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Krakowska Rodrigues, K.K.

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KAMILA KRAKOWSKA RODRIGUES

Leiden University Center for the Arts in Society

Storytelling nights: Performing (post)memory of Cape Verdean migration to Rotterdam

ABSTRACT

The Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam (the third biggest Cape Verdean diaspora in the world) have left a clear imprint on Rotterdam's culture especially in terms of music production. Recently, this cultural and historical legacy has been gaining more recognition. In the field of performing arts, which constitute a relevant aspect of the urban nightlife (when not impacted by the current COVID-19 restrictions), the stories of migration circulating among the community have inspired Dutch-Cape Verdean artists to create thought-provoking plays on diasporic identity negotiations and belonging. In this regard, two theatre storytelling pieces by second-generation Dutch-Cape Verdean female artists, Lena Évora's Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland ('Music and stories from my homeland') (2018) and Sonya Dias's Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder ('The story of my mother') (2017), engage with the notions of 'home' and 'story' in a particularly thought-provoking way, especially in what concerns night aesthetics. By close reading these two plays within the framework of Diaspora and Critical Archival Studies, this article aims to address how arts play a role in creating imaginary records of Cape Verdean migration history and contribute towards a more inclusive recognition of Rotterdam's multicultural social texture and its nightlife.

KEYWORDS

female voices
Cape Verdean diaspora
Rotterdam's diversity
imaginary records
night aesthetics
night cultures

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1. The collection of these interviews, initiated by Davidson Rodrigues (DRM) and Marjan Beijering (GeschiedenisLab) in 2014 and finalized with the support of the NITE research project in 2021, is available at the Rotterdam City Hall Archive https://stadsarchief.rotterdam.nl/zoeken/resultaten/index.xml?mizk_alle=storia%20de%20nhas%20pais&mizig=299. Accessed 16 March 2022.

The history of Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam (the third biggest Cape Verdean diaspora in the world, after Boston and Lisbon) dates back to the shipping industry boom in the post-Second World War Europe (Carling 2008: 92) and offers truly inspiring insights into the issues of (in)visibility, recognition and silencing in the context of migration. The early newcomers, despite struggling with often harsh working conditions and difficulties in obtaining visas and work permits, were finding their place in the Dutch society relying mostly on the support within the Cape Verdean social network. Hard working and not standing out – this image of the community has prevailed in the public opinion and among the authorities until recently (Carling 2008: 96). The label of ‘silent migrants’, with all its benefits and drawbacks from a societal point of view, seems particularly ambivalent given the community’s clear imprint on Rotterdam’s cultural scene, especially in terms of music production. In this regard, the foundation of Morabeza Records in 1965 was a springboard for paving the way for a global outreach of the Cape Verdean music industry, which operates within a highly transnational network of production and reception (Sieber 2005: 126–27).

Recently, this cultural and historical legacy has been receiving more public recognition by both the Rotterdam’s local authorities (e.g. by the digitization of the Morabeza recordings by the City Hall Archive) and the descendants of the first migrants (such as the oral history project ‘Storia de Nhas Pais’, in which first-generation migrants were interviewed by the younger generations).¹ The stories of migration and settlement circulating among the community have also inspired several Dutch-Cape Verdean artists in the field of performing arts, which constitute a relevant aspect of urban nightlife (when not impacted by the current COVID-19 restrictions). Theatre, as will be argued here, opens up a creative space to rethink how diasporic communities negotiate their ‘multi-local’ (Vertovec 1999: 450) sense of belonging. Importantly, by navigating between facts and fiction, between personal and collective experience, between the Netherlands and Cape Verde, the stories brought on Rotterdam’s stages by Cape Verdean descendants weave an alternative artistic archive of ‘postmemories’. This concept was introduced by Marianne Hirsch in the context of Holocaust trauma among the so-called generations ‘after’, in which ‘connection to the past is [...] not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation’ (Hirsch 2008: 107). In the particular case of the Dutch-Cape Verdean diaspora, the stories transmitted among generations seem to operate as narrative and affective moorings that allow them to explore the situated meanings of home.

