason to stay in the Indies. In the meanwhile they lived upper class and felt comfortable. Why should they go to Europe?

East Indies does not have. In *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, the Dutch East Indies are represented as a colonial society that is ruled by Dutch people, but on which the Netherlands does not have a lot of influence.

This separation between the colonial society in the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch society in the Netherlands is not as present in *De stille kracht*. As it was published in 1900, *De stille kracht* was written when the preference for newcomers from the Netherlands over Dutch people from old colonial families in governing positions increased. In *De stille kracht* we find some people of multiracial descent, some *blanke* people who were born and raised in the Dutch East Indies, and some *blanke* people who arrive in the Dutch East Indies after their lives in the Netherlands. There is thus a great mixture of races on a spectrum from brown to *blank*. In *De stille kracht*, there is mention of a policy being developed by the colonial government that enables Dutch people who are new to the colonial society to be preferred in governing positions over Dutch people who were born and raised in the Dutch East Indies. Otto van Oudijck expresses his incomprehension for the colonial government to put newly-arrived Dutch people in high positions. In his opinion, the lack of experience of the Dutch people with the indigenous customs and languages of the Dutch East Indies will have a negative influence on the functioning of the colonial system.

En zijn rezidentsleven had hij niet willen ruilen voor welk ander leven. O, hij tobde nu al, wat hij later zoû doen als hij gepensioeneerd was. Het liefst zoû hij zoo lang mogelijk blijven in dienst; lid van den Raad van Indië, Vice-prezident... Wat hij niet zeide, maar stil ambieerde, was, in het verschiet, de troon van Buitenzorg. Maar men had tegenwoordig in Holland die vreemde manie om vreemden tot de hoogste betrekkingen te benoemen, Hollanders, baren, die totaal niets van Indië afwisten - in plaats van getrouw te blijven aan het principe oud-Indische gedienden te kiezen, die van aspirant-controleur waren opgeklommen en de geheele ambtelijke hierarchie op hun duimpje kenden... (Couperus 1993, 34)<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> And his life at the residency he wouldn't have traded for any other life. O, he was already pondering, what he would do once he had gotten his retirement. He would prefer to stay in service as long as possible; member of the council of the Indies, vice-president... what he didn't say but silently desired, was, in the future, the throne of *Buitenzorg*. But people in Holland nowadays had a strange rage to appoint strangers to the highest relations, Dutchmen, newly-arrived Europeans, that knew nothing about the Indies - rather than staying true to the principle

The focal point of Otto van Oudijck expresses his exasperation towards the tendency of the Dutch government to put Dutch newcomers in the highest positions in the Dutch East Indies. Otto van Oudijck exhibits a preference for the old ways where Dutch people follow a career path that allows them to make promotions in the bureaucratic hierarchy. This old career path is similar to the one described in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*.

In *Rubber*, published in 1931, the tendency to prefer newly-arrived Dutch people over old Dutch families that have been living in the Dutch East Indies for a long time seems to be completely realized. All Dutch adults in the story were born and raised in the Netherlands and moved to the Dutch East Indies for the sole purpose of making money through a career in the colony, after which they will return to the Netherlands. This resulted in a focus on promotion, also among the wives of the Dutch employees during an evening in the club:

Ditmaal vormden zich ook andere paren. John had mevrouw Terheide gevraagd. Toen hij voor haar boog, stootten een paar assistentenvrouwen elkaar aan. “Moet je de likker zien!” “Alleen maar freules zijn goed genoeg voor hem!” “Wanneer wordt hij baas?....” Het venijn giftte alweer door hun gedachten. Het was de achtergrond van hun bestaan: wie maakte het eerst promotie? Wie kreeg de eerste kans, zooveel geld te verdienen, dat hij zoo gauw mogelijk wég kon?.... Terug naar Holland!.... Dat besef was er altijd. (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 133)<sup>56</sup>

The Dutch wives live in the Dutch East Indies to help their husbands earn as much money as fast as possible. They spend their time waiting for their husbands to earn enough wealth to return to the Netherlands. This attitude is very different from the old Dutch families described in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* who do not wish to return to the Netherlands because the Dutch East Indies satisfies them in all their needs.

The only Dutch people in *Rubber* who were born in the Dutch East Indies are the children of the Dutch characters. To Marian Versteegh, the fact that her child will grow

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of choosing people that had served in the Indies, who had started as prospective inspectors and climbed the civil hierarchy and knew it well...

