Exploring Sonic Diaspora: An ethnography on diaspora music and heritage in the electronic music scene in the Netherlands
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Abstract

This article explores the experiences of diasporic djs from the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region in Dutch electronic music scene context. Through participant observation, interviews, and fieldwork, the research examines how these individuals navigate their cultural identities, negotiate their heritage, and express their artistry. The study reveals a diverse and dynamic diasporic community that draws inspiration from their diasporic backgrounds, implementing it in the electronic music scene to re-shape the existing dominant narrative.

The research highlights the artists' use of music and performances as platforms for self-expression, cultural exploration, and connection. By challenging stereotypes and creating inclusive spaces, they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of diversity and foster cross-cultural dialogue. However, the research process presents its own challenges, including issues of access to participants and the influence of the camera on interactions.

A key finding is the fluidity and complexity of diasporic identities. The participants resist singular categorisations, emphasising personal experiences, community, and shared connections. Their negotiation of cultural heritage reflects an ongoing process of self-discovery and identity formation, shaping their artistic expressions.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of diasporic communities within the electronic music scene. It underscores the power of music as a bridge between cultures, the significance of cultural diversity in the Dutch electronic music scene, and the need for nuanced approaches to studying and engaging with diasporic individuals. The findings invite further exploration of the complexities of diasporic identities and the transformative potential of music within the electronic music landscape.

Introduction

I have always been attracted to the rousing energy that inhabits electronic music. Being on the dancefloor, eyes closed, and feeling the bass thumping through my whole body feels almost like a celestial experience; at least to me, it does. Luckily, the Netherlands is one of the leading countries in the electronic music scene, and we have abundant music events for me to visit. In the Netherlands, the techno and house music scene are flourishing, and as stated by 3voor12 (2021), it is the home base of countless (internationally) successful electronic dance music djs.

The painful reality, however, is that the Dutch electronic music scene is mainly dominated by white djs and producers, catering to a white audience (Simons 2016). This is curious as techno and house music are rooted in black resistance. Techno music originated from Detroit's black community and that it was founded by Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson, also known as the Belville Three, in the 1980s. (Tsitsos, 2018:274) According to Tsitsos, techno music was the escapist reaction to the decaying industry in Detroit. It created new vision of possibilities through "aesthetic solutions" to the problems the abandoned city of Detroit encountered. Tsitsos (2018:276) portrays techno music as "an attempt to create a new, pure order".

The Guardian article *"Make techno black again": a social experiment subverts whitewashing in clubs* criticizes how techno music has been "whitewashed" and become detached from its origins (Wheeler, 2020). According to Wheeler the leading festivals Awakenings and Dekmantel (both held in the Netherlands) are being criticised for their lack of diversity.

In the Dutch podcast Dipsaus (2019), Axmed Maxamed and Mathys Rennela also talk about the "whitewashing" of techno music. Rennela explains how white artists often use music and artwork made by black artists without crediting the origins of the artwork. Instead of giving credit and appreciation for this black culture and heritage it is appropriated and "whitewashed" by white artists.

The critique on the of diversity in the Dutch electronic music scene is also confirmed by the VICE article *De problemen waar zwarte dj's in Nederland tegenaan lopen* (Simons, 2016). Simons reports that in the five biggest techno clubs in Amsterdam, the ratio of solo artists is divided in about eighty per cent white djs and 20

percent non-white djs. In the article by Simons, Philou Louzolo explains that when black artists play black music, it is often considered as "too black" but when white artists play the same music, it is considered "hip and edgy". The article also touches upon the experiences of non-white djs and how they are mistreated in the industry. For example, Louzolo was requested to wear a dashiki at a performance and dj Lucien Foort was mistaken for a cocaine dealer at a club he would perform that night.

The racism and cultural appropriation within the electronic music scene in the Netherlands illustrates the disregard towards the roots of and history of techno music. As a result of whitewashing, misconceptions about the origin of techno and house music are created. Furthermore, whitewashing also establishes a norm of whiteness, marginalises a large diasporic community from the scene, and it constitutes a representation inequality because of the lack of diversity behind the dj booth.

This ethnography focuses on the experience of Dutch djs with diasporic roots and their contribution to re-shaping the dominant narrative in the electronic music scene in the Netherlands. The research encompasses several vital themes, such as the exploration of the social realities and cultural backgrounds of diasporic artists and, their identification as "Third Culture Kids" (TCK)[1] in contemporary Dutch society. As the Netherlands is the home to multiple migrant communities, the cross-cultural experience of TCK is something that a lot of Dutch people relate to, including myself. Because of this cross-cultural experience, the boarders of Dutch and non-Dutch culture blur and questions about one's cultural identity emerge. This thesis will include an analysis of these diasporic TCK experiences and identity struggles and how they have shaped the work of these diasporic djs.

Another theme is the role of electronic music as a platform for diasporic communities to assert their cultural presence and challenge dominant narratives. This

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[1] The term Third Culture Kids was coined by Ruth Hill Useem and the definition of TCK that is most widely accepted is children that grew up in a different culture than (at least one of) their parents (de Waal, 2021). However, the term has been subject to academic debate which will be included in the theoretical framework of this thesis. The term refers to both children as adult TCK.

way, music events become spaces of cultural exchange, solidarity, and resistance, enabling diasporic communities to connect with one another, challenge the cultural boundaries they encounter and work towards more inclusion in the electronic scene in the Netherlands.

