

# A CITY OF COMINGS AND GOINGS

DECEMBER, 2021 | INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FOR THE CITY | ROTTERDAM



Afrikaanderplein, 1951

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FOR THE CITY STUDIES SUPERDIVERSITY IN THE AFRIKAANDERWIJK

Rotterdam, 2021

Our cities are increasingly defined by the dynamics of temporary inhabitants. Whether we are rich expats, hardworking labour migrants, young international students, or refugees – a globalised economy, climate change, armed conflicts and oppressive governments keep us constantly on the move. While in the media we are regularly confronted with the grim images of the confrontation between migrants and ‘Fort Europe,’ we almost forget how migration has also contributed to the attractivity and vibrancy of West-European cities. The interaction between students from all around the world in university towns like Delft, Cambridge or Aarhus leads to fruitful innovations and valuable new perspectives, while Turkish and African entrepreneurs breathe new life into abandoned shopping streets on the outskirts of cities like Brussel, Manchester, and Rotterdam.

In November 2021, the Independent School for the City therefore organized a one-week

research studio, investigating the different spatial dimensions of migration in Rotterdam’s Afrikaanderwijk – a former working-class neighbourhood on the southern riverbank of the city, which was shaped by migration.

*Nowadays over 170 different nationalities call Rotterdam their home and the population has become so diverse that the City has become part of a worldwide family of ‘majority-minority’ cities*

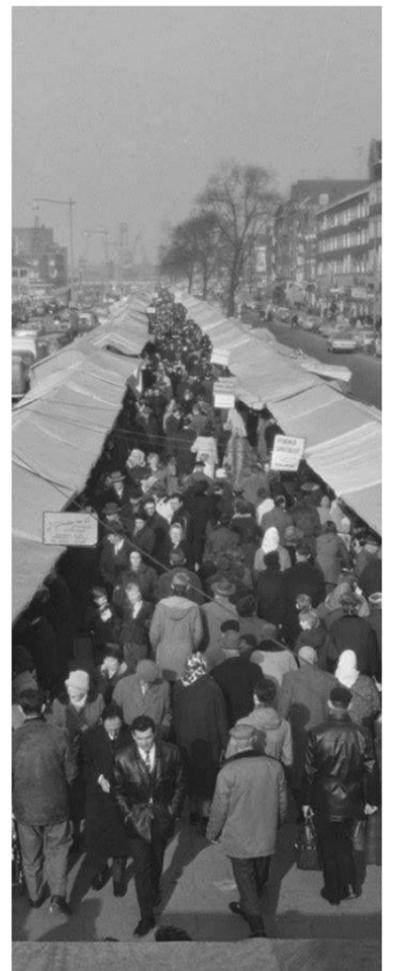
Already in the early 1900’s the area started out as a hub for the first generation of harbour workers who came from the

Dutch countryside, while much later, in the nineteen seventies, it became home to a large Turkish community. Throughout time people from various backgrounds have settled in the area, making it a Superdiverse neighbourhood with dozens of different identities. This comings and goings of people, did not always go without a struggle and social tensions arose while living conditions deteriorated and authorities marked the area as a problematic neighborhood by the end of the 1990s.

From 2007 onwards, numerous plans and a plethora of social, physical and art projects were therefore initiated and developed to counter the negative trends in the neighbourhood. By now, most of these plans have been executed: a new neighbourhood was built adjacent to Afrikaanderwijk (‘Parkwijk’), social and artistic projects were created to strengthened communities, and the controversial demolition of the Tweebosbuurt has taken place, displacing a few hundred inhabitants of social housing. A result of this period is that the Afrikaanderwijk has come to be known as the “frontline

of gentrification”. During this one-week studio we aimed to take a close look at the possible connection between urban planning and the social dynamics of superdiversity. A combination of quantitative, data driven research and qualitative research through interviews and news articles, helped us to not just look at the current situation, but also to get a better understanding of what happened over the past 15 years. What effects these measures and projects had on the migration in and out of the Afrikaanderwijk. Who left and who came in. Who moved within the district, how the demographic and ethnic make-up changed. And how the changes reflect in the social and commercial amenities of the district, be it the shops, art places or the famous market.