<sup>56</sup> This time others formed pairs too. John had asked Mrs. Terheide. When he bowed to her, a few assistant women pointed. ‘Look at that brown noser!’ ‘Only ladies are good enough for him!’ ‘When will he be in charge?....’ The poison spreading in their brains. It was the premises of their existence: who will get promoted first? Who got the first chance to make enough money, to get out?.... Back to Holland! That realization was always present.

up in the Dutch East Indies and will likely be less Dutch because of this, is something she wants to prevent at all costs. She makes this decision when she sees a Dutch child running around during her first days after her arrival in the Dutch East Indies.

“Zóó voeden wij onze kinderen niet op, Marian!” zei Frank geërgerd.... “nou begrijp ik waarom kinderen uit Indië altijd zoo totaal onhandelbaar zijn!” Marian knikte toestemmend, keek met half medelijden, half ergernis naar het bloedeloze bleke kind, dat humeurig nu dreinde. En even, als haar eigen kindje woelde in haar schoot, werd een ongerustheid in haar wakker.... Of ook háár kind zoo zwak zou zijn.... zoo anaemisch.... zóó als dit kind, een vroeg oud menschje! En wijd welde het moedergevoel in haar op, dat ze het hoeden zou en verzorgen.... alles geven wat ze het maar geven kòn, om te voorkomen, dat haar kind zou zijn: een indisch kind!.... Nee.... hòllandsch!.... hòllandsch zou ze het houden... Niemand zou het hem later aanzien.... haár kleinen jongen, dat hij was geboren in Indië.... (Székely-Lulofs 1931, 42)<sup>57</sup>

To Marian, a child born in the Dutch East Indies is in danger of becoming a child from the Indies instead of Holland. This is something that in her eyes should be prevented. Dutch people who were born and raised in the Dutch East Indies are in *Rubber* regarded to be less Dutch than Dutch people who arrived in the Dutch East Indies after having been born and raised in the Netherlands. The shift towards a stronger preference for newcomers in governing positions has in *Rubber* resulted in a disregard of old colonial families by Dutch people like Marian and Frank Versteegh.

A difference between *Rubber* and the other two novels that should be taken into account is that the story of *Rubber* takes on the rubber plantations on the island of Sumatra. This area was much less inhabited by Dutch people than the island of Java, where the stories of *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* and *De stille kracht* take place. It is therefore not surprising that old Dutch families that have established themselves in the Dutch East Indies are not prevalent on Sumatra. The social class and racial position of female

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<sup>57</sup> ‘That’s not how we will raise our children, Marian!’ Frank said annoyed.... ‘now I understand why children from the Indies are always totally uncontrollable!’ Marian nodded agreeing, looked with part compassion, part annoyance at the bloodless pale child, that was throwing a tantrum. And for a moment, if her own child stirred in her lap, a worry awakened in her.... If her child would be so weak.... so anemic.... so like this child, an early elder! Her mother instinct filled her up, she would care and cherish.... give everything she had to give, to prevent, that to be her child: a child from the Indies!.... No.... Dutch!.... Dutch, she would keep it... No one would see.... her little boy, that he was born in the Indies....

partners was also increasingly of importance as Dutch men climbed the career ladder. This becomes prevalent in the following part of the chapter where I analyze the relationships of Otto van Oudijck.

The lack of naming of multiracial characters in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* is different from the lack of multiracial characters in *Rubber*. When *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* was written, contact with the Netherlands was just starting to become denser. The Dutch families who had been stationed in the Dutch East Indies were the ruling group in its colonial government. One's name was the most important way to identify oneself as part of these families (Bosma and Raben 2003, 43). If someone had a multiracial background, it was more important that they were acknowledged to belong to a European family than it was to have a European appearance. Family names were the organizing principle among Europeans in the Dutch East Indies, not their racial position. When *Rubber* was written, the different racial groups in colonial society had been registered and divided bureaucratically and legally (Bosma and Raben 2003, 30). The racial categorizations did not allow people to belong to multiple racial groups as is the case for people with a multiracial background. In the cultural framework that was common during the publication of *Rubber*, everyone belonged to a defined racial group in spite of a possible racial hybridity in one's background.

### **“His Children, in Whom the Blood from the Indies Spoke”**

In *De stille kracht*, Resident Otto van Oudijck is described to have had several relationships with women in the past. Otto van Oudijck's son Theo finds out about a presumed half-brother who lives in a *kampong*<sup>58</sup> nearby. Si-Oudijck, the half-brother, claims to be the son of Otto van Oudijck. His mother was Otto van Oudijck's housekeeper when Otto van Oudijck was an inspector. Otto van Oudijck repudiated her and never officially acknowledged si-Oudijck as his son. Resident Otto van Oudijck refuses to support his unacknowledged son, so si-Oudijck grows up in the *kampong* in poverty. Addy de Luce introduces Theo to his half-brother. Si-Oudijck is proud to call

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<sup>58</sup> *Kampong* is the Indonesian term used for small, rural villages that are inhabited by indigenous people. *Pondok* is the Indonesian term for cabins or huts where indigenous people live and in *Rubber* it refers to the living quarters of the coolies. *De stille kracht* takes place on Java and the small villages that are inhabited by the indigenous people are called *kampong*. Neither of the terms are used in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, because indigenous people play next to no role in this story.