In this regard, two theatre storytelling pieces by second-generation Dutch-Cape Verdean female artists engage with the notions of ‘home’ and ‘story’ in a particularly thought-provoking way, especially in what concerns night and darkness as an aesthetic device: Lena Évora’s *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* (‘Music and stories from my homeland’) (2018) and Sonya Dias’s *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* (‘The story of my mother’) (2017). By close reading these two plays within the framework of Diaspora and Critical Archival Studies, this article aims to address how arts play a role in creating imaginary records (Gilliland and Caswell 2016) of Cape Verdean migration history. Moreover, the productions by Évora and Dias will be further discussed within the context of Rotterdam’s night economy with a special focus on the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and community building to probe how diasporic arts have a role in contributing towards a more inclusive recognition of Rotterdam’s multicultural social texture and its nightlife.

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HOMECOMING?

Both *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* and *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* invoke the ideas of rootedness and belonging already in their respective titles. Spatial and genealogical moorings that circumvent the contours of one's idea of 'home' seem to be their central narrative thread. Yet when addressed from a diasporic, transnational perspective, the notion of 'home' becomes blurry. As Robin Cohen summarizes in his overview of the canonical 'Caribbean paradigm' of theorizing diaspora and diaspora identity building, 'the collective identity of homeland and nation' is experienced and perceived as 'a vibrant and constantly changing set of cultural interactions that fundamentally questions the very ideas of "home" and "host"' (Cohen 1997: 127). However, the deconstruction of such binaries does not imply that there is no home, no space of belonging. As argued by Sara Ahmed, the 'journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival' (1999: 330).

From a different perspective, recent social science research has increasingly engaged with how more efficient (and affordable) physical and virtual contacts with the homeland as well as the flourishing market of 'diaspora tourism' influence the ways in which migrant communities negotiate their perceptions of 'home'. This type of transnational connection – clearly intensified in the recent decades – seems to be crucial for Dutch-Cape Verdeans, and especially for the younger generations, as evident in the vivid reception of the magazine *Nos Agenda* funded in 2017 not only to promote Cape Verdean culture in the Netherlands but also to help Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands connecting with each other and with the archipelago. In this regard, the concept of 'moments of home' introduced by Etemaddar et al. seems particularly productive. 'Moments of home' does not only highlight the transient nature of experiencing home in/as diaspora but also offer a more dynamic framework for addressing 'numerous ways in which different forms of travel and mobility can allow diaspora people, families and communities to experience home in different ways and in different geographic locations' (2016: 516). Consequently, 'homecoming' does not exclusively imply leisure tourism in the home country and/or visiting friends and relatives there, as it is approached in most tourism research, but also (re)creating memories, tastes and experiences through other forms of mobility, for example trips within the country of residence, hosting friends and relatives or visiting them in yet another country.

In this context, what imaginary of home is drawn by stories triggered by the Cape Verdean diasporic experience in Rotterdam? How can they contribute to a better understanding of belonging that is intrinsically in transit? The stories narrated and performed by Lena Évora and Sonya Dias, as will be further argued, embark on a symbolic, narrative journey that is nonetheless grounded in the memories of the physical movement across borders and in the lived experience of inhabiting a certain space, (re)creating a 'moment of home' for their audience. In fact, the act of visiting a theatre can also be perceived as a form of mobility, following Etemaddar et al.'s conceptualization (2016), and importantly, it is an intrinsically social act that is enacted 'after hours'. Bearing in mind that night-time economy studies are still relatively recent and in need of further development, attention of policy-makers and advocacy groups tends to be focused predominantly on nightclubs and bars, with music scene identified as a key aspect in stimulating a creative and booming nightlife (e.g. Creative

Footprint studies by VibeLab 2017–19) and other forms of cultural production like theatre left out of the picture. However, Dutch-Cape Verdean plays that bridge storytelling and music to ‘bring people together’ – a motivation behind Lena Évora’s acts as she openly acknowledges in an interview conducted for the NITE project (2020) – can be seen as catalysts for a reconceptualization of the imaginary of nightlife that would be more inclusive towards different types of creativity and culture as well as different types of audiences.

