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Night spaces and stories of the Cape Verdean diaspora in the Netherlands: Belonging and cultural activism

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the significance of night-time spaces associated with the Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam, home to the third largest Cape Verdean diaspora in the world. Through interdisciplinary approaches including interviews with key figures in music production and nightlife, mapping of key historical and contemporary sites, and close analysis of artefacts and music lyrics, this article considers how music practices of huge historical and cultural significance have been deeply embedded in the night-time cartography of the city. Following Doreen Massey's formulations, it considers urban space as a mobile junction of historical, sociopolitical and cultural layers, in constant transformation, and argues that night-time spaces were, and continue to be, integral to the development of a political-cultural consciousness among the Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam, in colonial and postcolonial contexts. These discussions are also relevant given current debates on the value of the 'night-time economy' in Rotterdam's post-industrial landscape.

KEYWORDS

migration
urban night
diasporic cultures
music making
Rotterdam
nocturnal aesthetics

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INTRODUCTION

Rotterdam, Europe's largest harbour and the Netherlands' second urban centre, is one of the world's superdiverse cities (Scholten et al. 2019). This label reflects a social make-up developed from a long history of migration, whereby people of native descent are now a minority group alongside a number of different migrant communities. This also entails a marked increase in diversity within each of these groups (e.g. in terms of generations, social status and education) (2019: 4). Against this setting, this post-industrial city is also home to a substantial Cape Verdean community, which originally began settling in the Netherlands in the 1950s, with migration gaining pace in the 1960s, as the anti-colonial struggles that ultimately led to Cape Verde's 1975 independence from Portugal were brewing. This article will consider the Cape Verdean migration to the Netherlands in its deep connection with the city of Rotterdam, focusing on the significance and role of the city's night-time spaces in relation to the largely overlooked history of the community's cultural and political activism and development of a sense of belonging. Musical production is deeply associated with the history of Rotterdam's Cape Verdean diaspora and will form a key focus of this article. Indeed, spaces associated with night-time cultural production have had a particularly strong link to music practices, as venues for sharing and playing music, as well as producing it. Moreover, the spaces we investigate here have been crucial for the construction of a common collective in which shared histories and experiences are conveyed through a shared imagination, often transmitted through music.

Indeed, drawing on Stahl and Bottà's work, we argue that at night 'new patterns of belonging are choreographed through music's role in galvanizing these experiences around shared activities and spaces', emphasizing that music functions as 'an organizing principle for socializing' (2019: 3). From the perspective of this study, this is particularly relevant for the context of migration and diaspora. Belonging is developed in relation to certain social locations through a sense of identity connected to categories such as race, nationality or gender and relates to 'what is required from a specific person for him/her to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging, to the collectivity' (Yúval-Davis 2006: 209). According to Ehrkamp, migrants 'engage in creating places, transforming the urban landscape of contemporary cities' that involve 'symbolic and material expressions of local and translocal connections' (2010: 361). Music practices, and the spaces in which these play out, are deeply involved in developing, remembering and honouring these connections.

The research undertaken here is inscribed in the large-scale European research project 'Night spaces: Migration, culture and integration in Europe' (NITE), which focuses on urban night spaces as they are mobilized around diverse migrant communities.¹ Following Williams (2008), we understand 'night spaces' as culturally mediated and socially produced; inscribed in urban contexts that are mobile junctions of historical, sociopolitical and cultural layers, in constant transformation (Massey 1991).

Thus, looking beyond traditional associations of the night with potential criminality or disorder, this research identifies the night and nocturnal spaces as being something of a 'blind spot' in the studies on migration and urban space despite playing an integral part in how cities are experienced and narrated. Indeed, in connection with the city of Rotterdam and its Cape Verdean heritage and contemporary identity, this article acknowledges night spaces as important sites of memory, crisis and regeneration, as we look at selected case studies in historical and contemporary perspectives.

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In fact, beginning with the earliest arrivals in the 1950s, today's Cape Verdean community of close to 20,000 makes Rotterdam home to the third largest Cape Verdean diaspora in the world after Lisbon and Boston. Cape Verdean migrants to the Netherlands gravitated, and still gravitate, in the vast majority of cases, to this port city, so much so that popular imagination has inscribed it into the cartography of the African country itself. The deep socio-cultural connection between Rotterdam and Cape Verde, an archipelago of ten islands, nine inhabited, off the west coast of Africa, has led to the city being commonly referred to as Cape Verde's tenth island.

Significantly, the Cape Verdean diaspora in the Netherlands has often been described by local authorities as 'silent migrants': hard working, traditionally out-of-trouble, but as a correlation to this also invisible. However, despite their reputation as 'silent migrants', the Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam has a long, yet still understudied, history of political intervention – much embedded in the city's cultural life 'after hours'. Indeed, since the early years of Cape Verdean migration, Rotterdam has been a hub of cultural production, most notably in the fields of music and performance, born out of diverse city night spaces around which (hi)stories of political activism have been mobilized. These, and the significant role of night-time public spaces as sites of community building and connection with the homeland, will be discussed in the sections that follow by homing in on some of the key spaces that have been instrumental in turning Rotterdam into the perceived tenth Cape Verdean island.

