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Nightlife in the Cabo Verdean diaspora: the case of Rotterdam City

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Chapter 4: The routines of work life in and around the city

Mar mar. Rotterdão mês de frio.
Bia, cretcheu na coraçon,
Ness cartinha nha dor dorid e esse nô na peito
Hoje, ta bai ta bai, Assim assim, pa graça de Deus,
Manhã, pa norte, de largada p`esse mund fóra. Longe longe d-riba de mar.

Sea sea, Rotterdam in a cold month…
Bia, my sweetheart,
In this letter I describe the pain I feel and the knot in my chest.
Today it's going okay, sort of, thank God.
Tomorrow, to the North, off to the world outside. Far, far away on sea.

(Tito Paris 1996, translation added)

In the song above, having recently arrived in the cold city of Rotterdam, a Cabo Verdean sailor sits down and writes a letter to his loved one, Bia. He misses her dearly, and struggles with his loneliness, although today he feels 'alright'. Tomorrow he is off again to sea. In 'Cartinha d'Holanda' ('A Letter from Holland'), singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist Tito Paris[8] (b. 1963) describes the emotional distress that is part of the sailor's lifestyle experienced by many Cabo Verdean men in Rotterdam. It is a portrait of how some men must have felt when arriving to yet another foreign city after having spent months at sea. The city probably not only felt cold because of Dutch weather, but because of feelings of longing, non-belonging and absence felt on arriving to a distant and unknown place. This same sentiment comes forward in an interview with a sailor from the island of Santo Antão, who arrived in Rotterdam in 1974. When he finally went back to Cabo Verde he found that many of his family and friends had passed away:

> I felt loss every day.
>
> - You felt loss every day, what did you think of?
>
> I thought about the future, about going back and seeing them again,

[8] Tito Paris' birth name is Aristides José Paris. I choose to use the artist's name in this work because they are usually better known by these.

> alive and well. Luckily I found uncle Antoninho, Bibi, Mana. The others had passed. (Santos Lima 2014, translation added)

The above excerpt only gives a small glimpse of the feelings experienced in migration and being in another country. Despite these feelings of loss and longing, the motive for most young men, especially in the beginning of migration to the Netherlands, was work. Many sought employment particularly with Dutch or international ships and shipping companies 'stationed' in Rotterdam.

This chapter seeks to understand how key places of work for Cabo Verdeans in Rotterdam from the 1950s onwards until now have been represented and experienced. Places related to work life have become important cultural references in Cabo Verdean diasporic culture, and these representations feed into local nightlife and local cultures. Past places have become symbolic for the community and are embedded in the cultural world of Rotterdam's Cabo Verdeans, being expressed through various forms of culture that are most often performed in the after-hours. In particular music has played an active role in creating a narrative of the diasporic experience and constructing an imagery of urban life, displaying how the city was lived in and experienced even for those in Cabo Verde or other places in the diaspora. In their songs Cabo Verdean artists, who often sailed the world as maritime workers, comment on the experience of work life, both at sea and in Rotterdam. These artists reveal how the city was navigated for work, leisure and more, creating an imagery of city life in the 1960s and 1970s, and up until the late 1980s, of its daily and nightly rhythms and activities, both during and outside work hours. Seafaring life became less relevant for Cabo Verdeans over time and more people started working on land. For this reason, after the 1980s few songs are written about such experiences.

In the process of finding work newcomers had to find their way around this new city, and as such it was explored and experienced in several ways. In a practical sense, several offices and stations had to be visited in order to go to sea again. Sailors needed to find an employer, arrange the right paperwork to go to sea, and buy the necessary maritime equipment and clothing. At the same time, having arrived ashore after a long time at sea, new arrivals were eager to spend their spare time in the city's bars, cafés, nightclubs, and restaurants. The places where these men would find work, or find each other after work, have been remembered through music and elsewhere, passing from generation to generation.

Narratives of work life found in music and other cultural productions highlight how belonging and non-belonging is constructed in the city, and how related themes such as poverty, marginality and illegality are spatially represented. Cultural productions were (and still are) a means or a vehicle for reflection on the life experiences of labour for Cabo Verdean migrants, and simultaneously are an important instrument in constructing a diasporic identity based strongly on images of work life and lifestyles that involves a broader range of daily and nightly activities. Representations of urban life are not constructed solely from the day, even though images of hard-working sailors are prevalent in Cabo Verdean migrant cultural production. Instead, we must account for the daily rhythms and activities that take place in a 24/7 city where work (or at least the process of finding it) is strongly connected to activities and experiences that take place during the evening and night, as captured in various forms of representation. Navigating the nighttime of an unfamiliar city is as much part of a sailor's lifestyle as is going to sea, and it is a well-documented experience.

In the first part of this chapter I discuss the role of the boarding houses where Cabo Verdeans often stayed after arriving in the Netherlands, and their role in work life and the networks that were set up to support newcomers. I also discuss the experiences of daily life in the guesthouses visible in interviews, literature, and music. After a night's sleep in the

guesthouses, sailors must also visit another important place, the maritime employment offices, also known as the *barracas*. This section emphasises the daily and nighttime rhythms that revolved around the barracas, an important place in the collective memory of Cabo Verdeans which was repeatedly sung about in music of the era. The lifestyles of the sailor-musicians and worker-musicians will be emphasised, with the music scene getting underway in the early years of migration to Rotterdam as musicians sought a path towards professionalising their musical careers. This started with the formation of Morabeza Records and Voz de Cabo Verde.

Cabo Verdean music history in Rotterdam is also analysed through the documentary *Rotterdam Saudade* (2007), mentioned in the previous chapter, which traces a day in the life of singer Américo Brito while emphasising both transnational and local connections to place. In the final section of this chapter, I focus on women's migration to the Netherlands, their workplaces, and the role of narrative in giving visibility to women's stories in otherwise male-centric diasporic memory practices. This section reflects both on the historical course of migration as well as cultural productions that emphasise the female perspective.

Arrival, employment: a night's sleep.

The history of Cabo Verde is intrinsically connected to the sea, sailing and ships. As mentioned, under Portuguese colonial rule the islands served as a transit port for enslaved people from West African countries on their way westward to the United States, Brazil, and the West Indies. In the nineteenth century, to escape drought and famine many young Cabo 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). The tradition of maritime work established a particular pattern of migration visible in the places where Cabo Verdeans settled over time, even in the (late) twentieth and twenty-first centuries: "In 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). Thus it is no surprise why Cabo Verdeans chose Rotterdam over other large Dutch cities such as The Hague or Amsterdam.

After the city's devastating bombing by German forces in 1940, Rotterdam underwent reconstruction and swiftly became a rapidly developing and growing city, home to the largest port in the world between 1962 and 2004, before being surpassed by Singapore and Shanghai. The first Cabo Verdean pioneers started to arrive in the post-war period. In the documentary on the life of João Silva, *Sodade - Djunga's Tiende Eiland* (2005), Silva speaks of his first time travelling to the Netherlands, in 1949: "the first time I arrived in the Netherlands, I don't know where this was because the whole port area was flattened with bombs, it was a mess. But in 1955 it was already a bit different, and I signed off from ship here" (Barendrecht and Slingerland 2005, translation added). As he speaks he is pointing towards the quay of the Maashaven, now a berth for inland vessels in Rotterdam bustling with warehouses and silos.

In the 1960s, the influx of Cabo Verdean men to Rotterdam started to increase. A dozen Cabo Verdean men who went ahead of the rest, the so-called 12 apostles, spread the message that Rotterdam was a good place to moor. Men who came to the Netherlands were often fleeing Cabo Verde because of poverty and political oppression, escaping mandatory military service, and were attracted by the prospects of working for Dutch shipping companies and in stable living conditions. This is also what Mendes da Silva, introduced in the previous chapter, emphasised: "Holland had a lot of fame already. The Cabo Verdeans who came here proved that the Netherlands was a good place to work. They sent money to their families, and these led an easy life" (Mendes da Silva 2019, translation added). Indeed, in the post-war period the economy was growing and finding work on ships was still quite easy:

> The shipping industry was booming in post-war Europe, and Rotterdam was where not only Dutch but also Norwegian, British, and German ships recruited their crews. In 1962, Rotterdam surpassed New York as the world's largest port, and for the remainder of the century it handled more goods than any other port in the world. The high level of activity meant that many Cape Verdeans found work soon after they arrived. (Carling 2008: 92)

First Arrivals, First stops

Traveling to Rotterdam was often a huge undertaking, and many who did it had never before taken a step outside the borders of Cabo Verde. A common first step before arriving in Rotterdam, often recounted in stories by first generation Cabo Verdeans, was an initial boat trip to Lisbon. There, travellers would be received by either family members, acquaintances or boarding houses. Boarding house owners in Portugal were often familiar with the routes

that migrants took towards other countries in Europe, and often aided in arranging the necessary paperwork and travel options. Those that decided to come by train arrived at Rotterdam Central Station. In other cases, especially when travelling without papers or illegally, the route towards Rotterdam was more hazardous, and migrants were constantly vigilant of the authorities' watchful eye. In many of these cases, border control in the Netherlands was circumvented by crossing the border by foot.