UNSETTLING THE ARCHIVE

Alongside the idea of ‘home’, the notion of ‘story’ forms another narrative axis in *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* and *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder*. To capture the creative ways in which these storytelling performances keep memory of migration alive and explore imaginaries of home (which are in fact relevant for different groups of Rotterdammers), the plays will be analysed through the lens of Critical Archival Studies. In the last few decades, Archival Science has been more and more engaged with ‘the creative act or authoring intent or process or functionality behind the record’ (Cook 2001: 24), a critical deconstructive process inspired by the postmodern inquiries into the nature of historical texts and artefacts, with Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (1996) as a clear reference (Cook 2001: 6). As Terry Cook argues, the role of the archive – seen as a concept, a practice and an institution – is double-edged since it does not only preserve but also create memory. This baseline assumption is crucial since memory is intertwined with forgetting and thus, privileges and on the other hand, silences certain records and certain stories (Cook 2013: 101). Critical Archival Studies address precisely such tensions and fractures inherent in the records’ selection, preservation and dissemination.

In this regard, Queer/ed Archival Methodology proposed by Jamie Ann Lee offers a valuable framework to analyse how the stories of arrival and settlement are embodied and artistically transformed by female artists of Cape Verdean descent, born and raised in Rotterdam. Within this methodology, the focus lays on the transformative nature of the human body that constantly undergoes process of becoming/unbecoming and thus certain (gender) identity markers can be only seen as contextual and inherently unstable (Lee 2017: 3). On the other hand, the momentary character of the archive itself is also acknowledged. In order to address it, Lee introduces the concept of the archival body – which combines both the idea of the human bodies and the archives – ‘to articulate the queer and the archival, two seemingly distinct and opposing constructs; one dynamic, the other held and preserved and, therefore, considered relatively static’ (Lee 2017: 3). Such approach opens up not only novel conceptual perspectives that allow to explore multiple, complementary but also competing narratives emerging from the archival records. Importantly, the interpretative framework of the ‘nomadic’ – of the ‘meandering ways of knowing and being’ (Lee 2017: 5) – allows to conceptualize the archival bodies as ‘shifting sites of (un)becoming’ and to perceive the collected stories as ‘stories so far’ (Lee 2017: 5). Unsettling the supposedly static archive is thus a critical praxis employed ‘so that archival practices do not reproduce neocolonializing categories or further subjugating conditions’ (Lee 2017: 6).

The Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam, as already mentioned, constructs its collective identity within a rather ambivalent social position: labelled as ‘the silent migrants’, they are seen as hard working and staying out of trouble, but they also remain invisible among the wider Dutch society (Slingerland 2012: 9–10) despite making an undeniable imprint on both the

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local and the global music scene. To understand how the Dutch-Cape Verdean artists engage with their cultural heritage within the framework of the dominant culture, the concept of 'impossible archival imaginaries' seems particularly relevant and productive. Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell introduce this idea to address human and ethical considerations related to the study of records that are unavailable, yet constitute sources of personal or public affect:

[I]mpossible archival imaginaries and the affect associated with the imagined records produced within those imaginaries, offer important affective counterbalances and sometimes resistance to dominant legal, bureaucratic, historical and forensic notions of evidence that so often fall short in explaining the capacity of records and archives to motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize.

(Gilliland and Caswell 2016: 55–56)

While including imagined records in the archival practice poses considerable challenges by disrupting the notions of evidence and authenticity (Gilliland and Caswell 2016: 72), fiction allows to explore potential pluralist epistemologies that Gilliland and Caswell argue for to give justice to collective imaginaries rendered unheard and invisible. Importantly, 'the imagined records anchors and projects new possible futures, futures which are foreclosed in the absence of the material artifacts' (Gilliland and Caswell 2016: 71), allowing for an engagement with the turbulent past and present in a meaningful way. In this regard, the role of affect – understood as a 'force that creates a relation between a body and the world' (Cifor 2016: 8), a corporal reaction to our individual and/or collective embedding in the existing social relations and frames of belonging – is a crucial aspect to consider.

