

# “Transatlantic Cross-Pollination”: 30 Years of Dutch Feminist Theorizing on Race and Racism

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## ABSTRACT

The article provides an overview of theorizing on race and racism within Dutch feminist scholarship since the 1980s. In analyzing the scholarship, close attention is paid to the role scholarship from the United States has played in the development of intersectional theorizing in the Netherlands. In line with professor

Gloria Wekker’s characterization, I show how the transatlantic exchange of ideas in women’s and gender studies has been a fertile “cross-pollination.” Dutch scholars have been inspired by the work of US scholars of color, but have also adapted and translated those concepts to address the specificities of Dutch racism.

In her inaugural lecture as the first professor in the field of “Gender and Ethnicity” in the Netherlands, professor Gloria Wekker referred to the work of the Caribbean American poet Audre Lorde as a great source of inspiration for her own scholarship (“Nesten bouwen”). The title of Wekker’s address, “Building nests in a windy place,” is a citation from the poem “Portrait” by Lorde. For Wekker, this quote captures the difficult situation of black, migrant and refugee women in Dutch society in general, and in the academy in particular. Like Gloria Wekker, many Dutch feminist scholars and activists of color have been inspired by North American and British theorists of color (Sterk; Captain and Ghorashi). The work of African American scholars like bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins and others, provided Dutch feminist scholars with tools and concepts that helped them to address the exclusion that women of color faced in the feminist movement, as well as within a gender studies context. Helma Lutz and Gloria Wekker described the impact of the work of feminists of color from North America and the UK as inspirational because it helped in recognizing that the hurdles faced by black, migrant and refugee women in the Netherlands were “not a unique Dutch problem: this was a problem that black, migrant and refugee women in the Western world shared, and the problem was called *racism*” (36, translation mine). At the same time, Dutch scholars have taken up the concepts and theories offered by US scholars, and adapted and translated (both in a literal and a figurative sense) them to their own local context. It is in this sense that Gloria Wekker characterized the transatlantic exchange of ideas in women’s and gender studies as a fertile “cross-pollination” (“Eén vinger”).

In this article, I provide a brief overview of the theorizing on race and racism that has been developed within Dutch feminist scholarship since the 1980s. In analyzing the debates, I will pay close attention to the role US scholars and concepts have played in the development of Dutch theorizing: the transatlantic cross-pollination that my title refers to. I first offer a brief overview of the development of the thinking on race and racism within feminist studies in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> Next, I will go into some of the conceptual issues that are at stake in these discussions. First of all, I discuss the terminology of *zwart* [black] and *zmv* [black, migrant and refugee women] that was developed by the black women’s

movement and black scholars in the Netherlands. Secondly, I reflect on the tendency to use the term *etniciteit* [ethnicity] rather than *ras* [race] in the Dutch scholarship. I close by reflecting on the contemporary state of affairs in Dutch feminist theorizing on race and ethnicity, on the basis of my own experiences as a white feminist student and researcher in gender studies in the 2000s and 2010s.

Before delving into the material, a disclaimer of sorts is perhaps appropriate: the reconstruction of, and reflection on, the debates on race and racism within Dutch feminist scholarship that I offer here are necessarily partial. They are partial because of my choice to focus on academically oriented texts (rather than, for example, activist texts), because I rely on the written material and documentation that I was able to access, and because I cannot give a comprehensive account in this limited space. But it is also necessarily a partial perspective because I approach these debates from a very particular angle: looking back on the preceding debates as a young white Dutch scholar in 2014. My account of the scholarly debates on race and racism cannot be disconnected from my personal trajectory of coming to grips with how whiteness and white privilege have shaped my own life and my voice within gender studies. I see the work of addressing racism and exclusions within the feminist movement and within feminist scholarship as a shared responsibility—not one that should rest solely on the shoulders of racialized women. It is in this spirit that I will discuss the important work that has been done by scholars of color (as well as white scholars) in addressing questions of race and racism in Dutch feminist scholarship. In the same spirit, I will also look forward at the work that still has to be

