

# The multicultural museum

## A history of multiculturalism and migration in the Amsterdam Museum

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## **Abstract**

*During the second half of the twentieth century the field of museum studies has changed significantly due to the emergence of the 'New Museology', post-colonial critique and cultural policies. Since then more attention has been paid to issues of representation and interpretation of museum display. These issues have moved on into the twenty-first century and were fuelled by the activity of terrorism and confrontations in multicultural societies. Cultural and religious conflict has always had an impact on the practice of museums. In this thesis I will pay attention to the question of how museums in the capital of Amsterdam (an important multicultural hub) are dealing with the notion of multiculturalism. I will link this with the new visions on museums from the 'New Museology'. Another question is which demands the government of the Netherlands poses regarding multiculturalism and addressing a diverse public in museums. Is multiculturalism in cultural institutions currently on the political agenda? And to what extent do museums in Amsterdam see multiculturalism as their task? In this thesis I will use the Amsterdam Museum as a case-study, considering the fact that it is the local history museum which should address the whole of Amsterdam's population.*

## Introduction

“The concept of a mixed society has for a long time been part of the terrain of liberalism. The idea of multiculturalism – meaning a belief that society should actively accommodate and support its cultural minorities – came into being in the 1970s, and the Netherlands, and Amsterdam in particular, led the way”.<sup>1</sup>

### Context: determination of multicultural issues in museums

Throughout the centuries museums have changed significantly and as more professionals became employed in museums, the more it led to museological critique. This resulted in rethinking and restructuring the museum practice. Nowadays museums, especially ethnographic museums, are promoting themselves as post-colonial institutions and are aware of how they have been influenced by and should respond to phenomena like globalisation and migration:<sup>2</sup> “Migration is anything but a recent phenomenon; it has a long history pretty much everywhere around the globe and is part of the “human condition”. The difference is, of course, that now more and more societies (or for that matter cities and museums) acknowledge – not without resistance- that they have been largely shaped by migration”.<sup>3</sup> What does this mean for museum practice? What is clear is that during the second half of the twentieth century museums have attempted to change their vision and policies: to open up to individual learning styles, subjective interpretation and the incorporation of multiple stories throughout collections and exhibitions.<sup>4</sup> More attention has been paid to museum display, believing it to function as a powerful agent in creating certain narratives that tell the visitors something about the world, its cultures and its people. No longer are museums considered as merely as places containing treasures and as places for education, but as important pioneers in the creation of knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

The new way of thinking about museums is often described as the ‘New

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<sup>1</sup> Russel Shorto 2013, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Boast. 2011, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ching Lin Pang, Joachim, Anja Dauschek, Paul van de Laar, Lieve Willekens and Leen Beyers 2014, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> An author who makes this very clear: Mary Bouquet 2012. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill(2000) also discusses this in her description of the post-museum.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Moser 2012, p. 22.

Museology', also described as the post-museum or new museum.<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that the changes that were taking place in museums during the second half of the twentieth century should be seen in a larger context: for instance, post-colonial thought has had its influence on museums as well.<sup>7</sup> It is also acknowledged that the museum public (partly influenced by these phenomena) has become more diverse. Thinking of how to deal with different publics is an ongoing question and the same goes for the issue of how to address different ethnic groups. The issue of a diverse public is a challenge for Dutch museums, because like many other Western-European countries, the country can be described as a multicultural society. The population of the Netherlands consists of many different people: different backgrounds, countries of origin, religions, sexual preferences, age, lifestyles and other differences. It is believed that cultural heritage can contribute to the relationship between countries and its citizens.<sup>8</sup> I believe this is especially important in multicultural countries where a term like 'identity' can become blurred.

The twenty-first century has been scarred by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and suddenly the pessimistic future perspective of Samuel Huntington as a 'clash of civilisations' became more realistic. In this vision ethnic and religious groups are standing opposite of each other, leading to a situation of hatred and devastation.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, these conflicts are not a new phenomenon and have also been explored in museum studies. An example is Flore Edouwaye S. Kaplan who discusses the importance of heritage in creating unity and identity. She illustrates her argument by examples on global scale: religious conflicts have for instance resulted in the devastation of the Bamiyan Buddha's in Afghanistan, war has resulted in the looting of important artworks during Nazi Germany and imperialism has led to the marginalized status of ethnic and religious minorities. These minorities are now often establishing own museums to 'get back their culture'.<sup>10</sup> Culture and heritage seem to be immensely important in the creation of (national) identity. Kaplan uses extraordinary examples, all part of larger developments and contexts, but I believe her argument could also be applied to multicultural societies on a national or regional level. All these tendencies

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Charman 2013, p. 1067.

<sup>7</sup> Bouquet 2012, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p. 187.

<sup>9</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, Lucia van Heteren, Chiel Kattenbelt and Kees Vuyk red. 2005, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> The relationship of heritage and identity is described throughout the article of Flore Edouwaye S. Kaplan 2011, p. 152-169.

(and many others) have resulted in a multicultural society under pressure.

When you look at reports on multiculturalism, it is often mentioned that the larger cities of the Netherlands contain the most immigrants. Generally, often a third of the city's population is a non-Western foreigner. These minority groups have settled down in certain neighbourhoods of these cities.<sup>11</sup> Migration waves have certainly changed the appearance of our larger cities significantly.<sup>12</sup> Cities can therefore be described as “laboratories of change”, in good as well as bad ways and due to the connectedness of migration and urbanisation, cities can teach us a lot about how to associate with foreigners.<sup>13</sup> Amsterdam is one of these laboratories; a city famed for its reputation as a tolerant city, which it has been for ages.<sup>14</sup> The city could be called an immigration city ‘par excellence’ and has been open for foreigners for centuries: Portuguese Jews, French protestants and German labourers.<sup>15</sup> Amsterdam is also very much a cultural city when it comes to museums and is home to the famous museums: *Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum, Stedelijk Museum* and also the touristic attraction of *the Anne Frank Huis*. I believe it would be interesting to see how museums in Amsterdam are dealing with their multicultural surroundings. Multiculturalism is still very much a challenge for museums since refocused attention has been paid to the representation of minorities and groups at the end of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century posed new challenges for politics and society, after the entrance of terrorism in everyday life. How are the museums addressing issues of differences, representations of cultures, religions and individuals? Can culture function as a bridge between these different ‘groups’ and how are museums trying to achieve the image of a multicultural museum?

#### Research: questions, hypothesis and methods

We have until now concluded that urban environments function as laboratories of change, especially when it comes to issues regarding multicultural society. In the Netherlands, Amsterdam is one of these urban areas where multiculturalism can be studied and it will be my focus point in this thesis. I want to concentrate on

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<sup>11</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, Lucia van Heteren, Chiel Kattenbelt and Kees Vuyk red. 2005, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Scheffer, 2007, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> Russel Shorto, 2013, p. 124-125. For a more general description see p. 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p. 12.

multiculturalism in museums and therefore Amsterdam seems the most logical choice: it contains many museums and other cultural institutions.<sup>16</sup> I strongly suspect that museums in Amsterdam will have to deal with a diverse public on a daily basis: its own inhabitants are already extremely diverse and in addition to the international popularity of the city.

I am especially interested in how Amsterdam Museums are influenced by multiculturalism and how they address this theme through their museum policies, collections and exhibitions. Maybe a more important question to ask is why Amsterdam Museums are dealing with multicultural issues: how do influential concepts as a new vision in museum studies, also known as the 'New Museology' mention the issues of representation and multiculturalism? What does the current cultural policy mention about appealing to a diverse Dutch public? Can we even speak of a general Dutch public? And then, what drives the museum to cater for a multicultural public; are they trying to live up to certain political aspirations, or does the Amsterdam Museum consider this multiplicity as its intrinsic task? And to what extent is Amsterdam an explicit example to explore multiculturalism in museums? Is the history of the city as 'tolerant' as its image suggests? All of these questions will be addressed in this thesis where I will ask myself the following question:

*How do Amsterdam museums address and deal with multiculturalism in their permanent collection, as well as the temporary exhibitions and to what extent does this notion of multiculturalism relate to larger contexts being the 'New Museology' and the Dutch cultural policy of the twenty-first century.*

This research question can be divided into two main questions: how do Amsterdam museums deal with multiculturalism? And how are they influenced by new tendencies in museums studies and by Dutch cultural policies?

I am very aware of the implications inherent to using these terms and concepts. The definition of 'multiculturalism' I will use throughout this thesis agrees with the one used by historian Russel Shorto (1959-): "meaning a belief that society should actively accommodate and support cultural minorities". This definition can be easily used in the

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<sup>16</sup> Veenman, red. 2002, p. 39.

description of 'museums tasks'.<sup>17</sup> Still, many authors have pointed out the danger of using a term like multicultural and mention plural would be a better word. However, the word multiculturalism is still used throughout academic and journalistic literature when it comes to describing western societies as well as the public of museums. In a Dutch research project, the author defines the term multicultural as multi-ethnic to clarify that he is speaking of different ethnicities as countries of origin. He considers it a more neutral term and less suggestive and generalising than multicultural.<sup>18</sup> I agree that this term suggests a more neutral position although I believe that we can never stay away from generalisation by using terms considering multiculturalism. A classification in terms of ethnicity is still a classification system and in museum studies a system such a system is always considered non-neutral and is always defined by the opinions, visions and preferences of the classifier.<sup>19</sup>

In this thesis I will research a case-study: the *Amsterdam Museum*. I chose this one because it is a historic, local museum concentrating on the history and present society of the city itself. Multiculturalism and tolerance being such important elements of Amsterdam, I believe the *Amsterdam Museum* will include those phenomena in their history of the city. They also want to address the whole society of Amsterdam. I could compare this to the situation of the founding of the National Historic Museum in the Netherlands, which eventually did not proceed. Instead of being a temple of national pride, the museum wanted to be self-reflective: "History cannot be presented as a story about the perfection of freedom". Stories of slavery for instance had to be included in the national canon, as well as migration history. Journalist Paul Scheffer (1954-) also states that historic museums should give way to the presentation of immigrants as being an important part of national history and identity.<sup>20</sup> The same could therefore be said about the *Amsterdam Museum*. Therefore I believe this museum is an excellent example for exploring multicultural issues in Amsterdam Museums.

Before starting with my research, and merely by using my gained knowledge in museum studies, I had a clear idea of a possible answer to my research question. I believe that in its essence, historic museums like the Amsterdam museums, have to address multiculturalism through their collections. The public of Dutch museums is

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<sup>17</sup> Russel Shorto 2013, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Veenman. Red. 2002, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ivan Karp 1990, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 416.

extremely diverse and to appeal to a diverse public museums will have to incorporate different voices. I also strongly feel that the Amsterdam Museum will consider this an intrinsic tasks although they will be strongly influenced by cultural policies that guide museum practice. The 'New Museology' seems to be an important current that has had an impact on museums since the last decades of the twentieth century especially when it comes to the incorporation of these different voices. Still, this current may not be that explicitly present in a museum nowadays because I believe it is currently acknowledged that museums are important players when it comes to creating meaning and identity.

Through systematic literature review I hope to gain insight into these questions. For this thesis I have used many authors that have played an important role in museum studies. To name a few: Peter Vergo, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Sharon MacDonald. To gain more knowledge about the Amsterdam Museum, curator Annemarie de Wildt has been an important source. She was able to give me some articles she has written and was currently writing about multiculturalism in the Amsterdam Museum from a professional perspective. Curator of modern history, Laura van Hasselt, was able to answer many of my questions through an in-depth interview in her office in the Amsterdam Museum. This interview in combination with governmental documents on Dutch cultural policy and literature on the 'New Museology' will help me answer my research question.

In the first chapter I will introduce the concept of multiculturalism a little further, focusing on the Netherlands and specifically on Amsterdam. In the second section I will address Amsterdam more extensively: a short history of its famous status as the most tolerant city. We must, though, not forget that tolerance is a term many have forgotten the original meaning and history of: tolerating something that is actually forbidden. In the twenty-first century we use this definition differently, no longer as a prohibition but as an invitation for mutual acceptance and respect, even for things and persons appearing foreign to us.<sup>21</sup> This chapter will give further insight into multiculturalism in the Netherlands but will also answer an underlying question: to what extent can we think of Amsterdam as a tolerant, multicultural city? In the second chapter I will deal with the larger contexts of the 'New Museology' and Dutch politics. During my research I stumbled upon the fact that post-colonialism and the new vision in museology had a lot of resemblances, which I will shortly discuss. This is accountable for the fact that these

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<sup>21</sup> Ivan Karp 1990, p. 162.

new visions were both being established in the second half of the twentieth century. The other factor that I want to discuss is the Dutch cultural policy to figure out in how it influences multicultural policies in museums or at least to what extent it mentions the attendance by cultural minorities. I don't believe we can talk about the practice of museums while not looking at political and economic implications, because of the strong connection. For instance, what does the government say about the incorporation of a diverse public? And how did the economic crisis influence multicultural policies in museums? The third chapter will include the case-study on the *Amsterdam Museum*. Looking at the practice of this museum with the knowledge taken from the former chapters will give further insight in multiculturalism in Amsterdam museums. Finally all the chapters will come together in the conclusion where the question will be answered how Amsterdam museums (The Amsterdam Museum in particular) are dealing with multiculturalism and how this relates to larger concepts and policies.

