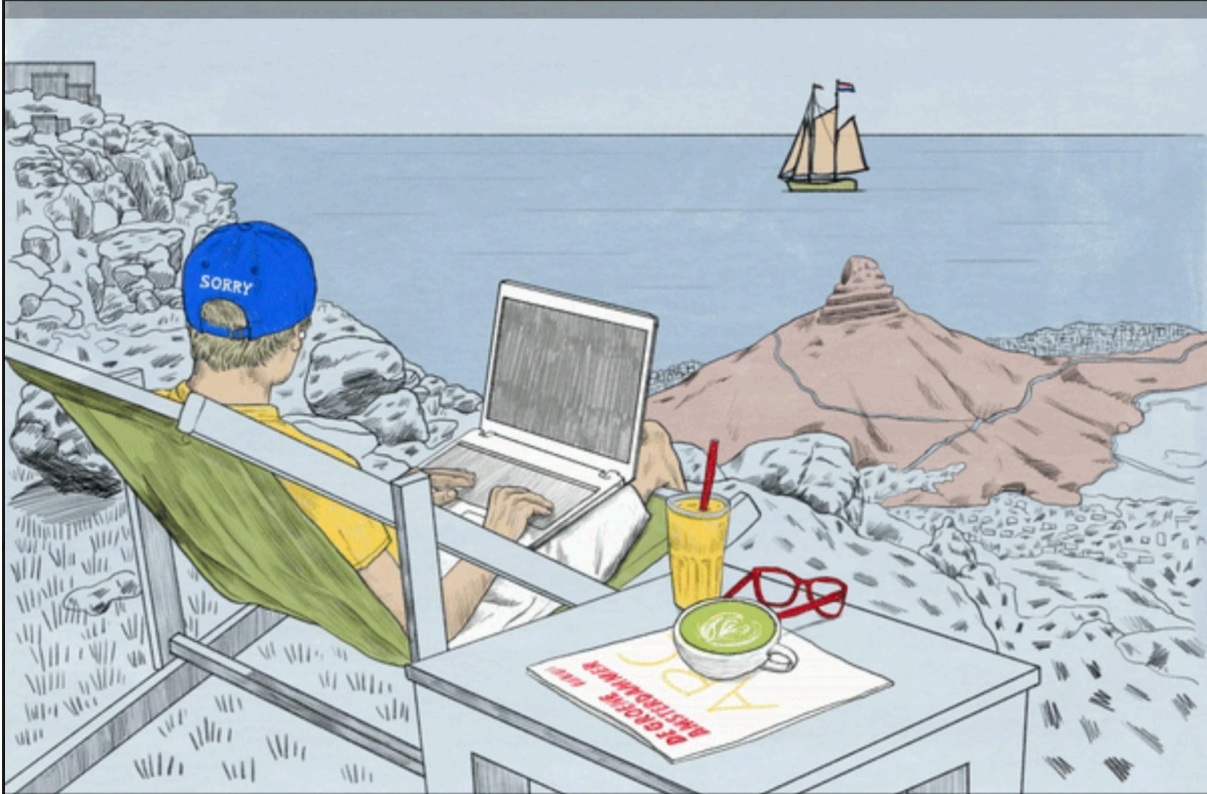


Navigating Urban Citizenship:

The enactment and reflection of the Havermelk Elite on being a citizen in Amsterdam



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¹ Image retrieved from Parool, drawn by Ted Stuver (Luijters and Ramdjan 2024).

Acknowledgements & foreword

As I worked on this thesis, I often pondered the potential impact. I am unsure how or if it will be utilised in the future, but the process has profoundly influenced my perspective on organising one's life. It seems that we often drift through life without pausing to reflect on how we wish to live it. At times, it felt as though life was living me, rather than the other way around. This research has opened my eyes to new possibilities and underscored the importance of mindful living. We should never act solely because it is what others do; there are many paths to choose from, and we do not have to follow the one that seems most conventional.

I want to express my deepest admiration for my interlocutors. Illuminating the lives of others is a sensitive endeavour, particularly when it prompts you to question your own way of living. Often, I found myself pausing to wonder why we hurry through the beautiful city of Amsterdam. The way Amsterdam has captured my heart, and the hearts of my interlocutors, is truly special. Cycling through its canals, it feels as if the city dances with us, its inhabitants, and our bond only grows stronger.

One memorable conversation was with an elderly woman in the Jordaan neighbourhood on the Westerstraat. I asked her why Amsterdam had captured her heart. She replied, "I know everyone here. It's just simplicity. I want to sit on the steps in front of my house and talk to the people around me. It's something I can't find in other cities." This image of people of all ages sitting on the steps of their homes is iconic of Amsterdam. These few steps are where lives unfold, bonds are forged, and love and sadness are shared. To me, no other city embodies this cosiness (gezelligheid) quite like Amsterdam.

Lastly, I want to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Sarah Barker, whose guidance has been crucial in helping me produce a thesis I am proud of.

Abstract

This anthropological thesis investigates the perspectives of young urban professionals in Amsterdam, referred to as the "Havermelk Elite," a term coined by Jonas Kooyman and commonly used by local newspapers to describe this social group. Drawing on Currid-Halkett's concept of the 'aspirational class,' which inspired Kooyman, this research connects Currid-Halkett's ideas to anthropological perspectives. Graeber researched how society is shaped by individuals driven by self-interest to achieve their life goals, linking this self-interested activity to drivers of individual behavior, such as economic and societal forces, the construction of social spaces, and the implications for citizenship in Amsterdam.

Through conversations with participants, the study examines their apparent individualism and where it is rooted. The findings suggest that while significant forces and structures encourage individual-focused behavior, this trend is not necessarily a conscious choice by the individuals themselves. Instead, it reflects the influence of urban life in contemporary capital cities like Amsterdam.

This research challenges the simplistic notion that the habits of the Havermelk Elite are inherently individualistic, proposing instead that external systems significantly influence their behavior. By reflecting on the systemic structures that shape our actions, the thesis calls for a reconsideration of perceptions of individualism and citizenship. It emphasizes the importance of slowing down and valuing relationships with people and nature, advocating for a more mindful approach to our roles and responsibilities as citizens, and ultimately suggesting that the responsibility lies within ourselves.

Keywords: citizenship, ecological citizenship, individualism, collectivism, climate change, capitalism

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Terminology list

Terms	Explanation
Havermelk Elite	A group of young people (25-35 years) living, working, and having a social life in Amsterdam. Often having a vibrant social life including going to the newest and most trendy restaurants and bars. Characteristics of this group is that they often have a subscription to classpass to be able to attend sport lessons at Saints and Stars gyms or go to Rocycle, have a hip e-bike such as a VanMoof, drink oat milk cappuccinos or matcha lattes, and like to work abroad, often working in corporate jobs.
3WO	“The three wise men from the East”. Three men who own about 30 restaurants in Amsterdam and have bought a lot more during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have created almost a monopoly on restaurants and bars in Amsterdam. Most of their restaurants and bars are located in Amsterdam East.
Saints & Stars gyms	An expensive and elitist gym that has sport lessons starting with “Holy ...”. They have Holy Ride (bicycle ride), Holy Yoga etc. The gym is filled with status symbols such as having the Stella Maris soap and having cool towels smelling like eucalyptus. The lights are low and the building looks fancy.
Zuidas	The Zuidas is located in the South of Amsterdam, where most of the corporate companies have an office. It is filled with the most prestigious law firms, consultancy offices, and more.

Rat race	This is an indication for working in the corporate machine. Literally, it refers to rats in a mill that keep running. This is often the comparison with the people who work very hard at the offices located at the Zuidas.
Aspirational class	Aspirational class refers to the theory of Elizabeth Currid-Halkett (2017), in which she speaks about the class of people that are young, urban professionals and living in big cities such as London. She researched them in the light of perceiving them as a new elite.
Anywheres	These are people not bound to a location and are able to work anywhere.
Somewheres	These are people bound to a location and are not able to work anywhere.
VanMoof, Cowboy, Urban Arrow	These are brands for hip and trendy electric bikes. Urban arrow is a cargo bike often used by people with children.
Natural or organic wine (often orange)	A term for a type of wine made using natural processes
Provincials (Pronvincialen)	People from outside of the 'ring' (which indicates the highway around Amsterdam).
One-upping (One-uppen)	The act of portraying in a conversation that you are a little bit better than the other person.
De Groene Amsterdammer	A local newspaper specialised in sustainability and news from Amsterdam.
Telegraaf	A more right-winged newspaper.
Parool	A local newspaper of Amsterdam.
Amsterdammers	People living in Amsterdam

Havermelk	A plant-based milk, made from oats.
Matcha latte	Matcha latte is a beverage that originates from Japan. It's made from finely ground green tea leaves that are mixed with steamed milk.

Preface

During my research, I attended a special event at the Scheepvaartmuseum, a marine museum in



Amsterdam. This event featured a collaboration between the journalist who coined the term Havermelk Elite and the "Food for Thought" exhibition.

The central theme of the night was the "Food for Thought" exhibition, which focused on pollution in food production. This theme was intriguingly linked to the Havermelk Elite, a group known for their seemingly sustainable lifestyle but often have high consumption patterns.

It was fascinating to observe how the Havermelk elite, known for their commercialised lifestyle and emphasis on organic and sustainable living practices, engaged with an exhibition highlighting the hazardous nature of food production. The Scheepvaartmuseum, with its rich historical allure and high glass ceilings, set a fitting stage for this event. Upon entering, I saw that the square beneath the glass ceilings had been transformed into an "orange ocean". The dim light of the orange illumination created a serene ambiance, see the picture above¹. On round tables covered in white cloths, easels were set up for painting different arrangements of objects like towers of orange wine, fancy French cheese, and beautiful chocolates. The elegant atmosphere was further accentuated by attendees dressed in neutral colours, with some women entirely in beige. Small stalls sold food and organic orange wine for 8 euros per glass.

The night featured several activities. Aside from the painting, there was a guided tour of the "Food for Thought" exhibition and a live podcast recording. I first joined the guided tour, where a motivated young woman led ten of us through rooms representing different countries. The exhibition, described by the museum as "A bird's eye view of the world of our food through the lens of photographer and filmmaker Kadir van Lohuizen," showcased the absurd and polluting aspects of our food production system. Photographs depicted perfectly healthy food deemed unsellable due to minor imperfections. The exhibition highlighted how food production is driven by cheap labour and optimal growing conditions worldwide. By the end of the tour, the group was visibly contemplative about their food consumption habits.

¹ Picture at Havermelk Elite night with Food for Thought exposition at Scheepvaartmuseum Amsterdam.

After the tour, I attended the live podcast recording by "Opscheppers," a trio with a podcast channel on Spotify. The name "Opscheppers" has a double meaning in Dutch, referring both to dishing up food and to boasting. Their podcasts usually cover dining spots in Amsterdam. This episode was meant to link the Havermelk Elite's eating habits to gentrification and broader societal impacts, which intrigued me. However, while the podcast was entertaining, it lacked depth, focusing mainly on rating restaurants for the Havermelk Elite rather than delving into more substantial issues.

As the night concluded, I reflected on the attendees and their motivations. The Havermelk Elite are known for their contradictory behaviours. They project sustainability by being knowledgeable about climate issues, riding electric bikes, wearing sustainable clothing brands, and drinking organic wine. Yet, they often engage in unsustainable practices such as frequent international travel, meat consumption, and exhaustive consumerism. I wondered why this group was drawn to spend their Friday night at an event focused on the hazardous nature of food production. Was it a genuine interest that they would discuss later and reflect upon in their future habits, or a way to maintain their sustainable image on Instagram?

I. Introduction

In this thesis, I will explore a lifestyle that feels within reach yet distant. I find myself on the edge, observing a lifestyle that feels closer to mine. Yet, I hesitate, uncertain whether I want to embrace it. What exactly is "there"? It is the realm of the Havermelk Elite, a world that feels both familiar and unfamiliar, inviting contemplation.

Map of Amsterdam by the Havermelk Elite

Legend

1. NOORDERMARKT → PLACE IN AMSTERDAM CENTRE WEST, SEEMS LIKE THE EPICENTRE NEXT TO PLACES IN THE PIJP. LOCATED NEAR JORDAAN AND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CENTRE OF AMSTERDAM. THERE IS A WEEKLY MARKET BUT IT IS MOSTLY VISITED BY MY PARTICIPANTS FOR ITS RICHNESS IN CAFES, RESTAURANTS, AND BARS.
2. SCHEEPVAARTMUSEUM → I HAVE VISITED ONE EVENT IN THE MUSEUM ABOUT FOOD PRODUCTION AND THE HAVERMELK ELITE.
3. CAFE DE DRUIF → A CAFE THAT IS OFTEN VISITED BY MY INTERLOCUTORS AND HAS THE TYPICAL HIP AMSTERDAM LOOKS WITH OLD, HALF PAINTED CHAIRS OUTSIDE AND THE TYPICAL AMSTERDAM FEEL INSIDE. THE INSIDE OF THE CAFE LOOKED LIKE AN OLD BROWN CAFE WITH THE WHITE CURTAINS AND CANDLES ON TABLES.
4. CAFE BINNENVISSER → IT IS A VERY HIP RESTAURANT THAT EVEN HAS THE ABBREVIATION "BINVI".
5. BARRACUDA → A FISH RESTAURANT THAT IS OFTEN DISCUSSED IN THE LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AS THE PLACE TO BE FOR THE HAVERMELK ELITE SINCE YOU CAN BE SERVED BY A ROBOT.
6. BAKKERIJ FORT NEGEN → A HIP BAKERY WITH 9 EURO SOURDOUGH BREAD.
7. KAASJES VAN KEF → A CHEESE SHOP AND RESTAURANT BY A TYPICAL AMSTERDAMMER. THIS IS A LANDMARK IN AMSTERDAM.
8. CRADAM → CAFE RESTAURANT AMSTERDAM, IS LOCATED WITHIN WESTERPARK NEXT TO THE WATER TOWER. IT IS AN ICONIC RESTAURANT BECAUSE IT IS LOCATED IN AN OLD MACHINE BUILDING. IT HAS VERY HIGH CEILINGS AND SOME OF THE MACHINES ARE STILL IN THE DINING AREA. ALMOST EVERYTHING THAT YOU COULD POSSIBLY WANT TO EAT IS ON THE MENU, FROM OYSTERS TO STEAK.



