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Queer Amsterdam 1945–2010

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Foreplay and context

World War II with the German occupation (1940–45) was a definite break in Dutch history. But this was not so much the case for homosexuals. The general picture is that discrimination was common before, during and after the war and that, in fact, the 1950s had the highest numbers of prosecutions for gay-related sex crimes. But in the post-war years things started to change and there were signs of greater acceptance. In 1946, some courageous men from Amsterdam restarted the homosexual rights movement. They launched a monthly journal in January 1940 just before the occupation but had to stop in its wake on 15 May. They were not the first to start such a movement. In 1912, a chapter of the German WHK (Wissenschaftliches Humanitäres-Komitee or Scientific Humanitarian Committee) was formed; it was called the *Nederlandsch Humanitair Wetenschappelijk Komitee* (Dutch Humanitarian Scientific Committee, NWHK). This was mainly the work of Jacob Anton Schorer (1866–1957) of The Hague though he halted his endeavour in 1940. After the occupation, a younger generation led by Nico Engelschman (1913–88) took over. The new organization was called *Shakespeare Club* and soon changed its name to *Cultuur en Ontspannings Centrum* (Centre for Culture and Recreation, COC). The NWHK was originally just a desk and an irregular newsletter with a library in Schorer's house; the COC was a membership organization with an office that organized lectures and social meetings. It published a magazine and founded the *International Committee for Sexual Equality* (ICSE). The Dutch homosexual rights movement has now existed for a century and has had its seat in Amsterdam since 1946. The focus of this chapter, though, is Amsterdam's rise to international fame as a gay and sex capital in the 1960s and 1970s and

its slow demise afterwards, while at the same time contesting the idea of the city as a gay utopia. Typically, when homosexuality is discussed in Holland, it nearly always concerns men. And indeed, the specific anti-homosexual article 248bis (1911–71) was concerned 99 per cent of the time with males.¹ In 2007, 96 per cent of anti-gay violence cases reported to the Amsterdam police concerned men.² As such the focus of this chapter is more on men than women. We find through the examination of interviews, newspapers, archives and secondary literature that Amsterdam has a reputation as one of the most sexually liberated cities for gay men in particular; in this chapter it is argued that this positive (self) evaluation needs nuancing. Too many problems with straight norms, discrimination and invisibility still haunt this idea of the city being a 'gay and lesbian Mecca'.³

Social situation

The discrimination homosexuals faced in the post-war years was manifold. Family, friends and colleagues would often reject homosexuals. This was related to religious beliefs that made homosex a sin unmentionable among Christians. At the same time, it was seen as a medical pathology and criminal offence. The silencing of queer issues may have been advantageous because it meant that the public perception of homosexuality among straight people remained low. The rejection of gay men was stronger than of that of lesbians for three reasons. The first issue was anal sex, the second, effeminacy and the third, the seduction of adolescents. Most insults towards gay people turned on the first two themes with variations of slurs from 'bottom' and 'brown' to 'sissy' and 'nelly'. The third reproach related to relationships between adults and minors of the same sex. In 1911, the Netherlands was the first country to include an article in the criminal law (248bis) that created a different age of consent for homo- and heterosexual relations, 21 and 16 years, respectively. It was based on the idea that since homosexuals did not reproduce they had to recruit youngsters to fill their ranks.⁴ This legal discrimination was the reason behind Schorer's decision to start the *NWHK*. Another legal article that affected homosexuals was the one about public indecency. It was not only the ways of having sex that were scrutinized, but also certain ways of being. From the late nineteenth century, the Netherlands witnessed, alongside other Western European countries, a debate about the cause of homosexuality. Around 1900, Amsterdam physicians Arnold Aletrino and Lucien von Römer followed German Karl Ulrichs in describing homosexuality as a natural variation with homosexuals, therefore needing equal rights. Their argument was taken up by medical people who proposed that 'sexual inversion' might be an innate, but pathological condition. So homosexuality was at that time in the Netherlands a sin, crime and disease. It was nothing to be proud of and was often a source of shame and difficulty for the men and women themselves and their families and friends.

The situation worsened after the introduction of new sex laws in 1911,⁵ strongly promoted by new Christian parties that participated in the government of the Netherlands from the World War I until 1994. From the 1930s on, medical therapies – including castration for ‘sex criminals’ – strengthened the social rejection homosexuals faced. This pressure continued to grow until the 1950s. Not only had the number of cases for sex with minors been rising, so too had public indecency. Moreover, municipalities introduced rules that made it illegal to remain for longer than 5 minutes in a public toilet. Amsterdam did so in 1955. But growing sexual repression meant that social resistance mounted.

