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"They were told it was too Black": The (re)production of whiteness in Amsterdam-based nightclubs

Timo Koren

Arts & Culture Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands

A B S T R A C T

This article investigates the spatial mechanisms through which cultural commodities are 'reworked' to become bound up in localised forms of white hegemony through a case study of cultural production in Amsterdam-based nightclubs. Combining geographical research on music scenes with a cultural geography of music genres, it seeks to understand not only how the production and consumption of electronic dance music has 'become' white in the Dutch capital, but also how this whiteness is sustained, how whiteness produces localised Others by connecting place, genre, and race, and how whiteness limits economic and creative opportunities for promoters of colour. Highlighting these processes shows that cultural discourses as well as economic practices inscribe whiteness into nightclub music genres. Rather than conceptualising genres as global entities, the paper analyses how cultural forms are reworked locally and how combinations of styles, or the resistance to combine styles, remakes the social formations that characterise spaces of cultural consumption. It makes these arguments based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 36 promoters for Amsterdam-based nightclubs conducted in 2019, short-term ethnographies in nightclubs and at industry events in the same year, and a document-based analysis of newspaper articles between 1988 and 2020. The article aims to contribute to a better understanding of how whiteness is inscribed into cultural commodities, as space reproduces privilege.

1. Introduction

Across economic, urban, social, and cultural geography, researchers have pointed out that investments in culture in cities in the global North predominantly cater to white, middle-class tastes (Keith 2005; Zukin 2008; Hae 2011; Leslie and Catungal 2012) and that cultural production is still defined by predominantly white, middle-class men (Saha 2018; Brook et al. 2020). However, white-middle class taste patterns do, at least discursively, value 'difference' (Leslie and Catungal 2012), as the spice that "can liven up the dull dish that is white mainstream culture" (hooks 1992: 21). Indeed, looking at music, the genealogies of many genres on offer in venues at the heart of western European urban cultural economies can be traced back to Black, African, Caribbean or Ibero-American musical styles – from rhythm & blues and soul to hip-hop, electronic dance music, and reggaeton. As these musical styles are commodified for white consumption in western European cities, they often lose their connection to Black cultural vernaculars[1] (Melville 2020), so called whitewashing. But whitewashing is not the only, inevitable outcome of transatlantic musical flows: some racialised social groups in western Europe rework Black genres into localised modes of countercultural expression (Lipsitz 1994; Hammou 2016), for example through establishing alternative or 'underground' urban economies (Fraser and Ettlinger 2008). This highlights that when geographers characterise 'creative quarter' spaces like art galleries, fashion boutiques and nightclubs as white, there is indeed a need to interrogate how, where and when cultural forms and genres 'become' white - because whiteness is not a 'given' nor is it 'inevitable' (Nayak 2011). This paper focuses on the cultural production mechanisms that 'rework' cultural commodities to understand how they become bound up in, and (re) produce, localised forms of white hegemony.

It focuses on a case study of cultural production practices of nightclubs in Amsterdam, an electronic dance music hub in western Europe.[2] Electronic dance music styles such as disco, house, and techno can be traced back to the nightworlds of (queer) communities of colour in New York, Chicago, and Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s (Garcia 2011). While mainstream histories often narrate that house 'became' white when it crossed the Atlantic ocean in the 1980s, a recent history of Black musical dance styles (rare groove, house, jungle) in London highlights the continuity between house and rave practices and already established forms of Black cultural production: warehouse raves and outdoor sound system

E-mail address: koren@eshcc.eur.nl.

[1] Or more generally cultural vernaculars that depart from white and western artistic norms.

[2] London and New York cite Amsterdam as inspiration for their night-time economy policies. Amsterdam is host to the largest electronic dance music conference in the world (Amsterdam Dance Event, with 350 000 visitors annually pre-pandemic). It is also home to the most clubs of any city in the Netherlands, and in 2018 electronic dance music was responsible for 73.4% of all Dutch musical export (Kroeske 2020).

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culture already existed among diasporic Caribbean populations in London, so house and rave promoters could build on their existing knowledge when organising unlicensed parties (Melville 2020). However, the same study also posits that "with the rise of stripped-down rhythmically brutal forms of Euro techno, from Belgium and Holland, which moved rave further and further from the norms of Black music, Black ravers drifted away" (Melville 2020: 198).

Amsterdam's 1990s rave scene proved a fertile breeding ground for entertainment companies like ID&T, which grew to fame through its events centred around 'rhythmically brutal forms' like gabber and eventually the maximalist, arpeggio-heavy trance genre, with DJs performing to huge audiences in football stadiums. This led to the return of electronic dance music the mainstream American market (van Bergen 2018) as 'EDM', which obscured its historical connections with queer communities of colour (Brunsma et al. 2016). The Dutch documentary series 30 Years of Dutch Dance (*30 Jaar Dutch Dance*, Vermeulen 2018) describes superstar trance DJs Armin van Buuren and Tiësto as "ideal son-in-laws" and evokes the image of "vacuum cleaning housewives who would first be appalled, but now think: 'hey I can go to house party too'". Gabber, the only Dutch music scene that receives a mention in Simon Reynolds' electronic dance music history *Energy Flash* , was infiltrated by white supremacist extremists in the 1990 s which shaped the genre's connotations – even though the style also inspired counter protests such as United Gabbers Against Racism and Fascism during the same period (Reynolds 2013). These examples highlight the central role of Amsterdam and the Netherlands in reworking electronic dance music's white articulations and orientations.