## 1. The history of a multicultural city

*Multiculturalism in the Netherlands and especially in Amsterdam, is a phenomenon with a long history. In this chapter I will narrate the story of Amsterdam from the seventeenth century until present day to construct a clear image of multicultural Amsterdam. I find this social and cultural context extremely important when discussing the issue of multiculturalism in the museum landscape of the Netherlands. This history will be referred to in the exploration of multicultural collections and exhibitions in the Amsterdam Museum. It will also answer more general questions of why we should discuss issues of multiculturalism in museums and other cultural institutions in larger contexts like demographic developments and globalisation. Therefore this chapter discusses an important background of the following chapters: it will give more insight in why so much has changed during the end of the twentieth century. It will also address the question to what extent can we think of Amsterdam as a tolerant, multicultural city?*

### 1.1 A general introduction of multiculturalism in the Netherlands

The Netherlands are known for many things: tulips, cheese, Delftware and legislation of soft-drugs. Throughout the ages Amsterdam has mostly functioned as a symbol of tolerance and liberalism, the legislation of soft-drugs being a quite recent example.<sup>22</sup> The country has a long history of immigration waves which will be made clear throughout this chapter.<sup>23</sup> During the Dutch revolt around the 1600s many religious refugees have sought their refuge and salvation in the liberal Netherlands where due to the political and economic climate, foreigners were “accepted”.<sup>24</sup> Jews and for instance the French protestants sought a new way of life, often establishing themselves in the city of Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup> These decades have been crucial for the development of Dutch multiculturalism. Historian Jonathan Israel (1946 -) underlines the large wave of religious refugees coming to the Dutch Republic during the second half of the sixteenth century, especially Protestants (Calvinists) from France, Germany and Britain.<sup>26</sup> An important impetus was the siege of Antwerp in 1585 when around 38.000 Protestants

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<sup>22</sup> For instance in Russel Shorto 2013, p.15-16. And p.45-46.

<sup>23</sup> David Pinto 2012, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Russell Shorto, 2013, p.129-130. This is also a conclusion that more explicitly can be made when having read the second part of the book.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 163 and 205.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Israel 1995, p. 102.

who refused to reconvert to Catholicism, left for the North. “Amsterdam attracted the largest number of immigrants [...], they amounted to a third of the city’s population”.<sup>27</sup> After this wave around 1590, the Southern Netherlands remained the main source of immigration, but for different motives; mostly better prospects.<sup>28</sup> A new wave of French Huguenots entered the Republic after 1685.<sup>29</sup>

The seventeenth century, also known as the Golden Age, was an age of trade, wealth and luxury products. Many international tradesmen visited the Netherlands and the Dutch were eager to invite them in to increase their businesses.<sup>30</sup> Dutch identity and the history of the nation are often strongly connected to this century especially in their struggles with the Spanish domination. In this way, the seventeenth century has been an incredibly crucial moment in Dutch history. I would like to take a closer look at the tolerant position of the Dutch and the multicultural character of its society during the early days of the Dutch nation. Trade was an extremely important factor when it came to early modern multiculturalism in the Low Countries. Of course the idea of tolerance is different and wasn’t in that sense very multicultural: tolerance being merely accepting other cultures, religions, traditions and visions, not necessarily being interested in them or seeing them equally as important as your own. “It wasn’t synonymous with ‘celebrating diversity’. It was more like ‘putting up with’, a concept born of necessity and practicality”.<sup>31</sup> Historian Jonathan Israel, states, in his account on the history of the Republic, that the Low Countries were not always as tolerant as is suggested. He mentions that especially foreigners did not openly celebrate the Dutch liberties:

Until the late seventeenth century many were appalled by the diversity of churches which the authorities permitted and the relative freedom with which religious and intellectual issues were discussed. Others disapproved of the excessive liberty, as it seemed to them, accorded to specific groups, especially women, servants, and Jews, who were invariably confined in other European countries, to a lowlier, more restricted existence.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Israel 1995, p. 309.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 627.

<sup>30</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 114-115. Also on p.178-179. It is also underlined by Israel on p. 610-611.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p.46. Israel underlines the importance of worldwide trade on p.2.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Israel 1995, p.1.

Israel also mentions that the freedom in the Republic was often disappointing to many free spirit artists and philosophers: “this celebrated freedom did not, in reality, stretch far enough”.<sup>33</sup> Israel clearly describes how complex the situation in the early modern Netherlands were and that freedom competed with certain restrictions. Especially the tensions between Catholicism and Calvinism proves the difficult position of (religious) tolerance. William of Orange was a preacher of religious tolerance throughout the Revolt.<sup>34</sup> His policy aimed for an united Dutch Revolt against Spain but also encountered protest, especially from militant Calvinists.<sup>35</sup> Before 1630, Israel states, we can’t really speak of the Netherlands as tolerant, for Jews and Catholics were not (fully) accepted. Only after 1630 things loosened up, especially towards Catholics: it was allowed for them to have their children baptized by Catholic priests. It must be noted that this tolerant policy was mostly practiced by regents and not by all Dutch citizens: tolerance did still encounter a lot of resistance.<sup>36</sup>

Another important factor was the political structure of the nation. Shorto states that the country lacked a certain national identity: the Netherlands were not quite a nation yet, but existed of independent provinces with their own local governments. This also means that the Dutch did not have a certain ‘Dutch identity’ yet which made the notion of tolerance somewhat different: if there is no we, then there cannot be ‘another’ either.<sup>37</sup> Russel Shorto mentions that this could partly explain why the Dutch were eager to act liberal and tolerant and that this liberal activism led to the famous Dutch revolt during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. I believe Shorto’s argument lacks some important historical consciousness and perspective here. In his account on the early Republic, Jonathan Israel describes a larger context of economic, political and social forces influencing the resistance against Spain.<sup>38</sup> He does underline the complex political structure of the early Netherlands which may explain why a ‘Dutch identity’ was lacking. He states that there especially were some radical differences between the northern and southern Netherlands.

With all the international tradesmen, political and religious refugees alongside many progressive intellectuals the Low Countries became a true multicultural hub, with

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<sup>33</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p.4.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Israel 1995, p.96-97.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p.195.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 637.

<sup>37</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 43-44.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Israel 1995, general conclusion of chapter four.

the centre being the city of Amsterdam. The specific situation of the capital will be further explained in the next section. What can be stated after the previous section, is that multicultural Amsterdam is a questionable image. Yes, the city attracted a lot of immigrants due to religious conflicts in Europe and through international trade. Still, immigrants did not gain any rights and were not treated equally. The original definition of 'tolerating' underlines this statement: the Dutch accepted the presence of immigrants and acknowledged that they had own beliefs and cultures but did not in any way infest in them. Looking at the research question, I must admit that Amsterdam's multiculturalism may not be as historical as I suggested in the introduction. When I think of multiculturalism today, I think of social inclusion, mutual acceptance but even more mutual interest. We want to learn about each other to understand and live with each other. In the last chapter of this thesis, I will discuss the Amsterdam Museum, a museum presenting the history of the city. After this section, we may conclude that the history of Amsterdam is very complex with many nuances which should be presented in the narrative of the Amsterdam Museum.

First, we will make big steps through history, into the twentieth century, also called the "century of the refugee".<sup>39</sup> Nowadays, multiculturalism is still an issue and an important point on the political agenda. The Netherlands hold an immense diversity in nationalities, all living next to each other.<sup>40</sup> Especially immigration leads way to a lot of questions. During the twenty-first century, the Netherlands and other European countries wanted to close the borders to decrease the amount of refugees. Russel Shorto mentions that during his stay in the Netherlands he found that for one group an exception was made: the Indonesians. They are very much considered Dutch.<sup>41</sup> Immigrants from other former colonies, Suriname and for instance Curacao, were not considered that assimilated and were much more seen as a social issue. There are many reasons that can explain this, one of them being that the 'Indo's' were more welcomed to the Netherlands and do not explicitly stand out from the Dutch crowd, much of them looking very Western-European.<sup>42</sup> From experience, I may also add that they often speak Dutch fluently and are very much integrated into Dutch culture. Maybe this could be explained by the colonial history: an important chapter in Dutch history (even though

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p.195. Also in Shorto 2013, p. 188.

<sup>40</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p.224-225.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 238.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 239.

often seen as sensitive). For four centuries Indonesia was part of the Netherlands which may explain the strong relationship and the different position of 'Indo's'. Shorto also mentions a public figure with an 'Indo-background': Geert Wilders, an extremely right-wing politician from the Netherlands preaching against immigrants and specifically the Islam:

"Wilders infamously compared the Koran to *Mein Kampf*. [...] The fact that someone who claims to speak on behalf of the "real" Dutch people, and against would-be infiltrators, is himself of a mixed-race, immigrant background says something about both the success of integration and some of its downsides".<sup>43</sup>

Wilders is one of the persons who makes multicultural issues in the Netherlands radically clear and therefore I also wonder to what extent the emergence of Wilder's party has in some way influenced museum policies. It must be noted that the group of PVV-voters in Amsterdam is relatively small, "partly due to the cosmopolitan attitude and image of Amsterdam".<sup>44</sup> Another example of someone who discusses the 'multicultural drama' is Paul Scheffer who published this article in the NRC Handelsblad in 2000. He ended the 'multicultural dream' by stating that multiculturalism had not led to a multicultural society, but instead had led to an "immigrant underclass that was becoming an unsupportable economic burden, whose members had little awareness of the values of society".<sup>45</sup> The problems were mostly created and evolved during the 1970s and 1980s:

"Beginning in the 1980s, multiculturalism – meaning an effort both to promote more diversity in society and to support the distinctness of different subgroups – had become the new incarnation of the tolerance the Dutch had shown in some sense invented, in the seventeenth century".<sup>46</sup>

During this period the Netherlands had led an open-door migration policy and built impressive immigration centres for refugees in the hope to enrich Dutch society with new impulses. Scheffer states this was one of the reasons why multiculturalism failed.

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<sup>43</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p.240.

<sup>44</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.211.

<sup>45</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 304-305.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p.304-305.

Another reason is that newcomers were actually encouraged to keep up their own culture, tradition and even language.<sup>47</sup> In the Netherlands, immigration is often interconnected with the attitude the Dutch have towards their colonial history, which means often trying to avoid the topic. After the Indonesian independence, for instance, many Dutch Indonesians travelled to the Netherlands.<sup>48</sup> These immigrants are named 'guest workers' and the name already indicates that the Dutch saw them as guests, immigrants who would come to work and then return to their home countries. Already family reunification was taking place considerably.<sup>49</sup> No thought was given to the integration of these immigrants and it led to segregation. Also, because the guest workers were encouraged to keep up their own culture with a leading motto: 'integration with preservation of own identity'. This was mostly aimed at making sure children would not lose sense of their native language and culture and could easily return to their home countries and resume their education. When it became clear that the guest workers would not return, they still held on to their own culture, which was strongly supported by the Dutch government.<sup>50</sup> Only since 1979 policies were created to deal with the social status of immigrant groups which were becoming less favourable. In 1994 policies were being formalised and the motto became 'mutual acceptance' and mostly focused on how to decrease the marginal position of immigrants. The key word in the new policy became 'responsibility' where naturalising became the destination point.<sup>51</sup> The article by Scheffer definitely hit a nerve, multiculturalism being something no one dared to challenge until then. It was considered a subject too sensitive to address.<sup>52</sup> His article became a starting point for conversation. The debate was fuelled by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and it led to a tense debate on immigration, Islam and Dutch identity.<sup>53</sup> Pictures rolled off our screens where radical Muslims declared the 'Holy War' which 'proved' that monotheistic religion also had a violent side to it.<sup>54</sup> Media has often concentrated on the problems that go along with multiculturalism and cultural coexistence and hasn't stressed the opportunities and positive sides.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Veenman 2002, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p. 179.

<sup>49</sup> Veenman 2002, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p.274.

<sup>51</sup> Veenman 2002, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 304-305.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, p. 306.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p. 343.

<sup>55</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, Lucia van Heteren, Chiel Kattenbelt and Kees Vuyk red. 2015, p.17.

Multiculturalism is considered a specific issue for the twentieth and twenty-first decade, even though the percentage of immigrants was much higher during the Golden Age. In 2012 seven percent of the Dutch population was foreign and only four percent had a foreign nationality. It must be said that the situation in the larger cities can differ, as these are concentrative areas.<sup>56</sup> In the Netherlands, two episodes hardened the attitude towards immigrants: the murders on Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh, both at the beginning of this century. In the Netherlands many felt like the open minded society with freedom of speech had come to an end, the Dutch started to doubt their own identity and had to look for new ways and answers to keep their society together.<sup>57</sup> Still, the government tries to improve policies on integration and citizenship. In 2011, an integration nota was presented: "*Integratie, binding, burgerschap*".<sup>58</sup> It stressed the fact that policies on multiculturalism had not reached their goals when it came to integration of larger ethnical groups in the Netherlands.<sup>59</sup> Cultural and demographic sociologist Eugenio van Maanen (1963 -), explains in his article on multicultural heritage why cultural heritage is important in multicultural societies. He emphasizes that cultural identity and heritage are often closely connected, for people use their past in relation to their cultural identity as well as a common Dutch identity: it becomes a unique fusion of identities. People for instance often relate themselves to physical spaces, mostly unconsciously and draw value from these spaces and therefore they are important in creating cultural identity. Van Maanen argues that cultural heritage can be a binding element between identity and those personally (unconsciously) related places. For cultural minorities in society, there can be a longing to create this kind of cultural identity which can be made possible by Dutch society: by accepting its multiculturalism and mutual acceptance and interest. Often this is made possible when society considers multiculturalism as a positive impulse and a contribution to society. Then, cultural heritage can be an intermediary element.<sup>60</sup> To make the creation of a new identity and interconnectedness possible the government, institutions and society as a whole, have to stimulate multicultural heritage.<sup>61</sup>

This idea of a multicultural society, a mixed society, especially finds its way in the

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<sup>56</sup> David Pinto 2012, p. 260.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p. 50-51.

