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Shu-Yi Huang

Dealing with everyday racism and discrimination: experiences of migrant Chinese mothers in the Netherlands

Abstract

Based on in-depth interviews and participatory observation, this paper aims to reveal how first-generation Chinese immigrant mothers deal with every day racism and discrimination inside and outside the private domain in the daily situation in the Netherlands. Based on data collected from my doctorate project, this article concentrates on the individual capacity and resilience of mothers to help their children to combat, resist and negotiate racism that they experienced.

Introduction

Generally speaking, a racist encounter must be defined or be recognized as a case related to racism first; it is possible then to become a case for the social worker to deal with. However, for minority groups in the Netherlands, such as Chinese migrants, the denial of racism is the biggest hurdle for them to report the issue. Social workers can only assist to their clients when the worst scenario has occurred. This paper focuses on how first-generation Chinese immigrant mothers deal with everyday racism and discrimination happened to their children and themselves, particularly in educational institutions.

Materials for this article were collected from my doctorate project of first-generation Chinese migrant women's motherhood practice experiences in the Netherlands. The material includes in-depth interviews and participatory observation (Liamputtong 2010). In this research, some interviewees came from informal snowball sampling, some were picked up in the restaurant where they are working, and still others came from an advertisement I displayed on the notice board of Chinese grocery stores. All the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The language was a mixed use of Dutch, English, Mandarin and Cantonese.

The knowledge and conception of Dutch racism towards Chinese persons in this study is a novel epistemological contribution by bottom-up voices, which are seldom heard or studied in the Netherlands. For the frontier social workers, to combat racism against minorities, one needs to understand how its hierarchical and relational power is demonstrated and performed in real-life situations. It requires us to interrogate the cultural narratives of women who have less voice. I found that dealing with everyday racism and racism toward their children is a necessity in their motherhood practice as migrant women. Their reaction and reflection on Dutch society prove that the very power relation of everyday racism is not unidirectional. Thus, anti-racist response and the narratives women produced are key elements to analyze and conceptualize in immigrant motherhood studies in White dominant Western society.

Speaking out a problem without a name: Dutch racism

Racial europeanization & denial of racism

Broadly speaking, the definition of racism is the cumulative instantiation related to prejudice (Essed 1991, 2002; Barker 2002), arbitrariness (Said 2002) and power (Essed 1990) resulting in the inherent superiority to justify the right to dominance (Lorde 1984) which always leads to institutional inequality (Omi/Winant 2002). Within this unequal power relation, certain ethnic/racial groups are defined as inferior to the dominant ethnic group because of their different cultural origin (Wekker 1995). Racism is a kind of constructed discourse which routinely reproduces itself within different forms¹, it convinces and legitimates stereotypes and prejudice of a racial minority among a white majority, which results in justification of right wing oriented policy implementation. According to Henriques et al. (1984 in Bacchi, 1999, p. 94) it is common in the West that whenever the problem is seen to be racist, it will immediately be reduced to a kind of personal attitude of the perpetrator, or as an individual aberration of the perpetrator which suppresses recognition of the institutional and structural dimensions of discrimination (ibid., p. 94).

It is argued that due to the German occupation of the Netherlands during War World II and given the circumstances of the Jewish Holocaust, talking about and discussing racism in the Netherlands became a taboo (Essed 1990; Wekker 2015). According to Wekker (2009, p. 72), surrounded by this social atmosphere, whoever mentions race was considered as highly uncivilized and a disgrace since WWII. From the Dutch government to

the mainstream media and academia (Essed/Trienekens 2008), people cautiously avoid using the term “race” (Wekker/Lutz 2001).