The Netherlands has historically prided itself with being a 'tolerant', 'progressive' country, but this self-image constitutes an imagined neutrality as it 'forgets' four hundred years of imperialism (Wekker 2016). Van Bergen's (2018) music history *Dutch Dance* prides Dutch cosmopolitanism and tolerance in assisting the development of the genre, drawing an explicit parallel between the ships of the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century and the private jets of DJs in the 21st century to illustrate economic prosperity[3] – an analogy that displays this type of forgetting. In everyday Dutch discourse, whiteness is an 'unmarked identity' rather than a racialised positioning (Essed and Trienekens 2008; Wekker 2016), but its imagined neutrality is based on othering social groups through racialising discourses (Çankaya and Mepschen 2019), which can be seen as the working of its dominance (Wekker 2016). This article builds on this recent Dutch literature on race and whiteness to further understand how whiteness is embedded in creative economies, as localised cultural production practices rework cultural commodities (Bonds 2013).

The aim is to show not only how and when the electronic dance music genre in Amsterdam 'became' white, but also how the circulation of the genre in specific*trans*-local networks continues to maintain this whiteness. It then proceeds to argue that because of how whiteness is embedded in Amsterdam's night-time economy, it produces localised 'cultural Others' through spatial language – genres such as dancehall, R&B, and Latin – which constrains the labour participation of promoters of colour. The paper combines a geographical scholarship on music scenes with a cultural geography of music genres to show how the norms and organisation of creative spaces (re)produce the whiteness of cultural forms and also to explain how this whiteness limits economic and creative opportunities for promoters of colour. It makes these arguments based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 36 promoters for Amsterdam-based nightclubs conducted in 2019, short-term ethnographies in nightclubs and at industry events in the same year, and a document-based analysis of newspaper articles between 1988 and 2020.

[3] For example: "Didn't this small country once rule the waves? (…) Private jets are taking the place of the ships of the Dutch East India Company; MDMA stands in for exotic spices; waveforms and LED screens replace oil paints" (Van Bergen 2018: 12). The involvement of the Dutch with the transatlantic slave trade goes unmentioned.

2. Geographies of music scenes and music genres

Geographers of urban cultural economies have shown where and when cultural production agglomerations emerge and grow (Scott 2000; Currid 2007; Kloosterman 2015) and where and when creative scenes thrive (Seman 2010; Lange and Bürkner 2013; Hracs 2016). Recently more attention has been devoted to the soft infrastructure of music scenes: the formal and informal networks musicians maintain with each other, cultural intermediaries, and other creative producers (Hauge and Hracs 2010; Hracs 2016; Kloosterman and Brandellero 2016). This can be defined as *the scene perspective*. Applying this to electronic dance music in Berlin, such an approach highlights the way networks of artists, producers, promotors, clubs, record labels and record stores (and other creative disciplines) exchange knowledge within their local environment to further innovate the genre, while also maintaining international connections with creative producers in similar niches abroad (Watson 2008; Lange and Bürkner 2013). The work on soft infrastructures devotes more attention to human agency, especially as it conceptualises cultural activity in the city as 'scenes' or 'place-based communities', rather than as 'economic agglomerations' as is the case in earlier geographical theories of cultural economies (Kloosterman 2015). These local and *trans*-local networks help understand how cultural genres are 'reworked' locally: they highlight the channels through which workers share and distribute knowledge that help explain similarities in discourses and strategies across businesses, for example similar geographical imaginations behind place-branding across mid-sized fashion firms (Brydges and Hracs 2018).

Geographers of urban cultural economies such as music scenes have mainly focused on the challenges and struggles of producers, scenes, and industries to create or maintain a place in cities but have not centralised the internal inequalities *within* those scenes and industries (Leslie and Catungal 2012). For example, to understand Berlin's techno scene, researchers have looked at spatial factors such as abundance of space, regulatory environment, cheap rents, and alignment with the city's political and cultural goals to understand its 'success' (Bader and Scharenberg 2010; Dorst 2015) but have not coupled this with an analysis of the inequalities, exclusion, and racism that academics in other subdisciplines observe in club scenes (Saldanha 2005; Talbot and Böse 2007; Garcia 2018). However, Fraser and Ettinger's (2008) research on the London drum & bass scene shows that since the genre was off-limits to 'mainstream' tastes, young urban Black communities created an alternative economy organised around different soundcarriers. However, by leaving the sonic properties of the music itself out of the equation, their explanation of why the genre remained peripheral is limited. A more cultural approach, alongside an analysis of the economic organisation, that couples an analysis of production to the cultural and social meanings of texts (Hesmondhalgh 2013; Saha 2018), would help better understand the mechanisms behind how, where and when whiteness is inscribed in (localised articulations of) music genres.

A cultural geography of the global and *trans*-local flows of music genres adds depth to an analysis of music's socio-spatial formations. Genres come with specific conventions, cultural ideals, histories, and orientations that may not easily fit in hegemonic production practices or follow cultural ideals that are disregarded by powerful, business-defining industry players (Negus 2002; Gray 2005; Lena 2012; Alacovska and O'Brien 2021). Part of the cultural ideal of genres is a sense of a 'proper place', such as the expectation that in contemporary hip-hop, even when produced by white artists, a homological relationship exists with its origins in Black communities in New York (Hesmondhalgh 2005). These homological relationships then become engrained in cultural production practices in the music industries, explaining on the one hand the subcultural political potential of the genre, but also why record labels continue to resort to essentialist conceptions of Black authenticity and Black masculinity (Balaji 2012; Shabazz 2014). This highlights that

the cultural industries are one of the key sites where through racialisation cultural commodities become inscribed with race-thinking, which happens through a form of "power/knowledge that operates as a logic of production" (Gray 2016, cited in Saha 2018: 6).