<sup>58</sup> Translated as: Integration, tie and citizenship.

<sup>59</sup> Eugenio Van Maanen 2012, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 13.

capital. As mentioned, many religious and other refugees looked for safety between Amsterdam walls. With this I am not stating that this city is the only liberal city where notions of freedom and tolerance were and are celebrated. Of course these standards are part of a larger Dutch attitude towards for instance society and religion. Still, issues of multiculturalism are often most explicitly perceived in the larger cities where most immigrants are gathered.<sup>62</sup> The position of the city of Amsterdam is also made clear by Shorto:

“The concept of a mixed society has for a long time been part of the terrain of liberalism. The idea of multiculturalism – meaning a belief that society should actively accommodate and support its cultural minorities – came into being in the 1970s, and the Netherlands, and Amsterdam in particular, led the way. The city not only welcomed non-Western immigrants but paid them to keep up their languages and tradition. Multiculturalism proved to be a failure. It was leading not to a mixed society but to a multiplicity of ghettoized communities living next to but cut off from one another: the very opposite of a ‘society’”.<sup>63</sup>

He also states that Amsterdam is even more liberal than the rest of the country: “In tolerating behaviour, celebrating diversity, empowering individuals, the city almost always goes far beyond what the country as a whole would do”.<sup>64</sup> The city and its inhabitants (for instance youth movements and politicians) continually try to expand individual freedoms. Many civil rights movements, protests and revolutions have taken place in the city. The website of the Rijksmuseum pays attention to the turbulent sixties:

Disillusioned with traditional socialist values, they voiced their vociferous opinions about domestic and international political issues. A protest movement emerged in Amsterdam, called Provo, [...] To campaign against the focus on consumption in modern society they held absurdist protests or *happenings*. In 1966, the movement turned its attention to the Dutch royals. [...] Protesters gained wider support when they demonstrated against US military intervention in Vietnam, or against ending youth benefits or for equal pay for men and women.<sup>65</sup>

This quote shows that speaking of the Netherlands as ‘tolerant’ or ‘multicultural’ is a generalized assumption. There were movements with social ideals, but this is not

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<sup>62</sup> Veenman 2002, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p.21.

<sup>64</sup> Ibidim, p. 281.

<sup>65</sup> Emancipation – youthculture: Timeline Dutch History. *Rijksmuseum*.

<<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/explore-the-collection/timeline-dutch-history/emancipation---youth-culture>>. Version: 29 June 2015.

reflected in Dutch society in general. Youth movements were considered to disrupt daily order. The source of this quote is also very interesting: the Rijksmuseum seems to find youth movements an important part of twentieth-century Dutch history. This could mean that the attitude towards these movements has slightly changed: no longer are 'provo's' and other groups seen as a nuisance but as important in social history.

## 1.2 Multicultural Amsterdam

As we have seen in the last paragraph, the liberal and tolerant position of foreigners in the Netherlands, is strongly intertwined with its capital city: Amsterdam. In the history of the city many migration waves have influenced the population of the Dutch capital.<sup>66</sup> Just Many religious refugees fled from the southern Netherlands, especially after the siege of Antwerp: many tradesmen, artists, professors, doctors and others sought (intellectual) freedom in this new country, bringing with them all their knowledge, traditions and also trade and political relations.<sup>67</sup> It must be noted that the largest percentage of immigrants came to Holland at the end of the seventeenth century.



Image 1: *The Dam Square in Amsterdam 1666*. J.H. Isings 1950.

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<sup>66</sup> This is a conclusion that can be drawn after reading Shorto 2013. He mentions immigration waves from the seventeenth century until the twentieth century.

<sup>67</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 85-86.

When picturing an early seventeenth century image of the city, an abundance of noises comes to mind: merchants pricing their products, dockworkers, tradesman from around the world on the Dam square. Trade was definitely an important factor of seventeenth century Holland. Obviously, this is my own imagination, but it is very well fed by the pictures, the books, films and other media regarding the Golden Age. I clearly remember one educational picture that is used in Dutch history classes (image 1) on trade and daily life in Amsterdam. In the foreground we can distinguish three groups: the regents, the seafarers and Eastern tradesmen. Amsterdam during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, was a true trading city what meant:

“both that is was used to things foreign – accents, tastes, beliefs – and that its leaders did not want to let nonstandard notions disrupt the flow of business. But that isn’t a full explanation. Other places in Europe were also trading centres, where exotic people and exotic ideas passed through. Amsterdam was unusual in the brazenness with which its municipal leaders paid lip service to the commands of higher authority to punish dissent and continued to tolerate a wide variety of nonstandard behaviors in its streets – including behaviors that directly challenged the authority of church and monarchy”.<sup>68</sup>

Another important factor is the political situation of the Netherlands. mentioned in the previous section. After the ‘Dutch revolt’ or the ‘Reformation’ of the Catholic Church around the 1600s, the Netherlands and especially Amsterdam became a haven for alternative ideas, religions and life styles.<sup>69</sup> Around this time the city had around 140.000 inhabitants from a range of countries of origin: Germany, Scandinavia, Turkey, African countries, Lapland and even Inuit visited the city.<sup>70</sup>

As we have seen, the tolerant status of Amsterdam can be questioned. This has continued into the twentieth century. During the first decades of the century had resulted in a Jewish population of eighty thousand, which was more than a tenth of the city’s total inhabitants. It is significant that the tolerance of this specific group always had its boundaries and Jews very much established themselves in specific Amsterdam neighbourhoods and in the 1920s they moved to new, modern neighbourhoods in the south of the city. Again, this shows how Jewish inhabitants did never really feel equal to

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<sup>68</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p.43.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, p.46.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 130.

other Amsterdam inhabitants and multiculturalism is a complex phenomenon. “Certainly discrimination existed, but there was a fresh wind blowing, a feeling that the twentieth century was going to be different from everything that had come before”.<sup>71</sup> We can all imagine that this positivism was about to make place for an uncertain period during the 1940’s. The Second World War has been a turbulent period where treason and protection were both very much happening alongside each other in Amsterdam. The city still pays a lot of attention to these five significant years that have left their traces: there is a memorial place at the Dam Square and there is the famous Anne Frank House.<sup>72</sup> The 1960s can be characterised by civil rights revolutions that took place and extending freedoms, especially in the form of drug policy. This was the start of the well-known Amsterdam coffee shops where soft drugs were legalised during the 1960s.<sup>73</sup> Amsterdam is still known for its tolerant attitude towards soft drugs, but also towards prostitution, a history dating back to the early days of the city. In contrast to the policy on soft drugs, prostitution was being isolated to a specific neighbourhood and was believed to have to be taken off the streets behind the windows of ‘*De Wallen*’.<sup>74</sup> At the turn of the century Amsterdam, especially its politicians started to doubt these ‘liberal excesses’. The city was threatened to become a centre of crime, being it the place where you can do ‘whatever you like’ and are allowed things that are illegal elsewhere. Coffee shops and windows were cut back, but still did not disappear. Former mayor, Job Cohen explains that Amsterdam citizens only wanted to regulate these excesses, not to remove them, being it an intrinsic value and part of the history of the city, which had to be protected.<sup>75</sup> Although, prostitution and the legislation of soft drugs do not relate to the theme of this thesis, it does again show that the tolerant status of the city can be questioned, also when it comes to its famous drugs- and sex policy. The Amsterdam politicians seem to be holding on to their image of open-minded and tolerant, but to not want this to be radicalised. Tolerance always has its boundaries, like we have also seen in the attitude towards for instance Jewish inhabitants.

Today, the city of Amsterdam is most probably considered to be the most “ethnically diverse in the world”. It is the home to around 180 different nationalities: a

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<sup>71</sup> Russell Shorto, p. 256-257.

<sup>72</sup> The examples of the memorial monument and the Anne Frank House are my own associations. The rest of the argument can be found in the previous note.

<sup>73</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 300-301.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, p.302.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, p.303.

true multicultural hub. Therefore it is also logical to research multiculturalism in the Netherlands through zooming into the situation in Amsterdam: the city has to deal with all the issues, questions and problems that come along with diversity in society.<sup>76</sup>

Even though the notion of tolerance, an open society and freedom of religion and speech are still very much apparent today, the multicultural society in the Netherlands is also a political issue. Russel Shorto writes about his Moroccan 'guest parent', a lady who takes care of his son while he is at work. The passage mentions bureaucratic issues concerning foreigners (especially coming from poor or Muslim countries) when trying to visit a city as Amsterdam. The sister of the family wanted to visit but had to "file extensive applications, including having residents vouch for them, even if all they wanted to do was see the canals and tulips". The sister was still denied access after going through the screening process due to the fear of her staying after her 'short' visit. The family was being regarded 'untrustworthy' while they have always played by the rules which means speaking the language, paying taxes and taking up their social role in society. Later, she was allowed access after all, but it does show that "a city famed historically for championing the notion of tolerance now seemed to be charting odd new frontiers of intolerance".<sup>77</sup> I believe this example emphasizes that the Netherlands are still less tolerant and open-minded than is often suggested.

The first year of the twenty-first century has been crucial in the development of multiculturalism and especially on the negative responses on multiculturalism and especially the emergence of Islamic radicals in the Netherlands. Three important episodes have influenced the perception of the notion of multiculturalism: the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, the murder on politician Pim Fortuyn and the murder on filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Van Gogh was murdered in 2004 and this event led to questions on militant Islam and how to deal with immigrants in the Netherlands. The murder had even more effect on Amsterdam. The 'noise gathering' that mayor Job Cohen had organised on the day of the murder slowly turned into a protest against the Mayor himself for not having foreseen the dangers of Islam and the failure of multiculturalism in his city. The city council was criticized for having "fostered ghettoization of Muslims and subsidized Islamist organizations, which taught that women were naturally inferior and the Jews were enemies". People said: "you could

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<sup>76</sup> Russell Shorto 2013,, p.224-225.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

almost feel the collective consciousness changing during the vigil, as people woke up to realize the scope of the failure of multiculturalism”.<sup>78</sup> The city council only got more motivated to invest in mutual understanding and to bring society closer together. Two men: the Jewish Mayor Job Cohen and Ahmed Aboutaleb (who was a city alderman, originally born in a Berber village in Morocco, as sons of an imam, and now Mayor of Rotterdam) went to work. They organised gatherings in several Amsterdam neighbourhoods and both applied other methods to speak to the Amsterdam public. Cohen stressed “that there was no reason to feel threatened by Muslims: investigations indicated that the young man who had killed Van Gogh had acted alone”. Aboutaleb spoke directly to Amsterdam Muslims to ask for better integration and he declared that; “Whoever doesn’t want to go along with Dutch society and its achievements can pack his bags”. He spoke in Amsterdam mosques to spread his word that everyone should acknowledge the key values that build Dutch society, an open society. Everyone who would not share these values could as explained, leave, for there would be no place for them in this open society.<sup>79</sup> Together, Cohen and Aboutaleb, tried to keep their city a unity and tried to counteract ghettoization.<sup>80</sup> Their approach only fuelled the populist expressions of the already mentioned right-wing politician, Geert Wilders, who used the reactions on the murder of Van Gogh to spread his anti-Islam politics. When made public that Cohen and Aboutaleb had drunk tea together in Amsterdam mosques, they were hugely criticized by Wilders: “Cohen personified the ever-weakening West, kowtowing to ascendant aggressive Islam”.<sup>81</sup> There were also more positive reactions to the approach of the two men. Political scientist Maarten Hajer states that the Mayor was not forcibly trying to become ‘friends’ with Amsterdam Muslim groups but was fulfilling his task as a mayor of Amsterdam: standing up for its heritage of liberalism. In 2006 he even became second in a World Mayor contests and was called a ‘European hero’ after his activities following the Van Gogh murder called a ‘European hero’.<sup>82</sup>

This chapter has discussed multiculturalism in the Netherlands and has mostly focused on the capital. It also raised a lot of questions regarding the multicultural status of the city: it is not always as tolerant as it seems. Still, multicultural issues (especially since the last decades) have proven to have influenced the city strongly. Therefore I still

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<sup>78</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 309.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Scheffer 2007, p. 176-177.

<sup>80</sup> Russell Shorto 2013, p. 309-310.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem, p. 310.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.

agree that Amsterdam is the right place to study multiculturalism in museums. Multiculturalism is a complex concept, but Amsterdam is multicultural when it comes to the diversity of the population with its inherent obstacles. We must, though, keep in mind the complexity of the phenomenon.

