A Clog-dance with Diversity
Past, Present and Future of the Multicultural Netherlands[1]

Dineke Stam

"There are no 'them' and 'us', if 'we' are 'them'."
(Fred Wilson)

Intercultural (Museum) Programmes (*IP*) worked between 1998 and 2004 to recognise and acknowledge cultural diversity in the heritage sector. The project was based at the *Netherlands Museum association* and worked closely together with its sister project *Cultural Heritage of Minorities* (*CEM*). The cooperating heritage umbrella organisations of monuments, archives, archaeologists, museums and digital heritage commissioned IP and CEM, and funding for both projects came from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.[2] I would like to present our vision of interculturalisation of the heritage sector, but first I must describe the political climate and context in which we worked. This context worked as a tightening corset, or a stiffening clog, while we were trying to dance with diversity.

The day that I gave my first presentation as a project manager for *Intercultural Programmes* was September 12th 2001, one day after 9/11. Our final conference "Dancing with Diversity" took place on 15th of November 2004, shortly after Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered. It is an understatement to say that the discourse on intercultural issues had changed immensely in this time span.

1 This article is a reworked and translated version of Dineke Stam, De band tussen boeren, burgers en buitenlui [The bond between farmers, burghers and outsiders], in: Boekman Tijdschrift voor kunst, cultuur en beleid, 61, (herfst 2004), available under: <www.boekman.nl>.
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2 Look at <www.museumvereniging.nl/nmv/ip> for the evaluation and activities of *IP*. See <www.prismaproject.nl> for Case Studies, also in English.

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The present debate on 'integration' in the Netherlands sounds more like a discourse on 'assimilation': 'we' feel that 'they' have to integrate. This so-called integration debate is often not about integration but about exclusion. The actual eviction (or deportation) of a large number of 26.000 asylum seekers whose refugee status has been rejected by the court, many of whom have been in legal procedures for years, and are often well-integrated in society, have had children, speak the language, painfully shows this. The fact that integration policy is based at the Ministry of Justice is striking. The tone is extremely negative. "Nobody talks about the advantages of immigration. Politicians and authorities only speak of limiting the number of immigrants and monitoring their behaviour", said a shocked chair of the EU Racial Committee Philips about the formerly liberal Netherlands.[3]

The events of 9/11 and the political rise and murder of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 have made fear an important factor in politics. Probably this fear had been present for a long time already, but it came to be politically exploited after Fortuyn, and even more manifest after the murder of Theo van Gogh. Fortuyn was killed by a leftist fundamentalist environmentalist. Theo van Gogh, the recalcitrant film-director of "Submission", the anti Islam-oppression of women pamphlet by parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali, was horribly murdered by a Muslim extremist. The response was huge. On television it seemed that all Muslims were responsible for the act of that one person. Arsonists set fire to mosques as well as Islamic schools and a church. Of course there is reason to be scared of Islamic fundamentalism and it takes huge courage from feminists like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, whose life has been threatened, to continue the struggle against female oppression within Islam. But the mechanism of scapegoating a whole community because of the acts of a few should be fiercefully combated.

Dutch people also feel threatened in their culture. In March 2004 the newspaper headlines told us that three quarters of 'the Dutch' fear the loss of their own culture. Two-thirds thought that newcomers had to be obliged to live and act according to Dutch culture. A recent instance of such an idea is the (serious!) proposition by the Integration Minister Rita Verdonk to oblige migrants to also speak the Dutch language at home, even if this is not the mother tongue. When asked what the features of Dutch culture are, most people answered "Queen's Day, cheese and ice-skating".[4] Recently, books on Dutch history and identity have flooded the market. The search for 'Dutch identity' has started and what is most stunning is the vastly traditional way Dutchness is presented, as pure or essential characteristics of those people living at the delta near to the North sea. The mainstream answer to the fear of loss of their own culture lies in the phrase "they have to integrate". This simple sentence hides three questions. Who are 'they'? What is 'integration'? Where do 'they' have to integrate into? In other words: who are 'we'?