Music genres are not bound to national or urban territories and the myriad of ways in which they travel places has profound implications for the social identities that form around and through music. As music circulates between countries as an interchangeable commodity, attachments to place can be upheld, erased, or transformed (Lipsitz 1994). This creates a cultural dialogue shaped by unequal power relations, in terms of geopolitical realities, differences in opportunities, legacies of colonialism, and organisation of the cultural industries (Lipsitz 1994). Notably, in *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy (1993) writes how Black musical communities across the Atlantic Ocean have given rise to cultural expressions that can be characterised through their 'polyphonic' fusion of modernist and populist aesthetics, which includes a commitment to the ethical value of music that entails the possibility of envisioning a better future (Gilroy 1993) – their 'genre ideal' (Lena 2012).

However, as music travels and Black musical forms like house or techno are adopted by white artists, such reciprocity is often absent. The social formations of genres thus take shape through their relationship to the past. In *The Black Atlantic* this relationship is an intergenerational, shared field of ethics for Black diasporic musical expressions (Gilroy 1993). In the house genre, the hegemonic European whiteness of the genre takes shape because the past[4] is only a romanticised historical reference and this romanticisation does not translate to (recognition of) local ethically informed practices (Garcia 2018). Such a 'forgetting' enables the formation of new, politically problematic socio-musical identities around genres: techno has its roots in Black Detroit, but white clubbers in Rotterdam (the Netherlands) in the late 2010s find the appeal of techno parties in the muting of sexual desire (influenced by ecstasy consumption), constructing a 'white sexuality' that defines itself against multicultural R&B parties that are made sense of as 'unconfined, sexual Other' (van Bohemen and Roeling 2020). Crucially, the cultural geography approach highlights that genres are not fixed, but reshaped, reworked, and transformed by time and place – not just as the endpoint of appropriation, after a genre has 'arrived' on the European continent, but also through continuous *trans*-local cultural flows, following similar disengagements with Black musical histories found across multiple cities in continental Europe (Lipsitz 1994).

The case study analysis of Amsterdam-based nightclubs' cultural production discussed below highlights that places are not just passive receivers of white commodities a genre but are actively bound up in reworking whiteness through professional networks, the organisation of cultural production, and shared cultural ideals and ideologies (Mullings 2012; Bonds 2013). Doing so combines the 'scene perspective' with a cultural geography of music genres, addressing the lack of engagement with race and racism in geographies of urban cultural economies. To understand how the electronic dance music genre is reworked in Amsterdam, this research starts with a historical account of how place transforms the cultural meanings attached to the genre. It then proceeds to understand how professional networks, in combination with a 'poetics of place' (Lipsitz 1994), sustain whiteness. In the second part the focus is on how the whiteness of electronic dance music creates a localised Other, like in Rotterdam's club scene (van Bohemen and Roeling 2020). Since racialisation is spatial, urban landscapes make race knowable through concepts such as 'the ghetto' (Lipsitz 2007; Çankaya 2020) and in urban music economies these spatial evocations are entangled with the racialisation of music genres. The last section focuses on the impacts of whiteness: how the embedding of music genres in the organisation of cultural production in Amsterdam's nightclub sector decreases economic and creative opportunities for promoters of colour.

[4] The queer nightworlds of the 1970s and 1980s in New York, Chicago, and Detroit. See introduction.

3. Methods

The research is a case study of Amsterdam's nightclub sector until the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to clubs closing their doors in March 2020 to comply with government-imposed lockdown regulations. Before starting fieldwork, clubs were categorised by looking at their programming (Stirling 2016), use of genre labels (Lena 2012) and social media and marketing (Garcia 2011). In the line with the theoretical framework, genres are defined as 'temporarily stable' (Alacovska and O'Brien 2021). This means that genre definitions and boundaries vary across space and are constantly remade (Maalsen and McLean 2016), with nightclubs functioning as active actors in this process. This inspired an analytical distinction between EDM and niche-orientated electronic dance music venues: the former maximalist, visual-heavy genre is dominated by superstar DJs like Calvin Harris (Brunsma et al. 2016), but EDM DJs' fees have become unaffordable for nightclubs – even for venues with a 2000 people capacity. This means electronic dance music clubs in Amsterdam typically focus on niches within genres with a 'post-disco genealogy' (Garcia 2011) like house, techno, and electro. They are niche-orientated: niche then refers to those forms of electronic dance music that resist expansion into the major label record industries, sticking with specialised, often independent record labels, for example (Lena 2012). These clubs are referred to as 'the niche-edm genre' in this paper. During interviews, participants would draw symbolic boundaries between the niche-edm genre and another set of clubs: clubs whose events focus on a mix of Black, Caribbean and Ibero-American musical styles such as hip-hop, R&B, dancehall, and Latin, mixed with house and pop. Niche-edm's 'Others' are grouped together as the 'eclectic genre', a term also used in the Dutch dance music history book *Mary Go Wild: 25 Jaar Dance in Nederland* (Kerkhof 2013).[5]

The research design consisted of three methods: qualitative interviews, document-based analysis, and short-term ethnography. 29 semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 36 Amsterdam-based promoters formed the main source of empirical material. Of this group, 19 were employed by a nightclub (club promoters), while 17 were self-employed or work for an external event organisation (external promoters). Respondents were mainly male (25), mainly white (seven did not identify as white), mainly in their 20s or 30s (81 %), mainly university-educated (24 completed a degree or were in the process of doing so). In short, most respondents shared my social biography (a white, higher educated man in his late 20s). This not very diverse sample reflects social inequalities in the cultural industries more widely (Brook et al. 2020).

