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Mexicano from Egypt

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Beyond Fast Food: Amsterdam-Egyptian Snack Bars as Neighbourhood Hubs

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam as everyday spaces of co-creation and creolisation within the city's superdiverse landscape. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in 16 snack bars, the study shows how these establishments function as informal neighbourhood hubs that foster cross-cultural interaction and a sense of belonging. Rather than fixed representations of 'Egyptianness' or 'Dutchness', these spaces are shaped by dynamic encounters between Egyptian-Dutch owners, diverse customers, and the urban environment. Grounded in theories of superdiversity, creolisation and co-creation, the paper highlights how cultural boundaries are continually negotiated and remade through daily practices. These snack bars extend beyond their commercial function, becoming overlooked yet vital sites of social connection and cultural transformation. By centring these spaces, the study offers insight into how diaspora, urban change, and everyday acts of co-creation and creolisation shape the city as a shared and ongoing process of belonging.

Object 1. *Abu Kareem at Snackbar Onze Hanny at the Van Hallstraat*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman

Introduction

It is King's Day in the Netherlands, and as I walk through the lively streets of the Jordaan, I pass one of my favourite snack bars. Amid the orange crowd, *Snackbar Aggie* set up a street stand selling not only the classic Dutch *broodje kroket,* but also *ta'ameya,* the Egyptian falafel made from fava beans, just as they do on the streets back in Egypt. The entire family is busy helping out, wearing orange Holland T-shirts. When I speak to Ahmed of *Snackbar Aggie* later, he tells me that King's Day is his favourite day of the year, proudly pointing to the photos on the wall—all snapshots of previous King's Day celebrations.

Object 2. *Snapshots of King's Day celebrations at the wall of Snackbar Aggie.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

This moment captures a broader phenomenon: the transformation of the Dutch snack bar by Egyptian-Dutch entrepreneurs. Traditionally, the Dutch snack bar has been a cornerstone of urban life—an accessible, informal space for quick meals open to all. After living in Egypt for nearly a year and a half, I was struck by the prevalence of Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam. Names such as Nefertiti and Sphinx, images of Cleopatra and Umm Kulthum, the renowned Egyptian singer, and the presence of Egyptian menu items alongside traditional Dutch snacks reflect how Egyptian culture is interwoven into these everyday spaces.

This paper first examines why so many snack bars in Amsterdam are owned by Egyptian-Dutch people. It continues to investigate how Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam function not merely as places of food consumption, but as neighbourhood hubs where diverse groups co-exist. It looks at how, through their aesthetic choices, culinary offerings, and social interactions, these snack bars become sites of co-creation and creolisation. The research examines how these spaces foster belonging and cultural transformation, illustrating how people shape daily life in a superdiverse city.

The idea for this research began in November 2023, when I stopped at De Dijk for a snack after a party and struck up a conversation in Egyptian Arabic with Mohammed behind the counter. That brief encounter sparked a longer process of building trust with the snack bar owners and employees—starting with informal chats and eventually leading to in-depth interviews at 16 Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam. Over time, I developed a mutual relationship with the people working in the snack bar. For example, I visited Ahmed's home to read Dutch children's books to his kids, and in return, was welcomed at family meals. I spent many hours at the snack bar—not ideal for my diet, but incredibly nourishing in terms of connection and a sense of belonging. I only began photographing after nearly a year, once strong personal connections had been built and clear consent was given. I see photography as something intimate, and I wanted to approach it with the same care and attentiveness that shaped the rest of my research. As a result, the photographs primarily feature the snack bar owners and employees—the people with whom I spent the most time, and who shared their stories most openly. I took most photos with a digital camera, with a few analogue shots added in later.

The Snack Bar

As an integral part of Dutch food culture, everybody loves the snack bar — whether it's a gezinszak patat [Translation: 'a family-sized portion of fries'] on a lazy Sunday or a late-night bite at 5 AM after a night out. Behind the TL-lit glass display, selection of quintessentially Dutch fast-food items, such as kroketten, frikandellen, and kaassoufflés sit neatly arranged between artificial green lettuce leaves.