The research for this studio was based on the work of Crimson Historians & Urbanists in 2007 for a project on the Afrikaanderwijk called ‘Sociologica’ and their research project ‘A City of Comings and Goings’ which was published in 2018 in the eponymous book and at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale.



Maashaven market, 1960

## TRACES OF SUPERDIVERSITY IN THE AFRIKAANDERWIJK

Today over 120 different nationalities call Afrikaanderwijk their home. This neighbourhood has become so ethnically diverse that it is immediately pointed out as the perfect example of Superdiversity in the city of Rotterdam. With this particular notion in mind, and additionally triggered by the polychromatism of the Afrikaanderwijk sign on the north-west entrance, one can easily construct preconceptions and assume that abundance of markings of the residents' country of origin would be imprinted in the neighbourhood, traces of multiethnicism and multiculturalism would be clearly visible in the neighbourhood's morphology and public space

*The absurdity of the fact that an element as trivial and casual as one curtain can diagnose a complete socio-economic background of a household is both surprisingly striking and hilarious at the same*

would be parochialized by different groups of users. Urban scenes of Kreuzberg in Berlin or Hackney in London come in mind. However, when one initially engages with Afrikaanderwijk, a slightly different reality emerges. With the exception of the few shopwindows,

concentrated on the two main commercial axes, which reveal the origin of the goods sold and food cooked, accompanied by the bi-weekly scheduled famous open market, very little physical evidence of ethnic and cultural diversity and interaction is present throughout the neighbourhood. Newly opened bars and shops provide the inviting (guilty) comfort of gentrification, the award winning sleek design of

the park perfectly complements its vast, gated emptiness, and walking along the residential streets feels like walking in an average Dutch mid-class neighbourhood, with the new developments having even cleaner and more generic architectural aesthetics. Any type of symbolism is scarce. The dichotomy of the two realities, the macro-statistical one on one side, and micro-locational one on the

other, leaves you questioning the ongoing diversification processes in the area. But, exactly by drifting along the same residential streets long enough, hidden items that expose the socio-demographical reality of Afrikaanderwijk start to emerge from behind the dark red and brown brick façades. Curtains! Of different size, material, knitting, motives, origin and cultural reference.

The absurdity of the fact that an element as trivial and casual as one curtain can diagnose a complete socio-economic background of a household is both surprisingly striking and hilarious at the same time. This is a catalogue of curtains found on a single residential block in Afrikaanderwijk, which hold strong resemblance of the residents' country of origin native design and knitting.



## IRIS VAN DER HEIDE

### WHAT ARE YOU COOKING TONIGHT?

Wednesday morning 17 November, around 10:30. I'm walking from the metro stop Maashaven in the direction of the Afrikaandermarkt in the Afrikaanderwijk, where I'm encountering a constant flow of people with trolleys and bags full of fresh produce. Arriving at the square I see a crowd of people gliding through the market stalls on the Afrikaanderplein and along the Paul Kruger straat and the Pretoriaaan. The lovely songs of the market are surrounding me; 'Euro per bak, één euro! Everything one euro! Otro día, otro día!'

The market, held on the Pretoriaaan and on the Afrikaanderplein is one of the largest markets in the Netherlands. Until 1964 it used to be located on the Maaskade, but because of the new metro line the market was moved to its current location. Nowadays it is well known all over the city due to its size and the wide variety of products form all over the world, that are sold for a very affordable price. Walking around the market, I find myself looking at a lot of different vegetables which aren't sold in the regular Dutch supermarkets.

Whilst looking around, the vegetables that are sold here are just as diverse as the people who are buying them. During this research week at the Independent School for the City we've been focussing on migration as a phenomenon to the foundation of the Afrikaanderwijk. The research and lectures of the week made me curious about the different people living in the area and how diversity is represented nowadays in everyday life. Because the market is the main selling point of the area I thought it would be interesting to find more about the background of the people by asking them a simple question: What are you cooking tonight?