The first section of this article focuses on the history of Djunga de Biluca, one of the pioneers of the Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam and founder of Morabeza Records, the first Cape Verdean record label in the world. A key reference in the cultural history of the Cape Verdean diaspora, the Rotterdam-born label played an important role in the anticolonial struggle against the Portuguese, including through anti-colonial lyrics of resistance, and was fundamental in generating a sense of Cape Verdeanness in the diaspora. Morabeza Records' houseband, *Voz de Cabo Verde* ('Voice of Cape Verde'), was one of the first Cape Verdean groups to perform in a Dutch nightclub, La Bonanza. As will become clear, the emergence of a night scene in which the first-generation Cape Verdeans met, danced and mingled became essential to the strengthening of a sense of belonging. The second section analyses a contemporary community venue, *Voz di Rua* ('Voice of the street'), which from 2018 until 2020 hosted a variety of events directed mainly at the Cape Verdean community. Engaging with Massey's (1991) conceptualization of place, this section seeks to show how *Voz di Rua* actively sought to connect with the cultural and political activist history of the Cape Verdean diaspora in Rotterdam, as well as provide a space for community building in contemporary, intercultural context.

CAPE VERDEANS IN ROTTERDAM

The history of Cape Verde is intrinsically connected to the sea. Under Portuguese colonial rule, the islands served as a transit port of slaves from West African countries that were transported westward to the United States, Brazil and the West Indies. In the nineteenth century, escaping drought and famine, many young Cape Verdeans 'seized the chance to leave home in search of a better life as crew members aboard the US whaling ships that were beginning to arrive at the archipelago's protected harbours' (Halter 2008: 35). Against this background,

the tradition of maritime work gave rise to a particular pattern of migration that is visible in the places where Cape Verdeans settled over time, even in the (late) twentieth and twenty-first century: '[i]n many countries, Cape Verdean communities are concentrated not in the capitals or the largest cities, but in the principal port cities. Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Antwerp (Belgium), Hamburg (Germany) and Gothenburg (Sweden) are cases in point' (Batalha and Carling 2008: 16). In the case of Rotterdam, the 1960s saw an increase in the number of Cape Verdean men arriving to work at the harbour. The early arrivals had spread the word back home that Rotterdam was a good place to moor. Those arriving to the Netherlands were often driven from their homeland by poverty and political oppression, escaping mandatory military service, and attracted by the prospects of working at Dutch shipping companies. With the help of a network of recently arrived Cape Verdeans, newcomers were eased into life in the new city and quickly found a place to stay, eat and work.

CABRAL – DJUNGA DE BILUCA

The increasing resistance to the Portuguese colonial regime in the colonies eventually led to armed conflict – and the year of 1963 marked the launch of armed struggle led by revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral (1924–74) aimed at liberating both Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. Back in Rotterdam, the incipient Cape Verdean diaspora would serve as an important network of cultural resistance at this time. An important figure in this cultural struggle was one of the first Cape Verdeans to arrive in the Netherlands, João Silva (b. 1929), also known as Djunga de Biluca. Noting the growth of the Cape Verdean community, Djunga and his work partner Constantino Delgado (b. 1926) saw there was scope for setting up a boarding house for Cape Verdean seafarers, which Delgado later did, under the name Delta Hotel. Djunga meanwhile set up a store catering for all necessities at sea, on the ground floor of his house on the Beukelsdijk, in Rotterdam. Djunga also housed seafarers on the two upper floors, while he himself lived on the first floor. Cabral got wind of the network that Djunga and his companions had set up and of the support he was providing to his fellow countrymen.

In this way, the names of Djunga and others in the diaspora began circulating in anticolonial spheres (Gonçalves 2021: n.pag.). Indeed, Cabral had already become aware of the diaspora support network in Rotterdam as Djunga's reputation was consolidating. Stories of Djunga's rebellious streak against the Portuguese colonizers, especially during his military service, caught Cabral's attention, leading him to send two representatives of the anti-colonial movement to the Netherlands. However, rather than recruit Djunga to join the war in the colonies, Cabral encouraged him to support the struggles from the Netherlands by preserving and promoting Cape Verdean music and culture, spreading a message of independence. In this way, Cabral was acknowledging the importance of the diaspora in providing financial and moral support to the decolonial movement. Morabeza Records, the first ever Cape Verdean record label, was born as a direct result of Djunga's anticolonial drive. Founded in 1965, Morabeza Records, 'Morabeza' referring to the creole term meaning 'friendliness' and 'hospitality', was able to count on the collaboration of a number of high-profile artists who first recorded with the new Rotterdam label. These included no less than the grande-dame of Cape Verdean music, Cesária Évora (1941–2011). Indeed, the label was instrumental in making Cape Verdean music well known around the world, beginning with the first album it produced, entitled *Caboverdianos na Holanda* ('Cape Verdeans

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in Holland') (1965). This compilation included a composition by Djunga himself, *Fidjo de Ninguem* ('Son of nobody'), which speaks of his rejection of Portuguese rule (Silva 2016: n.pag.).

These activities resonated with Cabral's well-known understanding of the political value of culture and the key role it should play in the construction of a national identity. In a speech delivered on 20 February 1970, at the University of Syracuse, New York, still at the height of the colonial conflict, Cabral explained how the foreign colonizer actively repressed cultural life and expression as a means to dominate the colonized populations:

History teaches us that, in certain circumstances, it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his domination on a people. But it also teaches us that, whatever may be the material aspects of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned.