Participants

In the field, I worked closely with djs Moody Mehran (Mehran) and Disco Arabesquo (Moataz). That is why this thesis will focus mainly on their experiences. Moataz is a 35-year-old dj and record collector from Amsterdam. He was born and bred in Amsterdam and has Egyptian roots, as his parents are originally from Cairo. Moataz hosts Arabic disco nights under the name Disco Arabesquo where he gives a stage to a myriad of djs and music artists with diasporic roots. He also collaborates with initiatives in Amsterdam that have a societal impact, such as his contribution to an exhibition at the Tropenmuseum, music workshops at a youth centre in the Osdorp neighbourhood in Amsterdam, and jam sessions for musicians at the community centre in the Kolenkit neighbourhood in Amsterdam.

I met Moataz at one of the jam sessions at the community centre Maqam, where he was playing vinyl records. Moataz played a version of "I Will Survive", and I recognized the tune. So, I gathered all my courage and walked up to him to casually introduce myself by asking which record he was playing. We got talking and agreed to meet a week later. The following week we initially met up for a coffee, but it was around lunchtime, and Moataz asked me if I was hungry. He insisted we got some food and he treated me to lunch. Little did I know that Moataz' insisting on him getting us food before filming and interviews, would become a habit. Moataz' kindness and generosity helped me greatly in the following weeks. He introduced me to many creatives and helped me get in touch with Mehran. With everything Moataz does, he tries to create opportunities for others around him, whether it be musicians, underprivileged youth or me, a beginning anthropologist.

Mehran is a 32-year-old techno dj from Amsterdam. He was born in Tehran and moved to the Netherlands with his parents when he was four years old. Aside from dj-ing,

Mehran is one of the founders of Diaspora Radio Amsterdam, in which he hosts a radio show about the diaspora from South- and West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) connected through music together with dj Hani. He also co-hosts techno parties with the collective Acid Hammam, which only programs djs from the SWANA region.

The first time I met Mehran, we agreed to meet for a coffee at a café close to the Amsterdam Bijlmer station. I felt nervous the whole train ride, but when I met Mehran, I immediately felt more at ease. We had coffee and talked about different things like our expectations of life, our childhoods, family, relationships, love, djs, and electronic music. He told me that he visited music events from a young age and that he encountered his fair share of prejudices because of his appearance and background. Becoming a dj and a part of this scene himself signifies why it is so important to him to change the existing bigoted culture that prevails in the electronic music scene.

We hung out for about two hours, and I hesitated to ask him for more of his time. Then he told me that if I wanted to, I could join him at an Acid Hammam gig and that he had plenty of time to help me and do interviews. We said goodbye to each other with a hug and I was very excited about how pleasant the meeting was. Because of Mehran, I got to see a realistic depiction of a dj with diasporic roots' life in Amsterdam, which can be much fun but also features different struggles.

Relevance

As mentioned earlier in the introduction the electronic music scene (in the Netherlands) is dominated by white djs and caters towards a white audience. It still has a lot to gain in terms of inclusivity and diversity. Unfortunately, the electronic music scene does not address the multiculturality that characterises our country. Therefore, the Dutch electronic music scene misses out on all the advantages cultural diversity has to offer.

This ethnography aims to shed light on the contributions of djs with diasporic roots to the broader process of decolonisation. By examining the multifaceted connections between diasporic experiences, electronic music and decolonial practices, this study offers academically relevant and timely valuable insights into the agency of diasporic

djs by investigating their role in the Dutch electronic music scene. This study seeks to explore the potential for cultural resistance, reclamation, and empowerment within the context of decolonial practices.

The academic relevance of this research lies in its multidimensional nature, encompassing the fields of diaspora studies, musicology, cultural anthropology, and postcolonial theory. Firstly, it addresses the complex experiences and cultural productions of diasporic communities, considering the ways in which music acts as a vehicle for maintaining and expressing identities in diasporic contexts. By focusing on djs, this research probes the creative agency and cultural influence they wield in negotiating their diasporic experiences.

Secondly, this project engages with electronic music as a site for exploring the dynamics of cultural appropriation, hybridity, and resistance. By analysing the practices of Mehran and Moataz, this research aims to uncover how they navigate these spaces, challenge dominant narratives, and contribute to the decolonization of cultural expressions.

Lastly, this research project connects with the broader discourse on diaspora and decolonisation and the ongoing struggles for social justice and cultural equity. By examining the contributions of djs with diasporic backgrounds, it explores the potential for these cultural agents to disrupt existing power structures, challenge hegemonic narratives, and foster processes of decolonisation. Understanding the ways in which djs engage with and transform electronic music scenes provides valuable insights into the larger project of decolonisation, highlighting the possibilities for collective action, cultural reclamation, and social change.

Personal relation

As a fervent visitor of electronic music events, this topic is very important to me. Although I enjoy visiting and supporting the electronic music scene, it also has not gone unnoticed by me that it only attracts a particular type of people and often, there is still a lot to gain in terms of inclusivity. This issue concerns me as I am of diasporic roots myself and I have plenty first-hand experiences that prove the importance of the pursuit of a more inclusive and safer electronic music community. That is why it

matters so much to me that people like Moataz and Mehran actively strife for awareness, inclusion, and progress in the music scene in the Netherlands.

The experiences I have shared with Moataz and Mehran were significant because they helped me comprehend why this research is so important to me. They shared their stories about the experience of growing up in the Netherlands with non-Dutch roots, and I related to them because I have Indo-Caribbean roots. This is something I do not think about often and is taken for granted in my social bubble of all-Dutch friends. I was unaware that the term TCK exists, which has made me realise that I am not the only one struggling to define my identity while appreciating my diasporic heritage. I feel that Moataz and Mehran were not only my research participants but also took the role of two big brothers who understood my personal search for identity.