Gay sex at a breaking point

The homosexual scene had very different forms before the 1960s sexual revolution.⁶ In the 1930s, Amsterdam had perhaps a dozen bars catering to gays and lesbians. These did not operate simultaneously. They were of two types: more exclusively homosexual ones and mixed ones in the Red Light District where queers hung out with prostitutes and their clients. Both were often owned or run by lesbians who had made money in the sex industry. The bars were closely watched by the vice squad who visited known venues regularly.⁷ Although there was no law forbidding queer bars, the police used its discretionary power. Bar owners protected themselves in different ways against inspections. They had doormen who warned against arrival of ‘Russen’ (Russians, slang for officers) and ‘uilen’ (owls, heterosexuals). They also saw to it that clients didn’t do anything reproachable (same-sex kissing, intimacy or dancing most obviously). Controlling police officers relied on the notion that gay men were effeminate and lesbians mannish both in clothing and behaviour. So a woman with short hair, drinking gin and smoking cigars was classified as lesbian.

The main part of the gay scene, however, was an extensive public sex circuit in which not only homosexuals but also heterosexuals participated. The delineation of identities was not so embedded in those times. The sexual border traffic was made possible because many young straight men who wanted sex had very few options as women were married and were meant to stay faithful, while the unmarried were meant to keep their virginity. Prostitutes were for many males simply too expensive. Their only means of sexual release was to do it with other, often homosexual men, for money or for free. Some may have paid for the more effeminate men who worked as hustlers. My respondents mentioned an older queen who still worked from his home in the 1950s as a whore in the Red Light District, with rouge, powder and female attire, and attracting a male heterosexual clientele. Gays found it a mystery how they could make money. In other cases, young straight or questioning men derived some economic advantage from having sex with homosexuals – a bed to sleep in, drinks or food,

a present or money as in other European cities. Sexual roles were clearly separated in unofficial ideology: real 'straight' men had 'active' (fucker, sucked) and 'unmasculine' gay men 'passive' roles (fucked, sucker). This terminology had less to do with what gay or straight and active or passive meant but more with what was seen as disgusting in terms of transgression of gender roles.

The main place for public sex was in or near one of the city's 50 urinals or dozen parks that witnessed sexual activity. Most cottages were in the city centre and men went from one to the other, making tours to find sex partners. This was the pivotal location of sexual border traffic between straight and gay. It was dangerous both because of police and popular sentiment and also very effective because, as a respondent said, 'there you see first what you elsewhere see last'. Already in the late nineteenth century, public toilets had been designed with little success in such a way as to prevent gay sex: lamps, separated urinals, open space at the top and bottom of cubicle walls so the police could see from the outside what happened within.⁸ Swimming pools were less known for homosex and gay saunas developed only in the 1960s. As an urban street culture, queer sex could begin at any place where men met: in 'normal' bars and cinemas, in front of shop windows, at newspaper stalls, in train stations, on markets and fairs. Male hustlers could be found in the centre on Rembrandtplein and Singel until the 1970s, and until 2000 in Central Station. Ganymedes (male prostitutes) and clients could consummate sex not only at the customer's home but also in dark alleys, urinals, parks or 'one hour'-hotels in the Red Light District (where people could rent a room for an hour to have sex). In other words, gay life was until the 1960s part of public life. Notwithstanding social taboos and its public nature, this kind of contact was widespread from at least the late seventeenth century until the late 1970s when it slowly disappeared in supposedly more tolerant times. It moved to semi-public spaces – dark rooms and saunas – and out of the city to highway stops.⁹

The rise of a gay capital

After the war another more respectable scene developed in exclusively gay bars and discos. They rarely catered to lesbian women and straight people. These bars set a new trend of gay men getting into a subculture hidden behind closed doors. The numbers of these bars and discos grew quickly. They were soon left alone by the vice squad and existed for extended periods of time. They also became more fashionable. Bars have always been quite small in Amsterdam because of the architecture of the city but both discos *DOK* and *COC's Schakel* (meaning link) that were founded in 1952 were grandiose by comparison. Soon they attracted great numbers of male homosexuals, not only from Holland but also from England, Germany, France, Belgium and beyond – including US soldiers who were stationed in

Germany. The rise of the gay scene in the 1950s and 1960s paralleled what happened with the Red Light District: growth and internationalization. Along with the bars and discos, hotels started to specialize in gay tourism. The movement from street to bar life was stimulated by the police who liked it better when gays were hidden away in their own subculture instead of hanging around on streets having sex and making trouble with straight men. It was in this period that it became forbidden to stay longer than 5 minutes in a urinal.