The denial of racism not only happened in the Netherlands but also in most of Western Europe (Zick et al. 2008; Van Dijk 2002). As Van Dijk argues, it is a major strategy to disclaim antiracist criticism. Unlike the United States in the 1960s, Europe never had large scale ethnic minority civil rights movements, and hence European states generally did not consider themselves as immigrant countries until the very late 1980s or 1990s. Ethnic minorities of the 1960s and the 1970s from outside the EU were seen as temporary sojourners, so their progeny is still very often considered as outsiders, who encountered institutional racism in everyday life, i. e. education, housing, employment and health insurance. In short, the denial of accepting the fact that European states are in-immigration countries not only resulted in institutional racism in many facets but also sustained the state’s power to an often arbitrary categorization of ethnic minorities for its political interest (Zick et al. 2008, p. 234). Moreover, it has been argued that there is a passive tolerance of racism in Western Europe (Essed 2002, p. 183). Recently, Dutch racism, as Essed and Hoving (2014, p. 13) argue, is transformed from a “carefully fabricated image of tolerance” in the 20th century to the “right to offend” in the 21st century. This trend is precipitated especially by rightwing, anti-Muslim Dutch politicians such as Pim Fortuyn, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders, who claim that their freedom of speech (Article Seven of the Dutch Constitution) is more important than Article One (freedom of religion). This kind of starkly explicit and open public discourse made “native Dutch citizens feel entitled to make racist remarks without excuse or introduction” (ibid., pp. 17–18), which means native Dutch people can express their dislike and hostility towards any non-Dutch because it is protected by law. The phenomenon of the “right to be racist” is speeding up racial Europeanization. Racial Europeanization excludes and silences the immigrants because of their non-European origin, religion and physical features. Particularly, in the Dutch context, racism is often seen as an individual problem (Essed 2002) but not a social issue. If this is the case, what are the circumstances that Chinese migrant women have to face and deal with on a daily basis?

“Allochtoon” vs. “autochtoon”: the construction of “otherness”

The denial of racism avoids using the sensitive word “race,” even though some controversial public policies were implemented or new terms were invented to avoid race sensitivities; for example, the invention of the binary

terms “*allochtoon*” and “*autochtoon*” which have been widely used from the 1980s until now. The racist connotations were either denied by the Dutch government or by the majority of white Dutch, thus the whole society is a variant of the sense of denial of racism (Essed 1991; Wekker 1995; Goldberg 2006; Vasta 2007). Simply stated, “*allochtoon*” means migrant, foreigner, alien or outsider, particularly used to refer to people or their parents originating from outside the EU, the non-white, the non-westerners. Opposite to “*allochtoon*,” “*autochtoon*” symbolically has a higher position. It stands not only for native, local but indicates a more favorable connotation. It is more valued and considered without problems (Wekker 2009, p. 71). Essed argues that the construction of Otherness through naming outsiders “*allochtoon*” justifies their second-class citizenship (Essed 1995, p. 52). It draws a clear line to separate those different from “us” and it sustains white supremacy in the Netherlands along with white identity of Europe (Essed *ibid.*, p. 53). In a similar tone, Anthias and Davis argue that the innovation of new words based on one’s blood lines to separate one from another in the framework of social hierarchy can be understood as a kind of “racial project” (Anthias/ Yuval Davis 2012, p. 5) which preserves ethnic exclusivity and privileges concerning the dominant ethnic group within the nation state.

The differentiations of “*allochtoon*” and “*autochtoon*” dichotomy not only exclude non-white and non-Western migrants from mainstream society, but are also arguably gendered. According to a study of the transformation of Dutch minority policies, Verloo and Roggeband (2007) argue that Dutch minority and integration policies have shifted from degendered to gendered policies (p. 286), in which migrant women, especially Muslims, are constructed as the most problematic “*allochtonen*” in Dutch society because of their cultural background and their backwardness, which obviously interfere with the Western democracy and women’s emancipation. While framing Muslim “*allochtoone*” women as the ultimate and urgent problems, the native “*autochtoone*” women are considered free from patriarchy and liberated. Elie Vasta (2007) also criticizes that the Dutch political discourse shift from multiculturalism to assimilation has revealed the pervasive institutional discrimination and cultural racism which will only deepen ethnic societal divisions further. Thus, Muslim migrant women are framed as a “problem” to be solved, because the contents of their motherhood are “dangerous” and “backward,” while the existing gender inequity among the native Dutch groups is dismissed and ignored.