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1. With the terms “feminist studies” and “feminist scholarship,” I primarily refer to scholarship and theorizing that takes place in the disciplines of women’s studies and gender studies. In the Netherlands, the term *vrouwenstudies* [women’s studies] was more common in the 1980s and 1990s, while currently the term “genderstudies” is more used. This transition is reflected, for example, in the change of name in the Dutch journal *Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies* to *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* in 1999. The term “feminist studies,” serves as an umbrella term for scholarship in women’s studies and gender studies, without privileging one term above another. In addition, I prefer this term because it allows to include feminist academic work that was not necessarily conducted or conceptualized within the discipline of women’s studies or gender studies. For instance, I count the work of Philomena Essed on everyday racism as an important example of feminist scholarship on race, while recognizing that Essed’s affiliation is with critical race studies rather than with gender studies as a discipline.

done. First, however, I will contextualize the origins of theorizing about race and racism in the Dutch feminist context.

### A Brief Chronology

In the Netherlands, the debate about racism in the women's movement and within women's studies started in the early 1980s. At the *Winteruniversiteit Vrouwenstudies* [Winter University of Women's Studies] held in Nijmegen in 1983, a group of black women protested against the marginalization of black women in the program, where topics related to black women were relegated to the thematic focus of "non-western cultures," which contained the subtheme "foreign women in the Netherlands." The black Dutch activist and scholar Troetje Loewenthal characterized this as a "total segregation between white and black women." She argued that the program was the product of an ethnocentrism, and a sign of an unconscious "framework in which the white culture is superior and the black inferior, so inferior that you do not have to take it seriously" (11, translation mine). At the Winter University, black women formed a separate group to discuss the issues they faced as black women in a white environment, including the environment of women's studies and the women's movement.

Troetje Loewenthal's speech at the Winter University was later published in the *Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies*, under the title "The White Tower of Women's Studies." With this title, Loewenthal was referring to the well-known characterization of the university as an "ivory tower": exclusive and excluding. Her play on the phrase indicated that the general exclusionary character of academia was reproduced within women's studies as well, and that it was directly related to *race*. Because of a lack of reflection on racism and racial hierarchy, the domain of women's studies remained a white tower, a discipline characterized by the unacknowledged whiteness of its practitioners that seeped into the knowledge that was produced. Loewenthal posited that the systematic exclusion of non-white women meant that the knowledge produced in women's studies was not only severely limited, but also explicitly racist (17).

Loewenthal's publication led to a debate known as “On the Color of Women's Studies” in the *Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies*: an exchange between on the one hand Troetje Loewenthal and Kamala Kempadoo and on the other hand Yvonne Leeman and Sawitri Saharso (Leeman and Saharso; Loewenthal and Kempadoo; Leeman and Saharso *Verbroken*).<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, these debates received a new impulse with the establishment of the network for “inter-ethnic women's studies” called “NIEUWS” (*Netwerk Inter Etnische Vrouwenstudies*) in 1993. This network brought together students, researchers and teachers in women's studies, and culminated in a conference held in 1996 in Amsterdam (Botman). The department of women's studies at Utrecht University (*Vakgroep Vrouwenstudies Letteren*) invited influential feminist scholars of color from the US to the Netherlands. For instance, bell hooks was a visiting scholar in 1992.

In the early 2000s, the term “intersectionality” was introduced into the debate by scholars such as Helma Lutz and Gloria Wekker (Wekker and Lutz; Lutz *Zonder blikken*; Wekker). The concept of intersectionality was developed by the African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who used the term to conceptualize the simultaneousness and interdependence of inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and other factors. The Dutch translation of the concept, *kruispuntdenken*, [crossroad-thinking] is based on the metaphor of the traffic intersection that Crenshaw employed to make clear why having attention for multiple forms of discrimination is crucial. In the seminal article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” Crenshaw suggested that “[d]iscrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them” (Crenshaw 149). It is from the image of a black woman injured at a traffic intersection, and the inability to distinguish whether the injury was caused by sexism or racism, that Crenshaw derives the term *intersectionality*. In addition to the creative translation of

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2. “Om de Kleur van Vrouwenstudies.” For an overview and analyses of these debate, see Pattynama; Sterk.