Object 3. *Kipcorns and the Berenhap are showcased behind the TL-lit glass display. Amsterdam, 2024.* Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 4. *Quintessentially Dutch snacks: frikandellen, kipcorns, bamischijven and kaassoufflès.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

The snack bar is more than just a place to grab a quick meal; it is a social equalizer. Unlike high-end restaurants or exclusive cafés, the snack bar is accessible to everyone, regardless of social class, age, or background. Because snack bars are relatively affordable, Horstman and Knibbe (2022) argue in their book, translated as *Healthy City: Exclusion and Meeting in Public Spaces,* that snack bars gave a strong impetus to eating out among the wider public and contributed to the emancipation of the lower middle class ⑦. The rise of the snack bar ensured that women were entitled to one cooking-free day a week. In line with this, historian Herman Belien suggests that in 1948, the snack bar played a key role in the collapse of Dutch *verzuiling* [Translation: 'pillarization'], as it was one of the first places where people from different religious and political backgrounds—Catholics, Protestants, and secular Dutch—ate side by side without social barriers (Home Academy, 2014). The snack bar therefore is a seemingly ordinary but deeply social place where cultural identities are negotiated, and new forms of urban belonging emerge.

To move beyond fixed and essentialist notions of identity, this paper draws on Steven Vertovec's concept of superdiversity (2007)—later expanded by Francio Guadeloupe (2015)—to emphasize the fluid, overlapping identities shaped through global migration. Rather than viewing culture as static, I approach Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam as dynamic sites of creolisation—a process of cultural mixing that, following Guadeloupe (2009) and Glissant (2008), produces new and unpredictable forms. Stuart Hall's (1990) notion of evolving diaspora identities reinforces this view. Finally, using the concept of co-creation (Brandsen & Honingh 2018), I analyse how these spaces are shaped collectively by Egyptian-Dutch entrepreneurs, diverse clientele, and their urban surroundings, making the snack bar a fluid, shared cultural space for all.

Superdiverse communities

Steven Vertovec (2007) used the term superdiversity to describe the complex and dynamic patterns of migration-driven diversity in the UK, particularly in cities like London. He argued that traditional categories such as ethnicity or nationality were no longer sufficient to capture the nuanced and multi-layered forms of diversity emerging from recent global migration patterns — diversity marked not just by more immigrant groups but by greater differences within them (Vertovec 2007, 1025). Francio Guadeloupe later expanded and reinterpreted the concept to fit his own critical analysis of Dutch society (2015). He rejects the concept of multiculturalism, which often presumes neatly separated cultural groups with fixed traditions. Superdiversity on the contrary, recognizes that individuals and spaces embody multiple, overlapping cultural influences. With regard to diaspora communities in the Netherlands, he states:

> *"Superdiversity is a concept that signals the bewildering multiplicity of diversities that cannot be captured in the simplified schemata of first came the postcolonial migrants from Indonesia, Papua, Suriname, and the Dutch Antilles, with which the Netherlands had colonial ties and then came the guest workers from Turkey, Morocco, and central and southern Europe. What this schema obfuscates is that there has always been movement of peoples, cultural expressions, and objects from within and without Europe." (Guadeloupe 2015, 21).*

According to him, these crosspollinations haunt any assertion of Dutch national homogeneity (ibid.). Although the snack bar could be seen as a typically Dutch place, in a superdiverse city like Amsterdam, both Dutch snack bar culture and the Egyptian diaspora in the snack bar cannot be captured in strict notions of 'Dutchness' or 'Egyptianness'.

Creolisation

Not only Francio Guadeloupe's interpretation of superdiversity, but also his application of the concept of creolisation offers valuable insights into understanding the case of the Egyptian-owned snack bar (2009). Originally a Caribbean concept, creolisation describes the blending of diverse people and cultures to form something new. Initially rooted in linguistics, creolisation referred to the creation of creole languages through the contact of different languages, particularly in colonial contexts. While scholars like Trouillot (1998) caution against applying the concept of creolisation beyond the specific historical context of plantation America, Guadeloupe challenges this view by allowing creolisation to travel through time and space (2009). He follows Édouard Glissant, who extended the concept beyond the Caribbean, and expanded creolisation into a dynamic process of cultural exchange and transformation (2008). Glissant emphasized that instead of a predictable blending of cultures, creolisation leads to the emergence of new, unforeseen cultural forms (83). Rather than treating it as a thing of the past, Guadeloupe rethinks creolisation as a dynamic, ongoing process. He states that *"nowadays no society exists outside this knotted relation of societies in motion. More importantly, no individual is fully captured by the norms and maxims of his or her respective society."* (2009, 83). Building on this perspective, I apply the concept of creolisation to the contemporary context of the Egyptian-owned snack bar in Amsterdam.