Theoretical framework

This research project explores the theoretical framework encompassing diaspora, third culture kids, heritage, sonic practices, and decolonial practices. This interdisciplinary framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics within diasporic communities and their engagement with sonic cultural expressions.

Diaspora

When I started this research, I initially defined diaspora as "a population scattered across regions which are separate from its geographical location". However, when I started to problematise, what diaspora entails, I learned it does not abide to one singular definition. The concept of diaspora has emerged as a large field of study within sociology, anthropology and migration studies and its discourse is extensive. When I asked Mehran what he thinks about when I mention the word diaspora, he answered:

> *"People who are far from home and long for a location from which they originally came from, beautiful and sad at the same time. On the one hand, you enrich cultures by traveling and sharing your own culture with others. On the other hand, there are a lot of people here in the Netherlands that miss their homes."*

This quote illustrates that to Mehran diaspora refers to a transnational sentiment of displacement and yearning for "home". The definition of diaspora that seems most widely accepted is the migration of peoples whether it be voluntary or involuntary, that typically involves a sense of collective identity and a connection to the ancestral homeland (Faist 2010, Adamson 2016).

Diaspora has become a highly politicised notion. The term diaspora is oftentimes used by nationalist/governmental groups as a strategy to mobilise support for political projects under the pretence of group identity (Faist 2010:10-11). What is striking, are the efforts of categorising and classifying diaspora's which present the inaccurate and suggestion that diasporas exist in homogenous groups (Adamson 2016:292). Defining diaspora by relying on only a particular category is misleading

and problematic because it ignores the larger political context and the internal politics and differences that form and maintain diasporic identities. Consequently, the dangers that surround the discourse of diaspora are the essentialising of group identity and categories in diaspora politics. Disregarding the temporal dimension and political context that shape and condition diasporas. In order to properly address diaspora, one has to take a step beyond looking at diaspora as a population or a group of people and acknowledge the socio-political context and the differences of individuals within that diaspora.

In one of the interviews I conducted, Mehran told be about his struggle to fit in at school. He told me that in his mind he created the idea that he belonged to the category of immigrant kid because of his Iranian roots and his past in a refugee camp.

> *"I used to participate in the fasting of Ramadan in high school because the other Iranian kids I knew did it. It was ridiculous really, because I would fast at school keeping up the pretence even though my parents did not raise me Muslim. I did it to fit into the category of the Iranian kids. Eventually I stopped doing it because it did not make any sense."*

Mehran thought he had to conform his behaviour to the group he "fit into". Even though he this notion of belonging to a certain group was partly self-imposed, it illustrates that diasporics are classified and categorized by the essentialisation of group identity, whether it be accurate or not. Although this categorisation may be an internalised process, it is caused by the pressure of having to choose one specific identity in order to fit in. However, this heightened sense of pressure to conform to established norms and expectations under the pretence of group identity, fails to recognise that diasporic identities are often marked by cultural hybridity.

Identity and Hybridity

As a result of diasporic migration, the identities of people with diasporic roots are characterised by cultural hybridisation due to cross-cultural relations. Postcolonial

theorist Bhabha's describes hybridity as the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through repetition of identity efforts (Bhabha 1994:159). This way cultural hybridisation performs as a transcultural amalgamated identity.

Furthermore, Bhabha introduced the "third space" concept as a site of negotiation that performs cultural hybridity without hierarchy between the multiple cultural influences. This "third space" transcends the binary oppositions of the ancestral homeland and the host country of one with diasporic roots. Rather, it is an amalgamation of culture caused by the fusing of different cultures resulting into one's personal unique experience (Bhabha 1994).

In one of the interviews I conducted, Moataz told me about his Egyptian roots. He explained how he relates to both Amsterdam and Egypt and how his identity is an amalgamation of these differentiating cultural spheres.

Moataz: I am of Egyptian descent. My parents are both Egyptian. My dad came to the Netherlands in the 70s. My mom followed him shortly after. They married in Egypt before they travelled to the Netherlands. I am Egyptian and I feel Egyptian, but also Dutch... actually Amsterdam... because Amsterdam really is my home base. I am strongly connected to Amsterdam. I would say my roots are both Amsterdam and Cairo.

Tari: Do you feel like a product of two worlds?

Moataz: Certainly! 100 per cent! I really feel like a product of both Amsterdam and Cairo, and that is also what others tell me. Here people see me as Arab, Egyptian... and when I'm over there, people think I am very direct in my approach, a bit cheeky... very Dutch. I just say what I think, you know? But yeah, I am definitely a mix.

Tari: Did you struggle with these two identities?

Moataz: Yes, I did, being Arabic and Islamic and living in Amsterdam, a city of endless possibilities and temptations. I try to find my own balance, but sometimes you do feel guilty. It isn't easy t to find that right balance, to stay true to yourself.

In the interview excerpt Moataz describes that his cultural identity is a hybrid transcultural fusion of Dutch and Egyptian facets. During the conversations I had with Moataz over the course of the fieldwork, I heard him mention the term "third culture kids" which I was not familiar with at first. I found it interesting that he seemed to feel so connected to this idea of the "third culture kid" because it is a type of "ideal model" in which cultural hybridity can be understood. As I alluded above in the section about diaspora, it is misguided to talk about diasporic identities as a collective identity or experience. However, both Moataz and Mehran seem to identify themselves with the "third culture kid" experience. In fact, I too felt understood and allied by the concept of "third culture kids".