Drawing upon the stories of migration of the artists' parents and, particularly in the case of Lena Évora, fictionalizing her own auto-biographic stories, *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* and *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* offer inspiring insights precisely into the affective dimension of imaginaries of arrival, settlement and diasporic identity negotiations that yield a deep symbolic and epistemological value, yet are not fully recognized and accessible. By turning the memories and postmemories of migration and (re)homing tangible and approachable, the storytelling events invite for a critical reflection on belonging in a historically multicultural port city that is currently rebranding itself as a 'creative city'. Such reflection is particularly timely and relevant since, as Boer and Schaap argue, the new image of the city 'as bold, edgy, progressive, international; an affordable alternative to Amsterdam' (2021: 20) does not include though all Rotterdammers, with residents with lower income being the ones mostly affected by the city's growing gentrification.

'HOE NEDERLANDS BEN IK EIGENLIJK MET MIJN KAAPVERDISCHE ROOTS?' ('HOW DUTCH AM I ACTUALLY WITH MY CAPE VERDEAN ROOTS?') (LENA ÉVORA)

The idea of homeland is the leitmotif of *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland*. Lena Évora in her role of storyteller departs in a symbolic quest for an answer to a fundamental question 'who am I?'. Comparing and contrasting different definitions of the term *vaderland* ('fatherland') provided in Dutch dictionaries, she concludes that depending on the criteria taken into account, she would be classified as either Dutch or Cape Verdean. This 'either/or' dichotomy implying a static notion of home and belonging clearly does not capture the dynamic

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behind the diasporic experience and, importantly, reinforces the othering of communities with migrant background. To challenge such constraining notion of fatherland, the performer scrutinizes in a series of sketches popular stereotypes regarding the supposedly detached nature of the Dutch as opposed to the Cape Verdean emotional character. The author recreates therein different 'moments of home', like for example visiting a friend or a relative in a hospital. Checking the visiting hours and the family's agenda to plan the most convenient moment for a visit is contrasted with a frenetic preparation of all kind of Cape Verdean traditional dishes – 'catchupa, canja, couscous, cold peixo' – to serve to the ill as if it was a remedy made of care and affection. Such mirror-like stories open up a space for ontological explorations into the very nature of being and belonging and invite the author to reflect on 'Hoe Nederlands ben ik eigenlijk met mijn Kaapverdise roots?' ('How Dutch am I actually with my Cape Verdean roots?').

The idea of home(coming) is further highlighted through the scenario. The artist stands in the middle of the stage covered by a colourful woollen carpet, which creates a cosy atmosphere as if she invited the audience to her (symbolic) living room (Figure 1). The musicians sit in a half circle behind the storyteller, which transmits impressions of coming together, of belonging to a certain community, of dialogue. Furthermore, the lighting plays an important role in reinforcing this feeling of intimacy. The light spots centred on Lena Évora clearly direct the audience's attention to her act, creating a contrast with the black background behind. However, the darkness surrounding the stage does not seem to be in opposition to the illuminated creative space; rather, the two spheres punctuate each other in a play of shadows, with the musicians occupying the border in-between the seen and unseen. Theatre has a long history of playing with light and darkness, propelled by technological innovations and safety concerns on the one hand, and by experimenting with the aesthetics of darkness on the other (Welton 2020: 180). *Muziek and Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* is not an experimental piece in this regard since it keeps the long-established division between an illuminated stage and dimmed audience. However, its set's lighting invites for a further exploration of how darkness – in which 'other people, places and things become temporary, fleeting content in the attentions of audiences and performers alike' (Welton 2020: 179) – makes us sensing the reality differently as well as of what implications this different type of sensing has for imagining and relating to one's home. The light spots illuminate clearly the artist but also the carpet, a metonymy of home, and expand towards the musicians and the audience alike as if all present were invited to Lena Évora's home certain evening to listen to her stories. Watching and listening are the key senses to engage with the play on stage but they do not seem to be sufficient to get to know the home whose image gradually emerges from the performance, a home that operates at the same time as 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination' and 'the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells' (Brah 1996: 192). Darkness embraces the participants as if creating a safe space to come together and gather around this imaginary home to experience what 'we learn of others aside from the culture of clarity that prevails in the lit world' (Welton 2020: 190).