Stuart Hall (1990), who wrote about diaspora identities in relation to creolisation, states that diaspora identities are continuously evolving, shaped by transformation and difference. He argues that these identities are in a constant state of production and reproduction, adapting to the changing dynamics of the societies they inhabit (235). In this sense, combined with the concept of superdiversity, Egyptian-owned snack bars are not fixed representations of 'Egyptianness' or 'Dutchness'. Instead, they are fluid spaces of creolisation, where new cultural meanings arise from everyday interactions.

Co-creation

Co-creation can be seen as a collaborative process where collective efforts produce something new. Brandsen and Honingh define it as a process in which citizens or communities actively shape services, spaces, and cultural practices, rather than simply consuming them (2018, 12). In this study, co-creation refers to the participatory and dynamic process through which Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam evolve as shared cultural spaces, shaped by Egyptian-Dutch entrepreneurs, superdiverse clientele, and its urban environment. This approach rejects a top-down model and instead emphasizes collaborative participation from customers, workers, and the neighbourhood.

Within this process, creolisation can be understood as a specific form of co-creation. It highlights how superdiverse communities contribute to the emergence of cultural expressions within the snack bar. These establishments thus become superdiverse spaces, where cultural boundaries blur and new meanings are continually negotiated through collective participation.

Object 5. *Egyptian-owned snack bar Corner Inn at the Bilderdijk-straat.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 6. *Snackbar Sphinx at the Oostenburgergracht.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 7. *Snackbar Sphinx at the Eerste Oosterparkstraat.* Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman

Object 8. *Snackbar De Dijk at the Haarlemmerdijk, where this research started in 2023.* Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

From fries to falafel: context of the snack bar

To understand why so many snack bars in Amsterdam are owned by Egyptian-Dutch people, it is essential to examine the history of the snack bar itself. There are indications that a Flemish friturist was the first in the Netherlands to sell French fries at the fair in Bergen op Zoom around 1905 (Fastfoodmuseum.nl). Jumping to 1949, after the fall of the colony Dutch East Indies, its cuisine made its entrance to the Netherlands (ibid.). Via Indonesian women, recipes ended up in magazines such as Libelle. Noodles and fried rice became a regular dish in cafeterias and snack bars. Over the years, snacks such as spring rolls, kroepia (in Rotterdam), satay and bamischijven (bami-slices) entered the snack assortment (ibid.).

Object 9. *Indonesian meals introduced in Dutch snack bars in 1949*. Photo by: Fastfoodmuseum.nl.

Object 10. *Snackbar Toetje "shoarma" at the Eerste Oosterparkstraat*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

A significant turning point came in 1986 when gambling machines were legalized in snack bars. These machines became a crucial source of revenue, enabling many owners to keep their businesses going. Ahmed, the owner of *Snackbar Aggie*, recalls that this was particularly appealing at the time because it allowed entrepreneurs to generate an income without depending on bank loans.

It is well-documented that, starting in the 2000s, many Chinese entrepreneurs in the Netherlands bought and opened snack bars as a response to labour shortages of chefs in Chinese restaurants (AD 2019, Volkskrant 2023). "Frietchinees" even became the word of the year in Belgium in 2012 and was often used in the Netherlands as well (Instituut voor Nederlandse Taal, n.d.). However, little or no research has been done on snack bars owned by Egyptian-Dutch people in Amsterdam. From the conversations with Egyptian-Dutch snack bar owners I had, it seems that the transfer of jobs and business ownership among Egyptians often followed community networks—Egyptians would hire fellow Egyptians, helping newly arrived migrants find employment. Trust played a crucial role in this process: "Can I trust Mohammed?" someone might ask. "Yes, he's a good man. You can trust him." If he was also from Alexandria, for example, that shared connection could be enough to secure a job. In addition, although the work is physically demanding, requiring long hours behind the deep fryer, it remains an accessible job for many newcomers.

The story of Egyptian involvement in Amsterdam's snack bars is reflected in individual success stories, such as Shaben's, who bought his first snack bar, *Snackbar 't Snorretje* at Krugerplein, in 1978 and went on to open six more. Similarly, at *Snackbar Jelle* on the Spaarndammerstraat, the story on how four Egyptian men took over the business from Jelle in 1988 is displayed on a poster at the wall. The men had studied economics in Egypt and were searching for work in the Netherlands. Initially taking jobs at McDonald's, they then started working in the snack bar.

Object 11. *Shaben posing in front of an Egyptian flag in snackbar 't Snorretje and a sign saying, "Nasi or Bami meal with satay and egg".* Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 12. *Story of how four Egyptian men took over Snackbar Jelle.* 2024. Photo: Facebook-page Jelle snacks – IJssalon.