The "third" in TCK

The notion of "third culture kids" was coined in the 1950s by Ruth and John Useem to describe the children of American citizens working and living abroad (Pollock et al. 2010, de Waal 2021). In 1989 Pollock and van Reken elucidated TCK as "people who have spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any." Moreover, Pollock explains that albeit TCK adopt elements from each culture in their identity, the sense of belonging is most often related to others of similar backgrounds (Pollock et al 2010).

The idea that is at the root of TCK is that they have no less than three cultural worlds shaping their cultural identity. The first culture being the culture of the (ancestral) homeland, the second being the culture of the current/host land, and the third being the cultural identity that bridges between the first two cultures. This third culture is not only different from the experiences and social realities from the first culture that is inherited through the parents, but it is also dissimilar to the experiences

of the people native to the second culture, leaving the TCK in a stage of liminality (van Gennep 1969 in de Waal 2021:12).

The notion of TCK relates to Bhabha's concept of the "third space" as they both refer to a "third" reality of the identity caused by the amalgamation of two different cultures that are merged in to one cross-cultural transcendental identity (Bhabha 1994, de Waal). However, although neatly categorising these entities into thirds might be appealing, I think this theorisation of cultural hybridity runs the risk of over-essentialising TCK as homogenous groups onto which we portray our academic assumptions of their identities. Essentialising these cultural precedents to interpret diasporic identities can lead to misinterpretations of cultural identity as detached segments. As an anthropologist, I rather characterise cultural identity as fluid, multifaceted and hybrid than adhering to the theories of "thirds".

Nevertheless, I do feel like these theories of "thirds", whether it be cultures or spaces, conceptualise the sentiment of liminality that many Dutch second-generation immigrants struggle with. Both Moataz and Mehran told me about their identity struggles and questions about who they think they are and as what Dutch society views them. They grew up in different places than their parents. They told me a lot about how the culture of their parents' homeland clashes with Dutch culture and how they have coped with shaping their identity struggling with the feeling of having to choose between different cultures. Which is understandable as people with non-Dutch roots are presented with the question "where are you from?" often preceded with the question "no but like… where are you really from?!" as their first answer tends to somehow not be considered sufficient by the asker.

In one of the interviews with Mehran we talked about his experiences of growing up in the Netherlands with a diasporic identity.

> *Tari: Did you struggle with having two different cultures?*
>
> *Mehran: Yes, I think that in the Netherlands people expect you to choose if you are Dutch or Iranian. That is something that I really struggled with. There is very little*

space to be both Iranian and Dutch. If you appropriate your own Iranian identity,
people consider you to be less Dutch. For me, both identities are my identity, a world
in which I grew up and it doesn't make me less Dutch I think... or less Iranian. Others
offer you a choice to satisfy their ideas about in which category you belong, and
sometimes it can be a struggle to just be yourself.

In this passage Mehran reflects upon his personal identity struggles. He talks about being both Dutch and Iranian which is oftentimes viewed in a binary opposition. However, Mehran claims that this choice that others offer him, between either being Dutch or Iranian, is invalid as his identity is transcultural. The idea of identity transcending binary oppositions relates to Bhabha's notion of "third space". However, I contemplate what implications putting a label of "thirds" on Mehran's experiences will employ. Would that be an oversimplified judgement of his experiences that disregards his personal agency? Does the TCK framework adequately account for the nuances and challenges that arise for diasporics, such as Mehran and Moataz, in Dutch society?

From what I have learned from both Mehran and Moataz, others oftentimes find it difficult to understand their transcultural diasporic identity as it does not fit neatly into one box. Consequently, their Arabic and Dutch roots are presented as a contrast by others, followed by the choice to which one of these cultural worlds, they relate the most. The concept of TCK becomes relevant in this context as it transcends the binary opposition often imposed on different cultures, allowing for a more inclusive understanding of their complex interplay and interconnectedness. Both Mehran and Moataz embrace the TCK framework as a means to navigate the multifaceted nature of cultural identity. However, as an anthropologist I do have my concerns about interpretating cultures through the framework of thirds.

Heritage

Trying to define what the meaning of heritage is, is not a simple task. Is it simply that what is inherited from the past? And if it is, who inherits, what do we inherit and what is discarded from this inheritance? Heritage is a concept that is problematic because it

is derived from the motivation to preserve. This raises questions about who decides what is to be preserved and if are we able to preserve it? In this article I will focus on intangible heritage as it fits the scope of my research.

Pfeilstatter (2017:609) discerns multiple anthropological approaches to heritage. Firstly, using the concept of culture by lawmakers to define a specific legal provision for heritage to preserve and safeguard heritage. Secondly, describing the concept heritage as a Western invention, that appropriates non-Western cultural phenomena as heritage. Thirdly, the universalist, transcultural notion of heritage that is motivated by a desire to protect and preserve cultural phenomena. According to Pfeilstatter (2017:610) this process is selective because it prioritises and makes distinctions between different cultural phenomena and symbols.

Controversially, Laura Jane Smith (2006) starts the first chapter of her book *Uses of Heritage* by stating *"There is, really, no such thing as heritage."* Smith (2006:11) argues there is a hegemonic discourse about heritage that is governed by western elite cultural values. This discourse in turn endorses the grand narratives of history that neglect to include alternative narratives and ideas about heritage. Thus, it results in Western cultural domination that determines what heritage is. Smith tries to demonstrate "that the subject of our heritage 'gaze' heritage is not so much a 'thing' as it is a set of values and meanings (2006:11).

Smith (2006:29) calls this hegemonic discourse about heritage the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD). Smith then criticises the AHD because it is not inclusive and has no critical engagement with non-expert/public users of heritage. Consequently, the AHD establishes a top-down approach between expert (heritage site) and the passive visitor. This results in the ideology that what is produced in this discourse, is perceived as authentic and legitimate heritage. Smith (2006:34) claims it leaves no room for using, remaking and negotiation of heritage.

