



Utrecht University

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# Negotiating a Sea of White

Whiteness and Diversity in Dutch Opera Practices

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# Abstract

The police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020 sparked large-scale protests and drew worldwide attention to the Black Lives Matter movement. Subsequently, conversations on racism and police violence arose globally. Opera houses, such as the Dutch National Opera (DNO), also discussed racism and promised to diversify. On social media, DNO acknowledges its responsibility to change as a predominantly white organisation. This statement raises the question of how DNO has dealt with their whiteness and measures regarding diversity and inclusion so far.

Therefore, in this thesis, I examine how the diversity and inclusion efforts of DNO between 2017 and 2021 reflect upon the organisation's whiteness. First, I position DNO within the contexts of whiteness concerning opera, the Dutch arts sector and Dutch society. The subsequent chapters address diversity and inclusion within the programme, public, personnel, partners and positioning (5 Ps) as the areas in which DNO aims to diversify.

The analysis of DNO's 5 Ps reveals how whiteness inhibits the organisation's diversity and inclusion aims. Within the programme, the overwhelming whiteness of the composers, writers, conductors and directors supports whiteness as a mechanism of exclusion through stereotypical casting and whitewashing. The chapter on public indicates that the convergence of both age and diversity within DNO's aims and projects enforces whiteness by centring a young white audience. Personnel analysis shows the workings of whiteness as an orientation, gender advancement at the expense of people of colour, and tokenism. DNO's partners mirror the whiteness of surrounding networks and the Netherlands, as most collaborators struggle with whiteness. Lastly, DNO's positioning strategy reinscribes systemic whiteness. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to the discourse on whiteness and institutional racism within the realm of opera and Dutch society at large and stresses the critical reflection on the role of diversity and inclusion strategies within these contexts.

# Acknowledgements

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Lastly, I would like to express a final word of gratitude to all the activists, antiracists, scholars and artists of colour that have inspired my thinking and I am greatly indebted to in writing this thesis.

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# List of Acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>English Name</b>	<b>Dutch Name</b>
AFK	Amsterdam Fund for the Arts	Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	N.A.
BIS	Basic Cultural Infrastructure	Culturele basisinfrastructuur
BLM	Black Lives Matter	N.A.
CBS	Statistics Netherlands	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
CCD	Cultural Diversity Code	Code Culturele Diversiteit
DIC	Diversity & Inclusion Code	Code Diversiteit & Inclusie
DNO	Dutch National Opera	De Nationale Opera
DWMB	Native Dutch or with a Western migration background	Nederlandse achtergrond of Westerse migratieachtergrond
ENO	English National Opera	N.A.
HNB	Dutch National Ballet	Het Nationale Ballet
MM&M	My Muse & Me	N.A.
NO&B	Dutch National Opera & Ballet	Nationale Opera & Ballet
NWMB	Non-Western migration background	Niet-Westerse migratieachtergrond

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OCW	Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science	Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap
OFF	Opera Forward Festival	N.A.
ROH	Royal Opera House	N.A.
RvC	Council of Culture	Raad voor Cultuur
YPC	Young Patrons Circle	N.A.

# Introduction

The police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery in the first half of 2020 sparked large-scale protests in the United States against police violence and drew worldwide attention to the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). In solidarity with the United States, anti-racist initiatives around the globe started their own protests against racism and police violence. On social media, people began to speak up about racism on both a personal and institutional level. Cultural institutions such as opera houses have also made statements on racism to show solidarity with the American protests. New York's Metropolitan Opera issued a statement in which they addressed their past mistakes and promised to do better in the future.<sup>1</sup> The Met's statement triggered additional critiques by musicologists such as Imani Danielle Mosley who reacted on Twitter. "We know that the 137-year history of the Met mirrors the racist history of the performing arts in this country." mirrors? how about re-presents? reinforces? Reinscribes?' Mosley goes on to post:

i am uninterested in hearing about EDI<sup>2</sup> if you're not going to talk about class & divestment. & i am equally uninterested in hearing about support as you continually undermine Black artists, musicians, & audience members. [...] it's more than just making Black artists visible, it's always more than that. [...] having Black singers, orchestral musicians, ADs, SDs, conductors, & composers is BASELINE. that's the bare god damn minimum. address where your money comes from, to

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<sup>1</sup> The Metropolitan Opera, "A Message to Our Audience," *The Metropolitan Opera*, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/user-information/a-message-to-our-audience/>. This was a response to the backlash they received on their sudden support of antiracism on social media because of the failure to stage composers of colour, structurally support artists of colour, continued loyalty to artists who endorse blackface and yellowface like Anna Netrebko and the staging of white artists in roles of colour among other things. The Metropolitan Opera, Twitter post, June 1, 2020, 7:46 p.m., <https://twitter.com/MetOpera/status/1267512872508313603>.

<sup>2</sup> Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

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whom you're beholden, whose interests you represent. address your history & i mean REALLY address it.<sup>3</sup>

Mosley addresses how opera companies actively shape spaces of oppression and how measures to increase diversity and inclusion bypass the large-scale and structural organisational changes that are necessary to create a real inclusive environment. Support statements such as those of the Metropolitan Opera were also widespread in the Netherlands. The Dutch National Opera (DNO) issued an official statement on social media stating that the organisation:

Underlines and supports an inclusive and just society. The conversation about racism and diversity within the world of opera and ballet is more active now than ever. Dutch National Opera & Ballet is a predominantly white organisation. We acknowledge the responsibility to change. That starts with daring to look in the mirror and to show our vulnerable side. Especially now, we need to open up to multicoloured groups in society; learn, fall, get up and always continue the conversation. Both small initiatives and also organisation-wide measures are appropriate here. We are aware of the necessity to take action but also know that there are still many steps to take.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Imani D. Mosley, Twitter post, June 6, 2020, 5:18 p.m., <https://twitter.com/imanimosley/status/1269287622066741253>.

<sup>4</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet ondersteunt en ondersteunt een inclusieve en rechtvaardige samenleving. Het gesprek over racisme en diversiteit binnen de wereld van opera en ballet speelt nu meer dan ooit. Nationale Opera & Ballet is een overwegend witte organisatie. Wij erkennen de verantwoordelijkheid om te veranderen. Dat begint bij durven kijken in de spiegel en ons kwetsbaar op te stellen. Juist nu moeten we ons openstellen voor veelkleurige groepen in de samenleving; leren, vallen, opstaan en altijd in gesprek blijven. Daarbij passen kleine initiatieven maar ook organisatie-brede maatregelen. We zijn ons bewust van de noodzaak tot actie over te gaan maar weten dat we nog vele stappen moeten maken. — De Nationale Opera - Dutch National Opera, Facebook post, July 10, 2020, 04:35 p.m., <https://www.facebook.com/DeNationaleOpera/posts/1301782423353091>. — All translations in this thesis are my own unless otherwise noted.

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Alongside this statement, DNO posted examples of efforts within the realm of diversity and inclusion which they have implemented since 2017. This statement and the accompanying examples are particularly interesting because, in June 2020, DNO's subsidy request for the period of 2021-2024 at their primary funder—the national government—was denied with one of the main reasons being precisely the lack of diversity and inclusion efforts in their plans.<sup>5</sup> DNO's statement makes me wonder what the diversity and inclusion initiatives over the period between 2017-2021 have contributed to the actual diversification of the organisation, whether they have addressed their whiteness before, and how these initiatives relate to the organisation's funding.

Therefore, in this thesis, I will examine how the diversity and inclusion efforts of the Amsterdam-based opera company the Dutch National Opera (DNO) within the period of 2017 to 2021 reflect upon the organisation's whiteness. I will do this by first positioning DNO within the contexts of whiteness in the realm of opera, the Dutch arts sector and Dutch society as a whole. Each of the subsequent chapters addresses diversity and inclusion within one of the five diversity and inclusion pillars (5 Ps). The structure of this thesis is inspired by these five Ps, consisting of the five areas in which NO&B states to increase diversity and inclusion 'to create a reflection of society in all layers of the organisation', namely programme, public, personnel, partners and positioning.<sup>6</sup> I chose this particular structure because it allows me to trace diversity and inclusion efforts within the specific aspects of the organisation that DNO is working on. The first four Ps, being programme, public, personnel, partners, are prescribed by the Diversity & Inclusion Code (DIC). This code was launched as an initiative by the Dutch cultural industry in 2011 to make the cultural realm more inclusive to people with a non-Western migration background and forms the backbone of diversity and inclusion efforts of Dutch cultural institutions such as DNO. The DIC is based on these four pillars to shape cultural diversity in cultural institutions adequately. DNO chose to add positioning as the fifth pillar.

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<sup>5</sup> Raad voor Cultuur, "Opera," *Raad voor Cultuur*, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/documenten/adviezen/2020/06/04/opera>.

<sup>6</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 50, accessed April 9, 2020, [https://www.operaballet.nl/sites/default/files/documents/pdfs/Jaarverslag\\_NO\\_B\\_2018.pdf](https://www.operaballet.nl/sites/default/files/documents/pdfs/Jaarverslag_NO_B_2018.pdf).

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I will focus on the period of 2017 to 2021 as this covers the previous four-year funding period (2017 to 2020) for which DNO received subsidies from the national government. I will include a part of 2021 because DNO's seasons within these four years consist of season 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 and therefore include a part of 2021.

DNO forms part of the larger entity called Nationale Opera & Ballet (NO&B) together with the venue also named Nationale Opera & Ballet (NO&B) and Dutch National Ballet (HNB). These three companies merged in 2013 but kept their separate brand names and funding structures. As I focus on opera in this thesis, I will mainly discuss DNO and leave HNB out as much as possible. However, it is impossible to leave the larger entity of NO&B out as specific strategies are deployed centrally, and the organisation consists of several central departments that serve both DNO and HNB. Therefore, in this thesis, I will use both the acronym DNO and NO&B. I use DNO when addressing only the opera branch—regarding the programme for example—and NO&B for topics that concern the company as a whole, such as its positioning, or when discussing the organisation's annual reports.

The concepts that are key to this project are whiteness, diversity and inclusion and intersectionality. I believe the concept of whiteness—a social construct that is deeply embedded in the realm of opera, the Dutch arts sector but also Dutch society at large—to be pivotal in the analysis of Dutch opera practices. Within Western society, whiteness is usually perceived as an unmarked and default mode of being. The dominance of whiteness renders it invisible and results in the exclusion and oppression of people who fall outside this category. Attention regarding race in opera studies is mostly drawn towards blackness or other topics. For example, Naomi André's writings stand central in the dealings of opera and blackness.<sup>7</sup> Her books are exceptionally valuable in breaking ground for studies on opera and race. She also succinctly addresses the relations between whiteness and blackness in *Porgy and Bess*; however, an elaborate discussion of the entanglement of opera and whiteness is outside of the scope of André's studies. The work

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<sup>7</sup> Naomi Adele André, ed., *Blackness in Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Naomi Adele André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

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of Nina Sun Eidsheim is pivotal in analysing opera from a perspective of race and ethnicity, but her work centres on the topics of sound and listening.<sup>8</sup> Frances Henry and Carol Tator provide a brief outline of the relations of Western European opera with whiteness, stereotypical representations and class.<sup>9</sup> However, the unmarked and omnipresent whiteness in opera practices, its ties to efforts of diversity and inclusion and the Dutch context remain unstudied.

Within the context of this research, I perceive diversity as pertaining to the presence of diverse groups and individuals, and inclusion as referring to appreciation and active engagement of those groups and individuals. To be able to discuss whiteness, I will look at diversity concerning race, ethnicity and gender for this particular study. This choice is informed by the way diversity is approached in the Netherlands. Here, most attention regarding diversity and inclusion used to be directed towards gender, race and ethnicity, and the definition is broadening increasingly. Focusing on cultural institutions in the Netherlands, Christine Delhaye emphasises the importance of focusing on the participation of people of colour in diversity policies because their continuous absence in the Dutch cultural realm is in danger of being overlooked because of the broadened diversity definition.<sup>10</sup>

Another concept that inspired my thinking in designing my research is that of intersectionality. This concept originated in Black feminism and was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. She argues that different axes of identity, such as race and gender, should not be viewed in isolation.<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw stated that feminist theory and antiracist politics are usually directed towards the most privileged within the categories of race and gender. For example, men

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<sup>8</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre & Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Frances Henry and Carol Tator, "Constructing Operatic Racism in Postmodern Cultural Studies," in *Opera in a Multicultural World*, edited by Mary I. Ingraham, Joseph K. So and Roy Moodley, 237-247 (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Christine Delhaye, "Inclusiviteit in het post-multiculturalisme-tijdperk: Diversiteitsbeleid van de rijksoverheid," *Boekman* 30, no. 115 (2018): 11.

<sup>11</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, (1989): 149.

of colour represent discussions about race, and white women represent the gender debate, and thus only a subset of these categories is being represented. Those who are multiply-burdened are not taken into account in this single-use framework, and as a result, women of colour often remain excluded.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I choose to look at race, ethnicity and gender. Not to call attention to white women, but to make sure women of colour are not overlooked in my analyses. As I do not have access to the pronouns of those whom I include in my study, I choose a binary gender distinction between men and women even though I recognise the limitations that this choice carries with it.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will discuss the terminology which I will be using in this thesis, I will set forth the methodology, and I will provide a brief overview and description of the chapters in this thesis.

## Terminology

Since I am focussing on the Dutch context, I will use the Dutch terminology to address race and ethnicity. These are also the official terms that form the base terminology of the DIC, which functions as the backdrop of this thesis.<sup>13</sup> However, these choices need some unpacking since the official Dutch terminology has a history of controversy.

Before I dive into the Dutch terminology on race and ethnicity, I first want to clarify how I view race and ethnicity. Following Edoardo Silva-Bonilla, I understand race not as biologically but rather socially determined identity categories which result in material realities that differ per group. Race is analogous to class and gender as it profoundly affects one's social, political, ideological and economic position in society and varies greatly depending on time and place.<sup>14</sup> This—highly political—racial classification of people is directly linked to historical practices such as conquest and colonisation, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, 140.

<sup>13</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Cultural Diversity Code," *Code Culturele Diversiteit*, p. 5-6, <http://codeculturelediversiteit.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Code-Culturele-Diversiteit-Engels.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 40-41.



practices like colonial and neocolonial labour immigration.<sup>15</sup> I believe ethnicity works similarly, and therefore I will follow Gloria Wekker in using race and ethnicity together as ‘two sides of the same coin’.<sup>16</sup> Along the same lines, I often use racism and whiteness together as the privilege that comes with whiteness leads to oppression and exclusion.

Because I will discuss issues of race and ethnicity in the Netherlands, I will draw on information provided by the Dutch central statistical office called Statistics Netherlands (CBS)—a Dutch governmental institution which gathers statistical information about the Netherlands. CBS classifies race and ethnicity by differentiating between three categories: people with a Dutch background, people with a Western migration background and people with a non-Western migration background.<sup>17</sup> People with a Dutch background are those of whom both parents were born in the Netherlands, regardless of the country this individual was born in.<sup>18</sup> A person with a Western migration background comprises people whose parent(s) come from other European countries (excluding Turkey), North America, Oceania, Indonesia and Japan. Lastly, a person with a non-Western migration background has one or two parents from Africa, Latin America, Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey.<sup>19</sup> CBS adopted these categories in 2016, as the previous distinction between *allochtonen* (allochthonous) and *autochtonen* (autochthonous) were deemed to be problematic. However, although the categories might have changed, the definition of the categories and therefore, the way they operate—namely, as tools of racialisation—remain the same.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>17</sup> CBS, “Begrippen,” CBS, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/onze-diensten/methoden/begrippen?tab=p#id=persoon-met-een-westerse-migratieachtergrond>.

<sup>18</sup> CBS, “Persoon met een Nederlandse achtergrond,” CBS, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/onze-diensten/methoden/begrippen?tab=p#id=persoon-met-een-westerse-migratieachtergrond>.

<sup>19</sup> CBS, “Persoon met een niet-westerse migratieachtergrond,” CBS, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/onze-diensten/methoden/begrippen?tab=p#id=persoon-met-een-westerse-migratieachtergrond>.

<sup>20</sup> CBS, “Wat verstaat het CBS onder een allochtoon?” CBS, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/faq/specifiek/wat-verstaat-het-cbs-onder-een-allochtoon->.

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Gloria Wekker sheds light on the workings of the Dutch terminology by arguing that the terms *allochtonen* and *autochtonen* create a divide based on colour because, in practice, people of colour are racialised as *allochtonen* or 'those who came from elsewhere', where they remain for generations. In contrast, white people are referred to as *autochtonen* or 'those who are from here'.<sup>21</sup> Wekker's discussion of these Dutch terms shows that the official terminology might seem neutral but boils down to being a euphemism for race and ethnicity while perpetuating a process of racialisation in itself. Additionally, Wekker states that:

Within the category of autochtoon there are many, as we have seen, whose ancestors came from elsewhere, but who manage, through a white appearance, to make a successful claim to Dutchness. Allochtonen are the ones who do not manage this, through their skin color or their deviant religion or culture. The binary thus sets racializing processes in motion; everyone knows that they reference whites and people of color respectively.<sup>22</sup>

This citation demonstrates the proximity of the categories of people with a Dutch or Western migration background and their distance to the category of people with a non-Western migration background. Additionally, even though the terminology of people with a Western and non-Western migration background is strongly related to race and ethnicity, it does not match the experiences of people of colour. On the one hand, Indonesia and Japan are included as Western countries because of their socio-economic and socio-cultural position, but this does not mean that people from Indonesia and Japan are not subject to racism in the Netherlands and treated as 'other'.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, non-European territories that are or have been members of the Dutch

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<sup>21</sup> Wekker, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Philomena Essed, *Alledaags racisme* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Van Genneep, 2017), 124.

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Kingdom for centuries and have perceived themselves as such—for example, the Dutch Caribbean and Suriname—are curiously confined to the category of non-Western.<sup>24</sup>

Because the official terminology of people with a Dutch, Western or non-Western migration background primarily functions based on race and ethnicity, I will use the terms non-Western migration background interchangeably with the terms people of colour and ethnically marginalised groups/communities to describe people that are racialised in the Netherlands based on their skin colour. When it comes to individuals, I will be as specific as possible in naming their backgrounds. The terminology I choose allows me to reflect on the position of people of colour within contexts of whiteness while drawing a line to the official data that is provided by CBS about race and ethnicity in the Netherlands. This is motivated by the fact that this thesis focuses on whiteness and I, therefore, find it important to use labels that reflect on the position of people of colour within white spaces. For convenience purposes, I will use the abbreviations DWMB for people with a Dutch or Western migration background and NWMB for people with a non-Western migration background.

I acknowledge the problematic side of using the chosen terminology as these homogeneous terms overlook individual identities, bluntly group people with a variety of experiences together and do not leave any room for the intricacies and nuances of the multiple cultures and identities at stake. Therefore, I will not apply the label to make statements about different racialised groups or look at specific individuals. For this particular study, the labels I use are useful as a tool to measure the broader state of whiteness and diversity at DNO.

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<sup>24</sup> CBS, "Persoon met een westerse migratieachtergrond," CBS, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/onze-diensten/methoden/begrippen?tab=p#id=persoon-met-een-westerse-migratieachtergrond>; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "End of Mission Statement of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance at the Conclusion of Her Mission to the Kingdom of the Netherlands," *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, October 7, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25100&LangID=E>.

## **Chapters and Methodology**

The primary research method I use in this thesis can be summed up as an institutional analysis. To perform this analysis, I use a mixed-method approach which combines both quantitative and qualitative methods that are thoroughly shaped by the necessities of the different chapters. I chose to pursue this study without the input of DNO to maintain an independent point of view. Conducting this research as a student not affiliated with a company and not having access to the input of the company and its workforce, I work with the resources that are available to me. I mostly make use of public data such as annual reports, season brochures and other information that is available online.

Because my methodology is strongly tied to chapters, I will elaborate on my methodological choices within the chapter descriptions and in the introductions of the corresponding sections. I will elaborate on the methodology of the personnel pillar more extensively within the introduction of the fourth chapter. As mentioned before, I chose to follow the DIC for the structure of my thesis and the methodology is inspired by the prescriptions of the DIC as well.

I will use six chapters to examine the diversity and inclusion efforts of DNO from 2017 to 2021 and reflect upon the organisation's whiteness. The first chapter functions as an outline of the backdrop of DNO's practices. This chapter is used to position DNO. Here, I will discuss three main dimensions that I believe shape the state of whiteness that DNO is in. First, I will discuss two international developments within the realm of opera that push opera companies to deal with issues of race and ethnicity and come to terms with their whiteness. The first development concerns the increasing critique on staging and the second development regards the focus on diversity both in terms of the audience and the opera companies' workforce. I perceive DNO's efforts regarding diversity and inclusion to be part of these developments. Because these developments are very topical, I use discourse analysis as a method in this section by distilling these central opera developments from a collection of online articles. Next, I will provide insight into Dutch racism and whiteness through a literary review as a method that discusses some of the

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central concepts that pertain to the Dutch context. I draw on Philomena Essed's concepts of *entitlement racism*, *smug ignorance* and *everyday racism*; Zihni Özdil's thinking about *Dutch exceptionalism* and Gloria Wekker's views on whiteness and the Dutch self-image. The third paragraph deals with the Dutch arts sector and its funding. Here, I will discuss the whiteness of the Dutch arts sector, how this incited initiatives for diversity and inclusion such as the DIC, and how these are connected to government funding policies that influence the decisions of DNO. As a method, I use a combination of scholarly articles on the topic and official government sources to construct an image of how whiteness is entrenched in the Dutch arts sector. In the last paragraph, I will give some background information about NO&B as an institution and how they view diversity and inclusion drawing from their annual reports, their website, literature and online articles.

After the contextualisation that I aimed to create in the first chapter, the next five chapters each focus on one of the five Ps. The second chapter is dedicated to DNO's programme. Here, I will first examine the way NO&B discusses programme diversity in their annual reports of 2017, 2018 and 2019. These are all of the annual reports that were published within the research period of 2017 to 2021. Then, I will trace how these views occur in their programme by mapping the diversity within the programme expressed in numbers. Here, I will use both quantitative and qualitative measures to provide insight into DNO's practices. I am guided by the principles of the DIC, which prescribe the importance of the inclusive way in which the company's products and services come into being and the diversity of perspectives in this process. I, therefore, demonstrate how DNO operates by analysing diversity in terms of the number of soloists of colour on stage per production and overall, and examining the diversity of the 'big 4' pertaining to the composer, writer, conductor and director of the production. This analysis is based on the information provided on the official NO&B website regarding the casting of the productions of the seasons from 2017/2018 until 2020/2021. From these numbers, two central themes emerge, namely that of stereotypical casting and whitewashing. In the last two paragraphs of this chapter, I will use examples from the programme and connect them to the literature on these two concepts to

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discuss how DNO's whiteness is reflected through their practices of stereotyping and whitewashing.

In chapter 3, I will explore how DNO approaches diversity on the public. I will do so by studying the way NO&B formulates goals regarding potential target groups, the necessity they present for diversifying the audience and how NO&B keeps track of their audience. NO&B's annual reports of 2017, 2018 and 2019, function as the primary source of information for this chapter. Next, I will discuss the strategies which NO&B employs to become more inclusive by analysing how they communicate to their audience and by examining the image of the audience, which they create on their website. Lastly, I will address the tension between a young *and* diverse audience as one of the main themes within this chapter. I will examine this tension on the one hand by going back to the programme and analysing the difference between the programme choices that cater to a young and diverse audience, and on the other hand by reviewing NO&B's educational choices and examining the goals of their youth organisations Spektakelaars, My Muse & Me (MM&M) and the Young Patrons Circle (YPC).

The fourth chapter is about DNO's personnel. In this chapter, I aim to provide an overview of the diversity present in all layers of the organisation. I do this through a headcount of all the staff members of DNO, and those from the central departments of NO&B, and by determining their diversity based on information that is available online. I choose a headcount in measuring the diversity among DNO's personnel as it is one of the leading quantitative types of diversity measurements—according to Roscoe Balter, Joy Chow and Yin Jin—and the most suitable to this particular project.<sup>25</sup> I adopt a comparative approach by setting the results of the workforce diversity against the diversity present in Amsterdam according to the numbers of CBS as an external benchmark. Additionally, I follow the thinking of Emily Vargas, Amy Seon Westmoreland, Kathrina Robotham and Fiona Lee. They argue that numerical diversity is essential because it impacts people of colour directly through the unique challenges they face due to their minority

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<sup>25</sup> Roscoe Balter, Joy Chow, and Yin Jin, "What Diversity Metrics are Best Used to Track and Improve Employee Diversity?" *Cornell University* (2014), 2.

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status in what are predominantly white organisations. This headcount allows me to make a base measurement of DNO's workforce diversity and assess how this changed between 2017 and 2021. To provide insight into the disparities in diversity depending on the different populations within the company, I distinguish four categories that also structure the paragraphs within this chapter. These categories are the off-stage workforce, the 'big 4', the board and the council of supervision, and the stage performers pertaining to the soloists and choir. Whereas I discuss the 'big 4' and soloists in chapter 2 through a programme perspective, I will discuss them from the viewpoint of the broader workforce of the company in chapter 4. Besides reflecting on these outcomes by making links to academic literature, I will use statements made by opera artists of colour to provide additional contextualisation.

In chapter 5, I will discuss the diversity of DNO's partners. My main aim is to examine what DNO's partners bring to the table in terms of diversity and inclusion. I determine this by looking at the statements regarding diversity and inclusion on the partners' websites and by having a glance at the diversity of these companies' workforce. I realise that these methods are a relatively limited way of measuring diversity within a company. However, I believe that they do provide an overall picture of partner diversity and fit within the limited scope of this thesis. In selecting the partners, I am guided by the partners NO&B published in the annual reports of 2017, 2018 and 2019, and the season brochures of the seasons 2017/2018 to 2020/2021. Similar to the fourth chapter, I divide the partners into different categories to analyse the differences in diversity and inclusion per partner type. These categories also structure the sections within this chapter which consist of business partners, funders and sponsors, production partners and educational partners.

The last chapter deals with diversity and inclusion in NO&B's self-established pillar of positioning. This concerns the formation of the 'right' image around DNO's product, service and organisation, which is realised through marketing. NO&B names their promotional pictures as an essential part of their positioning strategy.<sup>26</sup> I, therefore, examine NO&B's positioning strategy by

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<sup>26</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 40, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/sites/default/files/documents/jaarverslagen/Jaarverslag-2019-website.pdf>.

exploring the promotional images and videos which are used to promote the productions in the season brochure, on the website, on social media and on posters. I will discuss DNO's promotional pictures per season of 2017/2018 until 2020/2021 and connect them to the productions that they represent and ideas about diversity, representation and whiteness. This chapter is structured per season to track how NO&B uses images to disseminate diversity and inclusion and how this changed throughout the seasons.

As I will show in this thesis, the different Ps all have their own focus and way of dealing with diversity and inclusion. In turn, they also all illuminate different aspects of DNO's whiteness.