Otto van Oudijck his father, but he is also poor and neglected and therefore hateful towards Otto van Oudijck for refusing to help him.

Het deed Theo goed hiervan te hooren, van die huishoudster zijns vaders, uit diens controleurtijd, verstooten om een ontrouw, waaraan zij onschuldig was: het kind later geboren en nooit erkend, nooit gesteund; de jongen, zwervende van kampong tot kampong, romantisch prat op zijn ontaarden vader, dien hij uit de verte in het oog hield, hem volgende met zijn loerblik toen die vader assistent-rezident, rezident werd, trouwde, scheidde, weêr trouwde; te hooi en te gras wat leerende van schrijven en lezen van een magang, die hem bevriend was... (Couperus 1993, 91)<sup>59</sup>

To Theo, the idea that his father had an unofficial relationship with an indigenous woman and that Si-Oudijck is the living proof of this interracial relationship, feeds the hate for his father because it is a past that could undermine Otto van Oudijck's position of power as the Resident. As the Resident, Otto van Oudijck's behavior should be exemplary to his subjects. They would disapprove of an interracial relationship, and conceiving of a child outside of wedlock would likewise be denounced by his community. With the advancement of his social position and the changing opinions over time, Otto van Oudijck's history is no longer acceptable.

After his relationship with the housekeeper, Otto van Oudijck married a *nonna*<sup>60</sup> out of love. Otto van Oudijck does recognize the children who are the result of this legitimate marriage.

Hij had zijn gewest lief, en hij had Indië lief; naar Holland, naar het vertoon van Europeesche beschaving, verlangde hij nooit, toch zelve zeer Hollandsch gebleven, en vooral hatende alles wat half-bloed was. Het was de tegenstelling in zijn karakter, want hij had zijn eerste vrouw - een nonna - niet anders dan uit liefde genomen, en zijne kinderen, in wie het Indische bloed sprak, - uiterlijk bij

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<sup>59</sup> It pleased Theo to hear about it, about his dad's maid, from his time as an inspector, rejected for an infidelity, that she was innocent of: the child later born but never acknowledged, never supported; the boy, roaming from *kampong* to *kampong*, romantic pride on his degenerate father, that he kept his eye on from a distance, lurking when that dad became assistant-Resident, became Resident, married, divorced, married again; sporadically learned to write and read from a *magang*, who he was friends with...

<sup>60</sup> *Nonna* was a term used in the Dutch East Indies for women with Indo-European parents, or women born from interracial relationships (Pattynama 2014, 58).

Doddy, innerlijk bij Theo, terwijl René en Ricus geheel twee kleine sinjo's waren - had hij lief met een zeer sterk sprekend vaderlijk gevoel, met al het teedere en sentimenteele, dat in het diepe van hem sluimerde: behoefte om veel te geven en te ontvangen in den cirkel van zijn huiselijk leven. (Couperus 1993, 94)<sup>61</sup>

Theo and Doddy are their oldest children and stay in Otto van Oudijck's house when he divorces from his wife. His two younger sons, René and Ricus, attend a boarding school in Batavia. They are described as two small *sinjos*.<sup>62</sup> According to Otto van Oudijck, René and Ricus are influenced by the Indies both physically and mentally. Otto van Oudijck sends them later on to Holland to finish their education, possibly with the hope that they will have more Dutch influences in their environment.

The former housekeeper of Otto van Oudijck and the mother of si-Oudijck died in poverty in the *kampong*. The *nonna*, the ex-wife of Otto van Oudijck, relocated to Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies. There, she started a gaming house. She did not live a life in such a poor state as si-Oudijck's mother. After the *nonna*, Otto van Oudijck married Léonie. They did not have children, but when they divorce, Léonie moves to Paris. After her relationship, Léonie thus lives a more luxurious life than both the former housekeeper, and the *nonna*.

After his color change to yellow, Otto van Oudijck cohabits with Lena, the daughter of a coffee inspector. Otto van Oudijck explains his reasons to Eva Eldersma, who came to visit him and see how he is doing.

