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

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Summary

This thesis sets out to examine how urban night spaces have been, and how they are currently produced, imagined, experienced, and narrated among the Cabo Verdean migrant community in Rotterdam. The history of the Cabo Verdeans in Rotterdam begins with the arrival of the first sailors in the fifties. In later years they begin to settle in Rotterdam and work ashore. This was followed in the 1970s by a stream of women's migration. This allowed for the growth of the community, and different places in the city quickly became important spaces for the community, both in public (in streets, neighbourhoods and squares) and private (in restaurants, community centres, bars and nightclubs). This thesis focuses on the development and importance of nightlife and night spaces. These are often underexposed and overlooked as important spaces for migrant community building, activism and belonging.

Night spaces are produced in intersecting and overlapping ways. Indeed, the simple act of 'getting together' as a community does not 'produce' a night space per se. Instead, one must take into account not only what goes on at night, but what flows through it: night spaces are produced through an interweaving of narratives and representations. Night spaces are essential for generating a collective sense of self, which is supported by processes of cultural and political myth-making.

The chapter *Myth Making In The Rotterdam Diaspora* addresses the activities that take place in the city where a (conscious) effort is made to produce or maintain diasporic identities or narratives. It zooms in on a series of interrelated issues; the history and legacy of record label Morabeza Records, cultural activism in contemporary hip hop, and the cultural religious celebrations of São João Baptista. What these cultural manifestations have in common is that each claims its space(s) in the city, and these spaces have since been embedded in memories of the city. The city spaces in which myth-making occurs, and in which the construction of a

diasporic identity takes place, are simultaneously integrated into a network of community spaces, providing for a localized sense of belonging. Myths can be found in the political ideas that inspire nightlife events, in music and other cultural expressions that are enjoyed together, or in the sharing of stories of lives lived in similar and shared ways. Yet the ways in which night spaces are experienced, or narrated for that matter, are hardly ever homogenous. How one is able to navigate the city, during day or night, depends, for example, on one's legal status, economic position, or gender. As such, the production of space is also always telling of a certain exclusion from space.

The chapter *The Routines Of Work Life In And Around The City* traces the routes that have been taken from Cabo Verde to Rotterdam and within Rotterdam itself, zooming in on the experiences of the city, especially since the start of migration. It traces important places related to the labour migrant experience such as boarding houses, employment agencies, but also the bars visited after a day spent working or looking for work. This process involves working with an archive of musical material in which these places are meticulously described through experiences and stories. The archive of Cabo Verdean music on Rotterdam, of which a selection of songs is included in this thesis, provides a unique insight into the narratives of Cabo Verdean migration to Rotterdam. It is particularly unique because no other migrant group has so extensively sung about the Netherlands, nor about a Dutch city in particular. The music that emerged in this research shed light on life in the city in different ways: artists sing about their sadness and the longing for home, about the hardships of life in migration, but also about their experiences in the city at night. The stories found in music describe daily rhythms of work and going out, from a multitude of perspectives. Cabo Verdean music about Rotterdam is also distinctive in that it contributes significantly to processes of place-making as it reflects on and generates representations of very specific places which were important

during the times in which that music was written: it traces places and routes through the city and uncovers daily and nocturnal rhythms, echoing a particular atmosphere.

When discussing the various representations found in cultural expressions such as music, whether these construct imaginations of the homeland or narrate life in the city of Rotterdam at night, it is important to consider from what perspective these representations are produced. Considering that the first migrants to arrive to Rotterdam were male sailors, cultural productions both from the start of migration, as well as contemporary events, reflect the male perspective. It determined the lens through which the community's story was created, essentially shaping the image of the community's history, its important figures and events, as well popular representations of everyday life. The construction and development of the community in Rotterdam is mainly attributed to male pioneers, who admittedly were the first to arrive and played a hugely important role in this. However, the stories of female migration and their importance for community-building, as well as the role of female pioneers, often remains unrecognized in contemporary narratives. Capturing and recognizing their endeavours is particularly urgent considering the age of first-generation migrants. Women's role in political life and in community organizations, such as in the cultural and religious sphere, are significant, yet often unconsidered and overlooked. Several female cultural producers recognize the importance of these endeavours and in this sense seek to bring balance to the stories of migration that circulate. This thesis highlights issues of domestic violence, work-life balance and the invisibility of women with regards to their contributions to the community.

In Cabo Verdean music on Rotterdam, some composers were critical of the way Cabo Verdeans are treated, others are critical of how Cabo Verdeans behave in the port city, others are critical of this criticism. Music serves as an instrument of community self-reflection and discussion, yet it does so only from a particular position. Indeed, in reflecting on daily life in

migration, whether this is with regards to work life or nightlife, music about Rotterdam is almost exclusively composed by men. On the one hand, this means that what is being sung about in terms of the livelihood of women in migration is minimal. On the other hand, that what is being sung about is a delineated version of a certain reality. As such, music reflects a romanticized or idealized version of particular lifestyles. Although, for example, artists sing about going out in particular Rotterdam nightclubs, or about the desire to consume alcohol or drugs, this says little about the actual consumption of these goods and as such it lacks a critical notion towards these issues.

The chapter *Dancing Down Memory Lane: (Re)Experiences Of Cabo Verdean Nightlife* builds towards a discussion on music and experiences of nightlife in its more common sense, meaning dancing or clubbing, seen over a time period spanning the start of migration to the city until now. It examines how certain night scenes are remembered, but also how elements of historic night life are reused, reworked, and re-experienced in contemporary nightlife events. While maintaining awareness of the importance of the history of migration and its associated imaginations of both the homeland and diasporic identity, younger generations of Cabo Verdeans renovate and innovate the ways in which Cabo Verdeanness is dealt with. The engagement with both traditional and modern cultural products is a constantly creative process, influenced by the rich cultural and ethnic makeup of the city that produces new forms of expression at night. Also considering the ever-developing character of the city Rotterdam, the engagement with particular night-spaces is constantly updating, which will continue to occur in the future, changing the diasporic layout of Cabo Verdean Rotterdam.