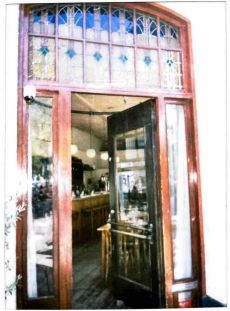
1 Noordermarkt



2 Scheepsvaartmuseum



3 Cafe de Druif



4 Binnenvisser

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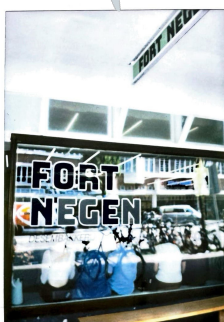
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5 Barracuda



6 Bakkerij Fort 9



7 Kaasjes van Kef



8 Cradam

1.1 Problem statement, relevance, and research question

The term “Havermelk Elite” is widely recognized in Amsterdam. Coined by Jonas Kooyman, it has dominated local newspapers, associating this group of young urban individuals with various broader discussions and stereotypical images. In the local newspapers, there are discussions on the effect this affluent group of people has on the city of Amsterdam. A spike in the amount of Saint and Stars gyms and many coffee bars with the most trendy matcha lattes² has created a different street view. The stereotypical image created by the newspapers of the Havermelk Elite is that they are either working in a corporate job or are working as a freelancer in media or art. They spend a lot of their money on their expensive gym memberships and on restaurants, bars, and coffee shops. This behavior is often critiqued by older generations since they think you should save up money to buy a house.

However, the current housing crisis left my participants with less hope for the future. Furthermore, the climate crisis and high amount of wars in the world also do not add for an inspiring perspective on the future. Therefore, the notion of choosing to live more in the moment is often more present amongst young people and that is one of the reasons they do not save up every penny as their parents are used to. The demonisation of the image of the Havermelk Elite by the local newspapers is an example of the way people perceive how young people ought to behave. Due to the climate crisis, the group of the Havermelk Elite is perceived as sustainable individuals by their sustainable clothes and riding electric bikes but also portray contradictory behavior by being frequent flyers. The contradictory behavior is something that this group also utilises for making jokes on Instagram. The account “Havermelkelite” is created by Jonas Kooyman and he asks after every weekend: “what was your most hme³ action of the weekend?”, which generates the most outrage responses. During the night discussed in the preface, there was also the possibility to write down your most “hme eating habit”. To illustrate, I will name a few:

“I do not buy avocados in plastic because that is bad for the environment.”

“Waiting in line for Fort 9 to buy a sourdough bread for 9 euros.”

“Using psychedelic mushroom drops as salad dressing.”

The contradictory behavior and making fun of yourself is crucial for this group, which has spiked my interest. However, I do wonder what the implications are of this lifestyle for themselves, their community, and the environment. Is the depiction of overpriced sourdough, orange wine, branded

² See terminology list for further explanation.

³ Abbreviation for Havermelk Elite, often used in the Instagram account.

clothing, and coffee with plant milks a hyperbole, or does it accurately represent the reality? How does this group fit within the larger context of urban subgroups and capital cities?

In this thesis, I aim to situate the Havermelk Elite in the wider anthropological discussions on class and citizenship. Through a brief ethnographic fieldwork project conducted in Amsterdam, the research illuminates the perspectives and decision-making processes of young urban professionals, referred to as the Havermelk Elite. By placing the Havermelk Elite within Elizabeth Currid-Halkett's concept of the aspirational class (2017), the thesis extends this theoretical framework to a new setting: Amsterdam. Furthermore, this will generate more insights in trends in class formation and consumption behaviors in urban settings (Bourdieu 1989; Graeber 2011; Low 2011). This thesis will also investigate how the Havermelk Elite shapes identity and social environments by contrasting themselves with outsiders. This exploration contributes to broader conversations on urban identity formation and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion among social groups. Lastly, the research will be embedded in the realm of citizenship literature by expanding on the traditional notions through the inclusion of social, political, and ecological aspects (Marshall 1983; Wolf and Moser 2011; Saiz 2005; Seyfang 2006). This expansion will highlight the tension between perceived individual rights and collective responsibilities, especially for the environment.

Therefore, the research question is:

“In what ways do social constructs, class, external economic, and societal forces shape the citizenship behaviors and responsibilities of the Havermelk Elite in Amsterdam?”

1.2 The Research location & population

My research is located within Amsterdam, to be more precise it is located within the borders of the Amsterdam highway, the ‘ring’. This highway indicates for me the borders in which my participants live and how they also distance themselves from everything outside of the ‘ring’. In three months, I spoke to my interlocutors about the meaning of Amsterdam to them and how they perceived the role of the city within their lives. A"It turns out that Amsterdam is very important to them, and most never want to leave. The city is so important to them that they rarely leave—why would they want to? Everything that you could want is right here.

I talked to young urban professionals between the ages of 25 and 35 years. I chose to research this specific group because I looked for people who are no longer students and have started working in this urban environment. Additionally, it was crucial that they live and socialise in Amsterdam for this research. This is of importance since I searched for restaurants, bars, and other types of recreation to meet more people and be able to conduct participant observation. I delved into the worlds of these

people to understand if the image of the young urban professional is the same as the image of the Havermelk Elite. This does not mean that I searched for people who exactly resemble the image that has been painted by the local newspapers. I want to enrich the image that is painted of the young urban professional living in Amsterdam.

1.3 Methodology and operationalization

In this thesis, I employed two primary methods to research the Havermelk Elite and their placement within citizenship. First, I used participant observation. During the initial month, I visited many places listed on the map, located in the beginning of the introduction, and made connections on the terrace. The goal was to observe how individuals reflect on their rights and responsibilities as citizens in day-to-day life. Participant observation is a well-rounded tool for detecting behavioural shifts (Bernard 2011). This method was crucial for gaining an understanding of the social world through involvement in daily practices (O'Reilly 2012). Using participant observation, particularly at the beginning, helped establish contacts and provided insight into how the research population lives. It also facilitated rapport-building, essential for good ethnographic fieldwork (Madden 2017; O'Reilly 2012).

During my fieldwork, I spoke to 11 participants and I want to emphasise that I was not looking for a perfect resemblance with the dictionary definition. The mainstream image of the Havermelk Elite has been that they have been defined online as: “A highly educated group of people with significant cultural capital, though not necessarily a large income, [who] consciously chooses to engage in responsible behaviour. They eat organic food and free-range chickens and use cotton shopping bags. They also hire nannies and household help to better develop their children and to have time for themselves to practise yoga and Pilates” (“Havermelkelite - Woordenboek Van Nieuwe Woorden.” 2019). The participants in this research are anonymous since I am not using their real names. Furthermore, gender does not play a role in my research because men, women, and non-binary persons can be included in the Havermelk Elite. In my perception, the group is very mixed in genders. Therefore, the participants have all gender neutral names. The operationalization of participant observation involved several steps. I started at the places listed on the map, carrying a notebook to describe the surroundings and how people interacted. I noted details about the restaurant decorations, people's attire, and engaged in short conversations, often asking why they chose that restaurant and their perceptions of Amsterdam. I took field notes in a notebook and avoided recordings to maintain a casual relationship. After brief interactions, I invited them for interviews to discuss their opinions and reflections on life in Amsterdam.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews to delve deeply into participants' perspectives (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). This method, though time-consuming, was crucial for obtaining nuanced insights and fostering an engaged, reflective, and collaborative

ethnographic approach (O'Reilly 2012). I prepared a list of questions categorised by themes. The first question in each interview was whether they felt more like a citizen of the Netherlands or Amsterdam, to prompt discussion on belonging and perceptions of Amsterdammers versus non-Amsterdammers. Other questions explored their lives, surroundings, perceptions of Amsterdam, and its inhabitants. I also inquired about individual and collective societal behaviours, societal structures, self-improvement pressures, and responsibilities related to climate change.

This study aims to understand how young urban professionals in Amsterdam perceive and express their views on the city, its inhabitants, people outside Amsterdam, and the concept of citizenship, including their rights and responsibilities towards others and the environment.

1.4 Ethics and positionality

As a cultural anthropologist studying the "Havermelk Elite" in Amsterdam, my unique position and ethical framework shape the integrity and authenticity of my research. I have lived in Amsterdam for the past six years, having been born here and returning at 19 after 15 years away. This background makes the question of what defines a "real Amsterdammer" particularly interesting, as it positions me as both an insider and outsider.

The path of the "Havermelk Elite" fascinates me because one is not born into it but can join through corporate success. My research explores the implications of embracing or avoiding this lifestyle, and my position in this study is akin to balancing on a tightrope, navigating between my past student life and this elitist world. This balance provides a unique perspective, as I understand the dynamics of this lifestyle while remaining somewhat detached. Many participants are acquaintances, either directly or indirectly, which adds a layer of familiarity and complexity to my interactions. This familiarity can provide deeper insights but also introduces the potential for bias. Therefore, my representation of the Havermelk Elite is a nuanced perspective rather than a comprehensive one.

Ethnographic research, particularly qualitative, demands a robust ethical framework. Informed consent is central to this process, as emphasised by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011). Throughout my fieldwork, I maintained a dynamic approach to seeking consent, aligning with the AAA code of ethics (2009), which prioritises ongoing consent and ensures the protection of participants' rights, interests, and sensitivities. Recognizing the moral obligations inherent in my role, I am committed to safeguarding the ethical integrity of the study. Addressing sensitive topics such as political opinions and perceptions of climate change requires careful consideration. While ethnographic fieldwork involves some intrusion (Scheper-Hughes 2000), open communication is vital. Before data collection, I clarified the research purpose, ensuring participants understood they could withdraw at any time. Transparency was enhanced by informing participants about the use of interview recordings. Furthermore, as stated in the methodology section, I have anonymised all of the participants.

As a privileged female researcher, I remain aware of my biases and the power dynamics at play. Given my younger age and lack of significant professional status, participants often hold more power within this societal structure. This dynamic necessitates a careful and respectful approach to ensure my research does not perpetuate existing inequalities. By incorporating these ethical considerations into my methodology, I aim to uphold the principles of respect, transparency, and participant well-being throughout the research process.

1.5 The structure

The analysis is split over three chapters. Firstly, I will elaborate on the context of the Havermelk Elite. In this chapter, I will discuss the context that can be seen as the environment of my participants. With their environment, I mean the physical environment of Amsterdam, the political climate, and the business environment they often live in. I will zoom in on the perceptions of the Havermelk Elite and how this is related to existing anthropological research. In the second chapter class will be the main subject. I will delve into the execution of class by the Havermelk Elite in which the image of the local newspapers will be compared to my research. Furthermore, the perception of a real Amsterdam versus the perception of someone outside of Amsterdam will be discussed. This will be linked to the construction of social spaces. In the last chapter, I link my research to the wider concept of citizenship. I will elaborate on the rights that one seems to have in my research and their perceptions of these rights. I will also zoom in on the responsibilities one carries and how they have perceived these. With these responsibilities I will delve into the environmental responsibility and to whom you might owe this responsibility. The chapter will end with a section on how, in my perception, my participants are stuck in a system and this plays a significant role in making decisions. This thesis will conclude with a summary of findings, contributions, and recommendations for future research.

II. Chapter One: Societal, Political, and Economic Landscapes in Amsterdam

This chapter situates the Havermelk Elite within broader societal structures. Firstly, it examines their comparison to the aspirational class literature and their context within Amsterdam. Additionally, it explores their physical environment in Amsterdam. Secondly, it analyses their positioning within the political landscape. Lastly, it delves into their role in the economic and business environments. These three elements have been chosen by the researcher since they were discussed frequently and therefore they are core elements of the living conditions of this group.

2.1 Havermelk Elite & aspirational class

The “Havermelk Elite” is a sub demographic group that is characterised in the local newspapers and the newsletter as young, urban, and often corporate 30-something people with e-bikes, subscriptions to expensive gyms, and a love for expensive specialty coffee shops (Parool 2023). This group is often discussed in local Dutch newspapers and forms an image of the young, hip, urban professional. I argue that this stereotypical image of young people in Amsterdam created in local newspapers can be linked to Elizabeth Currid-Halkett's book, *The Sum of Small Things* (Currid-Halkett 2017). This book delves into the new urban elite and their characteristics over the world. This thesis will utilise the theory of Currid-Halkett and link it to wider discussions in anthropology on class and citizenship.