## 2. Contexts, theories and policies: contextualizing multiculturalism

*In this chapter I will focus on the larger theoretical context of multiculturalism and how it is incorporated in theories relating to the field of museums also known as the 'New Museology' and I will also discuss the relationship between multiculturalism in museums and the cultural policy of the Netherlands. How do Dutch politicians approach multiculturalism in museums and to what extent can multicultural policies in museums be (partly) explained by the emergence of the 'New Museology'?*

### 2.1 The New Museology: a different view on museum practice

A new approach towards the study of museums has emerged since the 1980s. This period was defined by expansion and “diversification of the museum”, but also by the emergence of museum critique: “The end of the 1980s saw the publication of a number of academic collections whose aim was to bring together and develop the study of museums”.<sup>83</sup> What is also important to take in consideration is how this new study of museums is also linked to post-colonialism and the voices of minorities. Museums were more criticized for having played a role in unequal representations of cultures during the colonial era.<sup>84</sup> The term ‘New Museology’ was coined by Peter Vergo in 1989 and can be described as a critical analysis of museums.<sup>85</sup> He himself describes his starting point as the following:

“I would retort that what is wrong with the ‘old’ museology is that it is too much about museum methods, and too little about purposes of museums; that museology has in the past only frequently been seen, if it has been seen at all, as a theoretical and humanistic discipline”.<sup>86</sup>

Vergo suggests here that museums before the ‘New Museology’ did not think about their purpose. I believe this statement does not do justice to earlier examples of museum policies focusing on for instance education. What can be concluded generally, is that the last decades of the twentieth century proved that there had to be established a new relationship between museums and its communities. All around the world social issues

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<sup>83</sup> Macdonald 1996, p. 13. It is also mentioned by Bouquet 2012 p. 5 where she mentions the emergence of critical museum studies which may also be called ‘new museum studies’ or ‘new museology’.

<sup>84</sup> Macdonald 1996, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Paula Assunção dos Santos 2010, p.7.

<sup>86</sup> Wilke Heijnen 2010, p.13.

were about to transform the essence of museum policy and growing awareness was pushing museums to transform themselves into community based institutions.<sup>87</sup> Therefore: “The ‘new museology’ started with the intention of introducing a new philosophy around how museums function and a changed relationship between museums and their societies and communities”.<sup>88</sup> Vergo believed that museums still, mostly functioned as they had done during the nineteenth century. The traditional museology also had an elite sense to it by ascribing itself a civilising and disciplining function. It is said, that; “what could be called the traditional museology was seen to privilege both its collections-based function and its social links to the cultural tastes of particular social groups”.<sup>89</sup> This statement is too generalising because, in history, there have been many museums that especially focused on educating the lower classes. An interesting example is the South Kensington Museum in London, a museum that was established to benefit the nation and educate in ‘good taste’.<sup>90</sup> In this way the traditional museum also becomes a community-based museum where education was extremely important. This proves that we can’t apply the notion of the traditional museum to every nineteenth and early twentieth century museum and that the community-based museum may not be as modern as we believe it to be. Vergo does state that the new relationship between a museums and its communities still had to be established. He emphasized on museum awareness: opening up to a broader audience, social inclusion and visitor participation.<sup>91</sup> It mostly aimed to question the traditional museum authority and status of the curator and its collections, especially the belief that:

“they will provide a safe and neutral environment in which artefacts will be removed from day-to-day transactions which lead to the transformation and decay of their physical appear once museums are assumed to operate outside the zone in which artefacts change in ownership and epistemological meaning”.<sup>92</sup>

Museum display is as he mentioned, never neutral and always subject to curatorial choices.<sup>93</sup> This statement is now generally acknowledged and applied to nearly

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<sup>87</sup> Paula Assunção dos Santos 2010, p. 5-6.

<sup>88</sup> Vikki McCall and Clive Gray 2014, p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, p.20.

<sup>90</sup> McClellan 2008, p. 25-26.

<sup>91</sup> Wilke Heijnen 2010, p. 13-14.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Vergo 1989, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem.

everything. It is therefore important to be aware of the subjectivity of movements as the 'New Museology' as well: the term itself, coined by Vergo, has already proved to be too generalising because terms as 'old' and 'new' museology are not that static. This relates to the idea that museum objects are perceived differently: the curator has a certain vision that can be immensely different from the perception of the public and this is what is called 'multiple interpretations'.<sup>94</sup> With the emergence of the 'New Museology' the individual stepped forward in museum studies: no longer was a visitor merely perceived as a visitor but as a subject with his or her own experiences, interpretations and attitudes. This means that museum objects do not change according to epistemological theory: "but from day to day as different people view them and subject them to their own interpretation".<sup>95</sup>

The emergence of the 'New Museology' does not stand on its own: social awareness was arising in many branches, social, cultural as well as economic. Museums were more and more thought to be agents in creating meaning for different groups. Even more important was the awareness that this creating of meaning is extremely subjective and also subjected to many factors. I have argued that this was already being acknowledged in the past, although I can imagine that this belief became more generally acknowledged. Many ideas emerged that challenged master narratives and the authority of the museum: working with source communities but also the incorporation of new media and interactive techniques which enhance the museum experience.<sup>96</sup> The emphasis on 'experience' has increased due to the fact that museums are currently competing with other leisure facilities. Sharon Macdonald (1961 -) states that museums now "have more in common with the funfair or theatre than the traditional museum".<sup>97</sup> Again this is a very bold statement, suggesting that all museums are equally 'recreational'. I agree that this can be the case when festive openings, workshops, shows and other activities are too dominantly present. Still I believe, the museum's basic role is educating.

From the 1980s onwards the museum's role in creating national identity has been more criticized: "they also purport to serve as a storehouse of their nations' qualities". Museum displays narrate the past in a specific way that plays a key role in

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Vergo 1989, p. 19.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>96</sup> Wilke Heijnen 2010, p. 15.

<sup>97</sup> Macdonald 1996, p. 2.

creating collective memory.<sup>98</sup> This also due to the fact that museums are currently competing with other leisure facilities. Sharon Macdonald (1961 -) states that museums now “have more in common with the funfair or theatre than the traditional museum”.<sup>99</sup> Again this is a very bold statement, suggesting that all museums are equally ‘recreational’. I agree that this can be the case when festive openings, workshops, shows and other activities are too dominantly present.

“The ‘new museology’ has been broken down to changes in ‘value, meaning, control, interpretation, authority and authenticity’ within museums”.<sup>100</sup> According to this new study of museums, museums can play an active role in social issues as discrimination and social inequality. Visitors are taking a more important place in museum interpretation but also in the curatorial function. This visitor-focus also leads to the aim to generate wider access and cater to diverse groups. This would mean to also attract minority groups.<sup>101</sup> Interesting is how museum terminology changed along with the institution: terms as audience and public made place for thinking in communities (which is characteristic for the community-based museum). “The new term seems to reflect the more comprehensive, welcoming and relevant service that museums are aspiring to create”.<sup>102</sup> This is how community studies and museum studies intertwine:

“... it is important to create a public museum service that is meaningful for a broader range of people. It is about moving away from the grand narratives, traditionally told in the national museums, and giving greater recognition to local and community histories”.<sup>103</sup>

To me, this is the key point of critical museum studies. It gives way to social inclusion and the incorporation of ‘multiple voices’. During the 1990s it was decided that museums had failed to attract minorities. It was named as one of the problems facing the museums along with: dropping visitor numbers, conservation problems, expanding collections, crowded storage rooms and competition from other leisure activities.<sup>104</sup> The problem here is that communities are, even while living in a multicultural society, holding onto their identities: “They often decide to adopt excluding attitudes in their

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<sup>98</sup> MacDonald 1996, p.70.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem, p.20.

<sup>101</sup> Vikki McCall and Clive Gray 2014, p. 20-21.

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Croke 2011, p. 170.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, p.171.

<sup>104</sup> MacDonald 1996, p. 1.

community, rejecting to deal with the difficulties that result from multiculturalism”.<sup>105</sup> Then, the question remains how to deal with this multiple identities. Many authors have mentioned that identity is not as static as is often suggested: cultural identity can transform over time and due to external influence of society. Identity is constructed out of a shared self-defined history and material heritage.<sup>106</sup> As a solution, museums opened up towards this diverse public and displayed collections that were not considered that “museum-worthy” before but were now used to appeal to specific groups.<sup>107</sup>

The display and presentation were also subjected to change under influence of these new impulses in museum practice. The belief spread that museum display is necessarily artificial and the museums task is to make the visitor aware “of the means of representation”. This often leads to involving the visitor into “the process of display”.<sup>108</sup> Objects in the museum display are believed to be “triggers of chains of ideas and images that go far beyond their initial starting point”.<sup>109</sup> These responses are steps towards the fantasy of the spectator and are only possible through an imaginative process. This means that what museums are trying to present to their public does not always lead to that envisioned experience.<sup>110</sup> Visitors are diverse: “there is no such thing as ‘the typical visitor’, and there is no single level which can be expected and addressed”.<sup>111</sup>

‘The New Museology’ has led to the emergence of museum studies as we know it today which is supported by many academic publications and the establishment of academic disciplines on this terrain. I would like to bring forward an author that is of great importance in the systematic study of museums in current day: Eilean Hooper-Greenhill. She gives her own vision on the changing attitude, appearance and function of museums: she states that this change can also be characterised as a transition from the ‘modernist museum’ to the ‘post-museum’. The key terms are a changing museum ‘authority’ and creating more space for ‘mutuality’. The biggest change, according to Hooper-Greenhill, is visible in the museum-audience relationship which has become more important now museums are required “to provide socially inclusive environments for life-long learning”.<sup>112</sup> As mentioned museum education is refocusing itself on

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<sup>105</sup> Eduardo Giménez-Cassina 2010, p. 27.

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, p. 27-28.

<sup>107</sup> MacDonal 1996, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Vergo 1989, p. 20.

<sup>109</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova 1989, p.23.

<sup>110</sup> Ibidem, p.23.

<sup>111</sup> Philip Wright 1989, p.119.

<sup>112</sup> Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p.1.

individual interpretation, which inherently leads to questions of identity and culture.<sup>113</sup> Hooper-Greenhill also states that especially in multicultural countries, the museum audience is strongly concerned with the content of museums.<sup>114</sup> This means that the diverse public is also asking for multiplicity in museum display and exhibitions. She also touches upon the authority of the 'modernist museum': "museums create master narratives through acting both the constructor of a present-day 'reality' and through bringing into focus a memory of the past that (coincidentally) supports that present".<sup>115</sup> These master narratives are created through inclusion and exclusion, which is questioned by the 'New Museology'. The 'post-museum' relates to the museum that is imagined as the outcome of the 'New Museology': it gives way to multiple voices and interpretations and master narratives are challenged. This also means that 'sensitive histories' are being brought into the museum. Even though Hooper-Greenhill approaches the new role of the museum differently, it can still be questioned to what extent this approach is less static than Vergo's, because of the use of two distinguished models. Still, I believe, her approach leaves more space for exceptions and other interpretations.

I recently mentioned that post-colonialism can in some way strongly be linked to the 'New Museology' when it comes to new methods of interpretation and representation. This is also mentioned by Hooper-Greenhill: "post-colonial approaches have demonstrated the Eurocentric core of much of the history and culture that we take for granted in the West".<sup>116</sup> Post-colonialism and post-colonial art is "intimately linked to globalisation".<sup>117</sup> Migration and difference between cultural groups in society automatically raise issues of national identity and cultural heritage.<sup>118</sup> As mentioned, museums function as important agents in creating meaning and national identity.

As shown in this section, museums are re-establishing their relationship with their communities, which means that museums are always dealing with these societal issues. Post-colonialism, and specifically the postcolonial art world, are dealing with the previous mentioned issue of multiplicity (multiple voices) and representation of once

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<sup>113</sup> Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem, p.7.

<sup>115</sup> Ibidem, p.25.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem, p.140.

<sup>117</sup> Alessandra De Angelis 2014, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

suppressed histories and cultures:

“What is at stake here is not a pacific integration of the missing chapter of the forgotten, excluded and subaltern voices into inherited accounts, but rather a deconstruction and rewriting of those very histories through the irrepressible presence of these other narrations. This helps us to disengage the relationship between contemporary art, cultural difference and global reality from the exclusive politics of museology”.<sup>119</sup>

With this notion of post-colonialism I am attempting to create a larger context for the changes that have emerged in Western museums during the last decades. As I have mentioned, the ‘New Museology’ does not stand on its own: during the last quarter of the twentieth century many factors have influenced museums and made clear that change had to come. One of these factors is in my opinion, post-colonialism, and it appears to have a large overlap with the ‘New Museology’ as practiced by Peter Vergo and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill. Decolonising museums seems to be mostly applicable to the ethnographic museum, but the opposite is the case. I believe it says much more about the era of migration, globalisation and technologisation that was quickly emerging, while the world was still partly moving in the previous era; one of colonial hegemony, economic and social inequality and racism.<sup>120</sup> Museums were also moving in this space between old and new worlds and had to reinvent themselves which had to do with how to deal with old narratives, constructing new ones and to present historical collections in the post-colonial era.<sup>121</sup> Post-colonialism is just as much questioning the dominant authority of the traditional museum as the ‘New Museology’: “a new perspective is emerging, which involves a necessary critical review of the cultural role played by the museum, targeted at a society that had deeply changed and is now global, multicultural and multi-ethnic”. This clarifies that the notions of multiplicity and community-based museum policy partly originate in post-colonialism as well as the critical museum studies that is here mentioned as the ‘New Museology’.<sup>122</sup>

I believe it can now be concluded where the museological focus on multiculturalism has come from: the idea of multiplicity that was emphasized since the last decades of the twentieth century (even though earlier examples can be found). This

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<sup>119</sup> Alessandra De Angelis, 2014, p.3.