Having arrived in the Netherlands, newcomers were often collected by acquaintances, fellow Cabo Verdeans or boarding house owners, and sent to one of the many Cabo Verdean boarding houses in the city. In later years, when more Cabo Verdeans had already settled in the city, newcomers also stayed with acquaintances and partners, sometimes with multiple families in one home. A network of established Cabo Verdeans would thus ensure that newcomers were eased into new territory and quickly found a place to stay, eat and work. Many of them had never been in another country, much less worked as a sailor on a large ship.

In 1970 Maria Antonieta Miranda and her husband Manuel opened the boarding house Nossa Casa ('Our Home') in the Graaf Florisstraat, quite close to Rotterdam Central Station, which they bought with money they won in a lottery in Lisbon. The boarding house had room for around 60 people. In her autobiography *Vechten voor Vrijheid: Levensverhaal van Maria Antonieta Miranda* ('Fighting for Freedom: The life story of Maria Antonieta Miranda'), Miranda explains that the young 'men' that came to Rotterdam were often still children when they arrived:

> For a long time, we received young Cabo Verdeans that migrated even before they turned 16 and had to fulfil military service for the Portuguese army. Boys between the age of 14 and 16 came to

> Rotterdam saying they went there to study. We offered them a roof over their heads and arranged paperwork at the city hall. But those boys did not come here to study, because they did not have the money. In factories they were not allowed to work because in those times compulsory education was until 16 years old. They went to sail for companies that accepted them, and there were plenty of those. (Zonneveld and Miranda 2014: 20, translation added)

As can be understood from the above excerpt, the boarding houses and boarding house owners played a major role in supporting newcomers, who often had barely grown up and who arrived without any knowledge of the language or the Dutch bureaucratic system. Many migrants came to the Netherlands without a legal work permit and lived in precarious conditions, often depending on the help of fellow nationals in the diaspora for housing, work and social contacts.

Key figures in the Dutch diaspora such as boarding house owners, as well as other lesser-known members of the community, helped new Cabo Verdeans on their way in this unknown city. As mentioned before, Silva established a 'ship store', while Constantino established the first Cabo Verdean boarding house in Rotterdam, Hotel Delta, where Cabo Verdean seafarers could stay and where recently arrived workers could be connected to shipping agencies. As a side-note, Silva also opened a boarding house in the same street as boarding house Nossa Casa. In the documentary Sodade - Djunga's Tiende Eiland, Silva repeats the role of he and his friend Constantino for those that recently arrived:

> Thanks to Constantino's boarding house, those who arrived had accommodation and we tried to get them work on the boats. Usually, they arrived without documents, without work clothes, with nothing.

They did not know how to speak the language. We were responsible for taking care of them and helping them to find work. (Barendrecht and Slingerland 2005, translation added)

Figure 11: Inconspicuous between a snack bar and a private house, Hotel Delta 'sleeps' in 2021 © Seger Kersbergen

As cultural anthropologist Henny Strooij (1996) mentions, over the course of the 1960s a unique network developed for the reception of newcomers. To alleviate the initial financial needs, every Cabo Verdean contributed to a joint bank so that new arrivals always had something to eat. Most Cabo Verdean boarding house owners did not ask for money until they were certain that the newcomers had found work on the ships. Until then, their accommodation was free. Boarding house holders often had connections with shipping companies and other businesses, and used these networks in order to help recently arrived Cabo Verdeans along and to arrange maritime work (Strooij 1996), functioning as a link

between companies and new recruits. In this sense the boarding houses served as an important spoke between work and home, an intermediate station between the route to Rotterdam and the route to the sea. Written as an ode to Constantino Delgado's efforts for the community, in the book *De Mozes van Rotterdam* ('The Moses of Rotterdam') Mendes da Silva compares the role of boarding house owner Constantino Delgado to that of Moses. Whereas Moses led God's people from Egypt, across the Red Sea, to the Promised Land, Delgado did so from Cabo Verde, across the Atlantic, to hotel Delta in Rotterdam. Once they reached Rotterdam, Delgado was able to accommodate newly arrived sailors and offer them work:

> In the Netherlands, Mr. Delgado was very well known to all shipping agencies and maintained very good relations with the personnel managers who recruited the crews for their ships. They had so much faith in him that usually when they needed crew members, they went to Delta for the personnel they needed.
>
> It was almost always Mr. Delgado who took them to an agency in his car so that the signing on went smoothly. He spoke for them or acted as their interpreter. And often he brought them on board himself. Whenever he thought it might be a bit uncomfortable for a first timer, he wanted to be there to help him get to know the commander and make sure he was in good hands and well received. By handing the novice over to the commander, he had a good opportunity to gauge what kind of man that commander was, so that he knew whether he should be concerned or be at ease. (Mendes Da Silva 2016, translation added)

Delgado was one of the first *koppelbazen* in Rotterdam specialising in working with the Cabo Verdean community of Rotterdam. A *koppelbaas* is a 'matchmaker' or 'subcontractor', and in this role Delgado served as an intermediary, connecting employers and employees for a fee. Although Delgado's story is positive, there are many negative stories related to the industry, with subcontractors scamming vulnerable job seekers, which will be discussed later.

Beside recruiters going to agencies, they would also visit the boarding houses to find skilled sailors. Thus the boarding houses were situated within networks of workers, shipping companies, contractors and intermediaries, and enabled a flow of workers that would board both Dutch ships and those operating under different flags. So, even though the boarding houses are mostly seen as places of rest, sleep and a meeting place for Cabo Verdeans, they have also served as an essential spoke in 'mobilising' Cabo Verdean migration to the Netherlands and aiding in their maritime endeavours.

Socialising and sleeping in the boarding houses

Hotel Delta, founded in 1964, is an iconic place within the Cabo Verdean community as it was the first and best-known boarding house for Cabo Verdeans. Many other Cabo Verdean enterprises followed in its footsteps, and it is estimated by some that at the industry's peak around 15 boarding houses existed in Rotterdam-West and the Delfshaven district which were directed by and directed towards Cabo Verdean sailors,[9] as Mendes da Silva narrates:

> Pensão Mindelo, owned by Nhunha Brandão who is no longer with us, was a boarding house that was always ready to help Cabo Verdeans, if only for the price, which was about eight times lower than in Dutch boarding houses or a three-star hotel. Later appeared Manuel Panacho,

[9] This number is an estimate based on boarding houses mentioned in interviews with first-generation sailors, as well as in literature (Pires 2006; Mendes da Silva 2016)

> a cousin of Mr. Brandão. Several Cabo Verdeans lived in his boarding house. But his was purely business.
>
> In the mid-1960s, Nha Maria Belchior appeared with her dish of rice with peas and chicken. Those who, like me, did not yet have a home or relatives in Rotterdam, went to Nha Maria Belchior's house to eat there. Often there was no seat left and you ate her famously delicious peas with chicken and rice standing up as if we were in Cabo Verde. One day I met the now deceased Olavo there; we both ate standing. When I later learned that he was a rich man, I understood his simplicity better. (Mendes Da Silva 2016, translation added)

As mentioned before, boarding houses were the only accommodation option for many Cabo Verdeans, as other accommodation around the city was often too expensive. On the other hand, for entrepreneurs, starting a boarding house was one of the first business models in Rotterdam. That is not to say that these compatriots did not act out of a solidarity, but with the growing influx of jobseekers, running a boarding house could become a somewhat lucrative business.

A multitude of experiences of those that stayed in the boarding houses emerge from accounts found in music, literature and interviews. Following Brah's idea of a "homing desire" (1996: 197), the idea of 'making' home while negotiating the "multi-placedness of home" for those in the diaspora, the boarding houses offered a space with some degree of cultural familiarity; you would be able to meet Cabo Verdeans and, as Mendes da Silva notes, it was a space where you could enjoy common foods and find or make acquaintances. At the same time, to pass some of the time migrants spent ashore residents would regularly play music or enjoy a game of cards, and converse and laugh. Thus, besides the infrastructural and

economic role that the boarding houses played, they also served an important social function. People slept on bunkbeds in shared rooms, sometimes with as much as ten other people from the different islands of Cabo Verde, and in some houses also with different nationalities.