Currid-Halkett (2017) argues that the leisure class as an elite has disappeared and the aspirational class has risen. The aspirational class is an educated, self-made elite and ‘leisure’ is not part of their repertoire. The essence of one of her arguments is that these high-earners are losing leisure time, time to spend on enjoyment, and the low earners are gaining it (Frank 2012). I argue that the Havermelk Elite in Amsterdam and the theory of aspirational class have overlapped. The characteristics that are described by Jonas Kooyman in his newsletter have similarities to the characteristics described in the book of Currid-Halkett (2017). Some of these similarities are a love for restaurants and bars, which is often posted on social media. This group of university-schooled people have cultural capital and also spend their money on cleaning help or nannies to reserve time for yoga and pilates. Furthermore, similarities between the aspirational class of Currid-Halkett (2017) and the Havermelk Elite is that they are up-to-date on the latest news by listening to podcasts and other forms of media. This is very fitting for the current information economy (Coster 2023).

Currid-Halkett (2017) delves deeper into the consequences for class divide. In her book, she has researched the shift from Veblen's theory (1900) on leisure class to the nowadays aspirational class. In her research, mainly located in the United States and England, she speaks about the diminishing leisure time since the people who are aspiring to gain a higher position in society need to invest time

to obtain knowledge for this information reliant economic system. I argue that the theory of the aspirational class is applicable in Amsterdam to the Havermelk Elite since the importance of gaining knowledge is also very present in this economy. Furthermore, it is often that this group, the Havermelk Elite, has diminishing leisure time due to their aspirations to climb the economic and social ladder within this city.

Firstly, I want to focus on the environment, Amsterdam. A fast-paced urban environment in the middle of winter with lots of rain. The streets of Amsterdam are empty during February, March, and April but when there is a little sunshine everyone comes running out of their homes. I think that even when the rain pours, the homes look cosy. This idea of cosiness (gezelligheid⁴) in Amsterdam and the connection people feel with the city has been an important topic in my interviews. Charlie told me about their perspective on Amsterdam:

Lieke: What connects you to Amsterdam?

Charlie: I am living next to the market and I always loved that. It feels like that old-time of cosiness (gezelligheid).

Lieke: What is the meaning of this old-time cosiness? Can you give me an example?

Charlie: Yes, I remember back when I first moved here. Back then, we had a lot of those small cultural institutions where you could go watch a movie for free. It would be a small room with a projector and a few wooden chairs, you know, that kind of thing. That has decreased over the years, and now everything is organised. Now we also have those rooftop cinemas in the summer. But those are all quite expensive and very organised, no more squatters in a building saying, "Hey, come watch a movie and a donation is welcome." It's all become more polished, organised, and commercialised. And you really notice it throughout the whole city. It's also become more "Havermelk Elite." So all those white mothers with their cargo bikes, soybeans, trendy people, 3WO taking over the whole city with the same stupid trendy places. A bit more of a one-size-fits-all for elitist YUPs.

The comments of Charlie made me think about the way certain groups in Amsterdam seem to have created a distance between them and other social groups. As they said, elitist YUPs appear to have a certain feeling of being elevated above the rest of the Amsterdammers. In the newspapers, it has been clear that this group, the Havermelk Elite, seemed to distance themselves with types of behaviour or material things from the others. The Parool has said that the Havermelk Elite has transformed the

⁴ Gezelligheid in Dutch is untranslatable into other languages. It describes a feeling akin to cosiness or warmth, often associated with being in the company of others.

streets of Amsterdam to the restaurants, gyms, and other types of recreation to their liking. Like the city has become tailored to their wants and needs (“Hoe de havermelkelite de Amsterdamse fietspaden, horeca en sportscholen overneemt Amsterdam Wereldstad”. n.d.). In many articles of the *Parool*, the local Amsterdam newspaper, it has been said that the Havermelk Elite has created this splurge in trendy coffee shops, 3WO restaurants and bars⁵, and the Saints and Stars gyms⁶. 3WO is a chain that often buys restaurants and bars that have gone bankrupt. They transform these old bars and restaurants into new hip ones often looking quite alike. There is resentment from local restaurant owners because it is harder to compete with a restaurant that is linked to a chain and thus has the safety net of 30 other restaurants. It does not matter to 3WO when one place is not doing great. The other one in the next neighbourhood is doing very well. Therefore, the playing field becomes uneven and it almost feels like they have a monopoly in restaurants. As it turns out, this is exactly the type of restaurant that is very popular amongst my research population. In one of my first conversations, I spoke with Isa and Sam about the way 3WO has bought about 30 restaurants, mainly in Amsterdam East, during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were telling me that they were fully aware of the disastrous outcome this has for many small-scale restaurant owners but then again *Bar Bukowski is so much fun*. These restaurants are young, hip, and perfect for people like them, they told me.

2.2 Dutch politics & country club

While attending Roxane van Iperen's reading of "Eigen Welzijn Eerst" ("Prioritising Own Welfare"), I saw parallels with the behaviour of the Havermelk Elite. Known for her acclaimed non-fiction, van Iperen gained prominence with "Het Hoge Nest," a vivid portrayal of a World War II Jewish safe house, celebrated for its detailed research and storytelling on resistance and solidarity. I attended a lecture on her book "Eigen Welzijn Eerst" in which she wrote about the individualism trend within Dutch politics. She calls this trend the way the middle class has lost their liberal values and ideals. This book is a critique on the normalisation of extreme right-wing comments, the way muslim people are now treated in the Netherlands, and how this is founded in fear. The right-winged party "PVV"⁷ has xenophobic, right-wing, anti-Islam, and anti-migration opinions and have shared these slogans in their election campaign (Van Den Bogert 2021). In one of his most known speeches, Wilders, the leader of the PVV has stated that he wants "fewer Moroccans" in the Netherlands. The central bureau for statistics in the Netherlands has researched the amount of trust of Dutch citizens in politics, which drives polarisation. In 2022, it was already stated that the feeling of polarisation has augmented but now in 2024 there is evidence of affective polarisation due to the rise in structural inequality in the Netherlands, accompanied by as sense of unease and distrust in politics (De Ree and Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2024).

⁵ See terminology list for further explanation.

⁶ See terminology list for further explanation.

⁷ PVV is an abbreviation for "Partij voor de Vrijheid" (Party for the Freedom).

Isa: “In today's society, women are often encouraged to be strong and independent, focusing on their personal growth and self-sufficiency. This emphasis, however, can sometimes overshadow the importance of the collective. It's crucial to remember that if you don't take care of yourself, you can't contribute effectively to the community. The position of women has evolved to the point where they no longer need to depend financially on men. For instance, the rise in divorce rates reflects this shift. Yet, in cities like Amsterdam, high mortgage costs can prevent couples from separating, as losing the house is not an option.”

When I was researching and talking to Isa, we spoke about the trust that you need to have in yourself and how the high-paying corporate job is fueling this desire. They also told me that they did not rely upon any help from the government for help with housing, education, or in the job market. I understood that the notion of “you need to make it on your own, there is no safety net” was their motto. In anthropological research by Graeber (2011), he concluded that a society is made up from individuals, who all have their self-interest to make their life goals a reality. Graeber (2011) stated that therefore a society is the outcome of all this self-interested activity. It is not often that economics and anthropology can be aligned in literature. However, Graeber (2011), argued that that economics play a role in the behaviour of people but he also stated that anthropology has always been the most interested in the people who are not moved by the practical or theoretical world. This thesis takes a different stance. I want to understand the underlying motives of my participants and why they seemingly aspire to be a part of this economic world. Anthropological research has also been very interested in the way neoliberalism takes place in people's lives. Freeman (2007), an anthropological researcher, has linked the concept of “flexibility” to the neoliberal agenda. In Freeman's research, she has linked “flexibility” as a cornerstone of neoliberalism which is embodied in mandates for the fluid movements and restructuring of labour, capital, and information and for the individual as the capacity for creative self-invention and self-mastery.

For my participants, it is empowering to rely on the idea of independence, financially and emotionally. This is something that has also been discussed in the research of Freeman (2007), in which self-mastery is central to gain more flexibility and as Graeber (2011) stated this is a self-interested activity. This individuality is a core element in the current neoliberal agenda. Neoliberalism is often hard to define and has been perceived as an ambiguous concept used in many different contexts (Peck 2023). In this thesis, neoliberalism is perceived in multiple perspectives. Firstly, it is perceived as a concept that refers to the global market dominance. Neoliberalism's adaptive and powerful nature should be taken into account when thinking about the global market structures (Foucault 2008). Secondly, neoliberalism is also perceived from the impact it has on individual behavior. I want to emphasise that this economic system that fosters self-reliance, self-interested activities such as self-invention and self-mastery results in more individualistic choices.

In Roxane's lecture, she painted a picture of how Dutch politics is also one of the drivers of more individual choices. The focus on the individual has become more present due to less collective policies and the notion of making it on your own since there is no safety net. Roxane spoke about the way the middle class had lost its liberal values. When she started, she sketched the political situation of the Netherlands throughout the years after World War II. After the war, it was very important in politics to make sure that every citizen was treated the same and received the same changes. The playing field should be even in the beginning, after that the people that want to can make individual changes. At one point Roxane gave an example:

“It would be the general idea that everyone can become whatever they want. The farmer's daughter could be the next prime minister. It used to be very important right after the World War that everyone was treated equally and received the same position.”

There was a lot of fear of people being treated as second-class citizens as has happened in the war. Therefore, politics focused on policies that improved public services, education, and social security. It was the belief that if everyone was having what they needed it would benefit Dutch society.

However, there has been a change since these societal policies became too expensive. The reductions on these social policies created more pressure on the normal citizen to care for the people around them. Moreover, companies received more freedom with the idea that more wealth would “trickle down” to all layers in society. However, in practice, it became clear that the wealth remained at the top but the companies had already been privatised. Another factor that created more pressure on the middle class is off-shoring production. This resulted in more migration and more competition amongst citizens. The clue of the book is that the middle class is experiencing more fear of losing their societal position and is under pressure (Van Iperen 2022).

This pressure resulted in the fear of losing one's current position in society. This resulted in two ways of expressing “nativism”. Nativism is, according to Roxane van Iperen, that the perceived ‘own population’ is seen as first-class citizens and migrants are second-class citizens (Van Iperen 2022). The first way of expressing nativism is a direct form in which political parties like the PVV choose a scapegoat and blame them for the pressure felt by the middle class. In the case of the PVV, it is the narrative that people with a muslim background are blamed for the fear of losing the position middle class people have. This is a type of othering that is used in politics to gain more voters. The other form of nativism is indirect. This is often practised by the upper middle class by the notion of self-preservation. To elaborate, fear of falling creates the idea that one should put up walls to maintain their own position within society. Roxane refers to this as the “country club”. It is the phenomenon of excluding people to have access to the impactful spaces. This can be done by distinguishing children by sending them to better schools, living in wealthier neighbourhoods, and

thus creating a certain exclusivity. Ultimately, you create a network within the elite who pass on the jobs with power to each other. This is the result of segregation in education. Roxane talks about the people who ensure that they belong to the country club that has access to the best education or job you aspire to. According to the ideal of equality, everyone should have the same access, but to maintain certainty, a dictatorship of good taste has emerged. This causes people in this group to follow the dictate of the right school choice, holidays, hobbies, and clothing. The people in the club maintain this among themselves by giving each other an advantage, so the 'children in the club' have an advantage over 'the children outside the club'. This shows that the liberal slogan, that used to be very present in 60s and 70s, of 'hard work pays off' no longer applies. The walls of the people in the club are raised against anyone who does not adhere to the same lifestyle and image. I argue that this form of expressing nativism can be linked to the Havermeik Elite. During the lecture, it became clear to me that possessing social and cultural capital in the Netherlands is very important. In my opinion, the Havermeik Elite is inherently in this bubble, where they often have one or more master's degrees and are often supported by cultural or financial capital to get there. Currid-Halkett (2017) wrote about the way the aspirational class is rewriting patterns of consumption while disengaging in conventional material conspicuous consumption. They reveal their social position through more subtle behaviours and goods that are not necessarily expensive but imply a rich cultural and social capital relegated to their aspirational class membership. The aspirational class is a large and powerful cultural formation. They have the power to exclude people and create a distance between them and others. Their subtle and inconspicuous choices of their spendings, behaviour, what to value, and the way in which they often shore up their own and their children's sociocultural and economic position of privilege ensure to leave everyone else out.

In my research, there was one Saturday Morning when I went to a luxury bakery. This bakery, Fort Negen, is located in the centre of Amsterdam and is known for its sourdough bread. In the Instagram of Havermeik Elite, it is also portrayed as a symbol of wealth and if you want to be part of the elite you should definitely go to this bakery. Therefore, I was also standing in line on Saturday morning to buy the sourdough bread for 9 euros a piece. During this experience, it was interesting to see what people were wearing. I saw a lot of people in beige and nude colours. There was a woman standing in front of me in the line and she was wearing beige from head to toe. Moreover, she was pushing a stroller with a baby inside that was also completely dressed in beige, the stroller and the baby. This made me wonder why everyone was looking alike in their beige and neutral colours and wearing fabrics such as linen. It all had a very rich-looking allure.

In conclusion, the integration of the author reading event and the book van Roxane has portrayed an insight into the country club. This generated a new perspective, for me, of the relationship between individuality and the political system, and the way this is also pushing the focus on the notion of

self-reliance and self-interested activities in daily lives. Furthermore, my research has portrayed that the image of the country club is also present in the Havermelk Elite of Amsterdam. This portrays the necessity of a subtle form of consumption to maintain a privileged position.