### **Positioning Myself**

I was 16 when I saw my first opera. It was Sergej Prokofjev's *L'amour des trois oranges* at NO&B, then still called Het Muziektheater. The parents of my best friend were season ticket holders, and they had room for me to join them. I have always felt very privileged having that first opera experience at a relatively young age. At the same time, I have also felt out of place within the opera crowd. As a young, middle-class white woman, I often felt far from belonging amid the old and wealthy opera elites, even as I started studying musicology and increasingly learned more about opera. I started seeing the realm of opera through different eyes when I learned about social justice and decolonisation, coming to the opera then felt like stepping into a sea of white in the middle of the colourful Amsterdam. Still, I never stopped visiting, because I felt the opera itself concerns me and I feel strongly connected to it through my Italian descent.

But what if you have never had the opportunity of visiting an opera performance? Or, what if you do not feel a connection with the stories that are being told? What if you are not included at all? And why should being able to visit the opera be a privilege, to begin with? I want to capture the whiteness relating to opera in this project, so we have a starting point to move away from. Because I firmly believe that opera should be by everyone, about everyone and for everyone, especially since opera practices in the Netherlands are heavily subsidised with tax money paid by everyone. This is what ultimately inspired me to write this thesis.



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Having read Gloria Wekker's *White Innocence*, I learned about the concept of whiteness and how this functions within the Netherlands. This gave me the ability to conceptualise the realm of opera and start thinking about who is viewed to belong to opera as it is now, and why. When I visited *Porgy and Bess* in 2019, I could not help but feel uncomfortable as a white person, sitting in an almost entirely white audience, looking at and listening to a stage full of black people who were directed and conducted by white men. When I was invited to moderate a keynote lecture of the Belgian-Rwandan Olivia Rutazibwa about decolonising the arts at the Opera Forward Festival of 2019, I could not help but feel awkward when a board member asked the invited keynote speaker 'where she was from' while asking me, a white MA student, 'about my work'. After Rutazibwa's brilliant, but most of all apt and urgent, keynote another (this time ex-)board member came up to us in high dudgeon and said the topic did not apply to NO&B because they have been 'paying attention to diversity for over thirty years'. We should see the fact that Rutazibwa was even there as proof of how involved the organisation is on the topic. I believe that these examples, which illuminate the companies' whiteness, are at the core of the problem regarding the organisation's lack of diversity. Moreover, I believe that it is the responsibility and duty of the people that have access to these spaces to change them from within into something that belongs to everyone.

# Chapter 1: Contextualising Whiteness: Opera, the Public Arts Sector and the Netherlands

In this chapter, I aim to provide the relevant background information of the way DNO deals with their whiteness by mapping the contexts that lie at its basis. I argue that DNO's diversity and inclusion efforts form part of the developments that address racism and whiteness in the international opera world, and they are shaped by the whiteness of the Dutch arts sector and Dutch society at large. Therefore, I want to situate DNO within these contexts of racism and whiteness before I will dive into an analysis of the organisation in the subsequent chapters. In this chapter, I will first discuss two international developments that indicate the way opera companies deal with their whiteness through the lens of diversity and inclusion efforts. Then, I will look at racism and whiteness that is particular to the Dutch situation. Next, I will discuss whiteness and the Dutch arts and how this environment shaped Dutch funding structures, and lastly, I will consider some background information relating to NO&B and their definition of diversity.

## International Opera Developments

While cultural institutions like museums are being scrutinised for their colonial heritage, a thorough process of decolonisation has yet to take hold in the world of opera.<sup>1</sup> Operas like *Les Indes Galantes* (1735), *Aida* (1871), *Otello* (1887), and *Madama Butterfly* (1904), to name a few examples, have achieved the status of timeless dramas. However, their problematic representations of race and ethnicity, carried with them from centuries past, are often overlooked. Since operas are a direct reflection of the context in which they were composed, they transport ideologies that stem from European colonialism and imperialism into the present. According to

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<sup>1</sup> Leendert van der Valk, 'Het Tropenmuseum gaat voorop in 'dekolonisatie',' *NRC*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/12/tropenmuseum-gaat-voorop-in-dekolonisatie-13460466-a1576878>.

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Frances Henry and Carol Tator, the opera realm, in general, is thoroughly invested in whiteness due to the Eurocentric environment it developed in.<sup>2</sup> Henry and Tator argue that opera clings to Eurocentrism which results in the exclusion of artists of colour but also in the inability of appealing to multicultural communities.<sup>3</sup>

I argue that there are two significant contemporary developments in the realm of opera that show the urgency for opera companies to deal with issues of race and ethnicity and come to terms with their whiteness. Both signify the broader international context of which DNO's diversity and inclusion measures are a part. The first development regards the augmenting critique on staging. Whereas practices like blackface and yellowface are now frowned upon in theatre and film, these practices are still the order of the day in the realm of opera. For example, the role of the North African Moor in Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* was always performed by a white tenor in blackface until Ronald Samm became the first black man to sing the lead at the Birmingham Opera Company in 2009. This stirred up the complex debate about racial casting in opera, but afterwards, the use of blackface for this role continued.<sup>4</sup> English National Opera was the first to break the blackface tradition in *Otello* by not blacking up white tenor Stuart Skelton for the 2014 production. Still, it took until 2015 for the debate to receive more considerable attention. In 2015, the Metropolitan Opera announced that they were staging Verdi's *Otello* without blackface for the first time since its Met premiere in 1891. The Met's decision was based on the outrage caused by their promotional pictures that showed the starring white singer Aleksandrs Antonenko with darkened skin. An article in *The Guardian* states that 'it has previously been "practically automatic" for singers playing the part to use blackface—just as extravagant Asian-style makeup known as "yellowface" is still the norm for productions of *Madama Butterfly*'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry and Tator, 817.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, 818.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Fisher, "Otello, Ronald Samm and Racial Casting in Opera," *The Times*, January 9, 2013, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/otello-roland-samm-and-racial-casting-in-opera-3pg82njrv8w>.

<sup>5</sup> Nicky Woolf, "Decision to scrap blackface from Otello not complicated, says Met director," *The Guardian*, September 22, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/sep/22/otello-metropolitan-opera-scraps-blackface>.

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Some of the critiques on operas even led to the cancellation of whole productions due to their negligence and hurtfulness. The Hackney Empire in London cancelled the performance of Peter Eötvös' *The Golden Dragon* after receiving criticism on its all-white production of a story about the immigrant experience, set in a Chinese restaurant without involving the communities that are represented. Also, a series of protests concerning racism and yellowface in different productions of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* ultimately led to the cancellation of the production by the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players in 2015.<sup>6</sup> This development shows that it is increasingly important to reflect on opera productions critically, and it is pivotal to include the represented communities in the creation and representation of operas about marginalised communities.

The second significant opera development concerns the increased focus on diversity, both in terms of the audience and the opera companies' workforce. Within the realm of opera, diversity efforts are usually directed towards race, ethnicity and gender. One of the main instigators of diversity in opera is the urgency of attracting a new and diverse audience. While the amount of government subsidies and traditional wealthy patrons has declined in the past decades, the number of cultural consumers has increased along with a vast increase in options for consumer entertainment which makes for a very competitive entertainment market.<sup>7</sup> These circumstances force opera houses to be more responsive to the public and include marginalised groups. Bonita M. Kolb argues that people of colour are more likely to visit cultural institutions in which their communities are represented through art.<sup>8</sup> That is why besides focusing on audiences, it is also essential to make sure art is created and presented by people from communities of colour.

There are different initiatives employed around the world to make the realm of opera more diverse in terms of gender, race and ethnicity. One strategy regards intra-institutional actions to

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<sup>6</sup> Zack Sigel, "Opera in Yellowface Hastily Canceled After Public Outrage," *Hyperallergic*, September 22, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/238635/opera-in-yellowface-hastily-canceled-after-public-outrage/>.

<sup>7</sup> Bonita M. Kolb, *Marketing Cultural Organisations: New Strategies for Attracting Audiences to Classical Music, Dance, Museums, Theatre, and Opera* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), 1-17.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, 190-191.

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make the opera company's workforce mirror the diversity present in society. In a 2019 article published by *The Guardian*, Stuart Murphy, the new chief executive of English National Opera (ENO) said that opera is 'shockingly white, overly traditional and too slow to change'.<sup>9</sup> Murphy added that ENO's staff does not represent the British population, and therefore they are not being true to ENO's core value of providing 'opera for everyone'. As someone coming from a career in television, he said, 'It just felt strange to me. Young white audiences also think it is weird'.<sup>10</sup> ENO's solution to this question is the instalment of blind auditions in recruiting orchestra members, hiring new choir members with a Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) background, providing more opportunities for emerging BAME directors and lowering prices for audiences under 18.<sup>11</sup> Choosing partners that help with diversity aims is also a strategy. The Royal Opera House (ROH) works with the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (enei), the Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme, Shape Arts and the Camden Society, to actively encourage people that are currently underrepresented at ROH including those from BAME backgrounds and disabled people to apply for jobs.<sup>12</sup> In 2019, Seattle Opera appointed Naomi André as the only American scholar in residence to make Seattle Opera more inclusive for both the audiences and the workforce, and contextualise the programme.<sup>13</sup>

Also, some diversity and inclusion initiatives emerged that superseded the level of the single institution. An example is the multi-country initiative 'Get Close to Opera', which was started in 2017 to stimulate diversity within the world of opera. This EU-funded programme aims to involve more people in opera and is a joint effort of Materahub consortium, the Italian theatre

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Brown, "'Preserved in Aspic': Opera Embarks on Diversity Drive," *The Guardian*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/28/preserved-in-aspic-opera-embarks-on-diversity-drive>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Royal Opera House, "Diversity and Inclusion," *Royal Opera House*, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.roh.org.uk/about/royal-opera-house/work-here/diversity-and-inclusion>.

<sup>13</sup> Gemma Alexander, "Seattle Opera may have the Country's Only Opera Scholar in Residence, helping make the Art Form More Diverse and Relevant," *The Seattle Times*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/classical-music/seattle-opera-may-have-the-countrys-only-opera-scholar-in-residence-helping-make-the-art-form-more-diverse-and-relevant/>.

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company L'Albero, the RESEO network, the European Network of Migrant Women, the Opera Circus company, the ESART campus and the University of Patras. This programme is developing and promoting inclusive and multicultural arts education, and training programmes specially tailored to migrant and refugee contexts to use opera as a tool for cultural integration and 'create a community of people that rethink Opera Houses as spaces of social innovation, inclusion, cultural exchanges and learning for everyone'.<sup>14</sup>

Besides developments that address the audience and workforce of the opera companies, in recent years, light is also being shed on the conventionality of the repertoire and the diversity of its composers. The lack of diversity of the composers of the standard repertoire is emphasised by small opera companies like OperaCréole, The Harlem Opera Theater, Opera Ebony, and Opera Noire in the US which focus on marginalised works by composers of colour about topics like Malcolm X and Robert McFerrin, and provides people of colour the opportunity to take centre stage.<sup>15</sup> Other opera companies like the UK's Surrey Opera and New York's Morningside Opera have recently presented operas by composers of colour, for example, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Thelma* in 2012 and H. Lawrence Freeman's *Voodoo* in 2015. Opera Philadelphia appointed the African American tenor Lawrence Brownlee as their artistic director in 2017 to advise on repertoire and to provide insights on diversity in artistic practices and community initiatives among other things.<sup>16</sup> One of the works Brownlee commissioned is *Cycles of My Being*, composed by Tyshawn Sorey on a libretto by poet Terrance Hayes, both African Americans.<sup>17</sup> Whereas most of these projects focus on men of colour, there are very few initiatives providing space for women of colour. In 2019, the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston South Carolina commissioned composer of colour

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<sup>14</sup> Get Close to Opera, "The Project," *Get Close to Opera*, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.getclosetoopera.eu/the-project/>.

<sup>15</sup> Opera Grand Rapids, "Why We need more People of Color Represented in Opera," *Opera Grand Rapids*, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://www.operagr.org/why-we-need-more-people-of-color-represented-in-opera/>.

<sup>16</sup> Opera Philadelphia, "About our People - Leadership," *Opera Philadelphia*, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://www.operaphila.org/about/our-people/leadership/lawrence-brownlee/>.

<sup>17</sup> Opera Grand Rapids.

Rhiannon Giddens to write the opera *Omar* on Omar Ibn Said who was an enslaved Muslim-African man brought to Charleston in the early nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

All of these examples show that a selection of opera companies engages in an array of ways to diversify their practices and address their whiteness. One of the central aims is being a mirror of society and having a particular emphasis on diversifying the workforce, repertoire and staging. Additionally, attention is paid to education and institute-transcending conversations and programmes. As part of this international opera community, DNO's efforts to become more diverse and inclusive can be viewed in line with these two developments from the international opera realm.

### **Dutch Racism and Whiteness**

Despite the often general conception of the Netherlands as an open and tolerant country, racism is a structural phenomenon and shapes the lives of many people daily.<sup>19</sup> Whether it is institutional racism in the shape of ethnic profiling by the Dutch police, the Dutch tax authorities, the housing market, the job market or the 'traditional' celebration of Saint Nicholas accompanied by Black Pete, a stereotypical figure in blackface.<sup>20</sup> In this section, I will look at some of the main ideas and concepts that define racism and whiteness in the Netherlands, which are entrenched in the Dutch arts sector and reflect on the practices of DNO. I will explain these concepts here and make links to some of them throughout the thesis to show how the Dutch context informs the methods of DNO.

One of the Netherlands' central writings on race is *Dutch Racism* edited by Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving. Essed and Hoving define Dutch racism as a 'complex, paradoxical and contested phenomenon' which has 'its own legacy in the Netherlands and the (former) colonies,

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Cooper, "Rhiannon Giddens Is Writing an Opera," *The New York Times*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/10/arts/music/rhiannon-giddens-opera.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving, eds. *Dutch Racism* (Leiden: Rodopi, 2014), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Vera Mulder and Riffy Bol, "Institutioneel racisme in Nederland: wat het is, waar het zit, en wat jij eraan kunt doen," *De Correspondent*, June 10, 2020, <https://decorrespondent.nl/11317/institutioneel-racisme-in-nederland-wat-het-is-waar-het-zit-en-wat-jij-eraan-kunt-doen/464087536-47232adb>.

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operates in and beyond the national borders, is shaped by European and global influences, and intersects with other systems of domination'.<sup>21</sup> A defining feature of Dutch racism coined by Essed and Hoving is *smug ignorance*—a combination of ignorance and denial.<sup>22</sup> Even though racism influences many lives in the Netherlands daily, dominant Dutch discourses lack the connection of racism to histories of colonialism, slavery and antisemitism, view racism as outdated, and only recognise it as such when there is a clear intent of injuring or showing ideological conviction.<sup>23</sup> A way of thinking which inhibits productive conversations on the topic of racism and maintains systems of exclusion and inequality.

This also shows that there is a very narrow understanding of the concept of racism that does not reflect on reality. Zihni Özdil argues that the Dutch reduce racism only to discrimination or bigotry by individual actors instead of also perceiving racism to be institutional and systemic.<sup>24</sup> Even though antiracist intellectuals structurally address institutional racism, and that numerous studies document racism within the legal system, labour market, education and media.<sup>25</sup> Özdil compares the Dutch discourse with that of English-speaking countries by stating that:

Unlike in the English-speaking world, Dutch historiography, culture and Dutch lexicon lack analytical depth in regard to understanding racism. Concepts like whiteness or a critical understanding of the toxic history of the N-word in all its forms is absent in Dutch mainstream discourse, despite the fact that black and non-black Dutch people of color have addressed these issues for many years.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Essed and Hoving, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Zihni Özdil, "'Racism is an American Problem': Dutch Exceptionalism and its Politics of Denial," *Frame Journal of Literary Studies* 27, no. 2 (2014): 56-60.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Idem. 54.



Therefore, it is necessary to give a clear view of the different levels of racism present in Dutch society. Philomena Essed distinguishes three types of racism that apply to the Netherlands: cultural racism, institutional racism and individual racism.<sup>27</sup> Cultural racism pertains to cultural production such as books, media, art and cultural traditions that distribute specific ideas and images of people of colour, which is often the opposition of the 'good and civilised' whites versus the 'savage and underdeveloped' people of colour.<sup>28</sup> This type of racism also applies to the stereotypical way that people of colour are portrayed in opera. Institutional racism comprises of racist institutions that provide a limited scope of development, fewer rights and unequal possibilities to make use of rights for people of colour as opposed to white people leading to an overrepresentation of people of colour in low-wage, irregular and unskilled labour.<sup>29</sup> Institutional racism demonstrates that racism is a collective problem because it is about the systematic disadvantage of people of colour across the societal board.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, Essed discusses individual racism as a racial or ethnic prejudice that results in discrimination against people of colour on a personal level either actively or passively.<sup>31</sup> All three kinds of racism are pervasive in the Netherlands and, as I will show throughout this thesis, are also reflected in the practices of DNO.

Another important concept that pertains to the Dutch context is that of *Dutch exceptionalism*. Zihni Özdil argues that both the history and contemporary material effects of Dutch racism are pasteurised or watered down by the idea of Dutch exceptionalism as part of institutionalised political and intellectual discourse in the Netherlands.<sup>32</sup> Meaning, that there is no complete erasure or denial but rather a selective presentation of history.<sup>33</sup> According to Özdil, it is a general Dutch belief that concepts like whiteness are not relevant to the Dutch situation. Dutch whiteness is exemplified in the fact that terms like white, whiteness and white privilege are

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<sup>27</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racisme*, 146.

<sup>28</sup> Idem, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, 162-167.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, 175.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, 176-178.

<sup>32</sup> Özdil, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Idem, 51.

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downplayed as anglicised terms and that the Dutch should stick to their own accepted term 'blank' which does not only mean white but also has connotations of neutrality, fairness, beauty and clarity, whereas the N-word is normative over using black as a descriptor.<sup>34</sup> Özdil states that the combination of institutional racism and white privilege prevents people of colour from achieving lasting positions. The concept of Dutch exceptionalism in terms of racism relating both to the past and present materialities ensures a lack of public pressure on large Dutch institutions to increase diversity.<sup>35</sup>

Dutch whiteness can also be traced in the naturalness in which white people in the Netherlands idealise themselves while oppressing people of colour. Essed finds that, whether conscious or unconscious, all white people in the Netherlands benefit from their own privileged position vis-à-vis people of colour.<sup>36</sup> White people have the position and means of power that enables racism and results in lower societal positions and social status for people of colour.<sup>37</sup> The idealisation of whiteness is not a conscious act but a process of socialisation, Essed states that:

The idea of superiority is so deeply ingrained in the socialisation of white people, in their upbringing, in education, the media, in politics, labour relations, in short, the whole organisation and functioning of society, that many white people do not recognise the racism in their own feelings, attitude and behaviour towards black people.<sup>38</sup>

This idealisation is very much connected to the Dutch self-image. Gloria Wekker argues that an unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and feelings—compiled during four hundred years of imperial rule—still plays a significant role in Dutch society and remains unaddressed because it

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<sup>34</sup> Idem, 58-59.

<sup>35</sup> Idem, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racisme*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, 132.

<sup>38</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racisme*, 134.

does not match the innocent Dutch self-image of being 'a tolerant, small, and just ethical nation, color-blind and free of racism and that foregrounds being a victim rather than a perpetrator of (inter)national violence'.<sup>39</sup> This idea of tolerance stems from the 1960s and is not about accepting but about tolerating people from non-Western migration backgrounds who could keep their cultural habits and traditions as long as they did not disturb the Dutch norms.<sup>40</sup> This idea of tolerance centralises the positive attitude of the white Dutch people instead of the human rights of people of colour. Additionally, Wekker argues that the dominant representation of Dutchness is still white and Christian regardless of the mixedness of the Dutch population regarding race, ethnicity and religion.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Dutch Arts Sector and its Funding**

The centrality of whiteness in the Netherlands resounds in the predominantly white Dutch arts sector. In this section, I will discuss the whiteness of the industry, how this incited initiatives for diversity and inclusion and the connection of these initiatives to government funding policies that influence the decisions of NO&B.

Sandra Trienekens and Eltje Bos argue that the Dutch public arts sector is thoroughly shaped by whiteness, which results in white normativity and a hierarchical perception of arts and cultures in which non-Western cultures are perceived to be less culturally acquired than Western cultures.<sup>42</sup> Within this environment of whiteness, artists of colour continuously encounter forms of *everyday racism*. This kind of racism, coined by Philomena Essed in 1984 after interviewing Dutch-Surinamese women about their daily experiences with white people, comprises of the discrimination and prejudices people of colour encounter regularly.<sup>43</sup> Trienekens and Bos suggest that everyday racism in the shape of cultural denigration and an underestimation of non-white

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<sup>39</sup> Wekker, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racisme*, 125-126.

<sup>41</sup> Wekker, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Sandra Trienekens and Eltje Bos, "Strategies and Aesthetics: Responses to Exclusionary Practices in the Public Arts Sector," in *Dutch Racism*, edited by Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (Leiden: Rodopi, 2014), 296.

<sup>43</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racisme*, 109.

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artists because of this idea of lack of cultural acquiredness leads to typecasting and the unwillingness to cast actors of non-Western background in roles of colour.<sup>44</sup>

Melle Daamen and Clayde Menso, two general directors of several large Dutch arts organisations, argue that the Dutch arts are overwhelmingly white and unsuccessful in diversifying because they try to impose the existing white arts canon upon people with a non-Western migration background in a paternalistic way.<sup>45</sup> Instead, organisations should create space and centralise the interests of these marginalised ethnic groups. This is not happening enough.<sup>46</sup>

Because the Dutch public arts sector is fuelled by public funding, it has to be inclusive and accessible for everyone.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the Dutch public arts sector is racist according to Trienekens and Bos, because it pushes people of colour into the margins instead of centrally making them part of cultural institutions.<sup>48</sup> They argue that:

In a genuinely inclusive arts sector, diversity would cease to be a topic that needs to be discussed explicitly and would be fully integrated into the general practices of the sector. But to achieve such an inclusive state, explicit attention first needs to be drawn to diversity to make the sector aware of the need to deal with diversity issues.<sup>49</sup>

The overwhelming whiteness and lack of diversity in the arts have been central topics within Dutch politics and the Dutch arts sector for decades, but its importance has shifted over the years. The diversification of the Dutch arts was already a topic of debate in 1999 when state secretary Rik van der Ploeg created a policy document for diversity called *Clear Way for Cultural Diversity (Ruim*

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<sup>44</sup> Trienekens and Bos, 299.

<sup>45</sup> Melle Daamen and Clayde Menso, "Stop met het opdringen van witte cultuur," *NRC*, August 24, 2019, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/08/23/stop-met-opdringen-witte-cultuur-a3970995>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Trienekens and Bos, 295.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, 301-302.

<sup>49</sup> *Idem*, 297.

*Baan voor culturele diversiteit*). Van der Ploeg's main goals were to create more space for diversifying the arts supply, appeal to a larger and broader audience, and improve accessibility for minorities, youth and women to the workforce and boards of cultural organisations.<sup>50</sup> Instead of using diversity in arts as a means of integration as was done up until 1999, Van der Ploeg aimed to provide a space in the arts for people with a non-Western migration background to advance cultural pluriformity.<sup>51</sup> *Ruim Baan* triggered much controversy among artists, culture critics and politicians who did not see the urgency and thought diversification was a political issue that was at odds with the centrality of quality within the arts.<sup>52</sup> This controversy is an example of Essed and Hoving's smug ignorance because the problem of whiteness in the sector is denied and ignored by the people that critique the measures to make the sector more inclusive. The continuous emphasis on quality over inclusivity keeps mechanisms of exclusion in check and indicates what Essed calls the naturalness in which white people in the Netherlands idealise themselves while oppressing people of colour. In the end, a watered-down version of the bill was accepted in the *Cultuurnota 2001-2004*, which was extended to 2005-2008 but was discontinued afterwards.<sup>53</sup> The controversy surrounding the topic motivated Van der Ploeg's successor to pass on the responsibility of diversifying the arts to the cultural institutions themselves and led to the creation of the Cultural Diversity Code (Code Culturele Diversiteit: CCD).<sup>54</sup>

The CCD was launched as an initiative by the Dutch cultural industry in 2011 to make the cultural realm more inclusive to people with a non-Western migration background. This was due to the lack of success in diversifying the cultural realm and was inspired by the changing Dutch demographics in which Statistics Netherlands (CBS) predicts that about 23% of the Dutch people

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<sup>50</sup> Eltje Bos, *Beleid Voor Cultuur En Immigranten: Rijksbeleid En Uitvoeringspraktijk 1980-2004* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2012), 104.

<sup>51</sup> Delhaye, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Idem, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Toekomst Cultuurbeleid, "Cultuurbeleid van Rijk en regio: een geschiedenis is vogelvlucht," *Toekomst Cultuurbeleid*, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://toekomst-cultuurbeleid.cultuur.nl/verkenning/bijlagen/cultuurbeleid-van-rijk-en-regio>.

<sup>54</sup> Delhaye, 9.

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will have a non-Western migration background by 2050.<sup>55</sup> The initiative was voluntary, but upon its launch, the CCD was included in the Basic Cultural Infrastructure (Culturele Basisinfrastructuur: BIS) as one of the conditions for receiving government subsidies. The BIS is the funding procedure of the Dutch national government in which they establish which cultural institutions and funds receive subsidies during a four-year period. Within this procedure, the Dutch Council of Culture (Raad voor Cultuur: RvC) advises the minister of the Education, Cultural Affairs and Science (OCW) once every four years in the BIS report about the allocation of subsidies based on several criteria.<sup>56</sup> Adhering to the CCD became one of these conditions. The RvC evaluates how an institution wants to reach new and more diverse audiences and how the CCD is adhered to based on how an institution explains and employs the Code.

The CCD is based on four pillars to adequately shape cultural diversity in cultural institutions, namely programme, public, personnel and partners. Additionally, the CCD works with four principles that can be used as concrete guidelines. These principles are formulating a vision of cultural diversity, translating this vision into policy supported by the necessary financial resources, learning about and pursuing ongoing improvement in cultural diversity, and establishing supervision and accountability to comply with the CCD.<sup>57</sup> The code is designed to move towards attracting personnel, audience and partners that reflect the composition of the population and implementation is required within all four pillars (4 Ps) comprising the public, programme, personnel and partners of the company.<sup>58</sup>

In November 2019, the CCD was changed into the Diversity & Inclusion Code (DIC) and its diversity definition was broadened to include other forms of difference, such as gender,

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<sup>55</sup> CBS, "Prognose bevolking naar migratieachtergrond (2019-2060)," CBS, December 17, 2019, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2019/51/prognose-bevolking-naar-migratieachtergrond--2019-2060-->.