In Dutch eyes, Chinese are considered as “*allochtonen*” and so are their descendants, even though some Chinese have already been living

here for over one century, speak no Mandarin and whose national identity is Dutch. Dutch attitude towards Chinese in Indonesia during the colonial period has its contemporary impact on Dutch prejudice towards Chinese. According to the Dutch historian Berteke Waaldijk (2003) in the 19th century, Chinese and the so-called *peranakan* (native born Chinese in the Dutch East Indies) were subdivided as “Foreign Orientals” basically referring to Arabs, Chinese and other Asians living in the colony (p. 103). Chinese were denied their rights because among the “Foreign Orientals” groups the Chinese were often considered as a danger to both the colonial rule and to the indigenous population (p. 107) because they seemed to be more loyal to China and not to the Dutch colonial state. Beside political concerns, the social representation of Chinese in the Dutch East Indies also reflected a certain racial prejudice. What was the social representation of Dutch Chinese then? Based on Mak Geertje’s research (2000), Chinese men were considered as abandoned, poor, ill, and potentially harmful to public health and morally dangerous to Dutch society in the 1930s. To sum up, the general attitudes towards Chinese either in the Dutch East Indies or in the Netherlands were less positive than before WWII. In the next section, I discuss the main theoretical framework of this paper.

Everyday racism approach

I use Essed’s “everyday racism” as the main theoretical framework. I find her approach very inspiring and helpful while interpreting and conceptualizing the daily experiences of Chinese women in dealing with racism. Moreover, I am more interested in how racism functions as a power mechanism, which has pervasive impacts on people’s ordinary life in various cultural dynamics. Thus, I am more aware of the political considerations and struggles behind the interaction and decision making while women deal with racist encounters.

Here I want to give a brief sketch of the definition of the “everyday racism” approach. According to Essed, “the concept of ‘everyday racism’ connects structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life. It links ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes and interprets the reproduction of racism in terms of the experiences of it in everyday life (1991, p. 2).” Essed points out that the “everyday racism” approach shows “the frequency (on the daily basis)” and the “systematical structure” of racism (1986, p. 24). Hence, this approach is to conceptualize and generalize individual experiences encountering racism of non-White people in the Western society in order to understand the practices of power

and White supremacy. Essed (2002) argues that everyday racism can be defined as a process, whereby (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations (p. 190).

While generalizing and conceptualizing “everyday racism” experiences of Chinese women, I focus on those common racist encounters and denial of racism most of the interviewees encounter with the Dutch society. As Anthias & Yuval-Davis point out, racist practices do not necessarily connect with institutional power, but its effect matters, for “these practices may exacerbate or even produce exclusions and subordinations which are coterminous with supposed ‘racially’ different populations” (1992, p. 13). In short, racist practices can be carried out by everyone in every facet of daily interactions between racial majorities and minorities. By applying the “everyday racism” approach, I can generate and conceptualize the characteristics and types of Dutch racism towards Chinese from women’s day-to-day life experiences. Moreover, I can elucidate how dominant social values work on women’s motherhood practices inside and outside the domestic domain and how women negotiate and interpret this power mechanism.

Dealing with everyday racism and discrimination

In this section, I provide a description and analysis of how a sample of Chinese mothers dealt with everyday racism and discrimination. Firstly, I discuss the everyday racism which Chinese women face routinely. Secondly, I focus on how racism affects women and their motherhood practices. After analyzing the narratives of women’s experiences, I argue that the motherhood practice of Chinese immigrant women, as expressed by my participants, serves as a method to combat, resist and negotiate racism and discrimination in a White dominant society.