The change from street to bar life had another important cause. Gays had been defined as sissies: men not only with same-sex interests but also with an inverted, feminine gender identity. In the 1860s, Ulrichs' had summarized his theory of an innate homosexuality and psychic hermaphroditism for gay men as 'female souls in a male body', with lesbians being 'male souls in a female body'. Effeminate homosexual men and masculine dykes did not look for sex with their equals, but with their opposites: 'real' straight men and women who were not gender-inverted. As in heterosexual relations, the idea reigned that only opposites could be sexually attracted to each other. 'Dykes with dykes' was perceived as incompatible and wouldn't work sexually. In Dutch, queens and trade were *nicht* (sissy, literally niece) and *tule* (tulle, probably referring to the 'beauty' of straight youth). *Butch-femme* had no clear equivalent in Dutch. A *butch* was a *pot* (meaning pot or jar) with some variations, and for *butch-femme*, generally, binaries were applied: brother-sister, boy-girl, trouser-skirt, sling-handbag.¹⁰ Other oppositions like those of class, age or ethnicity could replace or be added to gender differences in sexual relations. What straight people specifically attributed to gay men, effeminacy and an interest in straight men, was theory and practice until the 1950s, for gay and straight men as for psychiatrists. Just before the war a collection of 35 stories of homosexual men and women was published – *De Homosexueelen* – in which homosexuals discussed these 'stereotypes' having purchase in their real lives. Lesbians presented themselves as tomboys with an interest in rough play while male homosexuals expressed a strong dislike for sports like football.¹¹

Queens of the 1950s were still effeminate and Paris was for many of them epitome of a culture of elegance. They wore French styles of dress, listened to continental music like French *chansons* and German and Dutch *Schlagers* and danced Viennese style. Dandies were their preferred subcultural icons, not cowboys. But this image and iconography would soon be superseded by a new generation from the late 1950s onwards who saw queens as relics of a repressive past. The new style was decidedly American: blue jeans, lumberjack shirts or white Ts, short hair, pop music and wild dancing, and icons like James Dean. Beer replaced sherry and wine as favourite drinks. And most importantly, there emerged on the scene new 'masculine' gay men who were interested sexually in each other and no longer searched for heteros. They could not understand how their predecessors had desired straight men and cultivated a feminine style.

The change of attitudes from a system of sissies looking for straight guys to gay men deliberately pursuing each other had important consequences for sexual comparisons. The homosexuality of past times was seen as similar to prostitution: situational contacts between unequals with monetary transactions. The new gay men often had more equal relations that resembled marriage. They rose in status from whorish to marriageable and respectable. This change in perception strongly influenced psychiatrists who compared homosexuality in the early 1950s with sex-work and shit (referring to anal sex) and thought sissies seduced boys into homosexual pleasures. A decade later, exactly the same people had changed over to ideas of homophile identities and 'fixed friendships' – with sex, boys and money left out. From sodomy, pederasty and whoring, homosex had finally become acceptable as homophilia (a popular word in post-war Holland), more a special identity than an abject practice. It meant an end to public sexual border traffic and the rise of a privatized gay commercial scene that created safety inside but not beyond its walls.

Interest in trade had been widespread among homosexuals, and also in adolescents. Paedophiles belonged to the gay world as COC iconography demonstrates: many illustrations of its journal *Vriendschap* (Friendship) showcase adolescents under 21 years. Youngsters could easily be found in streets, around urinals and in parks, but entering gay bars was forbidden to them. They had sex with older gay men for money, as a pastime or as a way of experimenting with homosexuality. For various reasons many young men stopped having gay sex in the 1950s and 1960s: because girls were less pressured to remain chaste (some were even able to acquire contraceptives to prevent pregnancy) and also because a greater although negative awareness of homosexuality made it less attractive for adolescents who needed to be seen as hetero and masculine. Youth became less available and more straight. Gay men were forced into each other's arms where they had previously felt uncomfortable. From the 1960s on, relations between adult men became the dominant and desired form of same-sexual pleasure.

Men with paedophile interests still referred to classical times when such relations were highly regarded. Greek and Roman antiquity remained a reference point for the homosexual movement until the 1950s. The renowned Dutch turn-of-the-century author Louis Couperus strongly contributed to this reputation with his classical novels on emperors, Alexander the Great and Elagabalus. This celebration of male eros ended, mainly because sexual equality became the norm and gay men now rather desired each other than the straight or undefined men and youth of the past. Paedophiles were increasingly differentiated from homosexual men, and a clearer separation developed between love for adult men and male youth. The two main paedophile spokesmen became Frits Bernard and Edward Brongersma. They worked for the COC but were sidelined in 1963 although Brongersma continued to lobby as a Labour senator for the repeal of article 248bis, which was finally realized in 1971. Paedophiles saw some

success in the 1970s in the slipstream of the gay and lesbian movement. Some psychiatrists, journalists, politicians and police officers supported their cause; since the 1980s, however, paedophilia has been increasingly demonized in Holland.

It wasn't just paedophiles that emerged as a special group in the post-war period. In the early 1950s, the bar of *Hotel Tiemersma* in the Red Light District's Warmoesstraat developed into the first leather venue with the city's first dark room. It meant the beginning of serious masculinization of homosexuals in Amsterdam. In 1965, the *Argos* opened and in 1970 the *LL* bar that soon organized highly appreciated monthly leather parties. Also in 1970, *Motor Sportclub Amsterdam* (MSA) became the organization for kinky queers.¹² At the other end of the gender spectrum, COC and DOK had organized drag parties and fashion designers came to gay bars in spectacular female clothing.¹³ In 1961, these shows became a regular feature for mainly straight audiences in the bar *Madame Arthur*.¹⁴

The sexual revolution

The same people who started the first drag bar also initiated in 1959 the *Fiacre*, modelled after a stylish Paris café of the same name. It would become the great fashionable place of the sixties where many gay artists came to socialize and unwind. The amazing development was the rising number of bars. Even more surprising was the sudden openness of gay men many of whom worked in the art scene and had no longer any intention to hide. Their visibility in ballet, theatre, literature and soon also on TV meant a major breakthrough for public queer life.