<sup>120</sup> Ibidem, p.11.

<sup>121</sup> Nelson Graburn, 2012, p. 58.

<sup>122</sup> Margherita Parati 2014, p.99.

took place in a time of larger societal, cultural, demographic and economic change. As mentioned in the former chapter, the twentieth century can be described as the age of migration. I do believe this has challenged museums at the end of the century: their public became more diverse and issues of representation and identity became points of discussion. Therefore I would like to conclude this section with stating that I believe that multiculturalism in museums can only partly be explained by something as specific as the 'New Museology'. Turning points as these are more complex. What we can conclude is that at the end of the twentieth century museums were struggling to make themselves relevant for that time, partly because they had to establish new relationships with their diverse public.

## 2.2 Cultural policy in the Netherlands

“Over the last decades of the twentieth century, commitment to multiculturalism became embedded in social policy discourse in a number of western democracies”.<sup>123</sup> This has been the same for the Netherlands and its social policy as mentioned in the first chapter. Not only did multiculturalism become embedded in social policy, but also in cultural policy. In this section, on (multi)cultural policy in the Netherlands, I will exclusively focus on the twenty-first century for I am concentrating on the current situation of multiculturalism in museums. Before moving on the current issues, it is important to investigate where the current cultural policy of the Dutch government originates. After the Second World War, when much cultural heritage was threatened, the government decided that it was necessary to play a key role in the cultural sector. It was believed that this could be best achieved through a system of subsidies.<sup>124</sup> There was a problem when it came to allocating these subsidies: they were awarded by specialists, very well embedded in the specific disciplines. The Dutch government acknowledged that this led to a one-sided offer of cultural activities, mostly focused on art-lovers, often the richer, higher-educated groups of society. Until the end of the twentieth century the government has attempted to break this biased system: much more attention was being paid to education, interculturality, urban cultural life and the incorporation of new media in arts and culture.<sup>125</sup> Since the beginning of the twenty-first century museums have to justify their social role, which could be intellectual (research)

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<sup>123</sup> Sue Kenny and Michele Lobo 2014, p.105.

<sup>124</sup> *Cultuur als confrontatie* 1999, p. 3-4.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

or social/cultural. The cultural policy of the period 2001-2004 has made social outreach and the public key criteria for the status of cultural institutions. It has to be noted that this social criterion was weighed as important as the qualitative component.<sup>126</sup> Multiculturalism was therefore considered an important factor. This is made visible in two criteria that the ministry presented: to demand that fifteen percent of the total income would come from the public (sales) and to demand that three percent of the total government funding that the institutions would receive would be dedicated to attracting new target groups. These criteria functioned as demands for admission to the so called '*basisinfrastructuur*' of the Dutch cultural landscape, but would also determine whether and how high subsidies of certain institutions would be.<sup>127</sup> Especially the second measure is of great importance for our subject: to attract cultural minorities and responding to the multicultural society. The cultural program of the first years of the twenty-first century makes clear that special programs for new target groups got special attention and aimed to provide activities and programs alongside the regular activities of the museum, gallery, theatre or other related institutions.<sup>128</sup> This demonstrates that the Dutch government of this period did consider catering to multicultural society as an important element of museums. Museums do not have a choice but to follow these demands, for this is the only way to government funding and participation in the '*basisinfrastructuur*'. There is one contradiction in this cultural policy that has to be pointed out: is generating more public income not the opposite of attracting cultural minorities? This is one of the questions that will return in the next chapter on the Amsterdam Museum, but is also something the minister recognizes himself by stating that more public is not always the same thing as attracting new publics, probably often the opposite is true. Attracting a different, new public is more probably leading to less public income.<sup>129</sup> The former state secretary, Rick van der Ploeg (1956 -), who wrote the principles of the cultural policy of the period 2001-2004, believed that arts and culture should function as a meeting place for cultures. This is why he titled his program *Cultuur als confrontatie*.<sup>130</sup> He wanted to create more space for the expression of cultures of the diverse ethnic groups in the Netherlands and encouraged cultural

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<sup>126</sup> *Cultuur als confrontatie* 1999, p.26.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, p.27. '*Basisinfrastructuur*' means as much as cultural institutions that are thought of to be of great importance and are supported by the Dutch government.

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem, p.27-28.

<sup>129</sup> Ibidem, p. 28.

<sup>130</sup> Ibidem, p.47. The title can be translated as: Culture as confrontation.

institutions to open up their doors for diverse cultural programs. Van der Ploeg also wanted to make the cultural sector more accessible to cultural minorities. He emphasized that he did not mean to 'positively discriminate' cultural minorities, but that he aimed to enrich Dutch arts and culture by incorporating other cultures and traditions. He believed that cultural minorities had a lot to offer to museums and other institutions and that it would inspire, enrich and create dynamic in the cultural sector.<sup>131</sup> He wanted to achieve this program of cultural diversity by encouraging established institutions to aim for more diversity which would be achieved by an active attitude and using outreach workers, functioning as intermediaries between the institutions and these new possibilities. Further, Van der Ploeg wanted to create a budget for cultural diversity to support new artists coming from cultural minorities. His last program point was to create easy-access for cultural minorities and encourage institutions to diversify its own boards, management and commissions. He recognized that this would demand active recruitment, education and headhunting.<sup>132</sup> The cultural program of the first years of the twenty-first century shows that a lot of key points of the cultural policy were aimed to cater to the multicultural society and to incorporate the multiple voices that were mentioned in the former paragraph as well. This focus on multiculturalism can be explained by looking at the larger context: the age of migration had ended, the Netherlands were now a multi-ethnic society, the government of the 1990s had failed in its policy on multiculturalism and the cultural sector was demanding change after the museum critique that started at the end of the 1980s. It is thus not surprising that Van der Ploeg emphasized multiculturalism in his cultural policy.

We are now about ten years later; we have entered the new cultural policy of the period 2013-2016 and much has changed since the beginning of the century. First of all, less and less institutions are being funded by the government. The new cabinet has made attracting young people and public reach a central point of its cultural policy.<sup>133</sup> In 2008 the economic crisis struck which had a major impact on the cultural sector: expenses had to be cut back. Since the start of the new policy in 2013 two-hundred million euros were cut back in the cultural sector.<sup>134</sup> The key points on the agenda of the

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<sup>131</sup> *Cultuur als confrontatie* 1999, p. 47. Van der Ploeg does not mention a dynamic cultural sector, this is my own interpretations after reading his work.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*, p.48-49.

<sup>133</sup> *Cultuur in beeld* 2012, p.7.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9. This is also emphasized in the official cultural policy document bij Halbe Zijlstra: *Meer dan kwaliteit*.

new state secretary, Halbe Zijlstra (1969 -), differed from his predecessor: he mainly focused on development of new talent, cultural education, cultural entrepreneurship and internationality. Many of the new measures were also put to practice due to the recession. Although subsidized institutions were less harmed by the cut-backs, some museums and other institutions had to reorganize or even merge with related institutions.<sup>135</sup> I believe the cut-backs had a huge impact on multicultural policies in museums: museums had to invest more effort in attracting public and generating income which effected the social role of the museums. The economic crisis is often blamed for the withdrawal of government support. I believe it must also be stated that the party members of the VVD can be described as elitist and they promote a free-market-spirit. I believe it could be said that their elitist program mostly influenced the debated cultural policy of this period.

In the cultural policy of 2013-2016 the same contradiction can be found : the state secretary is aiming for more museum visitors, more own income, increasing joint approach by looking at the needs and wishes of the public, but believes this can also be achieved by reaching out to a new public.<sup>136</sup> As we have seen in the policy of his predecessor this can often lead to contradictions and raise questions in museum practice. We also see a shift in the target group that is being reached out to: Van der Ploeg aimed to attract cultural minorities and Zijlstra is mostly focusing on teenagers. Education for this specific group is one of the new criteria museums are being judged upon.<sup>137</sup> Officially the following are the new criteria for judging subsidy requests: Public (listening to what the public wants from cultural institutions), entrepreneurship, participation and education (focusing on the younger part of society), international status and main areas of the country.<sup>138</sup> It is interesting how attracting multiculturalism seems to have disappeared from the cultural program of this period. This may be ascribed to influence of the mentioned PVV party leader, Geert Wilders, who with great persuasiveness tries to accomplish an anti-Islam law and policies. The notion of cultural participation is also specifically focused on school education, not recognizing the broader context of participation and education.<sup>139</sup> Zijlstra also raised the bar for public

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<sup>135</sup> *Cultuur in beeld* 2012, p. 10-11.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 73-74.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> *Meer dan kwaliteit* 2011, p.11.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibidem*, p.12.

income: he increased this from 15% to 17,5%.<sup>140</sup> The *Raad van Cultuur* published its concerns on the new cut-backs and especially believed that it would harm the diversity of arts and culture in the Netherlands by saving on supporting new talent.<sup>141</sup>

The new Minister of Culture is Jet Bussemaker (1961 -), was appointed in 2012 and published her vision on the cultural sector in 2013. In her letter on museums she mentioned she aimed to interest more people in museums and heritage. She also planned to change the subsidy criteria and focus on collaboration between institutions, education and reaching out to new publics.<sup>142</sup> Bussemaker believes that culture is a key instrument in connecting people, but is also able to deal with questions society raises. This very much relates to the concept of the museum as a contact zone which was mentioned in the former paragraph. This also suggests that multiculturalism will again become a more important factor than in the former policy. For the next period of 2017-2020 she aimed for a cultural policy that is dynamic, comes closer to the public and acknowledges its role in creating individual identities.<sup>143</sup> To achieve a closer relationship between the cultural sector and the public museums have to place themselves within society and interest a new public for their activities. She actually emphasizes that attracting a different public does not always lead to the same effect as blockbuster exhibitions and more visitors. She wants to bring these results into the decision-making on subsidies.<sup>144</sup> Other advisory bodies agree on the importance of the social role of museums and that this is a complex issue due to the diverse composition of society, and especially in the larger cities. As society changes, people are looking for reflection, clarification and giving meaning, something that can be provided by museums.<sup>145</sup> Many advisory bodies also shared the concerns that the cultural cut-backs would be at the expense of the cultural programs. Less money can then be invested in important functions of museums: education, knowledge development, innovation and even exhibitions.<sup>146</sup> I would like to add multicultural policies to this list. I also believe that especially the more specialized exhibitions will be touched because museums will mostly focus on blockbuster exhibitions to attract a larger public. The only problem

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<sup>140</sup> *Meer dan kwaliteit* 2011, p.21-22.

<sup>141</sup> *Slagen in Cultuur* 2012, p. 7. *Raad van Cultuur* can be best translated by Council of Culture.

<sup>142</sup> *Samen werken, samen sterker* 2013, p. 1.

<sup>143</sup> *Cultuur beweegt* 2013, p.1-2.

<sup>144</sup> *Samen werken, samen sterker* 2013, p.5.

<sup>145</sup> *Musea voor morgen* 2012, p.10.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem*, p.20.

then is that less investment in different activities will in some way always decrease the general public income.<sup>147</sup> Although the final plans are not yet published, the detailed ideas for the cultural policy of 2017-2020 are available online. Some general changes and focus points can be distinguished. Firstly, more attention will be paid to urban areas, which means that cultural institutions have to respond to the wishes of the inhabitants of these cities. This will also touch upon the issue of multiculturalism: in the larger cities of the Netherlands, most non-western foreigners can be found. This group does not feel connected to the traditional cultural art forms that can be found in most museums and their wishes should be heard.<sup>148</sup> The government states that too many institutions focus specifically on Western cultural art forms.<sup>149</sup> These ideas paint a better future for multicultural policies in museums, but only time will tell. The Cultural Board believes that if museums and other institutions will not invest more effort into attracting 'less interested publics', the total visitor numbers will eventually drop which is an undesirable development.<sup>150</sup> Another issue regarding multiculturalism in museums is that their program and staff do not reflect society in a representative way and often don't contain people with a different background.<sup>151</sup> It is also noticeable that non-western, urban, innovative ideas often do not receive subsidy or sponsorship which makes these activities unavailable for the larger public.<sup>152</sup> Another interesting document that is published by the Dutch government regularly is the document *Cultuur in beeld*, which presents the most recent results of cultural policy in the Netherlands. In the edition of 2014, much attention was paid to influences of the economic crisis on the cultural sector, but also on the cut-backs that were applied in 2013.<sup>153</sup> Unlike the publication *Meer dan kwaliteit*, in which the cultural policy of 2013-2016 is outlined, multiculturalism gets specific attention in this document. It is stated that in 2060 the amount of foreigners in the Netherlands will be 30% of the total inhabitants of the country, and the rise can mostly be explained by the amount of immigrants.<sup>154</sup> These numbers underline the necessity for the cultural sector to cater to a diverse public with

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<sup>147</sup> *Musea voor morgen* 2012, p. 20.

<sup>148</sup> *Agenda Cultuur 2017-2020 en verder* 2015, p. 3-4. Is also referred to on p.67 where is being said that especially in urban regions people with different cultural backgrounds are more diverse.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem*, p.43.