(Cabral 1974: 1)

For Cabral, the promotion of culture was vital to the success of the 'liberation movement'. Indeed, the role of cultural life featured as a central concern in many of Cabral's speeches and texts delivered during the war of independence, in which he defended it as a crucial instrument of emancipation from the colonial yoke:

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture. Thus, it may be seen that if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.

(Cabral 1974: 4)

The need for culture was also emphasized by the movements in the Cape Verdean diasporas, within which migrants were educated and even recruited to participate in the colonial wars. In the context of the diaspora in Rotterdam, Cabral referred to the city as an important place for the cultural and musical development of Cape Verde. In a speech of 1969 before the party cadre of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), Cabral emphasized the significance of 'the mornas and coladeiras that have been composed, inspired on our struggle, lifting high our party, the name of our courageous fighters' (Cabral cited in Cidra 2018: 441). Cabral was alluding to a set of cultural expressions arising in the forests of Guinea at the moment of the armed struggle and presented in diplomatic meetings (such as poetry, storytelling, theatre plays, music and dance), but also to the recording of Cape Verdean music in Rotterdam. In this context, the recording of the Cape Verdean musical genres of *morna* and *coladeira* became a means to spread the nationalist claims to self-determination as a 'cultural act' (2018: 441).

ROTTERDAM RECORDINGS: MORABEZA RECORDS

Casa Silva – later renamed Morabeza Records – was founded after the Cape Verdean nationalist Abílio Duarte (1931–96) visited Rotterdam. As an

2. Even though *Caboverdianos na Holanda* was recorded instrumentally, several compositions actually have corresponding lyrics.

important figure in the PAIGC, he and Djunga discussed the idea of recording music albums. The idea of recording was born out of the musical gatherings that had been taking place at Djunga's home, mixing music-making and get-togethers. With members of this early group of musicians, such as the renowned artists Frank Cavaquinho (1927–93) and Tazinho (1932–2017), the LP *Caboverdianos na Holanda* was recorded, initially under the Casa Silva label, which later became Morabeza Records. The musicians involved formed the band Voz de Cabo Verde, busy in other employment during the day and recording music often at night and at weekends. One of the main issues in the productions of Morabeza Records was defining what is Cape Verdean, and what it means to be Cape Verdean, as explained by the current curator of the label, Carlos Gonçalves:

Morabeza is Cape Verdean music, morna is Cape Verdean. In search of what distinguishes the Cape Verdean, the creole language, literature, poetry, all these came together in Morabeza's music. They sang in creole, they sang about the nostalgia for Cape Verde, about the Cape Verdean traditions and history, the feeling of being Cape Verdean, they were distinguishing themselves. The poetry telling stories of the famine, the misery that was experienced, all these were themes in morna.

(Gonçalves 2021: n.pag.)

The *mornas* recorded by Morabeza expressed an independent sense of Cape Verdeanness, distinct from the colonizer's ideals, often carrying hidden messages, such as the pain experienced under colonial yoke and the desire for an independent nation. The album cover of *Caboverdianos na Holanda* carries such a message, through the image of the combative, clenched fist holding up the maracas in a sign of cultural and political defiance.

The instrumental album contained classic *mornas*, as well as newly produced compositions, the titles of which were deliberately ambiguous, leading to possible political double meanings. One composition, *Bô Tem Carinha di Bô Mãe* ('You have affection for your mother'), refers to Cape Verde as motherland: '[t]he songs released by Morabeza often hid secret messages',² says Gonçalves: '[a] text about the love for your mother was actually about the love for your motherland. For example, Cape Verdeans were called upon via music to unite and fight for their country, without arousing the suspicion of the Portuguese' (2021: n.pag.). Another song on the album, *Otarde o Nunca* ('Late or never'), is an obvious reference to the struggle for independence that had started after more than 500 years of colonization. On the back cover, Djunga describes the sentiment of Cape Verdean music:

Cape Verdean music has a painful feeling. Why? Because it is in our songs that we express what the mouth does not say, what the hand does not write. Muted anger, muted grief, muted despair, words of faith that have never been spoken, and confessions that die in the throat. All of this is delirious.

(Silva 1965: n.pag., translation added)

As these words suggest, the back cover of *Caboverdianos na Holanda* conveys the importance of music for Cape Verdean culture. Silva speaks cautiously about the oppression in the islands, about a sense of injustice that is simmering and that cannot be spoken about out loud. As the productions of Morabeza

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Figure 1: Caboverdianos na Holanda album cover, 1965. Copyright Morabeza Record Int.

were prohibited in Cape Verde, there was not a large market for the label given that communities in Europe were still relatively small. Djunga paid for studios, artists and press, but it was not a lucrative business. Indeed, despite Morabeza playing an important role from a cultural point of view, aiding in the socialization of the community, it was unfortunately not a commercial success (Gonçalves 2021: n.pag.). As Djunga himself reveals,

The LPs were sold sparingly, I had them pressed in editions of no more than 1000 copies. I paid the orchestra 6,000 guilders, the studio 400 guilders an hour, the sound engineer 200 guilders an hour. Then there were the factory costs for the pressing. They were albums with a price of ten guilders, which also did not sell.