<sup>56</sup> Raad voor Cultuur, "Advies Raad voor Cultuur: Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2017-2020," *Raad voor Cultuur*, p. 4, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/downloads/document?id=85d26260-0620-4ceb-ab21-c87695581598&title=Advies%20Raad%20voor%20Cultuur%20basisinfrastructuur%202017-2020.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Cultural Diversity Code," *Code Culturele Diversiteit*, p. 7, <http://codeculturelediversiteit.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Code-Culturele-Diversiteit-Engels.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*, 12.

disability, sexual orientation, religion and socioeconomic status, level of education and age.<sup>59</sup> In the period leading up to 2019, it was the responsibility of the institutions to apply the CCD. Whether the CCD was being used—and to what extent—would be inquired during subsidy applications but without any direct repercussions as this was still relatively noncommittal.<sup>60</sup> The evaluation process was based on the principle of ‘comply or explain’ in which all principles should be respected, and any actions that deviate from the guidelines should be substantiated.<sup>61</sup> Starting from 2019, the DIC will play a more significant role and not adhering to it will directly result in loss of subsidies.<sup>62</sup> OCW names adhering to the DIC—along with other codes such as the Fair Practice Code and Governance Code Cultuur—as a ‘knock-out criterion’ for the funding period of 2021-2024.<sup>63</sup> Applicants must provide insight into how they translate the codes (step by step) into the concrete implementation of policy in the period 2021-2024.

## Dutch National Opera and Diversity

In this section, I will provide some background information concerning NO&B and discuss their definition of diversity. Rising out of the ashes of The Dutch Opera Foundation (De Nederlandse Operastichting) in 1986, The Dutch Opera (De Nederlandse Opera: DNO) is the Netherlands’ biggest opera company and the only one with its own venue.<sup>64</sup> In 2013, DNO merged with The Dutch National Ballet (HNB) and its venue the Muziektheater into a larger and single entity which was dubbed Nationale Opera & Ballet (NO&B) in 2014. During the merger, the opera company changed its name into Dutch National Opera (De Nationale Opera: DNO), and the Muziektheater

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<sup>59</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, “De Code,” *Code Culturele Diversiteit*, accessed April 15, 2020, <http://codeculturelediversiteit.com/de-code/>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, “Cultural Diversity Code,” p. 6,

<sup>62</sup> Kunst Centraal, “Nieuwe Code Diversiteit & Inclusie,” *Kunst Centraal*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.kunstcentraal.nl/blog/2019/11/07/nieuwe-code-diversiteit-inclusie/>.

<sup>63</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, “Cultuursubsidie aanvragen,” *Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.cultuursubsidie.nl/aanvragen>.

<sup>64</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, “Een Rijke Geschiedenis,” *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/nl/history>.

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changed into Nationale Opera & Ballet. Even though the three companies merged, they still maintain their separate brand names and funding structures.

NO&B is a Public Benefit Organisation (Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling: PBO), which accommodated close to 250.000 visitors in 2019 alone.<sup>65</sup> According to the Dutch tax authorities, a cultural institution can be qualified as a PBO when at least 90% of the institution's efforts are focused on the general good and benefit the public, meaning that this part of the activities should be without a profit motive. The main benefits of being a PBO are not having to pay tax on received donations and donors receiving tax benefits on donations. One of the conditions of being a PBO is the online publication of data such as a policy plan and an annual report to provide the public and financiers with insight into the business operations. The online availability of the company details allows me to conduct online research on the plans and practices of DNO.

DNO is the cultural institution in the Netherlands that receives the highest amount of subsidies from the Dutch national government, amounting to almost 26 million euros per year on average between 2017 and 2019.<sup>66</sup> The annual reports show that the most substantial part of DNO's income emanates from government funding. About 70% of the total budget is funded by the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science (OCW), around 25% comes from box-office sales, and 5% comes from private and corporate sponsors.<sup>67</sup> As mentioned before, DNO, HNB and their venue NO&B have a different finance structure. This agreement goes back to Napoleonic times in which the municipality of Amsterdam and the Dutch national government agreed that the city had to provide a venue suitable for opera and the national government had to finance the opera practices.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, DNO is fully funded by the ministry of OCW, HNB is funded by

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<sup>65</sup> Nieuws, "11% meer bezoekers in 2019 voor Nationale Opera & Ballet," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/nl/nieuws/2020/01/11-meer-bezoekers-2019-voor-nationale-opera-ballet>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p.124, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/sites/default/files/documents/pdfs/Jaarverslag-NO-B-2017-web.pdf>; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 116; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 122.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Maes, Truze Lodder and Katia Segers, "Twee kunstvormen onder één dak: De Nederlandse Opera in Het Muziektheater Amsterdam," in *Opera: achter de schermen van de emotie*, edited by Francis Maes and Piet de Volder (Leuven: Lannoo Campus, 2011), 271-272.



both OCW and the city of Amsterdam, and the venue NO&B is fully funded by the city of Amsterdam.<sup>69</sup>

Even though DNO is heavily subsidised and has the aim to ‘benefit the public’ as a PBO, right now, the organisation only attracts an audience that represents a niche within the Dutch population: white, educated, wealthy and of age.<sup>70</sup> This is enabled by the decreased focus on diversity and inclusion in the Dutch arts sector, as discussed in the previous section. However, they do aim to diversify and become inclusive. Sandra Eikelenboom, head of NO&B’s marketing department, states that attracting a younger and more diverse audience is crucial to safeguard the company’s future, which poses a significant challenge for the opera branch in particular.<sup>71</sup> General manager Els van der Plas told the AWWN (General Employers’ Association of the Netherlands) in 2017 that NO&B’s current challenge is to achieve more diversity within their staff, audience, programming and partners—or the aforementioned 4 Ps. So, the organisation reflects society in all its facets and also reaches fellow Dutch people with a non-Western migration background such as Moroccans, Turks, people from the Dutch Caribbean and Surinamese people.<sup>72</sup>

On their website, NO&B foregrounds diversity by presenting their company as a company which ‘creates and performs dramatic musical art, focussing on quality, diversity and innovation. This leads to a new approach to opera classics, rediscovering repertoire that is rarely performed and creating new operas’.<sup>73</sup> They further emphasise diversity as a central aspect of the organisation by following the previously mentioned DIC and by signing the diversity charter with

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<sup>69</sup> AKr A-Bis Kunstenplan 2017-2020, “Zo mooi zo anders Advies ter voorbereiding van het Amsterdamse Kunstenplan 2017 – 2020,” *Amsterdamse Kunstraad*, p. 115, [https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/03/AKr\\_Advies-A-Bis\\_Kunstenplan-2017-2020.compressed.pdf](https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/03/AKr_Advies-A-Bis_Kunstenplan-2017-2020.compressed.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Mischa Spel, “Nationale Opera & Ballet is wereldtop, nu nog een jonger publiek trekken,” *NRC.NEXT*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/05/31/explosie-aan-indrukken-a1603766>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Marloes Hooimeijer, “Opera en ballet: maatschappij beter weerspiegelen,” *AWVN*, November 2017, <https://www.awvn.nl/nationaal-opera-en-ballet-inclusieve-organisatie/>.

<sup>73</sup> De Nationale Opera, “Opera,” *De Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/nl/opera/opera>.

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the company Diversity at Work (Diversiteit in bedrijf).<sup>74</sup> However, the way NO&B defines diversity and what they include in this definition remains somewhat unclear. When looking at NO&B's annual reports, I found that they do not elaborate on the definition of diversity, but its meaning can be traced through NO&B's usage of the term. Theoretically, the link between diversity and race and ethnicity can be linked through the perception of diversity in the Netherlands. Because, generally, even though the terms of diversity and inclusion are broadening in the Netherlands, Philomena Essed argues that the concepts of diversity and inclusion are still mostly understood by the Dutch ear as pertaining to ethnic difference.<sup>75</sup> NO&B's annual reports clearly show that they also relate the terms diversity and inclusion directly to race and ethnicity. One reason is their implicit and explicit references to the DIC in talking about diversity. Examples are the report of 2018, which states that NO&B endorses and follows the DIC in a section that discusses workforce diversity relating it directly to people of non-Western origin.<sup>76</sup>

Another example is the 2017 document in which the DIC is not explicitly mentioned, but there is the discussion of establishing diversity in terms of the 4 Ps: programming, personnel, partners and public. In the 2019 report, the board states that diversity is an essential focal point and they link it directly to initiatives involving people of colour like the production of *Porgy and Bess*, the cooperation with ISH (a dance collective that brings street styles to the stage), and

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<sup>74</sup> This charter is a declaration of intent which focuses on employers from the public and private sector that want to commit to self-defined goals to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Diversity at Work offers support with the diversity policy and guides companies towards diversity without imposing strict rules and goals which lead to consequences for the organisation if they remain unmet. Diversity at Work forms part of the Social Economic Council (Sociaal-Economische Raad: SER) and is an initiative of the Foundation of Labour (Stichting van de Arbeid). The initiative is financed by the Council for Public Personnel Policy (Raad voor het Overheidspersoneelsbeleid) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid). Diversity at Work focuses on different dimensions of diversity such as ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, LGBTI, age and disability. The charter forms part of the European Platform of Diversity Charters. — Diversiteit in Bedrijf, "Meten is weten: kennisdocument 'zicht op effecten van diversiteitsbeleid'," *Diversiteit in Bedrijf*, p. 4, January 2, 2018, <https://diversiteitinbedrijf.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DIB-Kennisdocument-Meten-is-weten-versie-2-januari-2018.pdf>; Diversity at Work, "Knowledge Platform," *Diversiteit in bedrijf*, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://diversiteitinbedrijf.nl/en/>.

<sup>75</sup> Philomena Essed, "Cloning Cultural Homogeneity While Talking Diversity: Old Wine in New Bottles in Dutch Organizations." *Transforming Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (2002): 3.

<sup>76</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 50.

participation in the Black Achievement Month.<sup>77</sup> Another case in point shows that other types of diversity are not part of NO&B's diversity and inclusion rhetoric. For example, the reports never talk about gender in the sections about diversity, and they always put age next to diverse by usually addressing young *and* diverse people, illustrating that these are two separate aspects. These are a few of the many instances that indicate that while an explicitly formulated definition of diversity is lacking, there is an obvious usage of the term in relation to race and ethnicity.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the fundamental contexts that shape the state DNO is in and lie at the basis of their diversity and inclusion efforts. These aspirations are part of the larger international developments within the realm of opera that arise from the artform's entanglement with whiteness; being the augmenting critique on staging and the increased focus on diversity in terms of the audience and the opera companies' workforce.

How DNO deals with their whiteness is thoroughly influenced by the Dutch context and the Dutch arts sector. As Philomena Essed, Isabel Hoving, Zihni Özdil and Gloria Wekker argue, racism and whiteness are pervasive in the Netherlands and shape all lives on a cultural, institutional and individual level. However, racism and whiteness are hardly ever addressed because of denial and ignorance (smug ignorance), a limited understanding of racism, the idea that these phenomena do not apply to the Netherlands (Dutch exceptionalism), the dominant representation of Dutchness as white and Christian and the Dutch 'tolerant, ethical and colourblind' self-image which enables the idealisation of white people at the expense of people of colour. These are the (often unconscious) mechanisms of exclusion that are pervasive in the Netherlands, maintain a status quo of whiteness and inhibit inclusion as demonstrated by the Dutch arts sector. Lastly, discussions about the sector's whiteness impact DNO directly since these discussions shaped funding policies and diversity and inclusion initiatives such as the DIC.

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<sup>77</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 3.

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This chapter shed light on the contexts that have produced DNO as a white organisation which caters to an overwhelmingly white audience. In the next chapters, I will trace how the diversity and inclusion measures in DNO's programme, public, personnel, partners and positioning reflect on the organisation's whiteness.

# Chapter 2: The Power of the Programme

When looking at the repertoire specifically, the selection of works to be staged is not arbitrary but reveals much about the opera realm and has a strong social function. Opera programmes usually draw heavily on the operatic canon. According to Marcia Citron, the canon of Western art music is rooted in a European tradition which represents a white upper- and middle-class experience.<sup>1</sup> The repertoire is a replication of social relations, and it both mirrors and determines who belongs to the art form and who does not. James A. Parakilas states that the operatic canon functions as 'as a system of cultural upbringing for performers and opera-goers (and the public in general)'.<sup>2</sup> This means that the repertoire shapes both performers and the audience. Opera is very influential, according to Frances Henry and Carol Tator, because it functions as a vehicle in which cultural ideologies are promoted, sustained and reinforced.<sup>3</sup> This makes an analysis of the programme's diversity essential to trace to whom the spaces of DNO provide room and who is welcome to create.

In the previous chapter, I have mapped the context of DNO in order to see how environments of whiteness inform local opera practices. In this chapter, I will start exploring DNO's diversity and inclusion by examining their programme. This consists of an analysis of the repertoire of opera productions that were performed by DNO between 2017 and 2021. The Diversity and Inclusion Code (DIC) formulates the pillar programme as the inclusive way in which the company's products and services come into being and the diversity of perspectives in this process.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Parakilas, "The Operatic Canon," in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 941.

<sup>3</sup> Henry and Tator, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Code Diversiteit & Inclusie," *Code Culturele Diversiteit*, p. 10, <https://codeculturelediversiteit.com/de-code/>.

In this chapter, I will evaluate whose stories are told and the degree to which people from non-Western migration backgrounds are involved in both creating and performing these stories. First, I will examine the way NO&B discusses programme diversity in their annual reports of 2017, 2018 and 2019. Then, I will look at diversity in the programme by establishing the numerical diversity of the makers and performers in the shape of the 'big 4' and the soloists.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, I will discuss two themes that emerge from my numerical analysis which shed light on the dealings of DNO with their whiteness.

### Talking about the Programme

Before looking at the programme itself, I want to briefly discuss the way NO&B represents their view of diversity within their repertoire by looking at their annual reports. In NO&B's mission and vision, they state that they aim to connect tradition to innovation by creating new productions and new interpretations of the classic repertoire. The way NO&B approaches programme diversity in terms of race and ethnicity remains somewhat unclear in the annual reports; they do, however, indicate what they understand to be a diverse programme.

The 2018 report sheds light on the way NO&B views programme diversity, namely as racial and ethnic diversity on stage, which also extends into the diversity of the audience. Here, they discuss the American interdisciplinary chamber opera *We Shall Not Be Moved*, which was brought to Amsterdam during the Opera Forward Festival (OFF), by quoting an article by Peter de Lint in the newspaper *Trouw* who refers to the production as 'a hybrid opera with black singers and actors in a venue filled with youth and people of colour'.<sup>6</sup> The opera staged a very diverse cast and was created by four Americans of colour: composer Daniel Bernard Roumain, the libretto written by Marc Bamuthi Joseph, conducted by Viswa Subbaraman and directed and choreographed by Bill T. Jones.<sup>7</sup> Other examples of NO&B's perspective on programme diversity can be found in the

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<sup>5</sup> All specifics regarding the programme in terms of title, date, composer, writer, conductor and director can be found on the programme list in the appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *We Shall Not Be Moved*, "About," *We Shall Not Be Moved*, accessed April 13, 2020, <https://moved.love/>.

2019 report. Here, the board mentions programme diversity in the shape of opening the year with *Porgy and Bess*.<sup>8</sup> In the section on artistic policy, DNO does not make any statements concerning diversity; instead, they coin diversity by citing a review on the *Theaterkrant* website. This quote states that it is 'extra enjoyable' that *Caruso a Cuba* and *Girls of the Golden West*, two operas from this season's OFF, provide black singers and singers of colour with a self-evident part, and, whether intentional or not, this could be the answer to the much-heard complaint that opera is too white.<sup>9</sup> For the rest, NO&B does not make any statements about it themselves in terms of goals or centrality of diversity within their artistic choices. They do, however, emphasise the diversity of the *Caruso a Cuba* and *Girls of the Golden West* casts in the section about the OFF.<sup>10</sup> The way NO&B uses examples of productions to portray diversity shows that they perceive an opera to be diverse because there are people of colour on stage, while the composers, writers, conductors and directors of the named productions are all white except for the production of *We Shall Not Be Moved*. There seems to be a lack of focus on diversity beyond the stage and an absence of reflection on the whiteness of the company at large. In the next paragraph, I will look at the way programme diversity is practised in the productions of 2017 to 2021.

### Numerical Analysis

To give a clear overview of the diversity of the programme, I will first discuss the numerical diversity of the repertoire between 2017 and 2021 and how this changes over the years. For this discussion, I will look at the soloists per production and overall, and at the 'big 4' pertaining to the composer, writer, conductor and director of the production. This analysis is based on the information provided on the official DNO website regarding the casting of the operas. The choir is not included in this discussion, because it is unclear which members are staged and which ones

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<sup>8</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, p. 15.

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are not, and other choirs that are hired for productions—and who remain outside of the scope of this project—do not specify their performing members in DNO's productions either.

The season of 2017/2018 consists of about 17 operas, of which 10 contain people of colour. The average number of NWMB people on stage depends on the perspective. When looked at per show, it is about 14%, but when approached via the total number of people, 28 out of the 167 are NWMB people which comes down to an average of 16,77%. The productions that are most diverse in terms of staging are *We Shall Not Be Moved* in which 75% of the soloists are people of colour, *Eliogabalo* with 4 out of 10 roles for NWMB people, and *La clemenza di Tito* with half of the main casts consisting of people of colour in different parts. The average of NWMB people in the 'big 4' amounts to 11% being the highest diversity number among the 'big 4' of all seasons, which is due to *We Shall Not Be Moved*. This is the only opera in the period of 2017 to 2021 that is actually created by four people of colour. *Tristan und Isolde*, *La morte d'Orfeo* and *Gurre-Lieder* are directed by the French-Lebanese Pierre Audi, and *Eliogabalo* has Argentinian Leonardo García Alarcón as its conductor. This means that apart from *We Shall Not Be Moved* there was only one director of colour and one conductor of colour within the whole season.

The period of 2018/2019 has the most diverse staging by far. There are 17 operas on the programme, and 12 of them have NWMB soloists. The average diversity per production in this season is 10%, which forms an interesting contrast between the total number of NWMB people within this period's programme of 27,91% (48/172). This significant rise with respect to the previous season is caused by the (almost) all-black cast of *Porgy and Bess* which is by far the most diverse opera of the whole researched period with a number of 85,71% on a cast of 21 people. Other diverse stagings this season are *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Girls of the Golden West* and *Caruso* *A Cuba* which all contain around 50% people of colour. As opposed to the cast's diversity on stage, this season's 'big 4' dropped to a mere 4% with Argentinian Valentina Carrasco—as the only NWMB woman of the whole period of 2017 to 2021—directing *Oedipe* alongside Spanish director Àlex Ollé and Pierre Audi behind *Fin de Partie* and *Aus Licht*. This shows that there is a significant disparity between the soloists on stage and the 'big 4' behind the production.



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As the number in the personnel section also showed, the diversity in the third season diminishes again. 16 operas were staged in the period of 2019/2020, among which 11 include people of colour. Per production, only 7,14% of NWMB people are on stage, which amounts to 19,02% when compared to the total number of people (31/163). The productions that stage most NWMB people are *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *La Cenerentola* and *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. The number of NWMB people in the 'big 4' declines even further to 1,25% with the only person present being the Colombian Andrés Orozco-Estrada directing *Carmen*.

The last season, of which 9 out of 15 productions comprise NWMB people, shows a slight rise in the diversity on stage and has a more even distribution between the diversity per show, consisting of an average of 21,36%, and among the total cast being 22,06%. The most diverse productions are *Oedipus Rex/From 'Antigone'*, *Mefistofele* and *Upload*. The latter having only a cast of two people which are covered by Roderick Williams and Julia Bullock—both black. At the same time, the diversity of the 'big 4' stays at the minimum of only one person, in this case, Samy Moussa who composed the opera *Oedipus Rex/From 'Antigone'* in response to Igor Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* in the production of *Oedipus Rex/From 'Antigone'*.

The outcome of this analysis shows that the focus lies on diversity on stage and is therefore very much in line with the diversity view as distilled from the annual reports. While there are many operas with only one or a few people of colour, the numbers here are mostly carried by a few operas with a very diverse cast such as *We Shall Not Be Moved* and *Porgy and Bess*. However, these operas are both about and represent African American communities. There is no single opera that actually addresses the Dutch communities of colour. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), most people with a non-Western migration background have roots in Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, Indonesia and the Dutch Caribbean.<sup>11</sup> All of these communities remain excluded in the productions of DNO, and therefore their programme cannot be a reflection of the diverse groups present in Dutch society.

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<sup>11</sup> CBS, "Bevolking naar migratieachtergrond," CBS, November 21, 2016, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2016/47/bevolking-naar-migratieachtergrond>.

While conducting this numerical analysis by matching names with pictures and their parts, there were two themes that stood out for me, namely that of stereotypical casting and whitewashing. As mentioned in chapter 1, typecasting and the unwillingness to cast actors of non-Western background in roles of colour are caused by racism in the form of cultural denigration and an underestimation of non-white artists because they presumably lack cultural acquiredness.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it forms part of cultural racism which Philomena Essed defines as the often stereotypical image of people of colour that is conveyed through cultural production.<sup>13</sup> In the next two sections, I will address these two themes specifically.

### **Stereotypical Casting**

A central theme that emerged when I looked at the people of colour that are cast in DNO's programme between 2017 to 2021 is that of stereotypical casting. On the one hand, there are quite a few operas within the repertoire that have people of colour as leads in large-scale productions which are not explicitly written for people of colour, such as *Porgy and Bess* and *We Shall Not Be Moved*. Some examples from the classic repertoire staged with African American artists are *La Cenerentola* with tenor Lawrence Brownlee as Don Ramiro and *La clemenza di Tito* with tenor Russell Thomas as Tito Vespasiano. On the other hand, there are also multiple cases in which people of colour are cast in a stereotypical role, whether it is a lead or a small role, and this seems to occur even more frequently with black artists.

Nina Sun Eidsheim explains stereotypical casting as a form of *racialised typecasting*.<sup>14</sup> Artists of colour are associated with certain types of roles which usually leads to them being cast in the role of the 'other'. Eidsheim argues that this mechanism causes African American women to be cast in the role of the maid, 'slave-girl' or 'gypsy' and African American tenors—the voice type that usually plays the lead and romantic hero—are disadvantaged because artistic directors

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<sup>12</sup> Trienekens and Bos, 299.

<sup>13</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racisme*, 147.

<sup>14</sup> Eidsheim, 67, 84.

will hardly cast a black romantic lead and especially if that would amount to an interracial romance.<sup>15</sup> According to Naomi André, it is important to be cautious about which roles to cast people of colour in as there are several operas that contain roles with negative stereotypes like Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte* or the characters in *Porgy and Bess*.<sup>16</sup> André stresses that it is very complicated to cast a black person in these roles because this would seem like the stereotypes are being reinforced.<sup>17</sup>

Some of these stereotypes are also traceable in the operas of DNO. In *La forza del destino*, the only person of colour is the African American soprano Roberta Alexander who is cast in the role of the maid Curra. Another example is *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, in which Armenian soprano Nina Minasayan plays Olympia, a mechanical doll. In this production, South African tenor Sunnyboy Dladla plays several small roles: Andrès a waiter, Cochenille a lab assistant and Franz and Pittichinaccio who are both servants. In *Jenůfa*, the only person of colour is Puerto Rican-American soprano, Sophia Burgos. She plays the role of Jano, a shepherd's boy who is indebted to Jenůfa because she taught her how to read and write but still betrays her in the end.<sup>18</sup> Again as the only person of colour, Burgos plays the maid Despina in *Così fan tutte*. Chinese soprano Ying Fang is the only person of colour in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and she plays Susanna the maid. The African American mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges has two lead roles, but one as the exotic *femme fatale* Carmen—in which South African baritone Martin Mkhize plays the role of a smuggler—and the other as Giovanna (Jane) Seymour, the lady in waiting and 'other' of Anna Bolena (Anne Boleyn) in *Anna Bolena*. Another problematic example is *Der Fliegende Holländer* in which the black French mezzo-soprano Katia Ledoux interprets the role of the nurse serving Senta who is in turn played by white South African soprano Elza van den Heever.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Max Arian, "Ingetogen Weduwe," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/ingetogen-weduwe>.

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In *Ritratto*, which premiered in 2020, there are several people of colour in the cast but Martin Mkhize, the only black person in the opera, plays the role of Garbi, the black servant of the main character Luisa Casati. The opera is based on a true story, and Luisa Casati did have a black servant, so the role required a black baritone if DNO wanted to be true to the story. In the podcast *Making an Opera*, created by Stef Visjager around *Ritratto* for the Dutch public radio station NPO Radio 4 and public-service broadcaster NTR, Visjager asks Mkhize about the fact that he is playing a stereotypical character.<sup>19</sup> Mkhize states that at this stage in his career, he is not in a position yet to question the roles he gets politically. This will be different at a later stage in his career, for example, if he reaches a more prominent position such as Dmitri Hvorostovsky. Right now, Mkhize feels privileged as a student to receive a role in which he can premier. This conversation sheds light on the power dynamic that is in place in opera in which white people are in a position of power that allows them to decide what and how an artist of colour performs.

Artistic leader and coach of the opera Studio Rosemary Joshua also responds to this matter in the podcast and argues that Mkhize is not chosen because of his colour, but because he was the best voice for his role based on his vocal range and timbre and DNO chooses singers based on their voice not on their colour. This statement echoes two ideas. First, the concept of colour-blindness and second, the myth of objective casting.

Colour-blindness entails the practice of bypassing a conversation around race because a person states they do not see colour and therefore does not judge based on race. This attitude ignores the fact that our lives are thoroughly shaped by the colour of our skin and opts for a simple solution to racism as simply not addressing it. It also reflects the privilege of white people to be able to say they do not perceive race while a person of colour has to deal with the effects of racism. According to Reni Eddo-Lodge, the colour-blind approach to racism 'does not accept the legitimacy of structural racism or a history of white racial dominance' and does not contribute

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<sup>19</sup> Stef Visjager, "#1 - Akte 1: Audities," *Making an Opera*, Podcast audio, February 12, 2020, <https://www.nporadio4.nl/podcasts/making-an-opera>.

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to diminishing racism and improving the lives of people of colour.<sup>20</sup> She argues that it is crucial to see race, who benefits from it and who is impacted by negative stereotypes in order to be able to dismantle racist structures.<sup>21</sup> Naomi André specifically addresses colourblind casting in opera and states:

There is no blindness today regarding black and nonblack casting of roles or roles of any racial/ethnic identity; race and gender are always noticeable: people do not not see race and gender. Even if roles are portrayed where these identities are meant to be ambiguous, these are parameters that audience members will always look for and notice.<sup>22</sup>

The way Joshua is able to dismiss racially informed choices in the realm of opera echoes Essed and Hoving's smug ignorance in which racism is denied or ignored. This denial perpetuates whiteness by not discussing the intricacies of race and overlooking the lived experience of Mkhize who is put in the very particular position of being the only black person, being cast as a servant and having white people in positions of power telling him what to do.

The second idea, about objective casting based on voice type—and unrelated to race—is a myth. In her discussion on sonic Blackness, Nina Sun Eidsheim argues it is not the singer but rather the listener who conceptualises timbre.<sup>23</sup> The way timbre is conceptualised and racialised is not based on reality, but it does have real effects for African American opera singers. Eidsheim calls this a 'constructed phantom genealogy' which is used as a rationale for the bracketing of timbre.<sup>24</sup> She states that besides the appearance of the artists, it is precisely this process that leads

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<sup>20</sup> Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 58/59.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Eidsheim, 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*, 66.

to typecasting based on race and ethnicity. According to Eidsheim, these underlying assumptions are connected to the sound of whiteness, a particular performance of culture that structures who has the right to make white sounds.<sup>25</sup> The sounds of blackness or whiteness are not expressed timbrally but:

A vocalist's materiality performs one of its potentialities. This realized potentiality, in turn, has been indexed as whiteness or blackness according to sociocultural norms regarding timbral style and technique, and—in combination with a vibrational entity in the form of the singer and the listening body—is thus heard as whiteness or blackness.<sup>26</sup>

Eidsheim shows that Joshua's reasoning is deeply rooted in a performance culture of whiteness that is connected to the realm of opera. The unreflectiveness of this whiteness actually perpetuates it. Additionally, the way opera companies cast black opera singers is directly informed by this same realm of operatic whiteness.

