Writing an Asian perspective into the Dutch racism debate

An autoethnography of the lived experiences of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub employees

Name student: Mae Lyn Meulman
Student number: 1115715
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Course: Master's Thesis Gender Studies
Supervisor: Dr. Zuleika Bibi Sheik
Second reader: Dr. Jamila Mascat

Utrecht University

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Writing this thesis has been challenging and rewarding at the same time. Challenging, because a research process and in particular writing an autoethnography is inherently messy, confusing, chaotic, and non-linear. There were times I questioned everything, myself, the research design, the theory. I am glad that during these times, I could seek support with my supervisor, Dr. Zuleika Bibi Sheik, who ensured me I was on the right track and able to work consistently. Also, already long before this master's thesis, open talks with my family, friends, and partner about racism gave me the courage and strength to write about this topic. I am also very thankful to the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub employees. Their openness and helpfulness throughout the fieldwork made it possible to write this thesis.

Gladly, this writing process has also been very rewarding. Rewarding in the sense that writing this thesis satisfied the felt need in myself to show the ways in which anti-Asian racism in the Netherlands contest its so-called tolerant, liberal and anti-racist identity. I hope that after you've read this thesis, you get a sense of an Asian perspective in the Dutch racism debate.

Abstract

Pivotal scholarship on racism in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993; Essed & Hoving, 2009; Wekker, 2016) doesn't pay much attention to racism experienced by people of Asian descent (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021). Also, the Netherlands has a tendency of self-praise, in which the Dutch are tolerant and anti-racist people (Van Dijk, 1993; Wekker, 2016). However, in the Dutch context there are many examples of anti-Asian racism (Asian Raisins, 2020; 2022). Oftentimes, people of Asian descent encounter food-related slurs with references to dishes served by Chinese-Indonesian restaurants (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021). Therefore, this research reflects on the ways in which anti-Asian racism experienced in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub contest the Netherlands' identity as a liberal, colour-blind and anti-racist-country.

An autoethnography is build of the lived experiences of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub employees, to value and honour these experiences and contribute to awareness about anti-Asian racism in the Dutch context. The research method used is participant observation. Prior to this research, I have worked seven years at the fieldwork location as a restaurant, snack bar, and pub employee of Asian descent. The analysis is grounded in Asian critical theory [AsianCrit]. AsianCrit is developed in the US context and in the field of Education, to look at Asian American experiences and the role of racism herein (Chang, 1993; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Resulting from the analysis, it becomes clear that anti-Asian racism is a container concept, and that the employees from Asian descent rather experience anti-Southeast Asian racism. Particularly white older employees and white customers perpetuate and play down anti-Southeast Asian racism. Thus, this research shows a denial of anti-Southeast Asian racism experienced in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub.

Keywords: AsianCrit, critical race theory, racism, racialization, Dutch racism, autoethnography

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I am fifteen and he is eighteen.
Our eyes meet in the club I party every weekend.
My friends and I are obsessed with boys and constantly desiring validation.
Are we pretty?
Are we cute?
Are we funny?

Fear is guiding my body when I party.
Fear of being presented as an exotic and weird market product.

"Who wants to kiss the Chinese person? A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!"

Shit, how am I supposed to feel or behave?
Laugh along?
Make myself invisible and tiny?
Disappear in the mass?
Am I supposed to feel shame?
Am I supposed to defend myself?
Protect my bodily territory?

Not tonight, tonight I met you.
A fun and handsome guy.
We exchanged numbers.
Maybe I'll get the validation I desire.

The next morning a notification appears.
Mark added you to the group chat: Dog emoji, chopsticks emoji, noodle emoji.

Within a few seconds, messages start to come in.

"Hey spring roll, you had the time of your life yesterday, right?"

"Hey Chink, Ching, Chang, Chong!"

"Hey dirty dog eater, go back to where you came from."

Panic floods my body.
My heartbeat accelerates.
What am I supposed to do?
Leave the group chat?
Tell my parents?

Shame is holding me in freeze mode.
I try to erase my thoughts.
Wash away shame in the shower.

I found a solution!
From now on, I will ignore my own reflection.
Details in my appearance which make me, me.
Instead, I am white.
Pfff, what a relief!

I am fifteen, next weekend I will party in the same club.
Will I run into him again?
He is eighteen, next weekend he will party in the same club.
Will he make a fun joke again?
I am fifteen.
He is eighteen.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Situating myself

I wrote “I am fifteen, he is eighteen” for a spoken word and dance improvisation performance I did with other students for a course in our Gender Studies program. The title of our performance was “Being Singular Plural”, which stands for the various ways in which singular understandings can move into plural understandings of a globalized capitalist, heteropatriarchal, colonial, and racist world. In the writing process, I felt an urge to write down this story to be able to communicate how anti-Asian racism is affectively experienced, and how these experiences make you long for being white.

I was adopted by my parents when I was a nine-month-old baby and grew up in a small village in the Netherlands. My little sister and I were one of the few with a coloured skin and grew up with Dutch culture and traditions. My parents did everything they could to give us a loving and safe environment in which we could thrive as children. They also included Chinese culture and traditions in our upbringing, for example the bookcase of my mom was filled with books about China, and she had read them all.

Despite the loving environment in which I found myself, throughout elementary and high school I was (unconsciously) struggling with finding my place between the Netherlands and China. This mostly meant that I was trying to look and behave as my peers, whom were all white. At the same time, I was trying to ignore and laugh away degrading incidents of racism. For every situation, I would prepare myself that there was a chance that I would be confronted with racist attitudes. Sometimes it would come from unexpected places, such as from my own friends or in the form of a birthday song (see: paragraph 1.2 Societal relevance).

In therapy, I had the chance to reflect on the racism I experienced. Eventually, I had the epiphany that it was not okay and normal how many people had treated me. During conversations with my friends and family I noticed an urge to find ways to fight racism in general, but also to raise awareness about anti-Asian racism. In many conversations I had, including with my parents, people were surprised about the stories I told them. They were more familiar with racism against Black people for example. Simultaneously, this continuous reflecting process and my interest in social justice brought me to Gender Studies. A text we had to read, called “Public Feelings: A Collective Project”, by Ann Cvetkovich (2012), theorizes for me how my depressive feelings can be understood in the context of cultural phenomena, such as racism, rather than as part of a medical disease. Moreover, negative feelings resulting from cultural and social events can serve as a resource for political action, which is how I got inspired to write this thesis on anti-Asian racism.

Before moving on to the societal and scientific context of this research, I want to state that I am aware of the critique that autoethnography often receives as it being therapy for the researcher. Instead, doing autoethnography is a fine balancing act, in which my reflexivity is anchored by theory (Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis, 2008).

1.2 Societal relevance

"Restaurants have been vandalized. As if the pandemic wasn't hard enough, there's this added threat to Asian business of this lingering hate." (Fernando and Mumphrey, 2020). This quote is taken from an article written during the Covid-19 pandemic by Public Broadcasting Service [PBS], an American public media news organization which has a nightly hour-long television broadcast (PBS, n.d.). The lingering hate the quote is referring to, has to do with stigmatization of Asian food as dirty and disease-laden (Fernando and Mumphrey, 2020). Moreover, because people believe the Chinese caused the Covid-19 outbreak, anyone who is perceived to be Chinese can be a target of violence. During the pandemic, Asian people and the Asian diaspora have suffered from more racist incidents all over the world (Ho, 2020).

In the Dutch context there are many examples of anti-Asian racism. For example, the corona song of Radio 10 DJ Lex Gaarthuis. This song was released in February 2020, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and is called "Voorkomen is beter dan Chinezen" ("Prevention is better than Chinese"). It contains sentences like *"It's all because of those stinky Chinese"* and *"Don't eat Chinese, then you have nothing to worry about"*. Eventually the Dutch Public Prosecution Service agreed that it was insulting and offensive, but it was dismissed on legal grounds because it was satire about society's absurd responses to the Covid-19 outbreak (Openbaar Ministerie, 2020). Another example of anti-Asian racism is the children's birthday song "Hanky Panky Shanghai", which is still used in some elementary schools and believed to be a Mandarin translation of "Happy Birthday to you". This has received more attention over the past years from Asian-Dutch activists and they made a petition to end the song (Asian Raisins, 2020; 2022). Thereafter, a documentary called "Hanky panky goodbye" about anti-Asian racism came out on November 2022. Though, it didn't receive many views, because it aired around midnight (Mazereeuw, 2022). Also, Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands struggled during the pandemic with a decline of customers, because people were scared to catch Covid-19 (RTL Nieuws, 2020). Within this context I have laid out, it becomes clear that it is much needed to raise more awareness on the topic of anti-Asian racism in general, and on anti-Asian racism in the Dutch context. This is necessary, because experiences with racism can negatively influence both physical and mental health, and can negatively influence

the economic and social circumstances of the people who are racialized (Kennisplatform Integratie & Samenleving [KIS], 2021). Ultimately, I hope this research honours and values experiences of people of Asian descent, and will contribute to a decrease of anti-Asian racism.