<sup>150</sup> *Agenda Cultuur 2017-2012 en verder* 2015, p. 69-70.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibidem*, p.71.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*, p.72.

<sup>153</sup> *Cultuur in beeld* 2014, p. 11.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13. Can be translated as 'More Than Quality'.

different backgrounds and that multiculturalism will remain an important element in the future. Visitors, now coming to museums, are still mostly highly educated and non-foreign.<sup>155</sup> If museums want to stay relevant to the largest part of society they will have to respond to these tendencies.

In this section I have tried to summarize the cultural policy of the Netherlands of the last decade, focusing specifically on multicultural policy: how does the government want to achieve to attract more cultural minorities to museums? What is now clarified is that cultural policy is extremely dynamic, just like society: multiculturalism can be a key issue as in the cultural program of Rick van Der Ploeg at the beginning of the century, or it can even not be mentioned by policy makers as in the period 2013-2016. I believe the current ideas regarding cultural policy are taking an in-between position where multiculturalism is seen more as one of the dynamic elements of modern society and society as a whole needs to be addressed more in cultural and museum policy. Cultural minorities are looked upon as one of the many voices and wishes society raises. To me, the most important conclusion that can be drawn after this section, is that financial motives seem to compete with the social role of museums. More attention has to be paid to business and marketing and less to content and social inclusion. I believe this could harm multicultural policies in museums.

### 2.3 Resumé

In this chapter I have asked myself the question why multiculturalism is on the agenda of museums and how it is mentioned by critical museum studies, known as the 'New Museology' and the cultural policy of the Netherlands, for that is the country this thesis applies to. This chapter has shown that a lot has changed in the field of museums since the last decades of the twentieth century, especially when it comes to museum authority and issues of representation and identity. The public as well as the museum sector screamed for change and removed themselves from the traditional, nineteenth century, idea of the museum. 'Other voices' were being brought into the museum and more attention was paid to museum interpretation and presentation. Sensitive stories were brought to light and even 'source communities' entered the museums. The first section made clear that the second half of the twentieth century, the age of migration, was a

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<sup>155</sup> *Cultuur in beeld* 2014, p. 35. Also mentioned on p.38 where it is said that non-western foreigners participate less in arts and culture.

turbulent time and that museums had trouble being relevant for that time. This is posed by Eilan Hooper-Greenhill as the transition from the 'modernist museum' to the 'post-museum'. Post-colonialism dealt with the same issues of representation of former suppressed cultures and in line with the 'New Museology' posed a more representative, open-minded approach. The idea of 'multiple voices' very much resonates with multiculturalism: to cater to a diverse public. This is also very visible in the cultural policy of the Netherlands, dealt with in the second paragraph. I have specifically focused on the policies after the age of migration, now multicultural society is an acknowledged fact. I have discussed three policies: the period 2001-2004 where multiculturalism was an important pillar, then the current policy of 2013-2016 where the issue seems to have vanished. In the second period much more attention was being paid to economic circumstances, which can most probably be explained due to the economic crisis. I have also discussed the plans for the coming period of 2017-2020 from Bussemaker who refocuses on multiculturalism in a less explicit way than Van der Ploeg. She considers cultural minorities as part of larger society, agreeing with my idea of multiculturalism now being an inherent part of Dutch life. She states that museums have to keep in mind the wishes of the public and respond to those. After this chapter we can conclude that multiculturalism is imbedded in the renewed practice of museum studies and also in the current cultural policies. Everyone seems to acknowledge that we are living in a globalized, dynamic world and that there is no such thing as an objective story being told by a Western museum. Multiculturalism, even though a concept we can trace back several ages, was born in the twentieth century and has left its traces everywhere.

### 3. Multiculturalism in Amsterdam museums: a case study

*In this chapter I will introduce and analyse my chosen case-study for the issue of multiculturalism in current-day museums in Amsterdam: the Amsterdam Museum, a historical, local museum. I have deliberately chosen this museum due to the fact that it is in close relationship with its surroundings and it deals with the theme of migration throughout the ages. As we have seen in chapter one, historical museums tend to include cultural or religious minorities and sensitive histories naturally. I will start with an introduction on the museum and then focus on the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions from the passed few years. For the purpose of this chapter, I have had an interview with one of the curators of the museum and I received some interesting research written by another curator who is specialized in issues of multiculturalism and has done a lot of research on this subject. This research has given me insight into how multiculturalism affects museum practice and what obstacles can be stumbled upon. I will finish the case-study of the Amsterdam Museum by relating it to the larger contexts that were explained in the former chapter: the New Museology and the Dutch cultural policy.*

#### 3.1 Amsterdam Museum history and vision

The Amsterdam Museum was formerly called the Amsterdam Historical Museum and was founded in 1926. In 2010 the museum dropped 'historical' from its name, which according to curator Annemarie de Wildt was decided on for two reasons. Firstly, many people relate 'history' to something boring. Secondly, "talking about Amsterdam implies talking about history".<sup>156</sup> The historical element is obvious enough just by the name Amsterdam Museum. De Wildt names the Museum of London as an example, which "does not need history in its name either".<sup>157</sup> The new name, to me, suggests that the museums wants to focus more on modern Amsterdam and current social issues. The museum does try to achieve this, especially through temporary exhibitions, but in its essence, the museum remains a historical museum. In 1975 the museum opened its doors at the present location, an old orphanage in the centre of the city.<sup>158</sup> The museum currently has a collection of around 90.000 objects and contains more modern and

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<sup>156</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.208.

<sup>157</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>158</sup> Ibidem, p.207.

contemporary objects than during the first years of its existence. A larger part of the historical collection is on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum.<sup>159</sup> The museum is located right in the heart of the old city centre of Amsterdam, a city with 790.000 inhabitants and around 180 different nationalities, more than the half being originally foreigners. This major Amsterdam community with all its inhabitants and also tourists who form an important target group of the museum had to be addressed in the museum, but “what personal links could these people now have with seventeenth century Amsterdam, the so-called Golden Age that features so prominently in our exhibition and collections?”<sup>160</sup> The Amsterdam Museum aims to involve the Amsterdam community into their exhibitions and to “establish a closer relationship with its surroundings”.<sup>161</sup> The museum is very innovative in the way it works with communities, for instance by letting others decide on the content of exhibitions. In this way these communities (cultural minorities) gain more power and representation in the Amsterdam Museum.<sup>162</sup>

Annemarie de Wildt states that the Amsterdam Museum “like many other city museums has, a history of exhibitions and events around migration, ethnicities and identities”. Curator of modern history, Laura van Hasselt, also believes that the museum always aims to incorporate different voices and wants to give multiculturalism a place in its permanent collection as well as the temporary exhibitions.<sup>163</sup> “As a city museum we are from and for all Amsterdammers”, Van Hasselt declared, pointing out that multiculturalism is very appropriate and necessary in the Amsterdam Museum.<sup>164</sup> This is reflected in the museum’s mission statement:

“The Amsterdam Museum brings the history of the city alive for an audience that is as large and diverse as possible. The Amsterdam Museum challenges inhabitants of and visitors to the city to deepen their relationship to the city”.<sup>165</sup>

The mission statement emphasizes the diverse public of the museum and also focuses on tourists. They even make up forty to seventy percent of the total public, depending on

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<sup>159</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.207.

<sup>160</sup> Anne Marie de Wildt 2013, p.11.

<sup>161</sup> Davida de Hond, Sebastiaan van der Lans and Marjolein van der Vlies 2010, p.60.

<sup>162</sup> Ibidem, p.61.

<sup>163</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.207. This information I have also received in the interview with Laura van Hasselt 7 May 2015.

<sup>164</sup> Interview Laura van Hasselt 7 may 2015.

<sup>165</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.26. Is here quoted from the businessplan of the museum 2013-2016.

the temporary exhibitions on display.<sup>166</sup> This vision is generally shared by other European city museums: “as one of the key roles of city museums consists of acting as a ‘platform’ for all citizens, these city museums need to take into consideration this increasing diversity and complexity”. The identity of cities has significantly changed due to globalisation and migration. City museums should therefore be dynamic institutions, responding to current (multicultural) issues.<sup>167</sup> The Amsterdam museum also hopes to make new Dutch citizens feel at home and welcome them into the city. They very much consider foreigners as typically Dutch or at least typical for Amsterdam and welcome them very much.<sup>168</sup> In the future, the Amsterdam Museum will most probably continue to organise exhibitions with multicultural elements:

“Migration is part of the narrative of Amsterdam and therefore it is important to include this in the narrative of the museum, although telling the separate story of all migrant groups is impossible. And perhaps it is just as important to present the story of the superdiverse city they have chosen as their new (temporary) home”.<sup>169</sup>

De Wildt also mentions the contradictory position that the museum finds itself in when it comes to their public. On one hand they try to “attract the relatively easy-to-reach, culturally-engaged Amsterdam citizens as well as tourists”. On the other hand, “the museum is also an institution that has made and will continue to make conscious efforts to attract people that are not very used to visiting museums”.<sup>170</sup> Also, these groups often don’t have the money to visit museums, for they mostly have lower incomes. According to her cultural diversity is a complex issue, and it is difficult to achieve ultimate multiculturalism. What the museum can aim for in its policy and in the creation of exhibitions is to function as a contact-zone where people can listen to each other’s stories and histories and try to “broaden their horizon”.<sup>171</sup> I do question to what extent this is possible: the museum follows a certain, historical narrative, even though it aims to incorporate personal, diverse stories. This contact-zone is therefore subjected to the boundaries of the museum’s narrative. De Wildt poses another obstacle in the process of

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<sup>166</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 208.

<sup>167</sup> Ching Lin Pan, Joachim Bauer, Anja Dauschek, Paul van de Laar, Lieve Willekens and Leen Beyers 2014, p. 32.

<sup>168</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.217.

<sup>169</sup> Ibidem, p.230.

<sup>170</sup> Ibidem, p.230-231.

<sup>171</sup> Ibidem, p.231.

achieving a multicultural museum:

“Cultural diversity should be taken into account on different levels: publics, programmes, partners, and personnel. An obstacle in creating a more inclusive museum is the fact that most museums, including the Amsterdam Museum, are rather white museum, are rather ‘white’ institutions at least at the level of educational and curatorial staff and management”.<sup>172</sup>

This statement has been mentioned before. Even though I believe it is important to diversify museum staff, I don’t consider this a reason for a museum not to be able to create cultural diverse programmes and exhibitions. Museums should be aware of multiculturalism, but I believe this diversity can also be created through, for instance, consultation of source communities. The conclusion seems to be that multicultural policies seem to be inherent to the social mission of the museum, but economic and political circumstances force the museum to reconsider their priorities.

### 3.2 Multiculturalism on display

Multiculturalism is one of the central themes of the museum as the mission statement declares, but is also something the museum’s curators underline.<sup>173</sup> It is an ongoing theme throughout the permanent collection as well as the temporary exhibitions. A larger part of the permanent collection is dedicated to what is called Amsterdam DNA, a chronological tour around Amsterdam in forty-five minutes. The display was opened in 2011 and occupies 500m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>174</sup> The display deals with four elements characteristic for the city: freedom, spirit of enterprise, creativity and civic virtue. I must admit that these themes seem quite self-glorifying and does not automatically give way to more critical reflections. Most of these elements were inspired by the written works of Russell Shorto to whom I referred to in the first chapter. It has become a very visual display, designed by a famous Amsterdam-based design bureau *Kosmann.dejong* who believe that “moving pictures win out over text”.<sup>175</sup> Laura van Hasselt, who was responsible for many work that has been done for this project, as well as De Wildt explained that the display was

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<sup>172</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 231.

<sup>173</sup> This can be concluded after the interview with Laura van Hasselt and even more after also reading the chapter by Annemarie de Wildt.

<sup>174</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.208.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem, p. 221-222.

accompanied by information in ten different languages. Van Hasselt saw this as a way to address the diverse public that visits the museum, this in contrast to the opinion of De Wildt who emphasized that it aimed to cater to the large groups of tourists visiting the museum and that languages of the largest cultural minorities (Moroccan and Turkish) are not incorporated.<sup>176</sup> It is therefore questionable to what extent this can be considered as a multicultural element of the Amsterdam Museum. It suggests a multicultural approach, but is in fact an economic consideration and a clever marketing tool: to attract more tourists and generate more income. This seems to be in line with the current cultural policy of the Netherlands.

In line with the 'New Museology' and post-colonialism the museum does pay attention to sensitive, Dutch histories such as the plantation system and slavery trade during the seventeenth century. The amount of space and available time led to making hard choices, but as both curators emphasized: "one sentence can make a difference".<sup>177</sup> The display is next to being cheered for its innovation and interactive approach, also criticized because it would glorify Amsterdam's history too obviously. Amsterdam DNA, generally, does not deal with multiculturalism extensively but only mentions it now and then. What is interesting is that the twentieth century occupies a smaller amount of space than previous era's and that the amount of immigrants is only mentioned in several lines and videos, often linked to decolonisation.<sup>178</sup> This is interesting when thinking of the fact that this was the age of migration and that the museum aims to target newcomers with this display. We can question to what extent this can be achieved when only mentioning their personal experiences so briefly and even the modern era in general is a minor part of the installation. This being the time, we learned, that most immigrants strongly relate to.