## Whitewashing

The programme between 2017 and 2021 reveals that there are missed opportunities in terms of diversifying the stage and that it contains problematic representations of non-European communities through whitewashing and the practice of yellowface.

There are several productions and characters in DNO's programme that were whitewashed. Whitewashing is a widespread phenomenon that is increasingly gaining attention. From depictions of Jesus Christ as a white man to the controversies over Jake Gyllenhaal playing the lead in *The Prince of Persia* (2010) and Scarlett Johansson interpreting the character of a Japanese woman in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), to name a few of the many examples, whitewashing

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<sup>25</sup> Idem, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, 196.

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entails the representation of white people in characters of colour.<sup>27</sup> In opera, this phenomenon is also critiqued. Artistic director Aria Umezawa called out the Metropolitan Opera for dropping blackface but still casting the white Latvian tenor Aleksandrs Antonenko in the 2015 production of Verdi's *Otello*. She states that these decisions are often based on vocal ability, but this is problematic because it implies that 'there are no people of colour capable of claiming the few available opportunities for diverse casting'.<sup>28</sup> Umezawa argues that this is a missed opportunity for employment equity in opera because white artists are already cast in the overwhelming majority of roles and whitewashing takes away the few opportunities there are for artists of colour in a lead role.<sup>29</sup>

In the programme of DNO, there are several operas within the period of 2017 to 2021 that stage communities of colour but predominantly contain white performers. Examples are *Clemency*, from *Trouble in Tahiti/Clemency* which takes place in Palestine but consists of an all-white cast, *Nabucco*, of which the whole staff is white while the story takes place in Jerusalem/Babylon, *Das Jagdgewehr* which takes place in Japan—technically a Western country according to the CBS definition but a marginalised community in the Netherlands and in opera—but has an entirely white cast except for the Austrian-Turkish tenor Ilker Arcayürek in the role of a poet. Other operas contain characters of colour in the lead for which white performers are cast in the programme. An example is *La forza del destino* in which the part of South American Don Alvaro is played by the white Italian Roberto Aronica. Other cases are the productions of *Aida*, which is staged in Egypt and has an Ethiopian princess as the lead, and *Madama Butterfly*, with the Japanese geisha Cio-Cio-San as the lead, which are both interpreted by the white Russian soprano Elena Stikhina in the DNO productions.

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<sup>27</sup> Eddie Falvey, "A Brief History of Whitewashing in Film," *OneRoomWithAView*, April 3, 2017, <https://oneroomwithaview.com/2017/04/03/brief-history-whitewashing-film/>.

<sup>28</sup> Aria Umezawa, "Met's *Otello* Casting Begg the Question: Is Whitewash Better than Blackface?" *The Globe and Mail*, August 7, 2015, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/mets-otello-casting-begs-the-question-is-whitewash-better-than-blackface/article25879634/>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

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In the case of DNO's *Madama Butterfly*, whitewashing is clearly present because the production has predominantly Japanese characters who are almost all interpreted by white singers—people of colour interpret only two minor roles with the Dutch-Japanese soprano Tomoko Makuuchi as the only person of Japanese descent in the role of *la zia*—and there is also a strong tradition of yellowface connected to this opera, which is also present in DNO's production. Similar to blackface, yellowface is the degrading practice of dressing up and putting on makeup to portray Asians in a stereotypical manner on stage.<sup>30</sup> The tradition of yellowface is strongly tied to notions of orientalism and also whiteness. In his famous book *Orientalism*, Edward Said discusses the politics of representation. He argues that Orientalism is a system of knowledge about the Orient established through a body of theory and practice in which has been invested considerably. He calls Orientalism a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.<sup>31</sup> One of the primary qualifications of Orientalism is a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient, and it is shown by the power of representation of the Orient.<sup>32</sup> This power of the West over the Orient reveals whiteness as the power structure in which the white Westerner's position is normalised and universalised as the beholder of the oriental other.

While *Madama Butterfly* is about the Japanese community, it is not created and represented by the Japanese community itself. Apart from the almost all-white cast in yellowface in DNO's *Madama Butterfly*, the people behind the production—the 'big' 4—are also all white. Even the costumes and lighting are not created by people of Japanese descent. Still, DNO presents the opera as authentic. In the season brochure, announcing and promoting the production, they state:

The composition shows fascinating contrasts between East and West: it contains leitmotifs in the style of Wagner, but also authentic Japanese melodies, to which

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<sup>30</sup> Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1851s—1920s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem*, 6-21.



the composer had done extensive research. Puccini himself thought *Madama Butterfly* was his most experienced and expressive opera.<sup>33</sup>

Here, DNO seems to argue that the opera is an authentic representation of Japan because Puccini studied the culture closely—even though the opera reveals more about Puccini himself since he had never been to Japan and based the opera on the few encounters he had with Japanese people and the scarce knowledge of Japan available in Italy in his day.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, DNO uses the authoritative position of the composer to support their claim.

DNO also discusses director Robert Wilson in the same terms and describes the authenticity of his work by saying that ‘there is no quasi-oriental kitsch with little scurrying Japanese women. A real oriental element is his way of dealing with time. Meticulously choreographed slow movements remind of Japanese Nôh theatre’.<sup>35</sup> Apart from the essentialist character in these lines, these phrases also resound the idea that white people are universal and able to portray all different cultures authentically.

These examples show that DNO’s whitewashing takes away opportunities of artists of colour rather than providing more space to marginalised artists on the one hand, and they also shed light on DNO’s whiteness and their lack of dealing with it regarding their repertoire on the other hand. Whereas people of colour are raced and confined to stereotypical casting, white people are able to move freely within roles and can interpret and represent all sorts of ethnicities and races under the guise of authenticity—even if it is disrespectfully and stereotypically as in the case of yellowface.

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<sup>33</sup> De compositie vertoont boeiende tegenstellingen tussen Oost en West: er komen leidmotieven in de stijl van Wagner in voor, maar ook authentieke Japanse melodieën, waarnaar de componist uitgebreid onderzoek had gedaan. Puccini zelf vond *Madama Butterfly* zijn meest doorvoelde en expressieve opera. — Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2018-2019, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Groos, “Return of the Native: Japan in “*Madama Butterfly/Madama Butterfly*” in Japan,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 2 (1989): 168-170.

<sup>35</sup> Bij hem geen quasi-oosterse kitsch met dribbelende Japanse vrouwtjes. Een écht oosters element is zijn manier van omgaan met de tijdbeleving. Minutieus gechoreografeerde, langzame bewegingen doen denken aan het Japanse Nôh-theater. — Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2018-2019, p. 39.

## Conclusion

I discussed DNO's programme in this section by focusing on whose stories are being told and who does the storytelling through analysing the soloists and 'big 4' of DNO's 2017-2021 repertoire. According to the annual reports, DNO views programme diversity as pertaining to the diversity on stage and not regarding the composers, writers, conductors and directors. This perspective reflects on the diversity numbers as there seems to be an evident lack of diversity beyond the stage, with Daniel Bernard Roumain's *We Shall Not Be Moved* as the only opera created by a NWMB 'big 4'. As the programme mirrors the artform and shows who belongs to it, the deficit of representation reveals DNO as a domain of whiteness.

Additionally, the programme demonstrates practices of stereotypical casting and whitewashing, which resound common themes from the Dutch arts sector of cultural denigration and a presumed lack of cultural acquiredness regarding NWMB people. Stereotypical casting combined with whitewashing at DNO reveals that people of colour are confined to specific roles, while white people can authentically represent anybody—even through yellowface. Both practices of stereotypical casting and whitewashing enforce whiteness, and with it, mechanisms of exclusion which are kept in check via cultural racism, smug ignorance, the myth of colourblindness and ideas about authenticity. I believe it is precisely the absence of NWMB people in positions of power such as the 'big 4' which enables stereotypical casting and whitewashing within the programme.

In the next chapter, I will look at audience diversity. Here, I will also briefly address the programme but from an audience perspective.

# Chapter 3: Who is the Public?

As mentioned in chapter 1, the most substantial part of DNO's audience is highly-educated, wealthy, white and of age.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, NO&B presents young, diverse and broad as the main themes of audience outreach in 2017.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I will examine audience diversity at DNO. Because I do not have access to numbers regarding audience diversity, I will look at the way DNO approaches, presents and shapes the public. I will do that by analysing how they discuss audience diversity in their annual reports and how they present their activities, themselves and their audience on their website. Also, I will look at DNO's youth organisations that have the main aim of attracting a young and new audience. I will be guided by the central principles that the Diversity & Inclusion Code (DIC) states regarding audience diversity.<sup>3</sup> According to the DIC, public diversity is about the consumers of the product or service. The Code prescribes several ways to achieve public diversity. It entails mapping all current and potential target groups based on diversity and what new target groups would mean for the organisation. This pillar is also about the accessibility of the programme and how it meets the needs of potential target groups. Additionally, the DIC proposes to involve key figures from potential target groups in developing the programme and in attracting potential customers. Lastly, the code argues that language and tone are essential, and all communication channels should disseminate inclusivity.

## **Potential Target Groups, Motivation, Projects and Measurements**

I do not have access to the way DNO creates profiles for their potential target groups. However, a lot of information regarding their view and aims for audience diversity can be distilled from their annual reports. Here, NO&B sheds light on their perception of audience diversity, what their target group is, what their plans are for achieving audience diversity and why they want to achieve it.

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<sup>1</sup> Mischa Spel, "Nationale Opera & Ballet behoort tot de wereldtop, nu nog een jonger publiek trekken," *NRC Next*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/05/31/explosie-aan-indrukken-a1603766>.

<sup>2</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 37,

<sup>3</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Code Diversiteit & Inclusie," p. 11.

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In the 2017 report, NO&B's main goal regarding audience diversity appears when discussing that they contribute to reaching the various residents of Amsterdam, young and old and with culturally diverse backgrounds. They stress the importance of being recognisable for the most extensive and broadest possible target group in the organisation, as well as on stage and in the audience.<sup>4</sup> NO&B mentions the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in 2018, by stating that NO&B finds it very important to be an open home for everyone, so also for Dutch people with a migration background.<sup>5</sup> All of these descriptions in the annual reports point to a very broad definition in which race, ethnicity and age seem to play a central part. Still, for the rest, they do not make explicit what they include in their definition of a diverse audience.

NO&B also motivates the importance of diversification of the audience in the 2018 report. Here they discuss the need of attracting a new audience to improve the occupancy of the hall due to the dwindling numbers in season ticket holders.<sup>6</sup> Also in 2019, NO&B states the hall occupancy as one of their main challenges and sees a new and younger audience as the solution to this problem.<sup>7</sup> In their risk analysis, NO&B argues that the ageing of their regular audience poses a threat to the continuity of their business.<sup>8</sup> This makes sense when seeing that only 12% of their public is under 40 and 46% is over 65.<sup>9</sup> When tracing back the hall occupancy, DNO went from 96% in 2016 to 91% in 2017 to drop further to 86% in 2018 with a slight rise to 88,9% in 2019.<sup>10</sup> Between the seasons of 2015/2016 and 2019/2020, the season tickets have decreased by almost 20%. These numbers demonstrate the urgency for attracting a new audience to boost their box office results to counterbalance ongoing revenue loss.<sup>11</sup> However, NO&B does not mention that

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<sup>4</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 44,

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 17,

<sup>8</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 66,

<sup>9</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 37; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 37;

Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 40,

<sup>11</sup> The turnover of 2018 and 2019 of € 8.373.000,- and € 9.245.000,- turned out to be € 904.000,- and € 728.000,- short of the estimated amounts. Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 124; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 116; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 122,

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being accessible to the general Dutch public—in all shapes and forms—is also essential for receiving government funding both on a national and municipal level; which is actually by far their most significant source of income.

As mentioned in the introduction, DNO's funding request for the period of 2021-2024 was declined by the national government and would only be remunerated if the new adjusted plan is accepted. This was due to NO&B filing their request as a whole, instead of DNO and HNB submitting their application separately on the categories of dance and opera. However, it was also as a result of the lack of substantiation of how to adhere to the DIC and the fact that the artistic course was too generic and poorly motivated; especially regarding audience innovation. The BIS report states that the 'intended efforts in the field of diversity and inclusion are largely separate from the main programming and are not yet tangible in the DNA from the institutions themselves'.<sup>12</sup> Even though this report pertains to the period of 2021-2024, it demonstrates the increasing importance of diversifying the audience to satisfy DNO's primary funder: the national government.

To increase the diversity of the public, NO&B presents an array of projects, events and productions in their annual reports. Plans to achieve a new audience consist of the establishment of youth organisations and the *Opera & Ballet Flirt*, a programme in which people under 35 who have never been to opera or ballet before receive significant discounts and get to meet the performers and makers of the production afterwards.<sup>13</sup> Other marketing projects focus on a pilot poster campaign in nearby provinces, print advertising in magazines, radio red carpet events and the Opera Forward Festival (OFF) that generate attention.<sup>14</sup> Additional ways of attracting a new audience consist of developing more programmes outside of NO&B's venue.<sup>15</sup> There are also

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<sup>12</sup> Voorgenomen inspanningen op het gebied van diversiteit en inclusie staan veelal los van de hoofdprogrammering en zijn nog niet voelbaar in het DNA van de instellingen zelf. — Raad voor Cultuur, "Inleiding Opera advies 2021 2024," p. 3, <https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/documenten/adviezen/2020/06/04/opera>.

<sup>13</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, p. 38-40.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, p. 43.

some free activities designed to attract a new audience. In 2017, DNO organised a free lunch concert in its foyer every Tuesday, and there was a free yearly Christmas concert which is accessible to everyone.<sup>16</sup> Together with the open house, in which they open their venue to the public free of charge, all of these activities are intended to increase the accessibility of the theatre and get more people acquainted with opera and ballet.<sup>17</sup>

The annual reports do not provide a clear indication of how DNO keeps track of the diversity of their audience, making it difficult to determine the success of their initiatives. The reports show that there are several audience characteristics which NO&B tracks; however, race and ethnicity do not seem to be explicitly monitored. The 2017 report, for example, marks that the OFF generated 26% new audience and 13% young audience.<sup>18</sup> It also states that 41% of the public is from Amsterdam, 53% is from elsewhere in the Netherlands, and 6% is based outside of the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> The 2019 document shows several charts with audience information of both HNB and DNO regarding regional distribution, age and gender, but race or ethnicity are not taken into account.<sup>20</sup> This makes me wonder how NO&B measures and tracks audience diversity to be able to formulate clear goals and measure if the projects generate the wanted outcomes.

### **Opening Up: Talking About Audience Diversity**

One of the central themes in NO&B's communication regarding audience diversity is that of being open to everyone. The transition to this theme—which is part of the positioning strategy of 2019 as further discussed in chapter 6—can be traced in the language of the annual reports. For example, in 2017 and 2018, NO&B states that they create operas for a broad and diverse audience.<sup>21</sup> Whereas in 2019, they mention their aim of attracting the broadest possible audience

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<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, p. 35/43.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 1; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 1.

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and being actively open for a public of all ages and diverse backgrounds.<sup>22</sup> Although NO&B presents rejuvenation and the broadening of the audience as one of their main challenges in 2017, the 2019 report states they are already building a broad and diverse audience and that their search for a new and younger audience is successful, but it will take time to create a deeper bond.<sup>23</sup> By changing their approach, they are presenting themselves as more open and inclusive.

DNO also actively disseminates an inclusive image of their audience. At the beginning of 2020, NO&B published a short article in their magazine and on their website in which they introduced the opera audience.<sup>24</sup> Here, they interview several members of the audience on their experiences at NO&B. The first person to be interviewed is a 68-year-old woman from the Dutch Caribbean who has been an avid opera lover since she arrived in the Netherlands and who talks about visiting every opera by herself and meeting new friends at NO&B. Her picture is also on the website as a cover of the complete article. The second interview is with two people in their thirties who work at the DeLaMar theatre in Amsterdam and one of whom was adopted from Asia. They visit NO&B together and talk about their transition from ballet into opera. Next, is a retired white gay couple in their sixties who would not leave Amsterdam because they cannot miss the opera. Lastly, there is a white father and daughter of 74 and 31 who visit opera together and talk about opera conventions like clapping versus shouting 'Bravo!'. In this article, NO&B presents a very diverse image of the opera audience concerning race and ethnicity, age, sexuality and whom you can bring with you to NO&B.

This presentation also has a downside, Sara Ahmed talks about the dangers of diversity becoming a diversion from the actual problem and turning into 'an institutional desire for good practice' with the focus on happy stories and antiracism as organisational pride instead of focusing on the actual racism.<sup>25</sup> She reveals the workings of whiteness into diversity politics when stating:

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<sup>22</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 1,

<sup>23</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 5; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 17 & 42.

<sup>24</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, "Ontmoet het operapubliek," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, February 18, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/node/10901>.

<sup>25</sup> Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 164.

It is this very structural position of being the guest, or the stranger, the one who receives hospitality, which keeps us in certain places, even when you move up. So, if you 'move up', then you come to embody the social promise of diversity, which gives you a certain place. It is the very use of black bodies as signs of diversity that confirms such whiteness, premised on a conversion of having to being: as if by having us, the organization can 'be' diverse.<sup>26</sup>

The way that NO&B presents itself in the previously mentioned examples indicates that they are already diverse and inclusive. The presentation of NWMB people as exemplary opera visitors masks the fact that DNO's audience is predominantly white and diverts attention to the organisation's success of 'welcoming everyone'.

### **Young Versus Diverse: The Programme**

According to the DIC, a vital part of catering to the audiences consists of the accessibility of the programme to the potential target audiences. Morris Fred and Betty Farrell discuss ways to attract a racially and ethnically diverse public. They state that these audiences want to see their communities and cultural traditions represented by performers and artists from their communities, and they want programmes that are relevant to their lives. Additionally, they are attracted to works that reflect on values from their communities and organisations that are devoted to establishing long-term relationships with them. When looking at the way DNO speaks about audience diversity and their programme and taking the points mentioned by Fred and Farrell about representation into account, I find there to be a significant disparity between the focus and activities that centre age over those that are directed at racial and ethnic diversity.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



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In the annual reports, NO&B often addresses diversification of the public and attracting a younger audience together and formulates goals and projects aiming at both, even though they are seen as separate components. The convergence of young and diverse makes it difficult to draw a clear line between the two, and it often seems as though age gets the larger part of the focus within this duality. For example, a passage in the 2019 report discusses audience diversity but in combination with the public's age.<sup>27</sup> The most substantial part of this section addresses attracting a young audience via youth organisations and activities such as the Spektakelaars, My Muse & Me (MM&M), the Opera flirt and the Young Patrons Circle (YPC); a youth organisation that seeks to connect the young and wealthy to NO&B as donors. A small portion discusses audience diversity; here, NO&B states it is building a broad and diverse audience by consulting ambassadors with a bicultural background.<sup>28</sup> Other activities that increase audience diversity include OFF (which NO&B calls 'a powerful instrument for diversifying the audience'), participation projects and performances on festivals such as Lowlands or at the Holland Festival which attracts a mixed audience.<sup>29</sup> By continuously grouping age with race and ethnicity, the audience diversity outcomes remain vague in the presentation of their projects.

When looking at the programme and assessing the represented stories and communities, there seems to be an increase in operas that are created for young white audiences as opposed to productions that cater to a racially and ethnically diverse audience. During the season of 2017/2018, the number of diverse operas and youth operas is about the same. The productions that are most diverse in terms of staging are *We Shall Not Be Moved*, in which 75% of the soloists are NWMB people, *Eliogabalo* with NWMB people cast in 4 out of 10 roles, and *La clemenza di Tito* with half of the main casts consisting of people of colour in different parts. However, while Peter Sellars staged *La clemenza di Tito* with a gender non-conforming character and artists in *hijabs*, *We Shall Not Be Moved* is the only opera that is actually written to represent a community

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<sup>27</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Idem, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 13; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 41.

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of colour and is produced by African American artists.<sup>30</sup> During this season, there is also an opera that is created for children, namely *Hondenhartje* which is designed for audiences from the age of 8 years and up, stages two people of colour and is based on Alexander Raskatov's *A Dog's Heart*.

In 2018/2019, the diverse operas consist of *Porgy and Bess*, which is by far the most diverse opera of the whole researched period with 85,71% on a cast of 21 people. Other diverse stagings this season are *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Girls of the Golden West* and *Caruso A Cuba* which all contain around 50% NWMB people. These operas cater to a diverse audience to a certain extent but are created by a white composer, writer, conductor and director. Additionally, *Madama Butterfly* represents a Japanese community but is both created and interpreted by white artists. For young people, DNO brought *De jongen die te snel groeide* with only DWMB people for an audience from 6 years on and organised a performance of *Die Zauberflöte* for people under 35 with additional discounts for people under 16.<sup>31</sup>

The disparity rises significantly in the season of 2019/2020, with three operas for children: *Kriebel* for 2 years and up, *Een lied voor de maan* for children from age 6 and *Het monster van Minos* for all ages and which is even partly created by children. These productions only stage white people; a stark contrast with the zero operas that represent communities of colour this season. The productions that stage most NWMB people are *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *La Cenerentola*, *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* and *Das Jagdgewehr* represents the Japanese community with an all-white cast.

The last season continues along the same lines with *Kriebel* again, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* from 4 years up and *Goud!* for children over the age of 7, which are all-white productions. While *Oedipus Rex/From 'Antigone'*, *Mefistofele* and *Upload* are among the most diverse stagings, but none of these are about communities of colour nor specifically cater to them. Also, *Aida*, which takes place in Egypt, is executed this season with a predominantly white cast.

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<sup>30</sup> Jessie Bodell, "Changing Tradition to Preserve Tradition: How Diversifying the Canon Could Save Classical Music," (unpublished paper, May 10, 2018), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2018-2019, p. 89.

Besides all of these productions that are specially created for the youth, there is the yearly children's choir festival the *Kinderkorenfestival* and the children's choir Nieuw Amsterdams Kinderkoor, which participates in several large-scale productions such as *La bohème*, *Das Floss der Medusa*, *Pagliacci/Cavalleria rusticana* and *Mefistofele* just to name a few.<sup>32</sup>

All of the results in this section demonstrate that in terms of the programme, there is a lot of effort made to attract a young audience. Still, there is not that much effort put into attracting a racially and ethnically diverse public. This is due to the lack of representation of communities of colour by artists and performers from these communities, and a lack of reflection on themes that matter to these groups. The programme does not indicate that there is an effort made to establish a long-term relationship with marginalised communities.

### **Young Versus Diverse: Education and Youth Organisations**

Two ways in which DNO tries to involve potential target groups with their activities is through educational programmes and youth organisations. Within both topics, the company claims to achieve both a younger and more diverse audience, but again there seems to be a disparity between those two characteristics. Regarding education, NO&B argues in 2018 that the education projects which involve schools are directed towards 'reaching a young and multicultural audience'.<sup>33</sup> The company did this in 2017 by organising an array of visits, tours, projects, matinees and events for all layers of education. They also brought the opera to the classrooms by organising music lessons and opera workshops for primary school pupils.<sup>34</sup>

Regarding education, NO&B collaborates with the Leerorkest in Amsterdam South-East—one of the city's most diverse neighbourhoods—which aims to make music education more accessible and democratic by creating orchestral projects for economically disadvantaged

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<sup>32</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2019-2020, p. 126, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 31,

children.<sup>35</sup> In the same year, DNO started a large-scale project called *Opera aan de Zaan* in which over 6.000 children became acquainted with opera by organising a whole opera year with lessons, tours, workshops for 25 primary schools in the Zaan region. In 2018, the *Opera aan de Zaan* project continued, and 900 youngsters were involved in actually making an opera called *Prinses Turandot*—which was based on Puccini's *Turandot*—and 2.600 pupils visited the youth opera *Hondenhartje*.<sup>36</sup> These projects demonstrate that DNO aims to familiarise children with opera to create a new audience. However, it remains unclear to what extent diversity plays a role in these activities and how much these projects actually contribute to audience diversity. Within the Zaan region, for example, about 18,27% of the inhabitants has a non-Western migration background, whereas the numbers of Amsterdam amount to almost double being 33,32%.<sup>37</sup>

It is also remarkable to see that DNO chooses a profound Orientalist opera with 'outdated gender roles, blatant misogyny, and problematic racial stereotypes' like *Turandot* to acquaint children with opera.<sup>38</sup> This story is more or less the same with the text translated to Dutch and the melodies are made accessible for children by Toek Numan.<sup>39</sup> The children's production is even completed with yellowface makeup and Chinese dress.<sup>40</sup> DNO's choosing of yellowface deeply reflects on their whiteness by showing how they normalise cultural racism through racial stereotypes and shape their audience from a young age into accepting these practices.

Another major way in which NO&B mentions to attract both a young and diverse audience is via youth organisations such as the Spektakelaars, MM&M and YPC. The Spektakelaars is a board of young ambassadors which was installed in 2017. This group of youngsters gets to see

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<sup>35</sup> Idem, 44; Leerorkest, "Visie en doelen," *Leerorkest*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.leerorkest.nl/nl/over-ons/visie-en-doelen>.

<sup>36</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> CBS, "Bevolking naar migratieachtergrond."

<sup>38</sup> Rob Buscher, "Turandot: Time to Call it Quits on Orientalist Opera?" *Opera Philadelphia*, September 19, 2016, <https://www.operaphila.org/backstage/opera-blog/2016/turandot-time-to-call-it-quits-on-orientalist-opera/>.

<sup>39</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, "Prinses Turandot," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/node/4771>.

<sup>40</sup> Stichting Agora, "Opera aan de Zaan," *Marktplaats 25*, March 2019, [https://agorastichting-live-72b7b57d88f74fbfaee-e725d8e.divio-media.net/filer\\_public/1c/59/1c59ece0-d23e-46c5-9473-6cba76a278c9/marktplaats\\_25.pdf](https://agorastichting-live-72b7b57d88f74fbfaee-e725d8e.divio-media.net/filer_public/1c/59/1c59ece0-d23e-46c5-9473-6cba76a278c9/marktplaats_25.pdf).

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performances, is engaged in productions, meets the cast and crew, functions as a sounding board, can start their own projects, and autonomously reports their experiences.<sup>41</sup> Their main goal is to enthuse people between the ages of 15 and 20 about opera and ballet by organising free events, giving backstage tours and creating content on social media about NO&B.<sup>42</sup> MM&M focuses on people between 16 and 35, provides their members with age-dependent discounts on the complete NO&B programme and organises events with introductions and drinks around a selection of productions for a yearly fee.<sup>43</sup> YPC is a youth organisation that seeks to connect the young and wealthy to NO&B as donors. Members pay a minimum of € 500,- a year during 5 years for exclusive events, a gala, complimentary tickets, international trips and more. YPC supports specific educational programmes for young artists such as the Opera Studio and the Junior Company.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, none of these youth organisations mentions anything regarding diversity on their websites. The Spektakelaars and YPC did post a black square on their Instagram account during #blackouttuesday on June 2, 2020.<sup>45</sup> YPC also released an official statement in July 2020 that said:

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<sup>41</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, "Spektakelaars," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/node/6965>.