1.3 Dutch (political) context

Using the word "race" is taboo in the Netherlands and instead "ethnicity" is often used (Weiner, 2014). This is rooted in the belief and discourse that the Netherlands is a tolerant and colour-blind country (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 73; Wekker, 2016, p. 1). In December 2022, Prime Minister Rutte made a formal apology about the Netherlands' history of slavery. This shows the Dutch government is increasingly acknowledging the historical roots of racism, and what part the Netherlands has in that. Though, in 2017, Rutte mentioned that people who experience racial discrimination should put up or shut up. Also in 2020, Rutte dismissed people who experience racial discrimination and called the term "institutional racism" sociological jargon. However in 2022, the Dutch government publicly admitted that the root cause of the child benefits scandal was institutional racism within the Dutch tax service. In this scandal, racial profiling was executed by the Dutch tax service to indicate potential fraud with childcare benefits (European Parliament, 2022). Also, in the same year the National Coordinator Against Discrimination and Racism [NCDR] was put in place to counter discrimination within the Dutch government. However, this is still a governmental organization, which works within the same system to fight discrimination and racism (Darroch, 2023).

1.4 Case study

There are several reasons why I choose to research anti-Asian racism by taking a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub as a case study. These three parts of the business are all located in the same building, and run by the same owners. From the 1920s, Chinese-Indonesian restaurants changed the Dutch food culture, because Chinese cuisine was the first cuisine considered 'ethnic food'. The combination of Chinese and Indonesian food in Chinese-Indonesian restaurants had to do with the former Dutch Indies colony, because in Indonesia a Chinese minority lived. The specific combination of Chinese and Indonesian food stimulated people to go to these restaurants, because it was deemed a specific Dutch "tradition" (Amenda, 2009). Despite the long history the Dutch have with Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, Asian people living in the Netherlands often encounter food-related slurs. These insults often contain references to dishes Chinese-Indonesian restaurants serve (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021). A common used phrase to mock Asian people is *"Sambal bij?"*, which refers to the question

whether someone who takes away Chinese-Indonesian food wants some sambal with it. More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic intensified Asian hate, and in the Dutch context this news article from 2020 shows how Chinese restaurants had to deal with a decrease in customers because of fear for Covid-19 (RTL Nieuws, 2020).

News about anti-Asian racism and news about Chinese-Indonesian restaurants draw my attention, because I am personally connected to and touched by this news. From 2015 until 2022, I worked at the case study business as a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar and pub employee. The business was, and is still located in my hometown and run by an owner of Chinese descent. We mainly served fast food, but also provided buffets with Chinese-Indonesian food. I became friends with my boss and her family, who also own a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant. During the years I worked in the restaurant, snack bar, and pub, I noticed racist attitudes and jokes of customers towards me and my boss. When I would ask what she thought about these incidents, she would advise me to shout back at them. We also had several conversations about the Chinese-Indonesian food she cooked for the buffets, and that it was very far from the Chinese food she cooks for herself and for family dinners for example. The customers asked for this type of "Chinese" food, and she delivered. My personal involvement with this topic in combination with the long history of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands and intensified Asian hate during the pandemic resulted in my interest to research anti-Asian racism in the Dutch context.

1.5 Scientific relevance

Pivotal scholarship on racism in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993; Essed & Hoving, 2009; Wekker, 2016) doesn't pay much attention to racism experienced by people of Asian descent (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021). However, the aforementioned examples of anti-Asian racism in the Dutch context show that these experiences do exist. In the US context and the field of Education, scholars have developed Asian critical theory [AsianCrit] as a theoretical framework to look at Asian American experiences and the role of racism herein (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Saito & Li, 2022; Kim-Bossard, 2022; Qin, Colomer, Yu & Cole, 2022; Kim, 2022). AsianCrit aims among other goals to rewrite the history of Asian American people and include their stories in our collective histories. In the Dutch history and to this day, it seems like Asian voices aren't much included. Therefore, I hope to be able to contribute to Dutch racism literature by applying an Asian critical perspective, and contribute to the field of Critical Race Theory.

1.6 Research questions and objective

Resulting from the previously mentioned case study relevance and the societal and scientific relevance, the questions I will address in this thesis are:

In what ways does anti-Asian racism experienced in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub reflect national debates on racism in the Netherlands?

- How can an Asian critical theory approach contribute to broadening the field of critical race theory?
- How does lived experiences of employees working in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub contest the Netherlands' identity as a liberal, colour-blind and anti-racist country?

Corresponding with these questions, my objective with this thesis is to build an autoethnography of the lived experiences of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub employees, in order to look beyond the stigma and stereotypes surrounding people of Asian descent and value and honour their experiences. Moreover, I hope this research will contribute to awareness about anti-Asian racism and to research about anti-Asian racism in the Dutch context. Envisioned research material to answer the research questions varies. Sub question 1 will be addressed by providing a theoretical framework around Asian critical theory. Thereafter, I will provide reflections on sub question 2 by doing participant observation in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub. During the analysis of the fieldwork, I will reflect on the use of my own lived experiences to support the analysis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Critical race theory

There is a movement of activists and scholars who grapple with critical race theory [CRT] to understand and transform the relation between race, racism, and power. Contrary to traditional civil rights discourse, which values incrementalism, CRT questions the principles of the liberal order. The origins of CRT lie in the 1970s, when lawyers, activists and legal scholars across the United States noticed that the progression in the 1960s civil rights movement had stagnated and even went backwards. Also, CRT builds on other movements, notably critical legal studies and radical feminism. Moreover, it is inspired by several European philosophers and theorists, for example by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Simultaneously, it draws from famous figures such as Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King, and the Black Power and Chicano movements from the 1960s and early 1970s. While it started as a law movement, it is now a widely spread theory among different disciplines, such as in education, political science, and philosophy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3-7).

There are several key ideas from different movements CRT uses. Firstly, the idea of legal indeterminacy from critical legal studies stands for the idea that legal cases can have more than one correct outcome, depending on interpretation of facts for example. Secondly, the group of CRT adopted scepticism towards triumphalist history and successful precedent, because of possible narrow court interpretations and red tape. Thirdly, insights from feminists regarding the relation between power and social roles, and the invisible power of patriarchy and other forms of domination are taken up by CRT. Fourthly, CRT is inspired by civil rights movements to restore historical wrongdoings, emphasize the practical consequences of legal and social theory, and value a sense of community and group empowerment. Fifthly, from ethnic studies CRT incorporates themes like cultural nationalism, group cohesion, positionality, and situatedness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 5-6).

Thereafter, CRT has seven principles which can describe its general theorization. The first principle argues that racism is an ordinary phenomenon instead of abnormal. Commonly and every day, people of colour in the US experience racism. Because this ordinary feature of racism is not always acknowledged, it is hard to address. Equality measures that aim for colour-blindness for example, run the risk of only tackling visible forms of racism. Secondly, the racist system with white supremacy supports important psychic and material purposes to uphold the dominant group. Therefore, large groups in society have little motivation to act against racism. The third principle of CRT emphasizes the social construction of race and races instead of the belief that race is objective, fixed, and biologically determined (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.

8-9). Alternatively, CRT argues that *"races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient."* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8-9). Fourthly, CRT is interested in different racialization and its consequences. Minority groups are racialized by the dominant group, but the racialization can differ per period depending on economic developments for example. Relating to this, the portraying and stereotyping of minority groups can also change over time, subject to changing interests and new events. Applying the notion of intersectionality is the fifth principle of CRT. Intersectionality stands for the idea that different forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, and classicism, interrelate and overlap. For example, a white woman deals with other forms of inequality than a woman of colour (Crenshaw, 1989). The sixth principle is related to intersectionality and emphasizes the importance of anti-essentialism. Anti-essentialism states that no one has a single and unitary identity, but often overlapping identities. Lastly, and in slight contradiction with anti-essentialism, CRT argues that people of colour have a unique voice. Notably, their stories about race and racism contain information that white people are never able to know (Delgado & Stefancic, p. 10-11).

2.2 Asian critical theory

2.2.1 Limitations of CRT

Asian Critical Theory [AsianCrit] is grounded in critical race theory [CRT] and emerged in the 1990s in the field of law (Chang, 1993; Teo, 2022). Museus and Iftikar (2014, in: Iftikar & Museus, 2018) played a pivotal role in the theory building of AsianCrit. It provides a framework for describing the role of racism in Asian American experiences and builds upon previous scholarship in Asian American Studies and CRT literature. The CRT framework has limitations when applying it to the situation of Asian American people. First of all, in CRT there is an overemphasis on Black and white populations. This is not to say that this focus is unnecessary, it is very important considering the racial oppression Black communities face. However, a thorough critical analysis of other racial groups can result in more holistic understandings of race, racialization and white supremacy. Hence, CRT and AsianCrit are not mutually exclusive, in which the suffering of one racial group is more important than that of other racial groups. Rather, AsianCrit expands upon current CRT theory and makes contributions to look more holistically to the racialization of communities of colour.