“Mama kijk, Chinezen!”: everyday racism at school

At the age of five, children in the Netherlands begin with their compulsory education. Chinese are easily singled out in a White dominant environment by their physical appearance. As mothers, Chinese women inevitably engage with children’s scholastic performance and social events. She and her child become visible in daily interaction with school teachers, other

parents and their children. The title of this part “*Mama kijk, Chinezen!*” (Mama look, Chinese) is directly quoted from Gina’s narrative. She is a 54-year-old and has two teenage children, she is a middle-class fulltime housewife, married to a native Dutch man, living in a Dutch neighborhood. Ten years ago, on the first day of the school, she biked her son to the gate, a child saw them and said to her mom in a loud surprised tone, “*Mama kijk, Chinezen!*,” “as if we were some animals she had never seen.” “It was really a cultural shock (to me) that in the year 2003, people could still marvel while seeing Chinese,” Gina told me with unbelieving laughter. I chose the surprise of a little Dutch girl of seeing a Chinese person as a symbol to show that the presence of Chinese people in a White dominant society triggered the attention and reaction from the majorities. What happened next to the Chinese children after they were seen by the majorities?

Among the 38 interviewees, 29 mothers reported that their children suffered from different levels of racism at school², while only five teachers corrected and gave warnings to the offenders. This means that Chinese students must face racism and bullying as ethnic minority members at school. Most teachers either told the parents they did not witness the event or they denied that the offenses were racism. “They were just playing,” is the most common comment by teachers. Two mothers chose to transfer their children to the international schools eventually. For those women whose children are under the school age, six of them reported that they already had registered their children or that they were waiting in line to enter the international schools to prevent them from harm, because of other Chinese children’s racist experiences and the indifference of teacher towards racist behaviors.

While typing and coding all the transcriptions and narratives, I found one shocking and extremely sad truth that my Dutch profanities came from their experiences with everyday racism. I never knew that there are so many aggressive and hostile words people and their families can receive in everyday situations just because they are migrants. Here are the terms that children were sworn at in school or in the street, for instance, *poep Chinezen* (shit Chinese); *kut Chinezen* (Chinese cunt); *vieze Chinezen* (dirty Chinese); *ching-chang-chung* (a meaningless pronunciation which is used to mock Chinese³); *Chinees studeer varken* (Chinese study pigs); *loempia* (spring roll); *babi pangang* (Indonesian grilled pork). These negative terms range from interiorizing one’s race, degrading one’s preference for Asian food and one’s peculiar pronunciation. Verbal racist attacks are the most common form of bullying that Chinese encounter at schools. The

racist bullying is also gendered. For boys, the racist bullying often turns to physical violence. For girls, verbal racist bullying ends in sexual harassment or physical assault. I provide two cases to show that the severity of the denial of racism can result in serious harm to migrant children.

In the beginning of this chapter I used Gina's daughter's first day at school as an opening. Here I describe the experience of Gina's second son as an example. Gina's second son, Gimmi⁴, is one year younger than his sister. In 2004 Gimmi went to the same school as his sister; they were the only two Chinese children attending. Compared to his sister, Gimmi looks more Chinese in appearance. Since the first week, Gimmi reported several times being mocked or sworn at. Gina reported to the teachers about the racist verbal attacks of both children by emails or phone calls, or face-to-face. However, the teachers replied that it was nothing serious, just "children playing." Gina also told her Dutch husband that she wanted to transfer the children to the international school, but her husband insisted that children must stay at a local school to mingle with Dutch children. Her husband told her that children needed to learn how to deal with this matter by themselves and this was the Dutch way to teach children independence. Gina has no other way but to tell her children that they have to learn to talk back and, unless necessary, not to use violence to solve the problem. At first, her children just ignored the racist swearing. After his parents' encouragement, especially Gimmi started to talk back. However, talking back is very risky way for migrant students. One time, Gimmi was called at *poep Chinees* and *kut Chinees* during class break. Gimmi shouted back by *fucking vies Nederland* (fucking dirty Netherlands) but ended up by 6 to 10 students surrounding him in the corner and pushing and yelling at him. Fortunately, other students told the school teachers to intervene. About two days later, Gimmi was chased by the same students who always bullied him at school on the way back home on bicycles. They threw water balls at him and kept swearing at him with all kinds of unbearable slang. As soon as Gimmi arrived at the door, he jumped from his bike and slammed the front door. It happened to be a holiday for Gimmi's father, and while stepping down, he witnessed around 6 to 8 children throwing water balls and pebbles at his living room window shouting *poep Chinezen, fucking Chinezen*. After this event, Gimmi refused to go to school for a week, and he became very emotionally unstable. In the end, they transferred both children to the international school and they moved to a neighborhood in Eindhoven where more expat families live. Gimmi and his sister had to go through a one year treatment by a child therapist; the unstable and hostile emotion