This revolution ran parallel to changes in traditional institutions that had been essential in oppressing homosexuality: religion, psychiatry, law, popular opinion. In the 1950s, catholic and protestant psychiatrists met gay clients and started to change their views from rejection to acceptance. The Catholic Church established a social care institution *Open Door* in the heart of Amsterdam where priests, psychiatrists and social workers met 'real life' homosexuals. A protestant psychiatrist studied homosexuals and found seduction played no role in their sexual development.¹⁵ In many ways, the transformation of gay identification from feminine to more masculine roles while relations began to look less like prostitution and more like marriage stimulated a change of view among psychiatrists. Explanations shifted: it was no longer seduction of youth but a deep, unchangeable desire that was the cause of homosexuality. Psychiatrists in turn influenced clergy to adapt their views. Bishops, priests and parsons started to accept the homosexual, although not his sexual practices. These professionals changed course from condemning and castrating to accepting homosexuals.¹⁶ In the late 1960s, public opinion began to shift from negative to positive, paving the way for the abolition of article 248bis in 1971. In 10 years, homosexuality had gone

from sin, crime and disease to something close to normal, from an abject practice to a more accepted way of being.

The COC was a major player in these transformations. It changed from an underground organization of men who used pseudonyms to one that participated in public culture and started a dialogue with other groups. In 1965, it founded a journal *Dialogo*, a title that indicated its intention to form a bridge between gay and straight – now in political and no longer in sexual terms.¹⁷ Gay author Gerard Reve became one of its editors. He was already well known but now made headlines because of the ‘donkey’ court case. In an article in *Dialogo* he expressed his belief that Jesus would return to earth as a donkey that he would fuck out of love and faith. An orthodox protestant MP brought him to court and the case went all the way up to High Court. He was judged not to be guilty of blasphemy: it was, the court said, his private way of believing.¹⁸ Reve was extremely important for homosexual emancipation and beyond because his work also included themes of polyamory and kinky sex. COC’s Christian members were critical of Reve’s pronouncements but like most other Dutch people they were astounded by the quick and radical changes. In 1965, Reve’s work was still unacceptable but in 1968, it became fashionable despite this bestial blasphemy.¹⁹

In the sexual revolutionary years from 1965 to 1970, Amsterdam’s streets witnessed dramatic changes. In 1965, a radical anarchist *Provo* movement squatted houses for the homeless, was against polluting cars and in favour of public transport, and had a ‘white bicycle’, a ‘white women’ and a ‘white homophile plan’. This meant that bicycles should be freely available and that women and homosexuals should have equal rights.²⁰ In the first issue of its journal *Provo*, an activist declared himself in favour of ‘complete amoral promiscuity’. Though *Provo* suspended its activities in 1967,²¹ it set an example for other groups in Amsterdam and elsewhere. Protests started to fill the streets with demonstrations against nuclear weapons, Vietnam War and fascist or colonial regimes. Young artists protested against a fossilized system, radical feminists declared lesbianism to be a political choice against patriarchy, artists created nude shows and published explicit erotic journals. More students than ever started studying and fought for democratization. Squatting became a major housing policy for the alternative scene and several lesbian and queer communal households were set up.

Soon feminists started their own journals, printing and publishing houses, bookshops and bars in which lesbians actively participated. They had leading positions in feminist organizations, struggles for abortion and sex-worker rights, women’s studies and cultural endeavours. Many opted for feminist rather than gay activities and often remained invisible as lesbians. The first lesbian movements of the 1970s criticized homophobia of feminists and sexism of gays, but after that decade many participants looked to feminist causes rather than specifically lesbian and gay issues. After a short flowering of lesbian sexual visibility in women’s festivals in

the famous art house Milky Way (1977–79) and in glossy *Diva* (1982–85), Amsterdam's lesbian life began to stagnate. Some bars and parties started in this period but it remained more difficult to organize lesbians than gay men in terms of this scene. The city had at most two or three lesbian bars in those decades compared with the dozens for gay men.

The gay scene grew from five bars in 1950 with eight new bars and two discos in 1953–57, one to two venues each year in the period 1961–67 and six in 1968 alone to some 30 locations in 1970. Among these new venues of the 1960s were three saunas and one exclusively lesbian bar *Tabu* that opened in 1969. Four mixed pubs were tended by lesbians, two of them already existing in 1950, the famous *Mandje* of Bet van Beeren (1927–83, 2008–present) and the *Monico* of Saar Heshof who herself kept the bar for 60 years (1941–2001). These mixed bars catered to *butches and femmes*, while the *Tabu* attracted an elegant middle-class lesbian public. In this period, only three venues went out of business and four changed owners – indicating that gay bars now had a longer lifecycle.²² The authorities in the 1960s disliked the many tourists who flocked to Amsterdam for its gay life which was felt to be freer than elsewhere in Europe. The influx continued for many decades, though – and to the city's benefit.