However, numerous accounts also exist that are less about the joys of coming together. For many, life in and around the boarding houses felt monotonous, especially when not finding work over time. The 'process' of searching for work and not finding any, and the routes and activities undertaken during that job search, will be described in the next subchapter as it connects to other important spaces in Cabo Verdean work history in Rotterdam. Simply put, more often than not the boarding houses were the cheapest option to sleep and eat. As one sailor from the island of São Nicolau jokingly claims, the boarding houses were 'almost' like an all-inclusive hotel:

> It was a system that allowed people to live with very low costs, allowing seafarers to get along. And with the meals you could also feed yourself. You paid a single, affordable price for eating and sleeping. But there were boarding houses where you paid just to sleep, and you could make your own food. The food in the boarding houses was basic food, with little variety, but you had to eat. It was like you were on vacation and you have those "all-inclusive" packages [laughs]. At that time there was already "all inclusive" [laughs], for sleeping and eating. (Gomes 2014, translation added)

The boarding houses were fully geared towards receiving seafarers who came and went, and these were often people with little income or in debt from the journey taken to Europe. As Mr. Gomes explains, residents lived on the edge of poverty in the boarding houses, and facilities were limited to simple food, a bath and a bed. In Figure 12, mis-captioned as a 'boarding house for Portuguese', the modesty of the facilities is particularly striking: a simple bedspread, bunkbeds, a washbasin and, except for a single poster, no decoration.

Figure 12: Ary Groeneveld, 'Guest workers: Interior with bunk beds and residents of a boarding house for Portuguese in Willem Buytewechstraat', 1971. Photograph. Rotterdam. © Stadsarchief Rotterdam

As the aforementioned sailor explained, the winters in the boarding houses were often freezing cold. However, the hope of work and going back to Cabo Verde was a large part of their motivation:

> You lay in the cold bed, with 2 or 3 blankets on top. You wore your pyjamas and even your socks. You lay there waiting for sleep to come. When you managed to fall asleep, suddenly someone boisterous would enter your room. That's what life was like! But you already know how it is… we had that idea in our heads, the hope of working and returning to our land. (Gomes 2014, translation added)

It was indeed a meagre existence in the boarding houses, consisting mainly of eating the provided meals and, at night, resting up for the next day. Sometimes those who left at night to go out into the city would return late and disturb others' peaceful night's sleep. Thinking back to the song 'Cartinha d'Holanda' that opened this chapter, it becomes clear that the song indeed describes an everyday sentiment or experience in the city of Rotterdam.

Viewing that era from a slightly more negative perspective, for those that were not happy with working on ships, or could not find any, Mendes da Silva narrates a tale of hopelessness:

> Those who had no predisposition to become amphibians withdrew against their will into their boarding houses. They had to adjust the monthly allowance for their families according to circumstances and had little chance of taking a holiday once a year. The cure for the homesickness that welled up in these desperate hearts was sought in the mind, and the mind in alcohol, and alcohol required money. (Mendes da Silva 2016, translation added)

Many were motivated to work in the Netherlands in order to be able to provide financially for their families back home on the islands, as is typical for migrant workers. But not everyone became an 'amphibian', Mendes da Silva's term for the sailor's work rhythm in which people come ashore for a short period of time and then go back to sea for months. Not everyone could cope with this irregular and mobile existence, and opportunities were not always there for the taking, depending instead on the economic tide and changing work regulations.

In such cases, where large parts of the day were spent in the guesthouses, the walls could seem to close in on you. Where some felt a sense of freedom and opportunity from being in another country, in terms of work, politics, and socially, others felt only loss and

longing for family, friends and the homeland. There is a variety of narrated experiences of the boarding houses that contribute to the community's stories. Indeed, even though referring to similar places, these narratives contribute to both the ambivalence and diversity of experiences of belonging. The accumulation of these experiences in narratives forms a picture of life in and around the boarding houses in which one story does not preclude the other, adding to the complexity of migrant life in the boarding houses.

Economic tides, the rhythm of the *Barraca* and daytime endeavours

While the boarding houses were the first place recently arrived Cabo Verdeans would visit when arriving to Rotterdam, those looking for work would soon be directed towards employment agencies for maritime shipping in the early mornings. These agencies were located on the Willem Buytewechstraat in the Coolhaven, one of the port districts of the city. Most Cabo Verdeans refer to the agencies as the barracas, literally translating as 'sheds', as the agencies were located in a temporary emergency building constructed in the 1960s. The barracas were officially named the Centraal Arbeidsbureau Scheepvaart ('Central Employment Agency for Shipping'), and were part of an official municipal system of employment offices spread across the city. The daily rhythm of these sailors was dominated by visits to the barracas as a main place for finding employment, and many spent entire mornings and afternoons, sometimes week after week, waiting to find a place aboard a ship.

The importance of the barracas as a significant space in the memory of the Rotterdam diaspora is underlined by several musicians restating their experiences of work life in the city in lyrics. Their songs often reveal how these experiences are connected to several other spaces in the city, such as in the song below, titled 'Rotterdam':

> Rotterdam, nha vida, ca é tão fácil, sima txeu sta imagina.
>
> É ergui di plemanhã, cum barriga pertado, m'bai pa barraca, xinta num banco. Na incerteza, ta espera cai di céu, um barco, ki ta traba deste vidinha.

Um barco ki ta traba deste vidinha, um barco ki ta traba deste vida di gasta sem julbeira. Ki ta sai pa impregamu. E se encontra um barco m tinki bai sem espia pa preço, se não est outro ta tomab el.

Se ka encontram na barraca, m sta na papa dedona ou na tipoia ta passa tempo. Pam ka bai pa cama, pamode na cama, pode encontra um bilheto ki ta levabu pa fronteira.

Rotterdam, my life, it is not as easy here as many imagine.

Waking up early, going to the barracas, sitting on a bench, waiting for a miracle from heaven, a ship, that takes me out of this penniless life.

A ship that takes me out of this life of spending with empty pockets. If I get offered a ship, I have to go without asking the price, or someone else will take my place.

If you can't find me in the barracks, I will be at Papa Dedona's or at Tio Poia's bar, to spend my time. Because if I go back to bed, I might find a one-way ticket that takes me to the border.

(Lima & Les Sofas 1977, translation added)

Written in the style of a letter to his beloved, Cabo Verdean singer Abel Lima (1946-2016) narrates a route through the city that starts in his boarding house bed, waking up and visiting the barracas, before ending the day either in *Papa Dedona*'s, or *Tipoia*'s bar. In a melancholic, wailing tone, Lima emphasises the difficulties and hardship encountered in his search for work, in going about his day without money, and in hiding from authorities that might send him back to Cabo Verde. Abel Lima was a sailor who lived in Paris and visited Rotterdam often because of the many clubs and cafés he would perform in, and because of its music studios. 'Rotterdam' is included on the album *Nos Bida* ('Our Life') (1977), on which several songs evidence Lima's commitment as a militant of the PAIGC-party, with a strong connection to the faith of the homeland, but also demonstrating an attentiveness towards the conditions of migrant life (Nogueira 2016: 21). The song is a testimony to the historical moment in which it was written, especially in relation to the economic conditions and the migrant's position in the 1970s, which gives a fresh context to the ways in which the city was experienced. For this reason, in this section I will first contextualise the lyrics of the song

historically. After this I will turn to narratives of life around the barracas. Finally, I discuss how the song connects the barracas to several other places, creating a route through the city and narrating experiences of daily life and of the daily and nightly rhythms of Rotterdam.

In figure 13 we find the employment agency for seafarers on the left. On the right we see the Parksluizen pumping station, in function of the locks that connect the Coolhaven with the Parkhaven.

Figure 13: 'Willem Buytewechstraat at the corner of Puntegaalstraat with a view of government buildings', 1981. In Stadsarchief Rotterdam © Jannes Linders.

Working conditions and wandering around

'Rotterdam' was written during a time in which immigration policies, the economy and Cabo Verde were all undergoing large changes, affecting processes of legal citizenship in the Netherlands for the Cabo Verdean diaspora, as Carling noted:

> In the 1960s, the Netherlands was relatively open to immigrants. Labour migrants could easily enter in search of work without formal intermediaries. Provided they found employment and accommodation, they could eventually acquire work and residence permits. The 1970s was a much more difficult period for Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands. The world-wide recession severely affected the shipping industry, and companies started hiring Asian seafarers at lower salaries. (Carling 2008: 92)

Abel Lima's 'Rotterdam' describes the local context and consequences of the economic recession. Especially after the 1973 oil crisis, which had a severe impact on employment opportunities in the ports of Rotterdam, Cabo Verdeans experienced increased difficulty in finding ships to work on. Several Arabic OPEC countries halted oil exports to the Netherlands because of the government's pro-Israel stance in the Yom Kippur war, cutting oil supplies to the port city by seventy percent, and prices shot up. This severely affected fuel prices for maritime transport and starved the refineries and petrochemical industries based around Rotterdam (Hellema et al. 2004: 99-100), making substantial workforce reductions unavoidable.