intersectionality as *kruispuntdenken*, more literal translations such as *intersectionaliteit* and *intersectionalisme* are also common.<sup>3</sup>

From the 2000s until the present, intersectionality became the favored concept to theorize the connection between gender and race/ethnicity and the importance of an anti-racist perspective in women's, gender and feminist studies. Helma Lutz even referred to it as a paradigm shift within women's studies (*Framing Intersectionality* 12). Gloria Wekker, whom I have already mentioned in the opening of this article, has consistently put intersectionality at the foreground of her work. In the inaugural lecture to her appointment as the first professor of "Gender and Ethnicity" in the Netherlands, Gloria Wekker emphasized that "concentration on one set of processes at a time does not do justice to the complexity of reality. Gender and ethnicity co-construct each other, they are at work simultaneously: gender is always filled with ethnic meaning and ethnicity is always already gendered. Only a complex set of tools is able to address the complex questions that we are faced with" (Wekker 31, translation mine). The edited volume *Caleidoscopische visies: de zwarte-, migranten- en vluchtelingen-vrouwenbeweging in Nederland* [Caleidoscopic Visions: The Black-, Migrant-, and Refugee- Women's Movement in the Netherlands] was crucial in bringing together scholarship on racism by feminist scholars of color, and disseminating the theorizing on intersectionality (Botman, Jouwe and Wekker). In the early 2000s, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism emerged as important topics for feminist scholars, particularly in the context of the approval of the widespread anti-Islam rhetoric by mainstream feminist voices in the Dutch public debate.<sup>4</sup>

Within this tradition of feminist scholarly attention for race and racism that I have briefly outlined here, several themes of discussion emerged. I will go into two conceptual issues in the following sections, starting with the question of Dutch language terminology.

### **Developing Dutch Terminology: *zwart* and *zmv***

The women who first protested against the whiteness and racism within the women's movement and women's studies identified themselves as

*zwart*: black. In the Netherlands, the term *zwart* was introduced as a political term: a term that should not be understood as referring to skin color directly, but instead as a term that would unite all those who are racialized and subjected to racism. At the Winter University in 1983, Julia da Lima defined the target audience of the term as follows: “With the term black women I mean women from the former and current colonies of the Netherlands, and all women that are called foreigners, *allochtoon*,<sup>5</sup> non-western, Third World, etcetera by white people” (Da Lima in Botman and Jouwe 2001, translation mine). In other words, the term black was meant to unite women with very diverse backgrounds and experiences of racism, such as Afro-Caribbean, Turkish, and Indonesian women. As Loewenthal and Kempadoo articulately phrased it: the term “doesn’t differentiate in terms of ‘bad’ or ‘worse’ [experiences of racism], chocolate colored or white as honey, Islamic or Catholic” (Loewenthal and Kempadoo 81, translation mine). Similarly, in the 1993 edited collection *Vrouwenstudies in de cultuurwetenschappen*, an interdisciplinary introduction for students in the field of women’s studies, the literary scholar Pamela Pattynama emphasized that the term *zwart* should rather be understood as expressing a shared *condition* than any objective characteristic. She wrote: “those who take up the black position in the western black/white thinking stand outside of the center of power, are objectified and subjected to white norms and values” (“Het dubbele zelfbewustzijn” 159, translation mine). Pattynama thus conceptualized *zwart* as a relational term that emerges in a context of a white norm, and in resistance to that norm.

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3. More recently, the specific metaphor of the traffic intersection has been criticized by scholars who argue that it does not capture adequately the fundamental intertwinedness and co-constitution of the different forms of discrimination: the metaphor still implies that there is something distinct known as “racism,” “sexism,” or “colonialism,” that subsequently meet at a crossroads (Carastathis; Garry; Nash). Perhaps the use of more literal translations such as *intersectionaliteit* in Dutch should be understood as part of that effort of getting away from the specific metaphor of the traffic intersection.
  4. For example, the editor of the feminist magazine *Opzij* publicly expressed that she would not employ any women wearing a headscarf in her editorial team. For a discussion of this incident, see Lutz (“Zonder blikken of blozen”) and Midden. For work on Islamophobia in the Netherlands done by feminist scholars, see for example Ghorashi; Prins.
  5. A term introduced in the Netherlands to refer to people with a foreign background. For the origins and the racial connotations of the term, see Essed and Trienekens.