Many snack bar owners and employees had the plan to return to Egypt after they made some money in the Netherlands, but returning did and does not seem to be a viable option due to ongoing political and economic instability in Egypt—topics that frequently prevailed in my conversations with snack bar owners. As a result, these businesses became not only a means of financial stability but also a cornerstone of the Egyptian diaspora in Amsterdam.

Neighbourhood community centres

Spending countless hours in these spaces, I have witnessed the ways in which snack bars extend far beyond their function as eateries and more so functions as neighbourhood community centres. Every neighbourhood has its own snack bar and 'the snack bar around the corner' became a household name. Egyptian snack bar owners have seamlessly integrated into the urban landscape, creating superdiverse spaces where everybody feels at home. Mohammed from Snackbar De Dijk on Haarlemmerdijk calls everyone buurman (neighbour) to give customers a welcomed feeling.

In the Jordaan, everyone calls Ahmed, the owner of *Snackbar Aggie*, *Aggie* (عجي), meaning 'my brother' in Arabic. Even those who are not there to eat find a space to hangout; at *Snackbar Onze Hanny*, Abu Kareem (Father of Kareem) prepares cups of Egyptian tea (*bil na'na*, with mint) for customers who stop by just to chat. The father-metaphor relates to the snack bar more often. At *'t Snorretje*, a customer tells me "He's the *abu* of the neighbourhood", pointing to Reder behind the counter—the father figure of the community. Abu Kareem greets regular customers with "*oei oei*", a twist on the Dutch farewell "*doei doei*". These small rituals and language adaptations reinforce a sense of belonging, creating an atmosphere where regulars and newcomers alike feel at home.

Object 13. *Mohammed greets customers from behind his desk upstairs, beneath a sign that reads: "Specialties for the neighbour."* Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 14. *Abu Kareem (father of Kareem) at Snackbar Onze Hanny*. Amsterdam, 2024.
Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 15. *Reder posing in front of the deep fryer at Snackbar Sphinx.* Amsterdam, 2024.
Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Conversations unfold about everyday life—someone makes an appointment at the local hairdresser while waiting for their fries, another person asks for help finding an apartment, and someone else leaves a message looking to swap their social housing flat for one with an elevator. A woman parks her typical Dutch Canta in front of the door and comes in for a chat. A man in search of a job is told there are no openings now but is handed a cup of hot tea. Mohammed at *Snackbar 't Centrum* at Haarlemmerplein boils water for a homeless person so he can make instant noodles. Meanwhile, politics are debated — discussions range from Palestine to Amsterdam's new 30 km/h speed limit. Snack bar owners are deeply embedded in the personal lives of their customers. "*Is your wife still sick?*" Reder asks one of his regulars, demonstrating a familiarity that goes beyond mere transactions. Ihab, the owner of *Tiba Cafetaria*, located next to the OLVG East hospital, offers a 10% discount to anyone working at the hospital. "*Everyone has their own discount*", he says, reinforcing the personal connections that shape these spaces.

Object 16. *A typical Dutch Canta in front of Snackbar Onze Hanny*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 17. *A customer painted a mural of Abu Kareem on the snack bar wall, depicting him holding a cone of fries with the words "lekker hé?!"[translation: 'tasty right?!') written beside him.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 18. *Tiba Cafetaria across hospital OLVG East where hospital workers can eat with a discount.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

This is where co-creation becomes visible: rather than passive consumption, customers play an active role in shaping the identity and function of the snack bar. It is not only about ordering a *broodje kroket;* more so, it functions as a neighborhood community centre. Within this space, different cultural backgrounds intersect, and unconscious acts of creolisation occur through everyday interactions. The snack bar allows different social groups to interact in informal settings and is therefore a site for social inclusion. By serving as a space for conversation, debate, complaints, and connection—often with people outside one's immediate social circle—the snack bar is actively shaped as a communal hub by the people who gather there.

The place is superdiverse; Moroccan sweets traded for a cup of tea, Surinamese women stopping by to get a *kapsalon* and to have a chat. Customers and owners alike contribute to a shared, co-created cultural experience that cannot be reduced to simple categories like 'Egyptian' or 'Dutch'.