In fact, the symbolic journey through the contours of Lena Évora's space of belonging – which as argued by Sara Ahmed emerges within the logic of an interval (1999) – is a travel through music. The choice of the piece 'Vaderland' by the Dutch popular singer Frank Boijen for the opening of the play seems deeply symbolic. On the one hand, it can be read as Évora's claim

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Figure 1: *Lena Évora in Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland. Courtesy of Lena Évora.*

to her Dutch identity. The Netherlands is embraced by the artist as her place of birth and upbringing, a place she recognizes as her own when returning from holidays (and facing its rainy weather), a place where she feels at home. Interestingly, this album by Boijen was composed after his travel through Asia and the lyrics express a longing for the fatherland ‘zo ver weg’ (‘so far away’). While the polders are sung by Boijen as a memory of the past that makes one stop and reflect, the Dutch landscape is Lena’s lived experience in the present.

However, the play does not only engage with the here and now of the storyteller’s life, but through music connects the present with the past and opens up for the future. While the two main acts include several music pieces sung in Dutch, the intermezzo explores musically the Cape Verdean roots of the artist. Ironically entitled ‘Het verhaal “Hoe Kaapverdië de wereld ontdekte”’ (‘The story – “How Cape Verde discovered the world”’), it is simply told through a morna – which is a Cape Verdean music genre classified as intangible cultural heritage by the UNESCO in 2019 – of Lena Évora’s authorship. In contrast, in other scenes, music serves as an important means of communication but it does not exist outside of a story; it complements the sketches, the stories, but is not self-explanatory like ‘Kamin de Corda’ (‘Way to Corda’) seems to be. This song represents the singer’s travel to the island of Santo Antão to visit her family in the village Corda, which is marked by the feelings



Figure 2: Lena Évora meeting her grandmother. Still from the video clip ‘Kamin de Corda’. Copyright Lena Évora.

of love, pride and gratitude for not only her relatives but also the ancestral homeland:

Terra, mar e ceu uni	(‘Land, sea and sky united
Orgulho que m ta senti	Pride that I am feeling
Li m bem parçebe	Here I well understand
Es amor profund que m ten pa bo	This deep love that I have for you’)

Importantly, the video recorded in 2014 captures Lena Évora’s meeting with her grandmother Joana Honorata Lima (Figure 2) who passed away relatively shortly after, a unique archival record of a private, family history that symbolizes the need for reconnection with the ancestral roots by generations of diasporic Cape Verdeans. Within the narrative structure of the play, ‘Kamin de Corda’ operates at the liminal space between the facts and the imagination, which opens up possibilities for (re)creating memories of waves of physical and symbolic travels that mark not only the identity negotiations of the Cape Verdean diaspora both in the past and in the present but also the composition of Rotterdam’s city texture as inherently multicultural and postcolonial.

The play concludes with a realization that ‘Ik ben wie ik ben’ (‘I am who I am’) and acknowledges the role of affect in bringing people together. Just like love for music brought Lena Évora and other musicians in the band together as she explains: ‘Wij zijn allemaal verschillend en hebben allen een andere achtergrond. Maar hebben we elkaar gevonden in een overeenkomst. De liefde voor de muziek’ (‘We are all different and have a different background. But we have found each other in a joint interest. The love for music’). However, it is important to highlight that this storytelling travel through personal spaces of belonging is not simply a symbolic, narrative act, but it is an embodied experience, as evidenced by the opening words:

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Hier sta ik dan	(‘So I stand here
Dit is wie ik ben	This is who I am
Ik ben een kopie van jou	I am a copy of you
Bepaald door het verleden	Determined by the past
Geleid door het heden	Guided by the present
Onderweg naar de toekomst	On the way to the future’)

This statement, repeated also in the closing act, positions the artist not only as the master of the spoken word but also highlights her physical presence. She occupies a material space – standing in the middle of the carpet covering the stage – and the way she experiences and relates to this space is informed by her positioning, referring here to Stuart Hall’s reflections on cultural identity as always ‘in context’ (1991: 222), in transition between the past and the future, between generations. An archival body that intrinsically operates as a ‘shifting site of (un)becoming’ (Lee 2017: 5) whose story can only be known ‘so far’.