In the permanent collection there is an animated city map installed where the population growth throughout the centuries is shown. The first migration wave of the seventeenth century is made visible by circles around the medieval canals. The circles of the second half of the twentieth century show the city's expansions of the neighbourhoods where many immigrants currently live.<sup>179</sup> The themes migration and multiculturalism come back several times throughout the permanent display: German

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<sup>176</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.222. It is also mentioned in the interview with Laura van Hasselt.

<sup>177</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>178</sup> Annemarie de Wildt, 2015, p.223.

<sup>179</sup> Ibidem, p. 209.

soldiers during the Second World War, Turkish guest workers at Kamp Atatürk, in accounts on Jewish immigrants and the building of Synagogues in the early modern period and many more small examples can be found during a visit to the museum.<sup>180</sup>

Another part of the permanent collection that is freely accessible is the Civic Guard Gallery where since 2012 a forty meter long carpet can be found, crafted by the Amsterdam-based artist Barbara Broekman (1955 -). She wanted to give the cultural richness of the city a place on the carpet, representing the 180 nationalities living in Amsterdam. This cultural element was made visible through the use of cultural-related materials like Belgian lace. The carpet was given a fitted name: *My City, a Celebration of Diversity*. De Wildt states that, although this artwork is an harmonious representation of multiculturalism in Amsterdam, it also resembles the issues that multiculturalism causes for museums. Carpet is not a material that lasts for a long time, it is a material that wears off quite easily. Because of this there is an idea to create a new carpet from a different, more sustainable material. The museum did want to keep the carpet because they noticed it attracted a lot attention from the public, also because it is visited by the shopping public from the nearby *Kalverstraat*. It functions as a colourful entrance of the museum and it is freely accessible.<sup>181</sup> There are as said, around 180 different nationalities, but not every group can be compared in size: “one person from Djibouti , six from Yemen and 30 Haitians, compared to 71.055 Moroccans and 41.042 Turkish Amsterdammers”.<sup>182</sup> Then there is also the issue that culture is often automatically considered bound to nationalities. This way of interpreting would not take in account the large Surinamese community, who often possess Dutch nationality.<sup>183</sup> The curator recognizes the fact that it is impossible to appeal to and incorporate everyone in the display of the permanent collection. She hopes, though, that many will recognize and relate to stories that are being told: “a Turkish family may come across the story of Kamp Atatürk , where the first guest workers lived. Surinamese Amsterdammers may wonder or get angry at the archive film about the immigrants from Suriname in 1975 who were forbidden to settle in Amsterdam”.<sup>184</sup> In her article on multiculturalism and superdiversity in the Amsterdam Museum she states very clearly that: “a presentation that includes each and every one is impossible. The Amsterdam Museum is a general city

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<sup>180</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.219.

<sup>181</sup> Interview Laura van Hasselt 7 may 2015 and some is also emphasized by De Wildt in her article.

<sup>182</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 210-211.

<sup>183</sup> Ibidem, p. 211.

<sup>184</sup> Ibidem, p. 212.

museum, and migration is only one of the themes that needs to be addressed”.<sup>185</sup>

There are many examples of exhibitions in the Amsterdam Museum that in some way address multiculturalism. At the end of this thesis, a list of these exhibitions is included. For now, I will focus on several examples, starting with *Allemaal Amsterdammers* (*We Are All Amsterdammers*). The exhibition of 1985 was an overview of migration waves comparing earlier immigration stories during the seventeenth century to others during the twentieth century. It aimed to address all people that feel connected to the city and presented many reasons for migrating or traveling to Amsterdam: “to find work and/or to seek refuge and find a relatively tolerant place where they could practice their religion or (in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries) their sexual preferences”.<sup>186</sup> This exhibition focused on the contributions of immigrants and not so much on issues of for instance discrimination. In this way *Allemaal Amsterdammers* does not seem to be a very critical exhibition. Are we really hearing ‘multiple voices’? The museum states that the exhibition was a “response to emerging voices protesting against multicultural society”.<sup>187</sup> The stories of the immigrants were made personal through the use of personal letters from immigrants to their homeland. In later centuries also documentation in spoken words were included<sup>188</sup> This relates to the vision of the museum that they want visitors to relate to other people’s stories and to bring people together. It is questionable to what extent this approach is in line with the ‘New Museology’, but I do believe this comes close to the concept of the museum as a contact zone.

The next exhibition I would like to address is the *Buurtwinkels* (*Neighbourhood Shops*), a project of three years starting in 2008. It was another example of a project outside of the museum: it started again, with a website which was inspiring enough to create exhibitions on two locations, representing the traditional neighbourhood shops. One shop was installed in Amsterdam North and one in East, both in very multi-ethnic areas of the city.

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<sup>185</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 212.

<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, p.214-215.

<sup>187</sup> Ibidem, p.215.

<sup>188</sup> Annemarie de Wildt, 2015, p. 215.

“The exhibition showed how from the 1970s onwards shops were bought by Turkish bakers, Moroccan butchers and Indian textile traders. Not only did the faces of the shop owners change, but also their merchandise. In came the döner kebab, tropical fruits, garlic, Surinamese roti, and couscous. The life stories of the shopkeepers are tales that cross continents”.<sup>189</sup>

The exhibition *Buurtwinkels* was obviously an exhibition mostly focusing again on the contributions immigrants could make to the Netherlands; how they enriched Dutch society. Curator and initiator Annemarie de Wildt emphasized that it was not the intention to make a distinction between foreign and non-foreign shops and their shopkeepers, but rather to discuss a phenomenon very common to the time. She aimed to “show processes of change”.<sup>190</sup> The exhibition fitted with the idea of the Amsterdam Museum to address ethnic groups directly, but through a broader thematic approach: “a very common subject like shopping provided the opportunity to talk about grand themes like migration, globalization of the food market and the role of shops in the local economy”.<sup>191</sup>

The last example I would like to discuss are two exhibitions from 2012 that are strongly connected and celebrated “400 years of diplomatic and trade relations between the Netherlands and Turkey”. The exhibition, *De kamer van de Levantse handel (Sultans, Merchants, Painters: The Early Years of Turkish-Dutch relations)*, had a festive opening in the company of former Queen Beatrix, (then still) Prince and Willem-Alexander and Princess Máxima but also the Turkish president Abdullah Gül. The exhibition was made possible through collaboration with the *Pera Museum* in Istanbul, the first location where the exhibition could be seen. The other part, only on display in Amsterdam, was *Turkse Pioniers in Amsterdam (Turkish Pioneers in Amsterdam)* on immigrant labourers. Another exhibition very much related focused on Dutch immigrants moving to Turkey for economic, social or other positive prospects and chances. It wanted to provide a counter-perspective next to the negative reactions towards Turkish people living in the Netherlands. These reactions present a negative image of the country while it is currently a very much developing and promising nation.<sup>192</sup> I seriously question the multicultural factor in these exhibitions, especially in the first discussed. I believe diplomatic motives have created this exhibition and have most probably played a larger

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<sup>189</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 220.

<sup>190</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 220.

<sup>191</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>192</sup> Ibidem, p. 226. Also emphasized in the interview with Laura van Hasselt.

role than social motives.

In the conversation I had with Laura van Hasselt, she expressed her plans for a coming exhibition on the celebration of the 100 year existence of Schiphol Airport. Even in a theme that does not seem to have a direct link with multiculturalism, there is always place to broaden and personalise the narrative. She wants to bring in the story of a Turkish immigrant who had his first job at the airport. He then tells the story of the wave of immigrants in the twentieth century who either arrived in their new country through the airport, or have worked there during this period. She mentioned this example to emphasize that every theme or story connected to the city of Amsterdam is connected to a multicultural context.<sup>193</sup>

This last statement, from Laura van Hasselt, shows the social role of the museum and that it believes to cater to ‘all Amsterdammers’. This section has shown how complex multicultural policies in museums have become, due to economic and political circumstances and demands. Although the museum wants to create exhibitions that appeal to their immigrants, they also focus on blockbuster-exhibitions on the seventeenth century that mostly attract large crowds of tourists. Their multicultural policy does therefore not appear very consistent.

### 3.3 Contextualizing the museum: context and policies

As discussed in the previous chapter multiculturalism came on the agenda of politics and museums during the last decades of the twentieth century. The age of migration asked for more input of cultural minorities in cultural institutions and this was reflected in cultural policies of museums. The Amsterdam Museum developed a multicultural policy during the 1990s for exhibitions and educational programs. An important example that was mentioned by curator Laura van Hasselt is the educational program for newcomers in the Netherlands who are also taking Dutch and naturalisation classes. During this period the Amsterdam Museum “was the leading museum in the Netherlands for the making of exhibitions on migration and other social issues”.<sup>194</sup> The first steps the museum took included stories of different immigrants in the museum narrative. The museum considered them as an important part of Dutch and Amsterdam’s history. They tried to establish partnerships with different cultural groups

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Laura van Hasselt 7 may 2015.

<sup>194</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.215.

and organizations. The museum also acquired more personal objects for their collections during this period.<sup>195</sup> As mentioned, the Amsterdam Museum also shows its face outside of the museum walls, for instance in the project *Buurtwinkels*. Another example is the photo studio that was set up in the *Oosterpark* during Ketikoti (Break the Chains) where the abolition of slavery is annually celebrated. Many people had their shots taken in their often traditional clothing. Museum staff, but also many volunteers, interviewed the participants about their motives and feelings to be celebrating today. These stories with personal anecdotes can now be found on a specifically created website that can be found via the main website of the museum. This shows how the Amsterdam Museum considers modern technologies as an important instrument to connect to Amsterdam communities, bring them together and personalise the museum experience (even outside of the museum).<sup>196</sup> Laura van Hasselt also emphasized that she encourages the use of photography because it is a strong way to show personal stories and it also makes people proud to become a visual part of an exhibition.<sup>197</sup> These examples make clear that the Amsterdam Museum strongly aims for social inclusion and their ideas strongly relate to characteristics of the 'New Museology' discussed in the previous chapter.

At the turn of the century events as 9/11 and the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh led to a heated debate on multiculturalism. De Wildt believes that this discussion did not influence the museum intensively because people often feel more connected to a city than to a country. The idea 'Amsterdam' was still standing, even though there was a national ongoing discussion on multicultural society.<sup>198</sup> I personally have my doubts about her account: as explained in chapter one, these events had a huge impact on daily life in Amsterdam and local politicians had to do their utmost best to keep the city together. I agree with her that the connection to a city or village can be much stronger than a national relation, I just don't believe this theory applies here. I live in Haarlem, a city in the Netherlands, near Amsterdam and I strongly feel that living here is part of who I am: it is where I grew up, where most people I know live and obviously it is the world most close to you. If something happens so close to where you feel home, then I believe it does influence you strongly. This is, I believe, something especially local

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<sup>195</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 215-216.

<sup>196</sup> Ibidem, p. 224-225. Also mentioned in the interview with Laura van Hasselt.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Laura van Hasselt 7 may 2015.

<sup>198</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p. 21.

and city museums should respond to. To come back to De Wildt's statement; immigrants often feel a special connection to Amsterdam and the museum wondered what could be the reason they had until then still failed to attract these groups in large amounts. She believes this can be explained through the lack of contemporary stories and objects: it is not the Amsterdam these people know and feel connected to.<sup>199</sup> The year 2000 can be seen as a turning point: the vision on exhibitions changed and the museum modernised and personalised its displays. The museum shifted its focus from temporary exhibitions focusing on one specific culture or ethnic group to larger themes, often also concentrating on larger issues like globalization.<sup>200</sup>

Another input that was addressed by post-colonial critique and the 'New Museology' was that black pages of history had to have a place in museums as well, especially the example of slavery is often mentioned. In 2013 there was a large exhibition on the Golden Age on display in the Amsterdam Museum, in a year that also commemorated 150 years of abolition of slavery. Annemarie de Wildt considered this an important milestone that had to be mentioned and obviously it related closely to the celebrated Golden Age: the period also contains some dark pages. It was decided that the subject should not have a separate exhibition but that the theme should interfere with the glory days of the Dutch Republic. The installation added an extra layer to the exhibition and gave way to many personal stories of descendants of slaves.<sup>201</sup> It also changed the appearance of the exhibition from mostly self-glorifying to a more critical reflection. Again we see that personalising exhibition is a way in which the Amsterdam Museum tries to achieve the idea of multiplicity. De Wildt also states that these sensitive histories often lead to reactions from both sides:

"In various ways one comes across dilemmas when creating exhibitions that deal with diversity. The woman who created the headgear that was part of the slavery intervention told me (but only on my third visit to her) that some of her Surinamese-Amsterdam acquaintances had told her 'not to work for the white people'".<sup>202</sup>

The Amsterdam Museum is still changing and evolving, reacting to whatever plays in its surroundings. The museum is planning renovations on the permanent display,

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<sup>199</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.216-217.

<sup>200</sup> Ibidem, p.217.

<sup>201</sup> Ibidem, p. 226.

<sup>202</sup> Ibidem, p. 228.

exceptionally the Amsterdam DNA. These changes have been planned for several years but were cancelled due to the economic crisis. There is the intention to incorporate cultural diversity more extensively in the new permanent display.<sup>203</sup>

A concept that is very appropriate for the Amsterdam Museum, is the idea of the museum as a 'contact zone' that was introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in 1992 and applied to museums five years later by James Clifford: a place where different cultures meet and can also discuss certain matters.<sup>204</sup> The museum then functions as an interactive, but also a very creative space where cultures fuse. A comparison to multi-ethnic neighbourhoods can be made here: areas in Amsterdam that are often considered multicultural are also thought of to be immensely creative and trendy. As mentioned this concept also gives way to a dialogue on more sensitive subjects:

"In the representation of super-diversity in the museum space and other sites one needs to balance between the representation of conflicts and harmonious civic integration practices. Indeed racism, discrimination and exclusion are part and parcel of multi-ethnic societies".