Secondly, the general theorization of CRT can be used for analyses of all communities of colour, but does not provide a deep and nuanced understanding of these groups. Rather, the CRT framework needs adaptation and modification when applying to specific communities of colour. Frameworks that are more specific and rooted in the experiences and histories of a

community of colour will result in a deeper insight into the experiences of these populations (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

2.2.2 Rationale AsianCrit

AsianCrit acknowledges that the Asian American population is ethnically diverse, but the framework itself is pan-ethnic for two reasons. Notably, society racializes Asian Americans as a homogeneous racial group, with subordinate traits, which results in a shared experience of racialization. Examples of shared experiences for Asian American students are racial isolation and hostility in academic and social spaces in school (Qin, Way & Rana, 2008). The other reason why AsianCrit uses a pan-ethnic approach to understand Asian American experiences is that it allows and stimulates analyses about race instead of ethnicity and consequently, encourages analyses about white supremacy and systemic racism (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

The AsianCrit framework offers seven interrelated tenets which show how white supremacy and systemic racism shape the experiences of Asian Americans. The first four principles combine CRT scholarship with knowledge about the racial realities of Asian American people. The last three tenets use core tenets of CRT that are critical about white supremacy and its relation to the experiences of Asian Americans (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). AsianCrit,

> "can help better understand how white supremacy maintains ideological tropes that structure racialized experiences and identities, interacts with global colonial and imperial projects to influence Asian American experiences, and shapes how racially marginalized people navigate, engage with, and utilize the racial categories through which white supremacy attempts to homogenize and essentialize them" (Iftikar and Museus, 2018, p. 940).

While CRT and AsianCrit are US based theories, it is valuable to apply them to the Dutch context as well. Therefore, the seven tenets of AsianCrit will be supported by the works of several authors on racism in the Dutch context in the following paragraph.

2.2.3 Seven tenets

The first tenet, **Asianization**, points at processes in which people in the US are labelled as "Asian" through racialization processes, stimulated by white supremacy. Asian Americans are racialized and depicted as everlasting foreigners, threatening yellow perils, model and deviant minorities, and sexually deviant weak men and hypersexual women. These stereotypes come in useful in the dehumanization and exclusion of Asian Americans through white supremacy thinking in laws and policies and are not mutually exclusive or exclusive from other racial

groups (Iftikar and Museus, 2018; Yoo, Gabriel & Okazaki, 2022). Moreover, these stereotypes erase individual and ethnic diversity within the "Asian" group (Kim-Bossard, 2022).

The stereotype of being a perpetual foreigner, points at the racial portrayal of Asian Americans as foreign, despite their citizenship, generational status, or length of stay in the US. Particularly when there was a perceived threat of US national security, economy, or health, Asian Americans were seen as perpetual foreigners. The recent anti-Asian discrimination and violence because of the political rhetoric around the Chinese origin of COVID-19 for example resulted in a depiction of Asian Americans as foreigners who form a threat to public health (Yoo et al., 2022). Moreover, in the Dutch context, minorities or immigrants in general are often depicted in media discourses as problematic and deviant (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 278). Still, immigrants are depicted as a threat to national stability, security, and Dutch norms and values (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2015; Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2017). Additionally, the Netherlands has a history of discursively portraying a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in political debates about immigrants and refugees. This nationalist rhetoric with self-praise communicates the message that the Dutch are mostly tolerant people, and discrimination is an incidental experience. Often, the message is that the Dutch are forced to be less generous in immigration policy, because of the negative behaviour of immigrants or refugees (Van Dijk, 1993, p. vii-p. 79). To this day, the ruling party in the Second Chamber of Dutch Parliament (VVD) states that there are too much fortune seekers in the Netherlands who stimulate xenophobia (VVD, n.d.).

Wu (2014) goes in-depth into the model minority stereotype, which arose in the US context in the 1960s. During that time, there was a felt need to fight exclusion. However, this development came with the challenge of redefining racial order and citizenship. For Asian American people, their terms of inclusion were based on the model minority stereotype. Asian Americans as the model minority are separate from the white majority, but well assimilated, hardworking, and politically nonthreatening, and certainly not Black (Wu, 2014, p. 2-3). Inherent to this stereotype is a mechanism of upholding white supremacy by commending and comparing Asian Americans to other racial minority groups (Yoo et al., 2022). In the Dutch context, there is a corporate discourse that "spoiled" minorities should be put to work. This leaves behind possible labour discrimination minority applicants have to face (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 123). Also, in the 1950s in the Netherlands, Indo-Europeans were taken as Dutch citizens, but they still needed to be civilized by welfare workers (Captain, 2014, p. 57). Moreover, in the book "Dutch racism" of Essed & Hoving (2014), Hondius (2014, p. 288) argues that Black and Asian people could be more accepted in Dutch society, because Muslims are increasingly seen

as the out-group. Here, Hondius (2014) compares people of Asian descent to other racial minority groups, which is inherent to the model minority stereotype (Yoo et al., 2022).

The rising of the model minority stereotype in the US context was unanticipated and the result of intersecting political, social, and cultural developments. Liberalism played a significant role in this. Specifically, the change of the interpretation of liberalism from *laissez-faire* policy and limited government intervention to liberalism with an active state, considering the welfare of its citizens (Wu, 2014, p. 2-4). The "yellow peril" discourse does entail a fear of cultural and economic takeover of the United States by Asian people. This discourse works dialectically with the model minority stereotype: *"as the model minority, South Asians are lauded for their apparent ability to climb the ladder; but when they get too high, they pose a threat of "taking over" the nation."* (Mudambi, 2019, p. 285). Because of this contradiction, Asian communities have to negotiate their desirable and undesirable position in their identities (Mudambi, 2019). In the 1920s in the Netherlands, the "yellow peril" discourse was also visible. At the time, Chinese immigrants were seen as a threat to the Dutch national economy. Therefore, the Chinese immigrants had to deal with police and state racism, and xenophobia. Consequently, there were racist razzias and forced deportation of Chinese workers in the 1930s (Essed, 1991, p. 2-18).

Thereafter, the sexual deviant stereotype plays a significant role in the experiences of Asian Americans. It serves the purpose of upholding racial, patriarchal, and class domination. Asian American men and women are represented in an extreme way, that differs from white male heteronormativity. *"Asian American men are emasculated and assumed to be less "manly", asexual, and unattractive"* (Yoo et al., 2022, p. 573). Contradictory, Asian American women are portrayed as hypersexual and *"assumed to be exotic, pleasurers, and sexual objects"* (Yoo et al., 2022, p. 573). Also in the Dutch context, Indo and Thai women are commonly sexually represented as submissive and ultra-feminine in a traditional way (Wekker, 2014, p. 161). Moreover, Asian people can be depicted as hypersexual in the Netherlands (Wekker, 2016, p. 96 & 129).

Next to the aforementioned stereotypes, Van Dijk (1993) analyses negative stereotypes of minorities and Third World peoples in the Dutch textbooks from the 1990s. In these books, ethnic prejudice and racism are ignored and Surinamese and Indonesian immigrants are barely mentioned. Consequently, the colonial backgrounds of their immigration to the Netherlands were ignored. Only Moluccans and their "problematic" situation in an independent Indonesia are discussed. What also stands out is that discrimination is more critically considered in relation to the US or apartheid in South Africa (Van Dijk, 208-217). Van Dijk (1993) doesn't

often mention in his analysis in which ways or how people of Asian descent were racialized. Only Chinese people are briefly mentioned: *"Most Chinese work in the restaurant business. Some of them are in the drugs business and give this group a bad name in our country."* (Andeweg, 1986, p. 69, in: Van Dijk, 1993, p. 220). This stereotype is still very much alive in the Netherlands, as Dutch people with Asian descendance often encounter food-related slurs related to dishes Chinese-Indonesian restaurants serve (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021).

Moreover, including **transnational contexts** in situating racism in Asian American experiences is the second tenet of the AsianCrit framework. These contexts stand for a (historical) network of global relationships, which include *"historical and current processes that extend beyond national border, such as imperialism, the emergence of global economies, international war, and migration"* (Museus & Iftikar, 2014, p. 96, in: Iftikar & Musesus, 2018, p. 358). Instead of understanding Asian Americans as a monolithic group, accounting for transnational contexts emphasizes how racial or ethnic identities can be uniquely influenced by the effects of globalization, imperialism, colonialism, and transnationalism. Moreover, paying attention to transnational contexts gives the opportunity to look at the large group of undocumented Asian Americans and their relation to different sets of US immigration laws and policies (Yoo et al., 2022).