Semi-legal negotiations with intermediaries, the so-called *koppelbazen*, increased a worker's chances of finding work, but would often cost money, hence Abel Lima's lyric about accepting any offer to board a ship 'without asking the price'. This was common practice for shipping companies, especially in economically challenging times. In 1970, The newspaper *Trouw* published rumours of recruitment practices by a scamming subcontractor: "the man visited boarding houses where Cabo Verdeans stay and surreptitiously persuaded the sometimes barely literate Cabo Verdeans to give him their passport and a hundred guilders, after which he would provide work" (Organisatie Trouw 1970, translation added).

According to the newspaper, the broker's arrest led the police to discover the whereabouts of 30 Cabo Verdeans, who were traced and would be sent back to Cabo Verde. Subcontractors took advantage of the precarious conditions of foreign workers in this manner. On September 29, 1981, a newspaper headline stated 'Shipping Companies hold Cabo Verdeans in slavery'. It claimed that around 200 Cabo Verdean men were being held in slave-labour conditions by inland shipping companies. Labour conditions were bad, working days were long, and sailors were only allowed to leave their ships to get groceries (*Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad* 1981). Another newspaper adds that workers were charged between 700 and 1000 guilders as a hiring fee (*Algemeen Dagblad* 1981), for a salary below minimum wage. It must be noted that these practices did not take place at the barracas, but elsewhere in the port area, often with individual subcontractors or small employment agencies. A logical interpretation of Lima's song, then, is that the sailor in question could not find work at the official employment office and sought his salvation elsewhere.

Besides the danger of being ripped off by one of these intermediaries, there were other dangers ahead. Strict immigration policies forced illegal migrants to wander the city. Going back to the boarding houses during daytime was risky, as immigration police often raided them while searching for illegal workers, and being caught meant receiving a one-way ticket back to Cabo Verde. In this context, constructing a sense of belonging and citizenship is a complicated process. Massey argues that different social groups have distinct access to place, or abilities to move about space:

> Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others, some are effectively imprisoned by it. (Massey 1994: 149)

Illegality limits access to and use of urban space, which in turn limits access to practices of belonging that depend on the use of everyday spaces. Daily routines define both belonging and non-belonging, as the condition of illegality shapes and inhabits daily practices and the use of space, thus limiting how migrants themselves can 'create' spaces of belonging as authorities seek to apprehend these non-citizens. However, even as non-citizens in the Netherlands, a sense of belonging is created in relation to specific locations in Rotterdam, which serve as common references to the community.

These spaces, however, have an ambiguous character, which is captured in Abel Lima's 'Rotterdam': on the one hand Cabo Verdeans come to places such as the barracas to find work, or to not find it. Some would go to bars mentioned in the songs to enjoy their free time, while others are forced to do so due to their problematic legal status. Daytime is represented as an endless search for work, an endless routine carried out under constant threat of being discovered as a non-citizen. In this case, the visibility of daytime also forces illegals to withdraw from the public eye. The night may serve as a release from daily life, yet that same temporary freedom only confirms their illegal status.

It is not the case that all Cabo Verdeans arrived in the same economic or social conditions when looking for work. But there are several songs that criticise the way Cabo Verdeans were treated by employers in Rotterdam. In 1966, on a LP produced in the Netherlands by Casa Silva, Bana, accompanied by Voz de Cabo Verde, recorded a *coladeira* about the conditions of work life in the Netherlands. It was titled 'Desobriga', meaning to be released from duties, or more simply, to be fired:

Oh Menísh nôs bem po es vida de Paz
Est coisa de nos já tá demas
Ques Holandês ta muito mau
esh cre so da nôs payoff.

Oh people, let's stop this life
It's enough already
These Dutchmen are really bad
They want to get rid of us.

(Bana 1966, translation added)

This coladeira criticises the treatment of Cabo Verdeans by the Dutch in the workplace, the lack of job stability in the Netherlands, and the routine summary dismissals of migrant workers. Even though the song calls for an undefined change to living conditions in the Netherlands, Bana later emphasised that Cabo Verdeans are clever enough to 'find a way' to survive abroad. Even though some musicians have highlighted stories of wealth and success in the Netherlands, most songs addressing the working conditions of Cabo Verdeans emphasise aspects of hardship, exclusion, poverty and hopelessness.

There are, however, different and competing representations of migrants' experiences in the Netherlands. Many Cabo Verdeans consider the era during which this song was recorded as the golden days; they were well-received by the Netherlands, and help from within the community supported new arrivals to find a place to sleep, to work and to have fun. This is highlighted by Silva:

> When you start living in a new country, the first thing that you think is how will these people receive me, recognise me in this country? So, then you start to doubt… But when you notice that you are well received and recognised, then you feel more at ease and free.
> (Barendrecht and Slingerland 2005, translation added)

Narratives, whether positive or negative, establish a frame of reference through which city life in the diaspora can be understood and interpreted by its members. In this sense, right from the

early days of migration music served as a medium through which these narratives were propelled, and where concerns could be voiced, discussed, but also questioned.

Commentary on living conditions is an important element in Cabo Verdean migrant music on Rotterdam. Often such music was not written with the purpose of reminding, exciting or pleasing, but rather to remind Cabo Verdeans of their position as foreigners in Dutch society, and often as illegal migrants. Amongst other methods this is achieved by offering a commentary on people's experiences in particular important places related to the history of Cabo Verdean migration to Rotterdam. Until now the role of place in this process has remained underexposed. By commenting on experiences in historically important places, a memory of the city is created. I will now turn to the barracas and the routes taken from there through the city, topics which are frequently sung about by Cabo Verdean sailor-musicians.

From Barraca to Bar

For Cabo Verdeans in the port city, the lyrics of 'Rotterdam' contain various shared references to common places, situations and experiences. Even though place is often present in music, "most popular music […] is subtle, ambivalent or vague in its designations and descriptions of place and identity" (Connell and Gibson 2003: 71). Many Cabo Verdean artists, however, have been very precise in defining, naming and commenting on particular places in the city. This is particularly true for the diaspora, where references are often made to central places known within the localised communities, whether during the day or the night, for work or for leisure. So even though place in music lyrics is often represented as "generic and aspatial" (Connell and Gibson 2003: 71), place in Cabo Verdean music is often its opposite: specific and spatial, linked to real and lived experiences in these places.

During the Rotterdam port's heyday the barracas were visited each day by hundreds of work seekers, not just Cabo Verdeans but also Spaniards, Indonesians, Filipinos, Portuguese

and other nationalities. As one sailor recalls, “there were as many people there as there are cobblestones on the street” (Santos Lima 2014, translation added). It was a continuous flow of people coming and going. Going to the barracas was a process of waiting and waiting in the hope of getting a call to board a ship. As observed in the story of one sailor from Santo Antão, it becomes clear that seafarers remember going there, drinking coffee, and playing *uril* (a so-called pit and pebble game) or cards, ‘always waiting’ to be called for a job:

> If they called… Even if they don’t call you, you have to go in the morning and in the afternoon, again the next day, it was always like that because they can call you suddenly and if you don’t show up, they would call someone else who gets the job and then you’d have to wait again. We arrived at eight, eight thirty. We stayed there until noon. At noon it closed and at one-thirty we went there again. (Santos Lima 2014, translation added)

Whether work was found there or not, the barracas thus determined the rhythm of migrant life during the daytime. The visits became part of a standard routine that many had to follow, and it is remembered as such in music and stories. Similar to Abel Lima’s ‘Rotterdam’, in 1982 the group Galaxia 2000 recorded ‘m Krê Bai Pa Nha Terra’ (‘I want to go to my land’), which emphasises the endless process of looking for a job and not finding any.