Hij zweeg even, eenvoudig weg, als zoû zij wel begrijpen wie Lena was: de heel jonge vrouw met de goudgewaasde wangen en de koolzwarte oogen, die zij even in een flits had gezien. - En dan zijn er broêrtjes, die moeten leeren in Garoet. Ziet u, dat is nu mijn huiselijke kring. Toen ik met Lena kennis maakte, heb ik de heele familie er maar bijgenomen. Het kost me wel veel geld, want ik heb mijn eerste vrouw te Batavia, mijn tweede te Parijs, René en Ricus in Holland. Dat kost me

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<sup>61</sup> He loved his province, and he loved the Indies; to Holland, as the display of European civilization, he never longed, however he remained very Dutch, and hated everything of mixed blood. It was the contradiction in his character, for his first wife - a *nonna* - he hadn't taken for anything but love, and his children, in whom the blood from the Indies spoke, - on the outside for Doddy, on the inside for Theo, while René and Ricus fully were two little *sinjos* - he loved with a very strong speaking fatherly feeling, with all the tenderness and sentimentality, that slumbered inside him: the need to give and receive in the circle of his household.

<sup>62</sup> In Indonesian, *sinjo* means something like "Dutch boy from the Indies." It implies that Otto van Oudijck's youngest sons have grown up to look and think like indigenous people.

allemaal geld. En nu hier mijn nieuwe “huiselijke kring.” Maar ik heb nu ten minste mijn kring... Het is me wel een Indische boel zal u zeggen: dat Indische-huwelijk met een dochter van een koffie-opziener, en daarbij nog op den koop toe de oude vrouw en de broertjes en zusjes. Maar ik doe er nog iets goeds mee. De menschen hadden geen cent, ik help ze. En Lena is een lief kind, en de troost van mijn ouden dag. Ik kan niet leven zonder vrouw, en zoo is het van zelf zoo gekomen... En zoo is het heel goed: ik vegeteer nu hier, en drink lekkere koffie en ze zorgen goed voor den ouden man... (Couperus 1993, 211)<sup>63</sup>

Otto van Oudijck focalizes that he set up a household with Lena out of a desire to have a domestic circle and out of his need for a woman to take care of him. In the reasons given by Otto, his love for her is not mentioned, he explains it as a rational choice. What should be taken into account is that even though Otto van Oudijck changed the racial position he was performing, he did not lose all of the privileges of a white racial position. In the paragraph above, he states that his domestic circle costs him a lot. Through the wealth he obtained as the Resident of Laboewangi, a governing position that was reserved for people in a *blanke* racial position, Otto van Oudijck can afford the family he desires to have.

The whiter skin color of Otto van Oudijck's spouses coincides with the higher status of his social position and the increasing preference for white people in the Dutch East Indies. The contrary happens when Otto goes on an early retirement and marries an indigenous woman “the Indies way.” His shift towards a wife with cheeks with gold instead of *blank* matches the drop of his social position. The decline of his social status is thus followed by Otto choosing a partner with a darker skin color. In the following part of the chapter, I discuss Doddy and Theo van Oudijck, Otto van Oudijck's two children with a multiracial background.

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<sup>63</sup> He was silent for a while, simply, like she would understand who Lena was: the very young woman with the golden shine on her cheeks and the eyes as black as coal, that she had seen in a flash. - And there are brothers, that have to study in Garoet. You see, that is my household. When I met Lena, I took on the whole family. It cost me, because I have my first wife in Batavia, my second one in Paris, René and Ricus in Holland. It all costs me. And now here my new ‘household’. But at least I have it... It looks like a crowd from the Indies: that wedding from the Indies with the daughter of a coffee warden, and on top of that the old woman and the brothers and sisters. But I am doing something good. These people didn't have a penny, I help them. And Lena is a sweet child, and the comfort of my older days. I cannot live without a woman, and that is how it happened... And it is good like this: I vegetate, drink nice coffee and am being taken care of...

### “She Was Only European by Name”

As explained before, the periods in which the novels were written are reflected in the presence of characters with a multiracial background. In *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, Mina Jansen is the only character who is described to have a multiracial background. In *De stille kracht*, multiple characters are multiracial, among whom are Doddy and Theo van Oudijck, two characters who are multiple times focalized in the story. Another multiracial character is Addy de Luce, whom I analyzed in the second chapter when I discussed the brown skin color in the novels. In *Rubber*, not one character is described to be multiracial. In this section I will discuss several multiracial characters to explain the fluidity of racial categories in the novels.

In the first description of Mina Jansen in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd*, her multiracial background becomes clear through the clothes that she wears.