2.3 'Rat race'

The 'Rat race', I asked Sasha, what did they mean by this? I had never heard of this way to describe the capitalistic business system in which we all work. Sasha explained that it is the constant mill in which we spin. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) investigated the transition from people in corporate life looking for a new form of living. Often when they describe their migration they used language like 'getting out of the trap' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). The working environment in Amsterdam is really diverse but amongst my research population, it was quite common to work in a corporate job, such as consultancy, law, or banking. Even my own friends, who are now finishing up their higher education know that they will then apply for jobs at the big five. The big five is an urban term for the biggest and richest consultancy companies all over the world. To apply for jobs at these companies it will take months, many tests, and many hours to even be considered. Moreover, when you are accepted at one of the companies, it is quite common to have no social life next to your job the first three years since you have to work 60 hours a week and go to all the social events. When I spoke to Isa, we talked about friends who have gotten into such firms at Zuidas⁸. They told me that it is normal to be thrown into the deep end. From the first day you are responsible as a lawyer for your clients. There is a clear hierarchy and your boss will have no mercy for you when you are failing, they said. Furthermore, in these companies everyone can become a client as long as you pay. There are ethical considerations to be taken into mind when choosing to work for companies such as Shell, Phillips, or Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (Dutch Oil company). However, when people speak about these first few years, they say it is for a bigger cause because after you are in, you are in. I perceive that 'getting in' means that you will be able to get better roles, higher functions, and more money if you move to another company with these years of experience to your name. In my conversations, it seems like we have been told that expending and wanting more is in human nature.

I spoke with Ezra, a 28 year old person who has been working in corporate finance for 6 years now. They has been living in Amsterdam for about 15 years and in their free time like to play Padel⁹. They told me that when you are in this corporate business system you get used to the luxury. They illustrated this with an example.

"I find it difficult. Because, yeah, some people still have very little. I remember, for example, when I was 18, I went to Thailand and there were people literally living with just a net

⁸ See terminology list for further explanation.

⁹ Padel is a racket sport played in doubles on an enclosed court with walls, combining elements of tennis and squash)

between two trees. Or a piece of cloth. And they were happy or something, you know. So sometimes I also think, yeah... we can't go back to basics anymore because we already have too much. So that will never work for us. But those people live with what they have. And that's enough for them. But we can't go back. I don't think... I think if we now... in the worst case scenario, go live in the bushes with a cloth over our heads, everyone would be quite unhappy. We are accustomed to luxury. We are accustomed to nice houses. We are accustomed to good jobs. Good food. If people can't eat out because of their job, they start to complain. Vacations, luxury, everything. I think people always want every step of prosperity. Maybe this has happened since the Stone Age. I think that this search for more prosperity started once humankind was used to living in a group. And when people perceive changes, like your tribe leaves or even when you lose your favourite stone. Then you find it difficult to go back. But it's also like going from a €150k salary per year to €60k. You have to adjust, and that just takes time.”

In my conversation with Ezra, they speak about the way it is easy to get used to a certain standard of living. The comparison they make with people who used to live in the stone age and how people get attached to living with one certain group and even to material stuff which they call a stone. It gave me insights on the way we perceive this system of corporate business as very normal. The social construct that we created to educate yourself and after that take a high-paying job that gives you a certain position in society. This advanced form of neoliberalism has resulted in a new pace of the economy. Capitalism is speeding up, creating more efficiency, and more production. The focus of this economy is on speed (Rosenblat 2018). Next to the importance of speed, it is also of importance to take in mind that this economy is inherently global. In the research of Tsing (2005), she researched how social and economic relations are shaped by globalisation and friction occurs from these interactions. There is an uneven distribution of the impact of globalisation across the globe and across different social groups. These global connections can lead to unexpected alliances and conflicts. Tsing (2005), portrays with her research the interactions that cause “friction” and make diverse interests and worldviews collide. In the case of the Havermeik Elite, it is interesting and of importance to understand that they, as actors, are part of the global economic system and play a role in this capitalistic global network. Moreover, Tsing (2005) emphasised the agency of individuals in navigating global processes and responding to the challenges posed by globalisation. I argue that this individual agency is of high importance in thinking about the impact one wants to have with their job. In the conversations I had, people told me that the fast-paced work ethic created more pressure and more stress. When we spoke it was often about the way it is expected to perform each day. In this economy growth and development depended on market competitiveness; everything should be done to maximise competition and competitiveness, and to allow market principles to permeate all aspects of life (Standing 2011).

Furthermore, when looking at the research from Currid-Halkett (2017), the aspirational class is built upon this knowledge society and even leisure time is used to obtain more information. As Sasha said, the 'rat race' is creating a lot of pressure and often for jobs that people do not feel completely passionate about. Moreover, these corporate jobs are often not the best for either the planet or the people. It is often that the big companies on the Zuidas are involved with less sustainable or societal goals. Examining Amsterdam's consultancy, law, and banking sectors reveals their pivotal roles alongside significant controversies. Consultancy giants like McKinsey and Deloitte are critiqued for dominance and impacts on innovation (Mazzucato and Collington 2023), often prioritising profit over broader societal responsibilities (Goldenberg 2023). In the legal sphere, lobbying by firms during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, raises ethical concerns about corporate influence (Salomons 2020). Meanwhile, banking scandals involving Rabobank's market-sensitive information sharing (Parool 2023b) and ING's contradictory environmental commitments highlight gaps in ethical and sustainable practices (Milieudefensie 2022).

With this chapter, I hope to paint a picture of the structural forces that shape the environment of the Havermelk Elite. I want to emphasise that the position of my research population is linked to these external forces such as their environment, the Dutch political climate, the country club, and the rat race. It is often that this perspective of working in prestigious companies, such as the ones named, has the connotation of becoming a successful human-being. The picture that I illustrated in the beginning of this subchapter shows that even when the work has not started yet, the process of indoctrination starts. Whilst I am still a student it is common to hear that the goal is to be accepted into one of these big corporate companies. The high-paying salary is very alluring, especially when you have created a student debt of more than 50,000 euros, which is quite common. Furthermore, these prestigious companies only take the best students with the highest masters and this makes you also feel like all that studying is finally going to pay off. Next to this, it often feels like it is the only option to be able to work in this system, afford a home in Amsterdam, and have a comfortable life. In my conversation with Billie we spoke about the idea that we live in an individual and achievement-oriented society and what this means for your expectations. I think that this section of our conversation portrays the way we also have been told that expending and wanting more is in human nature.

Lieke: What's your take on the idea that we live in an individual achievement-oriented society?

Billie: I partly agree. Sometimes it seems like people always want more and better. That's why the world may be going downhill, you know? You discover something, it works, you want more, better. I find that challenging. Even individually, if you earn well, you always want more. There are very few cultures where that's not the case. At some point, it's hard to stop when you... yes going from more to less is very... that is then difficult to give things up.

There's something human about it. Maybe it's not even about culture, but also about biology and survival. It's the species that keep surviving, that adapt and continuously want more, more food, more... better. Yes, better. So that they survive better. I think that's more ingrained in us. It's the nature of the beast. And not so much from the systems around it.

In my conversation with Billie, it was clear that they talked about the way it seems like humans want to have more and become better. They explained it as something that is natural to humans. I think that is very interesting due to the way social constructs are made by humans and capitalism is also one of those constructs. To be fair, yes I do think that there are very few cultures that do not strive for a higher position but I argue that there are external drivers that push people to this type of behaviour. When researching the Havermelk Elite, I have thought about the patterns that can be unravelled amongst this group. For starters, most people are highly educated and often have a masters degree on their name. This advocates often for higher paying jobs and a certain feeling of prestige since they have obtained the highest education level. Furthermore, at universities it is not uncommon to have companies advertise their internships or job openings, especially in the law and business administration masters. Therefore, to reduce the image of the corporate hard working employee to the nature of humans wanting more is interesting to me. Moreover, this becomes particularly intriguing when placed within the broader discourse on the justification of pursuing roles that hold high societal status but may not contribute positively to wider societal or environmental concerns.

The 'rat race' seems to be the only option in Amsterdam to work. It is often that when I speak to people and ask them what they are doing that they name the big corporate companies. Moreover, it seems like it is the only way that you can sustain this type of living that is linked to the Havermelk Elite in the newspapers. The local newspapers write about this group and create a stereotypical image of the young urban people on a VanMoof bike going to their corporate jobs and when they are having time off it is often spent in the more expensive cafes with natural wine and cheese from France. Furthermore, whenever they have time it seems like they go to South-Africa to work there for a couple of months. This image is inherently linked to a high-consumer pattern and frequently flying. However, this puts the responsibility solely on the individual whilst not looking at the bigger picture; the system that pushes them into this way of living. The corporate 'rat race' creates high amounts of stress and people seem to perceive that they need to go to the other side of the world to be able to wind down. It should be taken into account that having the ability to fly to Cape Town to wind down is also a matter of class. In the next chapter I will discuss academic perspectives on class and status linked to the Havermelk Elite.

III. Chapter two: Importance of class

This chapter states the way class is executed in Amsterdam by the Havermelk Elite. This will be portrayed by a discussion on the construction of social spaces, in this case Amsterdam. For the construction of social spaces and the role of the Havermelk Elite in this construction. Secondly, the execution of class via status symbols will be analyzed. Finally, we will revisit the broader scope by analyzing how people are included or excluded in Amsterdam's social sphere, and we will discuss perceptions of those within and outside this community.

3.1 Construction of social spaces

Why and how has Amsterdam become this homogenous bubble of left-winged elite? And is the picture that is painted in the local newspapers true? In the “Telegraaf” which is a populist newspaper with right-winged political views it said; “oatmilk is a rich left-winged elite that turned away from Dutch society” (Bahara 2023). They stated that solely the lucky few could put oat milk in their coffees and the left-winged parties have turned their back on the ‘normal man’ to focus only on the Havermelk Elite. This picture is very useful for the populist right-winged parties. Furthermore, in the Dutch chambers there was also criticism of oat milk. The oat milk critic in question was PVV member Marjolein Faber. On the 18th of April 2023, during the usual PVV tirade against the 'elite' who are trying to push through a 'globalist agenda' in a 'sneaky manner' (the same elite who 'opens the borders wide for hordes of young men from Farawayistan'), Faber also took the opportunity to complain about oat milk which 'has also made its entrance in this Chamber' (Bahara 2023).

The construction of social spaces is intriguing, often tied to nationalism and territorial control, as observed in Amsterdam (Williams and Smith 1983). However, the sentiment of nationalism appears nuanced, with many residents identifying more strongly with Amsterdam itself rather than the broader Netherlands. Discussions frequently revolve around the competitive dynamics driving housing prices, pushing long-time Amsterdam residents outward to neighbouring cities like Almere and Purmerend. Bourdieu (1989) contributes to this understanding through his theory of social spaces, emphasising how social groups are structured by various forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural. Central to Bourdieu’s framework is habitus, which encompasses ingrained behaviours and preferences shaped by socialisation within specific contexts, influencing perceptions, interactions, and decision-making. Bourdieu's theory posits that social spaces are arenas shaped by distinct rules, hierarchies, and types of capital, reflecting processes of differentiation and stratification where individuals compete for both material resources and symbolic status. This framework proves invaluable for comprehending the origins of social inequality and the uneven distribution of capital. In Low's work (2011), engagement involves uncovering and addressing inequalities and social segregations perpetuated by exclusionary policies, institutional structures, and discursive practices.

Spatializing culture—analysing cultural and economic phenomena through a spatial lens—has proven instrumental in revealing both material injustices and symbolic exclusions (Low 2011).

Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1989) provides a lens through which to analyse the dynamics of social space and capital accumulation among Amsterdam's Havermelk Elite. This elite group, characterised by its economic, social, and cultural capital, wields significant influence over the city's social fabric and urban development. Economic capital, manifested through high-paying corporate positions, enables them to shape Amsterdam's physical landscape with trendy establishments like upscale gyms and concept cafes (Parool 2023). Their extensive social networks exemplify their social capital, fostering connections that reinforce their status and influence (Bourdieu 2005). Moreover, their cultural capital, derived from education and local knowledge, positions them as arbiters of taste and trendsetters within the city (Huang 2019).

Consequently, the Havermelk Elite's dominance underscores Bourdieu's contention that social hierarchies are not merely economic but also cultural and social constructs. These elites not only define who belongs in Amsterdam's evolving social space but also dictate its rules and norms. Discussions on their impact often reveal tensions over the displacement of traditional Amsterdammers from neighbourhoods like Jordaan due to rising housing costs, illustrating struggles over symbolic and economic capital (Parool 2023).