Levanta tud dia, bai pa barraca
Volta pa casa, que môn na queshada

Get up every day, go to the barracks
Return home, hand in my chin

(Galaxia 2000, 1982, translation added)

These references form a common narrative created of Cabo Verdean sailor men living similar lives. Belonging is thus established both through “specific” locations and a “specific

narrative" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 205) which defines a community, with attachments to specific symbols, places and lifestyles in Rotterdam. In this context, however, belonging is also strongly linked to economic opportunities, economic structure and the worker's uneven position relative to employers that is defined by insecurity and illegality. Being broke and looking for work at the barracas becomes part of a common identity that is created between those that have had similar experiences, and is often presented as an endless and repetitive process. This monotonous life is often confirmed in interviews when asking sailors about their daily lives in Rotterdam, where day and night become an almost continuous and arduous series of events and in which the night seems to become just as repetitive as daytime:

> The daily rhythm was always the same. You wake up early in the morning, or you go to the shipping company, or to the barracas, you go back to the boarding house and eat something, in the afternoon, you go out again and then you come back to have dinner again. Then, after dinner, if you want to you go to sleep, or you go out, you go to a café and find people to converse with. You had cafés to play billiards or play cards, and like this over and over. Or you just went out and took a walk, you could go to the cinema, and at night you went to sleep. That's what it was like. (Gomes 2014, translation added)

Whereas the night is often highlighted for its potential for freedom and expression, allowing the letting-go of the struggles and routine activities of the day, it is important to emphasise that the experience of the night is extremely context specific. The romanticisation of the night that is overly present in popular music, where the night is often liberating, is contrasted with accounts of endless and repetitive searches for work in which the night offers little more than distraction (and needed rest).

The visits to the barracas connect to a route through the city. The bars that are visited in the hours after job-hunting are as much part of it, as if it were a routine. In Rotterdam, Abel Lima refers to two bars that have become well-known within the community. He refers to them by the nicknames of their owners; *Papa Dedona*, roughly translated as 'Father Fatfinger', named for his apparently large hands, and *Tipoia*, which translates to 'Uncle Pimp', whose bar additionally offered prostitution services. Even though many songs by Cabo Verdeans mention these and other similar places in their songs, often glorifying Cabo Verdean nightlife in the process, in this context these places are mentioned more as places to stay out of necessity rather than for pleasure: due to the strict immigration policies, going back to the boarding houses during daytime was risky as migrants risked being caught up in police raids.

As mentioned before, not all seafarers' experiences were the same, and not everyone who arrived in Rotterdam lived or worked illegally. Nevertheless the work and rhythm of life of many Cabo Verdean jobseekers seems to have been quite similar, and took place around the barracas situated around the Nieuwe Maas River and the streets that connect to it. The quays where they departed and arrived were close to the barracas. In turn, these were within walking distance of the pubs and bars frequented by the Cabo Verdeans, such as on the Nieuwe Binnenweg, as the artist Américo Brito explains: "the street was buzzing at this time because it was right next to the port's disembarkation pier. The sailors left and advanced in this direction. Many, even many, came from Cabo Verde" (Rodrigues 2022, translation added).

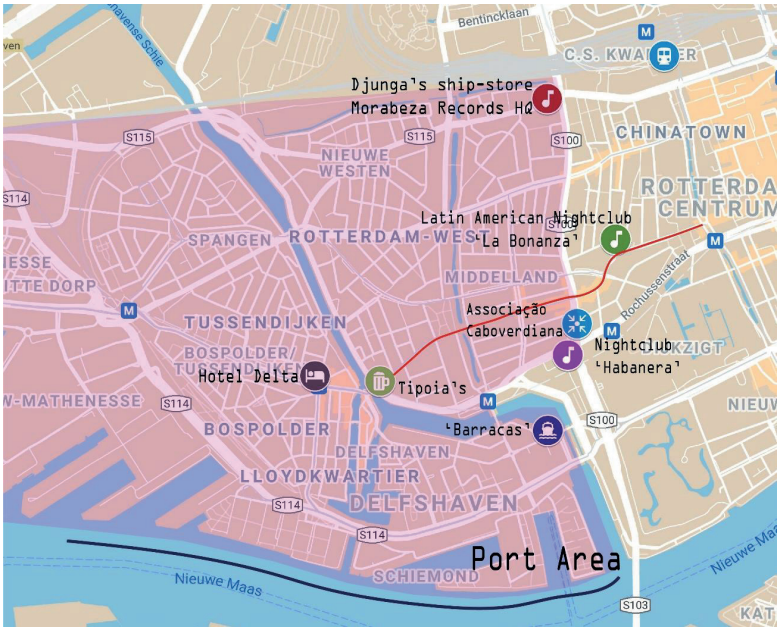

Figure 14: Map of city spaces & rhythms. Retrieved from Google.com

Note on mobilities and routes through the city

As can be seen on the map in Figure 14, many of the core sites of the Cabo Verdean community in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were located around the same area in Delfshaven. As is visible from the map, the barracas were within walking distance, situated about 15 minutes from hotel Delta, which itself is also only 15 minutes from the quays along the Nieuwe Maas River, where the old harbour area was located. The Associação Caboverdiana and the Habanera nightclub, which was demolished in 1966 (Platform Wederopbouw Rotterdam n.d.) were also both only a 10-minute walk away from the port area and the barracas. Many other pubs and bars could also be found on and around the Nieuwe Binnenweg, marked with a red line on the map, and these were popular spots for Cabo Verdean visitors. Tipoia's, for example, was located on the corner of Nieuwe Binnenweg and Aelbrechtskade, while Papa Dedona's cafe was also located a little further along Aelbrechtskade, and they were all a stone's throw from the waterfront of the Coolhaven.

Given the port's proximity to the centre of the city, it is no surprise that the surrounding streets were somewhat oriented towards offering entertainment for sailors arriving to the city.

Besides the various social and political processes, Cabo Verdean migration to the city of Rotterdam consists of various routes and motions to, through and in the city. Particularly with regard to work life, these movements visualise the concept of mobilities that "encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life", as stated by sociologists Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006: 1), thus connecting the local and the global. In this particular case, these mobilities involve movements of migration and work, often intertwined, between Cabo Verde, Rotterdam, and many other places sailors travelled towards, as well as movements *within* the city.

Connecting such routes there are "moorings" (Hannam et al. 2006): places and stations through which these movements take place and which enable these mobilities. These are "interdependent systems of 'immobile' material worlds and especially some exceptionally immobile platforms, transmitters, roads, garages, stations, aerials, airports, docks, factories through which mobilizations of locality are performed and re-arrangements of place and scale materialized" (2006: 3). The aforementioned places such as the boarding houses, stores, port areas and barracas are all situated within "complex networks by which 'hosts, guests, buildings, objects and machines' are contingently brought together to produce certain performances in certain places at certain times" (2006: 13). In this context, we could think of guests such as sailors being received by boarding house owners and sent to ships' moorings in the port area by intermediaries. Indeed, the movements between, through and within these places are examples of how mobilities are produced within the city, directed towards a particular economy.

Although the concept of mobilities and moorings emphasises places related to economic activity, it is important to state that these mobilities are also located within a network of places situated outside these economic activities, but nevertheless involved within the same processes, such as through activities that take place at night: rest, distraction, entertainment, not only as a network of places, but also as a rhythm.

Around the 1970s, more Cabo Verdeans started working ashore. Besides working for Dutch shipping companies, now more frequently on shorter routes or inland shipping, Cabo Verdeans would also come ashore to work in the factories in and around Rotterdam. Such places included the Van Nelle factory, a factory for tea, coffee and tobacco on the outskirts of the city, and the factory of the world-famous Heineken beer brand. They would also work in the cleaning industry, or in other unskilled positions around the city. Thus over time the port area became less directly relevant for Cabo Verdean migrants, and those that stayed in the city found work in factories located elsewhere in the city. As one former sailor recalls, having sailed for over ten years, working ashore was often harsh: "I went to work in a tea factory. But it was dirty work, a lot of dust, a lot of dirt, the vest I wore turned red. I left this job and told Maria [his wife] 'if all the work in Holland is like this, I'll go back to the sea'. Because I'm already used to the sea" (Fortes 2014, translation added). Because work ashore was typically in low-skilled positions, conditions were often poor. This could partly be related to the physical environment, as described in the quote above, but also to the fact that much of the work was physically demanding, or took place at irregular times, such as at night. The former sailor sought and indeed found other work:

> I smelted iron with sand, made about 50 kilos during those 8 hours of continuous work, except for about 15 minutes to eat. I didn't want to go on. I preferred the sea. Then I left, I already had a son, I told Maria that now I was going to look for another job, because this one was

> often at night, and I couldn't sleep during the day. I went looking for work and found a job at Van Nelle, where I lasted about 2 years, with a man who told me that he had also been a sailor. (Fortes 2014, translation added)

As described in the previous section, where a common lifestyle was shared by many on and around the sea, this was also the case with work ashore and was how many found their way to different factories. Pires explains why working ashore would eventually be important in 'becoming Dutch'; at first, working time in the service of a Dutch shipping company did not count when applying for a residence permit, which required working on the Dutch mainland. For this reason, a search for work on land started. Seamen started working as classifiers (cleaner of oil tankers), as factory workers or as low-skilled personnel at other companies (Pires 2006: 77). Work ashore was often less lucrative for Cabo Verdeans as it meant that they would have to rent or buy a place to live and had to account for other expenses such as food, whereas aboard a ship this was all included. They were also forced to accept the conditions of the work they could find. As of today, especially within the second and third generation of Cabo Verdeans, the field of work is enormously diversified. According to Pires, this is partly because there is no longer a language barrier and they have better integration within Dutch society, as well as a higher level of education. With this, the specificity of places that marked the working life of the previous generations has disappeared. The ports have relocated from the city towards the coast, and so have the barracas and boarding houses, in the city's drive to innovate and modernise.