(Silva 2016: n.pag., translation added)



Figure 2: Mechê album cover, 1969. Copyright Morabeza Record Int.

In the late 1960s, Djunga was able to secure a contract for Voz de Cabo Verde as the houseband for the South American themed nightclub 'La Bonanza' in Rotterdam, where Voz de Cabo Verde played every night for about a year. This was a turning point in the professionalization of the group, which from then on was in a position to solely focus on music. As the group's musical fortune took off, it was clear that some of the members of Voz de Cabo Verde did not support the issue of independence and the politics surrounding Morabeza Records' activities:

Some were aware of what was happening, but there were also musicians who were completely unconcerned about independence. Bana, for

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example, was Portuguese, and did not like it.³ He was only busy making music and did not like all that independence business, and neither did Morgadinho. For them it was just about the music, and the story about independence was not important, they were not concerned with that. In fact, some of them were not pro-independence at all.

(Gonçalves 2021: n.pag.)

Yet, while for some of Voz de Cabo Verde's members the main reason for playing was professional and not political, there were other members who were more conscious of the political situation and supported independence. Indeed, Voz de Cabo Verde and Morabeza Records undoubtedly played an important role in capturing and promoting a unique cultural identity distinct from that of the oppressors at a time of great political upheaval, both through recordings and performances. As Morgadinho (b. 1932) recalls,

There were many Cape Verdean mariners in the Netherlands, due to the merchant navy, and since Cape Verdeans are very fond of music, they would listen to good groups (at the time the Italians predominated). So, they felt a great pride knowing that a group from Cape Verde appeared to show what we knew.

(Nogueira 2016: 377, translation added)

Performances and the space in which these were held became important for generating a sense of belonging in the diaspora. Not only was a cultural identity reinforced through music and lyrics, but a sense of 'us' was created by enjoying these cultural references in night-time venues.

The cultural identity of Cape Verdeans in the diaspora is a theme that would still resonate in more recent music by several composers. Some of these, such as Faria Júnior (b. 1948), would even use music to give explicit advice on how the night should be enjoyed by Cape Verdeans in the diaspora. In 'Viagem de Costa' ('Coast travel') (1986), Júnior calls for more attention to be given to the 'reality of our land' and to appreciate Cape Verdean nationality in the diaspora.

Bem escuta realidade de nos terra,	('Come listen to the reality of our land.
ka bo ser engrato dess manera	Do not be so ungrateful,
desd bo méte pe na estrangeiro	Since you set foot on foreign land,
ta toma ness pils, bo esquese se	Drinking pilsner, you're forgetting
bo e fidjo nacional caboverdiano	that you are a child of Cape Verde.
[...]	[...]
Ben brinca na nôte caboverdiana,	Come play at the Cape Verdean Night.
ben dança na baile popular	Come dance at our dance night.
se bo e caboverdeano,	If you are Cape Verdean,
bem relembra nos pikapada's	Remember our pikapada's,
e ka bo confunde funky ku	And do not confuse funk with your
nacionalidade	nationality.)

(Fortes 1986: n.pag., translation added)

3. Bana, also known as the 'King of Morna' and one of Cape Verde's great names, was the initial vocalist for Voz de Cabo Verde. Later, when Voz de Cabo Verde started playing at La Bonanza nightclub, Bana was replaced by Djosinha, who offered a broader repertoire. Bana moved to Lisbon, where he set up his own nightclub and a music store, later forming a band that was also called Voz de Cabo Verde. Morgadinho (Joaquim Soares de Almeida, 1932) first joined Voz de Cabo Verde as a bass player. When Bana left, and before Djosinha joined, he also performed on vocals. He later moved to Paris.

4. Luís Morais was a composer and wind instrumentalist who was a member of Voz de Cabo Verde.

The lyrics criticize a perceived distancing by some members of the community from Cape Verdean culture, in their adopting foreign practices, such as drinking pilsner, dancing to rock and funk music. The music later contrasts these practices to what it considers more 'authentic' Cape Verdean cultural expressions, i.e. *morna* and *coladeira*. Jacqueline Fortes (b. 1954), the interpreter of the song, mentions that 'a lot of people arrive here, they become part of an environment here, and they don't even listen to Cape Verde's music'. Therefore, one should not 'confuse funk with nationality': '[y]ou are Cape Verdean, do not think you're American or Dutch. It's to remember that this person is actually Cape Verdean' (2020: n.pag.). In 'Viagem de Costa', a more authentic Cape Verdean nightlife event is said to be the 'Pikapada', popular parties that are held to this day and that often continue late into the night and include live music and/or DJs.

CAPE VERDEAN PARTIES IN THE NIGHT-TIME CITY

Besides the recordings, the band Voz de Cabo Verde also played at various locations in the diaspora, including in Rotterdam. This history is also reflected in the album *Luis Morais em La Bonanza* ('Luis Morais in La Bonanza'),⁴ produced by Morabeza Records. The album features Latin American songs and the album cover adopts a stereotypical image: two men with ponchos and headgear seated on the floor, and a woman with a turban reminiscent of Brazilian star Carmen Miranda, thus playing with imagery of Latin American pop culture.