DE BOOM WAAR U NAAR KIJKT IS EEN BIJZONDERE. [...] ER IS EEN DING DAT U NIET ZIET AAN DEZE BOOM EN DAT ZIJN HAAR WORTELS (‘THE TREE YOU ARE LOOKING AT IS A SPECIAL ONE. [...] ONE THING THAT YOU CANNOT SEE IN THIS TREE ARE HER ROOTS’) (SONYA DIAS)

Het Verhaal van mijn Moeder opens and closes with the imaginary of a tree, a symbol of rootedness and rebirth. However, as explained by a narrator in voice-over (clearly recognizable as Lena Évora), this is a special tree since it has no roots. The idea of (un)rootedness runs through the whole play, with the tree occupying the central part of the stage and dominating over the actors and musicians as a living memento of the eternal play between one’s roots and routes (Figure 3). This idea is explored further in the epilogue, in which the voice-over narrator clarifies it is a mango tree, successfully replanted from the village of Lajedo on the island of Santo Antão, the birth place of the play’s protagonist, Joana, to a land with a temperate climate. This narrative arch positions Joana’s personal story as a history of a whole generation of migrants leaving Cape Verde in the colonial times in search for better life opportunities.

The narrative is woven by Sonya Dias, who sits comfortably in an armchair throughout the play creating an atmosphere of intimacy. The armchair functions as a metonymy of home in a similar manner to the carpet covering the stage in *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* and visually reiterates the idea of negotiating the boundaries between the private and the public, the personal and the collective. The storyteller is symbolically at home: her home, her mother’s home, home of generations of Cape Verdean families in Rotterdam. In fact, like in Lena Évora’s performance, lighting plays here an important role in creating a welcoming, homey atmosphere and inviting the audience to relate to the story being told. With Sonya Dias in full light, the rest of the stage is covered in dimmed lights as if re-enacting not only the joy but also the hardships of migration and settlement needed certain opacity to accommodate and express all the feelings and emotions this journey caused and its memory (and postmemory) continues to trigger. The shadows projected by the tree and the actors invoke the imaginary of a nightfall, of a landscape in twilight that can provoke diverse emotional



Figure 3: *The replanted mango tree. Still from the recording of Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder. Copyright Sonya Dias.*

responses ranging from nostalgia and melancholy to hope and optimism as illustrated in a thought-provoking way in Peter Davidson's *The Last of the Light: About Twilight* (2015).

Despite or maybe precisely because of the highly symbolic character of *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder*, its storyline includes detailed spatial and temporal references. The narrator identifies the neighbourhoods of Rotterdam where her mother lived, mapping out the Cape Verdean presence in the city, which became known as the archipelago's tenth (inhabited) island. Interestingly, the opening words include also a brief overview of Cape Verde's topography and popular imaginary of its diverse population:

Mijn wortels liggen in Cabo Verde, een eilandengroep voor de west kust van Africa te hoogte van Senegal. Een land die bestaat uit tien eilanden waar de mensen mooi zijn, niet alleen vanwege hun diversiteit en autelik maar vooral vanwege hun hartelijkheid en gastvrijheid.

('My roots lie in Cabo Verde, an island group at the west coast of Africa at the latitude of Senegal. A country formed by ten islands where people are beautiful, not only due to their diversity and authenticity, but mostly due to their cordiality and hospitality.')