The concept of the contact zone is related to the idea of social inclusion in museums that was proposed by the 'New Museology'. The concept is mostly used for ethnographic and archaeological museums: types of museums that are mostly faced with issues of post-colonialism and are trying to boost their post-colonial status by the inclusion of 'source communities'.<sup>205</sup> Pratt introduced the term in a time when post-colonialism was a heated topic in many social institutions and even though that is not always appropriate in the case of the Amsterdam Museum (it is for instance applicable to the issue of slavery) it remains a solid, visual term, very much appropriate for a museum that wants to bring the city's community together in their physical space.<sup>206</sup>

The question could be asked to what extent the Amsterdam Museum actually has put the 'New Museology' into practice and I believe they have to the extent that they are aware of the multicultural necessity of their permanent display as well as the temporary exhibitions. This has led to the incorporation of many personal stories and links to

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<sup>203</sup> Annemarie de Wildt 2015, p.229. Is also mentioned in the interview with Laura van Hasselt.

<sup>204</sup> Ching Lin Pan, Joachim Bauer, Anja Dauschek, Paul van de Laar, Lieve Willekens and Leen Beyers 2014, p. 34.

<sup>205</sup> Robin Boast 2011, p.56.

<sup>206</sup> Ibidem, p.57.

immigrants settling in Amsterdam throughout the ages. It has to be noted that participation of cultural minorities in the way that the 'New Museology' has posed by literally bringing people into the museum and sharing curatorial tasks is not applicable to the Amsterdam Museum. Many projects are short-term and often 'source communities' are only used as theoretical sources as well as narrators of personal interpretations of the narrative that the museum has set up. I also believe that the permanent display (Amsterdam DNA) lacks multicultural depth. The museum is strongly holding on to certainties and not handing over work to non-professionals completely, but always supervised.<sup>207</sup> This is something that could be criticized when looking from a museological viewpoint, but when we look at it practically the museum does want to achieve high quality exhibitions and collections. That means that the projects are always supervised by museum professionals. So we could ask ourselves whether a true participation by cultural minorities is possible or desirable. It is sometimes believed a solution could lay in the cultural composition of museum staff, who as mentioned often have a Dutch background. As mentioned, I find this questionable and believe multicultural awareness is what counts. This can also be achieved by consultation and projects as the Amsterdam Museum's program for new Dutch citizens. I don't consider short-term projects a problem as long as museums are reaching out to as many institutions and communities as possible. Short-term projects also create diversity. These could be more permanent projects in the form of, for instance, research.

When it comes to the cultural policy of the Netherlands and its relation to multicultural policies of museums, curators state that it is not very effective. First of all the cultural policy has proven to be contradictory in practice: attracting a larger but also a new, different public leads to opposite results. Laura van Hasselt believes that the demand of generating more public income through sales or sponsorship could even do harm to the multicultural aspect of the museum. Government funding has also become less and only local governments, now and then, fund smaller exhibitions with a specific target group. These projects do not, generally, lead to more visitors and income. Museums could get out of touch with their original vision and mission. The groups who do not visit museums often have to be attracted, but the larger public of the museum consists of white, higher educated, older people.<sup>208</sup> This is the contradiction in the

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<sup>207</sup> Davida de Hond, Sebastiaan van der Lans and Marjolein van der Vlies 2010, p.63.

<sup>208</sup> Interview Laura van Hasselt 7 may 2015.

cultural policy that has been mentioned throughout this thesis. It remains a difficult task to attract cultural minorities and it is not achieved by only incorporating multiple voices into the museum narrative. The fact remains that; “how to transform new citizens with a migration background into active cultural consumers requires major rethinking of how we construct and view the new urban condition of diversity, mobility and multiple belongings”.<sup>209</sup> The question then remains whether this can be achieved by the museum’s efforts or that this needs wider support from other (governmental) institutions. This can be underlined by looking at the influence the cultural policy has on multiculturalism in museums: when the government focuses more on economic than social factors, so will museums.

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<sup>209</sup> Ching Lin Pan, Joachim Bauer, Anja Dauschek, Paul van de Laar, Lieve Willekens and Leen Beyers 2014, p.36.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have asked myself the question how Amsterdam Museums address and deal with multiculturalism in their permanent collection as well as the temporary exhibitions. Second part of my question was to what extent this notion of multiculturalism relates to larger contexts being the 'New Museology' and Dutch cultural policy of the twenty-first century. I realize that these are merely two of the many factors. The changes that were made in museums during the last part of the twentieth century were part of a larger, dynamic process of change that influenced many disciplines. I have therefore mainly focused on themes like migration (the twentieth century being the age of migration) and globalisation.

I have specifically focused on the main capital: Amsterdam, because this is a multicultural hub as well as a cultural one where many of the most famous Dutch museums can be found. The first chapter has shown that the Netherlands and in particular its capital have functioned as an attractive place for immigrants, a safe haven. Especially during the seventeenth century, Amsterdam functioned as a place where many ethnic and religious groups gathered and sought refuge, the city was then famed for its tolerant attitude (which can be questioned). A second large wave of immigrants arrived during the twentieth century, often as guest workers, from whom it was not expected to stay but time decided otherwise. This wave is particularly important for our concept of multiculturalism in museums and relates to changes that had to be made in museums, according to the 'New Museology'.

The 'New Museology' (and alongside also post-colonialism) asked for a new attitude from museums towards the public. This can be strongly related to the age of migration and globalisation where boundaries had vanished and national identity was being questioned. The movement emerged in 1989 and started with the publication of Peter Vergo and still stands today in a more critical museum studies as Hooper-Greenhill has proved. I believe some key elements of the 'New Museology' can be distinguished which influenced multiculturalism in museums:

- The relationship between museums and their communities had to change alongside with the function of museums. It was believed that museums had lost

their touch and did not change along with society. Now western societies had significantly changed due to immigration waves and globalisation, museums had to be modernised.

- The museum authority was being brought into question: curators could no longer decide on what the 'true narrative' could be. Museum display was now believed to be subjective in its essence and that different people viewed objects and stories differently. This has also led to huge changes in educational programs.
- This point relates to the idea of 'multiple voices': if a clear story couldn't be distinguished, a 'truth', then different sides of the story had to be brought to life. This also meant that 'sensitive (hi)stories had to be addressed in museums. Another example is the use of 'source communities'. Collaboration between museums and communities can be put to practice in many ways: from slight contribution to the handing over of the curatorial task.
- Museums are thought to be powerful agents in creating identity and meaning. Representation was being criticized which resulted in the concept of 'multiple voices' but also in the contact zone. Especially in multicultural countries this was believed to be able to bring cultures together.

Another factor that I wanted to address was that the cultural policy of the Netherlands for museums is always influenced by governmental choices. Cultural policy is also strongly connected to tendencies in society. What the paragraph on the cultural policy has shown (as well as the interview with Laura van Hasselt) is that museums are mostly influenced by the debates on cultural fundings. Economic motives seem to influence the cultural policy even stronger than social motives. This can be concluded after comparing the other two periods to the one of 2013-2016. This was written during the high days of the cultural crisis and the cultural program can be mostly characterized by its cut-backs on cultural institutions. Another fact that reoccurred was the contradiction in cultural policy: the government asked from museums to attract more visitors but also wanted museums to cater to cultural minorities which in practice can be very contradictory. Exhibitions and collections that appeal to these minorities often do not seem to attract larger crowds. Bussemaker has tried to incorporate this into her cultural program of the period 2017-2020. Annemarie de Wildt believes that these minorities do feel more

invited into the museum when they address current issues and current day Amsterdam for that is what they relate to most.

The third chapter was dedicated to the case-study of the Amsterdam Museum. It became clear that the museum is very aware of its multicultural surroundings and is always striving towards the idea of a multicultural museum. The Amsterdam Museum responded quickly to the changing tendencies at the end of the twentieth century: in the 1990s already, they addressed multiculturalism in their exhibitions. Firstly they focused on exhibitions about one specific culture and around 2000 they changed this policy and used exhibitions as a space for debate and addressed larger themes like migration. This is particularly interesting when thinking of the fact that this is just after the ending of the age of migration and the high days of the 'New Museology'. The museum is still paying very much attention to the relationship with their public. Many examples of exhibitions were mentioned in the second paragraph and in the appendix a complete list of them can be found. It is visible that the museum often collaborates with communities on a short term basis and mostly through delivering information and telling personal stories. It is questionable whether this is the style of collaboration the 'New Museology' aimed for. What can be seen is that, in line with the 'New Museology' and post-colonialism, the museum often addresses sensitive histories as the issue of slavery. They even incorporate it into what could be a self-glorifying exhibition of the Dutch Republic during the Golden Age. This again relates to the concept of the contact zone where different groups can meet and debate. On one point I disagreed with De Wildt and that is concerning the murders on Van Gogh and Fortuyn. She believes it did not really effect the Amsterdam Museum. Shorto mentioned in the first chapter that it scarred the city deeply, and as a city museum I would believe it should touch upon the Amsterdam Museum as well. The influence of these kind of events should be interesting for further research. What can be concluded is that the Amsterdam museum is very aware of its multicultural public and is always aiming for a broad representation of Amsterdam history and present day life. They certainly react to whatever is going on in their surroundings. As mentioned by De Wildt, multiculturalism is still only one of the many aspects that have to be addressed and Dutch identity is always a characteristic. However, I believe that the museum considers multiculturalism as an intrinsic part of this Dutch identity.

## **Appendix: list of multicultural exhibitions in the Amsterdam Museum as published in *Museums, Migration and Identity in Europe*.**

*List of exhibitions involving representations of migration*

1985/6

*Allemaal Amsterdammers – nieuwkomers, nakomelingen, Nederlanders, immigranten vanaf 1150* (All Amsterdammers – Immigrants, Descendants and Dutch from 1550), major exhibition 1986.

1986

*Nieuwkomers, nakomelingen, Nederlanders* (Newcomers, Offspring, Netherlanders) Poster exhibition for schools and community centres.

1987/8

*Exodo, Portugezen in Amsterdam 1600-1680* (Exodo, Portuguese in Amsterdam 1600-1680) Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon and Amsterdam Historical Museum, major exhibition.

1989/90

*Goed verkeerd. Geschiedenis van homoseksuele mannen en lesbische vrouwen in Nederland* (Two of a Kind. A History of Gays and Lesbians in Holland), major exhibition

1990/1

*Dong Feng – Oostenwind. Chinezen in Nederland* (Dong Feng – East Wind. Chinese in the Netherlands), major exhibition.

1996

*Amsterdam 'daki Anadolu'- Anatolië in Amsterdam* (Anatolia in Amsterdam), Photo-exhibition on Turkish migration and collection project.

1997

*Ik heb een Tante in Marokko – leven in twee culturen* (My Aunt in Morocco – Living in

Two Cultures), photo project by Kadir van Lohuizen who portrayed the life of an Amsterdam-Moroccan family, exhibition and collection project.

1990s onwards: various programmes for people learning Dutch as an introduction to Amsterdam.

### 1999

New galleries on the nineteenth/twentieth centuries, including migration carousel, Children's Stories (till 2014) and Camp Atatürk, semi-permanent displays.

### 2002

*Ja, ik wil* (Yes, I do), together with Silver Scissors, a girl group from Amsterdam East who created bridal gowns for Barbies on occasion of the royal wedding, courtyard exhibition.

### 2003-4

*Oost, een Amsterdamse Buurt* (East, an Amsterdam Neighbourhood), major exhibition and story website.

### 2006

*Mijn Hoofddoek* (My Headscarf), small exhibition.

### 2006

*Hier sta ik* (Here I Am), 'dreamboxes' with photographs and poems by children from an asylum centre, courtyard exhibition.

### 2007

*Wat wens ik voor mijn kind* (What Do I Want For My Child?) Parents from diverse backgrounds visualize their children's future, courtyard exhibition.

### 2007

*Water, verhalen van de El Kadisiaschool* (Water: Stories from the El Kadisiaschool), courtyard exhibition.

## 2011

*Buurtwinkels* (Neighbourhood shops). Major exhibition in the museum and satellite initiatives, website and events.

## 2008

*Amsterdam tracks* (about street culture), courtyard exhibition.

## 2012

*De kamer van de Levantse handel* (Sultans, Merchants, Painters: the Early Years of Turkish-Dutch relations), major exhibition in collaboration with the Pera Museum, Istanbul.

## 2012

*Turkse Pioniers in Amsterdam* (Turkish Pioneers in Amsterdam). NDSM werf/wharf (Amsterdam Noord) and Theater Mozaïek, medium-sized exhibitions.

## 2013

*De Zwarte bladzijde van de Gouden Eeuw* (The Dark Pages of the Golden Age). Intervention in major exhibition on the Golden Age in combination with events (discussions and walks).

## 2014

*Bekeerd* (Converted), exhibitions about Dutch people converting to Islam, small exhibition.

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## List of images

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