Voz de Cabo Verde also played regularly at Cape Verdean parties in the city. Certainly, in the early days of migration and around the time of independence in the mid-1970s, these events contributed to the socialization of the community. Parties were often organized by organizations involved in the well-being of the community, such as the Associação Caboverdiana, the Cape Verdean Association, which was also founded by Djunga.

Cape Verdean nights not only contributed to a sense of belonging amongst the Cape Verdean migrants by creating an environment for socializing, relaxing and dancing, but also played a key role in promoting the political ideas and aspirations of the Associação Caboverdiana and of other like-minded organizations. According to the sociologist António da Graça, besides its social and cultural role, the association also focused on promoting the political consciousness of Cape Verdeans in the diaspora. Some board members were strongly influenced by the political ideas of Amílcar Cabral. In the 1970s, an underground group linked to the PAIGC was formed in order to stimulate this consciousness (Graça 2010: 56). As João Silva states in his autobiographical book *De Ribeira Bote a Roterdão* ('From Ribeira Bote to Rotterdam') (2009), he and others who helped organize the community played an important social role, and for a quick socialization of the community they organized cultural and social activities, including sporting and musical events (Silva 2009: 120). It is clear that many activities were inspired by a political consciousness based on the PAIGC party's ideology, as Silva noted: 'Amílcar Cabral sent instructions directly to the PAIGC-cell in the Netherlands, which I coordinated, and which had as its mission to spread the Cape Verdean culture in the diaspora, to do everything to make sure it is preserved and nurtured' (2009: 131, translation added). In this respect, night spaces were fundamental in bringing a community together and 'out there' in order to create a sense of belonging.

In fact, within the Cape Verdean context, music spaces could function as safe spaces in which one found 'cultural comfort from the hostile world

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Figure 3: Luis Morais em La Bonanza album cover, 1974. Copyright Morabeza Record Int.

outside' and where the community was able to 'develop their own music and dance cultures' (Sedano 2019: 273). There, the colonial Portuguese cultural ideology could be questioned through alternative practices of resistance. As local music genres in Cape Verde were often prohibited by the Portuguese authorities, music styles such as *morna*, *coladeira* and *funaná* thrived in the diaspora. One first-generation organizer explained the role of *morna* in diasporic nightlife as follows: 'Cape Verdean people like music, *morna*, they like it because it expresses the feeling of the colonial situation in which we lived under the Portuguese. That's why these people left to find a better life' (Rodrigues 2019: n.pag., translation added). As such, music has functioned as a vehicle through which solidarity can be generated and information can be spread.

5. *Vers Beton* is an online magazine that focuses on topics regarding the city of Rotterdam, from a progressive standpoint.

HERITAGE

As discussed in the previous sections, both nightlife and stories such as those of Morabeza Records are important as a kind of frame of reference through which the common identity of the Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam can be understood. As Gonçalves mentions in an interview in the online magazine *Vers Beton*⁵ ('Fresh concrete'), the story of Morabeza deserves to be cherished and passed on. After all, it is an important cultural heritage, both of Cape Verde and Rotterdam. 'Stories like these can contribute to a community's self-image', as Gonçalves (2019: n.pag., translation added) points out. As of 2016, Morabeza Records' master tapes have been digitalized by the Rotterdam City Archive, making the music accessible online as well as providing historical context for the label. In 2019, the label was recognized by the Rotterdam Museum as 'Real Rotterdam heritage', a move which represents an important step towards recognizing the label as part of the memory of the city.

The importance of the label also lies in the fact that the careers of many of the most famous Cape Verdean artists took off in Rotterdam, thus born of nightlife: '[t]he discography of Cape Verdean music starts in the Netherlands. The careers of the greatest Cape Verdean artists, including Bana and Cesária Évora, started in Rotterdam' (Lizardo 2016: n.pag.). Morabeza acted as a springboard for Cape Verde's musical development. Following Djunga's enterprising spirit, running a ship store, a music label and transforming one floor of his home into a boarding house, as mentioned above, many other boarding houses also started music studios, greatly increasing Rotterdam's influence on the Cape Verdean music scene, opening up the music market and stimulating the further professionalization of the scene. A range of studios sprung up around the city: Brandão Records, José Mestre Records, John Pop Records, Black Power Records, Svk dos Reis Records, Manuel King Records, CDS Records, Giva Records, Atlantic Music Records, Wow Pow Music Studios and more. Rotterdam was the 'springboard' for the later development of Cape Verdean music, including new genres. Transnational networks of music-making, performing and distribution between the Cape Verdean islands and countries in the diaspora stimulated the professionalization of groups and artists and ensured a sales market and made it considerably easier for artists to record and disseminate their music (Cidra 2008).