(Dias 2017)

This presentation can be read as a pedagogical endeavour to make the audience acquainted with the protagonist's birthplace and an ancestral homeland for a considerable part of the local Rotterdam's population. It opens up thus the archive of memories engendered within the community's collective historical experience for a wider audience. The subsequent travels of Joana, which took her further and further away from her family on Santo Antão, chart a trajectory well known to generations of Cape Verdean migrants, but only recently touched upon in narratives on Rotterdam's multicultural texture like for example in an episode dedicated to Rotterdam of a

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popular TV show *De Hokjesman* ('De Rotterdammers' 2016). Upon her arrival in Lisbon, Portugal, the young woman stays in a boarding house called in the play 'Calçada d'Estrela', where migrants from several Portuguese colonies would meet to form and maintain transnational networks of community and solidarity. The scenes located in Lisbon, like Joana's joyful meeting with friends from Cape Verde and going out to celebrate a new beginning, illustrate the different ways newcomers would try and recreate 'moments of home' (Etedemmar et al. 2016) away from home. However, Portugal was not the protagonist's final destiny, but a temporary and convenient – Cape Verde was still a Portuguese colony at the time – stop on the way to reach economically more developed European countries. The denial of entry in Luxembourg where Joana was supposed to join her aunt and her subsequent illegal travel to the Netherlands to join her loved one accounts for the determination, perseverance and resilience not only of the young protagonist but also of the generations of whom I would call 'founding mothers' of the Rotterdam's Cape Verdean community. Such act of storytelling that turns a personal story into a history of a community can be arguably only captured and transmitted if encompassed by feelings of affection and solidarity. The play is composed as an act of love to the mother that has always been a guide and inspiration for Sonya Dias, as openly acknowledged by the storyteller in the play's closing, on the one hand. On the other, it gains a more universal meaning and becomes a homage to Cape Verdean mothers, their independence and resistance, as suggested by the closing song 'Hey Kriola', which Lena Évora composed in 2015 to celebrate the Day of Cape Verdean women.

Indeed, as Sonya Dias acknowledges in an interview conducted by the NITE team (2020), the play was received by many as not just a particular story, but a story of Cape Verdean mothers in the Rotterdam's community. This reception shows the relevance of *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* as an imagined record, recurring to the framework of archival imaginaries by Gilliland and Caswell (2016), given that the migration histories of the so-called founding fathers of the Dutch-Cape Verdean community are relatively well recorded and gradually more recognized, as is the case of Djunga di Biluca, the founder of Morabeza Records or Constantino Delgado, the owner of the iconic hotel Delta. The stories of women's arrival and settlement function mainly in the private sphere, unrecorded and rendered into silence in the public space. There are some recent projects paving the way for more recognition of the role of women in the community as well as in the formation of the multicultural texture of Rotterdam, with the publication of life history of Maria Antonieta Miranda by Carla Zonneveld (2014) in the forefront. Yet *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* fills in a clear void in the archive and importantly, explores the affective dimension behind the collection and dissemination of stories of migration and integration.

This affective nature of stories of migration is also highlighted throughout the play by music and dance. Joana's trajectory is marked by songs of emotional and symbolic value to the community, like 'Sodade' ('Longing'), which became a metonymy of Cape Verdean identity and diasporic history. Importantly, migration is a lived, embodied history. The crucial turning points in Joana's life – like her deportation from Luxembourg or the decision to get divorced – are accompanied by dance performances (Figure 4). The expressive movements of the dancers to the nostalgic rhythms of mornas, like emblematic 'Terra Longe' ('A far away land') composed by B. Leza, one of the key figures in the development of Cape Verdean music (1905–56), and sung here by Lena Évora, make us 'deeply aware of our bodies as containers and transmitters of

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Figure 4: Dancing scene. Still from the recording of *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder*. Copyright Sonya Dias.

memories and histories through trans-temporalities' (Hellier-Tinoco 2019: 3). Reactivating 'bodies of history', which Ruth Hellier-Tinoco identifies as a creative potential of performance projects (2019: 4), *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* opens up a possibility of engaging with the past by next generations in a way that fully explores 'the capacity of records and archives to motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize' (Gilliland and Caswell 2016: 56) and turns these imagined records meaningful in assuring community's well-being and growth.