The third tenet is based on the reality that Asian Americans are mostly made invisible and voiceless in the history of the US. Following the tenet "**(re)constructive history**" thus means overcoming the invisibility and silence that surrounds Asian American people and aim for the creation of a collective historical narrative of Asian Americans. Existing histories should be re-analysed and written to incorporate the voices and contributions of this group (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). A collective Asian American history can contribute to the contextualization of present-day experiences of Asian Americans with race and racism (Yoo et al., 2022). Also, in pivotal publications on Dutch racism, there is little written about racism experienced by a variety of Asian communities living in the Netherlands. Mostly, attention is paid to the voices of people with a descendance related to the former the Dutch Indies colony (Essed, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993; Essed & Hoving, 2014; Wekker, 2016). Also in general, there is a denial of racism, and a façade of tolerance in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991). The Dutch discourse of the Netherlands as a tolerant and welcoming country towards racialized others is highly stubborn. In this, the white Dutch sense of self operates within and next to this tolerance discourse (Wekker, 2016, p. 1).

Additionally, the fourth tenet of AsianCrit takes from CRT the idea that race is a social construction and influenced by economic, political, and social forces. **Strategic**

(anti)essentialism *"recognizes and counters the ways that white supremacy racializes Asian Americans as a monolithic group in the US, but also emphasizes that Asian Americans can and do actively intervene in the racialization process as well."* (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 940). Examples of active interventions are the coalition building that Asian American scholars and activists practice to gain political power and advocate against white supremacy. Eventually, by using their power they can problematize and (re)define racial categories and stereotypes (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Yoo et al., 2022).

The fifth tenet, **intersectionality**, helps in understanding how different layers and systems of oppression and exploitation interact and overlap with each other and influence the daily experiences of Asian people (Crenshaw, 1989). Examples of systems of oppression are racism, imperialism, colonialism, sexism, and ableism. Every person has different identities and group memberships and is located in a unique way within these systems of oppression, which shapes their daily life and sense of self(identity). For instance, the stereotype of Asian "tiger parents", parents who are strict and very determined to ensure their children's success, highly influences the way in which Asian American moms perceive themselves (Kim-Bossard, 2022).

Prioritizing the unique voices, lived experiences, racial struggles, and agency of Asian Americans stands for the sixth tent of AsianCrit: **story, theory, and praxis**. This is based on scholars of CRT, who argue that the experiences and resulting experiential knowledge of racially marginalized people can be used to counteract dominant, white, European epistemology and offers an alternative. This epistemological alternative is grounded in lived experiences of people of colour. Moreover, the relation between story and theory or intersections between theory and practice are put forward in this tenet, because *"stories inform theory and practice, theory guides practice, and practice can excavate stories and utilize theory for positive transformative purposes."* (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 941). Also, this tenet challenges imperial or colonial scholarship, and critiques the way in which alternative epistemologies and stories are marginalized in the academic world (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

The last tenet **commitment to social justice** puts forward that AsianCrit wants to advocate for the end of systems of oppression and exploitation. Committing to social justice implicates the need for developing strategies to counteract oppression, which have to be rooted in the specific experiences and histories of Asian communities (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Chapter 3: Methodological framework

The research design of this thesis is an autoethnography. The research uses participant observation as a method. This fieldwork is done in my own community, and therefore asks for specific ways of doing research than usual methods normally prescribe (Tomaselli et al., 2008). First, I will lay out basic principles of autoethnography and doing participant observation. Then, I will critique some of these principles by reflecting on my positionality in this particular fieldwork.

3.1 Research design: autoethnography

In autoethnography, the prejudices, ideologies, and tacit knowledge of the researcher are considered inherent to the research process. *"An autoethnography typically communicates the life experiences, thoughts, views and beliefs of the film-maker, and as such is often considered biased."* (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 65). Objectivity is not the goal. The personal sphere is connected to the cultural, in which the researcher is placed within a social context. It requires that the researcher analyses their personal history, which is embedded in a group or culture. This endeavour is dual, as the researcher needs to explain themselves and needs to analyse the situation. It can be seen as a way of avoiding the imposition of the researcher's meaning on the participants. The incorporation of the self into the research can include *"dialogues, emotions and introspections as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure and culture"* (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 66). This challenges dominant views on silent authorship and instead includes the researcher's voice in the research (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 65-66).

Adams, Holman-Jones and Ellis (2014, p. 26-35) show a set of priorities autoethnographies often have. These are: foreground personal experience in research and writing, illustrate sense-making processes, use and show reflexivity, illustrate insider knowledge of a cultural phenomenon/practices, describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices, and seek responses from audiences. Also, based on Adams et al. (2014), there are several reasons why I included autoethnographic material. It can value vulnerability as a way to understand feelings and improve social life. Moreover, it has the potential to disrupt taboos and reclaim disregarded voices. Lastly, it can make research more accessible to diverse audiences, because it steps away from traditional ways of doing science.

Teo (2022) lays out the link between CRT/AsianCrit and autoethnography. A critical race theory autoethnography potentially can *"enact resistance through exposing hidden experiences of oppression and racism in daily events … all the while revealing "meaning without committing the error of defining it"* (Arendt, 1983 as cited in Mackinlay, 2019, p. 190,

in: Teo, 2022). Autoethnography can stimulate engagement with politics of all levels, which can embody the change AsianCrit ultimately wants to establish (Teo, 2022).

3.2 Ontology and epistemology of autoethnography

The ontological stance of this thesis derives from Tomaselli et al. (2008), in which they state that autoethnography does entail a reality in which the self and culture are held together, not in equilibrium, but in a world which is constantly in a state of flux and movement. Autoethnography follows the flow of *"story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement. It creates moments of clarity, connection and change."* (Tomaselli et al., 2008, p. 360). In this, I have an ethical commitment to do justice to the reality of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar and pub employees.

Writing an autoethnography implies that knowledge is situated and socially constructed. Ways of knowing comes from people within a historical context. Inevitably, stereotypes and prejudices can be perpetuated (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 3). Doing autoethnography prioritizes proximity and not objectivity as an epistemological starting and end point. Autoethnography values intimate and close-up perspectives on experiences, in which feelings, voices, and bodies are included as objects of research (Adams et al., 2014, p. 23).

3.3 Method: participant observation

The tool I have mainly used to answer the central research question is participant observation. Participant observation is a specific method within ethnographic fieldwork (Musante, 2015). In participant observation, the researcher participates in daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the participants in order to get familiar with both explicit and implicit aspects of their experiences. In this method, it becomes possible to embody tacit knowledges, through standing, sitting, moving, and using our voices in the shared social reality of participant and researcher. Field notes are essential to capture thoughts and reflections on the social reality. It can be seen as both a data collection and analytical tool, because it improves and influences the analysis and interpretation of data (Musante, 2015, p. 239-247).

3.3.1 Finding a balance between participating and observing

Before conducting the participant observation, I reflected on my personal characteristics and position I bring into the context. Participant observation asks to be both participant and observer, which should include skills like fitting in, "active seeing", short-term memory, informal interviewing, recording detailed field notes, and patience.

Because the participants share their social reality and experiences, it is important for me to consider reciprocity as a value in participant observation. During the participant observation, personal information was shared with each other, for example about the racism we had experienced. Also, I was transparent about the goals of the research. Furthermore, I tried to be a useful employee during the participant observation (Musante, 2015, p. 255). In the end, I want to share the results with the owners of the business to make clear their participation in the research was valuable. During the fieldwork, we already discussed some encounters with the customers. In these moments, I noticed that we had different opinions on racism. Therefore, I will explicitly state while sharing the results that these are my interpretations and that they can have their opinions on their own. I want to leave it up to them to share the results with the white employees from the village, because it would maybe make the owners uncomfortable if I share the results directly with the white employees.

There are several important skills to have a fruitful observation. Observing a social reality has to include all the senses, self-observation, and reflexivity. During the observation, the researcher should map, count, and listen actively. One can make mental and physical notes about things that stand out and be ready to ask questions when something is unclear.

There are multiple limits to observing a social reality. Notably, it is important to acknowledge that *"every observer observes a phenomenon from the place from which the observer observes"* (Musante, 2015, p. 258). Moreover, observation always impacts the social reality it observes, and therefore impacts the observation itself. Being reflexive throughout your research about the position you are investigating from and how that impacts social reality is hence vital to rightfully honour the relationships among the observer, the observed, and the report of the observation. Thus, I should ask myself how I am biased in this research, instead of questioning whether I am biased (Musante, 2015, p. 257-259).