Many scholars emphasize that the political use of the term *zwart* in the Dutch context is indebted to the anti-racist struggles in the US and the UK (Botman et al.; Pattynama; Captain and Ghorashi). The civil rights movement and the development of a strong and proud Black consciousness in the US is an important source for the Dutch feminists of color. As Pattynama explains, “*Zwart* has its origin in the Afro–American tradition. American blacks were the first to take up the term “black” with a positive connotation in the sixties, to evoke political power and unity (Black Power) and a counter image of beauty (Black is Beautiful)” (“Een tekening” 113, translation mine). Although the term was inspired by the US anti-racist struggle, the Dutch term *zwart* was taken up in a different way than “black” in the US. As I noted, the term was used in a broad and inclusive way, intended to refer to all non-white ethnicities and racialized groups. In the US, the term black tends to be reserved for African American people, while the term “people of color” or “women of color” refers to racialized populations in a broader sense. In this early political definition of the term *zwart*, Dutch feminists thus drew on the US terminology, but also modified it to fit their context and goals. The broad and inclusive use of *zwart* in the Netherlands reminds of the way in which black feminists in the UK have used the term “black” to refer to both women of African and Asian descent.<sup>6</sup>

However, the broad use of the term *zwart* was also a subject of debate in the Netherlands. At an early stage, Yvonne Leeman and Sawitri Saharso criticized the choice of the term, arguing that *zwart* would not automatically or easily unite all women subjected to racism, and thus did not fulfill the function of identification (284). Proponents of the term *zwart* argued that this simply meant that the term still had to become better known (Loewenthal and Kempadoo 81). Nevertheless, looking back on the trajectory of the term *zwart* in 2001, Maayke Botman and Nancy Jouwe note that particular groups of migrant women, such as Turkish, Moroccan and Southern European women, did in fact have trouble identifying with the term. Despite efforts to disconnect the term from a reference to skin color, the connotation remained strong, which made it a term not everyone felt comfortable with. Botman and Jouwe conclude that “the term *zwart* can also facilitate mechanisms of exclusion and in the

Netherlands it never became the norm for non-white feminists to gather under the umbrella of *black feminism*” (18, translation mine).

In order to overcome this difficulty of identifying with *zwart*, the shorthand *zmv* was developed. *Zmv* stands for *zwarte, migranten en vluchtelingen vrouwen*: black, migrant and refugee women. The term was developed in the late 1980s (Captain and Ghorashi). Initially, the “V” simply referred to women [*vrouwen*]: black and migrant women. However, in the 1990s refugee women became more visible within the movement and the meaning of the initial V was adapted to explicitly include this group (Captain and Ghorashi 169). As Botman and Jouwe explain the term, *zmv* stands for “an analysis in which the differences, in ethnicity and migration history, as well as the commonality of the situation, a shared position of marginalization in Dutch society, are expressed” (Botman et al. 18, translation mine). In developing terms such as *zwart* and *zmv*, Dutch feminists of color have resisted the negatively loaded labels that are put on them by mainstream society, ranging from *buitenlander* [foreigner] to *allochtoon*. As I have shown, these Dutch language terminologies are in dialogue with the English language terms developed in the US and the UK, but also differ from them. The next issue I want to touch on also has to do with terminology, as it is the question which concept is central in the Dutch feminist anti-racist theorizing: race, or rather ethnicity.

### What is at Stake: Race or Ethnicity?

In feminist scholarship, race is generally approached from a social constructivist point of view. This means that race is seen as a product of racialization: a product of (ongoing) histories of colonialism, domination, exclusion and inequality. Thus, instead of referring to any “real” biological differences between groups, race is understood as referring to the very real social differences that these histories have created and continue to create. However, the use of the term “race,” even in a critical sense, can be controversial, because the deployment of the term

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6. See, for example, the reader *Black British Feminism* which unites both women of African and South Asian heritage (Mirza 1997).

can be understood as signalling a belief in essential, static, biological differences between people. This is the case in the Netherlands, where the use of term *ras* in the Dutch language inevitably recalls the history of biological racism. In addition, the memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War also play an important role in the hesitancy around discussing race. Gloria Wekker described the general consensus as follows: “According to the dominant discourse, ‘race’ does not have any meaning in the Netherlands since the Second World War, except as a term for types of potatoes and animals” (“Nesten bouwen” 30, translation mine). Wekker indicates that *ras* is generally understood as a term which does not hold any relevance any more, as an outdated and misguided term.