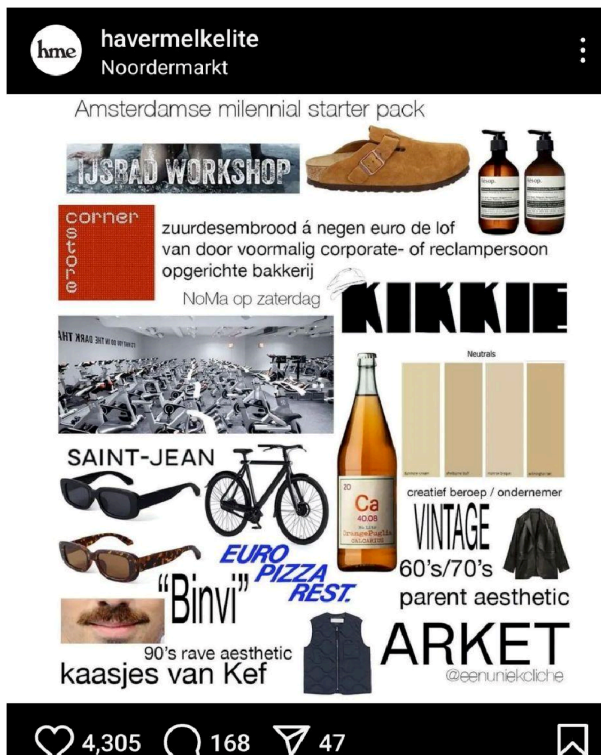
Ilahiane's study (2001) on the Haratine in Morocco provides a comparative backdrop, showcasing how Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital illuminate power dynamics within stratified communities. Similarly, the Havermelk Elite's consolidation of power through economic means mirrors strategies seen among the Haratine, albeit in vastly different contexts (Ilahiane 2001). Both cases illustrate how the acquisition and deployment of capital reshape social relations and urban landscapes, underscoring Bourdieu's enduring relevance in understanding contemporary social structures (Huang 2019).

In conclusion, Bourdieu's research illuminates Amsterdam's transformation into a hub dominated by the Havermelk Elite, whose economic, social, and cultural capital wield substantial influence over the city's social dynamics and urban development. Their control over Amsterdam's social spaces highlights the interplay between economic power and cultural hegemony, shaping both physical landscapes and social norms. This phenomenon reflects broader societal shifts and tensions, illustrated by debates over inclusion and exclusion within Amsterdam's evolving social fabric. By contextualising these dynamics within Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this analysis underscores the enduring relevance of understanding capital accumulation and social stratification in contemporary urban settings.

3.2 The execution of class

What is class and how is it executed? During my research, I was wondering at many times what the meaning was of the daily behaviour of my participants. Why did almost all of Amsterdam ride a Van Moof electric bike? And why was a special beer like an IJwit or glass of orange natural wine the only possible drink on a typical Friday afternoon in the most trendy bars of Amsterdam ?

In the image¹⁰ below, the account “Havermelk Elite” has created a starter pack, in which elements of the Havermelk Elite are portrayed.



In this image it is shown what a millennial, someone who is approximately 30 years old, wears, drinks, and uses for transport. I will elaborate on the general idea of this ‘starter pack’ to become an Amsterdam millennial. Some of the elements will be discussed but moreover, I want to indicate the importance of these status symbols. In this starter pack, the elements are often showing an image of people who are rich in knowledge and money. For example, in the top right corner of the picture is posted an ‘ice bath’ workshop which is good for your health and therefore shows that one is knowledgeable on how to be in good health. Furthermore, the knowledge on

what is a hip restaurant is also portrayed in this image by the ‘Corner Store’, ‘binvi’, and kaasjes van Kef (cheese from Kef). These restaurants are very hip and trendy in Amsterdam. Moreover, the neutral colour palette is also a way of showing a rich-looking image of themselves and the clothing store “Arket” and the vintage 60s/70s look adds to this image. All of these status symbols portray how people can be inside or outside of the group. The nuance to which elements are included is very interesting and seems to be changing all the time. Status symbols and class are inherently intertwined.

Currid-Halkett (2017) has linked the aspirational class to the theory of Veblen, a sociologist, on leisure class. Veblen’s theory is interesting since it portrays how the elite has changed over time. In the theory of Veblen originally from 1900, he is focused on the relationship between material goods and status. The work of Veblen has become popular since the consumption and wastefulness from capitalism came along with the wealth. He is most famous for his concept of “conspicuous

¹⁰ An Instagram post from Havermelkelite, retrieved on 3th of June.

consumption”. He used this concept to express his critique on the “leisure class”. His book “the theory of the leisure class” was at that time very controversial since it critiqued irrational and wasteful consumer habits of the upper class. The first indication of status symbols could be said. “Conspicuous consumption” is the term used firstly by Veblen to indicate the act of buying something to portray that one has wealth. This is not something that has started due to capitalism but since the beginnings of human civilization, there has been a desire to demonstrate status and imitate the higher social classes.

As Veblen laid the groundwork for theories on the concept of class, the anthropologist Carrier (2015) has more modern perspectives on this concept. The concept of social class influences how we see the world and what questions we think to ask. In theory, people can ask whatever they want, but in reality, the way we view the world tends to make some questions easier to ask and some issues easier to discuss while making others harder to address. Carrier (2015) pointed out that different perspectives encourage certain types of debates and discourage others. Therefore, it's important to think about what kinds of questions and issues are brought up by looking at wants and needs from a class perspective. Furthermore, Carrier (2015) argues that the concept of class suggests a methodological shift for anthropology. To truly understand people's lives and relationships, it's not enough to focus solely on their own perspectives and understandings. While these perspectives are important, anthropologists must also consider broader systemic factors that influence people's situations, as outlined in the first chapter. Therefore, the first chapter has delved into the systemic societal factors that influence the Havermeik Elite of Amsterdam.

The execution of class for the Havermeik Elite has portrayed the importance of status symbols. Material goods and status symbols play a crucial role in defining social order and class distinctions, particularly among the aspirational class or Havermeik Elite in Amsterdam. Galbraith (1998) argues that material goods determine our identity and social standing, with increased materialism blurring the lines between rich and poor. As industrialization has progressed, more people can afford status symbols, leading to a societal trend where higher income correlates with increased expenditure on dining out, drinking, and home goods (Currid-Halkett 2017). Interestingly, while the rich may spend less on overt displays of wealth, the middle class engages more in conspicuous consumption to portray affluence.

In Amsterdam, the Havermeik Elite, characterised by their middle- to high-income status, exemplifies this behaviour through the use of status symbols like the VanMoof e-bike. Bourdieu (1984) highlights that social status is often signalled through everyday cultural items and behaviours. For the Havermeik Elite, the VanMoof bike represents a significant status symbol, akin to owning a luxury car in a city where cars are impractical. In a podcast with Jonas Kooyman and Tahrim Ramdjan, it was observed that this group splits into two subgroups: one more affluent, often with high-paying

corporate jobs, and another less affluent, often freelance creatives, aspiring to align with high-consumption patterns and status symbols ("Hoe de havermelk Elite de Amsterdamse fietspaden, horeca, and sportscholen overneemt" n.d.).

During almost all of my interviews, we spoke about the meaning of status symbols. Many of my participants agreed that the VanMoof, Cowboy, or Fatbike are status symbols in transport. In my conversation with Noa, they told me about the link between age and status symbols amongst the type of e-bike.

Lieke: What kind of things do you think are status symbols?

Noa: I think that there are many types of status symbols. I also think it's linked to age. In high school, it's a fatbike, at university it's a VanMoof or an electric bike like the Cowboy, and when you get older, it's a cargo bike or a Biro.

In this conversation, I found it interesting that Noa perceived a link between age and the type of status symbol a bike would have. Furthermore, it is also interesting to me that we did not even mention the normal non-electoral bike, like it is not even part of the ranking. This discussion about owning the latest e-bike is significant because having a car in Amsterdam is impractical. As a result, the most stylish and expensive bikes become the "Porsches" of the streets.

In my interviews, we also spoke about environmentally friendly status symbols. It seems like the Patagonia jackets and Solomon walking shoes became part of the status symbols. Furthermore, the status symbols are also found in the way this group eats and drinks. The amount of organic wine bars has exploded in the last couple of years. However, my participants do admit that there is a certain contradiction. Sam said to me that the organic wine often is paired with veal. I think that the status symbols of the Havermelk Elite are often linked to the image of being sustainable, whilst there are also very common practices that are far from sustainable. This contradiction is very interesting since it makes me question what is linked to motives of people to make an ethical consideration before consumption.

Another interesting aspect of this new elite can be related to the theory of Veblen (2017) regarding social positions in modern society is explored, emphasising how only the upper class historically had the luxury of engaging in non-productive activities. The concept of the leisure class has transitioned, giving rise to a new elite with distinct values and norms, albeit with heightened inequality. This elite is rooted in meritocracy, where an individual's socio-economic status is determined by their merits. However, status isn't solely tied to consumption; it encompasses leisure, work, and consumption patterns, contributing to growing inequality associated with the democratisation of luxury. The emulation of wealth serves as a means of signalling aspirations to join the elite and communicate

one's status, a desire evident throughout documented human history. Capitalism didn't originate conspicuous consumption but did democratise it, making luxury more accessible to the masses, as seen in the flaunting of expensive items like BMWs. During the late nineties, wealth and luxury were showcased in media like *Sex and the City*, although true luxury remained exclusive and costly. Mass production, consumption, and marketing facilitated the replication of luxury goods, democratising conspicuous consumption. The decline of the leisure class paralleled the rise of the aspirational class, composed of self-made individuals who have earned the means to purchase luxury brands. Leisure no longer denotes status, as the economy shifted towards knowledge-based industries, with the creative class emerging as winners (Currid-Halkett 2017). In my conversations, we discussed the feeling of pressure that comes with this self-made status.

Lieke: Do you feel like there's a certain pressure to constantly improve yourself?

Charlie: Absolutely, tremendously. Yeah, you just hear it a lot. There's a lot of pressure to better yourself and become the best version of yourself. To be productive, for example, to have your own business. You see quite a bit of content suggesting that if you have a 9 to 5 job, that's not good enough. That you need to have freedom. Freedom is something you hear a lot, also financially, financial freedom, being able to schedule your own days, those kinds of things. That's heavily promoted. And yeah, it's also part of society. It's also part of where you're headed when you have a very individualistic achievement-oriented society. Everyone for themselves and achieving as much success as possible. And we see success as something of financial value, a certain job, a certain house, a little family. So yeah, that's what people strive for.

For the aspirational class, knowledge is paramount, empowering them in an economy driven by innovation. They seek higher social, environmental, and cultural awareness, making informed decisions based on facts and values. Their consumption serves as a reflection of their values system (Currid-Halkett 2017). Graeber (2001), has written a book on the theories of 'value'. In his book, he wrote about how value is ambiguous and perhaps this is part of the allure of this term. In sociology, value is perceived as "the conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life" and in economics value is perceived as "the degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them" (Graeber 2001, 11). These two perceptions of value are inherently interesting to take in mind when researching the Havermeik Elite due to the forces of capitalism and the ethical considerations they have about the environment. To circle back to Currid-Halkett's observations, she indicates that the aspirational class let their consumption serve as a reflection of their values. This is interesting since the Havermeik Elite is making contradictory choices in their consumption. It is often that they want to invest in solar panels on their roof but also have a high consumption pattern.

“This new cultural and social formation is elite by virtue of the material and symbolic trapping required to be a member, but ultimately those who are members of this new cultural and social formation aspire to be their version of better humans in all aspects of their lives, with their economic position taking a back seat (Currid-Halkett 2017, 32).”

Leisure for this group is imbued with productivity, such as engaging in activities like yoga for mental health or reading *The Economist*, all rooted in knowledge acquisition. In the research of Currid-Halkett (2017), she painted the picture that people within the aspiration class have the characteristic of self-assurance with their decisions and seeming deservedness of their social positions allows them to ignore the growing inequality around them. I argue that there are similarities between the description of the aspirational class by Currid-Halkett (2017) and the Havermeel Elite. However, I do want to emphasise that this idea has been painted by the local newspapers and I will research this for myself. It is not the full picture of Amsterdam and I will unpack this further in my research. In the next subchapter I will discuss my conversations on the often seemingly distance between my participants and people from outside of Amsterdam. This trend will be discussed in depth in the next subchapter.

3.3 The real Amsterdammer versus the Provincialen

What is a real Amsterdammer? It was a question that frequently popped up during my interviews. I was sitting on the terrace with Sasha and Sam. The first sun of spring was on the street and we, just like the rest of Amsterdam, were sitting on a terrace in de Pijp. It was one of those hip bars where you could get only rose from Provence and you could only sit at those shabby picnic tables. We started talking about the meaning of being an “Amsterdammer”. Sasha said that people should be born in Amsterdam to be a real Amsterdammer. Sam agreed, at least being born here. I said that I was born here but I was not raised and when I actually moved to Amsterdam I still had to find out all the nuances of a real Amsterdammer. Then, Sam said, well maybe you should also be raised here to be a real Amsterdammer because then you know all the ins and outs of the city before you are grown up. I asked, since they both had been living here for 10 or so years, if they know the ins and outs of the city and thus if they have become an Amsterdammer? Sasha looked at me and was thinking about my question. Sam responded that living here whilst you are a child adds to a deeper understanding of the city. Then I asked, but what happens when you move for a while, do you become less of a real Amsterdammer? They both quickly responded that this does not matter since you already have your base in Amsterdam. Later in the conversation, Sasha said that it was also important to have seen the city when it was not as nice and clean as it is right now. It adds to your understanding of the city when you have seen the transformation from a messy place to a place with more luxuries. Sam showed this with an illustrative example.

Sam: Even when you look at the simple things, like a cup of coffee, it used to be a “bakkie pleur in een papieren bekertje”¹¹ but now every cup of coffee comes with a story. It is located in a concept store that should give you an experience. I also think that having all these experiences with even the simplest things, like a cup of coffee, is a symbol of status. Nothing can be simple anymore, it needs to come with an experience.