The possibility to be openly gay together with the parallel abolition of religious, criminal and psychiatric discrimination was the great revolution of the 1960s and was an amazing step forward. The ease and eagerness with which many gay men acted upon it remains astonishing. The retreat of official anti-homosexual attitudes into hidden closets and of homosexuals from streets into private and semi-public spheres – also in terms of more acceptable clothing and behaviour in public – was simultaneous. This new 'integration' also made homosexuals increasingly invisible.

The COC may have been exemplary of these developments halfway through the 1960s, but its new and open leadership was soon overrun by a more radical student generation from 1967 on. They demanded social change as a precondition for homosexual integration. Since they were affected as 'minors' by article 248bis, they staged the first gay and lesbian demonstration in February 1969 on the steps of parliament in The Hague against this legal inequality. In 1970, they also organized the first demonstration in Amsterdam and in the late 1960s, they held same-sex 'dance actions' in straight discos. In the early 1970s, these student groups were surpassed by more radical movements that proposed separatism to discover their own culture and what it meant to be gay or lesbian before social integration could be developed. Starting in 1971, *Purple Mina*, *Purple September*, *Lesbian Nation* (the first Dutch lesbian movements), *Faggot Front* and *Red Faggots* mainly operated culturally with parties, bars, books, zines and music. In 1977, lesbians organized the first national demonstration in Amsterdam inspired by the Stonewall examples that developed into the *Pink Saturdays* celebrated to this day in June's final weekend. In less than 15 years, Amsterdam's gay and lesbian world had seen four generations of

activists: closeted homophiles, homosexuals desiring personal integration, gays and lesbians looking for social integration and queer separatists. When this last generation stopped its activities with a faggot festival 'Real Men?' in 1980, their message lingered on but Amsterdam witnessed little radical activism thereafter.²³

Gays and lesbians join social institutions

The new gay and lesbian generation paved the way for the march through the social institutions and for an influx of queer representations in the arts. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw many gay and lesbian caucuses developing in political parties, trade unions, universities, police and army, medical care and churches, and on stages queer plays were performed. Pacifist-socialist member Bob van Schijndel of the Amsterdam city council penned the first 'homo report' in 1982 and demanded more education in schools on homosexuality, protection for cruising queers, a stop to demolition of urinals, lesbian visibility, housing for singles, better care for the elderly, grants for gay and lesbian culture and a HomoMonument to remember the homosexual victims of World War II.

His requests had the following results. Sex education was left to the school's discretion, but the topic is rarely dealt with in a systematic way. It is not included in courses and anti-gay slurs in schools are not countered. The police started to protect cruising gay men but this has continued to be a controversial policy, and its application fleeting. One gay active tearoom that had been removed was reinstalled but had lost its sexual function like most others that remained in place. By 2000, urinal sex had become a relic of past times, while parks like *Vondelpark* and *Nieuwe Meer* (New Lake) continued to function as cruising grounds to this day. Lesbians remain largely invisible in the city. Housing is no longer a specific problem but care for the elderly has remained on the agenda. Cultural activities have been funded on a small scale. In 1987, the HomoMonument was inaugurated in the middle of the city and it has become the heart of queer activities.²⁴ After 30 years, the policy demands have only been partially realized. All political parties may say they are supportive of gay and lesbian policies, yet concrete results are meagre and financial investments low. The Dutch see sexuality as a private affair and rarely discuss it in terms of intimate citizenship.

When the AIDS epidemic broke out, city officials, health authorities, COC and the gay medical group that had started some years before, met and developed policies of care and prevention. In its first 10 years, the epidemic mainly struck gays, and the cooperation between the different parties has in general been beneficial for all concerned. No dark rooms or saunas were closed although health authorities wanted to do so, and prevention information specifically directed to gay men was distributed.²⁵ Gay and lesbian groups for example in the police and army contributed

their share to changing policies in their institutions. It is only recently that 'company pride' groups started to cater to the interests of gay and lesbian personnel in private corporations.