In this context, mentioning or making use of the term *ras* could be heard as asserting a belief in the existence of different races. It could be heard as a racist statement in and of itself. A recent example of this dynamic in the Netherlands is the 2013 piece by journalist Rob Wijnberg about the phenomena of *Zwarte Piet*. In this piece, Wijnberg argues that anti-racist activist Quinsy Gario is guilty of race-thinking, simply because he talks about blacks and made use of the slogan *Zwarte Piet is racism* [Black Pete is racism]. Wijnberg argues that the general Dutch population does not see a problem with the tradition of *Zwarte Piet*, exactly because they are free from this kind of racial thinking. In contrast to Gario, Rob Wijnberg declares himself to be a racial sceptic: someone who dismisses the relevance of the concept of race, recognizing it as a cultural misconception. The piece by Wijnberg is a typical example of a narrative of race- or colorblindness, in which the white author positions himself as someone who simply does not “see” color. In a paradoxical move, the person who confronts racism is understood as creating or perpetuating the very thing that they are trying to address.<sup>7</sup> In this case, it becomes clear the denial of racism (in this case the racism of the *Zwarte Piet* figure) is built on a denial of race as a meaningful category. Since race does not exist, this logic holds, *Zwarte Piet* simply cannot be racist. In the edited collection *Dutch Racism*, Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving have pointed out that the denial of racism is widespread in the Netherlands (10). They argue that “there is a sense of smugness and self-satisfaction about ignoring the

issue—racism is seen as an outdated topic that has no relevance in the 21st century” (11). This smugness is very explicit in the case discussed here, where the author positions himself as being beyond the outdated race-thinking.

The example above powerfully illustrates how the mainstream consensus in the Netherlands that race does not exist can make it difficult to confront, theorize and analyse racism and racialization.<sup>8</sup> As Gloria Wekker points out, despite the widespread taboo on discussing race, “‘race’/ethnicity forms a fundamental but invisible and almost unspeakable organizer of life in the Netherlands, to such an extent that our knowledge, disciplines in the academy, and our daily lives, are organized according to lines of ‘race’/ethnicity” (“Nesten bouwen” 30, translation mine). Wekker writes of an invisible and unspeakable organizer of life, pointing out that the denial of the relevance of *ras* has not undone racism, but instead has made the frank discussion and tackling of it difficult. Given this context of a widespread societal taboo on the term *ras*, it is not surprising that Dutch feminist scholars have been hesitant to make use of the concept. Instead, the term *etniciteit* [ethnicity] is more often used than the term *ras*. The terminology of *etniciteit* reflects mainstream societal discussions and it follows the vocabulary that is most often used to talk about racism and differences between population groups. When the term *ras* does appear in texts of Dutch feminist scholars, it is often in the context of quoting or discussing the work of US scholars or British scholars, where this concept is used. For example, in a 1994 text, Mieke Aerts and Sawitri Saharso mention *ras* when discussing the work of Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval–Davis, but when they talk about the Dutch context, only ethnicity is mentioned (Aerts and Saharso). When Dutch feminist scholars do make use the term *ras*, they have to carefully point out that

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7. Sara Ahmed has written powerfully about how addressing a problem can become heard as creating a problem—or being a problem. See: *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, and “The Problem of Perception.”

8. The mainstream discourse that positions race as irrelevant is not particular to the Netherlands. Fatima el-Tayeb powerfully described the broader European distancing from “race” and “racism” in her book *European Others*. In the US context, this denial of race in order to distance from racism is often referred to as the myth of “post-racialism.”

they understand it as a social construct. One way of signalling a critical distance to the term is by putting the term between quotation marks: “*ras*.” We can see this at work in the quote by Gloria Wekker above.