3 De Volkskrant, 2 July 2003.

4 Koen Koch, Schaatsnatie, in: Trouw, 2 april 2004; Speaking Dutch at home, May 2005.

To begin with the question "Who are they?": integration policy is not just about people that have just arrived in the Netherlands (the newcomers), it is also directed to so-called 'old comers'. It is about immigrants. One term in the Netherlands prevails for this group, 'allochtones', the opposite of autochthones (i. e. natives). This is a statistical term used by the *Central Bureau for Statistics* for persons that are born abroad or are children of one or two parents born abroad. Of course nobody feels 'allochtonous'. Nobody originates from a country called Allochtonia. To be an 'allochtone' is an imposed identity and even used as a term of abuse. A lawyer from Congo, who is an important human rights activist, remarks: "The Netherlands look at foreigners as one and the same. Foreigners are paper; they don't exist as individuals with their own qualities. Always one is *Monsieur tout le monde.* That is most irritating. One is not taken seriously."[5]

Germans are, with four hundred thousand, almost the largest 'allochtonous' group, followed immediately by the Indo Dutch (who mostly are not categorised as 'allochtonous'). Turkish, Surinamese and Moroccan Dutch all number around three hundred thousand people. One in ten Dutch belongs to the group of non-western 'allochtonous'. In this group one finds both an Indian professor, a child born abroad from Dutch parents as well as a popular princess. I myself use several terms, like immigrants, persons with a double cultural background, or for example Surinamese Dutch.

The other problem with this formula that "they have to integrate" is the lack of recognition of the fact that integration is a two-way process. Within integration policy, culture gets little attention. Traditionally this policy was more directed at social inclusion, specifically in work and education. Recently the question has become topical whether socio-cultural integration will conquer segregation and exclusion. The call for one-sided assimilation to 'the' Dutch culture suggests a uniformity that does not exist. New generations bear the cultural luggage of their parents as well that of their neighbourhood, school and social networks. New cultural expressions are formulated time and again. Any attempt to limit those expressions into one single steady box will not succeed and will only lead to repression. Or would one seriously oblige all Dutch to compulsory take ice skating lessons, eat cheese and celebrate the Queen's birthday?

And as to the question "Who are we?": in *Intercultural Programmes* we advocated an approach to identity that includes many aspects besides ethnicity. Age, gender, talents, position in or outside of the family, class, and many more things matter. Identity is a process. It can contain conflicting elements. To have different cultural backgrounds by the way doesn't imply that differences will overrule similarities. On the contrary, the similarities between people are huge, after all, there is only one humankind, one human 'race'. To recognise and acknowledge differences is a prerequisite for the ability to connect on an equal basis.

A telling story in this respect was told by Raoel Fransen, who represented Dutch youth on the "World Aids conference" in June 2004. Before travelling he had realised the enor-

5 Jeroen Corduwener, Vreemdeling is verre van welkom, in: Trouw, 5 July 2003.

mous differences between living a life with HIV in Western Europe or in South Africa. During the conference, however, he was more struck by the similarities: "Whatever the circumstances, young people have the same dreams and wishes. To go to school, make a career, find a job or a partner. To build a life."[6]

Heritage, culture and identities

It is an enormous challenge to our heritage organisations to give the dynamic concept of Dutch culture more content. Museums and heritage organisations are *the* place to be if it comes to culture. The Prisma-website "Refresh you memory!" offers a lead to take that challenge. This project joins hands with international policy directed towards pluralism and cultural diversity like the Unesco declaration on cultural diversity (2001).

Culture develops as a cross-over of ideas. "Dutch culture has always been on the move, partly (not only) because of the influence of immigrants", write the editors of the new series on Culture and Migration in the Netherlands, Rosemarie Buikema and Maaike Meijer.

> Changes in our culture have led to passionate debates in the last century. The recurrent question was: What exactly is Dutch culture? In all respects, it is surprisingly dynamic. Culture and traditions that immigrants brought with them – or that the Dutch themselves had picked up somewhere – have mixed with autochthonous cultural habits. In some areas cultural confrontations didn't mix or mutually influence, but led to separation and rejection, and to withdrawal into subcultures.[7]

What we see as 'characteristically Dutch' is sponged with international influences. There is no such thing as 'the Dutch identity'. A national identity, just like an individual one, is multiple, dynamic and even contrary. All of us have come from somewhere. 'Our' heritage, our history crosses borders. A Dutch chef who lives in the United States of America calls nutmeg and cinnamon typically Dutch. This is both true and not true. These spices have been taken by the *Dutch East India Company* (*VOC*) from the Indonesian archipelago. Nutmeg and cinnamon have become part of Dutch culture, a fact that has to do with our colonial and trade history.

The Nederlands Vlechtmuseum (Dutch Braid Museum), that was opened in the Frisian village of Noordwolde, owes a lot to the East Indian braid-art, an until recently overlooked part of history. Both the artistic motifs and the high level and variation of materials used by broidery artisans from the Dutch East Indies have enriched the Noordwolde industry.

6 Trouw, 15 July 2004.

7 Rosemarie Buikema and Maaike Meijer, Cultuur en migratie in Nederland. Kunsten in beweging 1900–1980 [Culture and migration in the Netherlands. Art on the move 1900–1980], Den Haag 2003.