Whiteness is an unmarked social category, but it can create a proximity or likeness in interview settings over sharing the same cultural biographies and dispositions (for example, not being familiar with being excluded) (Ahlstedt 2015). White interviewees often seemed to assume I shared their political and cultural views (regardless of what they were), while respondents of colour did not. For example, when a respondent of colour evoked the phrase 'white men' he apologised and said it was not intended as a personal offence, whereas the white respondents using the same phrase did not make any categorizing comments. Interviews with promoters of colour alongside white promoters, who recollected their experiences of exclusion, exposed how whiteness in the nightclub sector functions (Essed and Trienekens 2008).

The interviews are corroborated by 111 hours of short-term ethnographic nightclub and industry event visits to understand the cultural product in its spatiotemporal dimensions and a background document-based analysis (policy documents, newspaper articles, archives, dance music history books, TV documentaries). They provide a historical and institutional context that situates cultural production in a specific time

[5] Van Bohemen and Roeling (2020) define R&B as techno's Other, but I chose these genre definitions that encompass a collection of styles because it better reflects the boundaries that promoters for Amsterdam nightclubs draw.

and place and in dialogue with different policy rationales and cultural ideals, highlighting the importance of temporality and locality. Discursively analysing historical processes and musical lineages is a crucial way to redress essentialism in data interpretation (Stirling 2016), positioning Amsterdam's nightclubs in the globalised music industries (Montano 2013).

4. The arrival of house: white becomes the default

The formation and then the preservation of whiteness in niche-edm genres (like house and techno[6]) in Amsterdam nightclubs show how white musical identities are constituted not just as the endpoint of appropriation, but rather that whiteness is continuously remade. In the late 1980s, American house travelled from Black discotheques in downtown Manhattan and former factories in Chicago to, first, the more culturally elite club RoXY in a former cinema in Amsterdam's city centre (de Wit 2008). In the 2010s, Amsterdam-based promoters were influenced by Berlin's queer techno scenes, as they travelled to dark, sweaty, and smoky dancefloors of clubs in former industrial buildings, inspired to recreate that vibe in their hometown. This context has shaped current-day promoters in Amsterdam, for whom whiteness in the niche-edm genre has become the default to which other ethnicities are 'added'.

As niche-edm genres popularised in the Netherlands from the late 1980s into the early 1990s, two popular narratives can be identified that both highlight the genre's relationship to Blackness. The first narrative emphasises race/ethnicity. While many of the intermediaries (journalists, promoters, et cetera) among the early adopters of house in Amsterdam were white, they publicly emphasised that house is a Black genre. They did so in two ways: pointing to the 'innate' rhythmic qualities of the music and to their 'place of origin', inner city American metropoles. Eddy de Clercq, a Belgian native, is a pioneer figure who popularised the house subgenre to Amsterdam in his role as programmer for the venue RoXY. In the late 1970s he travelled to New York to visit the nightclub Paradise Garage and recollects: "You had the feeling you'd been on another planet. Sometimes I had the impression I'd ended up at an African tribe" (de Wit 2008: 85), and: "You can't imagine that as a white European, to see people in trance like that" (de Wit 2008: 45). Here, to describe the response to music predominantly made with electronic equipment, de Clercq falls back into a stereotype where Blackness is read as exotic, shocking and primitive (Frith 1992).

The national newspaper *de Volkskrant* is the first to cover the niche-edm substyles extensively and places them in the Black music tradition (van Veen 1989). Techno is understood as a product of the Black consciousness of post-industrial, disenfranchised Detroit (van Veen 1992) and in a report on London (UK), the subgenre jungle is described as "it has the street feeling of the ghetto, just like reggae" (van Veen 1995). Here, Blackness is not conceptualised as innate, rather, genres are seen as a product of racialised poverty which adds a 'subcultural authenticity' (Garcia 2018) to the music. These social embeddings are also understood as geographically distant: the article on jungle questions whether similar connections between genre and Black identities could emerge in the Netherlands (van Veen 1995). For example, bubbling, a sped-up version of ragga and dancehall, popular among Afro-Dutch communities is not attributed the same subcultural authenticity in the same newspaper that year (van den Eerenbeemt 1995).[7] It is not included in the 'canon' of niche-edm styles: in an overview of the sub-genre house in the USA, the UK and the Netherlands, Rietveld mentions the role of Black and Afro-Caribbean cultural production in the USA and UK but posits the main Dutch musical contribution is adding "European sensibilities" (musical influences from Belgium and Germany) to niche-edm production (Rietveld 1998: 8). Here, Blackness is constructed as distant to Dutch society.

The second narrative deracialises the niche-edm genre, adopting an explicitly universalist, 'colourblind' approach. For example, in a 1993 article in the newspaper *Trouw*, DJ Pieter Franssen is quoted saying: "The Netherlands doesn't have a hip-hop culture. There is no breeding ground for it. Our ghettos are not as bad as in the United States. House is neutral and doesn't carry a heavy cultural load" (Bosch 1993). The comparison with hip-hop is insightful, because like jungle it was thought that the Netherlands lacked the racialised poverty that is conditional to produce meaningful hip-hop. While in the 1990s Dutch hip-hop may have been peripheral, today it has become a vehicle for musical expressions that decentre whiteness (Gazzah 2008). However, when it comes to the house genre in the Franssen-quote, its social history is obscured, bringing to the fore a 'neutrality' that is rendered its appeal. In the same article record label manager Fred Berkhout says: "For white kids house is the musical trend of the nineties" (Bosch 1993). This quote, probably unintentionally, discloses that the supposed neutrality of niche-edm styles serves as a marker of whiteness: neutrality constitutes the often unmarked racial norm that peripheralises aesthetic expressions not considered white (Essed and Trienekens 2008).