3.3.2 Taking notes and analysing them

According to Musante (2015, p. 261-263) field notes are considered the main data collection method within participant observation. The researcher can write down detailed narratives about for example activities and conservations they did during their participant observation. Field notes should focus on the careful and detailed analysis of events, behaviours, and speech within the social context. It is important that notes are taken short after the participant observation and that the researcher read and reread their notes, to search for incomplete information for example. Additionally, field notes are both data and analysis. Observations, conversations, and informal interviews are recorded in detail, but also simultaneously constructed by the

researcher. Therefore, the researcher should take responsibility that it is their version of the social reality.

Furthermore, it is important to consider when it is suitable to take notes. It can be done throughout the participant observation in front of the participants, or when the researcher has a moment for themselves. There are several ways of taking field notes, but most of the field notes are comprised of:

- Jot notes or scratch notes: written down during the day
- Field notes: written down during quiet time
- Analytic notes or meta-notes: reviewing one's own notes
- Diary, journal or log: listing activities, events, people
- Head notes: thoughts that never get written down

Head notes are growingly incorporated to answer to the reflexive need of ethnography and to be able to write down emotional and tacit information (Musante, 2015, p. 261-263). For this thesis, I agreed with the participants that I can make audio notes during the participant observation. When I got home, I had the time to write the events and all my thoughts down. Also, for the analysis I decided to mainly use storytelling to analyse the data. In this, my lived experiences are included as well, because this also serves as data (Adams et al., 2014, p. 66).

3.4 Ethics of participant observation

There is a danger of the position of an ethnographic researcher as deceitful. Participants can easily forget that casual interactions are also part of the data. Informed consent of the participants in this case is very important. Thus, a consent form was signed by all participants beforehand. Additionally, throughout each stage of the project, it is important to ensure continued willingness. This is called "process consent". Process consent views consent as dynamic and ongoing instead of something that can be done by a form only (Adams et al., 2014, p. 57).

Next to that, I aimed to be transparent about my position and aims throughout the participant observation. Moreover, anonymity plays a role in this research. Lived experiences with racism are very personal, and therefore the participants and business are made anonymous. Also, I have been conscious about which information I included in the research, to be wary of the impact this research can have on the participants. Moreover, I took into account and acknowledged power differences, and tried to minimize them. I also tried to reflect on both positive and negative consequences for the participants to participate in the study. For example, I noticed that the owners were happy with an experienced employee during their opening

weekend, but also hesitant about sharing information about their customers (Adams et al., 2014, p. 57-62).

On top of that, participating in the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub forced me to reflect on past traumatic experiences. The question of engaging and intervening in the observation is also important to consider. If someone is making a racist "joke" to me or a co-worker, should I say something about it or let it be and see how the situation unfolds itself? In this, I agree with Nash (in: Musante, 2015, p. 267) that the world is not simply a laboratory, but rather a community in which we are coparticipants. Therefore, I can intervene in the situation if I feel like it is necessary for myself or the participants (Musante, 2015, p. 263-267). Lastly, autoethnography can also be seen as a way of caring for the self. Writing about anti-Asian racism and continuously reflecting on my own histories and experiences functioned as a way of processing and comprehending traumatic experiences and improved the understanding of myself. Also, it provides a fruitful ground for political action (Adams et al., 2014, p. 62).

3.5 Doing fieldwork in my own community

My positionality in this research, doing fieldwork in my own community, shows how many positivist approaches largely ignore the feelings, emotions, and the lived experiences that influence the way in which I conduct research (Tomaselli et al., 2008). In my case, being both the insider and outsider highly shapes the participant observation. Objective research methods about fieldwork often assume that one can simply go to a community and observe as an outsider. However, for my positionality, and for autoethnographic research, pre-fixed methods aren't sufficient. We need to continuously navigate between different positionalities and pay attention to the complexity and tensions of relationships. Because I have been employed at the fieldwork location for over seven years, I had to find a balance between working and observing. Also, I tried to incorporate an auto-reflexive form of writing, in which I continuously reflected on personal and biographical stories in detail, to acknowledge the relation between lived experiences and the factors that shape them. Using personal narratives and storytelling critiques received notions of expertise and challenges conventional researcher-subject relations. Lastly, autoethnographic research is inherently messy and non-linear, which should be embraced and documented in the field (Tomaselli et al., 2008).

3.6 Participants' backgrounds

The participants in this research are the two owners of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, pub, the son of one owner, and four employees of the business. The two owners and the

son are all three of Chinese descent and can speak Mandarin fluently. While conducting the participant observation, they mostly spoke in Mandarin to each other. Also, they live in the upstairs apartment above their business.

The first owner identifies as female, and has the most snack bar working experience. Additionally, she has work experience in a sushi bar and other restaurants in the hospitality industry. She can manage herself in Dutch, but doesn't speak it fluently. Thereafter, she is almost forty and her son works as one of the employees. She told me she moved to the Netherlands when she was an adult. Her son is around fifteen years old and helps his mom out in the snack bar and pub. The second owner identifies as male, and is about the same age as the other owner. He has work experience as a cook in Chinese-Indonesian restaurants and also fulfils the role of being a cook in the eatery. Moreover, he works as a bar tender in the pub. He can speak a few words Dutch, but mostly speaks Mandarin. I haven't spoken to him about his migration background.

Thereafter, the two snack bar employees are both fifteen years old, white, and grew up in the village. They have worked in the snack bar for about half a year. The other two pub employees are both above fifty, white, and also live in the town. They both have been working as pub employees for the local pub for about ten years, and already worked there before the old owners (my old bosses) took over the business.

Chapter 4: Analysis and results

4.1 Context of fieldwork

Have you heard about the new owners of the snack bar and eatery in town? The lady who is going to serve food is Chinese! You should definitely watch out for dog meat. I cowered internally when I overheard this person racializing someone who looks like me. I did not say anything about it, as a teenager I did not have the confidence or courage to speak up against these types of racist comments.

On a national scale, the Netherlands has a long-standing tradition of denying the existence of racism in the country. The denial of racism is rooted in the strong belief that race doesn't exist in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Essed & Nimako, 2006). Therefore, using the term "race" is a taboo. Instead, policymakers and scholars often use the term "ethnicity", which brings forth notions of culture, but doesn't cover hierarchical power differences central to racial identities and racialization processes in the Netherlands. Both internally as externally, the Netherlands has a long history of immigration and racialization. Internally speaking, Dutch policy didn't allow religious and cultural outsiders full citizenship, and Africans and Asians have been fully excluded from citizenship. On an external level, the Dutch have actively played a role in genocide, oppression, and exploitation in their former colonies, which still impacts social and power structures in the Netherlands and their former colonies of Surinam and Indonesia (Weiner, 2014). Contradictory, political, corporate, educational, and media discourses of the Netherlands have a tendency of self-praise, in which the Dutch are tolerant, colour-blind, and antiracist people (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 73; Wekker, 2016, p. 1). This attitude is rooted in Dutch history, in which Jews and Catholics could practice their religion in freedom in the Netherlands, unlike in other countries (Weiner, 2014).

More specifically, anti-Asian racism is often dismissed within public debates and publications on Dutch racism (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021; Bos, 2022; Van den Berg, 2020; Essed, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993; Essed & Hoving, 2014; Wekker, 2016). However, about one million of the people living in the Netherlands have an Asian descendance (Asian Raisins, n.d.). During the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 until 2022, there was increasing attention to Asian hate and Asian activism, because anti-Asian racism increased in this period. However, according to my experiences with racism and that of others (Van den Berg, 2020) anti-Asian racism has existed for a long time already. Also, Hoogervorst & Tarisa (2021) challenge the persistent stereotype that Chinese migrants aren't politically engaged and remain with the status quo. Instead, in 1935, Chinese students from the Netherlands Indies became an activist group as a response to a poem written by students from Leiden called "The yellow peril".

Furthermore, the context of my hometown is relevant to describe. The village has about 1700 inhabitants and is located in the South of the Netherlands. Almost all villagers are white and in the last Provincial council and water authority elections, the majority voted for the farmers party BBB, which has a right-wing and conservative nature. There is a high sense of social cohesion and control, and everyone knows each other. Moreover, the business which is central to this fieldwork is known as the local pub, the only snack bar and only place which serves Chinese-Indonesian food. Before the new owners bought the place, the business had always been run by white people. About ten years ago, when the owners were settling themselves in their new home and business, my fellow white villagers were busy with performing their white normativity. Unconsciously probably. The commotion around the arrival of the new owners is of course stimulated by the small size of the town. But there is more to it. There is a sense of white normativity, in which being Dutch and European is associated with modernity, progress, and superiority. Being civilized according to western norms is deemed as the necessary standard, and the other, in this case a Chinese business owner, is portrayed as barbarian, eating dog meat (Essed & Trienekens, 2008).