The big silence on our colonial past is a negation of that artistic influence. It shades our understanding of the importance of Indonesia in Dutch history. Even the well known former Chair of Parliament Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven, who opened this museum in her birthplace Noordwolde didn't understand why she had been singing in a *krontjong* orchestra in her youth.[8]

A nice example of acculturation – the inclusion of a cultural element from elsewhere in such a vast manner that the origin has become invisible – is the present 'farmers handkerchief', that was presented in the municipal museum *De Lakenhal* (Cloth Hall) in Leiden. Both colour and motifs of this handkerchief have originated from shawls that *VOC* sailors and traders noticed in India.[9]

By time and again placing 'Dutch' in an historical perspective, we are taking responsibility for our history, both for the events that we now disapprove of as well as for the things we are proud of. How the Dutch identity was perceived in the nineteenth century was very different from the present perception. At that time the colonial empire was an essential part of it. Today this historical recognition is superficial. The fact that the present Kingdom of the Netherlands still has overseas parts, and that Antilleans are Dutch, seems to be less important for the identity of the Dutch in the Netherlands than of those on the Antilles.

Buying slaves with shells

The historical collections in the Netherlands, present in museums, monuments and archives, that form 'our' heritage, contain endless hints to colonial history, migration history and the history of the slave trade and slavery. The things we include in 'our' heritage depend partly on whom we want to include. There is little debate on the question whether the painting by Isaac Israëls that depicts the wounded soldier Kees Pop in 1882 belongs to our heritage. This African man was named Kees Pop when he became a contract soldier in the *Dutch colonial East Indian Army*, the *KNIL*. The Dutch contracted about three thousand soldiers in West Africa in the nineteenth century to fight in the Dutch East Indies. *Belanda itam*, or Black Dutch was the Indonesian name for these soldiers. Some came back wounded. Kees Pop was staying over in the colonial *Werfdepot* (Recruitment depot) in the Dutch city of Harderwijk, when Israëls portrayed him.[10] Black and Dutch are not

8 *Krontjong* is an Indonesian music tradition; cf. Berteke Waaldijk and Susan Legêne, Oktober 1901. Gerret Rouffaer constateert een artistieke ereschuld. Vernieuwing van de beeldende kunsten in een koloniale context. [October 1901, Gerret Rouffaer identifies an artistical debt of honour. Innovation of the visual arts in a colonial context], in: Buikema/Meijer, Cultuur, see note 7, 19–39; and a tv-interview in Villa Felderhof with Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven.

9 Trouw, 12 September 2003.

10 KNIL Royal Dutch Indies Army: Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch leger. The painting is in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, see: <www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria> for a picture and more information; Ineke

mutually excluding categories, as some white Dutch like to think. Not only in the present, also in the past black Dutch existed; often against their own will, as was the case with people that had been brought into slavery and were traded from West Africa to the overseas colonies.

For over a hundred years after the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Antilles and Surinam (1863) there was hardly any public recognition for this shared past. The traces of the slave trade, however, are out there to – literally! – get picked up. Sometimes kauri shells are washed ashore the beaches of the province of Zeeland from the shipwrecked vessels of the *Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie* (Middelburg Commercial Company). The kauri shells were used as money to buy slaves in Africa. Recently the provincial archives of Zeeland published a walking tour to discover the traces of slave history in the city of Middelburg. The green grassed slope near the harbour was the place where the slave ships departed. Not yet with people as cargo, but filled with shells, beads, heavy stones and homemade shackles to sail to Africa, buy people and shackle them.

It is impossible to isolate Dutch culture from its European, or even its global context. There lies a meaning in every object, archive or monument. The only way it gets this meaning is because people design, use, or contextualise it in a certain manner. To exchange meaning with another person, from another generation, class, gender, ethnicity or family, is an intercultural exchange. Two persons look at an object from a different cultural perspective.

To give meaning is a complicated process which is interesting to analyse. Why a certain object is regarded as 'heritage' is the central question. Heritage institutions normally leave this decision to curators or archivists. Diversifying staff and enlarging the influence of visitors and users are ways to share this power.

Diversify!

One way to discover intercultural influences on 'our' heritage is to work with people with double cultural backgrounds. A person that was raised in an 'Indian' atmosphere and has certain sensitivity might sooner recognise Indian motifs in heritage. An Arabic speaking person that can also write this language understands the calligraphy on an old Islamic antique bowl. Chinese signs and shapes on Delft Blue porcelain could be contextualised sooner by a Chinese-Dutch person. Perhaps somebody from Curaçao might be acquainted with the fact that the ultimate representation of the Netherlands, the miniature town Madurodam, was named after Curaçao-born George Maduro. This Jewish resistance fighter was killed as a Prisoner of War in February 1945 in Dachau.