The first narrative highlights the house genre's subcultural authenticity, the second narrative highlights the mainstream appeal. In both cases, a distance is constructed between Dutch niche-edm styles and Black cultural expressions – as if Dutch niche-edm styles cannot express anything that diverts from this 'unmarked' whiteness. In the first narrative, the Black 'routes' (Gilroy 1993) are part of how American and British niche-edm styles are observed, but in the second narrative, Blackness as a social category is constructed as irrelevant to niche-edm styles globally. This distance between Dutchness and Blackness is overstated: other historical accounts document how non-white cultural expressions are expressed through articulations of niche-edm genres and their predecessors: for example, the late 1970s Black queer party community (Wekker 2016), the bubbling genre (van den Eerenbeemt 1995), and the musical exchanges between the Dutch and Detroit-based DJs and label owners (Veilbrief and Passet 2013). However, investigating this further is beyond the scope of this paper.

5. Trans-local whiteness: how the new default travels

The previous discussion of two historical narratives serves to contextualize the position of current-day promoters in Amsterdam, for whom whiteness in the niche-edm genre has become the default to which other ethnicities are 'added'. To contrast the historic analysis with the contemporary orientations of promoters, the paper now turns to the interview data, to highlight how the genre stays white as whiteness is continuously 'remade' across spatial contexts. White niche-edm promoters function as intermediaries in *trans*-local flows by travelling to Berlin and taking inspiration home to Amsterdam. In comparison, two Black promoters on the borders of the eclectic and niche-edm genre did not refer to Berlin but mentioned their travels to London and South Africa as places where they had encountered inspirational music worlds. In this way, the possibilities for a genre to become a sustainable vehicle for aesthetic expressions that decentralise whiteness does not just depend on its 'origin' as Black musical expression. The contemporary

[6] Genre labels differ across countries. For example, in France 'electro' is current. In the Netherlands, house in the late 1980s stood for all electronic dance music. Techno was introduced in the early 1990s. In the 2000s minimalistic styles ('minimal') was a trend. In these sections I use 'niche-edm genres' to signify this cluster of styles with 'a post-disco genealogy' (Garcia 2011), but refer to specific subgenres (house, techno) when these are discussed explicitly in the publications cited.

[7] Tellingly, bubbling also does not have its own chapter in Mary Go Wild's history of Dutch Dance (van Terphoven, A. and van Veen, G. (eds.), *Mary Go Wild: 25 Jaar Dance in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Maslow).

'routes' in which a genre's cultural intermediaries, artists and audiences participate (Gilroy 1993) are just as important.

For most (white) promoters, whiteness remains an unmarked category as they discuss their travels to Berlin or their collaborations with promoters from that city. Berlin was referred to by one niche-edm club promoter as "the Mecca of the techno world", which describes its status in the genre, and this was readily followed by the intention to bring "something of that culture here". Many promoters were inspired by how the German capital's club scene re-articulated the orientations of the techno subgenre to freedom, anonymity, and centrality of queer communities. Berlin is known for its specific clubbing norms, such as bouncers that assess subcultural capital, which extend to inside the club: for example, the intention to 'hook up' is seen as 'going out for the wrong reasons' (Garcia 2011). Van Bohemen and Roeling (2020) describe this sexual disinterestedness, fuelled by drugs such as ecstasy, as a 'white sexuality' that positions 'R&B parties' as the unconfined, cultural other. Furthermore, Berlin is relatively close to Amsterdam and allows for weekend trips, which means these knowledge flows serve as a source of direct, applicable inspiration – more proximate than the distant American night worlds of the 1970s and 1980s.

During my interviews with Black male promoters, who were five out of 36 respondents, Berlin was more peripheral or went unmentioned in their geographical imaginations. One promoter mentioned his travels to London, which he had experienced as a city of multicultural, inter-genre possibility.

> When I'm in an Uber in London and I ask the driver, could you please play reggae, he goes ta-ta-ta three stations and for the whole day, 24/7, I have reggae. If I say bashment [substyle of dancehall], he goes to another station. Of course, there's a much larger demography of people who live there, but there is also more, different layers, an entry-level, where you can gain knowledge, which challenges your ears, just by shuffling through radio.
> (External promoter, eclectic, male, Black, late 20s)

He described it as a place where musicians are not pigeonholed like they are in the Netherlands, which allows artists from different genres to meet and collaborate more often. He lauded club nights that mix genres and radio stations that allow easy access to in-depth knowledge of multiple sub-genres - things he felt are lacking in Amsterdam. This promoter also mentioned the availability of DJ opportunities in London, including at online radio stations, where emerging DJs can gain skills without the pressure of the dancefloor. This is not to say that London's nightclub sector is devoid of structural inequalities. Rather, to the interviewee it represented a cultural geography of European nightlife shaped around a sense of opportunity and diversity.

This can be contrasted with Berlin. There, the appeal for promoters was the freedom and anonymity they experienced on dark dancefloors, while its ethics mainly centre around (white) queer practices. In the London example, accessibility and multiculturalism are at the heart of the interviewee's geographical imagination. It couples an aesthetics of cultural goods (genre hybridity) to an ethics of production (guaranteeing low thresholds), following the existence of opportunities for racialised minorities. Queer production practices like door policies to ensure safer spaces for sexual minorities (Moore 2018) are not always compatible with low thresholds as these same door policies might exclude racialised minorities (Garcia 2011). As a result, niche-edm promoters in Amsterdam rebuild historical ties to queer communities, but not to (queer) communities of colour. This highlights that production ethics and cultural discourses transfer from place to place as genres continuously flow across local contexts, but often in a partial, adjusted, or compromised form.