Van den Broek was naar het rijtuig gegaan, waaruit hij mevrouw Jansen haalde, gekleed in een *matinée*, het eenige Europeesche kledingstuk, dat ze droeg als ze niet in sarong en kabaja zijn kon. Met behulp van bedienden, werd ze binnengeloodst met en benevens een groote hoeveelheid potjes en fleschjes met allerlei confituren, vruchten en gebakjes, die ze gemaakt had voor de *njonja controleur*. Een inlandsche vrouw was Jansen's Mina niet, maar het scheelde weinig. Van een maleische moeder, en opgevoed diep in de binnenlanden, had zij van het Europeesche alleen den naam. Wat haar aan beschaving en gezelschapsvormen ontbrak, was haar vergoed aan kracht en frischheid; aan lichaamsvormen. Hoe slecht haar ook de mislukte *matinée* stond, waarin zij zat, gelijk een worst in een darm, toch bleef Mina een schitterend mooie vrouw. (Daum 1888, 11–12)<sup>64</sup>

Mina Jansen is wearing a *matinée*, a European piece of clothing. It is stated that she only wears that when she cannot be dressed in a *sarong* and *kabaja*, her regular indigenous clothing. Furthermore, the *matinée* is said not to suit her. It is emphasized

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<sup>64</sup> Van den Broek had gone to the carriage, where he assisted Mrs. Jansen, dressed in a *matinée*, the only European item of clothing, that she wore when she couldn't go in *sarong* and *kabaja*. With the help of servants, she was piloted in along with a large number of jars, bottles with all kinds of preserves, fruits and pastries, that she had made for the *njonja controleur*. Jansen's Mina was not a native, but it was close. From a Malay mother, raised deep in the hinterlands, she was only European by name. What she lacked in civilization and social customs, she made up for in vigor and freshness; in bodily shapes. However bad she looked in the failed *matinée*, in which she was sitting, looking like a sausage in an intestine, she remained a beautiful woman.

that Mina Jansen is not indigenous, but that, except for her European name, this is not noticeable. Her uncivil and ill-mannered behavior is implied to be typical for indigenous people. When Mina speaks, she mixes Malay with Dutch, so her speech is a hybrid of two languages. Nevertheless, her hybridity does not mean that she is not allowed to venture into white spaces where predominantly European people are present. Mina is not excluded even though her hybridity is emphasized.

In *De stille kracht* Doddy van Oudijck is a character that, similar to Mina Jansen, has a multiracial background and is hybrid in her behavior. Otto van Oudijck was in the past married to a *nonna*, a woman with a multiracial background. As the daughter of Otto van Oudijck and this *nonna*, Doddy has a multiracial background like her mother. This is clear from the description that does not mention her as *blank*, but refers much more to her likeness to her multiracial mother.

Het jonge meisje was nader gekomen, neuriënd. Zij was misschien zeventien jaar, en zij leek op haar gescheiden moeder: de eerste vrouw van den rezident, een mooie nonna, die nu te Batavia woonde, en, naar men zeide, een stil speelhuis hield. Zij had een olijfbleeke tint, met soms even den blos van een vrucht; zij had mooi zwart haar, dat natuurlijk kroesde aan hare slapen, en in een zeer groote wrong was vastgestoken, hare zwarte pupillen met vonkel-iris dreven in een vochtig blauwwit, waarom zware wimpers speelden, op en neêr, op en neêr. Haar mondje was klein en een beetje dik en haar bovenlip donsde even met een donker zweempje van haar. Zij was niet groot, en al te vol van vorm, als een haastige roos, die te snel openbloeit. Zij droeg een witte piqué rok en een witte linnen blouse met *entredeux*, en zij had om haar hals een schelgeel lint, dat heel aardig stond bij haar olijfbleekte, die soms opbloosde, plotseling, als met een stroom van bloed. (Couperus 1993, 12–13)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The young girl had come closer, humming. She was maybe seventeen, and she looked like her divorced mother: the first wife of the Resident, a pretty *nonna*, who now lived in Batavia, and, so it was said, kept a quiet playhouse. Her skin was olive pale, with the occasional fruity blush; she had fine black hair, that naturally frizzed at her temples, and was pinned up in a big bun, her black pupils with sparkling irises floating in a humid blue-white, on which heavy lashes played, up and down, up and down. Her mouth was small and a little plump and her upper lip fluffed with a shade of hair. She was not tall, and already too voluptuous, like a hasty rose, that flowers too soon. She wore a white *piqué* skirt and a white linen blouse with *entredeux*, and she had a shrill yellow ribbon around her neck, that looked acceptable with her olive paleness, that sporadically blushed, suddenly, as with a rush of blood.