towards school got controlled. But no one knows if there will be a negative impact on their adult lives.

Another example happened to Iris's daughter, Nikki. Iris is married to a Taiwanese man. She decided to bring both children to the Netherlands after 7 years apart from her husband. Before 2012, her husband lived and worked alone, and they thought that maybe it was time for children to try Dutch education and living abroad. However, things did not go very well. After three months studying in Dutch language schools, Nikki entered a local school. Nikki felt very frustrated at the beginning because of the language barrier. Her classmates often made jokes at her and she failed to make friends. The racist bullying did not take place at school but on the school bus. At first, some badly behaved boys touched or pulled Nikki's long black hair. Nikki was very frightened because she was taught at schools in Taiwan that you could not touch another person's body unless you got the other's consent. Nikki told Iris, and Iris emailed to the schoolteacher. The teacher said she was not on the school bus, so she did not know what happened exactly. Iris then asked to talk to the teacher who was on that school bus, the teacher told Iris that Dutch children are friendly and open so they would have some physical contact, which was good for Nikki to make friends. Things became more serious after the teacher told Nikki that touching was a way of Dutch students' to show goodwill and friendliness. Nikki told Iris that maybe this was a cultural difference. However, the teacher made a wrong judgment because of lacking racial and gender sensitivities. Two months later, Nikki screamed out loud on the school bus because she was touched on her breasts and was pinched on her crotch in the back seat. The school bus teacher immediately separated the perpetrators from Nikki and corrected their behavior. Iris could not believe that her daughter would suffer this pain in such a self-reported civilized country. Although Nikki had changed to a front seat next to the teacher of the school bus after the sexual assault, at the time I conducted the interview Nikki already went to another international school. Iris told me that both she and her husband were very upset and hurt by this event and by the teacher's carelessness. They consider moving back to Taiwan as soon as the company finds a successor.

The two cases show how severe the consequences can become because of the denial of racism. The majority of Dutch schoolteachers referred to in this study lacked racial and gender sensitivities thus, contributing to the consequences. Gina and Iris represent the relatively powerless migrant mothers. They reported racist bullying repeatedly not only once

to the schoolteachers but in vain. They tried to teach their children to assimilate to Dutch culture by talking back or by accepting physical touch as a symbol of friendliness, while letting their children suffer more harm. Their cases show an urgent requirement for training and re-education on racial and gender sensitivities for teachers by experienced social workers or other relevant personnel. In parallel to that, greater emphasis needs to be placed on teaching pupils to learn about respecting the diversities of sexuality/Gender since migrants from all over the globe will keep joining Dutch society because of globalization.

Dealing with everyday racism by pity and being above the racist

Most mothers told me that they teach their children to deal with racism by pitying the perpetrator. They think that this is the safest way so that their children will be not harmed by talking back but can also build their sense of confidence. Some Chinese mothers do not agree with the way that their Dutch husbands or in-laws teach children to talk back or fight back by giving the perpetrator a punch or a kick. They need to negotiate with their husbands and in-laws to stop their risky ways teaching their children to deal with racism. Chinese mothers must educate their Dutch spouses and in-laws by letting them realize that their children or grandchildren are not considered as majority Dutch people like them. Talking back or punching back can be a risk to her children's safety. In general, Chinese mothers do not suggest their children dealing directly with racism; instead they teach them to pity and to be above the racist.