External promoters, who are not employed by a club, navigate clubs' identities and target audiences to decide where to organise their parties. In the following quote a promoter talks about his idea to start a recurring party around the South African niche-edm style gqom (a combination of kwaito, techno, and house) but is not sure about its location:

> The electronic scene is really in those, in those clubs that a large share of the multicultural population does not know, so what you're looking for is a club with a central location, that feels a bit underground, a bit like [name of club], but then closer to town, easily accessible, recognisable eh and that doesn't [have] a clear identity of another target audience than the one you need to reach.
> (External promoter, eclectic, male, Black, early 40s)

This can be understood in the context of the cultural flows of Black diasporic music genres: while gqom may share stylistic similarities with other niche-edm genres, the promoter realised that if he would produce the gqom night in the cultural context of Amsterdam's niche-edm genre, gqom risks losing the possibility of connecting with "the target audience". Instead, producing the night in a club with a more open profile will help keep its connection to a Black or multi-ethnic crowd as the style travels from South Africa to Amsterdam. Targeted efforts like this help explain not only how racialised formations around music genres come into being as genres travel, but also highlights that places are not 'passive receptacles' (Bonds 2013), as clubs and club nights actively remake socio-musical identity formations.

6. How whiteness creates localised cultural Others

Whiteness manifests itself through the racialising discourses that produce cultural Others (Wekker 2016): like in Rotterdam's techno scene, where R&B parties are constructed as the 'unconfined sexual Other' (van Bohemen and Roeling 2020). Othering is also embedded in cultural production practices. The cultural-economic goal for niche-edm clubs is in-house production: clubs employ promoters who book all artists themselves to create a uniform venue identity. Inspired by Berlin clubs such as Berghain, a venue identity is an important criterium to obtaining a 24 hour license[8] from the local council (OIS Amsterdam 2017). However, while culturally prestigious, most nightclubs – and all eclectic clubs – resort to another production mode out of economic necessity: external co-production. Here, nightclubs reduce risk by not booking DJs directly, instead collaborating with external promoters with close ties to their audiences. This is a way of dealing with economic uncertainty in the cultural industries and which recalls major label's uses of 'imprints' (Hesmondhalgh 2013). To maximise audiences, eclectic clubs depart from a notion of cultural diversity: aiming to cater to an audience as wide as possible, while also not aligning explicitly with certain communities (Malik 2013). Seeking to represent the city demographically, promoters often do not cite race explicitly, but rather make use of a spatialised vocabulary of the city that implies race not through bodily markers but through referring to specific neighbourhoods (in the Amsterdam context often 'Bijlmer' or 'Zuidoost') (Lipsitz 2007; Nayak 2011; Çankaya 2020). This adds to our understanding of why the whiteness of music genres varies across space and place: evocations of the 'racialised urban' function to 'other' audiences as they become embedded in the organisation of cultural production, for example through external co-production of night clubs.

To understand how external co-production others genres and audiences through evocations of urban space, the paper presents an example of a niche-edm festival which takes place in Amsterdam's South-East neighbourhood, home to the largest Afro-Caribbean Dutch population in the city (van Gent and Jaffe 2017). The festival organisers sought to include people from the local area with the idea of adding a hip-hop stage to the event. An external promoter native to *Zuidoost* was asked to help organise this, but had his reservations:

> I had the feeling: we shouldn't do hip-hop, it's much lower in beats per minute, and eh dance at the time was a primarily white affair and

[8] Since 2013, selected clubs in Amsterdam can operate with a'24 h license' which means they do not have a curfew. The first licenses were granted after a competitive application procedure.

> I thought like, then you have a sort of, a stage with lots of Black youth who do hip-hop which doesn't fit, eh and there was a sort of stigma at the time, it was just, it was tedious to have it fit like that, so I said maybe we should go more towards afrobeats, afrohouse, eh eh things that are higher in beats per minute, that was actually the first reason, to do something that's close to the population here but which in one way or the other fits the dance scene.
> (External promoter, eclectic, male, Black, early 40s)

The location inspired the festival's attempt to include Black audiences by diverting from their musical profile by adding hip-hop. However, the external promoter offers a counter-imaginary, showing that to incorporate audiences of colour, the festival should instead program a musical style that is stylistically more like house and is also popular among local youth. Since neighbourhood demographics do not translate into audience demographics (with other factors such as image and ticket price at play), this intervention only added diversity on stage. As it happened, the festival's afrohouse stage was not well attended, likely in part because the local Afro-Dutch community were uninterested in the niche-edm genre or did not feel 'spoken to' or welcomed by the festival. However, the experiment provided the impetus for the external promoter to start a new club night that attracts a majority Black crowd and has successfully run for over five years in eclectic clubs. This illustrates how the whiteness of Dutch niche-edm was locally reproduced, and the promoter's unsuccessful intervention at the festival made him resort to clubs that centre around a different genre and that connect afrobeats to the eclectic genre.