Gay life after the sexual revolution

Since 1970, the gay scene has continued to develop but not to grow. The number of bars and discos remained relatively stable in the AIDS years although their locations changed. Kerkstraat had developed into a major gay street in the 1960s with bars, the main sauna and some hotels, but it was replaced in the 1980s by Regulierdwarsstraat that became the posh gay place. Amstel and Amstelstraat saw the development of a more popular gay scene where some pubs played Dutch music, while elsewhere Anglo-American pop set the tone. This district traditionally harboured some hustler bars of which only one now remains. The major new development was the rise of the leather scene just before the AIDS-epidemic around the Warmoesstraat and there are still half a dozen bars, a disco, a cinema, specialized hotels and – since the 1990s – two leather shops. In the 1980s, the *LL-bar* and its parties disappeared, but in the 1990s kinky parties and leather weekends became an important feature of Amsterdam. The leather scene diversified and added other fetishes such as rubber, skinhead and sports. Kinky bars organized sex parties for 'horsemen and knights', castigation, BDSM, only or no underwear. The sex club *Church* now caters to the diverse preferences of visitors in Kerkstraat.

Since 1990 two new discos *It* and *Roxy* attracted a mixed public with gay evenings, Love Balls, Pussy Lounges, kinky events, drag kings and a new set of drag queens who preferred to be described as gender transformation artists.²⁶ In 1999, *Roxy* burned down and in the same year the mayor temporarily closed *It* after the police found hard drugs on the premises. Some people see this as the beginning of the decline of gay Amsterdam because city authorities showed no understanding for the pivotal role of these places of gender extravagance and sexual transgression.

In 1998, Amsterdam held the *Gay Games*, which promised to be the grandest homosexual event in the city ever. Gays and lesbians were very welcome but any sexual explicit display was blocked by the organization: it was to be about friendship. Such events prefigured same-sex marriage, which may similarly be viewed as part of the desexualization of gay life. The following years would see all kinds of minor struggles about sex. A hotel with SM toys on location had to close and a leather shop had problems being licensed. The city shut down a hotel bar because it had no permission for its jack-off parties (which were a remnant of the fight against AIDS). The legal situation of dark rooms was discussed intermittently but they remained untouched by restrictive policies. Gay men's identities were worthy of acceptance, much less their sexual pastimes.

The new millennium: Gays, Muslims and straights

The decline of Amsterdam as a gay capital set in at the moment most people saw as the high point of emancipation: the opening of marriage to same-sex couples in a path-breaking move by the Netherlands government. It was the first country to do so. On 1 April 2001, the first marriages were celebrated in Amsterdam's City Hall. Both homo- and heterosexuals had the idea that this meant the end of the gay movement. The COC still saw a role for itself in emancipating the remaining pockets of orthodox Christians and Muslims (the first mainly outside, the last strongly represented inside the city) and exporting the Dutch message to nations opposed to homosexual rights.

The same year saw two other events that very much defined the next decade of gay politics. On the one hand, an imam wrote that Europeans were less than dogs and pigs because they allowed gay marriage. He said something similar in a TV programme about the rise of anti-gay violence that was mainly attributed to young Muslim men of Moroccan and Turkish descent. His negative remarks, half a year before 9/11, were widely discussed by politicians and in the media. Other imams followed suit saying that the Quran forbade homosexuality. These debates created an opposition of queer and Muslim. This has since been exploited by the radical right, first by Pim Fortuyn whose rise to fame as leader of this movement also took place in 2001. This gay dandy was the first to make homosexuality and the radical right compatible on the contemporary scene. He used his intimate knowledge of Moroccan men to say that he knew they were backward because he slept with them. And he denounced their anti-gay violence.²⁷ Fortuyn was murdered by an animal rights activist just before the elections of 2002 but his many straight successors on the right followed a similar logic of denouncing Muslims for their anti-gay attitudes: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Marco Pastors, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders. This debate affected gay men deeply, many of whom found themselves going from left to right, while the COC elected a chair who was a close ally of Verdonk. The radical right expressed the idea that there were too many Muslims creating problems. The ethnic composition of the city indeed dramatically changed in the post-war period. From being largely white, it became a more mixed city with 25 per cent of the population being ethnic minorities in 1990 and 40 per cent in 2004. The most important groups of recent immigrants in Holland are of Moroccan, Surinamese, Turkish and Antillean origin, the first two being strongly represented in Amsterdam among 177 other nationalities. Now 60 per cent of those between 5 and 20 years belong to ethnic groups of non-Western origin.²⁸

At the same time that the imam spoke out against homosexuals, a gay Arab bar was opened in Amsterdam showing that the purported opposition of homosexuality and Islam is deeply problematic. The ethnic transformation is visible in some gay bars and discos and certainly in the one Arab and one

Surinamese venue but this is less true in other parts of the scene. The gay movement is still by and large white. Since the 1980s, there have been ethnic gay and lesbian groups, first Surinamese and later Arab, Turkish, Muslim and racially mixed. Ethnic minority queers have to face the dichotomy that has been created between gay-friendly Dutch and gay-rejecting Muslims. Many queers from these groups like to go out but rarely to come out. Most local gay activists of colour are atypical recent immigrants. They followed a lover, sought asylum, studied here or came for the city's tolerant reputation. Second-generation New Dutch are rarely to be found among queer activists.²⁹