The conversation we had on how to be a real Amsterdammer and who is part of this group and who is not portrays an execution of class. The execution of class keeps people in and leaves people out. In other conversations we also talked about the relationship between the citizens of Amsterdam and the people from outside of Amsterdam. In every interview I asked the question; do you feel more a citizen of the Netherlands or of Amsterdam? I started with this question to get a better image of how my interlocutors perceive Amsterdam, especially compared to the rest of the Netherlands. It is not uncommon to hear people saying that the Amsterdammers have arrogance about their city and that they perceive it as better compared to other cities. In my conversations I often felt the sentiment of “everyone wants to live here right?”. Isa told me about their perception of the city being the place to be and if you go outside of the ring, outside of the ring of highways around Amsterdam, you would fall off the Earth. Therefore, I think this question spikes the discussion of what means better for them as inhabitants. What do we want from the place that we live in? I think that this is a very personal question and can be answered in a large variety, which makes it interesting. I wanted to ask a very open question that can be interpreted in many ways. When asking this question you can answer it by talking about how you think you are a citizen of Amsterdam or how you think you are not a citizen of the Netherlands. This is very interesting to me since it portrays where one would put the emphasis in their answer. Most of my participants answered that they felt more connected to Amsterdam since it was more inclusive of other ethnicities. The bubble that seems to exist in Amsterdam is more on the Groenlinks and Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD) side and therefore it seems more left-winged compared to the rest of the Netherlands. At first, it was not clear to me why most of my interlocutors emphasised that they are a citizen of Amsterdam and not from the Netherlands but after a while it became clear that they wanted to create a distance between them and the rest of the Netherlands. It was often that they told me that they felt like they are more at home in Amsterdam in which multiple ethnicities and genders are accepted and that this was not the case in other places in the Netherlands, especially in the countryside. It is, I think, also a point of pride to portray this image of being open and tolerant for everyone and it is, for some, also a point to make about why Amsterdam is better than the rest of the Netherlands. To circle back, the conversation on who is a real Amsterdammer and why Amsterdam is better than the rest of the Netherlands is also linked to the value of status, knowledge, and linked to class. In this conversation, the construction of social spaces, Amsterdam in this case, is inherently clear and the inclusion or exclusion of social groups is what creates the social space.

¹¹ A paper cup of coffee in speaking language.

During my conversations, the topic often turned to politics. Many of the people I spoke with voted for left-wing parties. In the Netherlands, these include parties such as GroenLinks and the PVDD. Left-wing parties are often very focused on environmentally friendly policies and aim to achieve zero emissions as quickly as possible. In addition, these left-wing parties are often supportive of migrants and more open about migration policies. My participants told me that they felt a distance between them and people from outside of Amsterdam. This feeling of distance seemed to have risen due to the latest political voting in 2023 where the PVV became the biggest party in the country. The PVV is a Dutch political party with Geert Wilders as the leader. In the latest election he advocated for his party by a number of points. His manifesto was titled “Putting the Dutch People First”. The PVV proposed a complete halt to asylum and restrictive immigration policies, including the withdrawal from EU asylum and UN refugee convention. Furthermore, the PVV seeks to ban Islamic schools, mosques, and headscarves in government buildings. Economically, they aim to abolish health insurance deductibles, lower the retirement age to 65, and reduce taxes on groceries and energy. In education, they advocate for more teachers, smaller class sizes, and an end to political indoctrination in schools. On climate, they want to withdraw from the UN Climate Agreement, keep coal and gas plants open, build new nuclear plants, and stop wind and solar projects. In foreign policy, they call for reducing diplomatic ties with Sharia law countries, relocating the Dutch embassy to Jerusalem, and closing the representation in Ramallah (Sebastian n.d.). This is contradictory to the ideas and plans of most left-wing political parties. The parties mostly voted amongst my interlocutors is Groenlinks/PvdA, which advocates for more climate justice, sustainable economy, reducing social inequality, and promotion of a strong Europe that upholds democratic values and human rights (GroenLinks PvdA 2024). There is a strong friction between these two parties in parliament, which seeps through to society.

This created distance between the people living within the ring of Amsterdam and the people outside of it and is creating polarisation from both sides. The majority of the Netherlands has voted for the PVV and this created quite a stir in the left-winged politics. In the bubble that I researched people did not expect the political outcome and felt even more distance to the people from outside of the ring. However, not all of my participants felt that the political outcome was a total surprise. Sasha spoke about her experiences in the city that they grew up in and how the PVV was already the biggest political party 15 years ago. They perceived that this trend amongst the people in her hometown made them more simple in their way of thinking. People from Amsterdam often call the people outside of it, the ‘provincials’ (people from the provinces, from the rural side of the Netherlands). Amsterdam is often perceived as more open and that young people are more present. It seems like the idea that Amsterdam is a city full of young people and their opinions are valued more compared to other cities. However, the distance, or even polarisation between people from urban spheres and people from rural spheres is also something that has been mentioned by a few of my participants.

Sam: The trend that the rest of the Netherlands seems to be becoming politically more right-wing causes Amsterdammers to become more left-wing. Polarisation between city people and farmers.

During the conversation with Sam, I thought about the way that distance seemed to be created. When the Provincialen seem to become more politically right, the Amsterdammers seem to become more politically left. It is often said that people from Amsterdam are stubborn. Is that the case or do we really have completely different values? And what does this distance mean within this small country?

I want to link this contemporary phenomenon to an older theory of Said (1977), since it seems like this trend has been happening for a long time. The way we perceive other people is inherently linked to the perception we have of ourselves. I argue that this theory still upholds in contemporary society and has even become stronger due to the augmented trend of polarisation on social media. Social media is linked to an algorithm that enhances your perceptions and opinions since it found out that you like this. This creates an online bubble that you will see more content only about your perspective and less of others. By encouraging users to interact with like-minded content and individuals, social media algorithms can inadvertently foster environments where polarisation is amplified, leading to more divided and less tolerant communities (Garcia 2023). I argue that this contemporary trend supports the theory of Said (1977) and is also linked to the polarisation trend between Amsterdammers and Provincialen.

Said (1977), wrote 'orientalism' in the field of postcolonial studies and examined the constructions of the "Orient". The Western scholarship and cultural representations were the main goal of his research. He wanted to zoom in on the perceived version by the West of the "Orient". In his research, he elaborates that this perception of the orient is not solely located in academic study or cultural representation but moreover that it is the embeddedness of power dynamics of the West. This power asymmetry conducted through history by the West having power in the colonial era and now through economic, political, and military power portrayed the image of the East that was solely created by Western discourse. This discourse had the goal to serve the interests of the West by justifying their dominance over Eastern peoples and their lands. From this research, Said created the concept of 'othering'. In this discourse he found that there is the tendency to essentialize and homogenise diverse Eastern cultures, reducing them to fixed stereotypes. In this process of 'othering', a distinctly and fundamentally different image is created from the West and a distance between the two is created. The process of 'othering' has been used in different types of research. In the research of Holsag (2015), the process of 'othering' is related to the process of 'selfing'. In this research, the perception of the 'other' and of the 'self' is utilised to legitimise violence in cultural, social, and physical dimensions. Other modern research into the meaning of 'othering' is conducted by Lisa Lowe (2015). She uses the concept of "othering" to describe the process by which European colonial powers

constructed and maintained distinctions between themselves and the colonised peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This process involves defining these groups as fundamentally different and inferior, thereby justifying their exploitation and marginalisation. Lowe (2015) examines how these distinctions were not just imposed but also interconnected, forming a global system of racialized capitalism and colonialism.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge that there is a big difference between the image that is created by Western colonisers about the East is entirely different from the distance that is visible between the Amsterdammers and the Provincialen. In the situation of Amsterdammers and Provincialen the power dynamics are nothing like the colonial power executed by the West. I do want to argue that the process that Said (1977), described on 'othering' and the creation of a stereotypical image that often has negative connotations. The image that is created by the Amsterdammers of the Provincials was discussed in my interviews. A telling example happened during my conversation with Isa.

Isa: I don't feel like a Dutch person either. I don't feel that culture. I think Amsterdam is much more open than the rest of the Netherlands. The culture of 'not too crazy' doesn't prevail in Amsterdam. You can be much freer here. Also, the rest of the Netherlands is a bit blunt and fake. In Amsterdam, you see who your people are. You see that there are people like me.

The bubble of Amsterdam is very present during this conversation. As Isa was telling me they found that the rest of the Netherlands is very different from her. Isa even found them blunt and fake. In another conversation with Sasha, they spoke about the difference between people in Amsterdam and the city she grew up in.

"I have been living in Amsterdam for 10 years now. Before that, I lived in a different city. I find there is a big difference between the two cities. Fifteen years ago, the PVV was already the largest party in Dordrecht. I found it simpler there, which was evident in how people voted. In Amsterdam, I find the people and the atmosphere more open. Young people have more influence here, which I think is unusual for cities but common in Amsterdam. Here, young people have more of a say."

Sasha's sentiment that voting for the PVV is a simplistic choice illustrates a sense of distance between her and PVV voters. The notion of 'simplicity' suggests that she believes voting for the PVV is not a well-thought-out decision. This perspective is common among people living outside Amsterdam, as the PVV received the most votes in many cities and villages in the last election.

Sometimes in my conversations, it felt like the people from inside and outside of Amsterdam don't know each other. The distance created from the Amsterdammers to the Provincials can be linked to the process of othering since it enhances a stereotypical image of the farmer, often perceived as dumb and simple. This stereotypical image of the Provincials has become stronger since the political division which showed for a lot of Amsterdammers that they were right about the 'other'. Furthermore, the created image of the Amsterdammers often revolves around the sentiment of being better than the outsiders. In Amsterdam, there are many universities and hbo schools. This sentiment of being better and the perception of the people from outside of Amsterdam is often linked to sentiments of them being 'simple'. Furthermore, in the Netherlands we have different levels of high school that already predict if you can go to a university at the age of 12. Moreover, there is a prestige image, especially from wealthy families, that it is not an option to have a lower highschool level than the one you need for university. I argue that there is a correlation between the perception of outsiders and the feeling of being better and high levels of university schooled people. In Amsterdam a lot of people come into the city for education as this city has many universities, often after graduation people start to work here and this creates a higher number of university schooled people in this city compared to the smaller cities (VZinfo.nl n.d). On the other side, there is also the sentiment that people want to receive the status of being a real Amsterdammers. I spoke with Noa about their experience on the train.

Noa: Uh, yeah, from personal experience, there's also a gap between people living in Amsterdam who aren't born here, import Amsterdammers, and sometimes people look at that strangely. And there's also a stereotype of people who live in Amsterdam. One time, I went to visit my parents in Limburg, and I was on the train talking to someone on the phone, and there were two guys sitting across from me, and they started chatting with me a bit, and then they said, "But you're one of those, too. Yeah, with your accent, your parents live in Limburg but you've probably only been in Amsterdam for like 2 months and you're already starting to talk like that." So I said, "Sorry, buddy, but I was born and raised in the Randstad, so I can't help it." But this showed that there's definitely a sort of stereotype prevailing about where we live and where we come from.

In this conversation with Noa, it becomes clear that the perception of Amsterdam has an elevated status above the rest of the Netherlands. In my conversation with Billie, we spoke about how they perceive this trend and how it is expressed in daily life.

Billie: I do have the feeling that many people, especially those who have been living in Amsterdam for a longer time, have a bit of a Republic of Amsterdam idea. We do have the idea of, "I live in Amsterdam and the rest is the Netherlands." While Amsterdam is actually part of the Netherlands, there is no city in the Netherlands where people boast so much and

feel special just because they live in Amsterdam. I have also been accused of this sometimes by my partner.

Lieke: Can you give me an example?

Billie: Yeah, there are jokes made about it. Like, "Oh, are you outside the ring?" But, and those are just jokes, and I find them... I find them really funny. But it happens a lot and it's actually quite bizarre. I think the amazement of the average Amsterdammer when they come to those outside the ring, that there's even amazement there, I find that quite remarkable.

In the conversation with Billie we tried to take a step back and understand the way in which boasting and 'one-upping'¹² seems to be quite normal in Amsterdam. The process of one-upping is that if one tells the other that they are good at something the other one has to say that they are even better at said thing. Further in the conversation Billie gave an example that when I would say that I was telling that I went to the Beyonce concert, Billie would say that they shook the hand of Beyonce. Billie also said that they feel like in Amsterdam stories are being blown up, more exacerbation. The process of 'one-upping' can be linked to the process of 'othering'. I perceive this as a modern form of othering since it portrays a superior image of the self compared to the other.

Moreover, Billie also said on the one hand this can be good since in the rest of the Netherlands there is more the mentality of downplaying all stories. I think that this contradiction even in the way that people from inside and outside of Amsterdam tells a story about their differences. The perceived differences between Amsterdammers and the rest of the Netherlands and the way this distance between the groups begins to seem bigger and bigger. What does this mean for social cohesion in the Netherlands? Is this trend of the feeling of urban elevation hurting social cohesion?

However, there are examples in which people stepped out of their bubble. I had a conversation with Ezra about their friend who did not have earplugs or headphones on and made contact with a stranger. During this conversation, you could feel the amazement in their voice. Their friend of about 29 years old made friends with a strange man of roughly 70 years old. Moreover, I was also actually amazed. It is often that I exclude people from the ability to talk to you since I am wearing big headphones. The friends I have made are mostly from my studies. Due to this we have very similar opinions and it limits my perceptions of people who have different opinions, especially on the matter of politics. Therefore, to make a new friend with an age difference and outside of your bubble amazed us.