I started my research by just asking people this question. While I thought this would be a simple task, I also encountered some problems and discomfort. From the approximately 25 people I approached, only 12 engaged in a conversation and allowed me to get

*I found the perfect opportunity to find out more about the background of the people by asking them a simple question: What are you cooking tonight?*

my answers. This also depended on my approach. Sometimes I would point out a vegetable and ask the person standing in front of it what it was and what they cooked with it. Sometimes I'd start the conversation with; I'm doing research for school, could you answer me some short questions about what you're cooking tonight? The people that didn't want to talk to me were either busy, didn't speak my language or just waved me away. After three rejections I had to find some courage again to approach people. But I'm happy I pushed through and that I managed to talk to 12 people in total. After this day I had a lot of interesting conversations. The question gave me a lot more insight about the diverse group of people coming to the market.

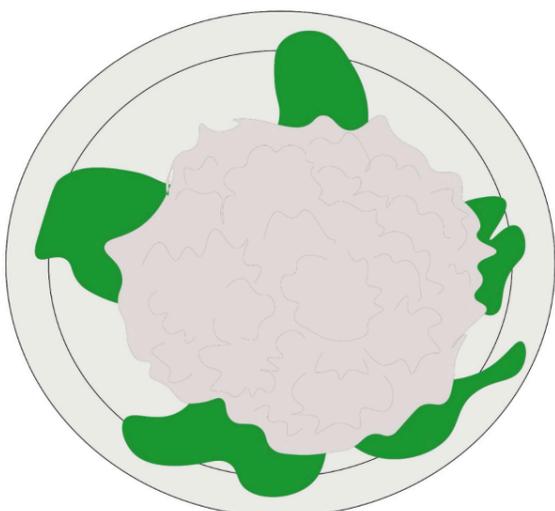
After the talks I can conclude that the market has been a gathering place for people with different backgrounds for over the years. My hypothesis was that the market was mainly visited by local

people, but I surprisingly found out that the market attracts people not only from Afrikaanderwijk, but also people coming from further out of the city, such as Overschie, Capelle aan de IJssel and Lombardijen. The main reason for these people to visit the market is because they lived in the neighbourhood before and they know the vendors and where to get their specific products. Another reason for people to come is because the market is cheap and convenient for them to reach with public transportation.

Over the past years the surroundings - like urban regeneration and migration in and out of the neighbourhood - has changed the area, but through my conversations with people I found out that the market has largely remained the same welcoming gathering place for a diverse group of people. The dinner table drawing is a representation of the diverse group of people that I encountered on the market.