Doddy's complexion is described as olive-pale with sometimes the blush of a fruit. Doddy is never described as *blank*, even though her father is. Instead, she is said to look like her *nonna* mother, and is compared to a hasty rose that blossoms too quickly. This implies that her beauty will be short-term and not long-lasting like her step-mother, the *blanke* Léonie van Oudijck. Through the perspective of Doddy a relationship is narrated in which a contrast between *blank* and the brownness of Addy de Luce is made. Even though Doddy has a multiracial background, she hopes that her children will be brown and not look like her *blanke* father, stepmother and brother.

Om hem zoû ze verlangen naar veel kinderen, heel veel kinderen, die wel bruin zouden zijn - niet blank als papa en mama en Theo - maar bruin, omdat haar eigen moeder bruin was, zij even donzig bruin, Addy mooi brons Moorsch bruin, en naar het voorbeeld, gegeven op Patjaram, zouden haar kinderen, heel veel kinderen, er opgroeien in de schaduw van de fabriek, en in al hun belang van en voor suiker, om later de velden te planten, en suikerriet te malen, en het fortuin van de familie weêr op te halen, dat het schitteren zoû als vroeger. (Couperus 1993, 194)<sup>66</sup>

Doddy contemplates that the future children of her and Addy will be brown because she is a fluffy kind of brown like her brown mother, and Addy is a beautiful bronze, Moorish brown. The reason for Doddy to reflect on the racial group that her children will belong to is that it is of consequence to the ways in which one is treated in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies. Even though Doddy's skin is fluffy brown, she grew up in a *blanke* family, with her father Resident Van Oudijck, his wife Léonie van Oudijck, and Doddy's brother Theo van Oudijck. Having children with a brown skin with a husband who is a descendent of an old noble house from Solo means that Doddy's children will be perceived to belong to the brown race and that by marrying Addy, Doddy will be seen as racially brown instead of her previous position as *blank*-passing. Doddy's musings over the skin color of her future children shows the plasticity of racial positions.

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<sup>66</sup> Because of him she would long for many children, very many children, that would be brown - not *blank* like daddy and mommy and Theo - but brown, because her own mother was brown, she even fluffy brown, Addy beautifully bronze Moorish brown, and after the example, given at *Patjaram*, the children, very many children, would grow up in the shade of the factory, and in all their interest in and for sugar, later on to plant the fields, mill sugarcane, and retrieve the family's fortune, that it would shine like before.

Contrary to Doddy, her brother Theo van Oudijck is described as looking European with blond hair and a *blanke* skin color like his father. Theo's *blank*-ness is emphasized in the passages told through the focal point of Léonie van Oudijck in which she compares the *blank*-ness of Theo to the brownness of Addy de Luce, her two lovers. Theo's racial hybridity becomes clearly visible through the focalization of the hatred he feels for his father when he discovers that his father has an unacknowledged son living in the *kampong*.

Het deed den echten zoon goed hiervan te hooren, omdat hij in het diepst van zich, hoe blond en hoe blank ook, meer was de zoon van zijn moeder, de *nonna*, dan de zoon van zijn vader; omdat hij in het diepst van zich dien vader haatte, niet om die aanleiding of deze reden, maar om een geheimzinnige bloed-antipathie, omdat hij zich, trots zijn voorkomen en voordoen van blonden en blanken Europeaan, geheimzinnig verwant voelde aan dezen onechten broêr, een vage sympathie voor hem voelde, beiden zonen van een zelfde moederland, waarvoor hun vader niet voelde dan alleen met zijn aangeleerde ontwikkeling: de kunstmatig, humaan aangekweekte liefde der overheerschers voor den overheerschten grond. Van zijne kinderjaren af, had Theo zich zoo gevoeld, ver van zijn vader; en later was die antipathie een sluimerende haat geworden. (Couperus 1993, 91)<sup>67</sup>

This passage affirms that in spite of his European appearance, Theo is more similar to his *nonna* mother. A blood antipathy is provided as the reason for the hatred he feels for his father. Through the indigenous blood he inherited from his mother, Theo has a connection to the motherland over which the Dutch people rule but for which they feel no natural love. The blood antipathy for his Dutch father is induced by his indigenous blood that inherently dislikes its colonial Dutch ruler.

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<sup>67</sup> It pleased the real son to hear about this, because deepest within him he was, no matter how blond or how *blank* he was, more the son of his mother, the *nonna*, was than the son of his father; because deepest within him he hated his father, not for that cause or reason, but because of a secretive blood antipathy, because he, proud in his appearance and manners of blond and *blanken* European, felt secretly related to this illegitimate brother, felt a vague sympathy for him, both sons of a shared motherland, for which their father did not feel except with learned custom: the artificial, humane cultivated love of rulers for the ruled ground. From an early age, Theo had felt this way, distanced from his father; and later on that antipathy had turned into a slumbering hate.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed in what ways the different discourses about race that correspond with the time periods in which the novels were written are noticeable in the stories. They are evident through the extent to which people with multiracial backgrounds are present in the stories and through the ratio of Dutch colonial families versus the ratio of Dutch people who newly arrived from the Netherlands.