The conceptual distinction between the race and ethnicity is not often reflected upon in the Dutch feminist scholarship. Most scholars end up working with both terms, talking sometimes about race, and sometimes about ethnicity. An example of a critical use of *ras* in conjunction with *eticiteit* is found in a report on the experiences and identity formations of adoptees of color produced by a team of the Gender Studies Department at Utrecht University. The authors Iris van der Tuin, Gloria Wekker and Cecilia Åsberg and Nathalie Frederiks reflect on their use of the terms *ras* and *eticiteit*. The authors posit that *ras* is “a problematic concept with a problematic history” (15). They note that concept of *ras* refers to a hierarchical relationship:

In the use of *ras* as a structuring principle of white, black and colored groups of people on the basis of physical characteristics, the supposed inferiority of black and colored people and the supposed superiority of white people is always slumbering. Therefore, we use the term *ras* between quotation marks in this report, in order to refer to an outdated biological concept of racial difference that defines the Otherness of adoptees of color on the basis of external and supposed genetic characteristics. (15)

Here, the authors explicitly distance themselves from the concept of race. They make clear that their employment will be a critical one, intended to question power hierarchies rather than reproducing them. They express that they will use the term *ras* only when describing certain research and discourses on transnational adoption, while when speaking themselves, they prefer to use the term *eticiteit* (15). Nevertheless, in the report of 92 pages, the word *ras* appears 78 times, and the word *eticiteit* occurs 139 times. Although *eticiteit* is used twice as much, the number of mentions of *ras* is still very high given the length of the report. In my interpretation, this signals that once a sufficient critical distance to *ras* has been established, the term can productively be used to describe existing processes of exclusion and

discrimination of individual and groups on the basis of skin color, biology or culture. The careful introduction serves to explain the critical approach to the concept, and to prevent accusations of *rassendenken*. Nevertheless, the concept remains important for analyzing the phenomenon at hand, to such an extent that it appears almost on each page of the analysis itself.

### Conclusion: Learning About and From Dutch ZMV Feminists

So far, I have discussed the trajectory of thinking about race and racism in Dutch feminist studies, and analyzed some conceptual issues raised within this scholarship. In this last section, I want to discuss the importance of foregrounding the Dutch feminist scholarship on race, drawing on my personal experiences. I first became acquainted with feminist theorizing on race through reading black feminist scholarship from the US. In the gender studies classes I took on bachelor and master levels, classical texts such as bell hooks’ *Ain’t I a Woman* and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s “Demarginalizing the Margin” were on the curriculum.<sup>9</sup> Yet it was not until I entered the research master in Gender and Ethnicity at Utrecht University in 2011, that I read the first text by a Dutch feminist scholar on race and racism: Gloria Wekker’s “Building Nests in a Windy Place.” Although I gained a Master’s degree in Gender and Ethnicity in 2012, I graduated knowing very little about the *zmv* feminist movement or scholarship from my own local Dutch context. I think this trajectory will be familiar to others in feminist studies in the Netherlands. The topics of race and racism *are* on the agenda—but they are still marginal in the field, and usually tackled by reading and discussing US theories and texts.

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9. I studied feminist theory at Radboud University Nijmegen and Utrecht University, completing a (research) masters in philosophy in Nijmegen in 2011 and a (research) masters in ‘Gender and Ethnicity’ in Utrecht in 2012. While my experiences in feminist studies in the Netherlands are perhaps not representative for the field as a whole, I have been an active participant in (national) gender studies contexts since 2010. I offer these personal reflections as a starting point for further reflection and discussion on the future of Dutch feminist anti-racist scholarship.

Is this a problem? In my opinion, while it is extremely important and enlightening to engage with US black feminist scholarship, there is a potential drawback to the knowledge gap about the Dutch scholarly debates. We risk losing sight of the important work that has been done on race and racism by Dutch feminists of color—both within the academic and activist contexts. In addition, by focusing on US texts and theorists, (white) Dutch feminists run the risk of symbolically placing the questions of race and racism at a distance: as questions relevant for the context of the US, but not necessarily in the contemporary Dutch situation. Reading a text by a US scholar as a white Dutch feminist, I am not necessarily implicated myself: the particular examples that the author discusses may not hit as close to home, and I can distance myself from the problem because the cultural context is not my own.