Smith (2006:54) highlights the importance of abolish the idea presented by the AHD that heritage is objective and merely physical. According to Smith (2006:54) Non-Western perceptions have challenged the AHD and all heritage is "a way of knowing and seeing" and therefore becomes intangible. Smith (2006:56) explains that

by categorising all heritage as intangible the focus of heritage shifts towards the influence of heritage instead of focusing on material objects.

In one of the interviews I had with Mehran, we talked about heritage and in what way he engages with his cultural heritage.

> *Tari: Are you consciously engaging with the cultural heritage that your parents taught you?*
>
> *Mehran: Yes, kind off… but it is only a small part of my heritage. For instance, we celebrate Nowruz (Iranian New Year's celebrations), but I did not know about all the festivities that surround it. It is like a longer period of time in which people in Iran celebrate. When I was little my mom would call me in sick at school and we would have a small family celebration. However, I found out later when I started celebrating it with friends, that it is actually a month of festivities. So, a part of this heritage I was taught by family, and a part came to be because I share it with my Kurdish and Iranian friends. Which is really nice because we all have different traditions because we are a mixed group, and we can share these traditions with each other.*

This passage illustrates that heritage is something which doesn't necessarily have to be passed on from one generation to the next. It can be shared and celebrated by everyone that is engaging with it. But what happens if these exchanges of heritage alter the ways in which this heritage is preserved?

When diasporics are separated from their homeland, they are cut off from the embodied experience of their heritage at home. The traditions and sentiments travel along with them to the place of settlement. Wobst (2010:102) argues that the heritage of diasporic communities does not reflect the continuing changes that take place in their home culture because of their spatial and temporal separation of their ancestral lands. Thus, oftentimes the performance of cultural heritage of diasporic communities is very traditional and dogmatic because they hold on to the memory of what once was.

In one of the interviews with Moataz we talked about his interest in Arabic music.

> *"In Arabic music there are many different styles, all different kinds of influences you can find in Arabic music. My interest in aesthetically different types of music also broadened my scope and eye for diversity and variations in Arabic music. I play Arabic music, but I would rather say eclectic Arabic because I find so many different styles within Arabic music interesting. Listening to all these different styles helped me to find my personal dj style without being afraid of the expectations of the audience. I want to give the audience a taste of the fusion of the music that inspired me."*

While we were talking, he mentioned all the different styles that shaped his personal sound, such as disco and electro pop. When I asked him about how he felt about sharing his cultural heritage through music he told me that by taking part in sharing and redefining Arabic music this is what he said:

> *"I grew up listening to Arabic music, but I love all music. What I have learned is that you just have to try different kinds of music, because music teaches you about the world. Music is not static, and it is supposed to be shared and co-created. Music enables people to travel without actually travelling, that is the power of music."*

As Mehran and Moataz clarified in the interview excerpts, the second generation of these diasporics are not in the same way connected to the cultural heritage of their ancestors. These TCK are in turn influenced by the social realities and the context of their homes. As Pfeilstatter (2017) has explained the notion of heritage is motivated by a desire to preserve and protect culture. Smith (2006) explained that this desire for preservation of heritage is subjugated to the AHD that perpetuates the Western grand narratives of history. Diasporic heritage is influenced by the dispersal of its community and could challenge the AHD and work towards a more inclusive notion of what heritage is. Which can lead into different developments, such as an increased interest and performance of their diasporic roots or sharing their cultural heritage with others that relate to their TCK experience.

Sonic practices

As this ethnography is set in the context of the Dutch electronic music scene and event industry, I also included a part on sonic practices. Littlejohn (2021:43) explains that through sonic ethnography we can learn by listening "to ways of being in, experiencing and knowing the world through relational listening histories" about other ways of knowing and experiencing. An important nuance that I should make is that my research will not necessarily be an ethnography in sound but rather an ethnography about sound. Furthermore, Littlejohn (2021:43) defines "sounding" and "resounding" as emitting and listening to sounds not only for communicative purposes but also as a means of knowing the empirical world.

Henriques (2008) also includes the concept "sounding" in their article about sonic diaspora. Henriques (2008:5) claims that sound is not a thing, but it is an activity "sounding". This activity/performance of sounding has agency and is always transitory that is subject to representation in order to sustain. This signifies that sounding serves as a means of transit. Thus, Henriques (2008:8) argues that music serves as a means for diasporic propagation.

Moreover, Henriques (2008:1) explains that diasporas are often accompanied by their sonic musical culture such as musicians, instruments, and recordings. By sounding and resounding feelings and memories travel and are reflected. Thereby, Henriques (2008:2) describes that music often spreads further than their origins and those sonic diasporas are based more on "feeling", "taste" and "vibes", rather than on an inherited predisposition or cultural knowledge. These sentiments can be conveyed through both objects and processes of sounding.

According to Rice, one of the key processes in identity formation is the construction of boundaries. Music can be a parameter along which boundaries are drawn that establish and sustain a certain social identity (Rice 2017 in Lidskog 2017). Music provides resources for diasporic communities to construct and renegotiate its identity and to claim cultural presence.

In one of the interviews I had with Moataz, he told me about how he tries to cater nightlife events for people of the Arabic diaspora.