Similarly, Horstman and Knibbe note that although the snack bar is often regarded with low prestige due to its association with unhealthy food, it plays a crucial role in fostering social connections (2022, 7). They say food brings people together, and snack bars are a place where newcomers connect with the Netherlands in a way not seen in many other places. A mix of regular customers and occasional visitors, often from the neighbourhood, sometimes from far away, makes the snack bar a meeting place (ibid.). To kill the waiting time, people chat, joke around, in different languages and dialects. In the snack bar, strangers become familiar strangers. The fact that in many neighbourhoods the snack bar is one of the few places of escape for people with little money gives food for thought, they argue (ibid.).

Ahmed's story offers another example of how snack bars function as neighbourhood centres. In June 2024, Ahmed witnessed a fatal stabbing in front of his snack bar *Aggie*—a deeply traumatic experience. In the aftermath, he received incredible emotional and financial support from the neighbourhood the Jordaan. Locals even advocated on his behalf, arranging for Amsterdam's mayor, Femke Halsema, to visit him and helping him resolve a dispute with the housing corporation to keep his social housing. Reflecting on the experience, Ahmed tells me:

> *"That's when I realized—this is not just a fries shop. I am surrounded by family; this is a community house. I haven't felt this kind of love since my father died when I was very young. My mother had to care for six children and was never really there. I never knew a mother's love. But now, I feel it again—because of this neighbourhood, because of the Jordaan."*

Object 19. *Ahmed posing in front of Snackbar Aggie.*
Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 20. *Photos with regular customers from the Jordaan at Snackbar Aggie, whom Ahmed describes as being like family*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

At *Snackbar Sphinx*, the sound of Umm Kulthum, a legendary Egyptian singer, echoes through the speakers, while at *Aggie*, Egyptian football matches—like Zamalek versus Al-Ahly—are always on the TV. These familiar sights and sounds create a bridge between home and diaspora.

Object 21. *Customers at Snackbar Sphinx.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 22. *Customers at Snackbar Sphinx.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Home in the snack bar

On a cold rainy Monday evening, I step into *Ma Baker* at the Rozengracht and find Hifny making ta'ameya. *"For myself for dinner"* he says. *"Do you want some too?"* I feel like I am in Egypt again, where they eat the deep-fried green fava beans for breakfast every day. We talk for hours over a cup of tea.

For Ahmed, the snack bar feels like being surrounded by family; for Hifny, it is like a living room where personal and communal life intertwine. At *Snackbar Sphinx*, the sound of Umm Kulthum, a legendary Egyptian singer, echoes through the speakers, while at *Aggie*, Egyptian football matches—like Zamalek versus Al-Ahly—are always on the TV. These familiar sights and sounds create a bridge between home and diaspora.

The Egyptian influence on Amsterdam's snack bars reveals itself not only through their names—such as *Sphinx, Nefertiti*, and *Aggie*—but also through visual references to ancient Egypt, including images of Tutankhamun, Qur'anic calligraphy, and Cleopatra, as seen in the photos below. These visual cues are complemented by culinary adaptations: just as the traditional Dutch snack bar once incorporated bamischijven and loempia's following the fall of the Dutch East Indies, it is now being subtly reshaped to reflect Egyptian food traditions. The Egyptian falafel made from green beans instead of chickpeas, ta'ameya (الطعمية), is their best-seller. At *Sphinx* in the Eerste Oosterparksstraat they sometimes sell koshary, Egypt's national dish of rice, pasta and lentils topped with tomato sauce and fried onions. *"For Dutch people, the snack bar is what koshary is for Egyptians,"* notes Ahmed—cheap, accessible, and quick. Alongside the classic Dutch huzarensalade, menus now commonly feature superdiverse options such as kebab, lahmacun (Turkish pizza), and an increasing selection of vegetarian snacks. At *Snackbar Onze Hanny* you can drink Egyptian mango juice and *Snackbar Toetje* is selling baklava alongside traditional Dutch snacks. The Transvaalbuurt's local newspaper advertises for *Snackbar 't Snorretje* by dedicating an article to the Mexicano from Egypt: a playful yet telling example of how culinary traditions at the snack bar are constantly remixed and reimagined.

Object 23. *The menu at Snackbar Onze Hanny features superdiverse options, e.g. Turkish pizza, falafel and shawarma*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 24. *In the vitrine of Snackbar Toetje, baklava sits alongside Dutch snacks*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

DE TELEGRAAF - DONDERDAG 19 NOVEMBER 2015

4 buurt

Eten voor twee tientjes in Transvaalbuurt

Mexicano uit Egypte

Het is maandagmiddag, even voor één uur, als we door de Pretoriusstraat banjeren. De maag rommelt, maar de spoeling qua eetgelegenheden is dun in dit deel van de Transvaalbuurt. En dus strijken we – na de innerlijke belofte om vanavond een extra hardlooprondje te doen – neer bij snackbar 't Snorretje.