Music genres are expressions of spatial conditions (Shabazz 2014), but these expressions are transformed as genres travel and local promoters inscribe new meanings onto them by bringing specific social groups together. When promoters set up club nights, they do not only evoke racialised ideas of space as a shorthand for marginalised social identities, but also to describe hegemonic white, middle-class musical identities. Club nights, as nodes in the global flows of genres, can help explain how white identities form around Black American genres like R&B. External co-production, through which promoters offer target audiences their own night, provides insight into these mechanisms:

> We have some guys, they do [name of party], who are from Amstelveen and from Zuid [South] and ehm, I connected them to a couple of guys who I know who are from het Gooi [affluent region just outside of Amsterdam], but they live in Amsterdam now, so what you try and do is put people together and so you have a dispersal actually through all of demographic Amsterdam actually.
> (Club promoter, eclectic, male, Black, early 30s)

Amstelveen, *Zuid*, and *het Gooi* are all examples of affluent, white areas. By bringing external promoters / friend groups from these areas together it becomes clear how on some nights the club will have a predominantly white crowd while other nights in the same genre can be characterised as multicultural. The logic of external co-production can serve to create new racialised Others *within* genres, for example because Blackness continues to be associated with crime and disorder (Talbot and Böse 2007). In terms of audiences, club promoters often prime demographic diversity over securing space for marginalised populations. In the following quote, the same promoter discusses organising a party with an external organisation that attracts a majority Black audience:

> Those guys, those girls, they could, they had a different location, I'm not going to name that location, but they had a different location and there they were told it was too Black, the party. That also something I took with me, somewhere I thought yes: I feel bad about it too, I mean what I like to see most is a night that's a representation of the Netherlands. So that you have white, Black, Turkish, Moroccan, everything mixed, that it just works, ehm, but well, if that doesn't work, but there are a thousand Black people really enjoying themselves, then it's also fine.
> (Club promoter, eclectic, male, Black, early 30s)

This shows how whiteness goes unnoticed as it manifests itself in space. The same promoter actively encourages connecting different groups of white external organisations to create cohesive audiences but is more apprehensive when majority Black spaces start to form. When an external promoter is told their party is 'too Black' and needs to seek opportunities elsewhere, it becomes clear how spaces of consumption like nightclubs play an active role in reworking the racial formations inscribed in cultural commodities like music genres.

7. How whiteness decreases economic opportunities for promoters of colour

Eclectic venues constantly need new target audiences to maintain their place in the market, so external promoters of colour use their ability to attract new groups of clubbers to convince club promoters, which is not possible to a similar extent at more culturally prestigious, less commercially oriented niche-edm venues that pursue a uniform, stylistically coherent venue identity. While there are more opportunities at eclectic clubs, the type of inclusion that comes with external co-production is temporal: it typically consists of one club night a week/month. It is also conditional: promoters of colour need to organise parties that are commercially viable and consider the 'comfort' of white space (Ahmed 2012). In his discussion on the mainstreaming of French hip-hop, Hammou (2016) describes this as 'the point of coordination and consensus', positing other-than-white cultural forms are commodified in such a way that they fit in the worldviews of white cultural workers (see also Saha 2018; Nwonka and Malik 2018). The combined requirement of commercial viability and white comfort limits the economic and cultural opportunities for promoters of colour – especially in niche or innovative subgenres.

This temporal point of 'coordination and consensus' (Hammou 2016) is unstable, as explained by this external promoter, who worked with a club that kept favouring other parties, prompting him to leave:

> The programmer approached us, yes the manager thinks you [are] Black,[9] he said I don't mind but this is what he thinks. So you know it's going on, but you don't have that at [name of another club #1], we did it there only just once, and at [name of another club #2] you don't have that either. They [club #2] just wants a full house, and how you do that, that's your business, as long as there's no trouble. Look, if there would be fights every month then okay you got to keep an eye on your crowd, but if you're crowd is Black, I'll just call it that, but it fills the house, then why should it matter?
> (External promoter, eclectic, male, Black, late 20s)

External co-production enables and restricts multiculturalism in Amsterdam's club nights. While already popular subgenres are more commercially viable, commercial viability is a demand harder to meet if you want to convince a club promoter of a style that does not already enjoy much popularity or of a club night that tries to be innovative or forward-thinking. Eclectic clubs are more frequently located in the city centre and face high rents and some club promoters posited a full house is basically a requirement on weekend nights, which means that the early adopters among external promoters have less time to 'build' a new concept or spearhead a musical style over weeks or months. The added concern for the promoter quoted above is that cultural production in nightlife is tied to a white 'discomfort with alterity' (Çankaya and Mepschen 2019): the promoter's mention of "trouble" and "fights" suggests that regardless of what actually happens at club nights, Black promoters still have to go the extra mile to convince clubs not to give in

[9] Here the promoter used not the word 'zwart', which would be the most common translation of the English 'Black', but 'donker' which would literally translate to 'dark' in English where it has strong connotations of personality, but not ethnicity, like it has in Dutch. In Dutch, 'zwart' is considered more politically correct than 'donker'.

to the old racist stereotype of Black people as 'violent' (Hall 1996; Talbot and Böse 2007).

This unstable point of coordination and consensus is entrenched in the organisational hierarchy between nightclubs and external promoters, adding to the instability. External promoters may be better at attracting audiences from peripheral, stigmatised urban areas to city centre clubs, but given that club promoters or club owners ultimately have a say over the future of these collaborations, Black promoters are hyper-aware that they will be held to account for anything that happens during the club night. The organisational hierarchy between the club and external promoters thus adds to the instability of the temporary coalition.