CONTEMPORARY VENUES: VOZ DI RUA

The cultural and political activism that coalesced around Rotterdam's night spaces and that shaped much of the diaspora's early activities still reverberate in many of today's night-time scenes. Indeed, commitment to politically engaged cultural production resonates with today's younger generations' drive to shake off the label of 'silent migrants'. Perceived as carrying connotations of inaction and social invisibility – beyond the mere sense of steering out-of-trouble – the connotation of silent members of the city's diverse migrant communities is increasingly being thrown into question by the younger generations. We might think of the programme of talks, performances and storytelling events organized by the highly respected writer, storyteller, performer and talk-show host, Sonya Dias, for example. A second-generation Dutch-Cape Verdean, Sonya Dias hosts events that include interviews with Rotterdam Cape Verdean business entrepreneurs and cultural producers, as well as music and storytelling events on themes of migration and settlement in the Netherlands. Significantly, such broad programme of events is

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promoted through social media channels, often accompanied by the hashtag *#hoezostillemigranten* ('#whatdoyoumeansilentmigrants').

Indeed, the importance of the voice as a key marker of a contested Cape Verdean identity in Rotterdam – whether we consider this in terms of music production or other – is also poignantly imprinted in the name of one of the key venues and cultural enterprises to have emerged in more recent times. *Voz di Rua* (translated as 'Voice of the street') was founded by artists and entrepreneurs Lucio Nery – more widely known by his adopted artistic name of *Cikay LAS* – and David Ferreira, and between 2018 and 2020 represented a hugely significant landmark on Rotterdam's Cape Verdean night scene. For this period and until the COVID-19 crisis severely impacted on the venue's economic viability, *Voz di Rua* was a key reference on the city's Cape Verdean night scene. Doubling as a key daytime community cultural centre and night-time venue, home of what was, prior to the successive lockdowns of 2020, a monthly Cape Verdean Music Night, *Voz di Rua* hosted a diverse schedule of events that also encompassed talks by community leaders, local business entrepreneurs, storytelling events, book launches and theatre performances. In line with the vision of inclusivity that lay behind the original plan for the venue, events at *Voz di Rua* were held in Dutch, Portuguese and Creole, to ensure their appeal and accessibility to publics beyond the Cape Verdean community alone.



Figure 4: *Voz di Rua*, 2019. Sara Brandellero.

In her now classic formulations around definitions of place, geographer Doreen Barbara Massey encouraged a thinking of places beyond the notion of a bounded area, privileging instead an understanding of places as intersections, areas that ‘can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings’ (1991: 27). Indeed, envisaged in historical perspective, Massey conceptualized any place as a ‘process’, acknowledging its essence as linkage of social interactions over time, ‘which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local’ (1991: 28). Such understanding of places in terms of historicized and dynamic processes, as conceptualized by Massey, seems to be eloquently expressed in the materiality of the Voz di Rua itself, given that its scope and ambition resonate in a number of its interior and exterior features.

Situated in the neighbourhood of Delfshaven, area of the old port of Delft now part of Rotterdam’s post-industrial metropolitan spread, Voz di Rua’s two-storey detached building stood at a junction of the port city with historic associations to migration. A nod to the place’s migrant roots was made immediately apparent to those approaching the building by the names of the surrounding streets, including the *Mayflowerstraat* (‘Mayflower Street’) and the busy thoroughfare of *Pelgrimstraat* (‘Pilgrim Street’), on which Voz di Rua itself was located. Indeed, it was from these lands at the mouth of the river Maas that the Dutch had reclaimed from the sea that the seventeenth-century pilgrim fathers had departed bound for America. In a later period of the city’s migrant history, these same places witnessed the arrival of Cape Verdeans in increasing numbers, many setting up business close by. In close proximity, it is still possible to find the building that housed the aptly named Delta Hotel, where a number of first-generation migrants lived, as discussed above. In 2018, Cikay LAS, a Cape Verdean who had spent his youth in Portugal, and David Ferreira, a second-generation Dutch–Cape Verdean, took on the lease of the house on the *Pelgrimsstraat* with the aim to establish a ‘venue for the community’, providing a site committed to knowledge exchange and educational events, business promotion, a restaurant serving the renowned *catchupa* stew and other Cape Verdean delicacies, complementing a busy night-time entertainment schedule (Ferreira 2020: n.pag.).

Cikay had engaged with Amílcar Cabral’s legacy through his cultural promotion and educational network *Fidjus di Cabral* (‘Children of Cabral’), founded in 2003 (CK3Nation 2021: n.pag.). He had also already set up his other online platform Voz di Rua, when he and Ferreira came together through hip hop music making. Ferreira approached Cikay, attracted by the potential for expansion of what was then still Voz di Rua music production platform. From this new collaboration came the idea to open a new venue, and the decision was made to keep the name of Cikay’s (Costa 2021: n.pag.) original online platform since it resonated with their vision for a venue committed to supporting and providing a physical platform for the local community.

In fact, if the vision behind the venue was already implied in the image of the street inscribed in its name, the renovation of Voz di Rua’s building under Cikay and Ferreira’s plans made an open statement to carry on the diaspora’s engagement with social and political activism. The conscious preservation of the memory of the city’s connection to the anti-colonial and anti-racism struggles, the cultural visibility of the new generations and the promotion of intercultural exchanges within the contemporary Dutch context were all imprinted in the venue’s redesign. The detached house sitting in the middle of an open green space surrounded by social housing that has so far escaped

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Figures 5 and 6: *Voz di Rua* external mural, 2019. Sara Brandellero.

pressures from developers in Rotterdam's recent aggressive gentrification process in itself reinforces its commitment as a site of memory, resistance and regeneration.