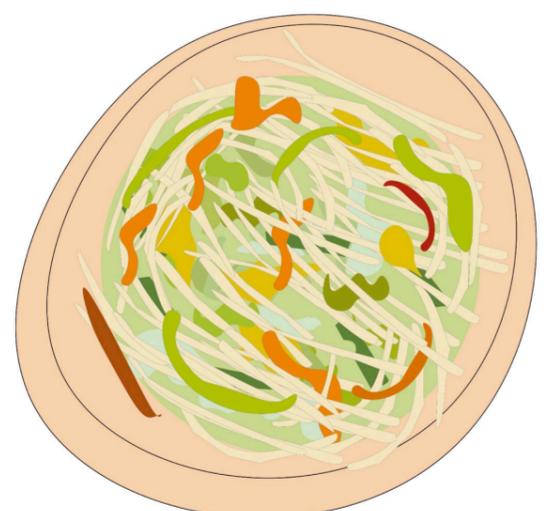
12 meals from all around the world



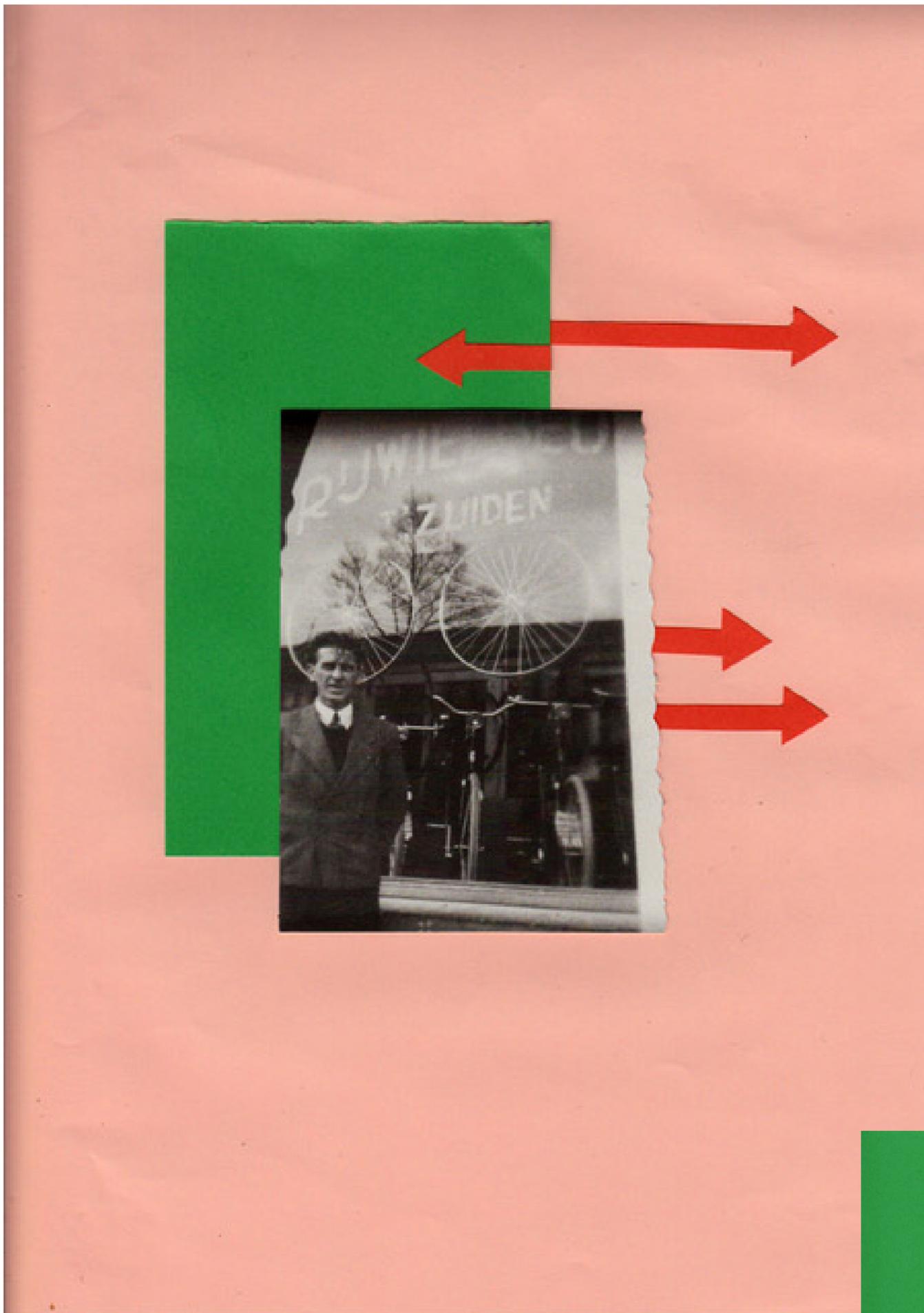
Something with cauliflower



Surinamese djarpesi moksi ales



Fata with bread, a spicy tomato stew

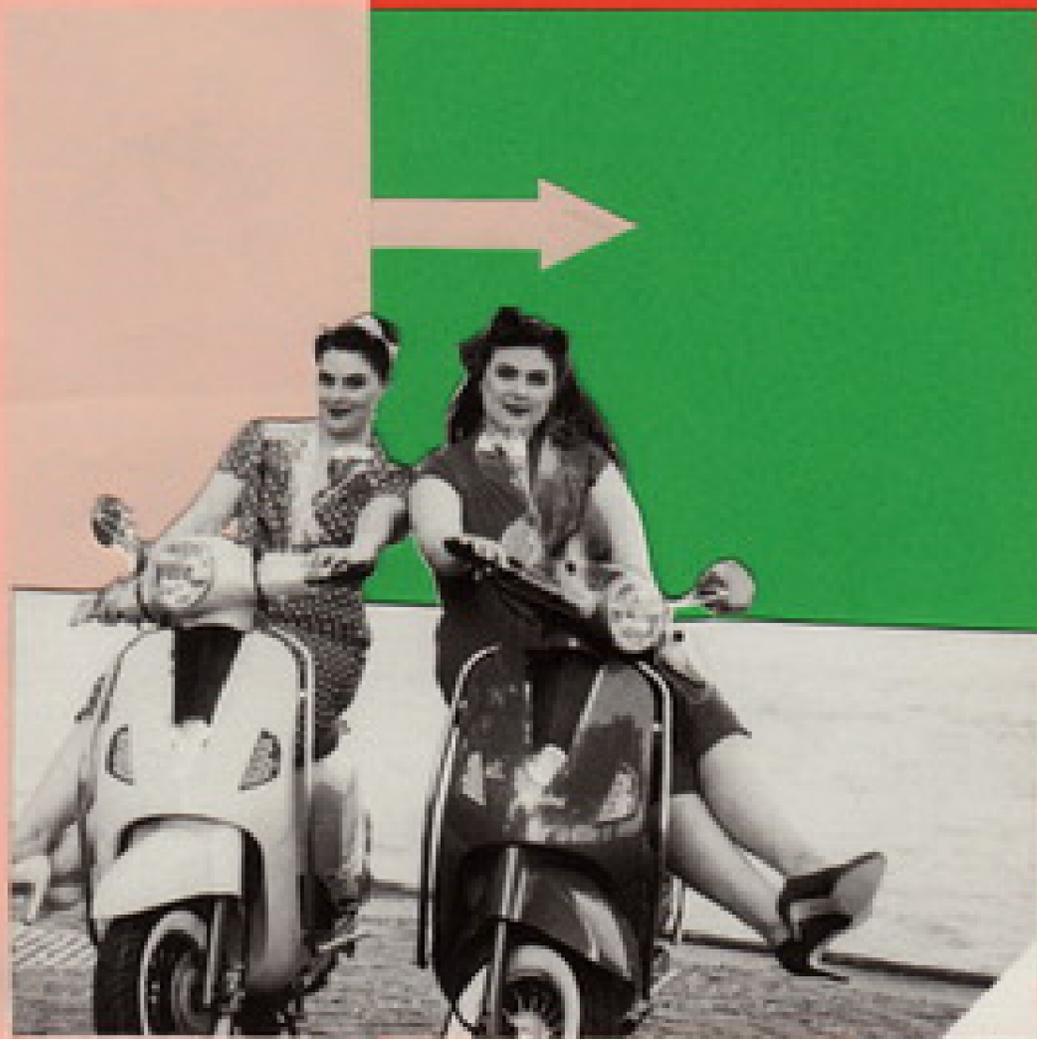


## ALBLAS TWEEWIELERS FACTS & FIGURES

- Family: 'Grandpa Alblas' (since 1945) – Aart and his wife Elizabeth (since 1980s) – Marloes & Suzanne Alblas (since end of 2019).
- Bicycles: products that give people autonomy and agency; devices with which people have some control over their own comings and goings.
- Buy shares in Berini scooters (at the end of the 1980s).
- An Italian sounding name that was actually derived from the first names of the Dutch founders Bertus, Rinus and Nico.
- A real 'Rotterdam' brand with components coming from all over the world, and which moved from The Hague to the North of the Netherlands, to Korea, India, China, and finally back to Rotterdam.
- Connect yourself with the neighbourhood.
- Offer jobs to people from the neighbourhood, and give special attention to the ones with poor job prospects.
- Become an active member of the shopkeepers' association; participate in neighbourhood improvement initiatives. But watch out: there are many initiatives, committee's, policies at the moment. Don't get carried away!
- Make yourself heard about what you think the neighbourhood really needs.



# HOW TO SURVIVE IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD OF COMINGS AND GOINGS



# AFRIKAANDER- WIJK: OBSERVA- TIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The following reflections on the field work conducted in the Afrikaanderwijk wants to introduce a potential theoretical angle from which to look at the places within a neighbourhood that is highly shaped by migration flows over time. For this, we want to focus on two concrete localities: the Café Arena and the Koffiehandel Pretoria Espresso bar. These locations were chosen because both serve as meeting and recreational spots for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. Both are so called 'third spaces' – places besides home and the workplace.