> So the first time we were in [name of club], in that small room, there were two fights and in the briefing the next day a staff member said: yes I liked what you did in that room, but the target audience you attracted is a pity. Then I thought: but wait, we didn't do any promotion, so you know, it was your people who came to our room, but because those people have, I assume, a darker skin colour, and we have that too, they thought it was our target audience, but it wasn't necessarily.
> (External promoter, eclectic, male, Black, early 40s)

When clubs use external co-production, the responsibility for audience behaviour is not shared between venues and external promoters. This can be read as an outcome of the power dynamic in which external promoters are ultimately held accountable for controlling the crowd, even when they have much less to say about for example the security staff.

The economic organisation of cultural production mediates how race structures spaces of consumption. Taken together, this shows how nightclubs' decisions about the organisation of production allow promoters opportunities (eclectic clubs, external co-production), but also that cultural diversity and demographic representation, as production ideals and in combination with the need for commercial viability and a white-centric conception of comfort, entrench connections between genre, race, and place. Ultimately, this limits the creative and economic opportunities for promoters of colour, especially when it comes to organising club nights based around forward-thinking, underground, or commercially unviable genres. This adds another piece to the puzzle to explain how, where, and when music genres 'become' white.

8. Conclusion

This article sought to understand not only how musical styles become white, but also how this whiteness is sustained, creates localised cultural Others, and decreases economic and creative opportunities for promoters of colour through a case study of nightclubs in Amsterdam. It combined an analysis of local and *trans*-local networks and organisation of cultural production with an analysis of the cultural ideals, orientations, and conventions of music genres. The international flows of music genres highlight what promoters value and implement: they recognise historical Blackness (of the American night worlds of the 1970s and 1980s) in the flows of electronic dance music, but not the potential for localised, contemporary artistic practices that decentre whiteness. Whiteness is not static but continually remade through *trans*-local flows, as demonstrated by the 'white sexuality' (Van Bohemen and Roeling 2020) that Berlin-inspired, Amsterdam-based niche-edm promoters embed in their production practices. Spaces of consumption matter: the economic organisation (in-house production or external co-production) of venues shapes the extent to which they are open to new styles and concepts from less established external promoters. External co-production enables these possibilities, but collaborations between clubs and external promoters are conditional: they rest on an unstable consensus based on commercial viability and a white conception of safety. The research showed that Blackness continues to be associated with crime and disorder, exemplary of a white discomfort with alterity, which regulates spaces of consumption through evoking notions of urban space.

The paper aimed to provide more of a theoretical basis to the frequently made claim that creative city spaces serve white, middle-class tastes (Zukin 2008; Leslie and Catungal 2012). Since whiteness cannot be treated as a given (Nayak 2011), there is a need to understand the spatial mechanisms through which cultural commodities are 'reworked' to become bound up in localised forms of white hegemony. On the one hand the paper recognises how in electronic dance music, through a fetishised evocation of the nightworlds of the past (Garcia 2018), 'difference' is indeed used to 'liven up' dull white mainstream culture (hooks 1992), but the comparison with the eclectic genre also shows promoters value a white-centric conception of 'diversity' (Saha 2018). Nightclubs seek to produce a 'risk-free alterity' (Garcia 2011): actual Black parties in mainstream venues can be considered 'too Black'. This means that spaces of consumption are not merely passive receptacles of cultural commodities, but actively inscribe racialised meanings onto them (Gray 2005; Bonds 2013). Connecting the notion of white discomfort (Ahmed 2012; Çankaya and Mepschen 2020) and an 'unstable consensus' (Hammou 2016) to cultural production practices highlights the narrow scope of white middle-class valuation of difference, which helps to further understand why 'consuming difference' is an enactment of privilege.

The findings of this paper contribute to the geographical understanding of whiteness by showing how race is embedded in concepts like spaces of consumption, distance, networks, and *trans*-local flows that are often employed to make sense of urban cultural economies in the global North. Cultural production practices (re)produce whiteness because promoters and key intermediaries construct some forms of racial difference as temporally and spatially *distant* while others are seen as more proximate: as briefly noted, a genre like hip-hop has taken on a different trajectory than niche-orientated electronic dance music and has become a vehicle for non-white cultural expressions in the Netherlands (Gazzah 2008). Rather than conceptualising genres as global entities, there is a need to understand how cultural forms are reworked locally and how combinations of styles, or the resistance to combine styles, remakes the social formations that characterise spaces of cultural consumption. This requires not only a critical interrogation of micro-scale relationships like professional and social networks (Mullings 2012) in distinct urban cultural economies, but also an analysis of the *trans*-local flows in which intermediaries are embedded (in this study: the Berlin-Amsterdam axis) and their geographical imaginations (in this article: London as a place of multicultural possibility), since both shape economic and creative practices.

This paper showed how cultural discourses shape cultures of production by embedding these in the cultural production practices that constrain economic and creative opportunities for – in this case – Amsterdam-based nightlife promoters of colour. More generally, this ties in with geographical work that combines a socially constructionist account of race without losing sight of the material consequences of racism (Gray 2005; Nayak 2011). A potential avenue for further research is to better understand the social and emotional dimensions through which urban spaces of consumption (re)produce or rework whiteness. The entanglement of techno and ecstasy as formative of a white sexuality is one example from earlier research (van Bohemen and Roeling 2020) and highlights the significance of drugs and social norms to inequalities in music cultures. Since culture is social, the social formations around music are not just formed by the aesthetic characteristics of cultural commodities, but also by a range of more contingent factors, from substance use to accessibility by public transport, that can help explain spatial variation in social inequalities. Combining cultural, economic, social, and emotional dimensions would contribute towards a more holistic, and less essentialist and static, understanding of the whiteness of spaces of consumption in urban cultural economies in the global North.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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