Ezra: And a friend of mine said something beautiful recently; a year ago, she was on the subway just sitting there without earphones, and then an older man sat next to her and started

¹² See terminology list for further explanation.

a conversation. And they still see each other to this day. They go to concerts together monthly or grab a beer somewhere.

Lieke: Did they really arrange to meet after the bus ride?

Ezra: They did arrange to meet afterwards, yes. He was an older man and they got off at the same subway stop. And then he said, sorry, maybe I'm overstepping, but would you like to grab a beer? I enjoyed our conversation so much and I'd like to continue it. So she had a beer then, and he invited her to a concert of someone he was a big fan of. And they still see each other several times a year. So, he was just lonely and really needed someone to talk to, and she was approachable. Yeah. So, I often think back to that when I'm on the subway and try to wear fewer earphones when I'm in public. Because beautiful things come from that.

In conclusion, this chapter explored the construction of social spaces focusing on the Havermelk Elite. This thesis utilised Bourdieu's framework of social space, capital, and habitus to understand how this elite group wields economic, social, and cultural capital to shape the city's social fabric and urban development. Their dominance underscores the interplay between economic power and cultural hegemony, influencing both physical landscapes and social norms. The execution of class in daily life has also been analysed and status symbols, particularly material goods associated with conspicuous consumption play a crucial role in belonging to the Havermelk Elite. Material possessions such as VanMoof e-bikes, Patagonia jackets, and organic wine became markers of belonging and a reflection of the group's values system, even if those values contained inherent contradictions. In the last section of this chapter the concept of a "real Amsterdammer" and the perceived distance between those living within the city and those outside of it has been analysed. This discussion highlighted the role of social space in creating inclusion and exclusion. The left-wing political leanings of many Amsterdammers contrasted with the rise of right-wing populism in the rest of the Netherlands, further amplifying this sense of division.

IV. Chapter three: Citizenship; rights and duties

Throughout my research and conversations with participants, I've pondered the conceptual boundaries of our discussions, exploring various subjects that have posed challenges in selection. The prevalent trend of individualism among the Havermeik Elite, evident in their behaviours and life choices, emerged as a significant driver. However, individualism alone isn't the sole focus of this thesis. I aim to delve deeper into the implications of this trend within Dutch society, particularly from an anthropological perspective on citizenship and its associated rights and duties.

4.1 Citizenship in theory

In anthropological discourse, citizenship transcends its conventional boundaries as merely a legal status granted by the state. Building upon Marshall's research (1983), who is one of the founders of the concept citizenship, conceptualization, citizenship is evolving, especially within the discourse of ecological citizenship, to encompass a broader spectrum of rights, responsibilities, and identities. The theory of Marshall (1983) is utilised in this thesis due to its relevance, theoretical depth, and analytical utility to understand the principles of citizenship in contemporary society. Revisiting this older theory is of importance due to the groundwork he has laid for the research on citizenship and its meaning. Marshall's (1983) essay is very influential despite its short length. Almost all writings on citizenship and the welfare state reference Marshall's work. Typically, these references follow a pattern: the author acknowledges Marshall's idea that social citizenship rights are part of citizenship, notes some problems with his arguments (like his focus on a specific historical period, his one-directional and Anglo-centric view), and then critiques these points (Lister 2005). At the core of Marshall's theory, citizenship embodies a delicate balance between rights and duties, traditionally synonymous with the rights and privileges afforded to individuals within a specific nation-state (Crane, Matten, and Moon 2008). However, ecological citizenship discourse places renewed emphasis on individual responsibilities over rights (Shelton 1991).

Within the domain of ecological citizenship, the discourse on rights extends beyond traditional confines to include environmental considerations. This variant of citizenship emphasises the entitlement to a safe and natural environment as a fundamental right, enriching the conventional understanding of citizenship with a focus on individual environmental entitlements (Dean 2001). Nonetheless, the precise definition of these rights, especially in distinguishing social from environmental rights, remains a contentious subject within ecological citizenship literature. Furthermore, ecological citizenship underscores the responsibilities individuals bear towards the environment and broader society, exploring how citizens should conduct their lives to minimise their environmental footprint and contribute to the collective good (Dean 2001).

Research has been conducted for nearly 30 years on how people understand, perceive, and engage with climate change (Wolf and Moser 2011). In this study, they have researched people's understanding, perceptions, and engagement. For this thesis, it is interesting to focus on the perceptions of people on climate change and their engagement with climate change since this influences the behaviour of my research population. Firstly, perceptions vary widely but the communication of climate change is very important. When balancing the negative message with positive messages that inspire hope it is often more productive. Some people feel a moral or civic duty to address climate change (Wolf and Moser 2011). Secondly, the research of Wolf and Moser (2011) has generated insights into the engagement people feel with climate change. They stated that ecologically minded people are more engaged but still face challenges in reducing their emissions. I perceive that my research population has this issue. They are, mostly, very ecologically minded people but still face the challenges of what one individually wants to do and what one is supposed to do for the collective.

Ecological citizenship challenges the conventional notion of territoriality by extending responsibilities beyond national borders, acknowledging the interconnectedness of environmental issues worldwide and emphasising individual agency in addressing these challenges (Saiz 2005). Furthermore, ecological citizenship blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres, highlighting civic concern for the environmental ramifications of individual actions (Seyfang 2006). Tensions arise within this discourse, particularly regarding the clash between neoliberal economic practices and the collective imperative for environmental action, underscoring the inherent complexities within ecological citizenship.

The theory of citizenship, particularly within ecological citizenship, transcends its traditional confines to encompass a dynamic interplay between rights and responsibilities (Wolf, Brown, and Conway 2009; Dobson 2003; Crane et al. 2008). This evolving conceptualization emphasises individual agency, global interconnectedness, and the moral imperative to address environmental challenges, redefining traditional notions of citizenship within contemporary anthropology.

Often portrayed as an apocalyptic scenario, climate change appears as the greatest challenge of our century and, perhaps, of human history. Beyond the dark projections for the future, it can be seen as a unique moment to reverse the paths of our techno-scientific modernity. By viewing climate change as a broader civilizational crisis, we propose an optimistic perspective: building a new environmental civic framework. It's not about replacing anthropocentrism with ecocentrism but about recognizing our responsibility to preserve the natural world for our survival. We advocate for environmental citizenship from the perspective of environmental rights as an extension of human rights, envisioned as duties towards the natural world. Rejecting apocalyptic visions, we emphasise a realistic utopia focused on responsibility towards nature and devising alternative sociopolitical models to the current

neoliberal paradigm. We need to replace the paralysing catastrophe narrative with hope, using climate change as a unique opportunity to build a bottom-up citizenship perspective and an ethics of responsibility towards nature (Rego 2021).

This aligns with the evolving concept of ecological citizenship. Rego's (2021) vision of environmental rights as duties towards nature complements the moral imperative of ecological citizenship. By emphasising realistic utopia and responsibility, this perspective supports a bottom-up citizenship approach that values individual agency and global interconnectedness, redefining citizenship to include responsibility towards nature as a core ethical and sociopolitical principle.

In revisiting Marshall's foundational theory of citizenship (1983), this thesis explores its evolution within the discourse of ecological citizenship. Emphasising a dynamic interplay between rights and responsibilities, ecological citizenship extends traditional boundaries to include environmental considerations and individual duties towards nature. Climate change, reframed as an opportunity rather than solely a crisis, underscores the need for a new environmental civic framework. This perspective advocates for environmental rights as extensions of human rights, promoting a realistic utopia centred on responsibility and hope. Rego's (2021) vision supports this approach, advocating for a bottom-up citizenship perspective that integrates environmental responsibility into core ethical and sociopolitical principles. Ecological citizenship challenges traditional notions of territoriality and public-private boundaries, highlighting the interconnectedness of global environmental issues and the role of individual actions in shaping sustainable futures.

4.2 Rights: legitimacy to take what is yours

As discussed above, anthropological theory of citizenship focuses on two sides; receiving and giving. As Marshall (1983) stated; the status of being a citizen comes with rights and duties. In this first section, I will zoom in on the rights people feel like they have received. The perception of rights will be linked to the feeling of happiness. The linkage between these two concepts is that often in my research I found that people gained happiness over their perception of freedom. But what does 'freedom' look like?

The perception of what you, as a citizen receive, is very interesting. In my conversations we often spoke about the ability to pick up your bags and work abroad. This was very common amongst my interlocutors. Often they went to South Africa to work for a couple of months in Cape Town. Most of their work is also possible online and why not? Working for a little while in the sun and having the ability to skip the winter in the Netherlands, that does not sound bad? Digital remote working is also very popular amongst my research population. Since the corona pandemic, remote working has become more normal. For most jobs it does not matter where you practise. Jonas Kooyman, who coined the term Havermeik Elite, has a theory on what the importance is of having a lifestyle that you

can live for a couple of months on the other side of the world. He says that the theory of David Goodhart about ‘somewheres¹³’ and ‘anywheres¹⁴’ which refers to the placement and bondedness one has to a certain place (Luijters and Ramdjan 2024). Kooyman says:

"Anywheres are the academically educated, cosmopolitan knowledge workers, individuals who can adapt to almost any urban centre in the world, as long as they have wifi and an Airbnb, and can continue their lifestyle. Somewheres are more conservative, practically educated, and tied to one place: people who work with their hands. For their profession and their community, they must be physically present in that location."

Most of my interlocutors can be perceived as ‘anywhere’ and travel to work for a couple of months to the digital nomad spaces, such as Cape Town or Bali. Furthermore, it has been said that millennials have been searching for luck, according to trendwatchers. Life does not revolve solely about working but this group seems to prioritise happiness (Luijters and Ramdjan 2024). I was talking with one of my interlocutors when we spoke about the meaning of happiness and how to find it.

Lieke: And you just said about how people want the same life and then the goal is, so what would the goal actually be then?

Ezra: So then, what do you want? I think people often seek happiness externally, outside of themselves rather than within. I think people have the idea that they will become very happy by going out to eat. Partying, let's see, is still good. Their holidays are all big and external. And sometimes I think, yes, but are you truly happy without it? Or do you know that you have been kind to someone, that you have helped someone?

Lieke: Yes.

Ezra: I don't know, that gratitude is sometimes really within yourself and. Sometimes. I have the feeling that we are more focused on. Showing how good? Do we have it or something? Yes, do you think so too when I look at myself, you know.

The perception of what we are entitled to, influences what we think we need to achieve happiness. Ezra explained in our conversation that they perceived these big vacations as external happiness and this raises the question: how do we achieve internal happiness? In the conversation Ezra meant with the search for external happiness buying material things that make you happy and with internal happiness they spoke about the search for balance, peace in your mind, and confidence in your body.

¹³ See terminology list for further explanation.

¹⁴ See terminology list for further explanation.

The meaning of happiness and the factors that contribute to happiness can be found in various research fields. One of the possible predictors of happiness is freedom of choice. It is generally accepted that freedom of choice increases happiness (Verme 2009). In my conversation with Charlie we spoke about the way happiness can be increased. In our conversation we spoke about the trends that are very common amongst the Havermeik Elite, such as wellness and yoga and how they perceived this as a longing for more calmness.

Charlie: I get the feeling, especially in the Western world, that people actually want to return a bit more to basics. Especially when you look at the whole trend towards wellness, yoga, meditation, bringing all those Eastern things here to actually come back from the whole hectic performance society that we've created. And then we're all burnt out and experiencing a burnout, and now we're trying to come back by just meditating together. I think we need to go back to basics. Take a bit less of a Western approach. The same goes for technology. We all want more and more, but at the same time we're depressed by social media. Everyone is comparing themselves, one influencer after another is burnt out again, and everyone is spending their money and rushing to the store. We just need to be normal for a moment. Take a step back. We don't need to all become Amish, but just take a step back, not keep rushing, not be so individualistic. Just a bit more Amish. I think we could all benefit from that. Doing things a bit more mindfully, enjoying what we have more, not being so greedy, and not wanting strawberries all year round. Being content with what you have, and I think we would all benefit from that and secretly we all long for it a bit.

During my conversation with Charlie, a few sentences caught my attention. At the outset of their narrative, Charlie discussed the growing popularity of wellness, yoga, and meditation, referring to them as "Eastern things." This association intrigued me as it connects these practices to their origins in the Eastern part of the world. Yoga, wellness, and meditation originated in Asian countries and are deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings. However, Charlie's choice of words highlights how these practices have been adopted by the Western world, indicating a desire to integrate aspects of Eastern culture into Western lifestyles. Their argument centres on the notion that despite the advancements in the Western world, there seems to be a sense of unhappiness. Charlie suggests that this unhappiness is closely tied to the adoption of Eastern practices in Western societies. What spiked my interest is that seemingly they proposed a solution to the corporate rat race that comes from elements that are inherently linked to the Havermeik Elite. Charlie was not the only participant that spoke about yoga and meditation as a solution for the busy mind. In my conversation with Jamie, they said:

“The idea that you can improve yourself, both inside and out, is very appealing to me. I am also drawn to supplements, tea, and an app that helps me meditate for 10 minutes every morning. It's as if I regain a bit of control, or at least a sense of control.”

In this conversation with Jamie, the meaning of happiness is linked to the feeling of having control. To achieve internal happiness seems to have become harder and to become more calm many of us started doing yoga, mindfulness and meditation. These things are also very popular amongst the Havermeik elite who are often working in busy business environments.