The contradictory attitudes in dealing with racist encounters between Chinese mothers and their Dutch spouses and family members reflect the starkly real-life alterity because of racial differences. Chinese women in this study decided not to talk back or fight back at that moment because it could bring more humiliation and risk to oneself. Their decisions are out of careful calculation and from that, the Chinese women in this study showed how they have developed a unique life philosophy to reverse the negative emotion.

There is a necessary psychological shift to put oneself above the racist by pitying and laughing at their stupid and uncivilized behavior. Yolanda is a 70-year-old Taiwanese woman who married a Dutch man. They have been living in an upper class Dutch neighborhood for 40 years. In the 1970s, their daughter was the only half-Dutch half-Taiwanese student at school. Yolanda told me that her daughter was constantly being laughed and sworn at in school because of her half-White half-Asian

appearance. She constantly came home crying and this was what Yolanda taught her girl:

Don't you cry my daughter; in fact some Dutch people are like the frog living in a well. Their worldview is only Europe. They can only see the sky above their head. Now that the (public) transportation is so convenient, you can go to different countries in a very short time. You have to understand some people can only see themselves; their worldview is so narrow. Don't let their narrow-mindedness affect you; these people aren't as lucky like as to be born into a family with broader global perspectives. So, you must learn to be your own master, to be independent, then you can survive in any place (in the world). Before that, you need to cultivate yourself, don't let others beat you own with these boring discourses. What matters is your wisdom and knowledge.

Yolanda is very proud of her only daughter. She is now working as a doctor in Germany. From Yolanda's words, it is clear that she taught her daughter as a global person to combat racism by lifting her position beyond the Netherlands, beyond Europe, beyond race issues. Moreover, she looked upon those racists by pitying their fates with the narrow-minded worldview. Thus, what they thought and what they said are boring discourses which do not serve her daughter anything and which only mean that she has to study hard to be her own master.

I found the discourses on encouraging children to surpass racism by studying hard as well as pitying the racist are not only shared by middle-class mothers but also by their working-class sisters. For example, Wendy, a 51-year-old restaurant owner, has three male children. Her first son had a fight which cost the counterpart a tooth because this boy constantly harassed him physically and swore at him such as "ching-chang-chung" or "poep Chinees" at school. Fortunately, the schoolteacher witnessed the whole event, and the boy's parents apologized to Wendy. Back home, Wendy gathered all three boys together and disciplined them:

You have to realize the fact that Dutch people don't like Chinese. Your father speaks no Dutch and mother speaks only klein een beetje (a little). If you really made some serious trouble, that will be a big problem oh. Don't waste your energy fighting and being angry with idiots. How can you duiniutanqin? (Playing music to the cows) ... After that all of my children ignored those boring children.

Here one can see two themes that were also present in Wendy's narratives. First, telling children the truth that comes from the mothers' own perceived experiences of everyday racism. Wendy asked her children to not cause trouble for their parents by picking up fights with the perpetrator because of the language barrier, which also implies the relatively powerless social position by telling children the fact that Dutch people do not like Chinese. Second, she also shifted the position to a higher moral ground by teaching children to save their energy because you could not educate those stubborn people. Wendy used a Chinese classic four characters idiom *duin-iutanqin* (對牛彈琴) to persuade her children that it was no use reasoning to the persistent people, so they did not deserve your time and energy. In sum, when dealing with everyday racism at school, the Dutch teachers in this study kept their distance from this sensitive issue. They either denied students' hostile behavior as being racist or they lacked the knowledge and cognition on racism and sexism towards migrant students. Secondly, mothers often felt powerless to deal with children's experiences of everyday racism because of the general denial of racist attitudes of schoolteachers or even their Dutch spouses. Nevertheless, being migrants themselves, women often encounter everyday racism and from their own perception, the way Chinese mothers teach children to deal with everyday racism is to bring children's self-esteem to a higher moral position, to disgrace and pity those uncivilized and undereducated racists. This is a carefully calculated method to protect children from further direct (physical or verbal) confrontation at the moment of being discriminated against.