Many Moroccan and Turkish political leaders spoke out in favour of homosexuals, and some like MPs Hirsi Ali and Ahmed Marcouch and Ahmed Aboutaleb (now mayor of Rotterdam) chastized their fellow-Muslims for their restrictive attitudes regarding homosexuals and women. The Labour Party, which had often supported gay and lesbian movements, became hesitant because they did not want to alienate their Muslim constituency by defending sexual freedoms too openly. Leftists stressed that the perpetrators of anti-gay violence were not only ethnic minorities but also white kids, or that Islam played no role in the violence. The number of perpetrators from the city of Amsterdam for 2007 shows that Moroccan young men were indeed overrepresented: 36 per cent of perpetrators of anti-gay violence were Dutch-Moroccan and another 36 per cent white Dutch; their share among young men under 25 years was respectively 16 and 39 per cent.³⁰

In recent years, the city's tolerant reputation took some serious blows. Since 2007, Labour leaders want to trim down the *Red Light District* using exaggerated numbers regarding sex worker abuse and trafficking. 'Problems' with drug tourists have caused national authorities to limit the sale of soft drugs to locals and excluding foreign tourists. Populists attribute all national miseries to New Dutch and 'Left Church' multicultural ideals. The present-day demonization of paedophiles stands in stark contrast to greater acceptance in the 1970s. Such sentiments are not peculiar for the Netherlands, but because Dutch were famous for tolerance on such controversial themes, recent changes surprised liberal observers who may have hoped that social progress is inevitable.

Tolerance of homosexuality seemed an exception. The number of Dutch who claim in surveys they accept homosexuality is rising to levels of 95 per cent. This is important and encouraging, but what is its value? Additional questions were posed about what they think of seeing two men or women kissing in public. Some 40 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, admit to disliking this. Homosexuality may be fine at a distance, but is less tolerated if close by.³¹ There are more examples of failing tolerance. Sixteen per cent of young lesbians and 9 per cent of gays under 25 years have tried to commit suicide.³² Thirty per cent of young queer males would prefer not to be gay.³³ In Amsterdam schools, 53 per cent of the boys and 18 per cent of the girls report anti-gay insults. For 22 per cent of male youth, this is a regular occurrence. Only 11 per cent of boys and girls admit to feelings of

same-sex attraction. It seems that many more boys endure anti-gay abuse than have such feelings – a sure sign of straight socialization in a presumably gay-tolerant city.³⁴ A major problem is lack of support in schools for kids who show non-normative gender and sexual behaviour. This disinterest facilitates anti-queer behaviour of male youngsters who set the tone in schools.

It remains difficult to assess the decline or growth of the gay scene. The number of venues may go up and down but they have remained stable over time. Neighbourhood and company pride groups are a recent addition to gay life. There is a distinct feeling that the number of gay tourists has stagnated but there are no data. Since 2007, the police registered ever more cases of anti-gay violence, but it may be more an effect of the growing attention to the subject and higher levels of people reporting such violence. What seems certainly to have decreased is the number of murders of gay men by male hustlers. In the 1980s, two men per year were killed, but now it is rarer.³⁵ This decrease is clearly related to the transition from street and bar prostitution to escort services on the internet. This seems to be safer. Remarkable is the growth of the annual *Canal Pride Parade* that takes place on the first weekend of August. It started in 1996, 2 years before the *Gay Games* and attracts growing numbers of visitors. Several hundred thousands are now expected. More organizations join the parade each year: first mainly gay groups and political parties, later big companies, police, fire brigade, municipal and national government and religious organizations. In 2001, an Arab boat was a big hit, while in 2007 another with under sixteens created controversy due to the paedophile scare. Every year there is criticism about there being too little emphasis on politics and too much on commercialization.

Nowadays, the city bears witness to much discussion about solidarity over group boundaries but offers little queer content. Amsterdam has become famous as a gay capital through the hard work of local queers, but support of various other groups is often symbolic rather than systematic. These groups were perhaps eager for economic profits derived from vacant identities but were antagonistic to sexual pleasures. The city has a long way to go to become a place where sexual citizenship in terms of 'doing' rather than 'being' is actively fostered.

Notes

- 1 Koenders, P. (1996), *Tussen Christelijk Réveil en seksuele revolutie. Bestrijding van zedeloosheid met de nadruk op repressie van homoseksualiteit*. Amsterdam: IISG, p. 864.
- 2 Buijs, L. J., G. Hekma and J. W. Duyvendak (2009), *Als ze maar van me afblijven. Een onderzoek naar antihomoseksueel geweld in Amsterdam*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, p. 55.
- 3 This article is based on the mentioned literature; see for gay and lesbian scene Kooten Niekerk, A. van and S. Wijmer (1985), *Verkeerde vriendschap. Lesbisch*