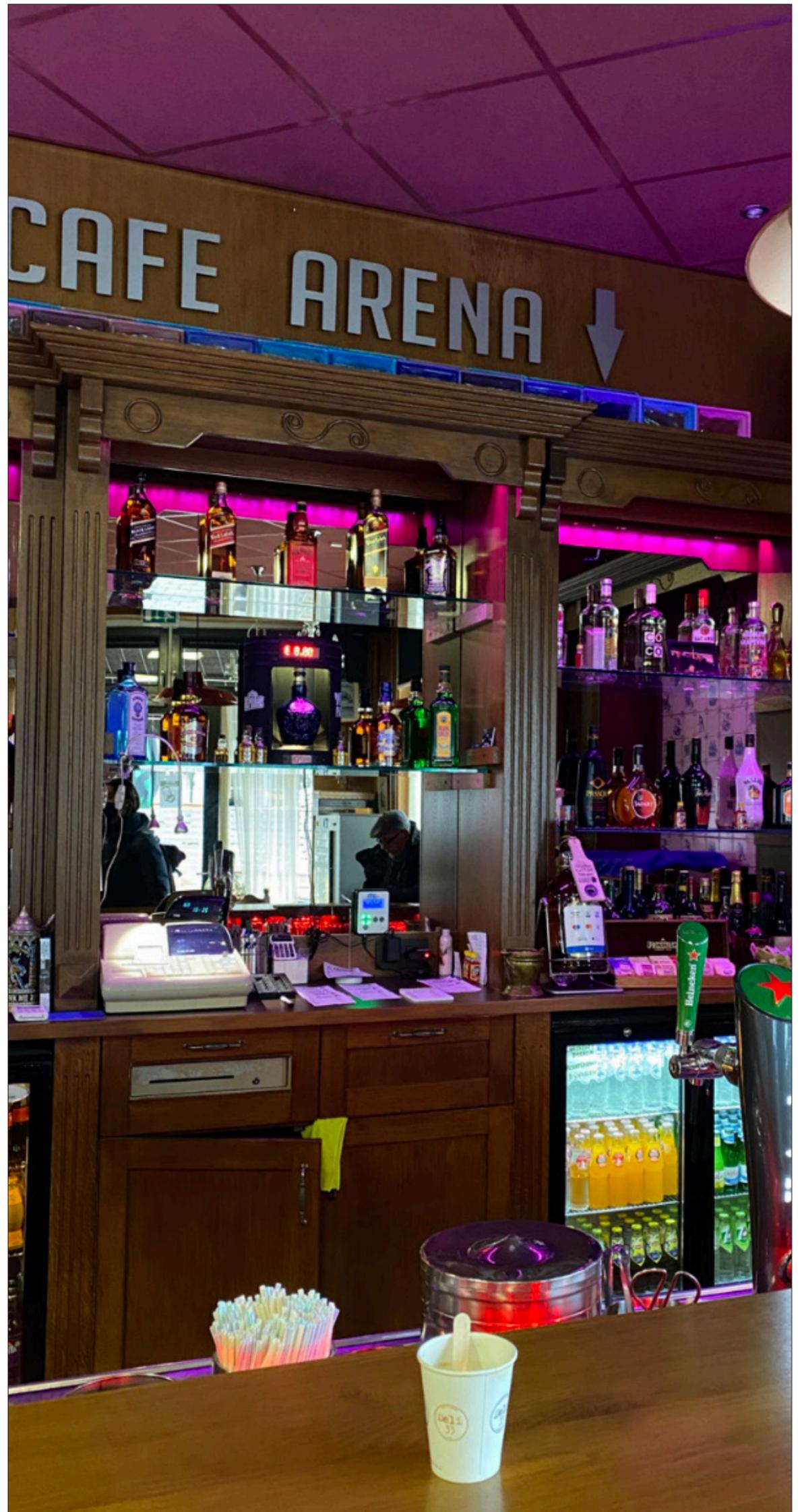
However, as we will show in the following, both cafés attract a highly different audience, partially also due to its interior. After giving a brief description of the localities, we will turn to Michel de Certeau's space and place dichotomy and Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" that we consider a fruitful theoretical lens to investigate the cafés' function within a neighbourhood shaped by migration.