›Waarom ook niet? We behandelden al legio fraai gesitueerde eetcafés en hippe kofflebarretjes vol zzp'ers in deze rubriek. Dus waarom niet eens vertegenwoordigers van de snelle, vette hap? Want ook in het domein van de cafetaria loopt de geboden kwaliteit sterk uiteen.

Helaas, de naam van het etablissement verwijst niet naar een prachtsnor bij de eigenaar. Het lijkt een erfenis van de oprichter, want huidig uitbater Shaban ontbeert beharing onder de neus. De Egyptenaar heeft wel een neus voor zaken, want over klandizie heeft 't Snorretje zelfs op maandag niet te klagen.

Bij het betreden van de zaak komt een jongedame ons tegemoet met een broodje dat we niet direct kunnen thuisbrengen. Er lijkt vlees op te zitten, saus en ook frietjes. „Doe maar dat broodje van dat meisje daar", stamelen we. „Ah, dat is een pistolet mexicano." Daarnaast is de kwaliteit van de gehaktbal vaak een goede afspiegeling voor de standaard van de snackbar zelf. Die voegen we dus toe aan de bestelling.

Terwijl Shaban onze mexicano én gehaktbal in het frituurvet laat afdalen, kijken we rond in de zaak. Het interieur is nogal verouderd: posters zijn vergeeld en de toonbank lijkt al zeker twintig jaar dienst te doen. Maar daarentegen zijn de prijzen buitengewoon schappelijk, het eerder genoemde broodje mexicano kost slechts twee euro. Dat verklaart waarom de ene na de andere scholier – niet echt obesitasproof – de vleessnack bestelt.

Wanneer wij onze bestelling krijgen, moet gezegd worden dat het calorierijke broodje mexicano een aangename verrassing is. Ook de pindasaus bij de bal is smakelijk, al stemt het frituren van een gehaktbal wel wat droevig.

Jelmer Geerds

'Dat broodje van dat meisje daar'

Ons bord met de pistolet mexicano met saus en frietjes.

Object 25. *An article written about Snackbar 't Snorretje's bestseller Mexicano in the local newspaper: Mexicano uit Egypte [Translation: 'Mexicano from Egypt']*. Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.


www.azrashoarmadoner.com
Snackbar Aggie
EGYPTISCHE FALAFEL
€ 6.50
Milkshake

← **Object 26.** *Ahmed in front of Snackbar Aggie and a sign that says "Egyptische falafel" [Translation: 'Egyptian falafel'].* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 27. *Egyptian falafel in Snackbar Aggie.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 28. *De Buurman [Translation: 'The Neighbour'] advertises their Egyptian falafel on the sign of their more upscale snack bar.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 29. *The classic Dutch huzarensalade at Snackbar Onze Hanny.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.


Doner Kabab Menu
11,00
Coca-Cola

← **Object 30.** *Old photos of Amsterdam from back in the day, displayed next to a sign that reads "Doner Kebab Menu" at Snackbar Aggie*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