<sup>43</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, "My Muse & Me," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/campagne/my-muse-me>.

<sup>44</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, "Young Patrons Circle," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/nl/steun-ons/young-patrons-circle>.

<sup>45</sup> #blackouttuesday was a highly controversial collective action initiated by the music industry in which major (cultural) institutions, musicians, celebrities and ordinary individuals posted black squares on their social media accounts to show support of BLM. This action was controversial because the black squares that also had the #blacklivesmatter tag blocked out vital information on social media that protesters in this period relied on. Also, the squares were without content silencing the conversation that was sparking around topics of racism. Lastly, it was a quick and easy way for both individuals and organisations to be labeled as antiracist without doing any of the actual work. Read more here Brian Welk, "Lil Nas X, Kehlani, Sade and More Criticize Blackout Tuesday: 'People Need to See What's Going On'," *The Wrap*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.thewrap.com/lil-nas-x-kehlani-sade-and-more-criticize-blackout-tuesday-people-need-to-see-whats-going-on/>.

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[...]Our community is hurting, so we must be a part of the solution. As we prepare for a new season at Dutch National Opera & Ballet, we are joining the conversation and will contribute to creating an organization that welcomes all. As representatives of the young patrons, we support the advancement of racial equality in ballet and opera, in all facets of life. Everyone has a role to play and we will do what we can to continue to create change, call out injustice and make progress towards a more inclusive world. We look forward to sharing more here soon.<sup>46</sup>

This citation indicates that YPC might take more action regarding diversity and inclusion in the future. Nevertheless, as things are now, it appears that these youth organisations cater to young people specifically, but they do not centre diversity.

### Conclusion

This chapter focused on audience diversity by examining a variety of aspects of NO&B that demonstrates how they both reach out and shape the public. The first section shows that hall occupancy is presented as a primary instigator for audience diversity. However, I believe that this pillar is also vital to satisfy the national government, DNO's principal financier. NO&B actively disseminates an inclusive image through their language and the way they represent their audience. NO&B presents a very diverse image of the opera audience concerning race and ethnicity, age, sexuality on their website. However, this masks the fact that DNO's audience is predominantly white and diverts attention to the organisation's success of 'welcoming everyone'.

The annual reports reveal that NO&B employs a very broad definition in which race, ethnicity and age seem to play a central part and appear to converge. However, the programme, the educational initiatives and the youth organisations reveal that a much larger emphasis is

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<sup>46</sup> Ypcoperaballet, Instagram post, July 22, 2020, [https://www.instagram.com/p/CC8343oIOHO/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/CC8343oIOHO/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link).

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placed on age. In order to attract people of colour through the programme, it is essential to represent their communities by performers and artists from these communities, and create a programme that reflects on values from their communities and are relevant to their lives. My analysis of these aspects within DNO's programme indicates that the productions are significantly and increasingly more tailored to young DWMB people than to NWMB people because the latter is simply not represented enough.

The convergence of age and diversity causes the disparity between these two categories and makes it harder for DNO to deal with their whiteness. This disproportion is also visible in my discussion of education and youth organisations. There does not seem to be a strong focus on diversity within education projects and youth organisations. The latter centres solely on age and the educational projects reveal how DNO (unconsciously) promotes cultural racism—by employing racial stereotypes—and familiarises their audience with these practices from a young age.

This more vigorous emphasis on youth could be due to the fact that education was a more established prerequisite for government funding than diversification between 2017 and 2020.<sup>47</sup> The danger of focusing primarily on young people with a non-Western migration background is that potential adult audiences are being overlooked or are not part of the main focus of creating concrete projects for the improvement of their inclusion.

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<sup>47</sup> Raad voor Cultuur, "Advies Raad voor Cultuur: Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2017-2020," *Raad voor Cultuur*, p. 4, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/downloads/document?id=85d26260-0620-4ceb-ab21-c87695581598&title=Advies%20Raad%20voor%20Cultuur%20basisinfrastructuur%202017-2020.pdf>.

# Chapter 4: A Personnel Reflection of Society

In this chapter, I will look at DNO's personnel diversity. I will do that by mapping the diversity present among DNO's personnel through quantitative measurements. Before I start with my findings, I will take some space in this introduction to elaborate on my methods.

According to the DIC, the pillar of personnel entails that an organisation must represent the diversity of its surroundings in all of its layers, and the company must be accessible for everyone.<sup>1</sup> Besides recruitment, retention of staff is of importance and making sure that all staff can think and act inclusively. NO&B states its diversity goal regarding personnel in the 2018 annual report. Here, NO&B elaborates on their diversity policy which focuses on the five Ps: programming, public, personnel, partners and positioning, to create a reflection of society in all layers of the organisation and let all employees develop an inclusive mentality.<sup>2</sup> This means that they aim to both change the workforce so that it mirrors the diversity present in society, and to make the organisation's culture more inclusive. NO&B states that their staff as a whole is very diverse in terms of nationalities, but it does not reflect the diversity present in Amsterdam or Dutch society.<sup>3</sup> The report underpins this by stating that NO&B is not well known among Dutch people with a non-Western migration background. Interestingly, in 2018, NO&B carries out a slightly different approach by emphasising they *are* a diverse organisation with over 30 nationalities, and inclusion in terms of programming, personnel, public and partners will remain an important focal point.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, NO&B mentions that they stimulate a safe and inclusive work environment by taking on the change of the organisation's culture as a high priority.<sup>5</sup> This change in self-reflection could be due to the new positioning strategy—as briefly discussed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Code Diversiteit & Inclusie," *Code Culturele Diversiteit*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 52.



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previous chapter and I will discuss more in chapter 6—in which NO&B aims to present themselves as open as possible.

In order to evaluate and improve diversity and inclusion within an organisation, measurements of the current state of affairs are deemed essential according to the DIC. When mapping out the diversity among the workforce, the simple act of counting and labelling the staff provides an overview of the diversity level within the company. Therefore, I will start my analyses by determining the diversity within the staff through a headcount within the workforce of DNO and tracing how this changed between 2017 and 2021. This method consists of online researching all of the employees whose names are published online through examining their pictures and the information about them that is publicly available on various websites including the website of NO&B and social media such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. As the primary source of this examination, I will use the season brochure of 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 which contain the *tableau de la troupe*—a full list of names of the employees along with their departments and if they belong to DNO, HNB or a central department.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, I will use the official webpages of DNO's opera productions staged during the seasons of 2017/2018 until 2020/2021 to include people that were hired for the productions specifically. Because I am focussing on opera, I will only take employees of DNO and the central staff of NO&B into account, leaving HNB out as much as possible. I will also leave the orchestras aside in discussing personnel. These companies will be briefly discussed in the chapter on NO&B's partners, but orchestras have their own selection procedures and diversity aims which are out of the scope of this chapter. I realise that not everybody who works at DNO or NO&B is registered on the lists of the season brochures or the website. Several employees are left out in this process, for example, not all employees are named on this list specifically, also, self-employed people, interns and volunteers are left out. However, this assessment does give a clear image of the diversity of the company at

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<sup>6</sup> The lists of employees can be found here. Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2017-2018, p. 112-115; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2018-2019, p. 120-123; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2019-2020, p. 136-139; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2020-2021, p. 172-175.

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its core. Measuring diversity in the shape of counting heads is a strange if not uncomfortable and awkward work. It is, however, pivotal to measuring the company's state of diversity.

Regarding the workforce as a whole, I tracked the diversity per season between 2017 and 2021 consisting of season 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. I will compare this to the diversity present in Amsterdam, as a benchmark in the form of the city's racial and ethnic diversity, because the representation of its surroundings is one of DNO's primary goals. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 13,6% of the Dutch population had a non-Western migration background in 2020.<sup>7</sup> When looking at Amsterdam specifically, the number of people with a non-Western migration background amounts to 35,7% in the same year.

DNO's staff numbers that were available to me fluctuate significantly. I registered 783 positions in 2017/2018, 811 in 2018/2019, 790 in 2019/2020 and 685 in 2020/2021. These are people working in all jobs and layers of the organisation. In some cases, one person holds different positions. For example, when the same director is hired for several productions, if a director is also the conductor, or when a member of the choir also sings a lead role. In these cases, I take the position as my point of departure, and I count this person multiple times. This decision is informed by the fact that it is a choice to let one person occupy multiple positions instead of hiring different people. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I use labels to distinguish men and women who are native Dutch or with a Western migration background (DWMB) and men and women who have a non-Western migration background (NWMB). I added a category of unknown for the people I was unable to categorise both based on race/ethnicity and gender, which amounts to about 3,5% on average.

To give more insight into the differences within the company, I grouped the results into different populations within the broader workforce. These categories consist of the board and the council of supervision, the off-stage workforce, stage performers like soloists and the choir and

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<sup>7</sup> CBS, "Hoeveel mensen met een migratieachtergrond wonen in Nederland?" *Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek*, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/dossier/dossier-asiel-migratie-en-integratie/hoeveel-mensen-met-een-migratieachtergrond-wonen-in-nederland->.

the 'big 4'—pertaining to the composer, writer, conductor and director. These populations vary enormously in size, which makes it easier for some populations to become more diverse than others. The populations of the board, the council of supervision, and the 'big 4' relate to the highest functions and thus the positions of power on both the organisational and production level within DNO. This analysis allows me to map the distinctions in diversity on different levels and if diversity is emphasised within these different populations. As the various charts below show, DNO's diversity differs strongly per population.

### **Average Workforce Diversity**

The chart below, in figure 1, shows the average diversity within the workforce as a whole. It indicates that there is some sort of trend in terms of diversification, but more in terms of gender and not specifically relating to race and ethnicity. Over half of the workforce consists of DWMB men (60,66% in 2017/2018) which steadily decreased significantly over the past seasons to 53,72% in 2020/2021. In turn, there seems to be a slight increase in the number of DWMB women. This group grew steadily from 27,46% to 32,26% over these four years. When looking at NWMB men, however, the chart shows that the category is minimal and there is actually a trend that is going downward. In the first season, this group consisted of 5,36% of the workforce, which went down to 4,93% in season two to then drop to 4,30% in the third season and further decreased to 3,21% in season four. In the category of NWMB women, a steadily upgoing diversification trend is lacking as this group rose from 3,83% in 2017/2018 to 6,54% in 2018/2019 to then decrease to 5,95% in 2019/2020 and move further down to 5,84% in 2020/2021. It appears that mainly the DWMB women benefit from the increased emphasis on gender. In contrast, NWMB women do not benefit as substantially, and this development even seems to disadvantage NWMB men directly.

The steep rise in women of colour between the first two seasons can be explained by the general increase in personnel which grew from 783 to 811 and then dropped to 790 and 685 throughout these four seasons, which would point to an act of 'plussing up' a white base instead of thorough diversification. This shift can also be impacted by the fact that NO&B wrote an action

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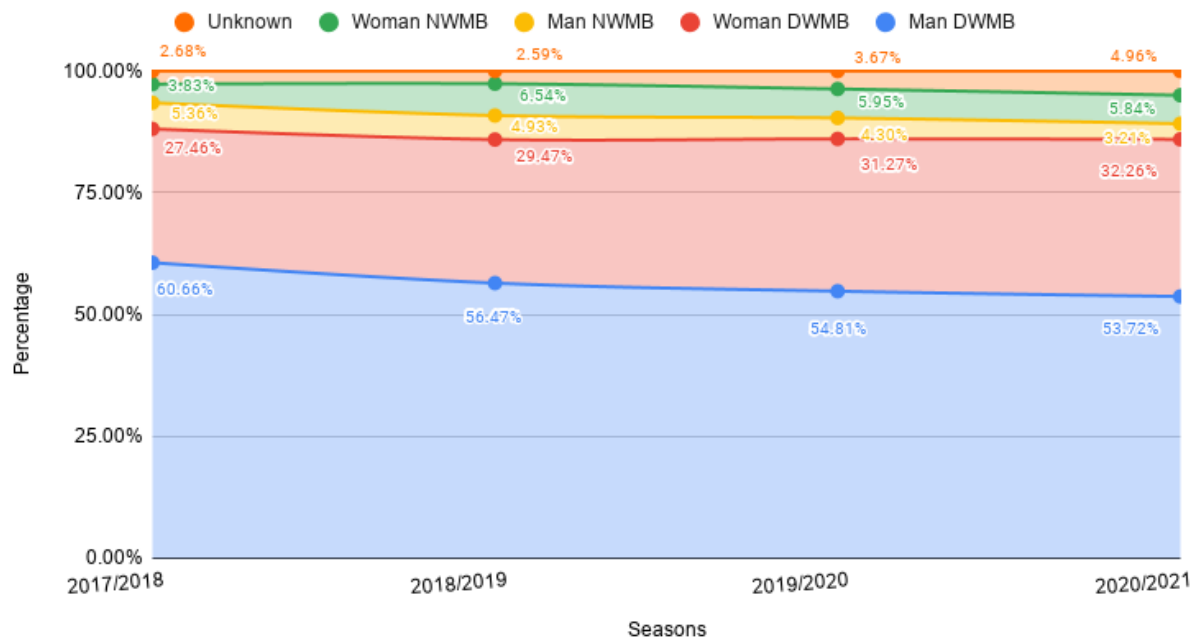
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plan for how to develop diversity in terms of staff, programming, audience and partners in 2017, which affected the next season. At the same time, NO&B reported in 2019 that an internal diversity working group would come into being, which would make a baseline measurement of inclusion and look for a 'critical friend' who can prompt diversity throughout the organisation.<sup>8</sup> However, these efforts do not seem to have been successful, given the unconvincing diversity numbers.

The rise in between the first two seasons was presumably due to season 2018/2019 having the highest amount of people of colour that were staged in productions—with the peaks being *Porgy and Bess*, *Girls of the Golden West* and *Caruso A Cuba*—, which influenced the companies' diversity totals considerably. With a total average of around 10% of people with a non-Western migration background, the chart in figure 1 demonstrates that DNO is far from meeting the numbers of diversity present in Amsterdam of 35,7% people with a non-Western migration background.

### Average Workforce Diversity 2017-2021



<sup>8</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 3.

Figure 1. Average Workforce Diversity 2017-2021

### **Off-stage workforce**

The off-stage workforce is by far the largest group of people within the organisation, moving from 478 in 2017/2018 to 505 in 2018/2019, 496 in 2019/2020 and 488 in 2020/2021. This category comprises all of the different administrative departments within the company: ticketing, the workshops of artisans, set and costume designers, set builders, makeup artists and many more. Most people within this category are permanently employed. Still, a part of them is hired per production, for example, to do the lighting, choreography, costume and set design, among other things. Generally, this population is more challenging to measure and more prone to mistakes because of the dependency on internet resources as there are fewer celebrities compared to, for example, the soloists. Therefore, there is a larger amount within the category of unknown due to the unclear cases. Overall, the total average number of NWMB people in the workforce is 7,78%, with the majority consisting of NWMB women (4,58%). The number of NWMB men fluctuates per season, moving around 3%. Whereas the chart in figure 2 shows a small yet steady rise in the number of NWMB women which moves from 3,14% in 2017/2018 to 5,53% in 2020/2021. This indicates that, whether it is conscious or unconscious, there is some kind of movement in racial and ethnic diversity within this population. The total average of this population of 7,78% is lower than the DNO's average of 10%. As this chart clearly shows, DNO's off-stage workforce does not meet the diversity present in the population of Amsterdam.

If I look only at the part of this population with permanent positions—and focus on the absolute number instead of the percentages—there does seem to be a tiny but steady yearly increase from 27 NWMB people out of 388 (6,95%) employees in the first season gradually moving up to 32 out of 420 (7,61%) employees in 2020/2021. Remarkably, I could not trace any people of colour in high positions or human resources. The largest group of NWMB people was to be found in the workshops where sets are built, costumes made, makeup and hair are done. Over the years

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more people of colour were employed at the marketing department, but there seem to be more difficulties in retaining personnel here.

Regarding the temporary contracts, the costume, lightings and set building professionals that are hired for particular productions, there is also an almost steady increase in diversity. From 5,55% (5/90) in 2017/2018 to almost double in 2018/2019 being 9,25% (10/108), further up to 14,28% (13/91) in 2019/2020 and slightly dropping to 13,23% (9/68) in 2020/2021. However, these high numbers are not due to many different people that were hired, but mostly because Taiwanese-Chinese chorus master Ching-Lien Wu was hired for around 8 productions per season from 2018/2019 to 2020/2021. If I count the number of individuals, it boils down to about 10 different people that were hired between 2017 and 2020 in these positions, of which the vast majority were choreographers.

The low numbers in people of colour and the positions they hold within this large population indicate a case of institutional racism which I discussed in chapter 1 through the definition by Philomena Essed. Institutional racism shapes a limited scope of development, fewer rights and unequal possibilities to make use of rights for people of colour as opposed to white people. This leads to an overrepresentation of people of colour in low-wage, irregular and unskilled labour.<sup>9</sup> While the positions that people of colour hold at DNO are hardly unskilled, the fact that there are no NWMB people in leadership is a sign of the systematic disadvantage of people of colour within the organisation.<sup>10</sup>

These numbers and positions of NWMB people also illuminate the whiteness of the company, not only as a colour but as an orientation. Sara Ahmed explained that whiteness as an orientation determines what is reachable in terms of objects but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques and habits through different spaces with an emphasis on institutions.<sup>11</sup> Whiteness is inherited and reproduced through habits which hold it in place and shape institutions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Essed, *Alledaags racism*, 162-167.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, 175.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmed, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, 156-159.

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Institutions that are orientated around whiteness are more likely to recruit white bodies over non-white bodies, and non-white bodies will have to inhabit whiteness to get access. Whiteness as an orientation results in some bodies being supported—and thus privileged—by spaces and others standing out as being out of place. This relates to DNO because the organisation seems to function in a way that very few and only certain positions and spaces appear to be available to people of colour. Ahmed argues that institutions orientated around whiteness presume this to be a given rather than an effect of past decisions.<sup>13</sup> I see this point resonating in the annual report of 2017, where NO&B argues their lack of diversity is due to them not being well known among Dutch people with a non-Western migration background.<sup>14</sup> This comment indicates that NO&B views the lack of diversity as something accidental instead of it being an act of continuously choosing white people over people of colour and creating an environment that is suited to the wants, needs and comforts of white people—whether these decisions are conscious or not. W.E.B. du Bois explains this often unconscious functioning of the white world perfectly when he says:

The present attitude and action of the white world is not based solely upon rational, deliberate intent. It is a matter of conditioned reflexes; of long followed habits, customs and folkways; of subconscious trains of reasoning and unconscious nervous reflexes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Idem, 158.

<sup>14</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 87.

## Off-stage Workforce 2017-2021

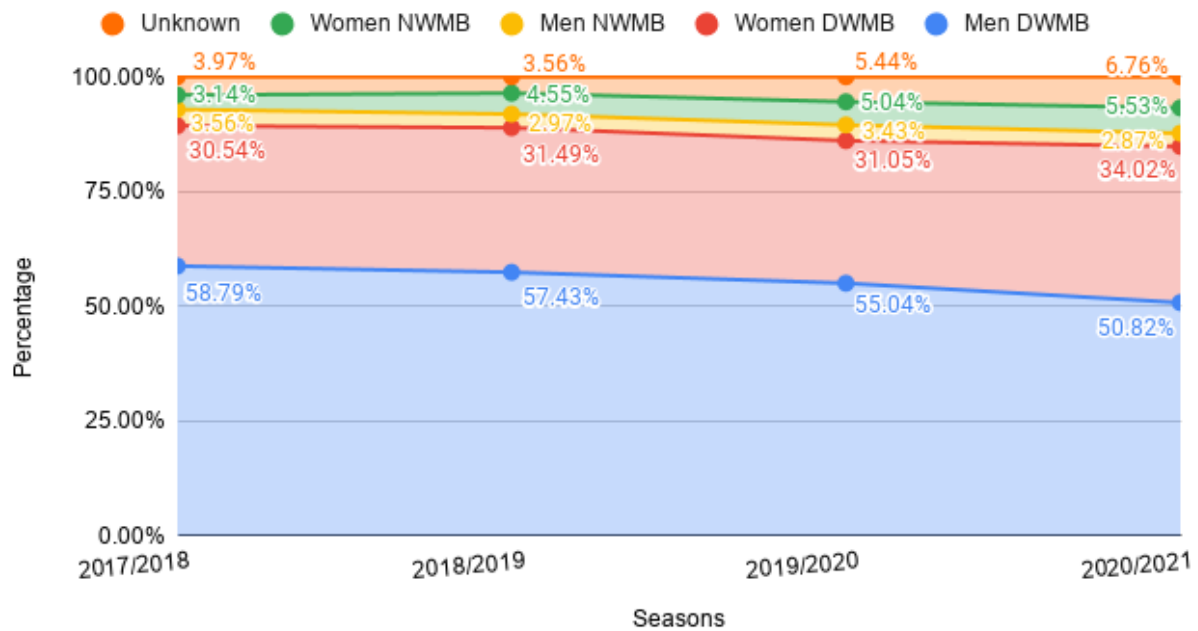


Figure 2. Off-stage Workforce 2017-2021

### 'Big 4' & Board and the Council of Supervision

I will discuss the 'big 4' category and that of the Board and the Council of Supervision within the same paragraph because they both pertain to the most powerful positions within the organisation. Here, I will first address the 'big 4' category and then the Board and the Council of Supervision.

On average, the 'big 4' category consists of 5% NWMB people, which is the second-lowest number within all the companies' populations. In this population, as the chart in figure 3 shows, there seems to be a significant presence of NWMB men initially, which then declines over the seasons. However, this is mostly due to the diverse cast of *We Shall Not Be Moved*, which was staged in 2017/2018, and on account of the French-Lebanese Pierre Audi directing multiple operas when he was still DNO's artistic director (from 2017/2018 until 2019/2020). The size of this



group does not fluctuate as significantly as other populations and remains around the average of 70 people between 2017-2021. As in the case of the company's average, this category clearly shows a steady decline of DWMB men and at the same time a growth in DWMB women. This shift indicates an increased focus on gender diversity. Still, NWMB women remain almost absent within this population, so there is an evident lack of focus on racial and ethnic diversity. The fact that gender diversity in the case of DNO only seems to pertain to white women proves why it is so important to have an intersectional approach because this example shows that when work is done to advance the position of women, women of colour remain marginalised.

**Big 4: Composer, Writer, Conductor and Director 2017-2021**

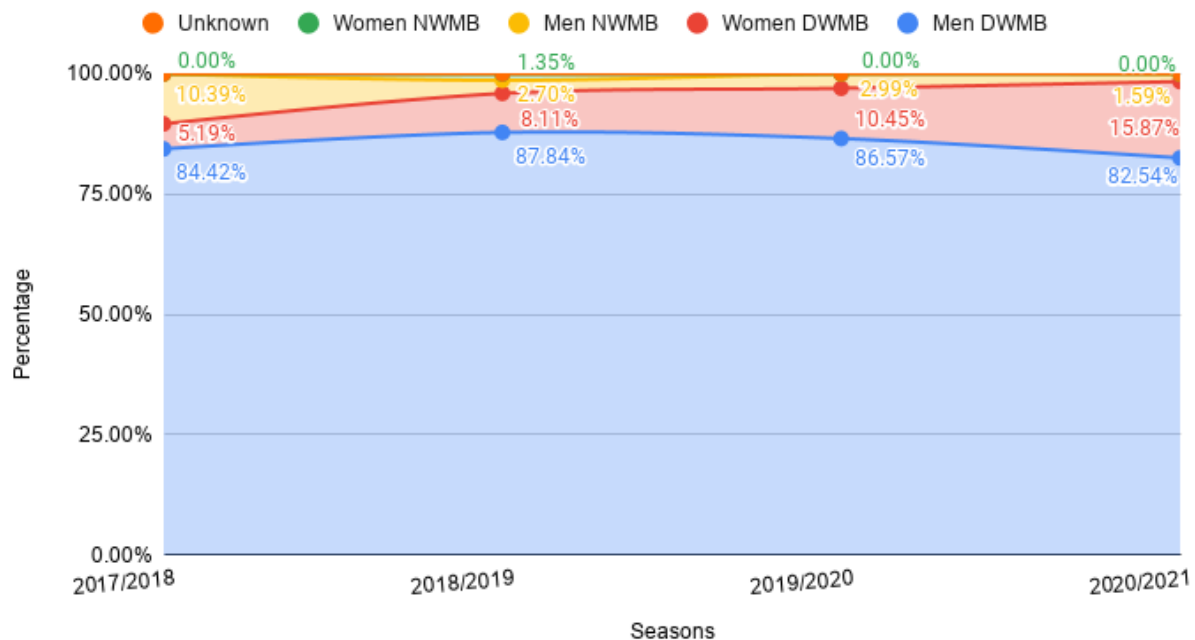


Figure 3. 'Big 4': Composer, Writer. Conductor and Director 2017-2021

With an average number of 15 people, the board and the council of supervision also remain relatively stable in terms of size as opposed to the larger populations of stage performers and off-stage workforce. As is visible in figure 4, this group seems to be assembled very

consciously regarding gender, with almost an even number in DWMB men and women across the seasons. However, the category is still overwhelmingly white, and race and ethnicity do not seem to be taken into account at all. NWMB people are left out entirely except for the first two seasons due to Pierre Audi's presence which amounts to an average of 3,23% of NWMB people. As with the 'big 4', the analysis of this population shows that gender advancement does not automatically lead to the inclusion of women of colour.