The first location is Café Arena, which is located at the corner of the Bloemfonteinstraat and the Paul Krugerstraat. While this particular bar has opened in 2019,

it has been a café before and part of the furniture and appearance was probably taken from the previous owner. The outside looks very generic and does not give any hint about the type of current customers. What directly struck us when entering the café was that the only women around was the bartender. The customers were all male, aged 50+. The majority of them sat around tables playing a board game. We approached the female bartender who told us that they are all "Turkish men" and that they were not likely to talk to us.

In retrospective, it is difficult to say whether our first impression that the interior was quite "Turkish" was because the bartender referred to the customers as Turkish men. This question arose because looking closer, there were still many objects that can be assigned to a typical Dutch bar, such as blue-white tiles on the wall behind the bar. These signs gave a hint of what the bar might have looked like before 2019 when it was possibly catering for a different clientele.

It is difficult to say if we read it as a Turkish bar mainly because of the customers or because the atmosphere inside. Nonetheless, we can conclude that the place



Café Arena, located at the corner of Bloemfonteinstraat and Paul Krugerstraat.

is now used by a homogeneous group of people regarding gender, age, and ethnic background. Even though the identity might not be created through the interior, the café itself has a strong sense of place attached to it – may it be intentionally created for a certain type of customers (i.e. men with Turkish origins), or created by the latter themselves. In any case, it seems to come with mechanism

of exclusion as the place was not visited by people from other communities of Afrikaanderwijk, women or younger people. This impression is also reinforced by the fact that little transparency is given from they outside to the inside; low curtains and privacy film on the windows block almost all view into the bar. It creates the impression of an intended seclusion from other places, like

an unofficial club with a code that is not accessible to everyone in the neighbourhood.

This stands in high contrast to the Espresso bar 'Koffiehandel Pretoria' located at the outer fringes of Afrikaanderwijk on the west of the neighbourhood. Before the current owner started renting it from public housing corporation Vestia in 2015, it had

been a retail shop. The café has a huge window front which has the place's name written in a white font and offers a welcoming view on the interior of the bar. It allows interaction between the passers-by and its customers. The café has two storeys; the upper one is connected with an open view to the ground floor. Small tables are organized on the walls and the counter is positioned in the centre of the room. One has the impression that the objects in the room are chosen with care to create an inviting environment and that the interior is a crucial part of the café's overall concept. This was confirmed by the owner who was serving his customers behind the bar. He explained how he wanted to create a place where people feel welcomed and everything is "easy going". According to the owner, the clients are mixed in terms of ethnic background, gender, and age.

Disregarding its welcoming atmosphere, we argue that the Koffiehandel Pretoria shows characteristics of what anthropologist Marc Augé (citation) calls "non-places"; places that lack a "sense of place" and, thus, authenticity. The characteristic of a placeless landscape element is that it has no special relationship to the place in which it is located. While shopping malls, gas/petrol stations, and fast food chains, are cited as examples, we view the Koffiehandel Pretoria in the same line. It is located in Afrikaanderwijk but one would not be surprised to find this espresso bar in a completely different neighbourhood in Rotterdam.

French philosopher Michel de Certeau refers to these placeless

locations as "space" in contrast to "place". According to him, "place" is space that has been ordered in some way to serve some human need. In the particular case of the Café Arena, we assume that it serves for a particular group within the Turkish community of Afrikaanderwijk – first or second generation male Turks – as a place to foster their identity.

Another aspect of de Certeau's "space" concept is that it is regarded as a site for freedom. This might be particularly insightful to look further into as the owner of Koffiehandel Pretoria, who told us that his customers feel at ease in his café. In particular, he mentioned Muslim women from the neighbourhood who come to the café to be by themselves since they have few places where they can spend their time alone.

To conclude, first observations and brief conversations with the bartender and owner of the two cafés in Afrikaanderwijk suggest that they serve as promising places to study the heterogeneity within one migrant group and thus the concept of Superdiversity. At the same time, we can formulate a first hypothesis to be investigated through further research: Non-places like the Koffiehandel Pretoria serve a double function: First, due to their lack of authenticity, they allow different groups of people to meet which can be considered highly desirable in a Superdiverse neighbourhood like Afrikaanderwijk. Second, they allow different groups within one migrant community to distinguish themselves from each other, like for instance, third generation migrants from first generations.



Espresso Bar Koffiehandel Pretoria, located at the outer fringes of Afrikaanderwijk on the west of the neighbourhood