- leven in de jaren 1920-1960. Amsterdam: Sara and Hekma, G. (1992), *De roze rand van donker Amsterdam. De opkomst van een homoseksuele kroegcultuur 1930-1970*. Amsterdam: Van Gennep. On gay and lesbian history Hekma, G. (1987), *Homoseksualiteit, een medische reputatie. De uitdoktering van de homoseksueel in negentiende-eeuws Nederland*. Amsterdam: SUA; (1999) 'Amsterdam', in D. Higgs (ed.), *Queer Sites, Gay Urban Histories since 1600*. London/New York: Routledge, pp. 61-88; (2004), *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland van 1730 tot de moderne tijd*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff; (2011), 'Queer in the Netherlands: Pro-gay and anti-sex. Sexual politics at a turning point', in L. Downing and R. Gillett (eds), *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 129-42; Oosterhuis, H. (1999), 'The Netherlands: Neither prudish nor hedonistic', in F. X. Eder, L. A. Hall and G. Hekma (eds), *Sexual Cultures in Europe Vol. 1: National Histories*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 71-90; Meer, T. van der (2007), *Jonkheer Mr. Jacob Anton Schorer. Een biografie van homoseksualiteit*. Amsterdam: Schorer; Schuyf, J. (1994), *Een stilzwijgende samenzwering. Lesbische vrouwen in Nederland, 1920-1970*. Amsterdam: IISG. Encyclopedic info in Bartels, T. and Versteegen, J. (eds) (2005), *Homo-Encyclopedie van Nederland*. Amsterdam: Anthos and Hemker, M. and L. Huijsman (2009), *LesboEncyclopedie*. Amsterdam: Ambo.
- 4 Hekma, G. and T. van der Meer (eds) (2011), 'Bewaar me voor de waanzin van het recht'. *Homoseksualiteit en strafrecht in Nederland*. Diemen: AMB.
 - 5 The new stricter laws also regarded sex with dependents, pimping, pornography, contraceptives and abortion.
 - 6 Kooten Niekerk and Wijmer (1985); Hekma (1992).
 - 7 The vice squad soon consisted of 25 officers. They kept a list of known homosexuals that contained before the war 1.7 per cent of the adult men in town. See Koenders (1996), p. 221.
 - 8 Duyves, M. (1992), 'In de ban van de bak. Openbaar ruimtegebruik naar homoseksuele voorkeur in Amsterdam', in J. Burgers (ed.), *De uitstad. Over stedelijk vermaak*. Utrecht: Van Arkel, pp. 73-98.
 - 9 Ibid.
 - 10 Dutch gays and lesbians had their own coded language and also their own terms, see Joustra, A. (1988), *Homo-erotisch woordenboek*. Amsterdam: Rap and Kunst, H. and X. Schutte (1991), *Lesbiaans. Lexicon van de Lesbotaal*. Amsterdam: Prometheus.
 - 11 Stokvis, B. J. (1939), *De homoseksueelen. 35 autobiographieën*. Lochem: De Tijdstroom.
 - 12 Claeys, P. (2009), *Leren Leven. Een verkennend onderzoek naar de geschiedenis van de Amsterdamse leerscene*. University of Amsterdam, BA thesis.
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 - 14 Rotsteeg, M. (1996), *Cherchez la femme. Travestie als fenomeen*. Amsterdam: Vassallucci.
 - 15 Bos, D. (1994), 'Een typisch menselijk verschijnsel. Homoseksualiteit herzien, 1948-1963', *Psychologie en Maatschappij*, 18, 192-209.
 - 16 Bos, D. (2010), *De aard, de daad en het Woord. Een halve eeuw opinie- en besluitvorming over homoseksualiteit in protestants Nederland, 1959-2009*.

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 - 20 Weerlee, D. van (1966), *Wat de provo's willen*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
 - 21 Kempton, R. (2007), *Provo. Amsterdam's Anarchist Revolt*. New York: Autonomedia.
 - 22 Hekma (1992).
 - 23 Hekma, G., D. Kraakman, M. van Lieshout and J. Radersma (eds) (1989), *Goed verkeerd. Een geschiedenis van homoseksuele mannen en lesbische vrouwen in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff; Klein, M. van der and S. Wieringa (eds) (2006), *Alles kon anders. Protestrepertoires in Nederland, 1965–2005*. Amsterdam: Aksant.
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 - 25 Mooij, A. (2004), *Geen paniek! Aids in Nederland 1982–2004*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
 - 26 Langer, M. (1993), *Alle geheimen van de It*. Amsterdam: Arena; Rotsteeg (1996).
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 - 28 Data on www.os.amsterdam.nl.
 - 29 Keuzenkamp, S. (ed.) (2010), *Steeds gewoner, nooit gewoon. Acceptatie van homoseksualiteit in Nederland*. Den Haag: SCP, pp. 320–2, *passim*.
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 - 32 Keuzenkamp (2010), pp. 143, 191.
 - 33 Graaf, H. de, H. Kruijer, J. van Acker and S. Meijer (2012), *Seks onder je 25°. Seksuele gezondheid van jongeren in Nederland anno 2012*. Delft: Eburon.
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 - 35 Gemert, F. van (1999), 'Chicken kills hawk: Gay murders during the eighties in Amsterdam', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 26(4), 149–74.

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