Everyday racism in the transnational family

In this part, I focus on everyday racism in the transnational family. By saying transnational family, I mean the family composed of a Chinese woman and a Dutch man with their children. It is not just in the public sphere that racism can occur, but also in the private. Comparing to the public everyday racism, on some migrant women, the private everyday racism has even more negative impacts. For example, in this study, of the 17 women who were married to Dutch husbands, three women reported that they felt discriminated against by their husbands or in-laws.

I mentioned Bonnie's experiences with the issue of the language education decisions in a book chapter "Bargaining between Husbands and Societies: The Obstacles and Difficulties of Chinese Mothers Teaching their Children Mandarin in the Netherlands" (Shu-Yi Huang 2014). Bonnie's husband declared his will by forbidding to use Mandarin anymore at

home without respecting Bonnie's feelings and opinions as a mother. As an immigrant spouse, Bonnie is oppressed by triple dominant powers, viz., racism, patriarchy and nationalism. She is deprived of her rights to make a decision on her children's language education by her husband, which can be seen as a patriarchal discrimination. The ideology behind the husband's action is supported by racism, which considers Mandarin and the mother's Chinese cultural background as useless and only the official language, Dutch, to be right and useful one for their children.

The second case is the confrontation resulting from cultural differences between the Dutch mother-in-law and the Chinese daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, the speech uttered by the Dutch side made her Chinese counterpart uncomfortable, and she felt she was being discriminated against. Because of the work of Fanny's husband, they often have to live in the Netherlands three months or four months annually, and they do not have their own house here. In order to save money, they sometimes live with their in-laws. Fanny's son is more Asian physically: his body is smaller and his eating habit is more Chinese-oriented. Contrary to this, Fanny's in-laws are typically Dutch; they only eat a warm meal once a day in the evenings. Breakfast and lunch are often simple and cold. Fanny and her husband forbid their son to eat junk food, such as coke, hamburgers, chips, artificial candy, concentrated juice or any fast food in Taiwan. However, every time Fanny's family comes to stay at the in-laws' house, they will prepare a lot of junk food for their grandson. Fanny tired several times to communicate with her in-laws by telling them that such food is not healthy for small children, but her mother-in-law took her action as deliberately distancing her son from his grandparents. Some misunderstandings occurred because of low language proficiency on both sides, and the atmosphere at home is somewhat tense. Fanny asked her husband to reason with and explain to his mother, but her husband asked her just to endure these trivial things and let his parents be happy since they only get the chance to be with their grandson once a year for a short period of time. But last summer Fanny told me she was pushed to her limit and decided that from then on they would only stay with her in-laws for one week and rent a temporary accommodation while staying in the Netherlands. The scenario occurred at the dinner table while Fanny and her family here were spending their holidays in her in-laws' house during the second week:

I was preparing the dinner in the kitchen then; my mother-in-law came to see what I was cooking. She saw me cooking rice in the pot and then she mur-

mured “rice every day, rice every day” twice. My husband was able to have a dinner with us on that day, then my mother-in-law first spoke some Dutch and then she grabbed my son’s arm and spoke in English “Why is my grandson so thin? Too much rice, no potatoes?” I felt that she didn’t want me to feed my son rice ... The second day, I bought a bag of potatoes for dinner and I found her cooking the rice. She has no clear standard and I really don’t know how to cooperate with her. I wonder if she would say the same words if I were Dutch?

Here we can see that Fanny is in a relatively lower position as a daughter-in-law in a transnational family. When contradictions and misunderstandings happen because of different eating habits, parenting style, and low language proficiency on both sides, Fanny’s Dutch husband asks her to keep calm and make his parents happy without trying to make things better or to attempt mutual understanding. He puts his family’s interests first, without supporting his wife. Fanny must face an uncomfortable environment by herself without breaking the surface harmony; however, those sarcastic words deliberately spoken in English to question her motherhood practice by her Dutch mother-in-law made her feel discriminated against. Fanny compared her own experience with other friends’; she told me that in general Dutch in-laws do not interfere with their daughter-in-law’s motherhood practice. They respect their decisions on childrearing but, Fanny does not feel this same respect from her mother-in-law.