> *"With my Disco Arabesquo nights, I try to create safe spaces for people. because a lot of my audience has not been home for a while. They long for their distant homes and visiting my parties, dancing to Arabic music, enjoying themselves, engaging with their diasporic community, gives them the sense of home. That is what we create, together, a home away from home."*

We discussed certain aspects of the electronic music scene and nightlife that foster values that are often not in line with Arabic social norms and values. According to Moataz, it is a waste that such a large community is largely excluded from the music event scene.

> *"Most music events start after midnight and unfortunately a lot of harassment towards women and drug abuse take place. That is why, at my events [Disco Arabesquo] we start at 21.00 and we have very strict rules about harassment and drug abuse. To make partying accessible and safe for everyone. Because us Arabs do like to party you know."*

At his Disco Arabesquo nights Moataz tries to create safe spaces that claim cultural presence for the diasporic Arabic community in the Dutch music event scene. Thereby he works toward a more inclusive and safer image of Dutch nightlife.

Adu-Gilmore (2021:201) introduces the term "critical sonic practice" that analyzes music performance which seek to resist the dominant social order of patriarchy and colonialism. Adu-Gilmore (2021:201) then proceeds to argue that music research can actively dismantle subconscious biases and that decolonising musical thought requires examining the social and economic factors that are relevant to music processes.

In the interviews I had with Moataz we talked extensively about the power of music and how he and others actively try to change the dominant Western view on the SWANA region.

"I think it is good to create a new safe space in a new territory. In which people can 'wake up' and start doing their own research. They will realise 'hold up, how can this cool music come from a region that is always conflicted by war and terror?' I aim to create that spark, so that people will start to think differently about the SWANA region. Because of that spark, they will do their research, and share it with their network, only because I played a song in a club. Changing people's mind will have a ripple effect, and that is how we will change the narrative.

They way in which Moataz speaks about the power of music and changing the narrative about the SWANA region relates to Adu-Gilmore's (2021) theory that music can dismantle biases and employ acts of decolonization.

Decolonisation

Betts (2012:24) defines how historically decolonisation, as a binary activity, was interpreted to be both a calculated process of military engagement and diplomatic negotiation between the colonial and anticolonial.

Betts includes the *two phases of decolonszation* written by Kinkers and Oostindie (2004:9). Firstly, the more 'classic' phase of armed conflict. Secondly, the phase of negotiation toward independence between the contending parties.

Considering the decolonising political acts that have taken place in history, Allen and Jobson (2016:130) focus on how anthropological theory has developed. Allen and Jobson approach decolonisation as an ongoing project that seeks to challenge the 'logic of coloniality'. Their aim is not to canonise or determine a singular genealogy of the anthropology of (post)colonialism but to reflect on the significance of overlooked contributions.

Shankar (2018:108) points out that postcolonial theory is a strategy to dispute "the multiple ways in which power and knowledge intersect under colonial regimes, and in their aftermath." Shankar (2018:109) denotes there is a difference between postcoloniality and postcolonialism. According to Shankar (2018:109) postcolonialism is an historically formed academic category/doctrine and postcoloniality indicates "an ongoing lived state of struggle."

Decolonisation vs heritage

The two concepts heritage and decolonization might seem to be conflicting because as Pfeilstatter (2017:609) and Smith (2006:11) describes heritage is characterised by a Western tradition of preservation and cultural domination. This tradition is created by Western categories of material heritage and therefore is not inclusive. As Allen and Jobson (2016:130) describe decolonisation aims to oppose colonial logic and dismantle normative colonial power hierarchies. That is why heritage discourse could benefit from efforts of decolonisation. By introducing intangible heritage such as sonic diaspora the heritage discourse will be influenced and steered towards a more inclusive decolonizing framework. Shankar (2018:109) describes postcoloniality as a continuous process of struggle which relates to the importance of shifting the gaze of heritage toward defining it as intangible because it is a way of understanding and producing knowledge as stressed by Smith (2006:54).

Decolonising diasporas

Demir (2022:64) argues that diasporas are agents that challenge dominant worldviews and can be employed as a tool to dismantle colonial logic. Demir gives a myriad of examples (such as the anti-Black Pete movement in the Netherlands) of how diasporas have changed national identities and narratives by demanding "radical inclusion" in the global North (2022:69-77).

The notion of decolonising diasporas relates strongly to this ethnographical research because Mehran and Moataz both pursue more inclusivity and diversity in the Dutch electronic music scene. In one of the interviews we had, Mehran discussed the importance of diversity behind the dj booth.

> "*I think in the Dutch electronic music scene we can still accomplish a great deal by booking djs with diverse backgrounds and different skin colour. Not just booking diasporics as a token for their culture or as a nice addition to a brand but really focusing on inclusion and diversity behind the dj booth in the electronic scene.*"

In this passage Mehran explained that djs with diasporic roots not necessarily always engage with their diasporic heritage. However, giving those diasporic djs a platform can still be considered a decolonising act as it offers an alternative to the dominant norms in the Dutch electronic music scene and challenges normative power hierarchies.

Although they take different approaches to re-shaping the electronic music scene and the biases diasporics are faced with in Dutch society, Mehran's and Moataz' decolonising influences matter greatly in the endeavour of altering the prevailing narrative in the Dutch electronic music scene.

Fieldwork

Over the course of the three months of fieldwork, between January and March 2023, there were different stages that developed. The first month I was focused on finding djs or producers wanting to collaborate with me, which was more difficult than I had anticipated. Luckily, I came in to contact with Moataz and later Mehran. From the second month onwards, I conducted participant observation with Moataz and Mehran. I got to know their welcoming attitude and warm personalities. They told me stories about their lives, and I learned a lot about their social reality, their passions and their struggles in the extensive conversations and experiences we shared.