### Board and Council of Supervision 2017-2021

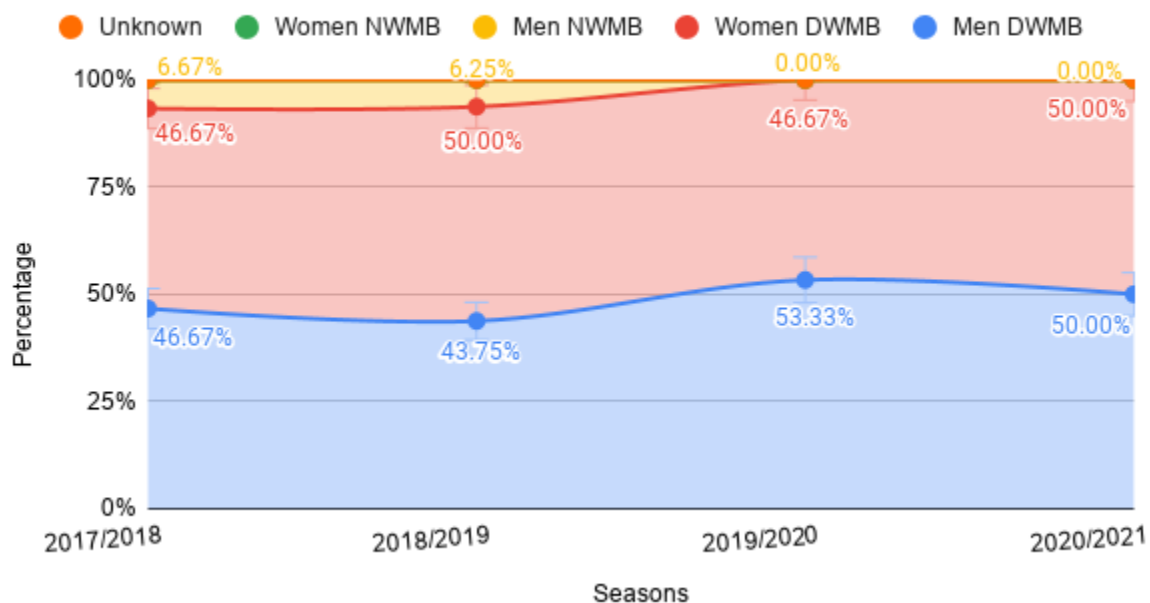


Figure 4. Board and the Council of Supervision 2017-2021

Whereas DNO has not given priority to diversifying the 'big 4', and the board and the council of supervision, these populations are often pointed to as the place where change needs to happen to make a company more inclusive. For example, the DIC states that the Code applies to the company as a whole, including the board and the council of supervision, and their

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commitment is invaluable to their success regarding diversity and inclusion.<sup>16</sup> The section from the board and the council of supervision in NO&B's annual reports address diversity and inclusion as a significant focal point. Still, at the same time, by not diversifying themselves, they do not acknowledge the part they are playing in the change they aim to create.

At the same time, many opera singers of colour argue that diversity and inclusion need to start from the top-down and not from the bottom-up. In a conversation organised by LA Opera and hosted by mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges—with a panel including soprano Julia Bullock, tenor Lawrence Brownlee, bass Morris Robinson, tenor Russell Thomas and soprano Karen Slack—Morris Robinson indicated the dire conditions opera companies are in and how this inhibits their goals of diversifying and attracting a broader audience:

I've never been hired by a black person. I've never been directed by a black person. I never had a black CEO of a company. I never had a black president of the board. I never had a black conductor. I never even had black stage managers, none, not ever, for 20 years. [...] Representation of the staff will help feed representation on the stage, and representation on the stage will also help feed the audience.<sup>17</sup>

Robinson's words echo the prerequisites of creating a long-lasting connection with a diverse audience which I discussed in chapter 3 through the ideas of Morris Fred and Betty Farrell.

The hiring of people of colour was also discussed in a community conversation organised by Long Beach Opera moderated by Dr Derrell Acon with panellists Prof Dr Naomi André, again Julia Bullock, soprano Ailyn Pérez, bass Solomon Howard, tenor Andrew Stenson, baritone Kenneth Overton, again Karen Slack, and baritone Brandon Alexander Bell about equity and diversity in the arts. When Dr Acon asked what the boards of opera companies can do, Solomon

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<sup>16</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Code Diversiteit & Inclusie," p. 8, 12.

<sup>17</sup> LA Opera, "Lift Every Voice: A Conversation Hosted by J'Nai Bridges," *Youtube*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5APSkV5qyK4>.

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Howard said that it is vital to provide space for people of colour to represent themselves instead of having white people speaking for them.<sup>18</sup> He added that there are more than enough people of colour that are perfectly qualified to be in prominent positions like that of an artistic director or a board member. Kenneth Overton—co-founder of Opera Noire—elaborated on the responsibility of opera companies' boards and said:

The boardroom should represent what you want the company on stage to look like. It should look like what the administrative offices should look like, and you should hold your general and executive director and artistic director to the task. When you don't see diversity on stage or in the pit or on the podium, you as the board, as the pocket strings of the company needs to say 'hey what's up why are there no Asian people this season, why are there no Hispanic people this season why are there no black people this season'. As the board, you need to step that up, and you have to insist that your board members aren't just on the board for a status symbol or a tax write-off—they need to be emotionally, physically and financially invested in the growth of the company to make it look like the community that it serves.<sup>19</sup>

All of these statements demonstrate that it is not enough to simply promote ideas of diversity and inclusion among the staff, but the positions of power within the company are the ones that need to be reviewed first and foremost.

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<sup>18</sup> Long Beach Opera, "Equity and Diversity in the Arts - a Community Conversation by Long Beach Opera," *Youtube*, June 14, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5nScHjvIn0&fbclid=IwAR0ky8JNuC954ia3aqb3xiT0O9Bqu7ct5VA3vzK\\_wRDdVBdCnvgBI34SCIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5nScHjvIn0&fbclid=IwAR0ky8JNuC954ia3aqb3xiT0O9Bqu7ct5VA3vzK_wRDdVBdCnvgBI34SCIE).

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*.

## Stage Performers

The category of stage performers has the highest numbers of all the populations in terms of diversity. This group is the most visible to the outside and consists of all the singers, choir members and incidental instrumentalists that perform on stage. Most people within this category are DWMB, but the overall average of 18,27% in NWMB people surpasses the diversity present in the larger Dutch population of 13,6% with a non-Western migration background and makes this category the closest to reflect the diversity present in Amsterdam of 35,7%. The overall chart in figure 5 does not evidently mark a racial and ethnic diversity trend, and this group's size varies strongly per season. This population consisted of 213 people in 2017/2018, 216 people in 2018/2019, 212 people in 2019/2020 and 120 people in 2020/2021. The diversity within this population significantly improved in 2018/2019 as opposed to 2017/2018. Still, the numbers decreased again in the season after and this continued for NWMB men in the season of 2020/2021 as well, whereas the number of NWMB women increased but marginally. There is also a slight difference between the soloists and the choir. The choir is part of the permanent workforce, whereas the soloists are hired per production. This provides space for choosing a more diverse selection of soloists, whereas it is more difficult to make the choir more diverse short term. As the charts below in figure 6 show, the choir almost completely consists of DWMB people. At the same time, the soloists are generally more diverse, and this diversity fluctuates significantly from season to season. The choir has an average of only 8,6% in NWMB people, of which around 93% consists of NWMB women, while the soloists more than double that amount with a share of 21,32% pertaining to that group and there is a relatively even distribution between NWMB men and women.

### Stage Performers: Soloists and Choir 2017-2021

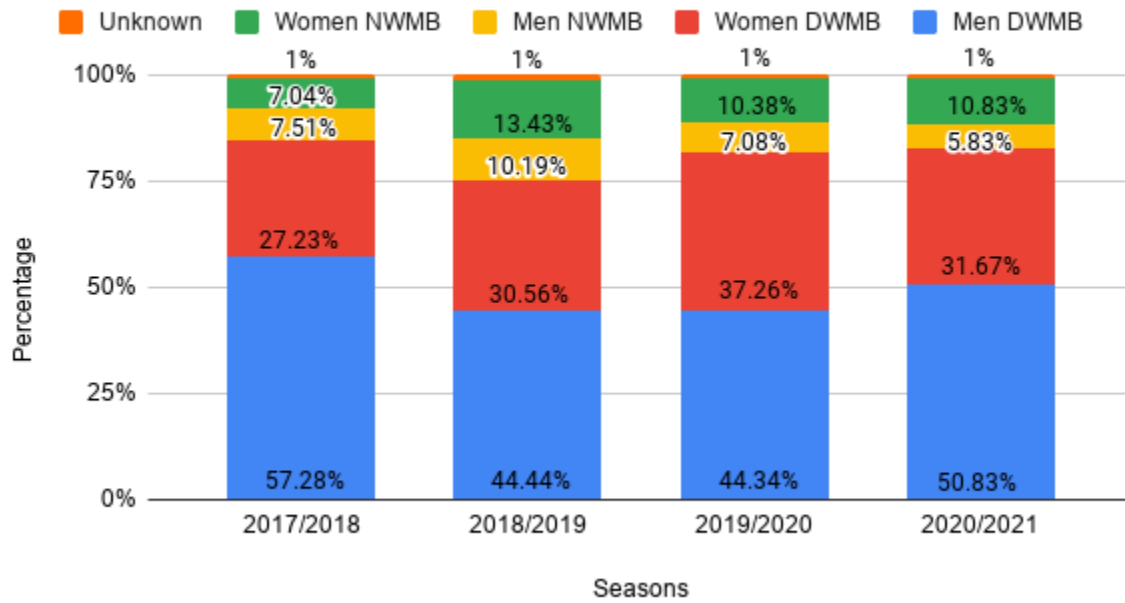


Figure 5: Stage Performers, Soloists and Choir 2017-2021

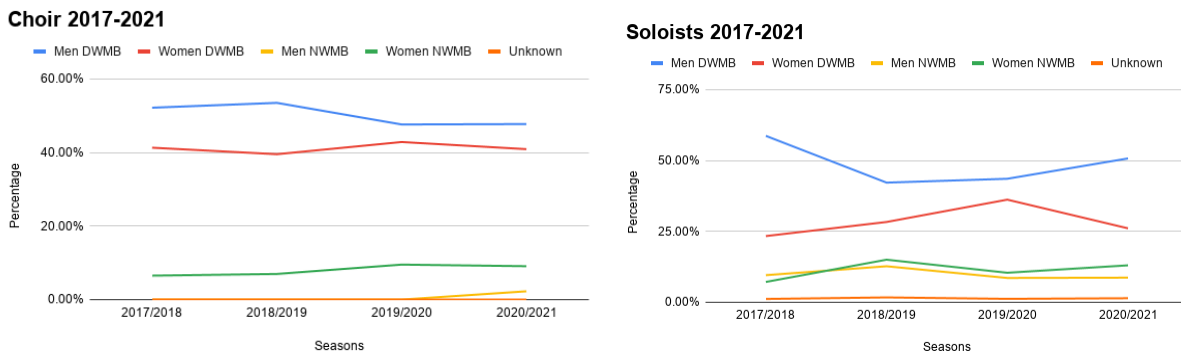


Figure 6. Choir & Soloists 2017-2021

It is remarkable to see that within this category; women of colour are more present than men of colour. This enforces Ahmed’s concept of whiteness as an orientation within the context of DNO because women of colour seem to be viewed as more suitable on stage than in positions of power.

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This population also proves that diversity works to shift the attention away from whiteness and its power. According to Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, diversity ideology is twofold. It addresses racial inequality on the one hand by centralising exclusion as the cause of racial inequality to which fair representation is the solution. This leads to a 'tick box' effect in which the focus lies on reaching an ideal number to make an institution inclusive.<sup>20</sup> And on the other hand, diversity ideology protects white people and organisations from being confronted with racial inequality both psychologically and materially. Mayorga-Gallo argues that:

Diversity ideology creates a logic by which whites can discuss racial inequality or the importance of diversity, while centering their desires, intentions, and comfort. In this way, diversity ideology buttresses whiteness as identity, status, and property. The logic of diversity ideology allows whites to construct a positive white identity as open-minded and accepting of difference or organizations as innovative and cutting-edge, while maintaining the social and legal benefits of systemic whiteness.<sup>21</sup>

Here, the diversity on stage operates as tokenism, a small and insignificant change while whiteness and the accompanying power structure remains in place.<sup>22</sup> According to Paul Kivel, by being used as tokens, people of colour are deployed to avert concerns about discrimination or diversity but not as full participants.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, "The White-Centering Logic of Diversity Ideology," *American Behavioral Scientist* 63, no. 13 (2019): 1793.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, 1794.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society, 2017), 330.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

My analysis of DNO's workforce indicates that they are still very far from the aim of reflecting the diversity present in Amsterdam within their organisation. There is no evident progression of diversity based on race and ethnicity across the board. The only clear yet minimal upward trend is that of the number of women of colour within the off-stage workforce.

The subdivision of DNO's staff into different categories shows that there are different focuses per population. Some populations are easier to diversify than others due to the number of permanent employees versus people that are hired temporarily. DNO seems to focus on the most visible category as the highest number of racial and ethnic diversity is within the category of stage performers and particularly among the soloists of the different opera productions. This is also the population that consists of temporary contracts, can be diversified easier and is quicker to provide a diverse image to the outside as opposed to less visible groups within the organisation. The relatively high diversity within this population operates as tokenism by diversifying where it is most visible and thereby masking the whiteness and the accompanying power structure which remains in place within the rest of the company.

The high positions within the organisation containing the most power in terms of decision making—consisting of the board and the council of supervision on the organisational level, and the 'big 4' of composers, writer, conductors and directors on the production level—show that racial and ethnic diversity does not seem to be a distinct focal point. This is even though opera professionals point to these populations as the place where change needs to happen to be successful in other pillars like programme and public. Remarkably, there is a clear focus on gender diversity within these categories. Still, this development is centred on whiteness as NWMB women remain marginalised in the process, and men of colour are disadvantaged.

Within the most extensive section of DNO's personnel, the off-stage workforce, there seems to be some kind of diversity trend because there is, in fact, a small but steady increase in the number of NWMB women. The general rise in racial and ethnic diversity between the first and second season can be related to a notion of 'plussing up' the workforce. The low numbers in



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NWMB people and the lack of people of colour in leadership positions point to institutional racism, and the orientation of DNO around whiteness; meaning the organisation subconsciously provides better access, support and opportunities to DWMB people.

# Chapter 5: Partnering Up

This chapter examines NO&B's partnerships. According to the DIC, the partner pillar concerns the external people and organisations a company collaborates with or contracts for a job.<sup>1</sup> The idea is to choose partners that help achieve diversity and inclusion goals and broaden an organisation's perspective. The diversity of the partners can be measured by analysing if they share the same values and vision on diversity and inclusion. NO&B consistently mentions partner diversity as a strategy for diversifying their company; however, they do not elaborate on how exactly. In their season brochures dating from 2017, NO&B states they are looking for partners or sponsors that 'appeal to a broad and diverse audience both nationally and internationally, young and old' and I want to examine what this approach to diversifying the company brought them.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, I will look at NO&B's different partners in this chapter and what they contribute in terms of diversity. Because it is not always clear which partners pertain specifically to DNO or HNB, I will focus on all partners that are listed in the annual reports and those that are named in the season brochures from 2017 to 2021.<sup>3</sup> These are probably not entirely conclusive, but provide a solid idea of the diversity of NO&B's partners in a general sense. Because establishing a company's diversity is a major and time-consuming occupation—as this thesis proves—I aimed to fit the examination of NO&B's partners within the scope of this project. I determined the partner diversity based on statements the companies make regarding diversity and inclusion on their website, and by having a glance at the diversity of the workforce of these companies. I realise this is a very superficial way of establishing diversity, especially since major companies make a habit of writing diversity and inclusion statements while not always looking the part. In contrast, it is often the other way around with smaller companies. However, this method is the most feasible

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<sup>1</sup> Code Culturele Diversiteit, "Code Diversiteit & Inclusie," p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2017-2018, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> All of the mentioned partners can be found here. Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2017-2018; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2018-2019; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2019-2020; Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2020-2021.

way of measuring partner diversity concerning the scope of this project. I have established four main categories in which NO&B's collaborators can be divided. These are business partners providing products or services to NO&B, sponsors or funds supporting NO&B financially production partners such as opera companies or orchestral partners, and educational partners such as schools, universities or other cultural institutions NO&B works with from an educational perspective.

### **Business Partners**

NO&B works with many different business partners for various purposes. NO&B works with companies such as Anomaly, The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Cisco, Desso, Ey, Gispen, LM Flower Fashion, Loyens & Loeff, Philips, Rutgers & Posch, &samhoud, Samsung, Dam & Partners, Jacobs Douwe Egberts (JDE), Gispen, M.A.C. Cosmetics, Exterior Media Netherlands and WeTransfer.<sup>4</sup> Many of these companies, such as marketing company Anomaly, consultancy firm BCG, technology company Cisco, flooring company Desso, professional services network Ey, law firm Loyens & Loeff, health technology company Philips, electronics company Samsung, cosmetics manufacturer M.A.C. Cosmetics and file transfer service company WeTransfer have diversity statements and include it within their central aims.

However, some prominent business partners do not seem to pay any specific attention to diversity and inclusion and look as if they have a relatively homogenous white workforce themselves. Examples are JDE, which provides NO&B's coffee and is a corporate sponsor at the same time, Exterior Media Netherlands, organising NO&B's outdoors advertisement, &samhoud, NO&B's consultancy firm, Rutgers & Posch providing legal aid, Gispen which designed all the furniture in the venue after the 2018 renovation, and architects Dam & Partners who designed both the venue in the 1980s and its recent renovation. Even though it is not entirely clear how NO&B measures the diversity of their partners, based on my findings, there does not seem to be

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<sup>4</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2017-2018, p. 116.

any significant improvement in partner diversity of the existing or new business partnerships that NO&B entered in between 2017 and 2021.

## Funders and Sponsors

The funding and sponsorship of NO&B can be placed under three subcategories according to the annual reports between 2017 and 2021. The most substantial amount of funding (around 70% for DNO) comes from government subsidies provided by the national government and the municipality of Amsterdam. I presume funders and sponsors to be the least likely category for diversification since NO&B currently depends on their money to survive. When looking at these two major financiers, I found that the national government, the sole subsidy provider for DNO, has issues with diversity. Still, the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science (OCW) seems to be one of the most diverse departments concerning gender, sexuality, age and race and ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> The municipality of Amsterdam—the main financier for HNB and the building of NO&B—is involved in many projects that focus on equality based on gender, race, class and sexuality within Amsterdam. Still, their own workforce is far from representing the city's diversity, and many employees have encountered racism, homophobia, ageism and ableism at work.<sup>6</sup>

The third-largest source of income comes from private funds.<sup>7</sup> These comprise around 4% between 2017 and 2021. It is remarkable that among all of these private funds supporting NO&B—which estimate an average total of about 17 per year—there are only three with a particular focus on diversity and inclusion. These are VSBfonds, Fonds 21 and the Bankgiro Loterij Fonds. According to VSBfonds' website, contributing to an inclusive society lies at the core of their

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<sup>5</sup> Algemene Bestuursdienst, "Diversiteit - Als je er écht voor gaat, dan organiseer je het gewoon," *ABD Blad 1*, March 15, 2019, <https://magazines.algemenebestuursdienst.nl/abdblad/2019/01/diversiteit---als-je-er-echt-voor-gaat-dan-organiseer-je-het-gewoon>.

<sup>6</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam, "Nieuwsbrief Diversiteit," *Gemeente Amsterdam*, July 2020, <https://www.amsterdam.nl/sociaaldomein/nieuwsbrieven/diversiteit/nieuwsbrief-diversiteit-juli-2020/>; Gemeente Amsterdam, "Gemeente kondigt stappen aan voor meer diversiteit in het personeelsbestand," *Gemeente Amsterdam*, accessed July 2020, <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/college/wethouder/touriameliani/persberichten/gemeente-kondigt-stappen-diversiteit/>.

<sup>7</sup> The second-largest source of income is the audience which generates about 25% of the turnover.

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organisation, and they support cultural initiatives that attract a broad audience.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, they released a statement regarding discrimination, exclusion and racism in response to the BLM movement in June 2020.<sup>9</sup> Their organisation employs about 12% of people of colour and has one black woman on the board.<sup>10</sup> Diversity and inclusion are also central to the Bankgiro Loterij Fonds whose workforce was not published online but who integrated inclusion as one of their four basic principles along with radical imagination, social practice and change and movement.<sup>11</sup> Fonds 21 supports projects that attract a broad and new audience and adheres to the DIC, but their workforce is entirely white.<sup>12</sup> The other funds are predominantly white in terms of staff and did not make any statements regarding diversity and inclusion.<sup>13</sup>

The smallest—but quickly expanding—group of contributors is that of corporate sponsorship, comprising an average of less than 1% of DNO's total income. The main sponsors are Houthoff, Loyens & Loeff, JDE, ING and Mercedes. NO&B's main sponsor is Houthoff. This is a law firm which made a clear statement regarding diversity and inclusion; however, only approximately 7% of their workforce consists of people of colour.<sup>14</sup> Loyens & Loeff is also a law firm. Their workforce is significantly more diverse than Houthoff's, and they made a statement

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<sup>8</sup> VSBfonds, "Over ons," *VSBfonds*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/over-vsbfonds>; VSBfonds, "Voorwaarden subsidie VSBfonds voor culturele projecten," *VSBfonds*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/kunst-cultuur/voorwaarden-subsidie-vsbfonds-voor-culturele-projecten>; VSBfonds, "Mens en maatschappij," *VSBfonds*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/mens-maatschappij>.

<sup>9</sup> VSBfonds, "Discriminatie, uitsluiting en racisme," *VSBfonds*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/over-vsbfonds/nieuws/discriminatie-uitsluiting-en-racisme>.

<sup>10</sup> VSBfonds, "Organisatie," *VSBfonds*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/over-vsbfonds/wie-zijn-wij/organisatie>.

<sup>11</sup> Bankgiro Loterij Fonds, "Het fonds," *Bankgiro Loterij Fonds*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://bankgiroloterijfonds.doen.nl/het-fonds.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Fonds 21, "Over Fonds 21," *Fonds 21*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.fonds21.nl/over-fonds-21/wat-doet-fonds-21>; Fonds 21, "Fair Practice Code," *Fonds 21*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.fonds21.nl/dossiers/2/dossier-fair-practice-code>; Fonds 21, "Medewerkers," *Fonds 21*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.fonds21.nl/over-fonds-21/medewerkers>.

<sup>13</sup> VandenEnde Foundation, Stichting Ammodo, Stichting Zabawas, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Brook Foundation, Turing Foundation, Freek en Hella de Jonge Stichting, Stichting Elise Mathilde Fonds, Staetshuys Fonds, Stichting Drs. Cor van Zadelhoff Fonds, Gravin van Bylandt stichting, Blockbusterfonds, Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, Goethe institut, Stichting Zomerlust, Maurice Amado Foundation, ENOA, Pieter Houbolt Fonds, Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds, Dioraphte.

<sup>14</sup> Houthoff, "About Us," *Houthoff*, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.houthoff.com/about-us>; Houthoff, "Our People," *Houthoff*, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.houthoff.com/Search/our-people>.

regarding diversity and inclusion as well.<sup>15</sup> Also, the bank ING and Mercedes Benz—part of the broader Daimler automotive imperium—seem to have a focus on diversity and inclusion due to their elaborate diversity statements.<sup>16</sup> The coffee company JDE professional appears to be the only corporate sponsor without any goals or ideas about diversity and inclusion.

These categories show that there is a considerable difference in diversity—or at least the way organisations present it—between governments, private funds and corporate sponsors. Generally, this category is overall very white. The period between 2017 and 2021 also demonstrates that there is very little change in funders and sponsors over the years, apart from Houthoff starting its collaboration with NO&B in 2018. This indicates that there has not been an increased focus on attracting diverse partners within this category.

## Production Partners

The production partners can be broadly subdivided into the subcategories of orchestral partners, opera houses and other cultural institutions. The collaborations with orchestras do not seem to bring more diversity to the table, but it instead appear to worsen things. The visibility of this group amplifies the image of whiteness in the theatre. While orchestras like DNO's home orchestra the Dutch Philharmonic Orchestra (Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest: NedPhO) and others such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest: KCO) and Asko/Schönberg do have statements regarding diversity and inclusion and ascribe to the DIC, their pits and administration are still overwhelmingly white.<sup>17</sup> However, these orchestras have obligations to

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<sup>15</sup> Loyens & Loeff, "About Us," *Loyens & Loeff*, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.loyensloeff.com/en/en/about-us/diversity-inclusion/>.

<sup>16</sup> ING, "Diversity Manifesto," *ING*, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.ing.jobs/nederland/Over-ING/Diversiteit.htm>; Daimler, "How we shape Diversity & Inclusion," *Daimler*, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.daimler.com/sustainability/basics/employees/how-we-shape-diversity-inclusion.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest, "Over," *Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest*, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://orkest.nl/nl/over/staf-en-raad-van-toezicht>; Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest, "Plan van aanpak inclusie en diversiteit," *Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest*, January 29, 2020, [https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/media/algemeen/subsidieaanvraag/concertgebouworkest\\_2124\\_extra\\_bijlage\\_6\\_actieplan\\_inclusie\\_en\\_diversiteit\\_behorend\\_bij\\_aanvraag\\_gemeente\\_amsterdam.pdf](https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/media/algemeen/subsidieaanvraag/concertgebouworkest_2124_extra_bijlage_6_actieplan_inclusie_en_diversiteit_behorend_bij_aanvraag_gemeente_amsterdam.pdf); Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest, "Ontmoet het orkest," *Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest*, accessed July 6, 2020,

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work with DNO. NedPhO is founded to serve the opera—an agreement that dates back to before the merger of NO&B—and this is still one of the conditions for the orchestra to receive their subsidy from OCW.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the KCO, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra (Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest) and the Residentie Orkest are required to accompany one DNO production each opera season for them to receive their subsidies from OCW.<sup>19</sup> These agreements make it challenging for DNO to work with orchestras which do diversify their workforce and practices. Still, all of the other orchestras DNO cooperates with do not have clear diversity aims and are also rather homogeneously white. There are no collaborations at all with orchestras that champion diversity and inclusion such as Chineke!, Chicago Sinfonietta or the all-women Camerata Romeu.

Things look similar when looking at opera houses that partnered up with DNO. Some opera companies like English National Opera (ENO) and Royal Opera House (ROH) address diversity and inclusion extensively on their websites, and Opera Front and Muziektheater Transparant have these themes at the very core of their organisation. Still, the myriad of other opera companies is not engaged in these matters at all and does not bring anything to the table in this regard. This is a missed opportunity because collaborations with African American opera companies that put people of colour front and centre like Opera Ebony, OperaCréole or Opera Noire of New York would provide opportunities for more diversity at DNO.

The two most significant collaborations from the last category of production partners concerning diversity are the Black Achievement Month and ISH. These two collaborations are often referred to in the annual reports concerning partner diversity, but they both pertain to HNB. For example, HNB participated in Black Achievement Month with both a dance conference and the productions *Embers* and *Echoes Through Time* which were performed in several venues such

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[https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/nl/het-orkest; Asko/Schönberg, "Actieplan diversiteit en inclusie kunstenplan 2021-2024," Asko/Schönberg, accessed July 6, 2020, https://www.askoschoenberg.nl/old/assets/Jaarcijfers/21062-Actieplan-diversiteit-en-inclusie-Kunstenplan-2021-2024-29012020-0756.pdf](https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/nl/het-orkest; Asko/Schönberg, ).

<sup>18</sup> Maes, Lodder, and Segers, 279-280.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

as the Amsterdam Stadsschouwburg.<sup>20</sup> Also in 2018, HNB performed during Black Achievement Month and toured with hip hop dancers from the dance collective ISH for the production of *GRIMM*.

All of these partnerships indicate that DNO has a long way to go if they want to diversify their company through production partners. Current collaborations are only enforcing DNO's whiteness, and there seem to be many missed opportunities. This section also sheds light on the whiteness of the larger network of companies that DNO is part of and depends on, as in the case of the orchestras. The most significant diverse partnerships were those of HNB instead of DNO.