4.3 Responsibilities: collective action & individual choices

On the flip side of citizenship theories lies the emphasis on the duties or responsibilities incumbent upon individuals as citizens. Particularly in ecological citizenship literature, there is a notable emphasis on the significance of these responsibilities (Shelton, 1991). In our society, individual choices often influence the responsibility we feel to climate change (Rego 2021). In ecological citizenship literature, the meaning of rights, having the right to a safe environment is intertwined with the meaning of responsibilities since we, as humans, influence the environment (Dean 2001). This literature delves into the normative ways on how citizens should conduct their lives by reducing their environmental impact (Wolf, Brown, and Conway 2009). To achieve a sustainable society, it is often the perspective to be “sacrificing personal inclinations or preferences for the common good” (Dobson 2003, 96). In my conversation with Jessie we spoke about sacrificing our inclinations. In our conversation, it became very clear to me that Jessie was very keen to prove that they care about the environment. Jessie has been a vegan for a long time and believes that this way of living keeps them in the clear. Jessie said that being vegan, not flying, trying to be as sustainable as possible helps them since Jessie feels that “at least I did my best”. However, Jessie does frame the things that they do not do for the environment as sacrifices and giving certain things up. Our conversation was very inspiring to me since Jessie spoke about their environmental beliefs with such passion but the conversation also had the undertone of loneliness. Jessie explained earlier on that they could feel alone in their beliefs and that it can be quite hard to stick to your beliefs if it is often questioned by people without asking.

Lieke: Has climate change ever influenced your choices?

Jessie: And in the end, it's all partly about making sacrifices in your own life and enjoyment. Especially when it comes to flying, I think. With food, I hardly notice it anymore, but I do give up something. But that's because I want to be very principled about certain things. Because I feel better about it. And I want to set a good example. But you do give up a lot. Still, I feel a kind of urge to prove that it's all possible. You don't need to fly every year. You

don't always need to eat meat. No. So I want to show that it can be done. But yes, you do have to give up something yourself.

Furthermore, in my conversation we spoke about the responsibility Jessie felt. But to whom does Jessie feel this responsibility? And does it become harder to stick to your beliefs when apparently the rest of the world is not doing the same? Often in discussions revolving around climate change it seems like we point fingers at each other, I am not becoming vegan if my neighbour is not. Why should I give something up when China is still polluting the environment 1000x more than my little piece of meat could? Even in academic literature it is debated that individual actions do not harm the environment because it is too small a scale (Sinnott-Armstrong 2005). Sinnott-Armstrong's detailed argument revolves around that small-scale actions do not influence this very large world, therefore this view says that most or all individual actions and even full individual lives do not make a difference with regard to climate change. However, thankfully this perspective has been contested by many scientists. Whilst it can feel like your tiny individual action is not having any impact it will matter. Hiller (2011) argues that if many individuals become aware of their daily impacts on the environment and change their practices, the cumulative benefits can be substantial. Individuals can be inspired to change their behaviour through targeted campaigns, which, like putting a human face on suffering, can make climate issues more relatable and spur action. These individual changes can increase political will to implement broader policy changes, reflecting a shift in public opinion and creating pressure on policymakers. Understanding the harm caused by certain activities also helps justify a system of reparations, allowing those harmed by climate change to make specific claims on those responsible, thus promoting a fairer and more sustainable future.

In the local newspapers, it seems like the Havermelk Elite does not have any ethical objections to taking the plane to the other side of the world. This group is often critiqued on their contradictory lifestyle, drinking organic natural wine, riding an e-bike, wearing sustainable coats such as Patagonia but also eating meat and often taking the plane to Cape Town or Bali (Parool 2023). I do think that it is often that the 30-something affluent city person takes the plane for their holidays. During my fieldwork, I spoke with people that I know often take the plane to countries on the other side of the world. They also have worked in Cape Town and stayed there for a couple of months. However, I do not argue that they did not do this without moral or ethical considerations. I argue that the situation should be perceived more nuanced than solely pointing a finger at anyone who enters Schiphol. In this economic capitalistic system, it is hard to not be pushed into more individual behaviour. However, in the case of the Havermelk Elite it is interesting that there is a pattern of wanting to be sustainable and having a life full of exploration across the world. These things are contradictory and therefore it is quite hard to find a balance between the two. On one side of the scale it is the force that pushed people to want to explore and have a rich life. The perception of having a rich life is often that you are an adventurous person wanting to learn about other cultures and making new friends. Social

media pushes the idea of wanderlust and the image of how a person needs to go to the other side of the world to find themselves. It is not uncommon amongst my research population that people go to Bali to do a yoga retraite or silent retraite for their mental health. On the other side of the scale, there is the knowledge that people have gathered about climate change and global warming. People within this group want to know about this subject and even in my research it was interesting that people chose to be in a museum and learn about the pollution that we create by food production on a Friday night. It was interesting that when later I was discussing this event people were telling how proud they were of themselves that they went, almost like there was a little bit of showing off.

There are various perspectives on how to handle responsibilities for climate change mitigation. One important perspective is effective altruism, a philosophy and social movement focused on maximising the good done for others (“What Is Effective Altruism? | Effective Altruism,” n.d.). Rooted in evidence and rationality, effective altruism emphasises making the most impact with our resources, prioritising interventions with the greatest positive effect, acknowledging resource scarcity, and promoting significant donations to effective causes (Eikenberry and Mirabella 2017). This approach aims not only to address immediate needs but also to create long-term, sustainable change. For instance, students are sometimes advised to pursue careers in investment banking rather than social work or teaching to earn more money and, consequently, donate more to effective causes (MacAskill 2015). However, critiques of effective altruism include concerns about accountability, its outsized influence on public and social policy, and the potential erosion of support for government programs (Eikenberry and Mirabella 2017). Rutger Bregman, in his book “Morele Ambitie,” (Moral Ambition) connects to these ideas by advocating for a reshaped moral landscape that emphasises systemic societal betterment over individual responsibility (Bregman 2024). He argues for confronting structural injustices and underscores the importance of collective action in addressing issues like poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Singer’s (2016) anthropological research aligns with this by highlighting the significant obligations of affluent people to aid those in extreme poverty, extending beyond conventional expectations. Singer also notes that effective altruists organise collectively through charities and meta-charities like The Life You Can Save, Giving What We Can, and the Centre for Effective Altruism, which work to expand the movement and evaluate the effectiveness of various charities.

In conclusion, balancing individual choices with collective action is crucial for addressing climate change. While personal sacrifices, like those made by Jessie, demonstrate a commitment to environmental responsibility, the broader societal and systemic changes advocated by movements such as effective altruism are equally important. This dual approach—individual efforts combined with coordinated, large-scale actions—reflects a comprehensive strategy to mitigate environmental impact and promote sustainability. Achieving a sustainable future necessitates both personal and

collective accountability, emphasising that even small individual actions, when combined, can drive significant change.

4.4 Stuck in the system

The system around us advocates for more individuality. In the housing market in Amsterdam individualism is rewarded. One of the examples of this can be found in social housing schemes since the policies are not very up to date and people with higher salaries can stay in their very cheap homes, whilst the ones who need it need to leave the city (Kruyswijk and Wagemakers 2024).

Furthermore, the government is cutting the funds for social housing and the corporations are forced to sell many apartments that used to be social housing into the normal housing market. Moreover, the housing crisis is causing immensely high rent and this trend also excludes people with lower salaries. Therefore, a high paying job is a necessity to be able to live in the city. This creates that even when people want to quit their corporate job, they often cannot make ends meet if they start working in the nonprofit sector. This trend of individualism within the housing market and the dependency on a high salary to be able to afford a house creates a skewed system. Next to this trend within housing, there is also the trend of individualism within national policies. As discussed in chapter 2.3 Dutch policies have become focused upon the individual and the chances are not the same for everyone anymore (Van Iperen 2022). Another trend that is pushing individualism is the 'rat race'. Often corporate business jobs are skewed to make their employees compete for the jobs with the highest salary and status within a company and this results in about 20% of the people having a burn-out (Statista 2023). Due to the pressure that is often paired with the high-paying jobs people feel entitled to make less sustainable choices. The narrative is often brought up that people deserve it since they work very hard and have stress. This causal relationship results in less environmentally friendly behaviour.

V. Conclusion

5.3 Summary of Findings

During this research, I was at first solely interested in the Havermelk Elite, their norms and values, and way of living. It spiked my interest to see how stereotypical the image has become in the local newspapers and how right-wing politicians have taken this image and used it to create a scapegoat. However, this study became a lot more than I anticipated. It became an insight to what could become my future and the conversations I had with my participants left me to ponder about the path that I will choose when I enter working life.

Analysing my conversations revealed that this is not just a story about this elite group and their behaviours, choices, and morals. It is about the broader societal structures we inhabit, particularly capitalism and the transformations within Dutch politics that have fostered individualism. This has created an ultimate individual group, trapped in a rat race driven by high-paying jobs to afford high rents, and pressured to constantly improve their performance, appearance, and personal fulfilment. This group faces immense pressure to maintain an active social media presence and a busy lifestyle, leaving little room for collective action and increasing tension between individual choices and collective responsibilities. What impact does this trend have on their sense of responsibility in light of their perspective on citizenship? I argue that societal structures push self-interested activities, amplified by the fast-paced urban life.

The research suggests that people have not deliberately become more individualistic. Instead, external systems and the pressures of urban life in Amsterdam drive this behaviour. This challenges the notion that the Havermelk Elite are inherently more individualistic, proposing that their behaviour is significantly influenced by these external systems. Reflecting on these deeper systems, the thesis calls for a reconsideration of our perceptions of individualism and citizenship. It emphasises the importance of slowing down, appreciating the smaller aspects of life, and adopting a more mindful approach to our roles and responsibilities as citizens.

Ultimately, it suggests that our primary responsibility is to ourselves.

5.4 Contributions and Future Directions

In the following section the way in which this research has contributed to the anthropological field will be discussed.

Firstly, through a short ethnographic fieldwork project in Amsterdam, the research sheds light on the perceptions and decision-making processes of young urban professionals, known as the Havermelk Elite. By delving into their lifestyle choices and cultural practices, the thesis challenges

oversimplified local narratives about this group, revealing a complex interplay of cultural capital and consumption patterns that distinguish them within Amsterdam's social landscape.

Moreover, the thesis links this local discussion to broader anthropological debates on class and citizenship. By situating the Havermelk Elite within Elizabeth Currid-Halkett's concept of the aspirational class (2017), originally explored in the context of the United States and England, the thesis expands this theoretical framework within a new geographic and cultural context—Amsterdam. This extension contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of global trends in class formation and consumption behaviours across diverse urban settings.

Furthermore, the thesis explores how the Havermelk Elite construct their identity through contrasts with outsiders, particularly "Provincialen" from outside Amsterdam. This analysis draws parallels to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (1977) and contemporary extensions by scholars like Lisa Lowe (2015), illuminating how urban elites reinforce their social status through cultural and political distinctions. This contributes to discussions on urban identity formation and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within Dutch society.

Additionally, the thesis touches upon political polarisation between Amsterdam and rural Netherlands, reflected in contrasting political preferences. It examines how this polarisation influences social attitudes and perceptions, contributing to a sense of urban elitism and alienation from rural areas. This analysis enriches discussions on the urban-rural divide and its implications for social cohesion and political stability within the Netherlands.

In the realm of citizenship studies, the thesis expands the traditional notion of citizenship beyond legal status. Drawing on Marshall's theory (1983), it explores how citizenship encompasses broader dimensions including social, political, and ecological aspects. This is particularly pertinent in the context of ecological citizenship, where the thesis highlights tensions between individual rights and responsibilities towards the environment. It argues for a nuanced understanding that balances personal choices, such as digital nomadism and global travel, with collective societal changes necessary for sustainable futures. This thesis provides a multifaceted analysis that connects local urban dynamics in Amsterdam to broader anthropological and citizenship discourses. It deepens our understanding of class distinctions, cultural identities, and political tensions within contemporary societies, offering insights into the complexities of citizenship in an increasingly globalised and environmentally conscious world.

For future research, I would recommend delving into intersectionality and identity within the Havermelk Elite. It would be interesting to research how factors such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation influence the identities and experiences within the Havermelk Elite. By examining intersectionality, the study would provide deeper insights into the complexities of privilege and

inequality within urban settings, contributing to both theoretical understandings of intersectional identities and practical implications for social inclusion policies. I would recommend doing qualitative research with ethnographic fieldwork for a longer period than this study, preferably 6 months or a year.

In my research, it would have been beneficial to extend the study period, as this would have allowed me to deepen relationships and gain more insights into my participants' lifestyles. Additionally, conducting research during the summer or spring could have yielded different results, as it is easier to meet people outdoors. In Amsterdam, people tend to go outside as soon as the sun shines, so fieldwork during nicer weather would have provided more opportunities to meet participants and gather data. It would also have been interesting to compare the Havermelk Elite in Amsterdam with those in other cities, such as Utrecht. Replicating the research across various cities could reveal whether this behavior among young people is specific to urban areas or unique to Amsterdam. Furthermore, exploring the concepts of environmental citizenship and sustainable practices in greater depth would enhance the study's contribution to discussions on urban sustainability, global citizenship, and the ethical responsibilities of affluent populations towards environmental stewardship. This focus could also offer valuable insights for policymakers and urban planners aiming to promote sustainable urban development practices.

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