In the introduction to *Caleidoscopische visies*, co-editor Maayke Botman makes a similar observation, as she reflects on her personal motivations that inspired the book project. She writes:

Under the influence of the work of feminists of color like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Anzáldua, Hazel Carby and bell hooks, my feminist side was revived. It became clearer that I hardly knew anything about Dutch black and migrant feminists... I no longer wanted to only draw from the work of American and British black and migrant feminists, but learn about and from the Dutch *zmv*-feminists. (Botman and Jouwe 19–20, translation mine)<sup>10</sup>

Botman indicates that the encounter with the writings of feminists of color from the US and Britain was an inspiration for the development of her own feminist awareness as a woman of color, but that she also soon felt a need to supplement this by engaging with the writings and activism of feminists of color of her home context, the Netherlands. The book *Caleidoscopische visies* was a first answer to that desire: by making

10. “Onder invloed van werk van feministen van kleur als Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Anzáldua, Hazel Carby en bell hooks werd mijn feministische kant nieuw leven ingeblazen. Het werd steeds duidelijker dat ik vrijwel niets wist van Nederlandse zwarte en migrantenfeministen... Ik wilde niet meer langer alleen putten uit het werk van Amerikaanse en Britse zwarte en migrantenfeministen, maar leren van en over Nederlandse *zmv*-feministen.” (19–20)

the knowledge, strategies and work produced by the *zmv* women’s movement in the Netherlands accessible to a larger audience, both inside and outside the academy.

As a woman of color, Botman describes her discovery and getting acquainted with the local Dutch *zmv* activism and theorizing as a Dutch feminist of color as a “warm homecoming” (Botman and Jouwe 20, translation mine). For a white Dutch feminist like myself, it might function instead as a confrontation with the way in which race and racism play a role in your own context. Rather than a warm feeling of arrival and recognition, this can be confronting and challenging. It forces you to examine your own assumptions and prejudices, as well as your own implication in structures of inequality. When reading the scholarship dealing with questions of race and racism in your own context, it is no longer possible to distance yourself from these questions.

An example that can illustrate this, is the case of *Zwarte Piet*. As a white Dutch child growing up with the holiday, I had an emotional attachment to the figure of *Zwarte Piet*. As a result, recognizing and acknowledging the racist aspects of the *Zwarte Piet* tradition was not that easy for me. It was through discussing the topic in a gender studies classroom that I started to become more critical. By that time, I had already read work by the US scholar bell hooks, and had developed a theoretical understanding of why feminism and anti-racism go together. Nevertheless, I had not made the connection to the *Zwarte Piet* tradition. You could say that I had not translated what bell hooks was saying about the US to the context of the Netherlands. My insight stayed on a theoretical level, and I was in the paradoxical situation where I thought I could both be a fan of bell hooks, and be a bit defensive about *Zwarte Piet*. It was by learning more about the history of Dutch colonialism and slavery, by engaging with scholarship on Dutch racism, and Dutch anti-racist feminist theorizing and activism, that I could not deny anymore that this situation was untenable. As a critical intersectional feminist I now reject the figure of *Zwarte Piet*, yet I also recognize that it was my own whiteness that made the racist character of the figure invisible and acceptable for me for such a long time. Learning from and about Dutch *zmv* feminists was crucial in this process of consciousness raising.

In this article, I have argued that Gloria Wekker's characterization of the relationship of Dutch feminist scholarship and US feminist scholarship on race and racism as a fertile cross-pollination is well founded. Dutch scholars have been inspired by and have made use of the activism and theorizing by African American feminists and other US feminists of color. Yet they have not taken up the concepts and theories uncritically or indiscriminately. Instead, they have adapted and translated them—both literally and figuratively—to fit their local context and to address specificities of Dutch racism. Remembering the work that has already been done and engaging with it in order to address the specificities of Dutch racism is crucial. In this article, I have attempted to take a step in that direction.

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