The sailor-musician hybrid

Cabo Verdeans who came to the Netherlands from the 1950s onwards, a movement that accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s, were sailors and workers. But curiously a number of the

men who arrived were also musicians, either singing or playing a particular instrument. This is, as many Cabo Verdeans consider to be a universal truth, an indication of an "inherent musicality" among the population (Braz Dias 2008: 173). However in the context of work, especially in the initial period of migration to the Netherlands, being a musician was often not sufficiently rewarding as a profession and there was no structure to become a full-time musician. At first, it was often in the boarding houses or at home that music would be played during gatherings and off-time. Later, with the community growing, more Cabo Verdean nights and events would be organised where migrants and residents could listen to music, dance and socialise, and thus also more opportunities for artists to play emerged across the city.

With the music scene growing, more musicians came to the Rotterdam to either record or perform, and newcomers came in the hopes of launching their careers in the port city. As Cabo Verdean music expert Guy Ramos mentions in the documentary *Rotterdamse Roots van de Kaapverdiaanse Muziek* (2012) ('The Rotterdam Roots of Cabo Verdean Music'),

> The cream of Cabo Verdean music came to Rotterdam during this time. During the day, some of them worked at Van Nelle or elsewhere, in the ports, and at night they played in cafés and dance venues. An artist like that is Bana, who also recorded the first Cabo Verdean solo LP in '66, here in the Netherlands. […] It is also in Rotterdam that Bana became most famous, because he performed at Habanera and the Rotterdam nightclub scene with the legendary group Voz de Cabo Verde. (RTV Rijnmond 2012, translation added)

Great names of the Cabo Verdean music scene such as Bana, Frank Cavaquinho and Manuel D'Novas arrived in the Netherlands as both sailors and musicians, later coming to work either

in the docks and factories of Rotterdam or staying in the city during the off-time between travels, before later leaving for other places. This was a common practice for musicians at the time.

Take the example of Voz de Cabo Verde, the first Cabo Verdean music group in Rotterdam which was introduced in the previous chapter. Morgadinho, the band's trumpet-player and bassist, explains how he got involved in the band, leaving the idea of life as a sailor behind:

> My idea was, from Holland, to make a career as sailor on one of the great European ships of the time. Meanwhile, Luís Morais, João da Lomba and Toy d´Bibia met Frank Cavaquim, who already lived in the Netherlands. And when I got there I was told: 'you are not going to work for any ship. What we're going to do is form a band'. So, instead of leaving on one of the ships, we stayed on land and got a job. And we were encouraged by Cabo Verdeans who lived there to form such a group, because they wanted to have a group in that country. (Morgadinho 2004, translation added)

In order to make a living, and before pursuing a professional career, the members of the band had to find work on land. Bana, for example, worked at the Van Nelle Factory, while Frank Cavaquinho worked in the Heineken factory. When the band started playing in South American nightclub La Bonanza and secured a contract there, it marked a turning point in the group's professionalisation as they were able to fully focus on music making and performing, leaving their day jobs behind. As is clear in the previous chapter, the history of the Cabo Verdean migration to Rotterdam is inextricably linked with the development of Cabo Verdean music worldwide, which started with the establishment of Morabeza Records, after which

Rotterdam became a central place for music production, attracting many Cabo Verdean artists and producers over the coming decades.

Besides the political role the record label played in disseminating Cabo Verdean culture, it also played a role in the professionalisation of Cabo Verdean music in Rotterdam. Many entrepreneurs followed Silva's example and set up new music studios, especially after independence, which opened the music market and stimulated further professionalisation of the Cabo Verdean music 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, Carrondo Records, Wow Pow Music Studios and more. Rotterdam was the 'springboard' for the later development of Cabo Verdean music, including the development of new genres. Transnational networks of music-making, performance and distribution between the Cabo Verdean islands and countries in the diaspora stimulated the professionalisation of groups and artists, ensuring a sales market and making it considerably easier for artists to record and disseminate their music (Cidra 2008a & 2008b).

The 1970s and 1980s marked a different era for Cabo Verdean music in Rotterdam, as the city became a centre for the development of different genres. *Funaná*, which was prohibited by Portuguese colonisers, began to be produced in Rotterdam after independence by groups such as Bulimundo and Os Tubarões (Gonçalves 2020: 165). One of Cabo Verde's most popular funaná bands, Ferro Gaita, recorded their first (and immensely popular) album *Fundo baxu* (1997) ('Low bottom') with CDS records in Rotterdam, sponsored by the State Secretary of Culture (Nogueira 2016: 200), thus evidencing global connections and networks in music making. Though other genres such as funaná also remained popular, the 1990s marked the era of *zouk*, originally an Antillean music from the French West Indies, and *cabo-zouk*, its Cabo Verdean derivative, with groups such as Cabo Verde Show and Splash!

(Hoffman 2008: 206-207) making hits and crowding dancehalls. Indeed, the history of Cabo Verdean music recording in Rotterdam "helped to create *cabo-zouk* in that Cape Verdean musicians as well as studios and impresarios already familiar with the music were located here" (Hoffman 2008: 215). The development of these genres is discussed in detail by the authors cited above. Performances by artists from these time periods, as well as the night scene and music scene that stemmed from them, are discussed in the next chapter. Important in this context is the fact that, even after the era of Morabeza Records, Rotterdam continued to play an important role in the development of Cabo Verdean music, both creatively, such as in the development of new genres, but also in the further professionalisation of music culture, which revolves around a network of artists, recording studios and performance venues.

The lifestyles of the sailor-musician

Some 'musical' men were not yet musicians when they came to the Netherlands, instead finding themselves becoming entangled in the music scene when they arrived in Rotterdam and encountered other Cabo Verdeans who played music in the boarding houses or elsewhere, as Rotterdam-based singer Américo Brito (1958) narrates:

> In the Netherlands, out of loneliness, I visited the hotels every day, or rather the boarding houses, where the older men played the guitar and I carefully started singing there. First, I played percussion on the tumba,[10] they didn't like that… "Stop with that noise" they said. Okay, I said. Then I started singing. (Thelosen 2008, translation added)

Music was often a pastime and a way to come together, to somehow forget or process the sorrow and difficulties of migration. One of the places where you could find others who

[10] The Tumba is a drum in the shape of a barrel.

shared these feelings and experiences was in the boarding houses, the first place migrants would stay in the city after arriving. As mentioned, at least at the start of their careers many artists worked during the day and performed and recorded at night and at weekends. In the 2008 documentary *Rotterdam Saudade*, Américo Brito presents the story of his arrival to the city in the mid-1970s and his route towards becoming a (popular) musician both in Rotterdam, Cabo Verde and other parts of the diaspora. In 1976, Brito left for Portugal at the age of seventeen for military service. After having reported for duty, he left for Rotterdam on leave and did not return to Portugal for some years. Today, he still lives in Rotterdam. In Figure 15 we follow a sequence of events in the documentary.

Figure 15: Sequence of Stills from Rotterdam Saudade Documentary © RTV Rijnmond & SeriousFilm

The documentary opens with a shot of Américo Brito, now around 60 years old, walking along the Nieuwe Binnenweg of Rotterdam. As previously mentioned, this street was historically home to many Cabo Verdean cafes, restaurants, but also hair salons and shops, as well as businesses of other migrant communities. Brito greets an acquaintance, and while talking and greeting he walks on into a record store. He stops in front of a rack with a large sign above it marked 'Cabo Verde', browses it, and leaves the shop again. In voice-over, he tells of his longing and homesickness towards his homeland, and his desire to return. The documentary has a clear performative character: While Brito investigates the shop window, the cameraman films the singer's observational gaze from inside the shop. The image cuts to

the ports of Rotterdam, where containers are loaded on and off ships. Brito walks on the banks, and sings a *morna* song, while the image cuts to the ports of São Vicente, Cabo Verde. While in one of the transshipment ports of Rotterdam he performs his song, 'Porto Grande', looking directly into the camera while standing in front of a port crane. The documentary recreates the lifestyle of the Cabo Verdean artist by tracing his movements through a particular set of places that have become an important part of the diasporic narrative. In doing so, it expresses a sense of belonging through multiple attachments, a here and there, a then and now, sounds and images that intersect and overlap and are both synchronous and asynchronous.