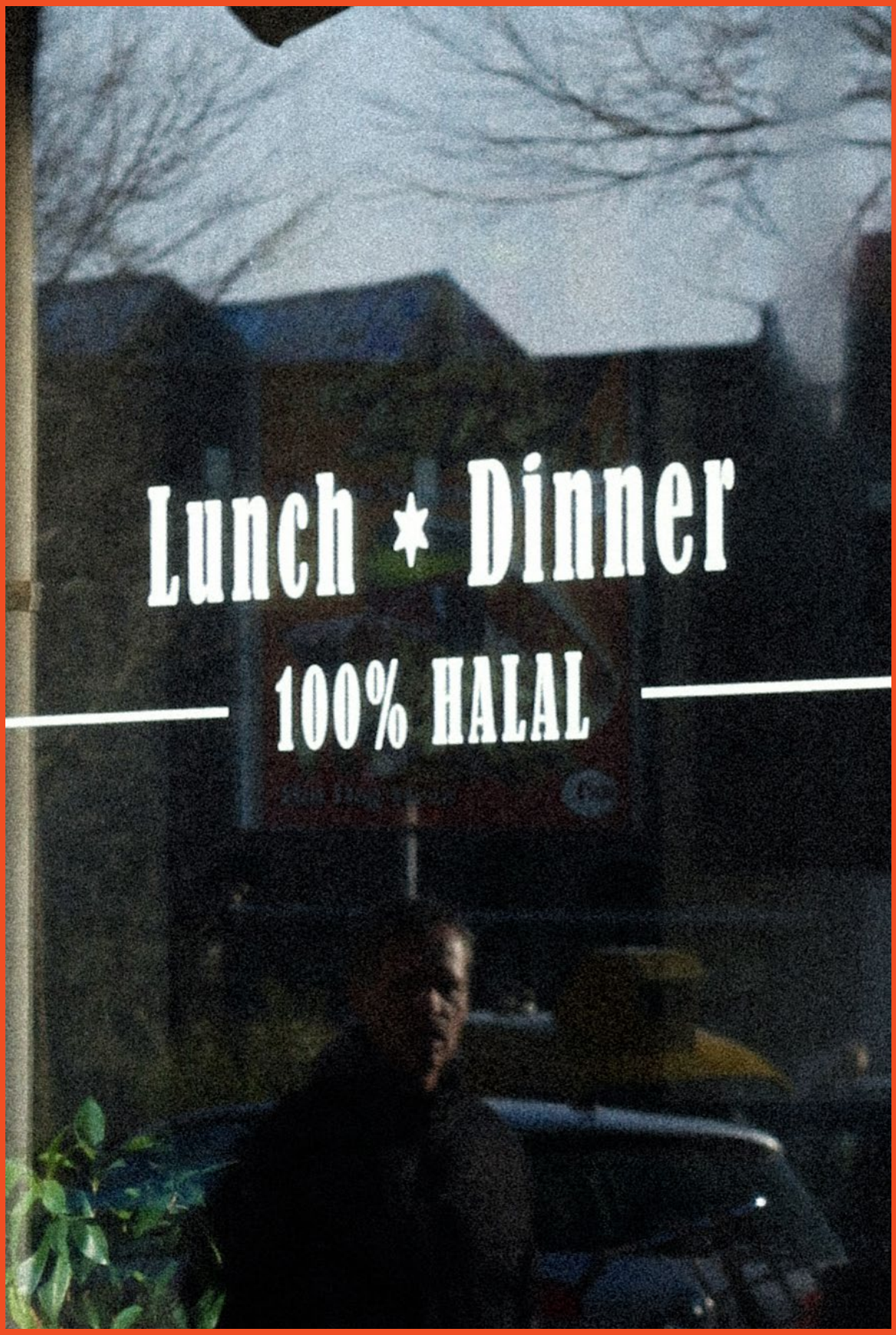
Object 31. *Egyptian mango juice at Snackbar Onze Hanny.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Horstman and Knibbe note varieties of snacks, like increasingly vegetarian snacks, create new connections between diverse populations on a narrow budget and play a connecting role in the dynamics between different people within the neighbourhood (2022, 7). The snack bar around the corner is also a window on an ever-expanding world, they say (ibid.).

Co-creation emerges not only in kitchens but also in everyday acts of mutual care. When Ahmed from *Snackbar Aggie* runs out of spring rolls, he stops by *Sphinx* to pick some up. In return, during Ramadan, he brings an iftar meal, the meal to break the fast, to Reder. *"Because he is alone",* Ahmed says. *"That is how we take care of each other".*

Religious practices find their place in the snack bar too. Hifny notes that he and his brother often perform their prayers inside the snack bar. Most customers are accepting of this, though occasionally, some leave upon seeing them pray. Such tensions reveal that co-creation does not mean perfect harmony, but rather an ongoing, negotiated coexistence. This reflects the broader reality that creolisation, as Stuart Hall reminds us, is never neutral. It unfolds through the *"continuous play of history, culture, and power"* (1990). Creolisation in places like the snack bar is always entangled in social and political hierarchies.

Halal practices, for example, demonstrate how values are negotiated within these spaces. By sourcing ingredients from halal-certified suppliers and omitting pork, the snack bar becomes accessible to a broader clientele. *"It is better this way",* says Hifny. *"Not just for ourselves, but because this way, everyone can eat here"*. Still, such decisions may draw criticism in broader Dutch society, where debates about halal slaughtering may clash with different views on animal welfare.