Through Otto van Oudijck's relationships, the increased preference for *blanke* people on high positions in the colonial society becomes visible. When Otto was an inspector, he had an indigenous housekeeper who gave birth to one son who was never acknowledged by Otto. Then, Otto was promoted to assistant-Resident and later became the Resident of Laboewangi. He married a *nonna* out of love, had four children with her, and divorced to marry Léonie, a *blanke* woman. As Otto's social position became higher with time, he correspondingly had relationships with women who were increasingly of more European descent, and had a whiter skin color.

Mina Jansen in *Hoe hij raad van Indië werd* and Doddy and Theo van Oudijck in *De stille kracht* are characters with a multiracial background. They do not clearly belong to one racial position. Mina Jansen is a very hybridized character through the mixed clothing that she wears and the hybrid language that she speaks. Doddy grew up in the upper-class *blanke* household of her father the Resident, but looks like her *nonna* mother and desires to marry Addy de Luce and have brown children with him. By marrying Addy de Luce, Doddy will start performing the life of someone in a brown racial position. Her multiracial background enables her to easily shift from the *blanke* racial position as the daughter of the Resident to the brown racial position as the wife of a poor descendant of a Javanese noble family that owns a sugar factory. Theo looks like a *blanke* man, but he has a blood antipathy with his father because from the inside he is more like his mother. In the course of the story Theo's hatred towards his *blanke* father increases and he considers scheming against his father and his ex-lover Léonie like his brown half-brother si-Oudijck does. Throughout the story he is thus moving towards the behavior of someone in a brown racial position.

The racial positions of these characters do not fit into one category because they are hybrid, the result of interracial relationships that were not exceptional in the Dutch East Indies. This changed when Dutch people in the Dutch East Indies developed closer

bonds with the Netherlands. A stricter division between indigenous and Dutch people came into place which was enforced bureaucratically and legally. This division assisted in the governance of colonial society because everyone was divided into groups that could or could not enter certain spaces and acquire positions. That this division of society was implemented by the time that *Rubber* was published is clear through the fact that there are no multiracial characters in the story. This chapter emphasized the deficient categorization of racial groups by analyzing characters that belonged to multiple racial groups at a time. This shows the fallacy of racial groups as a logical division of society.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I did research on the ways in which *blank* is being constructed in the novels I analyzed. I started this research from the idea of the double meaning of the word *blank*. I explained its first meaning of the term used for the white racial position in the Netherlands. I then discussed the second meaning, namely that of neutrality and the lack of color. This neutrality is connected to normalcy and stigmatizes everything that is not *blank* as “other.” I argued that the double meaning of *blank* perpetuates the idea that being white is the normal racial position in Dutch society and that it constantly reproduces ideas of otherness regarding non-*blank* racial positions in the Netherlands. I aimed to show this by investigating the use of *blank* in the last decades of the colonial period. I chose this period because at that time, racism became an important denominator in colonial society.

In the first chapter of this thesis I provided a theoretical foundation on which I built my analysis in the consecutive chapters. I used theories from the fields of critical race and post-colonialism to discuss the perception of race in the colonial period as a biological difference and the shift after the Second World War towards a form of racism that was more based on the idea that cultures make people inherently different from one another. I argued that when race is understood as a social construct, a constant performance according to the social norms of a race are necessary to sustain its existence. I also discussed ideas on whiteness as a socially invisible racial position. In this thesis I wished to pay attention to the white racial position in order to include it in discussions on racism and see its complicity in the persistence of racist structures.

I investigated three novels that were written during the last decades of Dutch colonial rule in the Dutch East Indies and tell stories that take place in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies. I looked at their use of *blank* and the associations that they connected to it. Through the analysis of the novels, I noticed in chapter two that *blank*-ness is often connected to ideas of innocence and beauty. These forms of *blank*-ness carried different connotations in the novels. The innocent form of *blank*-ness of Annet Walendijk and Nanni intersects with the idea of femininity as driven by emotions and being totally honest. I argued that this became clear through the feature of their *blank*-ness that is transparent and made their cheeks flush red when they were feeling certain emotions. The *blank*-ness of Louise van den Broek and Léonie van Oudijck is contradictory to the first form of *blank*-ness in the sense that their *blank* beauty enables them to hide their

misconduct rather than being compelled to show their feelings through the transparency of their skin. Through the discussion of these two forms of *blank*-ness it became clear that the *blank* racial position is not clearly demarcated and that different interpretations are possible of what the racial position entails.