A year after the owners took over the business, I was looking for a part-time job to earn some money. The snack bar and eatery had a vacancy and my mom encouraged me to apply. We already had some friendly encounters, in which my Chinese descendance and the composition of our family were discussed. Therefore, I would have a high chance to get the job according to my mom's logic. And indeed, she (the owner) was very happy with my application and I started to work there. We mainly worked in the snack bar together, but on request we also provided Chinese-Indonesian buffets in the eatery and for catering. Next to the snack bar there was a local pub, which was part of their business. To this day, the décor in the bar and snack bar has not really changed. The bar has always looked like a traditional Dutch bar, with dark interior. Contradictory, in the snack bar there is more traditional Chinese decoration, for example a Chinese calendar in the colours red and gold. Combining red and gold is common in Chinese culture to use for special occasions or presents. Red stands for happiness and gold stands for prosperity.

Soon after I started to work here, I sensed and experienced that customers were making fun of my boss's appearance and her culture. Moreover, they laughed about her accent when she spoke Dutch, and didn't always take her seriously. She even multiple times mentioned to me that the customers didn't classify her as smart, because she didn't have the same command of Dutch than native speakers. These incidents affected me, as I am of Chinese descent as well. However, every time we discussed racist behaviours of guests, my boss said it didn't bother

her. There was also a clear distinction between the Chinese food my boss would make for herself and me, and the food we would make for the buffets. The dishes for the buffets were the same as Chinese-Indonesian restaurants offer, for example Egg Foo Young and "*babi pangang*", fried pork served with a tomato-based sauce. Multiple times my boss mentioned that we need to keep in mind we're cooking for Dutch people, with Dutch taste, and that we can only serve them Chinese-Indonesian food. In this sense, the whiteness of my fellow villagers affected how my boss presented her Chinese descendance through food. Also, a homogenization of cultures is perpetuated when people consider the food they eat from Chinese-Indonesian restaurants only Chinese. Rather, it is a remnant from the former Dutch Indies colony, where a Chinese minority lived in Indonesia. Though, in the 1920s, people were excited to eat Chinese-Indonesian food, because it was deemed a specific "Dutch tradition" (Amenda, 2009). In this case, Dutch people were not only homogenizing but also appropriating culture, presenting Chinese and Indonesian food as an invention of the Dutch.

Since September 2022, the business is bought by new Chinese owners. My old boss and the new owners know each other indirectly via Chinese networks in the Netherlands. I stopped working there in August 2022, but stayed in contact with both the old as new owners. The popular discourse that the Netherlands is a tolerant country, in which racist incidents are minimal (Wekker, 2016, p. 1), has always been contrary to my lived experiences of being a Chinese-Dutch snack bar and eatery employee. Moreover, the homogenization of Chinese and Indonesian culture by people who deem Chinese-Indonesian food Chinese also contradicts the portrait of the Netherlands as liberal and antiracist (Wekker, 2016, p. 1). By using the case study of a snack bar, eatery, and pub in a small Dutch white town, and conducting participant observation there, I will show how the Dutch so-called tolerant attitude is being contested.

4.2 Participant observation in the snack bar, eatery, and pub

Before conducting the participant observation, on March 9 2023, I visited the new owner to get acquainted with each other and discuss the purpose and practical details of the research. It felt strange but simultaneously familiar to be back at my old workplace. The interior hasn't changed much either. Only the old owners, who made me feel at home, weren't there anymore. Nevertheless, the new owner welcomed me very friendly. In the same way my old boss and her family had always made me feel part of their community. *"Because you are Chinese too!"* they regularly mentioned in our conversations.

During the preparation meeting for the research we decided that the official opening weekend would provide us with useful information for the research, so we planned that I would

participate and observe that particular weekend on March 17, 18, and 19 2023. On Friday and Sunday I would be working in the snack bar, and on Saturday I would be working in the eatery and pub. Saturday was the big opening day. The owners organized an unlimited Chinese-Indonesian lunch buffet for the elderly people of the town. Then, in the afternoon a clown was invited to entertain children, and unlimited fries and lemonade was served. In the evening karaoke and sushi was offered to the guests. About hundred people enjoyed the Chinese-Indonesian lunch, twenty children plus their parents came to see the clown, and sixty people came to the karaoke night.

4.2.1 Researcher's positionality

The aesthetic difference between the interior of the snack bar and eatery/pub (traditional Chinese vs. traditional Dutch) funnily enough reflects my inner difference of two cultural backgrounds, which was highly influential on the way in which I experienced seven years of being a snack bar, eatery, and pub employee there. I grew up with the inherent contradiction of being coloured on the outside and white on the inside. This demands an enduring process of reconciliation, which in bad times feels like: "*the invisible violation which happens indoors and inside ourselves: the self-abnegation, the silence, the constant threat of cultural obliteration."* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2021, p. 3).

As an employee for the business, I constantly felt a position of in-betweenness, being an insider and outsider at the same time (Moraga, 2021, p. xxix). It oftentimes felt exhausting to bridge not only the contradictions within myself, but also between my boss and my fellow villagers. When a customer didn't understand what my boss was saying, I would immediately jump in to help. Racist incidents felt conflicting and confusing, because I have known these people all my life and they were still portraying me as the other. Because my boss and I became close, I got the chance to get to know the Chinese culture better. I noticed myself juggling between feeling shame and proud about my heritage.

The following passage from "The Bridge Poem" by Kate Rushin (2021) beautifully expresses what bridge work can demand of you:

> I've had enough
> I'm sick of seeing and touching
> Both sides of things
> Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody
>
> Nobody
> Can talk to anybody
> Without me
> Right?

The bridging work it takes for me to work in the snack bar, eatery, and pub fully came back during the three days of participant observation. On the one hand, my Chinese background was emphasized. During conversations with the new owner, she was mentioning: *"Yes you are really Chinese, because you really love fish… Chinese blood runs through your veins, so that's why you love fish."* Also, the owners would accidentally start speaking Mandarin to me, after which I had to reply I can't speak their language. This brought me back to the position of in-betweenness. Moreover, when explaining the research to the other employees, I purposely used the word "discrimination" instead of "racism", because I expect more backlash when using the word "racism" to Dutch white people. The expectation that using the words "race" or "racism" is taboo corresponds with the article of Essed & Trienekens (2008) on the construction of Dutch whiteness and white normativity. Dutch political and public discourse is more about "ethnicity", "national identity" and conflicting values between immigrant communities and our "modern" culture.

Additionally, the insider/outsider position I occupy during this thesis process, and occupied during the participant observation, served me in obtaining data others wouldn't be able to get. For example, on Friday the 17th and Sunday the 19th I noticed customers in the snack bar laughing silently and looking connivingly at each other when the owner talked in Mandarin to her son. Others may not notice this subtle moment, but I do because I have seen it happen before. Also, I think a big reason why I was able to do fieldwork there, was because the owners knew they could trust me based on the relationship I have with my old boss. Moreover, I experienced that we connected over our shared Chinese descendance. On Saturday the 18th, several customers came up to me during the Chinese-Indonesian buffet to ask if I still work

there. Here as well, my insider/outsider position helped me in talking to the customers about the new owners.

A remarkable encounter was with one of the regular guests, who connivingly approached me on that Saturday, and stated that my new boss surely would be a better boss to me than the old boss. This guest is also an inhabitant of the village, and is male, white, and above fifty. He noted that my old boss was constantly stressed out and strict to us employees. I responded that I temporarily helped the new owners out this weekend, and noted I still had a good relationship with my old boss. My response to this regular guest shows how I encountered difficulty in balancing my insider/outsider position, because in that moment, I wanted to make clear I am part of my hometown's community, not the community of the owners. I used the argument that I only temporarily worked in the eatery, because it was the weekend of the official opening. Notwithstanding, the omniscient and judgemental way in which this customer talked about the behaviour of the new and old owners left me with an uncomfortable feeling.

4.2.2 Participants' positionality

On March 17, I got the chance to shortly talk with an employee, who is the son of the owner. When asking him about discrimination and if he ever experiences such behaviour from customers, he felt visibly uncomfortable. *"The son of the owner is shy, he doesn't really dare to say anything and doesn't think it will really happen, discrimination"*. Though, I felt like he has much more to tell, but hasn't found a way to express himself. Moreover, when I explained the purpose of my research to the owner during the preparation meeting, she immediately recognized what I was talking about, but trivialized it as innocent and unharmful jokes. The attitudes of the employee and owner towards discrimination and racism remind me of the model minority stereotype. Especially the part in which Asian people have to be politically nonthreatening according to this myth. It could be that the owner and her son found a way to survive in Dutch society, by complying to the expectation of being a model minority (Wu, 2014, p. 2-3). The other Chinese-Dutch owner can't speak Dutch that well and provides all Chinese-Indonesian food. For me it stood out that he decided to incorporate some other dishes than the usual Chinese-Indonesian dishes into the lunch buffet. For example, he uses more tofu in his food, a product that most of my fellow villagers aren't familiar with.