Dutch people with a double cultural background as well as black Dutch are underrepresented in the higher staff levels of museums and heritage organisations. To interculturalise the sector in the long term, this should change. By hiring such staff, and working together with immigrant artists, more diversity can be achieved – in teams, networks, presentations, public and collections.

The active participation of visitors in presenting can also enrich the perspectives. A fine example of this is the book portrayal of the multicultural customer circle of the windmill called *De distilleerketel.* This 1727 monument is one of six hundred still functioning wheat grinding mills in the Netherlands. It is based in Rotterdam in the middle of a quarter that now counts over a hundred nationalities. With the flour of the windmill the mayor's wife Mrs. Opstelten makes old-fashioned Dutch pudding with red-berry juice. Mr. Massikini uses the fine grained maize to make his favourite recipe from Mozambique, while Franco Trovato takes wheat flour for his Italian pasta with tomato sauce.

Windmills are well known and important heritage in the Netherlands. The 17th century brought many technical improvements, as can be seen at the tourist site *De Zaanse Schans,* representing a typical 'dike-village'. In old Persia people already used wind as a source of energy. This energy brings people together from all backgrounds.[11]

Explicitly mentioning the worldwide connections of heritage can be particularly interesting for the present-day public. One of the refugees from a class in Dutch as a Second Language was really moved when he heard that the 17th century designer of the chairs of the villa that they visited for their language school was a protestant refugee from France, Daniel Marot.

History crosses borders

Every individual gives his or her own colour to the meaning of heritage. Exchange of meaning over an object is a rich source for recognising both differences and similarities between people. Numerous examples of history crossing borders are present in objects, language, names of streets, documents, plants, spices, bushes and trees, food and drinks, dress, music, architecture, painting, harbours where ships sailed to and fro. Heritage need not be used for strengthening national identities; it can also be an important tool in forming our identity as citizens of the world. On several places on earth, at almost the same time, important things were invented. Geniuses lived on places that don't coincide with present national borders.

The North American artist Fred Wilson contributed to the exhibition "Unpacking Europe" in the Rotterdam *Museum of Modern Art Boijmans van Beuningen* in 2000. He presented an installation of several objects taken from the collection of the museum that he had always assumed to be of European origin. To his surprise, many objects had originated from elsewhere in the world:

van Kessel, The Black Dutchmen: African soldiers in the Netherlands East Indies, in: idem ed., Merchants, Missionaries & Migrants: 300 years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations, Amsterdam 2002, 133–141.

11 Cf. Peter Paul Klapwijk and Gerard Keijsers, Uit alle windstreken. Internationale gerechten verzameld op de molen van Delfshaven [From all corners. International recipes collected at the windmill of Delftshaven], Kinderdijk 2001.

> Basic things like paper, ink, glass, trousers, and the notion of zero are all imports, though now seem to have sprung from Europe, fully formed. The list seems endless. While Europe slept, medicine was developed in Egypt, footwear in Mesopotamia, the smelting of carbon steel in Tanzania. The Indians invented numbers, and the Chinese the compass.' After indeed an almost endless list, he asks the rhetorical question that forms the motto of this text: 'If most Europeans have known that Europe has been such a cultural melting pot, how could there be a notion of the "exotic" (at best), or of ethnic hatred (at worst)? There are no "them" and "us", if "we" are "them".[12]

How Argentine tango conquered the world is a fine example of history crossing borders. The typical tango instrument, the bandoneon, was brought to Buenos Aires by German immigrants. When the dance was introduced in the Netherlands in 1913 it was seen as indecent. The European courts forbade the dancing of the Argentine tango. Recently, this dance has entered the centre of the Dutch nation by the marriage of the crown prince Willem Alexander with Argentine born Máxima. This example shows conflict as well as integration, pleasure as well as melancholy.

The 'we' that we look for in our pasts has to become inclusive: *With* postcolonial immigrants and colonial ex-pats, with guest labourers, immigrants and refugees, with slave traders as well as descendants of slaves. With farmers, citizens and beggars, both male and female. With princesses of Orange and growers of vegetables. Let's dynamise the 'we' instead of determining the 'other'.

12 Fred Wilson, When Europe Slept, It Dreamt of the Wordl, in: Salar Hassan und Iftikar Dadi ed., Unpacking Europe. Towards a Critical Reading, Rotterdam 2001, 426.