When David Ferreira opened the venue in 2018, he commissioned local street artist Thijs Landsbergen to depict the historical connection with Cape Verde on the entire surface of the external wall, in an anything-but understated nod to the urban history of immigration, hard labour and cultural production from which *Voz di Rua* emerged. The eye-catching, brightly coloured mural includes a series of figures portrayed toiling in construction work, on the port of Rotterdam. This local reference is contextualized within the history of Cape Verde's struggle for independence through the depiction of the country's newly designed post-independence national flag. Between vignettes referencing life stories of hard labour, we see figures playing music, recognizing and celebrating Cape Verde's cultural contribution to the city.

Once inside *Voz di Rua*, the walls functioned as an archive of collective memory and intercultural solidarity. Images of Cabral sat alongside displayed record covers from Morabeza productions (including the iconic *Caboverdianos na Holanda* cover of 1965 referenced above), framed newspaper cuttings from visits of Cesária Évora to Rotterdam and other significant political and artistic occasions, as well as contemporary references to the ongoing struggle against racist violence. One such reference appeared in the form of the photograph of



Figure 7: *Voz di Rua* walls as archives of resistance, 2019. Sara Brandellero.

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Figures 8 and 9: Bridging divides in Rotterdam and Cape Verde, 2019. Sara Brandellero.

6. Marielle Franco was a city councillor for the city of Rio de Janeiro and a tireless activist against police brutality. On 14 March 2018 Franco and Gomes were shot in their car whilst driving through the city.

the highly respected Black Brazilian left-wing politician, feminist, anti-racist and LGBTQ activist, Marielle Franco,⁶ who was brutally assassinated in Rio in 2018 alongside her driver, Anderson Pedro Gomes (investigation still ongoing). Hanging alongside an image of Nelson Mandela, the photo of Marielle Franco seemed to crystalize Voz di Rua's commitment to pan-African solidarity, acknowledging the continued relevance of Cabral's legacy in defending culture as key to positive social and political transformation.

Notwithstanding the prominence Voz di Rua gave to such key cultural figures, it also reminded visitors of the contemporary city of Rotterdam's circadian rhythms. This was suggested by two large-scale murals of cityscapes painted by Dutch artist Ruud Kooger above the bar area, which visitors saw as soon as they entered the premises. One depicted the city of Rotterdam and its iconic Erasmus bridge. Next to it, a night-time scene showed a bridge jutting out from a seaside town towards another, out of the frame.

Considering Dunn's idea of 'the nocturnal city as an alternative frame for thinking and being' (2016: 62), Voz di Rua's walls crystalize the potential of the nocturnal imagination in murals. Ferreira (2020: n.pag.) explained that this night scene depicted the islands of Santo Antão and São Vicente in the Cape Verdean archipelago, which are separated by a 11 km channel of treacherous waters. There has long been mention of building a bridge linking the two islands between which trade is intense, although such plans have never materialized. Yet, it is poignant that the image of the bridge – one real, one utopian – should be central to both landscapes, reflecting the essence of Voz di Rua itself as a space that, Ferreira stated, 'tries to connect worlds' (2020: n.pag.), and where utopian thinking is possible.

Other features pointed to their vision. Ferreira explained that there is a Dutch saying that goes something along the lines of 'Uit hetzelfde hout gesneden zijn' ('We are made of similar wood') when referring to people with similar characteristics. In constructing the bar for Voz di Rua, Ferreira recalled that it was decided to use different pieces of wood to demonstrate that strength comes from diversity, 'we can all function as one'. Significantly, Ferreira noted the importance of using night-time hours to ensure that Voz di Rua was able to be an effective venue to support his 'vision to collaborate with other minds to create the world we want to live in' (2020: n.pag.). Indeed, organizing events 'after hours' was key to Ferreira's plan for a Cape Verdean venue committed to intercultural understanding. In this, Ferreira claimed to take inspiration from Cabral, who would organize parties and social gatherings at which he would identify like-minded people to join the revolutionary movement.

BRIDGING CULTURES IN THE CITY AFTER HOURS

The COVID-19 crisis has been devastating for many entertainment venues, and small independent venues such as Voz di Rua have been particularly impacted. In late 2020, it came under new management under the new name of Oliveira's, but soon proved to be a focal point for the community, despite the challenges still presented by the ongoing pandemic. Meanwhile, in Rotterdam, as elsewhere in times of pandemic, a number of online initiatives have provided virtual alternatives to physical cultural events in imaginative ways. Among them, for example, are the concerts organized by Dutch–Cape Verdean artist Lena Evora in the courtyards and balconies of different Rotterdam housing complexes.

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During the pandemic, the yearly celebration of *São João* ('Saint John') also moved (partly) online, being rebranded as 'São João Digital'. The festival, mixing both traditional and modern cultural performances, coincides with the religious celebration of *São João Baptista* (St John the Baptist) feast of 24 June, held every year on the *Heemraadsplein* ('Heemraads square'). The Heemraadsplein is strongly connected to the migration of Cape Verdeans, so much so that the square is also officially known by its creole name *Pracinha d'Quebrod* ('Square of the broke'), remembering the many hard-up Cape Verdeans who historically used this square as a meeting place.