In this documentary, the city is brought to life through a montage of images and sounds, of spaces and routes, histories and stories of migration, city life and artistic endeavours. The documentary emphasises the strong and historical transatlantic connection created between two places, Rotterdam and Cabo Verde, through the image of seafaring. It is a trajectory that is sung about, portrayed, imagined and performed by many artists. 'Porto Grande'[11], the morna that Brito sings while standing between the containers, cranes and ships of the Rotterdam Port, refers to Cabo Verde's main port area, which is located on the island of São Vicente. It thus draws a visual-sonoric parallel between the two areas in its initial lyrics. These translate to: "Porto Grande, bay with so many thousand mouths that depend on you for their livelihood" (Brito 2011, translation added), underscoring that the main motive for travelling to Rotterdam was economic. Through Brito's performance, the connection with the homeland becomes inevitable, a powerful memory instilled through music that creates an ebb and flow between two places. It is the recreation of seafaring life and the conjuring of memories that are central to this scene and which instil an image of homeland and 'away-land'. The documentary invokes a nostalgic sense of belonging relived through a meditated

[11] Porto Grande was later recorded on the album *Noti de Morabeza* (2011)

version of city life that is connected to particular places and temporalities, emphasising what Brah coined the "multi-locationality" (1996: 197) of a diaspora. It is linked to the ships on which Cabo Verdeans came to Rotterdam, and to the opportunities of life and work in the city. Seafaring is 'the' symbol of migration, although in this context exclusively for male migrants.

Later in the documentary we see stills of a young Brito on board of a ship, a guitar in his lap, an example of the sailor-musician 'hybrid', so many of whom visited Rotterdam. Moments later, we are in Brito's house. Brito leans on a dresser supporting his stereo and computer (with the Cabo Verdean flag in the background) while he talks about his artistic inspiration Ildo Lobo (1953-2004) and a song that touches him, 'Alto Cutelo'[12] which plays on the background:

> It is a song about emigration, when the first left for Portugal; about the wave of migration to Portugal; about the companies they worked for. Tired, exploited. The women and children they had left behind. And then still, the Cabo Verdean that has the hope of returning to his country someday. (Thelosen 2008, translation added)

Next the documentary moves to Bar Stanis, a then popular Cabo Verdean bar on the Nieuwe Binnenweg, where Brito performs Alto Cutelo in front of an audience, illustrated in Figure 16.

[12] Alto Cutelo refers to a region/place in Cape Verde, on the island of Fogo.

Figure 16: Sequence of Stills in Bar Stanis from Rotterdam Saudade Documentary © RTV Rijnmond & SeriousFilm

The camera moves across a map painted on the wall and titled 'O arquipélago de Cabo Verde' ('The Cabo Verdean archipelago') and past a group of people at the bar laughing and talking, and then Brito begins to sing. The documentary bridges different temporalities and spaces where image and sound refer to local and transnational routes, mixing the local and global, the various places that could be considered 'home'. The bar is a place where *sodade*, the feeling

of longing to the homeland that is often present in Cabo Verdean migrant music, is shared and expressed, as if in a home away from home. The act of singing a song from another context, the migration to Portugal that occurred in a bygone time, is transported to the context of the Rotterdam migration, in a night of communion in the bar. Singing becomes, among other things, an act of collage, activating a confrontation between the two 'images' of migration. The past returns to the present, and the present is where the past is reborn. Or, the past is revived, building in the memory of both artists and spectators a relationship between these two times and spaces, giving meaning and reframing the past so that it becomes familiar, proper, a common experience.

The documentary, in this sense, maps the city, creating a "spatial texture" for Cabo Verdean musicians and migrants alike in the city, constructing the city through a series of images and events taking place in a "symbolic space", that is the city while at the same time shaping it, and which is operated as "a category of thought and experience", in the words of sociologist James Donald (2005: 179). In other words, a 'map' of belonging is generated that is at once geographical, through the city as well as across continents, as well as symbolic, as it entails the imagination of space and community. A map of belonging is constructed that traces the routes of the sailor musicians, both their physical journeys from the harbours to the cafes and the imaginary routes that are interpreted in music and that find their way to the cafes, bars, nightclubs and restaurants where those artists perform. It creates a reflection on the connections between places created by musical practices, the lyrics that refer to certain moments and experiences of migration, and the performances and places in which this is interpreted, which ultimately produce these places.

The previous sections focused on the working lives of the men who came to Rotterdam as sailors and musicians. In the next section, I seek to highlight Cabo Verdean women's stories of migration and work life.

Life-work balance from a woman's perspective

The Cabo Verdean migratory experience captured in music, popular literature and otherwise in events is mostly male-focused. Little is sung (or told, for that matter) about the experiences of female migration to the Netherlands and female migrants' struggles, lives and stories. This is also the case for the common narrative of the 'origins' of the community, which is heavily focused on the experiences of the first male pioneers and sailors in the city. However nowadays there is an increased level of visibility for the role of women in the community and their stories and history. In this subsection, I provide an overview of female migration, of the routes taken to the Netherlands, and of women's positions in the domestic sphere as well as in work life. I seek to highlight some of the issues and struggles that have occurred in relation to the domestic situation of Cabo Verdean women in Rotterdam. Finally, I seek to make visible some initiatives in the cultural sector that reflect on and increase the visibility of the roles played by women in the Cabo Verdean community.

Even though the first wave of migration in the 1960s consisted primarily of Cabo Verdean men, after approximately a decade migration of women towards the Netherlands also gathered momentum:

> In the 1970s, important links also developed between the male dominated Cape Verdean community in the Netherlands and the almost exclusively female community in Italy (Andall 1999). There were several thousand Cape Verdean women working as domestic maids in Italy and many opted to migrate to the Netherlands in search of greater autonomy and better working conditions. As a consequence of their migration from Italy, family reunification, and increasing independent female migration from Cape Verde, women became the

> majority among Cape Verdean immigrants to the Netherlands beginning in the early 1970s. Today the numbers of men and women are roughly equal, both among the resident population and among new immigrants. (Carling 2008: 92)

As sociologist Jacqueline Andall highlights, there were various reasons to migrate from Italy to the Netherlands. On the one hand, working conditions were more promising in the Netherlands as work in Italy was almost exclusively linked to the domestic sector, which also restricted independent social life and offered limited opportunities for family formation. The fact that hardly any Cabo Verdean men lived in Italy, and hardly any Cabo Verdean women in the Netherlands, also complicated the latter process. Through a series of interviews with Cabo Verdean women in Rotterdam, Andall highlights how diasporic networks generated new possibilities to meet a partner:

> Marta met her husband, who worked in Rotterdam, at a Cape Verdean party while he was on holiday in Italy. Jacintha's relationship with her husband started when she was on holiday in the Netherlands. Otaldina's husband, based in Rotterdam, saw a photo of her at a friend's house, obtained her address and began writing to her. They married two years later. (Andall 1999: 250)

It is not the case that all women already had a partner in the Netherlands and moved to the Netherlands for this reason. Many of them also came to the Netherlands alone, sometimes as single mothers. This also affected the economic situation of the women, who in this situation "could not rely on traditional patriarchal arrangements to provide their economic security" (Andall, 1999, p. 251). They were essentially 'on their own'. Women also started to arrive

directly from the Cabo Verdean islands, reuniting with or starting new families in the Netherlands, as well as from other parts of the diaspora such as Portugal and Senegal.

Like their male counterparts, women were prepared (out of necessity) to do unskilled work. As Pires explains, many Cabo Verdean women that came to the Netherlands ended up in the cleaning industry, usually in Dutch families, factories and hospitals in Rotterdam and its surrounds. For example, in the 1970s the sugar and chocolate factory in Delfshaven was a large employer. The Van Nelle factory, where many Cabo Verdean men already worked, also became a popular workplace. Pires notes, however, that even though work was often found quickly, at first it was also often arranged illegally. Many women (and men, for that matter) were arrested at factories and sent back to Portugal (Pires 2006). Exact numbers are not mentioned by Pires, nor are these available in national statistics or academic works.

Many of the women arriving in the Netherlands had crossed the border illegally or with a tourist visa, without a work or residence visa. They often arrived without proper schooling and without mastering the Dutch language. These circumstances pushed them towards both more precarious work and living conditions. Cabo Verdean women often worked as cleaning staff in hospitals such as in the Ikazia hospital, Franciscus Gasthuis, and Erasmus MC, all located in the city of Rotterdam, as well as in several nursing homes. As is typical in this line of work, this often included working evening shifts and on some occasions night shifts. With men at sea for several months at a time, women were often left singlehandedly raising their children while managing (multiple) jobs on land.