STORYTELLING NIGHTS

Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland and *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* compose their narratives of migration and homecoming at the liminal space between (auto)biography and imaginary offering valuable insights into the dynamics of identity building of a diaspora that claimed Rotterdam its home. Through performance, storytelling and music, Lena Évora and Sonya Dias offer their audience a reflection on how past cannot be simply enclosed as

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a record to be preserved and classified in an attempt to create the history of migration and the history of Rotterdam. Rather this past is still an embodied presence, felt and sensed as a story that exists 'so far' and opens up new imaginaries for the future. The affective dimension of these plays is a crucial narrative device that allows the audience to capture and relate to the experiences of home(coming) that are so much personal and private as collective and universal. Importantly, the two plays engage with a certain aesthetics of the night, marked by a play of light and darkness in tones of twilight, which seems to facilitate a creative dialogue in which memories of migration and settlement as well as experiences of being embedded in different cultural backgrounds can be truly acknowledged and addressed as 'momentary' (Lee 2017: 3) and 'within the logic of an interval' (Ahmed 1999: 330).

Furthermore, I would argue that the relevance of the contemporary Dutch-Cape Verdean theatrical production goes beyond offering its audiences inspiring and thought-provoking stories of identity negotiations and belonging in which carefully staged shades of darkness draw the contours of one's home. These plays need also to be approached as story nights, as much cultural as social events. In an interview for the NITE project, Sonya Dias reflects on the relevance of storytelling for keeping the community together and stresses that night is a time where 'we can relax, we can be together, we can see each other; social media is important, but it is also important to see each other, to look each other in the eye, to hold each other, to share' (Dias 2020: n.pag.). Similarly, Lena Évora in an interview also conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown restrictions, highlights that 'people have the need to come to each other' and night, with its events and entertainment offer (although put on hold for the time being), is precisely a way of building and maintaining interpersonal connections and fostering one's well-being (Évora 2020: n.pag.). Storytelling nights like these produced by Sonya Dias and Lena Évora seem to be thus key strategic stages for sharing – stories, experiences, memories, worldviews – not only across generations but also across Rotterdam's superdiverse population.

However, despite this societal potential, cultural producers and artists who gathered in January 2020 in a Cape Verdean community centre Voz di Rua² ('Voice of the street') at the workshop *Night Culture and Urban Policy* testified to the existing challenges in putting cultural productions inspired by migrant cultures and lived experiences on the map of Rotterdam's night scene. Complexity of funding applications, lack of constructive feedback and transparency in their assessment as well as limited access to suitable rehearsal and performance locations were identified as key issues to be considered in future policy planning. Hopefully, new opportunities might emerge with the end of curfew in the end of April 2021 and gradual reopening of night-life from June 2021 on so that Dutch-Cape Verdeans can keep sharing their stories of Rotterdam. Creating a rich and inspiring archive of factual and imaginary records, such productions can contribute to a more comprehensive recognition of the postcolonial nature of this port city, a clear void as identified in a recent publication by Francio Guadeloupe et al. (2020). So far, plays like *Muziek en Verhalen uit Mijn Geboorteland* and *Het Verhaal van Mijn Moeder* attest for the resilience and creativity of the Dutch-Cape Verdean community inherited from the first generation who, in the words of Sonya Dias, 'came and opened the doors for us, the second, the third, and now the fourth generation already' and in particular, from the women who were and continue to be the 'backbone' of their community (2020: n.pag.).

2. Voz di Rua Centre was closed in 2020 and with a new owner, the location is currently undergoing renovation to reopen under a different name and in a different format.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Kamila Krakowska Rodrigues is an assistant professor at Leiden University Center for the Arts in Society (the Netherlands). Her Ph.D. thesis (2014, Coimbra University, Portugal) on the motif of travel in Brazilian and Mozambican literature was awarded with the Fernão Mendes Pinto prize and published by the Camões Institute (2020).

Contact: LUCAS – Leiden University Center for the Arts in Society, BA International Studies, Leiden University, Schouwburgstraat 2, Room B1.04, 2511VA The Hague, The Netherlands.

E-mail: k.k.krakowska.rodrigues@hum.leidenuniv.nl

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9520-8378>

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