Object 32. *Snackbar Sphinx at the Oostenburgergracht advertises with their 100% halal food*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 33. *An image of Tutankhamun's mask at Snackbar Toetje.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Thus, Egyptian-Dutch snack bar owners do not merely 'add' Egyptian culture to the Dutch landscape but reshape the very notion of what a snack bar is through everyday encounters and exchanges. Importantly, these snack bars are not preserved capsules of 'ethnic identity'. Rather, they are dynamic spaces shaped by creolisation, co-creation and collaboration. The visual environment—papyrus scrolls, Qur'anic calligraphy, Cleopatra portraits—reflects a proud heritage, while also inviting others in. These are spaces of belonging, where a halal frikandel lies next to baklava, and where everyone is welcome.

At the same time, longing persists. Belonging in diaspora is rarely without ambivalence. Hinfy tells me he feels as if he lives half in Amsterdam and half in Alexandria in Egypt, which makes it difficult for him to feel fully at home in either place. Almost every owner lights up when talking about Egypt—the sun, the language, the family left behind. *"Egypt is* حياتي *, my life,"* one tells me. Mohammed for example, often closes his snack bar for months to visit his family and spend time in sunny Hurghada. Others celebrate Ramadan half in Amsterdam, half in their hometown Alexandria.

“These are spaces of belonging, where a halal frikandel lies next to baklava, and where everyone is welcome.”

Object 34. *A portrait of renowned Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum behind the display counter at Snackbar Toetje*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 35. *Images of Tutankhamun and the Quran displayed at Snackbar Onze Hanny*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 36. *Small statues of the Quran, Tutankhamum and Umm Khaltum behind the display counter at Snackbar Toetje. Amsterdam*, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 37. *An Egyptian plate behind the display counter at Snackbar Toetje*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 38. *A Holland scarf in Snackbar Aggie.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

"In a time when cities are often perceived as spaces of increasing individualization—marked by home deliveries, take-out food, and digital interactions—the Egyptian-owned snack bar reminds us of the persistent power of collectivity."

Object 39. *Images/statues of Tutankhamun and a Sphinx stand between the soft-serve ice creams at Snackbar Sphinx*. Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 40. *A photo depicting a dromedary, the Nile, and the pyramids displayed at Snackbar de Dijk, gifted by a Dutch customer*. Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 41. *A calligraphic inscription of an Islamic prayer at the wall at Snackbar Toetje.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 42. *An Egyptian papyrus displayed at Snackbar Aggie.* Amsterdam, 2024. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Object 43. *Mohammed taking a break from work under a film poster of Lawrence of Arabia.* Amsterdam, 2025. Photograph by: Lieve Wijman.

Conclusion

In a time when cities are often perceived as spaces of increasing individualization—marked by home deliveries, take-out food, and digital interactions—the Egyptian-owned snack bar reminds us of the persistent power of collectivity . These snack bars are not static symbols of cultural heritage (Dutch or Egyptian) but dynamic sites of creolisation, where owners and customers collaboratively shape new forms of home and belonging. From the inclusion of ta'ameya on the menu to the visual references to Egyptian heritage, the Egyptian diaspora in Amsterdam contributes to the social and cultural fabric of Amsterdam through the snack bar, making it a superdiverse place.

More than economic ventures, these snack bars serve as vital community spaces. They create a sense of home and belonging not only for Egyptian migrants, but for the broader neighborhood, where residents from superdiverse backgrounds gather—not just to eat, but to connect, exchange, and support one another. These snack bars demonstrate that spaces of everyday life—often overlooked in academic research—are crucial sites of co-creation and belonging.

Approaching these spaces through the lens of creolisation helps move beyond fixed ideas of 'Dutchness' or 'Egyptianness'. It emphasizes the fluidity of culture in motion and highlights the ways in which everyday interactions give rise to something new. Co-creation, in this context, is not just collaboration, it is the mechanism through which creolisation happens on the ground.

It is important to acknowledge that creolisation is never a neutral process. As scholars have pointed out (Hall 1990, Vergès 2016), it inherently involves power dynamics, inequality, and hierarchies, issues of domination and subordination, control and resistance. Although this study did not explicitly focus on these power relations, their presence should not be overlooked in any analysis of cultural interaction and mutual transformation.

On a concluding note, Egyptian-owned snack bars in Amsterdam do not simply reproduce Egyptian culture in a Dutch setting. Rather, they evolve through constant engagement with their environment—reshaping and being reshaped in return. As such, they stand as vibrant examples of how urban spaces can be reimagined through the lived practices of care, adaptation, and collaborative efforts. In doing so, they challenge static multicultural paradigms and offer a glimpse into a more interconnected, co-created urban future.

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