In the third month Moataz asked me if I would join him on a trip to Egypt together with a group of other creatives. Looking back on that trip, it was very important for debunking my own personal biases about the SWANA region and people from the Arabic diaspora.

Although spending one week in Egypt does not fully represent the entire SWANA region, I do think I was privileged with quite a 'local' experience. Especially, because I spent the week with native Arabic speakers, who were passionate about showing me the beauty of Arabic culture and values. My perception based on a holiday might be a romanticised one, however it did teach me that there is more to the SWANA region than I had anticipated. Before starting this research, I had little to no knowledge about Arabic culture aside from what I have experienced in Dutch society. I do not really have Arabic (or African) people I interact with at home, and this was the first time I was introduced to Arabic culture with first hand experiences.

Methodology

Going into the field, I had certain expectations about fieldwork. I planned to submerge myself in the field by doing participant observation focusing on making full fieldnotes and introducing the camera at a later stadium (Bryman 2016:44). I first wanted to get a thoroughly observe my participants in their natural habitat before introducing the camera, as the camera has the ability to affect situations (Suhr, 2016:390). I might have been a little naïve to think that I would have plenty of time and opportunities to try out a myriad of different observing techniques and interviewing methods such as

elicitation interviews, interlocuter led "walking with" interviews and mind mapping (Bryman 2016:475).

However, in reality the slow-paced observatory approach I had in mind proved to be inefficient and did not applicable in the field. First and foremost, because gaining access turned out to be more challenging and complicated than I had anticipated. It took me about a month to find participants and because of that I had less time than I would have liked to conduct the research. When I had finally managed to "get my foot in the door" and meet up with Moataz (and later Mehran) they expected me to start filming soon. Mehran and Moataz were very generous with the time they had made for me, but as they both often go abroad for gigs and had busy schedules with meeting to which I could not tag along my time with them felt quite sparse. I wanted to meet their expectations, as I felt I was dependent on it, and it felt inappropriate to ask them for more of their time.

With both Mehran and Moataz, I only had one occurrence without a camera present, which made it difficult to focus on notetaking while I was with them to familiarize myself with the environment (Bryman 2016:444). As Garcia discusses in his "manual for doing EDMC fieldwork" discusses, notetaking in nightlife fieldwork is not appropriate and very difficult to manage (2013:9). I realized that I had to adapt my methods to this situation and focus on using the camera as an instrument for observation. Collier and Collier (1986:152) argue that ethnographic film should not be accounted as observational and therefore is not useful for research, as the filmmaker is involved with creating a narrative. However, Pink (2007:4) accurately denotes that the constructing of research footage inherently occurs in any ethnographic representation, regardless of the medium utilised. Furthermore, Pink emphasises that by observing with a camera the anthropologist is engaging in a process through which knowledge is produced. The camera can be used as a catalyst to "develop an eye" for what is important and what is less important to observe (Pink 2007:12).

On the one hand, using the camera as my "eye" might have had an impact on the situations that unfolded before me, as the camera tends to influence how people act and people in a video are always "people in a video" (Pink 2007, Suhr 2016). This was the reality I had to accustom myself and my methods to. On the other hand, the camera

also functioned as my alibi in certain situations. I noticed that during the club nights and gigs people did not question me hanging around the djs or in the backstage rooms because they saw me with a large camera. It is important to become a "familiar face" in contexts like these so the interlocuters know they do not have to be hesitant or more reserved than usual around you (Garcia 2013:11). Carrying a camera around worked to my advantage in those nocturnal contexts because even in the darker and crowded areas, I stood out. People could easily recognise me or even approach me to ask me about my intentions.

Interactions in the field
Getting the behind the scenes' perspective in the music studios and backstage rooms taught me a lot about how diasporic artists and djs identify themselves and how they negotiate their heritage.

> *I went to a rehearsal in Amsterdam for the Arabic disco party Moataz was hosting. The rehearsal took place in a bunker at the NDSM werf and seemed to be not only an office or rehearsal space but also a home. The place belonged to Anastasis, who together with Ismael was going to perform at the Disco Arabesquo party. When I entered the studio, I saw that it was filled with instruments which I was not familiar with. What I thought were some kind of Persian carpets, lay on the floor and were draped on the couch. On the wall hung and other items with that same Persian-like pattern. There was a meditative almost hypnotic sound playing in the background and I couldn't quite tell what kind of sound it was even though it did sound familiar to me. I think I had heard before in yoga class. All these different elements made it unclear to me if they had a similar cultural origin and if they related to Anastasis' cultural heritage or not because I also did not know what Anastasis' diasporic roots were.*

> *During the rehearsal I noticed that Ismael and Moataz sometimes spoke Arabic words to each other, but they spoke English around Anastasis and me. Moataz had told me that Ismael was Palestinian and had moved to the Netherlands a few years ago. During the rehearsal session Anastasis, Ismael and Moataz were casually chitchatting. At one point, Moataz was talking to Ismael but while Ismael walked toward the*

kitchen. Then Moataz shouted to Ismael "Habibi, merhaba!" because he thought
Ismael was not listening to him. Then Ismael turned towards Moataz and answered
with a smile saying "Merhaba" to show him he was still listening. This interaction
showed that speaking Arabic seemed to be their common ground in which they felt
comfortable because it also showed a level of almost family-like playfulness.

I thought Anastasis probably wasn't from the Arabic diaspora because Moataz and
Ismael were speaking English around him. However, while rehearsing the songs
Anastasis and Ismael both started singing in Arabic. I was getting rather confused but
did not want to intrude by asking Anastasis "where he was from" because I felt it was
a bit blunt and it is always complicated to answer.