In the 1990s an emergency shelter for women was set up following several cases of extreme domestic violence. In 1994 Casa Tiberias was founded through the parish of *Nossa Senhora da Paz* ('Our Lady of Peace'). One of its founders, Tomázia Teixeira (1958-2021) stated, "the women's house had to be built. A lot of women were mistreated and then they

disappeared from Rotterdam, they did not know where they were going and then we suddenly saw them again. They came home again, their husband was nice for two or three days, and then things went wrong again" (Neves Teixeira 2020, translation added). In addition to serving as an emergency shelter for women and their families, the activities of the organisation are diverse. Since its foundation, the organisation has also played a key role in providing social assistance and as an activity centre for Cabo Verdean women where all kinds of projects are set up, such as Dutch courses and computer courses (Graça 2010: 66-67). In a personal interview, Tomázia told a story that exemplifies the precarity of the daily struggle to balance family and work:

> One time, an eight-year-old with two other kids enters the school playground. I was standing at the door and asked why their mother is not bringing them to school, to which the kid answers that she is at work. After inquiring with the mother, it turns out that she gets up early in the morning to prepare the kids, goes to work, and calls home the moment the kids needed to walk to school. Often, women would only come home after work to feed the kids, after which they started another evening shift, for example as a cleaner at a hospital. (Neves Teixeira 2020, translation added)

Women often did whatever work they were able to find considering the circumstances they arrived in the Netherlands. The evening and the night, even though not particularly attractive for many, make up part of a landscape in which low-skilled work is carried out and of which migrants often occupy a large part. The necessity to work evenings or night shifts complicates greatly what human geographer Sarah Dyer et al. (2011) calls the work-life balance, in which "diverse and complex negotiations and strategies to balance paid work and their caring responsibilities" form part of women's daily routines and where "tension between productive

and unpaid caring labour (with particular reference to the care of young children)" (2011: 685-686) is generated.

A 2003 local report shows that the problems of balancing family life and working outside regular office hours remain visible in the facilitation of childcare, putting Cabo Verdean women in a troublesome position:

> For (working) Cabo Verdean women the lack of childcare is a big problem. In particular, the fact that they often work outside 'office hours' plays a big role in this. A good example is that of women working in the cleaning sector: these women often work in the mornings before, and the evenings after office hours. These are exactly the times during which their kids are home (alone). (de Gruijter & Verwey-Jonker instituut 2003: 20, translation added)

According to Tomázia, only a handful of women were able to go to school after arriving as financial resources were often not sufficient for newcomers. The story that she tells is typical of the life of many women, often single or with their husbands at sea, looking to make ends meet:

> Women did whatever work they could find, so there were hardly any women who went to work at night, because they had to be home. You couldn't do that, with such a large group of single mothers. Getting up early to clean the offices before they open and back to work late in the afternoon was normal. They were tired, it was all they could do. The children learned very early to take care of themselves or to listen to the eldest who was usually not older than 10 years. (Neves Teixeira 2020, translation added)

Women's lives in cultural expression

For many women, the night was reserved for duties such as childcare, household, and rest, whereas nightlife in a context of socialising, relaxing and going out was reserved for sporadic occasions during the weekends. As will become clear in the following chapter on leisure and nightlife, this picture stands in stark contrast with narratives of the night that are brought to light by Cabo Verdean male artists, who often highlight going out as part of a common lifestyle that is routinely lived. This is also a lifestyle that is criticised by several Cabo Verdean composers. The song 'Dialogue', for instance, written by Cabo Verdean composer Faria Júnior and interpreted by Dutch-based female singer Jacqueline Fortes, highlights a lifestyle in which men often cheat on their partners on nights out while their wives are at home. In ironic fashion, she highlights a fictional idealised situation with an 'exemplary husband':

Mi nka tem ess problema
Nha marido é exemplar
Casa traboi, traboi casa
El ka sabe vadiar
Sum tiver n'arranjo de panela
El tá po mesa
E cuida de nós Fidjo

I don't have this problem
My husband is 'exemplary'
Home, work, work, home.
He doesn't know fooling around.
When I'm arranging the pots and pans,
He's setting the table
And taking care of our kids.

(Faria Júnior 1986)

With 'ess problema', Faria Júnior refers to an unfaithful husband who is living 'the good life', lying that he was at work, and always away from home. The harmonious coexistence within the family that Faria Júnior then pictures is not always present. Even though the situation illustrated in this song takes place in Lisbon, Portugal, similar situations are discussed in

many interviews and stories that include women's perspectives. Tomázia emphasises that when men returned from sea, they interfered with family life. On the one hand, the work that the women did both in the household and other jobs was little appreciated. On the other hand, many men behaved in macho ways, resulting in abusive home situations: "Once I was at work, and someone called me to come to the hospital right now. She had been pushed off the second-floor balcony by her husband for greeting another man, just an acquaintance, on the street" (Neves Teixeira: 2020).

Sonya Dias is a well-known storyteller, talk show host, entrepreneur and cultural producer within the Cabo Verdean community. In an essay on the role of women in the community, she emphasises that when the men began to work ashore, relations within the family became further disrupted and a spate of divorces ensued:

> The frictions and family problems increased, especially because many children had difficulty with the new relationships of authority and the often strict attitude and hard hand of the father. Unfortunately, there are plenty of examples of children who dropped out of school because of this and suffered emotional damage. It resulted in a big wave of divorces within the Cape Verdean community, which hardly happened before. (Dias 2020: 187-188)

The difficulties that arose in Cabo Verdean family life, like the fate of the women who had to fend for themselves and their families, were fairly invisible because it was a taboo subject. Tomázia discusses problems of the Cabo Verdean community in a radio program in the 1980s, at the Cabo Verdean Broadcasting Foundation C.O.S., called *Het Hoekje van de Vrouw* ('The women's corner'), which played at the beginning of the evening. For example, she discussed the theme of incest for 6 months on this show. She told the stories that were

shared with her personally, and guests came by with their story. Other themes discussed included the emancipation of women and teenage motherhood. Many of these topics, as mentioned before, were strictly taboo. However, she emphasises that men also listened to her program. She tells a striking anecdote about men who, after work, before heading home, would go to particular cafés in the city and listen to the program, which reveals the urgency of these discussions.

The invisibility of women, women's issues and their role in the Cabo Verdean diaspora also translates to the invisibility of women in narrative. Considering the concept of myth-making, it is clear that in both historiography and popular storytelling (whether spoken, written, or sung), the genesis of the community in all its facets, of which work life is one of the most important elements, is mainly based on the story and experiences of men and the sailor's lifestyle. This is of course not something that is exclusive to the Cabo Verde community but occurs in migration stories with different origins. The story of women's migration to Rotterdam is much less widespread and has earned little public recognition, although it has been very important for the organisation of the community. The myth, so to speak, is male. Indeed, perhaps also on a self-critical note, it is often the male pioneers of the community who are highlighted in stories of the community. One of the exceptions is Sonya Dias' work, briefly mentioned before. In 2018 she performed a storytelling theatre piece titled *Het verhaal van mijn moeder* ('The story of my mother'). This is a clear caveat to the standard male-centric story told about the Cabo Verdean migrants, as she herself states:

> The story of the first men who came to Rotterdam, like Djunga de Biluca, is known by many people. The people of Rotterdam know the story of the first Cape Verdeans that came, who came to work on the ships. But nobody told the stories of women; how did they get here? (Dias 2020)

As Dias highlights, her mother's story is a feast of recognition for many women who came to the Netherlands: "my mother's story is not my mother's story, it's the story of the first generation" (Dias 2020) and serves to fill a gap in an otherwise male-centric narrative of migration. Comfortably seated in an armchair and creating a visual atmosphere of intimacy, Dias narrates the early life story of her mother Joana until the moment she arrives in the Netherlands (Krakowska-Rodrigues 2022). Both a personal story (that of her mother Joana) and a collective experience (of many women who shared similar trajectories and lives), Dias' narrative unfolds the connections between roots, routes and memories by sharing a trajectory that starts in her mother's birthplace of Lajedo, on the island of Santo Antão and ends in Rotterdam. Although the story of migrant women is still an exception in the diasporic narrative and cultural productions that tell the history of the Cabo Verdean community today, present performances such as *Het verhaal van mijn moeder* generate a flow of 're-memory' (Brah 1996) and re-experience that create a broader narrative and enable re-imaginations of the community's past.