Thereafter, the positionality of the employees shaped the ways in which we could establish understanding among each other about racist experiences. I asked the two white employees above fifty if they ever noticed customers treating me, my old boss, or the new owners differently because of our Asian descendance. They both recognized what I was talking

about and could name a few examples, but justified these incidents as results of excessive alcohol use or group dynamics in a bar. I felt relieved they didn't immediately dismiss what I was saying, but I also felt exhausted because of the usual defensive reaction. Also, one employee mentioned that the same customers could as well express the same "kind" of inappropriate comments towards her, a white middle-aged woman. This reminds me of the infamous slogan *"All Lives Matter"* which was created by the opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement (Capatides, 2020). These type of responses deny and trivialize the lived experiences of marginalized peoples with systems of oppression such as white supremacy. Additionally, the reactions of the white employees to my lived experiences with racist incidents and them trivializing it, shows that the model minority myth is still very stubborn and prevents an understanding of racist experiences as valid and problematic. It could be that the white employees view people with Asian descendance living in the Netherlands as well assimilated, hardworking, and politically nonthreatening. Therefore, the white employees aren't able to see that these people experience oppression (Wu, 2014, p. 2-3). Contradictory, the younger white employees, around sixteen years old, both instantly understood what I was talking about when explaining the research to them. One of them also shared that she has seen clients treating the owner inappropriately, by being offensive for example. However, in those moments, the owner didn't recognize that behaviour as inappropriate.

4.2.3 Racist karaoke song

The homogenization of cultures and stubborn stereotype of Asian people as perpetual foreigners was visibly present during the karaoke night in the bar on March 18 (Yoo et al., 2022). I wasn't present at this moment, but on Sunday the 19th, I heard about this incident from the owner. Guests could choose which karaoke song they wanted to sing, and they choose the song *"How Long is A Chinese?"*. All guests were white and live in the village, none of them are below the age of twenty-five. This song was created in light of carnival, a celebration that is mostly celebrated by provinces in the South of the Netherlands. Every town has their own customs and traditions during these days and people dress up as a Disney character for example. Hearing

about this incident sent me back to the times I was working in the snack bar during carnival celebrations:

> Anxiously I look outside the window of the snack bar. Are there people walking towards us?
>
> Eyes communicating hunger, Smells communicating alcohol, Tongues communicating impatient and demanding food orders. Stimulating a burning shame and discomfort in my being, trying to remain calm and sit out the storm.
>
> Once the people sit down, the real deal begins. I brace myself. Razor-sharp words fly through the air and mark my skin. It seeps through my skin and touches old and new wounds.
>
> Now and then a float drives by, filled with young people, moved by pounding bass lines, and embellished with cultural appropriation. If you use your imagination, you can travel to the Chinese rice fields in one look. Isn't that great?

Most of the racist incidents I encountered as a snack bar and eatery employee happened during this celebration. Therefore, it didn't surprise me that something similar happened during the karaoke night, as this is also a party environment. The particular song and corresponding video on YouTube shows a group of friends dressed up as Chinese people and randomly singing different Chinese-Indonesian dishes in the song. The following passage shows a part of the Dutch song:

> Sambal sambal sambal bij jij jij jij
> Babi pangang
> Tjap tjoi hoi hoi hoi hoi hoi hoi
> Hoe lang is een Chinees

The text shows that Chinese-Indonesian food is associated with Chinese culture, because it only mentions Chinese people (Haverman, 2016). While this was the festive opening of the new owners of the snack bar, eatery, and pub, these guests still wanted to emphasize that the new owners are foreigners, and did that in a stereotypical way. When I asked the owner about how she felt about it, she said that it didn't bother her. The most important thing for her was that they were paying their drinks. Again, this might be a way for her to deal with the expectations of Dutch society, a hard working model minority (Wu, 2014, p. 2-3). Nevertheless, I think it is important to also show this perspective on racist incidents, because the participants have their own lived experiences with racism.

For me, this brought up feelings of shame and fear of being put in a stereotype by people I have known my whole life. Several encounters with guests in the bar resulted for me in an

uncomfortable feeling whenever I would see those customers again. It shows for me how the so-called liberalist, tolerant and anti-racist attitude of Dutch people is contested by these kind of incidents.

4.3 Asian critical analysis

In this section, I will provide an Asian critical analysis on the lived experiences of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar and pub employees in the Netherlands. AsianCrit starts with the premise that it provides a pan-ethnic framework for two reasons. This thesis and the conducted participant observation add nuances to this argumentation. Firstly, according to AsianCrit, the collective racialization of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group and a shared sense of racialization call for a pan-ethnic approach (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Throughout this thesis process, I have struggled with using anti-Asian racism as a term, because I am aware of the power language holds in shaping our experiences and understandings of what is (not) possible (Abdi, 2022). The Asian community in the Netherlands is diverse, as Asia is such a big continent. Afghanistan and Iran are for example also Asian countries. The lived experiences of the snack bar and eatery/pub employees centre around the racialization of people with Chinese and Indonesian descent. In this case, there is specific mocking and homogenization of Chinese and Indonesian food, and specific racist expressions, in which people with Southeast Asian descent are depicted as rice field workers for example. These racialization processes cannot be compared to the racialization of Afghan people. Therefore, in the Dutch context, it wouldn't be appropriate to talk about a shared Asian experience of racialization. Instead, I would opt for a Southeast Asian critical framework.

Secondly, AsianCrit being a pan-ethnic framework allows analyses about race and systemic racism. Taking ethnicity as the central object of analysis wouldn't grasp systemic structures of oppression (Iftikar and Museus, 2018). Dutch history with racism is known from denying the existence of race and racism, and instead focusing on ethnicity. This has worked into the Dutch discourse of being a liberal and tolerant country towards migrants (Hoogervorst & Tarisa, 2021; Bos, 2022; Van den Berg, 2020; Essed, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993; Essed & Hoving, 2014; Wekker, 2016). Based on the lived experiences of the employees, including my experiences of being an employee there from 2015 until the end of 2022, we can see that racism is still the everyday reality, and has a systemic nature. Therefore, looking outside of the Dutch ethnicity paradigm resulted in the possibility of analysing racism towards employees with a Chinese descendance.

Subsequently, the seven tenets of AsianCrit can be examined using the results from the participant observation. The first, **Asianization**, looks into the processes in which Asian Americans are racialized as typical "Asian". Three stereotypes play a role in this: perpetual foreigner, model minority, and sexual deviant (Iftikar and Museus, 2018; Yoo et al., 2022, Kim-Bossard, 2022, Wu, 2014). During the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 until 2022, I have experienced street harassment connected to my Chinese descendance and Covid-19 several times. I didn't discuss harassment related to Covid-19 with the employees, but this research report shows experiences with discrimination during the covid-19 pandemic of 30 Dutch people with East-Asian descendance (KIS, 2021). Moreover, the model minority stereotype clearly came back during the participant observation, in the ways in which the owners and the son possibly have internalized this stereotype. Importantly, the element of non-politically threatening and not expecting a reaction from people with Asian descendance may stimulate racist jokes (Wu, 2014). When I discussed the incident with the racist karaoke song with the owner on Sunday the 19th, the owner explained that she puts her economic benefits above the fact that customers are making fun of her Chinese descendance. Moreover, the son of the owner visibly felt uncomfortable when I asked about his experiences with discrimination and didn't want to say much about it. Lastly, the sexual deviant stereotype didn't come back in the lived experiences of snack bar and eatery/pub employees (Yoo et al., 2022).

Secondly, **the transnational contexts** of the employees is mostly discussed in light of my position as an insider/outsider during the fieldwork. Because I am adopted from China, and grew up in a small white village, my racial identity is uniquely shaped through my migration (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Including this perspective allowed me to reflect on the bridging work it took me to be a snack bar and eatery/pub employee there. Also, because I felt it was inappropriate to extensively ask the owners about their migration history, I only know that the female owner came to the Netherlands when she was an adult.

The third tenet, using **(re)constructive history** in an Asian critical analysis, proved to be useful for explaining the Dutch discourse of a tolerant and anti-racist country (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 73; Wekker, 2016, p. 1), which stimulates a denial of anti-Asian or Southeast Asian racism. This denial was sensible during the conversations I had with the two white employees above fifty, in which racist incidents were trivialized as humour, and equated to experiences of white pub employees.

Fourthly, the tenet **strategic (anti)essentialism** recognizes that Asian Americans are racialized as a monolithic group in the US (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). As mentioned before, the Netherlands has a highly diverse Asian community, which includes people with Iranian

descendance for example. The Dutch dominant stereotype of Asian people contains stereotypical characteristics of people with Southeast Asian descendance, for example depictions of eyes with two small stripes (NOS Nieuws, 2022). In this sense, people of Asian descent are racialized in a homogeneous way. Though, people with Iranian descendance aren't considered Asian in the Dutch context, and probably aren't experiencing a shared racialization. Therefore, this tenet overlooks the diversity of Asian communities in the Netherlands

The fifth tenet, **intersectionality**, helped in understanding how different positionalities influence the perception and experience of racism (Kim-Bossard, 2022). When I experience racism and talk about it, I feel like I have to bridge across differences, because I know both sides of the coin. Moreover, it became clear that the owners, the son, and I all experience and process racialization differently. Also, there was a difference in the ways in which the white younger and older employees perceived and were able to understand racism. For example, the male owner can barely speak Dutch, and can therefore not always sense he is being racialized.