### **Educational Partners**

The category of education appears to be the most diverse group of partners by far. NO&B works with educational institutions and cultural partners. Education institutions consist of universities like in Amsterdam and Utrecht, the conservatories of Amsterdam, Utrecht, Alkmaar and the Hague, the teachers training colleges in Amsterdam and Haarlem, and primary schools across the province of North-Holland.<sup>21</sup> Whether successful or unsuccessful, most of these institutions have put out diversity and inclusion statements.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of cultural partnerships, DNO works with many organisations specialised in the area of art appreciation. Here, NO&B teams up with Mocca and de Pit as relevant interlocutors in Amsterdam. Nationwide, NO&B is part of the National Knowledge Centre for Culture Education

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<sup>20</sup> The Black Achievement Month is an initiative by NiNsee (the National Institute of Dutch Slavery Past and Legacy) that focuses on acknowledgement and appreciation of the qualities and contributions of the (Dutch) black community. More information can be found here: Black Achievement Month, "Over ons," *Black Achievement Month*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.blackachievementmonth.nl/over-ons/>; Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> The diversity and inclusion initiatives at the University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University have been under fire for either being perceived as too drastic or not drastic enough. More can be read here: Dan Afrifa, "'Diversiteit op de UvA betekent witte vrouwen aan een baan helpen'," *Folia*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.folia.nl/actueel/136595/diversiteit-op-de-uva-betekent-witte-vrouwen-aan-een-baan-helpen>; Annelies Waterlander, "Onderwijsminister: 'diversiteitsbeleid UU eigen verantwoordelijkheid'," *DUB*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.dub.uu.nl/nl/nieuws/onderwijsminister-diversiteitsbeleid-uu-eigen-verantwoordelijkheid>.



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and Amateur Art (Landelijk Kenniscentrum voor Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst: LKCA) and NO&B also works with several institutions outside of Amsterdam like Fluxus and Agora (Zaandam), Artiance (Alkmaar), Cultuurbrigade (Heemskerk), Pier K (Hoofddorp), KUVU (Woerden) and 't Hart (Haarlem).<sup>23</sup> Other partners are the EYE film museum, the Balletorkest, Nexus and the School of Life, among many others.<sup>24</sup> Within cultural partnerships; there appears to be more of an emphasis on diversity. This is proven by alliances with the Leerorkest in Amsterdam Southeast, which aims to make music education more accessible and democratic by creating orchestral projects for economically disadvantaged children.<sup>25</sup> But, also by the inclusive venue and diverse programming of Stichting Multicultureel Podium Mozaïek, the collaboration with the black-led museological platform OSCAM and partnership with inter-cultural theatre the Bijlmer Parktheater.<sup>26</sup> Also, the aforementioned LKCA and Mocca centralise diversity and inclusion, and DNO asked for help from urban performing arts centre RIGHTABOUTNOW regarding works in which African or Caribbean culture plays a part.<sup>27</sup> The smaller educational companies do not all have diversity statements, for example, Artiance, Cultuurbrigade, Pier K, Kuvo and 't Hart do not, but others like Fluxus, Agora, Motion Dance Studio and Muziekschool Aslan do centre diversity and inclusion.

This category seems to be the most successful of all in terms of providing DNO with more diversity. There does not, however, appear to be a straight line in which the diversity is increasing. Partner diversity within this category increases between season 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 but then drops again in 2020/2021.

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<sup>23</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2017 Annual Report, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, p. 44; Leerorkest, "Visie en doelen," *Leerorkest*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.leerorkest.nl/nl/over-ons/visie-en-doelen>.

<sup>26</sup> Podium Mozaïek, "Over Podium Mozaïek," *Podium Mozaïek*, accessed July 8, 2020, <https://www.podiummozaiek.nl/over-ons/organisatie>; OScam, "About Us," *OSCAM*, accessed July 8, 2020, <https://www.oscam.nl/about/>; Bijlmer Parktheater, "Over ons," *Bijlmer Parktheater*, accessed July 8, 2020, <https://www.bijlmerparktheater.nl/nl/over-ons>.

<sup>27</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 47.

## Conclusion

Through this chapter, I aimed to explore the diversity of NO&B's partners. The categorisation of NO&B's collaborators shows that there are significant disparities between partner types. For example, most major business partners do not have a focus on diversity and inclusion and have a white workforce. There is no observable progression in diversity within this group between 2017 and 2021.

The subcategories of governments, private funds and corporate sponsors within funders and sponsors demonstrate a significant difference in diversity or the way these companies present it. The period between 2017 and 2021 also shows that there is very little change in funders and sponsors over the years—apart from Houthoff starting its collaboration with NO&B in 2018. This indicates that there has not been an increased focus on attracting diverse partners within this category, and this has not improved over the years.

NO&B's production partners—such as orchestral partners, opera houses and other cultural institutions—enforce NO&B's whiteness by not bringing diversity to the table as they struggle with their own whiteness or do not seem involved with the diversity question at all. Orchestras visibly amplify the already overrepresented whiteness in the theatre. Additionally, the prescribed orchestra partnerships limit the possibilities of complementary collaborations and shed light on the whiteness of the broader networks that NO&B is part of. Generally, this category shows many missed opportunities regarding diverse partners and the most significant cooperations pertain to HNB.

Most emphasis on partner diversity appears to lie on educational partners—comprising of educational institutions and cultural institutions—as this is the most diverse group. Still, within this category—as in all other partner types—there is no evident progression of diversity. Generally, partner diversity at NO&B seems to be very selective and not a criterion for all types of partnerships. Therefore, the strategy of becoming more diverse by having a variety of partnerships is not implemented successfully, and NO&B's whiteness remains enforced by their partners. Overall, this chapter also provides insight into the omnipresent whiteness in the Netherlands as

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many notable organisations discussed here do not actively engage in efforts of diversity and inclusion.

# Chapter 6: Positioning DNO

The last pillar I will discuss is positioning. This pillar is self-established by NO&B and is not related to the DIC. Positioning is a concept that comes from the marketing realm, and it comprises the perception of a product or service in the mind of the prospect with advertising as one of the primary means of communicating that image.<sup>1</sup> A central goal of positioning is to shape, change and manipulate thoughts and ideas that are already in the mind of the prospect instead of creating something new and different. According to Al Ries and Jack Trout, positioning works from the premise that we live in an overcommunicated society in which advertisement is only effective when it responds to the prospect's prior knowledge and experience.<sup>2</sup> It should, therefore, be selective, segmented and focusing on narrow targets. Ries and Trout say:

Truth is irrelevant. What matters are the perceptions that exist in the mind. The essence of positioning thinking is to accept the perceptions as reality and then restructure those perceptions to create the position you desire.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of NO&B, positioning concerns the formation of the 'right' image around NO&B's product, service and organisation. NO&B's promotional materials are an essential aspect of its positioning. Therefore, I use this chapter to explore the visual promotion materials DNO used between 2017 and 2021 to examine how they promote an image of inclusion. Every production has one main picture or short video clip which is used in the season brochure, on the website, on social media and posters. For clarity's sake, I made a collage of the season's pictures in each section. I will discuss DNO's promotional images by season and connect them to the productions they represent and ideas about diversity, representation and whiteness. To draw a connection between diversity and whiteness in this chapter, I will particularly rely on the work of Sarah

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<sup>1</sup> Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, 10.

Mayorga-Gallo. She argues that institutional diversity is a racial ideology which preserves the structural status quo of white supremacy through four tenets of diversity—*diversity as acceptance*, *diversity as intent*, *diversity as commodity*, and *diversity as liability*—which address racial inequality by valuing diversity while reinscribing systemic whiteness by centring white people’s feelings and desires.<sup>4</sup>

### Talking Positioning

In the period between 2017 and 2021, NO&B actively changed its positioning by updating its marketing strategy. They were working on it during 2018, and it was fully implemented by 2019. Their new strategy can be traced in their annual reports. In 2018, NO&B was already represented as ‘a place to be’, an ‘open and accessible place where there is always something to do’.<sup>5</sup> In the 2019 report, NO&B voices its positioning and the way this strategy is executed. They state:

In one word, the strategy is “Open”. The focus is on accessibility in which it is important to make world-class opera and ballet accessible to everyone. Within this concept, the idea of ‘Open’ is connected to emotion, being touched. A collaboration with photographer and artist Florian Joahn and stylist JeanPaul Paula is started who made quirky, inclusive campaign images for the season 2019-2020.<sup>6</sup>

It is noteworthy that NO&B presents their campaign images as an essential aspect of disseminating the new positioning strategy. The strategy itself echoes Sarah Mayorga-Gallo’s concept of *diversity as acceptance*. Diversity as acceptance celebrates differences based on race, gender, ethnicity, among other differences. According to Mayorga-Gallo, this is modelled by visible representation or general calls of inclusion like ‘everyone is welcome’.<sup>7</sup> By promoting

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<sup>4</sup> Mayorga-Gallo, 1790.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2019 Annual Report, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Mayorga-Gallo, 1795.

diversity as acceptance of people of colour, white organisations can tick the diversity box and maintain their whiteness.<sup>8</sup> This is in line with Sara Ahmed's argument of diversity efforts amplifying 'happy stories', and by that diverting from the actual problem of whiteness as I discussed in chapter 3.

### **Season 2017/2018**

The central theme of 2017/2018 was 'Fate and Awareness' (*Noodlot en Besef*) and the promotional pictures are shot by creative duo Petrovsky & Ramone—consisting of the white women Morena Westerik and Petra Van Bennekum.<sup>9</sup> The season's cover picture, as displayed in figure 7, which is used to represent the season as a whole, gives a very homogeneous white male image. The impression of this season becomes more diverse when looking at the collage of photos in figure 8, which portrays all of this season's promotional pictures. In these images, white people and particularly white men are still overrepresented. There are only 4 clear pictures that portray people of colour in the total of 16 photos representing 22 people. However, most of them do correspond with the diversity on stage. The images of *We Shall Not Be Moved*, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Les contes d'Hoffmann* all have casts of colour. Only *Das Floss der Medusa* has an all-white cast. A less clear case is the picture of *La morte d'Orfeo*, a production that stages people of colour and seems to represent a South Asian man on the promotional picture, but the image is not clear enough to know for sure. Generally, this season's photos do not particularly emanate a diverse and inclusive image and therefore correspond well with the lack of diversity within the programme of the 2017/2018 season.

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<sup>8</sup> Idem, 1796.

<sup>9</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2017-2018, p. 12.

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Figure 7. Season Cover Image 2017/2018

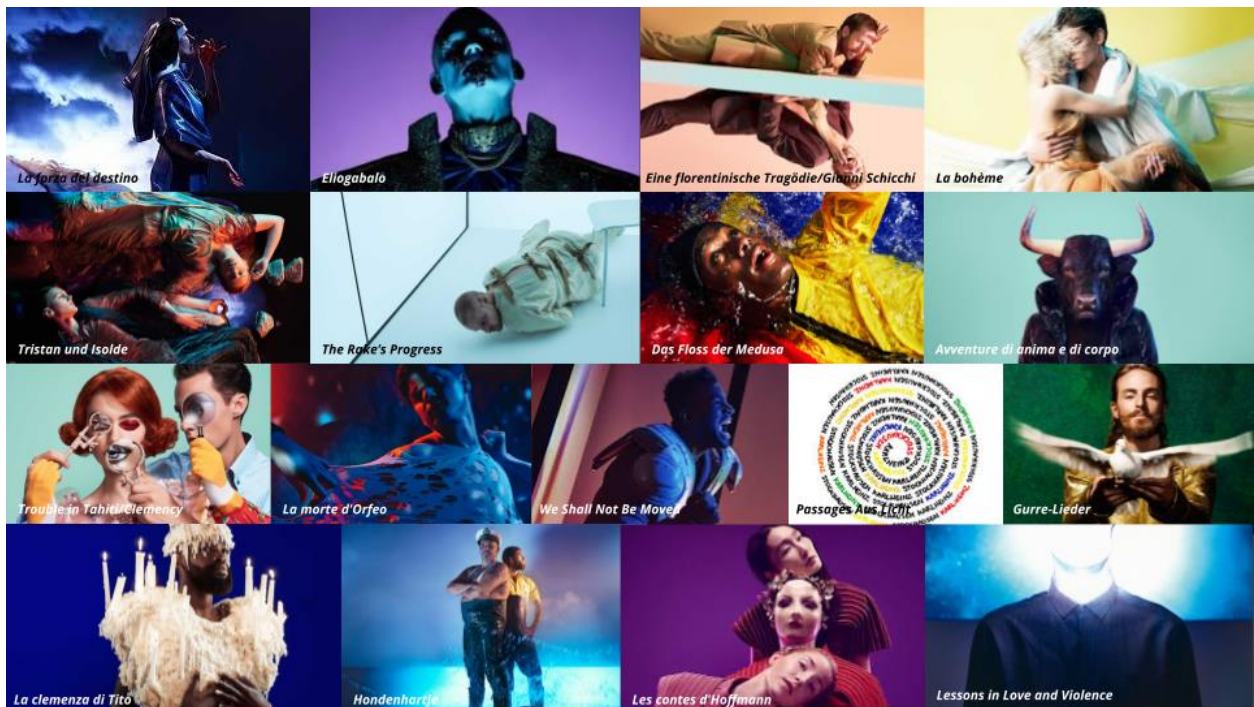


Figure 8. Promotional Pictures Season 2017/2018

## Season 2018/2019

The images of season 2018/2019, with the theme 'Identity and Confrontation' (*Identiteit en Confrontatie*), are also shot by Petrovsky & Ramone.<sup>10</sup> The cover photo in figure 9 already shows more diversity as opposed to the previous season both in terms of race, ethnicity and gender because a black man and an Asian woman are placed among the many white people in this picture. Concerning the overview of promotional pictures in figure 10, I find it most remarkable that there are only three images with people of colour in them. At the same time, this is the season that staged most people of colour of all seasons. This indicates that there is not much of a link between the diversity of the cast and that portrayed in the photos. The pictures of *Porgy and Bess*, *Tannhäuser* and *Madama Butterfly* portray people of colour, whereas *Caruso a Cuba* exudes a non-Western impression through the costume but remains somewhat ambiguous because the model does not face the camera.<sup>11</sup> Large productions with casts of colour such as *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Girls of the Golden West* do not show their diversity through the images at all.

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<sup>10</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2018-2019, p.12.

<sup>11</sup> The picture of *Madama Butterfly* also does not face the camera but it is a still of a video clip in which the character of Cio-Cio-San turns around and shows an East Asian woman — Nationale Opera & Ballet, "Madama Butterfly," *Nationale Opera & Ballet*, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/opera/2018-2019/show/madama-butterfly>.



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Figure 9. Season Cover Image 2018/2019

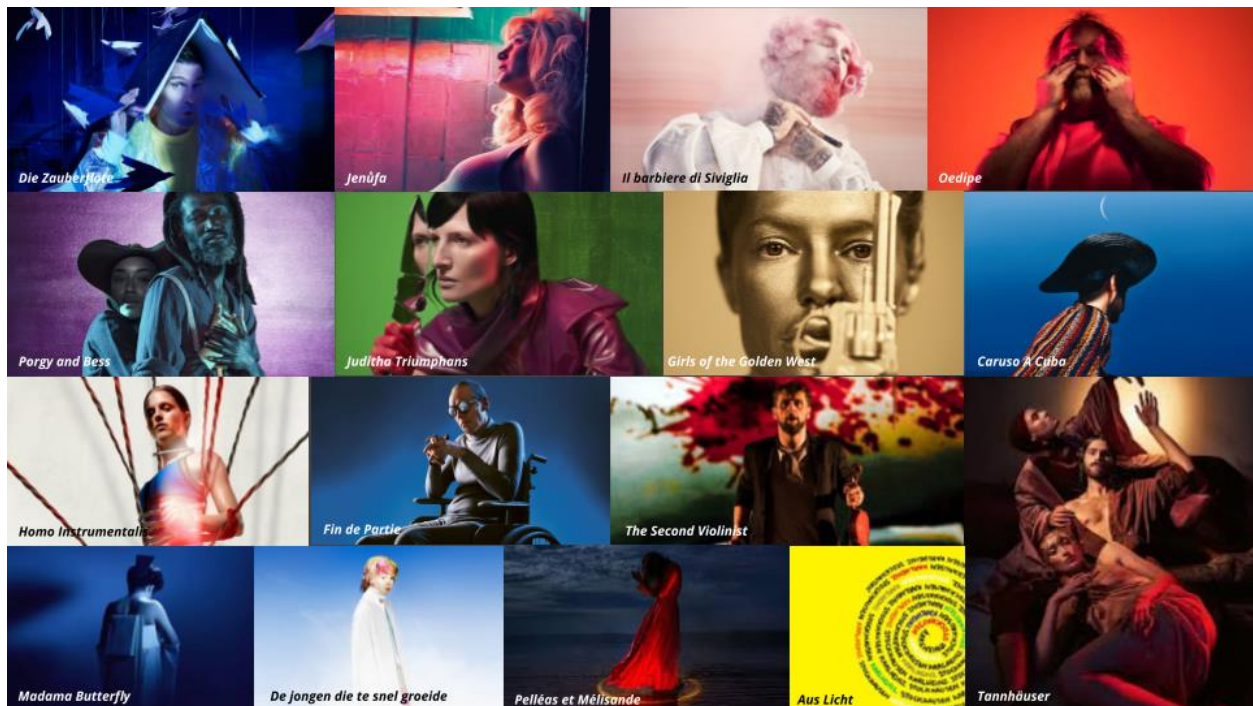


Figure 10. Promotional Pictures Season 2018/2019

## Season 2019/2020

The most significant shift in NO&B's portrayal of diversity occurs in the season of 2019/2020 themed 'Change and Wonderment' (*Verandering en Verbazing*).<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, NO&B hired the white German photographer Florian Joahn and the Curaçaoan-Dutch stylist JeanPaul Paula specifically to create an inclusive image of the company. The result is a giant leap from the previous two seasons. The season's cover, shown in figure 11, displays a very diverse image regarding gender, race and age. The collage in figure 12 shows that also religion (*Nabucco*) and gender queerness (*La Cenerentola*) are taken into account, and there is a particular emphasis on women of colour.<sup>13</sup> Out of the 16 promotional pictures, a staggering 11 represent people of colour. However, this does not correspond with the diversity on stage of the actual productions—as *Kriebel*, *Die Walküre*, *Nabucco*, *Das Jagdgewehr*, and *Het monster van Minos* contain all-white casts—or, with the fact that the number of people of colour in DNO's staff actually decreased this season as opposed to the previous season. 2019/2020's pictures demonstrate a case of *diversity as commodity*. According to Mayorga-Gallo, this type of diversity practice refers to the commodification of otherness—in this case, race—by whites. This tenet allows people of colour to be treated as objects and symbols instead of humans in order to benefit white people by providing them with a moral, white identity.<sup>14</sup> The commodification of people of colour is evident in practices such as asking people of colour to appear in advertisements as symbols of diversity while this diversity is not represented within the proper organisation.<sup>15</sup> Mayorga-Gallo argues that 'these mechanisms of faux inclusion dehumanize and tax people of color while maintaining the systemic whiteness of these institutions'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2019-2020, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> JeanPaul Paula himself is the model on the left on the picture for *Rodelinda*.

<sup>14</sup> Mayorga-Gallo, 1798-1799.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, 1799-1800.

<sup>16</sup> Idem, 1800.

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Another interesting aspect of the collaboration between NO&B and JeanPaul Paula was raised by the stylist and creative director himself in an interview with the magazine *OneWorld*. Referring to his cooperation with NO&B, Paula said:

Diversity is primarily a trick. It may seem like people of colour are becoming more visible, but there are almost always white people sitting at the controls. "Diversity" is alive because they have to tick a box. An example: Dutch National Opera who thought a series of campaign posters that I made for them to be "too black". It makes me wonder: then, why are you hiring me?<sup>17</sup>

In combination with this season's photo series, Paula's statement shows how NO&B negotiates their whiteness. They want to display diversity to a certain extent even if it does not reflect their own organisation or practices. Still, at the same time it has to be within the boundaries they define, through their white perspectives instead of providing the space for people of colour to represent themselves. This reveals the practice of *diversity as liability*, which enables white people and organisations to benefit from an inclusive identity while being able to engage with diversity on their own terms and set boundaries when feeling threatened by people of colour. In this tenet, diversity is embraced as an abstract form while it warns against the downsides like causing disorder or discomfort for white people.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Diversiteit is vooral een trucje. Het lijkt misschien alsof mensen van kleur zichtbaarder worden, maar achter de knoppen zitten vrijwel altijd nog witte mensen. 'Diversiteit' leeft omdat zij een hokje moeten afvinken. Een voorbeeld: de Nationale Opera vond een reeks campagneposters die ik voor ze maakte 'te zwart'. Dan denk ik: waarom huur je mij dan in? The whole interview can be read here: Ruby Sanders, "De dilemma's van JeanPaul Paula," *OneWorld*, May 5, 2020, [https://www.oneworld.nl/lezen/discriminatie/als-je-mijn-werk-te-zwart-vindt-waarom-huur-je-mij-dan-in/?utm\\_content=bufferebf85&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwAR1\\_SDPd0MPt2MXcH31VoR410\\_8XzwwBupqrKfS4FsP85xRsjlWpMxt9OT](https://www.oneworld.nl/lezen/discriminatie/als-je-mijn-werk-te-zwart-vindt-waarom-huur-je-mij-dan-in/?utm_content=bufferebf85&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwAR1_SDPd0MPt2MXcH31VoR410_8XzwwBupqrKfS4FsP85xRsjlWpMxt9OT).

<sup>18</sup> Mayorga-Gallo, 1801-1802.

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Figure 11. Season Cover Image 2019/2020

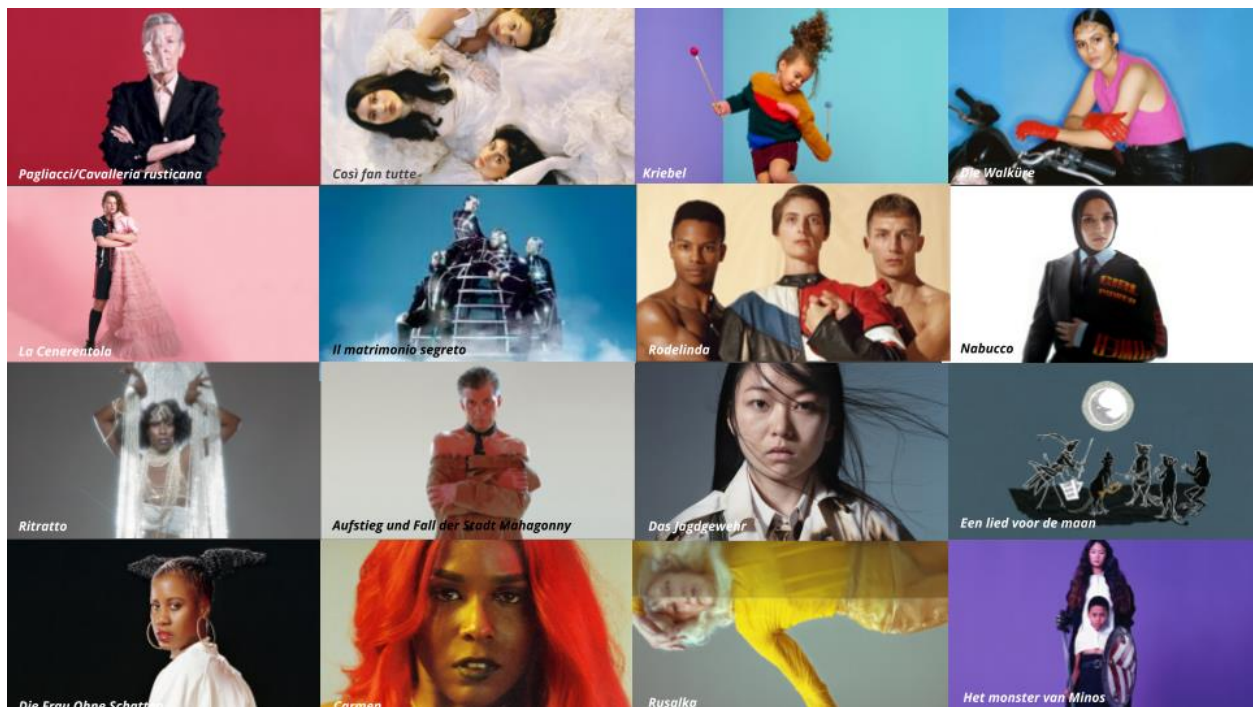


Figure 12. Promotional Pictures Season 2019/2020

## Season 2020/2021

Season 2020/2021's images are clearly going in a different direction. This season has 'Faust' as the theme, and the video clips are created by Jon Noorlander, a white Swedish motion graphic designer.<sup>19</sup> The season's cover picture, visible in figure 13, is a photo of NO&B's hall filled with a seemingly homogeneous white audience. Figure 14 shows that the graphic video clips depict abstract forms but mostly seem to portray women's bodies with 10 out of 15 videos representing women. The different body types in these abstract images, seem to be subject to some kind of racialisation process through which diversity can be traced.

The videos of *Agrippina* and *Der fliegende Holländer* contain female figures with very wide hips and large buttocks. These images could be inspired by the current trend of curvy bodies, or, perhaps they are informed by persistent representational practices of portraying black women with these body shapes. Even though black women have all kinds of body types, the representation of black women with wide hips and large buttocks is one that has been present in Western societies for a long time. For example, Gloria Wekker discusses the way that African women with protrusive buttocks, such as the South African Sarah Baartman, or, the 'Hottentot Venus', were exhibited at fairs in Europe to show racial hierarchy through the difference in body type.<sup>20</sup> In studying racialisation in neoclassical white marble statues, Charmaine A. Nelson argues that white sculptors portrayed racialised difference through sculpting black women with a voluptuous womanly body containing wide hips and full buttocks—among other bodily features—as signifiers of their race.<sup>21</sup> In today's world, these features are in fashion because they are popularised by celebrities like Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner, but they are still usually

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<sup>19</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, Seizoen 2020-2021, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Wekker, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 151-156.

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perceived as black body features.<sup>22</sup> This could mean that some of these seemingly abstract figures are created to look like black bodies.

Generally, it is remarkable that NO&B chooses to use these abstract images instead of actually representing the communities NO&B wants to attract. It seems as if they find it difficult to express their aim 'of being open to everyone' through an image of people. Another explanation could be that NO&B received some backlash from old-school opera fans on the previous campaign. I found some modest indications that this might have been the case. In the comment section of the blog *Basia con fuoco*, by music journalist Basia Jaworski, there are several responses to Jaworski's discussion of the programme of 2019/2020 that call the accompanying photos by Joahn and Paula 'hideous' and 'appalling'.<sup>23</sup> Also, the largest online opera magazine *Place de l'Opera* responded critically in their discussion of the 2019/2020 season by saying that it seemed as if photographer Joahn asked all of the models to look depressed or grouchy.<sup>24</sup> These responses indicate the friction between the wants and needs of the traditional elderly and white audience and that of a new young and diverse audience, and the way NO&B has to hover between the two in order to both attract a new audience but keep their loyal fanbase satisfied as well.

The step of choosing a different direction from the diverse visuals of the previous season indicates that NO&B uses *diversity as intent*. According to Mayorga-Gallo, this means an organisation showcases good intentions of those in power regarding diversity issues instead of the effects on marginalised people. Because the focus on visible representation depends on the opera company itself—and perhaps the opinions of the regular visitors—white feelings and intent

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<sup>22</sup> Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, "My body shape may be in fashion just now, but for how long?" *The Guardian*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2017/jul/30/my-body-shape-is-in-vogue-but-for-how-long-charlie-brinkhurst-cuff>.