Later during the rehearsal, they were discussing what to wear to the Disco Arabesquo
performance. Moataz told them they could wear whatever they wanted really. Then
Anastasis answered with "he has some nice tribal stuff" talking about Ismael. Ismael
answered, "tribal stuff, yeah we could do tribal stuff." Moataz answered "tribal stuff?
Like Syrian tribal stuff?" followed by "you could also wear something Greek" to
Anastasis. Ismael then said "What do you mean haha? Something Greek? What is a
Greek thing?" Anastasis then continued with explaining that he doesn't necessarily
identify as Greek even though he is from Greece. Rather he identifies as a Romaan
which is a mountain tribe in the area in Greece he is from.

I think this moment distinctly captures how complex and fluid diasporic identities are.
Diasporic identities can be difficult to navigate through and oftentimes we project categories
and labels onto people that might not be representative of their personal experience. Anastasis,
Ismael and Moataz tried to negotiate their cultural heritage and how they should incorporate it
in their performances. Another example of this negotiation of diaspora and heritage occurred
between Mehran and his at the backstage room in POING a club in Rotterdam.

I was in the backstage area of POING of the Acid Hammam party Mehran and his
Turkish friends were hosting to raise money for Turkey and Syria in light of the recent
earthquakes. At the party only djs from the SWANA diaspora were performing
including Mehran himself. I was chitchatting with Dogukan, one of Mehran's
childhood friends. He asked me a bit about who I was and what kind of research I was

doing. Dogukan told me that he and his brother have been friends with Mehran and that they met when they all used to live in Rotterdam.

Dogukan also helped with the logistics and organisation of the party and when I heard him talk with Mehran and others, I heard them use some Turkish words here and there. I recognised the words because I have visited Turkey often with my parents. Dogukan told me he has Turkish roots, and we were joking around a bit. Then he said, "if anyone is giving you a hard time tonight just tell them to come to me." I replied, "ah okay, so you are like the big baba around here?" To which he answered "of course! Is that not obvious?" We both laughed and I said "Tamam, I will remember that." Dogukan assumed that I was Iranian, and when I told him I was Surinamese he was confused.

We got to talking about our roots and then Mehran interrupted saying to Dogukan that they probably would not have time to finish their game of backgammon. Dogukan then said, "yeah you wish, you are just saying that because I am beating your ass!" Then Mehran replied, "abi, you and I both know I am the backgammon king." Mehran continued, "I mean backgammon is originally from Iran so…" Then Dogukan replied "oh man, this is what he always says!" Mehran answered, "I have to defend my nationalistic pride. Dogukan replied, "yeah but I would never say that, even if it is Turkish or not. Like I don't care, I just don't care" Then Mehran asked, "But what is Turkish that you are super proud of?" Then Dogukan answered, "something Turkish that I am super proud of? I don't know… probably food? But like if anyone were to say Baklava it's from Greece, I just don't care man."

I think these moments in the backstage also capture the negotiation of what diasporic heritage is and how people relate to it. In interviews with Mehran and Moataz they had no problem clearly vocalising their opinions, however when it comes to negotiating and defining what their cultural heritage entails their perception doesn't seem to be as clear cut.

These moments illustrate how people with diasporic roots navigate themselves through the multifaceted nature of cultural identity. Which is often difficult as they are confronted by the fact that they themselves also might not have the right answer to the question "who are you and where are you from". These struggles are something I relate to strongly and what is probably also visibly interwoven through this article. I

found it difficult to decide what is the right way to address Mehran and Moataz, should I say djs with diasporic roots or TCK or second-generation immigrants? I guess none of these entirely cover their cultural identity or experiences, and the best policy is to just stick to Mehran and Moataz.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article delves into the experiences of diasporic artists and DJs from the SWANA region in the Dutch electronic music scene, shedding light on their cultural identity, heritage negotiations and the complexities with which they are governed by expressing themselves. Through participatory observation, interviews and fieldwork that established a diverse and dynamic community of movements, which intermittently see that they could draw inspiration from their diasporic background while being actively involved in Dutch society.

During the research, it became clear that these artists and djs used music and performance as platforms for self-expression, cultural exploration, and connection. They challenged stereotypes, defied categorisations, and connected inclusive spaces where their audiences could celebrate and engage with their art. By embracing their cultural heritage, they have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of diversity, breaking down barriers and spawning cross-cultural dialogue.

The research process itself presented challenges, notably regarding access to the field, navigating through the landscape of cultural identity, and the role of the camera in the intermediate interactions. However, in the end these challenges turned out to be quite valuable in conducting research in dynamic cultural contexts. It demanded a flexible adapted approach from which I learned a great deal.

A central theme that emerged in this ethnography was the conversation about identities in the diaspora. Participants showed the fluidity and connectedness of their cultural heritage, resistance to singular categorisations, and probably the importance of personal experiences, community, and familiarity. As a result, the underlying process of self-discovery, identity formation and the underlying causes of culture and heritage shape not only their personal expressions, but also have a great impact on the Dutch electronic music scene. The decolonising endeavours of both Moataz and Mehran are exemplary introductions to paving the way towards an inclusive and diverse electronic music scene in the Netherlands.

Overall, this document contributes to a better understanding of diasporic communities within the electronic music scene. It is probably the power of music as a bridge between cultures, the importance of cultural diversity in creative expression and

the need for nuanced approaches to the impossible of and dealing with diasporic situations. By recognising the uniqueness of each participant's experience, we can create a more inclusive and appreciative society through the rich tapestry of cultural heritage within the music scene in the Netherlands.

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