This account points directly to the specific life style differences of two cultures. Since rice refers to Chinese and potato refers to Dutch, from Fanny’s mother-in-law’s speech, Fanny read the music beyond the melody, which means she got the offensive and hostile connotation by using the potato as a vivid metaphor to attack and question Fanny’s Chinese motherhood performance does not meet the anticipation of a Dutch mother-in-law. One can tell there is a hierarchy linkage between rice (Chinese) and potato (Dutch) in that question.

In the first part of this section, I discussed the everyday racism relating to motherhood practice that Chinese migrant women have to deal with. Not only outside the family, such as in schools, at the workplace or in shops but also at home. I found that the Chinese women in my study did not talk back or fight racism directly for safety concerns. They also taught their children not to risk personal safety in dealing with racism. They generally put themselves above the racism in their mindset and they perceive themselves as having a higher moral status than the racists have.

Conclusion

In this paper I made a short review of Dutch racism theories, the mass media representation of Chinese persons both in the Dutch East Indies and later in the Netherlands during the first half of the 20th century. The origin of Dutch racism is rooted in its imperial and colonial past. Its racial perception towards people of colour in overseas Dutch colonies is still consciously being reproduced by the state and the mainstream White society in every facet of life as a taken for granted ideology. After the Nazi occupation during WWII, the terms “race” and “racism” became taboo in public discourse. It only happens somewhere else in the world, but not here. In the Netherlands, “race” and “racism” no longer exist, they belong to the past. Nevertheless, the ideology of White superiority and dominance is still prevailing in the Dutch mainstream society, which considers non-White immigrants as outside intruders.

In the third section, I divided everyday Dutch racism experience apart from patriarchy and sexism. I elaborate how Chinese mothers deal with everyday racism and the way it affects their motherhood practice. I found that mothers often felt powerless to deal with children’s everyday racism at school because of the general denial of racism attitudes of schoolteachers or even the mothers’ Dutch spouses. The bullying situation became worse because of schoolteacher’s lack of multi-cultural sensitivities, and the social workers could only intervene when the racist bullying behaviors turned to violence or sexual assault.

Nevertheless, being ethnic minorities themselves in the Dutch society, the women in the study often encountered everyday racism both in the public and in the private domain. Based on their own perception of racism, the way Chinese mothers teach children to deal with everyday racism is to bring children’s self-esteem into a higher moral position, to disgrace and pity those uncivilized and undereducated racists. This is a result of careful calculation to protect themselves and their children from further direct (physical or verbal) confrontation at the moment of being discriminated against. After analyzing the narratives of women’s experiences, I argue that motherhood practices of Chinese immigrant women serves as a method to combat, to resist and to negotiate racism and discrimination in a White dominant society. The relationship between motherhood practice and racism in migrant women’s daily life experiences – both public and private – from different racial/ethnic groups are still needed to be explored and be recorded globally. From further empirical studies that build on this work, research can help to conceptualize the discourses on women com-

bating the racism and sexism and bridge a dialogue with other disciplines as well as giving voice to those involved.

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Annotations

- 1 Van Dijk concludes at least five forms of the denial of racism that the press generally quote to sustain and strengthen the racist discourses, viz., 1) positive self-presentation; 2) denial and counter-attack; 3) moral blackmail; 4) subtle denials and 5) mitigation. Please see Van Dijk, 1991, 1993 & 2002 in Essed & Goldberg.
- 2 Except for one mother who reported that her child was bullied outside the school, bullying often happened on the way to school or on the way back home. Because the perpetrators were her child’s classmates or senior schoolmates, I still consider that this case belongs to racism at school.
- 3 But the truth is there is no single Chinese term pronounced as ching-chang-chung.
- 4 To protect the privacy of the children mentioned in this chapter, pseudonyms are used.