<sup>23</sup> Basia Jaworski, "Seizoen 2019/2020 van De Nationale Opera," *Basia con fuoco*, February 19, 2019, <https://basiacofuoco.com/2019/02/19/seizoen-2019-2020-van-de-nationale-opera/>.

<sup>24</sup> Francois van den Anker and Jordi Kooiman, "Seizoen De Nationale Opera 2019/2020," *Place de l'Opera*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.operamagazine.nl/binnenkort/47171/seizoen-de-nationale-opera-2019-2020/>.

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are centred, systemic whiteness is reinstated, and structural changes and a focus on equitable results remain overlooked.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 13. Season Cover Image 2020/2021

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<sup>25</sup> Mayorga-Gallo, 1796.

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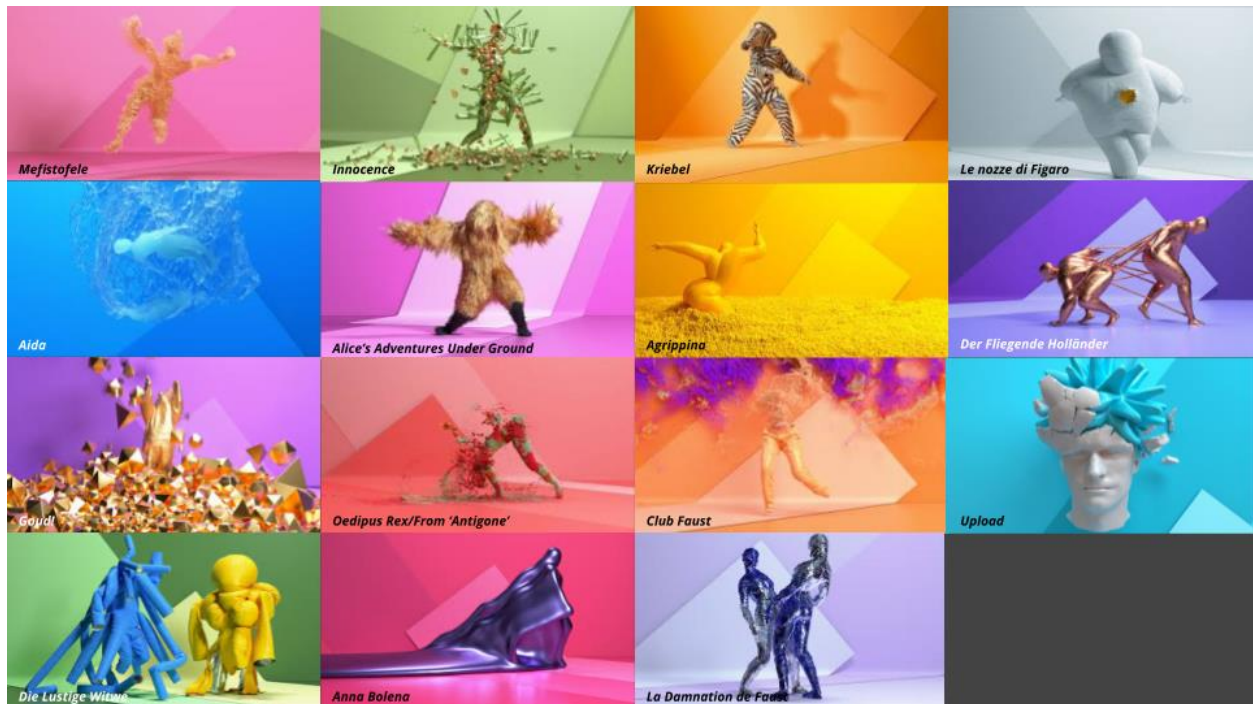


Figure 14. Promotional Pictures Season 2020/2021

### Conclusion

Within this chapter, I have looked at the way NO&B positions itself as diverse and inclusive through the promotional materials of the seasons 2017/2018 to 2020/2021. All of these promotional pictures across the seasons showed me that the image that NO&B tries to convey is very different from who they are as an organisation. As this chapter reveals, NO&B's positioning reinscribes systemic whiteness as formulated by Mayorga-Gallo.

The new positioning strategy of being 'open to all' illustrates NO&B's usage of diversity as acceptance. It seems like an easy way to present themselves as inclusive while maintaining their whiteness and avoiding having to thoroughly alter their organisation to become inclusive. This resounds Sara Ahmed's argument of diversity amplifying 'happy stories' and by that diverting from the actual problem of whiteness as I discussed in chapter 3. As the images changed from being very white to being very diverse to being very abstract, the diversity portrayed in the photos



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does not relate to the corresponding productions or the reality of the company at all—a discrepancy demonstrating how NO&B uses diversity as a commodity. The way NO&B employed a person of colour to do a shoot but then stating his work is ‘too black’ indicates diversity as liability because the company determines the boundaries of diversity and prioritises itself within this process instead of groups that are marginalised. By moving from a very diverse image in the season of 2019/2020 to an abstract image in 2020/2021—which also seems to represent black bodies—, NO&B lifts a corner of the veil regarding the tensions between pleasing their regular audience and drawing a new audience. However, it also shows that NO&B applies diversity as intent because the image of diversity can be altered on command without having any relation or commitment to structural change.

# Conclusion

Writing this conclusion in August 2020, the attention to the Black Lives Matter movement is starting to disappear from the social media timelines. It remains to be seen which positive changes emerge from the many promises made by organisations in June and July of 2020. In the case of DNO, becoming diverse and inclusive is pivotal to secure their funding for the next four years. It is therefore vital to look in the mirror and reflect on the past in order to bring about lasting change.

In this thesis, I have examined how the diversity and inclusion efforts of DNO in the period between 2017 and 2021 reflect upon the organisation's whiteness. As my study reveals, a whiteness which mirrors the international opera realm and is inherited from the Dutch arts sector and the Netherlands at large is deeply embedded within the structures of DNO. The diversity and inclusion pillars established by the Diversity & Inclusion Code (DIC) and implemented by DNO shed light on the different manifestations of whiteness within the organisation which continuously inhibit the organisation's aim of reflecting Dutch society in all layers of the organisation and letting all employees develop an inclusive mentality.<sup>1</sup> I will exhibit these manifestations by providing a summary of my chapters.

The first chapter provides the backdrop of this thesis by mapping the fundamental contexts that have shaped both DNO's current state of whiteness and their diversity and inclusion efforts. An outline of the contemporary public discourse from the international realm of opera demonstrates that DNO's diversity and inclusion initiatives are part of two larger international developments which originate from the realm's dealings with issues of whiteness. The first development concerns the rise of critique on opera staging and the second regards the increased focus on audience and workforce diversity. Additionally, I discussed critical aspects of Dutch dealings with race—formulated by Philomena Essed, Isabel Hoving, Zihni Özdil and Gloria Wekker—to shed light on how racism and whiteness are rooted in the Netherlands and often remain unaddressed. These comprise smug ignorance as an attitude of denial and ignorance

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<sup>1</sup> Nationale Opera & Ballet, 2018 Annual Report, 50.

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regarding racism, a narrow view on the definition of racism, Dutch exceptionalism, whiteness and Christianity as representing Dutchness, and the Dutch 'tolerant, ethical and colourblind' self-image. Mechanisms of exclusion such as these, seem to be anchored in the Dutch arts sector, and discussions about the domain's whiteness have shaped funding policies and initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion within the industry such as the DIC.

From the second chapter onwards, I have analysed DNO's programme, public, personnel, partners and positioning, being their pillars of diversity and inclusion. Chapter 2 reveals DNO's whiteness in the programme through a deficit in stories that concern, and are told by, communities of colour. This absence derives from DNO's view on programme diversity, which limits racial and ethnic diversity to the people performing on stage. The overwhelming whiteness of the 'big 4' (composers, writers, conductors and directors) enables cultural racism, smug ignorance, the myth of colourblindness and ideas about authenticity which support whiteness as a mechanism of exclusion through the practices of stereotypical casting and whitewashing. The examples of stereotypical casting and whitewashing show how people of colour are confined to particular roles while white people are allowed to represent anybody, even via degrading practices such as yellowface.

My discussion of audience diversity in the third chapter indicates that there is a large connection between the pillars of programme and public. This resounds in NO&B's views on audience diversity as stated in their annual reports and in the methods discussed by Morris Fred and Betty Farrell on how to attract ethnically marginalised communities. The annual reports also point to a convergence of the focus on a young and a diverse audience which operates in practice through the design of the programme, educational activities and youth organisations. It is the convergence of age and diversity that enforces whiteness as the programme, educational activities, and youth organisations all cater significantly more to a young, white audience than to a diverse audience. Within the public pillar, whiteness also emerges in the way that NO&B presents their audience online and uses bodies of colour as signs of diversity to create a diverse and inclusive impression; masking that their audience is predominantly white. Sara Ahmed warns for

these kinds of 'happy stories' which divert attention to the organisation's success instead of their problem. Lastly, whiteness is reflected in the way DNO unconsciously promotes cultural racism among their young audience employing racial stereotypes in *Prinses Turandot*. By converging youth and diversity, the latter is lost out of sight, and potential adult audiences of colour remain overlooked.

Chapter 4 pertains to DNO's personnel, a pillar that thoroughly influences all of the other Ps. My analysis in this section demonstrates that DNO's workforce is far from representing the diversity present in Amsterdam, and there does not seem to be an evident progression towards that goal. The emphasis on diversity differs strongly per population. Within the off-stage workforce, there is a minor but steady increase in the number of NWMB women. However, the numbers of NWMB people are meagre, and there is a lack of people of colour in leadership positions. This points to institutional racism as defined by Philomena Essed and whiteness as an orientation coined by Sara Ahmed by subconsciously providing better access, support and opportunities to DWMB people. The positions of power within the organisation—consisting of the board, the council of supervision and the 'big 4'—show that racial/ethnic diversity is not a distinct focal point, even though opera professionals argue that change needs to happen within these positions of power to be successful in other pillars like programme and public. There is an evident focus on gender diversity within the board, the council of supervision and the 'big 4'. Still, this progression is centred on whiteness as it only benefits DWMB women. NWMB women remain marginalised, and men of colour are disadvantaged. DNO prioritises diversity within the most visible category of stage performers and particularly among the soloists. The emphasis on diversity within this population, as opposed to others, operates as tokenism by diversifying where it is most visible and thereby masking the whiteness and the accompanying power structure remaining in place throughout the company.

In the fifth chapter, I explored the diversity of NO&B's partners. My assessment of the partners I categorised as business partners, funders and sponsors, production partners and educational partners reveals that there is no progression of diversity between 2017 and 2021 and

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there are many missed opportunities for complementary collaborations. The categories of business partners, funders and sponsors, and production partners do not seem to focus on diversity, as the organisations are predominantly white in staff and lack statements regarding diversity and inclusion. The production partners—such as orchestral partners, opera houses and other cultural institutions—amplify NO&B’s whiteness by not bringing diversity to the table and being occupied with their own whiteness. Orchestras visibly magnify the overrepresented whiteness in the theatre, and the prescribed orchestra partnerships limit complementary collaborations. Educational partners are the only ones that centre diversity but also within this group, there is no progression between 2017 and 2021. This chapter provides insight into the whiteness of NO&B’s broader networks and the Netherlands at large as many influential organisations do not actively engage in diversity and inclusion efforts or struggle with their own whiteness.

The last chapter addresses NO&B’s self-chosen pillar of positioning. In this chapter, I argue that NO&B’s positioning strategy reinscribes systemic whiteness. I rely on the concepts of diversity as acceptance, diversity as intent, diversity as commodity, and diversity as liability by Sarah Mayorga-Gallo to substantiate this argument. NO&B’s strategy of being ‘open to all’ illustrates their employment of diversity as acceptance which ticks the box of diversity and enables the organisation to maintain their whiteness. This is in line with my discussion of Sara Ahmed’s argument of diversity diverting from the actual problem of whiteness by amplifying ‘happy stories’ as I discussed in chapter 3. The promotional pictures show that NO&B uses diversity as commodity since the diversity in the photos does not relate to the corresponding productions or the reality of the organisation. The example of how NO&B treated JeanPaul Paula points to diversity as liability since they determine the boundaries of diversity and prioritise themselves in this process instead of supporting underrepresented groups. The promotional pictures changed from portraying predominantly DWMB people to depicting a more diverse image and ended with very abstract figures that seem to have racialised features. This development of imagery echoes diversity as intent since the look of diversity can be altered at any moment without a real

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commitment to structural change. Lastly, this chapter also touches upon the tension of negotiating between the regular audience and attracting a new audience.

This thesis reveals the racial structures anchored within DNO, which obstruct them from becoming a diverse and inclusive environment that reflects Amsterdam's diversity. However, my analysis of the organisation also provides insight into some solutions to this problem. A first step would be to acknowledge the severity of the problem, recognise that the state of whiteness is something that is constructed and maintained, and be open for real change even if it is uncomfortable. Several chapters in this thesis stress the importance of hiring NWMB people in positions of power. Now, DNO prioritises the most visible aspects of the organisation, such as the stage performers and the promotional pictures. Suppose they follow the advice of Morris Robinson and Kenneth Overton and actively improve diversity across the board. In that case, this will trickle down to the rest of the organisation and will advance diversity and inclusion within multiple pillars. As NO&B's general director Els van der Plas recently announced her resignation per 1 November 2020, this would provide an excellent opportunity to create change at the highest level.<sup>2</sup> Another vital aspect is to formulate clear definitions and develop goals and projects exclusively directed at people of colour alongside adopting an intersectional approach to avoid diversity aims that only benefit white women and white youngsters.

There are also limitations that I encountered in the process of writing this thesis. Since I conducted this research independently, I did not have access to DNO's input and unpublished documents. Studying their funding application and internal documents regarding diversity and inclusion aims would be valuable to establish how DNO strives to innovate. Additionally, DNO could provide insight into their diversity and inclusion measurements within all pillars. The wealth of information I aimed to process within this thesis made it very challenging to create a clear and concise structure. At the same time, the scope of this project forced me to make choices which led to the omission of relevant topics such as more profound reflections on my experiences at

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<sup>2</sup> Joke Beeckmans, "Els van der Plas vertrekt bij Nationale Opera & Ballet," *Theaterkrant*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/nieuws/els-van-der-plas-vertrekt-bij-nationale-opera-ballet/>.

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DNO regarding *Porgy and Bess* among other things, in-depth analysis of the programme and discussion of the Opera Forward Festival as a tool for attracting a new audience. One of the most considerable limitations in this project is probably my own whiteness. Not having to be aware of my race for a significant part of my life, growing up within the context of the Netherlands and moving through many white spaces such as the university; my own unconscious biases may have lead to substantial blindspots within this thesis. At the same time, these blindspots also provide opportunities for improvement.

My project can serve as a starting point for future research regarding whiteness and Dutch opera practices in many different directions. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I focused on providing the most elaborate view of DNO's practices within my abilities. A larger project would allow more space for theoretical reflection on these practices and a more detailed grounding of the topic within its respective contexts. Within a local context, it would be compelling to compare DNO's results to the other two prominent Dutch opera companies—Opera Zuid and The Dutch Touring Company (De Nederlandse Reisopera)—to see how Dutch whiteness plays out within and outside of the metropolis of Amsterdam. Another possible direction could be to equate DNO to opera houses abroad that deal with similar issues to examine if there is some sort of global code of whiteness that pertains to the realm of opera. Studying this topic long-term would create the possibility to trace DNO's diversity, and inclusion aims throughout the next funding period of 2021 to 2024. And lastly, extensive research is needed to explore how opera companies can serve their communities in all facets. I would like to close with a citation from Karen Slack which perfectly captures what such a 'people's house' would feel like if the diversity of the community in all aspects is incorporated:

When I turn the house lights up, I'd like to see diversity in age, race, sexual preference. [...] I'd like to see all of us collectively as a community experiencing the beauty that is opera. And I'd like to see the community embrace their opera company and their theatre as the people's house. It is your house; this is your

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theatre, this is your orchestra, hall, this is wherever your art is being done, this is your house. And that when people walk through the front door, that they know that they have ownership over it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Long Beach Opera, "Equity and Diversity in the Arts - a Community Conversation by Long Beach Opera," *Youtube*, June 14, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5nScHjvln0&fbclid=IwAR0ky8JNuC954ia3aqb3xiT0O9Bqu7ct5VA3vzK\\_wRDdVBdCnvgBI34SCIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5nScHjvln0&fbclid=IwAR0ky8JNuC954ia3aqb3xiT0O9Bqu7ct5VA3vzK_wRDdVBdCnvgBI34SCIE).



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# Appendix

## Programme List 2017/2018 - 2020/2021

Opera	Season	Composed/ premiered	Composer	Writer	Conductor	Director
<i>La forza del destino</i>	2017/2018	1861	Giuseppe Verdi	Francesco Maria Piave	Michele Mariotti	Christof Loy
<i>Eliogabalo</i>	2017/2018	1667/1999	Francesco Cavalli	Aurelio Aureli	Leonardo García Alarcón	Thomas Jolly
<i>Eine florentinische Tragödie/Gian ni Schicchi</i>	2017/2018	1916/1918	Alexander von Zemlinsky/ Giacomo Puccini	Max Meyerfeld/ Giovacchino Forzano	Marc Albrecht	Jan Philip Gloger
<i>La bohème</i>	2017/2018	1895	Giacomo Puccini	Giuseppe Giacosa/Luigi Illica	Andrea Battistoni	Benedict Andrews
<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	2017/2018	1859	Richard Wagner	Richard Wagner	Marc Albrecht	Pierre Audi
<i>the Rake's Progress</i>	2017/2018	1951	Igor Stravinsky	W.H. Auden/Chester Kallman	Ivor Bolton	Simon McBurney
<i>Das Floss der Medusa (OFF)</i>	2017/2018	1968	Hans Werner Henze	Ernst Schnabel	Ingo Metzmacher	Romeo Castellucci
<i>Avventure di anima e di corpo (OFF)</i>	2017/2018	2018	György Ligeti/Raphaël Cendo		Francine Vis/Romain Bischoff	Nina Spijkers/Romain Bischoff

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<i>Trouble in Tahiti/Clemency</i> (OFF)	2017/2018	1952/2009	Leonard Bernstein/James MacMillan	Leonard Bernstein/Michael Symmons Roberts	Duncan Ward	Ted Huffman
<i>La morte d'Orfeo</i> (OFF)	2017/2018	1619	Stefano Landi	Stefano Landi/Angelo Poliziano	Christophe Rousset	Pierre Audi
<i>We Shall Not Be Moved</i> (OFF)	2017/2018	2017	Daniel Bernard Roumain	Marc Bamuthi Joseph	Viswa Subbaraman	Bill T. Jones
<i>Passages Aus Licht</i>	2017/2018	2017/2018	1996/2018/2019	Karlheinz Stockhausen		Kathinka Pasveer
<i>Gurre-Lieder</i>	2017/2018	1911	Arnold Schoenberg	Jens Peter Jacobsen/Robert Franz Arnold	Marc Albrecht	Pierre Audi
<i>La clemenza di Tito</i>	2017/2018	1791	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Caterino Mazzola/Pietro Metastasio	Theodor Currentzis	Peter Sellars
<i>Hondenhartje</i>	2017/2018	2017	Oene van Geel/Florian Magnus Maier	Erik Bindervoet/Robbert-Jan Henkes	Leonard Evers	Marcel Sijm
<i>Les contes d'Hoffmann</i>	2017/2018	1880	Jacques Offenbach	Jules Barbier	Carlo Rizzi	Tobias Kratzer
<i>Lessons in Love and Violence</i>	2017/2018	2018	George Benjamin	Martin Crimp	George Benjamin	Katie Mitchell

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<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	2018/2019	1791	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Emanuel Schikaneder	Antonello Manacorda	Simon Mc Burney
<i>30 Jaar Pierre Audi &amp; DNO</i>	2018/2019	2018			Carlo Rizzi	Monique Wagemakers
<i>Jenůfa</i>	2018/2019	1903	Leoš Janáček	Leoš Janáček/Gabriela Preissová	Tomáš Netopil	Katie Mitchell
<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i>	2018/2019	1816	Gioacchino Rossini	Cesare Sterbini	Maurizio Benini	Lotte de Beer
<i>Oedipe</i>	2018/2019	1931	George Enescu	Edmond Fleg	Marc Albrecht	Àlex Ollé/Valentina Carrasco
<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	2018/2019	1935	George Gershwin	Ira Gershwin/DuBose Heyward/Dorothy Heyward	James Gaffigan	James Robinson
<i>Juditha Triumphans</i>	2018/2019	1716/1717	Antonio Vivaldi	Iacopo Cassetti	Andrea Marcon	Floris Visser
<i>Girls of the Golden West (OFF)</i>	2018/2019	2017	John Adams	Peter Sellars	Grant Gershon	Peter Sellars
<i>Caruso a Cuba (OFF)</i>	2018/2019	2019	Micha Hamel	Micha Hamel	Otto Tausk	Johannes Erath
<i>Homo Instrumentalis</i>	2018/2019	2017	George Aperghis/Yannis Kyriakides/Luigi Nono	Selected by George Aperghis/Yannis Kyriakides/Luigi Nono	Romain Bischoff	Romain Bischoff

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<i>Fin de Partie</i> (OFF)	2018/2019	2018	György Kurtág	György Kurtág/Samuel Beckett	Markus Stenz	Pierre Audi
<i>Second Violinist</i> (OFF)	2018/2019	2017	Donnacha Dennehy	Enda Walsh	Killian Farrell	Enda Walsh
<i>Tannhäuser</i>	2018/2019	1845	Richard Wagner	Richard Wagner	Marc Albrecht	Christof Loy
<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	2018/2019	1904	Giacomo Puccini	Giuseppe Giacosa/Luigi Illica	Jader Bignamini	Robert Wilson
<i>De jongen die te snel groeide</i>	2018/2019	1982/2019	Gian Carlo Menotti	Gian Carlo Menotti	Leonard Evers	Maria Lamont
<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i>	2018/2019	1898	Claude Debussy	Claude Debussy/Maurice Maeterlinck	Stéphane Denève	Olivier Py
<i>Aus Licht</i>	2018/2019	1980	Karlheinz Stockhausen	Karlheinz Stockhausen	Kathinka Pasveer	Pierre Audi
<i>Pagliacci/Cavalleria rusticana</i>	2019/2020	1892/1890	Ruggiero Leoncavallo/Pietro Mascagni	Ruggiero Leoncavallo/Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, Guido Menasci	Lorenzo Viotti/Aldert Vermeulen	Robert Carsen
<i>Così fan tutte</i>	2019/2020	1789	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Lorenzo da Ponte	Ivor Bolton	Jossi Wieler/Sergio Morabito

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<i>Kriebel</i>	2019/2020	2019	Leonard Evers	Leonard Evers		Caecilia Thunnissen
<i>Die Walküre</i>	2019/2020	1856	Richard Wagner	Richard Wagner	Marc Albrecht	Pierre Audi
<i>La Cenerentola</i>	2019/2020	1816	Gioachino Rossini	Jacopo Ferretti	Daniele Rustioni	Laurent Pelly
<i>Il matrimonio segreto</i>	2019/2020	1792	Domenico Cimarosa	Giovanni Bertati	Gianluca Capuano	Monique Wagemakers
<i>Rodelinda</i>	2019/2020	1719	Georg Friedrich Händel	Nicola Francesco Haym	Riccardo Minasi	Claus Guth
<i>Nabucco</i>	2019/2020	1842	Giuseppe Verdi	Temistocle Solera	Maurizio Benini	Andreas Homoki
<i>Ritratto</i> (OFF)	2019/2020	2020	Willem Jeths	Frank Siera	Geoffrey Paterson	Marcel Sijm
<i>Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny</i> (OFF)	2019/2020	1930	Kurt Weill	Bertolt Brecht	Markus Stenz	Ivo van Hove
<i>Das Jagdgewehr</i> (OFF)	2019/2020	2018	Thomas Larcher	Friederike Gösweiner	Michael Boder	Karl Markovics
<i>Een lied voor de maan</i> (OFF)	2019/2020	2020	Mathilde Wantenaar	Willem Bruls		Béatrice Lachaussée
<i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i>	2019/2020	1919	Richard Strauss	Hugo von Hofmannsthal	Marc Albrecht	Katie Mitchell
<i>Carmen</i>	2019/2020	1875	Georges Bizet	Ludovic Halévy/Henri Meilhac	Robert Carsen	Andrés Orozco-Estrada

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<i>Rusalka</i>	2019/2020	1901	Antonín Dvořák	Jaroslav Kvapil	Jakub Hruša	Philipp Stölzl
<i>Het monster van Minos</i>	2019/2020	2015	Jonathan Dove	Alasdair Middleton	Aldert Vermeulen	Marie-Ève Signeyrole
<i>Mefistofele</i>	2020/2021	1868	Arrigo Boito	Arrigo Boito	Marco Armiliato	Tatjana Gürbaca
<i>Innocence</i>	2020/2021	2020	Kaija Saariaho	Sofi Oksanen	Susanna Mälkki	Simon Stone
<i>Kriebel</i>	2020/2021	2019	Leonard Evers	Leonard Evers		Caecilia Thunnissen
<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	2020/2021	1786	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Lorenzo Da Ponte	Riccardo Minasi	David Bösch
<i>Aida</i>	2020/2021	1871	Giuseppe Verdi	Antonio Ghislanzoni	Andrea Battistoni	Dmitri Tcherniakov
<i>Alice's Adventures Under Ground</i>	2020/2021	2016	Gerald Barry	Gerald Barry	Karen Kamensek	Antony McDonald
<i>Agrippina</i>	2020/2021	1709	Georg Friedrich Händel	Vincenzo Grimani	Ottavio Dantone	Barrie Kosky
<i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i>	2020/2021	1843	Richard Wagner	Richard Wagner	Joana Mallwitz	François Girard
<i>Goud!</i>	2020/2021	2012	Leonard Evers	Flora Verbrugge	Leonard Evers	Waut Koeken
<i>Oedipus Rex/From 'Antigone' (OFF)</i>	2020/2021	1927/2021	Igor Stravinsky/Samy Moussa	Jean Cocteau	Erik Nielsen	Wayne McGregor

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<i>Club Faust</i> (OFF)	2020/2021	2021	Franz Schubert/ Charles Gounod/ Luke Deane		Romain Bischoff	Belle van Heerikhuizen
<i>Upload</i> (OFF)	2020/2021	2021	Michel van der Aa	Michel van der Aa	Otto Tausk	Michel van der Aa
<i>Die Lustige Witwe</i>	2020/2021	1905	Franz Lehàr	Viktor Léon/ Leo Stein	Marko Letonja	Christof Loy
<i>Anna Bolena</i>	2020/2021	1830	Gaetano Donizetti	Felice Romani	Enrique Mazzola	Jetske Mijnsen
<i>La Damnation de Faust</i>	2020/2021	1846	Hector Berlioz	Hector Berlioz/ Almiere Gandonnière	François-Xavier Roth	Calixto Bieito