In chapter three I analyzed the descriptions of characters with a brown skin color. I pointed out that the novels reproduced stereotypes of brown people as animal-like, uncivilized and underdeveloped. I also illustrated the sexualization of brown characters by analyzing paragraphs on Addy de Luce and his relationship with Léonie van Oudijck. I then discussed a different interpretation of descriptions of brown characters that portrays them as noble savages and implies a form of racism that is mainly anti-colonial. In this interpretation, races are not arranged hierarchically, but based on territory. The *blanke* race does not belong on the territory of the Dutch East Indies because that territory belongs to the brown race and drives out all other people. Lastly, I analyzed the events that take place in spaces that are inhabited by brown people such as the *kampong* and the *pondok*. These spaces were used in the story for morally reprehensible events such as murder, adultery and black-mail. By exposing these events I showed how space can also be used to reproduce racial bias.

In chapter four I found that racial positions are not always permanent. One can lose their *blank*-ness through an illness or being too integrated into colonial society. In the case of Otto van Oudijck, his *blanke* skin color became yellow through a liver disease. Furthermore, in the case of the Dutch child that Frank and Marian Versteegh see play, the paleness of the child is connected to its growing up in the Dutch East Indies and it therefore being a child from the Indies instead of a Dutch child. However, I also found that the loss of *blank*-ness is not permanent in all cases. There were several characters that were previously in the racial position of being *blank*, lost their *blank*-ness in the Dutch East Indies, but re-obtained it by returning to Europe for a certain period of time.

In the last chapter, I discussed differences between the three novels. I explained that the novels were written some decades apart during a period when attitudes regarding race changed in colonial society. I illustrated this by discussing the prevalence of characters with a multiracial background and showing that Dutch newcomers were increasingly preferred over Dutch colonial families for high governing positions. I then discussed the relationships of Otto van Oudijck to show how social status is connected to racial

positions and that his increasingly higher social status coincided with his partners being increasingly more *blank*. Lastly, I discussed characters with a multiracial background and showed how their multiraciality allowed them to shift between racial positions. This highlighted the artificiality of racial positions and its interconnection to other social positions such as class. It depended on the behavior and social position of the multiracial characters which racial position they were described to belong to. If their social position or behavior changed, they could also change in their racial position. Their racial position was thus always in flux and never static throughout their lives.

The possibility of losing one's *blank*-ness and the existence of border cases of racial positions both illustrate the fluidity of being *blank*. One is not *blank* because of their light skin color. One's *blank*-ness depends on a myriad of influences such as social position, beauty, behavior, family ties, and health. These influences constantly change throughout a person's life. Therefore, one is never sure of their *blank* racial position. This insecurity of *blank*-ness shows the fragility of the racial position. Furthermore, it posits the *blank* racial position as an ideal of whiteness. In the novels, only the most beautiful, best behaving, and healthiest people are described as *blank*.

The way that meaning is ascribed to being *blank* in the novels has implications on our present-day understanding of whiteness. Contrary to my expectation, being *blank* during the colonial period was not an invisible racial position that was taken for granted and the neutral position against which all other racial positions stand out. Instead, it was position that was assigned to very few people and which was never secure. Rather than it being a neutral and normal racial position, *blank*-ness is in the novels demonstrated as an ideal that has to be pursued constantly. Its fluidity forces people to perpetually reconfirm their racial position. In the novels, the *blanke* racial position is performed through behavior that is considered to belong to the racial position. *Blank*-ness in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies does not depend on one's complexion as much as it does on one's housing situation, conformation to gender stereotypes, the pursuit of a career and class position. It is through this behavior that one's racial position is continuously endorsed.

This finding may seem to contradict the theory of chapter one that framed the white racial position as invisible in society. However, I understand this invisibility as a learned blindness to the social relevance racial categories. Since there are no properly

defined rules to what a racial position entails, everyone has to make do with imitating the performance of others to be accepted into a racial group. The pursuit of an unreachable white ideal means that a performance that is never sufficient is necessary especially when it needs to seem effortless. This appearance of effortlessness helps to keep up the belief that racial categories exist outside of people's imagination and are a logical explanation for differences between people.

There is not a straight line in racism from the colonial period in the Dutch East Indies to the Netherlands in the present. However, racist thinking has been inherited from the colonial society to Dutch contemporary society through cultural products such as novels. It is therefore pertinent that we understand the perception of the *blanke* skin color as it was and as it is now, to change the continuous reproduction of this view. By raising awareness of our colonial past, the complicity of whiteness in racism is no longer something that we are drawing blanks at.

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