The festival's editions during the pandemic included traditional physically held elements, such as the carrying of the statue of Saint John the Baptist to the *Pracinha d'Quebrod*, performance by a group of drummers and a man carrying a miniature ship around his waist symbolizing safe sailing for a traditionally seafaring people. The festival also included the dancing of the *Kola San Jon*, a kind of dance in which a man and woman traditionally collide their belly buttons and hips, in an act to symbolize sexual fertility, even though in pandemic times the obligatory 1.5 m distance was observed. In the online component of the festival, space was given to honour pioneers in the diaspora and those who have contributed to the well-being of the community. A special theme of the 2020 edition was 'Rotterdam', for which several artists were invited to play not only their own music but also songs telling the story of the lives of Cape Verdeans in Rotterdam. One such invited artist was Jacqueline Fortes, who, among other songs, interpreted the previously mentioned song 'Viagem de Costa'. The digital edition thus showed not only how the city was imprinted in music, but also how music was imprinted on the city, as experiences of urban life were vocalized in live performances.

Alongside the iconic São João, Cape Verdean Independence Day on the 5th of July is another eventful day that is celebrated in Rotterdam through diverse activities such as theatre, dance and music, in which connections are maintained with memories and narratives of the history of Cape Verde and the diaspora. One event that was hosted as an online commemoration was *Noite da Independência* ('Independence night'), a nostalgia-filled event marking the Cape Verdean independence from Portugal. Noteworthy was the reception of the 2020 online event on the Cape Verde islands. The event was broadcast in the evening on the independent TV channel T-Verde. Even though organizer Savannah da Rosa (2020: n.pag.) emphasizes that having to go digital was a setback, it also provided an opportunity to include educational components. One example of this was a first-generation boarding house owner in Rotterdam sharing his story of migration together with his son. In addition to Cape Verdean entertainment, digital events appropriate and share the history of the community as a way of commemorating and honouring its pioneers and seeking connection with a common cultural 'frame of reference'.

In times of social distancing, a recent collaboration between Cikay Las and celebrated Cape Verdean artist Princezito illustrates how open public spaces have provided a setting for artistic reflections on belonging and promotion of intercultural understanding. Their 2020 single 'Finarap' defends Rap as a contemporary incarnation of the Cape Verdean *Finason*, a traditional musical genre based on improvisation. The single's official video was shot in Rotterdam and opens with Cikay and Princezito discussing the origins of Rap through *Finason*, within the history of slave trade and resistance and its other musical antecedents around the world, such as the Brazilian *Repentista* music. Cikay and Princezito appear in silhouette as night falls on a Rotterdam waterfront skyline.



Figure 10: Screenshot 'Finarap', 2020. Cikay Las & Princezito.

The song that follows, then, is an attempt to debunk common prejudices against Rap that dismiss it as a 'foreign' genre, not authentically Cape Verdean: 'Finason é rap, rap é batukal/Finason é rap, rap é finason' ('Finason is rap, rap is batuku/Finason is rap, rap is finason') (Cikay 2021: n.pag.). In the lyrics, Rap expressed in creole is defended as strongly linked to a Cape Verdean diasporic identity, as Pardue has argued through his study of creole rap in Lisbon (Pardue 2015). In 'Finarap', Rap is inscribed in a diverse musical tradition that includes *batuku*, one of Cape Verde's oldest musical genres and one deeply rooted in a history of Black cultural resistance. Traditionally performed by women singing a capella, clapping and slapping cushions, the genre's embeddedness in the African diasporic culture meant it was frowned upon and repressed in colonial times.

In the 'Finarap' video, shots of nightfall in which the exchange between Cikay and Princezito takes place alternate with daytime shots of the artists performing, including with accompaniment of the Rotterdam-based *batuku* group Sima Nos e So Nos, in a nod to traditional musical practices associated with a history of cultural resistance. The camera is careful to capture a number of shots of the waters of the Maas river, visually contextualizing the diverse musical tradition of Rotterdam within the history of migration. Night and day alternate in the video, suggesting the night as a chronotope of creativity that spills into the day.

CONCLUSION

The Cape Verdean diaspora in Rotterdam has played a key role in transforming it into the superdiverse city it is today and is increasingly being recognized for its contribution to its diverse cultural identity. Today, as in the early days of the Cape Verdean migration history, what happens 'after hours' plays a crucial role in creating opportunities to preserve community memory and share personal and collective life stories. Whether in *La Bonanza*, *Voz di Rua* or in the open air of Rotterdam's waterfront as night falls, we can trace a poignant history of coming together that the cover of darkness and moments 'after hours' seem to foster particularly effectively. As we have seen in this article, early nightlife was inspired ideologically by Cabral's ideas on culture, initiating a movement

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of togetherness and the formation of a unique cultural identity in the diaspora in support of the independence struggle.

Traces, fragments and histories of this cultural movement still inspire and are adapted by contemporary artists who continuously cross (imaginary) borders of Rotterdam, Cape Verde and the diaspora. Looking beyond historical associations of night and darkness with danger, disorder and potential criminality, we have traced an alternative journey through night spaces that have facilitated the sharing of experiences of exclusion and fostered solidarity – nurturing and providing a (safe) space to share stories of belonging and intercultural understanding.

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