Story, theory, and praxis form the sixth tenet of AsianCrit. The voices, lived experiences, and agency of Asian Americans should be leading research (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). This approach highly corresponds with the way in which this research is conducted. I intend to tell the story and lived experiences of snack bar and eatery/pub employees in this thesis, by doing fieldwork in my own community, which offers an alternative to dominant white, European epistemology (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Lastly, **commitment to social justice** is the seventh tenet. AsianCrit wants to aim for the end of all systems of oppression, which is why specific experiences and histories of Asian communities are also important to acknowledge (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Terms like "coalition", "collective liberation", and "bridging work" inspire me to establish understanding and support across differences. One moment during the fieldwork felt emotional and beautiful to me. It was on March the 18th, Saturday afternoon, after the elderly people had finished the Chinese-Indonesian food, when the male owner came outside of the kitchen to present himself as the cook. The elderly people gave him a really loud applause and it felt very warm and welcoming to me. Therefore, this moment evoked feelings of healing, comfort, safety, and togetherness for me.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I know now that once I longed to be white.
How many more ways? you ask.
Haven't I told you enough?
- *Nellie Wong (in: Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2021)*

I started to write this autoethnography to bring attention to the reasons why I, and many others, used to look in the mirror and wish they were white, and not from Asian descent. I hope this research makes clear that it can be the most subtle racist incidents, which sneak into your head and make you feel inferior and shameful about yourself. I remember an old classmate of mine, who used eyelid tape to make her eyes look like western eyes. I hope that eventually it will not be needed anymore to hide your true and beautiful self, and that we can all be free.

5.1 Asian critical contributions to critical race theory

The first sub question I aimed to address in this thesis, was: *"How can an Asian critical theory approach contribute to broadening the field of critical race theory?".* Firstly, an Asian critical approach as addition to the critical race theory field contributes to a more holistic and thorough understand of racialization and white supremacy, because people with Asian descendance experience different and specific forms of oppression and racialization. An example of the racialization process of the first tenet **Asianization**, is the stubborn model minority stereotype people of Asian descent experience (Wu, 2014). People with Asian descendance are seen as hardworking and obedient minorities, as a result of which their stories with racism can become unheard or are perceived as not deserving attention. Moreover, the third tenet of AsianCrit, **(re)constructive history**, showed how the silencing of voices of people with Asian descent resulted in the erasure of their collective history. In this, an AsianCrit approach stimulates the re-writing of histories and including the stories of people of Asian descendance.

5.2 Contesting the Netherlands' identity

The second sub question: *"How does lived experiences of employees working in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub contest the Netherlands' identity as a liberal, colour-blind and anti-racist country?"* was researched by comparing the literature review on the Dutch discourse to the lived experience of employees from the participant observation. The phrasing of the Dutch discourse of being liberal, colour-blind and anti-racist is derived from Wekker (2016). The Netherlands is commonly known as tolerant and welcoming towards racialized

others, but this is in contradiction with reality (Van Dijk, 1993). This view originates in the history of the Netherlands, because Jews and Catholics would go to the Netherlands to have the freedom of practicing their religion (Weinier, 2014).

The lived experiences of employees working in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub show that customers regularly express racist comments towards employees with an Asian descendance. Employees get laughed at because of their accent, or encounter food-related slurs. Moreover, I experienced that I needed to be "the bridge" between especially white people and people of Asian descent. This shows how the Netherlands is not particularly anti-racist. Also, the two white older employees weren't able to understand why the racist incidents I mentioned were racist. This has to do with the model minority, in which people of Asian descent are among other things seen as politically nonthreatening. This prevents their stories from taken seriously. Furthermore, a homogenization of cultures was perpetuated when Chinese-Indonesian food is understood as only Chinese.

5.3 Placing anti-Asian racism in Dutch national debates on racism

The central research question in this research was: *"In what ways does anti-Asian racism experienced in a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, snack bar, and pub reflect national debates on racism in the Netherlands?"*. National debates on racism in the Netherlands used to deny the existence of race and racism (Essed, 1991; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Essed & Nimako, 2006). Instead, ethnicity is often used to name cultural differences (Weiner, 2014). The formal apology December 2022 from Prime Minister Rutte about the Netherlands' history of slavery shows that the Dutch debate on racism is shifting from denying racialization to acknowledging the historical roots racism has and what part the Netherlands played in that. However, still in 2020 Rutte dismissed institutional racism as a term as "sociological jargon". Though, the child benefits scandal in 2021 stirred up Dutch debates on institutional racism, because the Dutch tax service for years discriminated mostly people of colour. Additionally, the NCDR was put in place in October 2021 to counter discrimination across five governments. However, this organization still works within the political system to tackle discrimination and racism (Darroch, 2023).

Regarding national debates on anti-Asian racism, recently there were a few news articles on anti-Asian racism, and Asian activist organizations try to put it more on the political agenda (Bos, 2022; Van den Berg, 2020; Asian Raisins, n.d.; NOS Nieuws, 2022). Also, in November 2022 a documentary about anti-Asian racism was aired on public television. However, it didn't get many views because it was aired just before midnight (Mazereeuw, 2022).

The anti-Asian racism, or maybe the anti-Southeast Asian racism experienced in the snack bar, Chinese-Indonesian eatery, and pub reflects that anti-Asian racism in the Dutch context is not a widely known phenomena and that it is even still denied to a certain extend. Especially white older employees and white customers tend to dismiss experiences with racism. Therefore, these experiences reflect the invisibility of anti-Asian racism in the wider racism debate in the Netherlands, but don't reflect the recent anti-racism actions the Dutch government took through the NCDR for example.

5.4 Discussion

The theoretical foundation of this research lies in the field of critical race theory and specifically in Asian critical theory. For a long time, Asian voices and experiences in critical race theory were underrepresented. This is noticeable because most sources date from 2022, sparked by the increasing Asian hate and violence as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, most publications focus on the field of Education, and on the US context (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Saito & Li, 2022; Kim-Bossard, 2022; Qin et al. Colomer, Yu & Cole, 2022; Kim, 2022). Therefore, this thesis contributed to AsianCrit scholarship, and brought nuance to it by writing about experiences of people with Asian descent living in the Netherlands. Moreover, my insider/outsider position as an adoptee from China adds an extra layer to these nuances. This position served as an advantage and disadvantage at the same time during the participant observation I conducted. On one side, I could access specific data others wouldn't be able to see or understand. On the other side, trying to form bridges between different cultures and within myself can be mentally and physically tough. Though, I mostly see my position as a vantage point to raise awareness about anti-Southeast Asian racism in the Netherlands.

Autoethnography is often accused of being therapy for the researcher. Notwithstanding, my lived experience and that of others are anchored in and guided by the AsianCrit framework I laid out in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the collaborative potential between AsianCrit and autoethnography (Teo, 2022) was validated in the analysis chapter. Here, the sixth and seventh tenet of AsianCrit, **story, theory and praxis** and **commitment to social justice**, fitted well into the engagement of autoethnography with politics of all levels. By this I mean that autoethnography is a balancing act between the personal and political, which serves as fruitful ground for change and social justice (Teo, 2022; Tomaselli et al., 2008).

This research showed that the Asian communities in the Netherlands are very diverse, and that the stereotyping named in the AsianCrit framework doesn't apply to all these communities. Therefore, my findings showed that the term anti-Asian racism is still a container

concept for racialization experiences of people with Asian descendance. Instead, a term like anti-Southeast Asian racism should be used to specify and correctly name the racism experienced in this research. Furthermore, because most research centred around AsianCrit is written in the field of Education and about the context of the US, I would suggest further research to broaden the field and use AsianCrit in other contexts, such as the Netherlands. This would benefit the current invisibility of Southeast Asian voices in the Dutch racism debate, a gap which this research hopes to fill.

5.5 Concluding remarks

While thinking about an appropriate way to close this research, I wrote this short poem to express that the work is not over, and we are not there yet.

The world is different now, they say

Fancy "Inclusion and Diversity" departments are installed.
Rutte acknowledged the existence of institutional racism
and apologized for the Netherlands' role in slavery.

The world is different now, they say
But how come Black friends are still denied at clubs?
How come we need to explain "Hanky Panky Shanghai" isn't Mandarin
and defend ourselves for speaking out against racist jokes?

The world is different now, they say
But how come we are still complimented for being exotic?
How come we need to explain we are not all made in China
and want to disobey when obedience is expected from us.

You tell me, how come?

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