Electronic Dance Music Festivals: A Promise of Sex and Transnational Experience

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Abstract
The popularity of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) festivals continues to rise in the United States and worldwide. EDM’s assumed utopic idealism is propagated by the production of recap videos and commercial advertisements of live DJ sets promoted on different companies’ YouTube channels and websites. Two companies in particular, Ultra Music Festival and Tomorrowland, have benefitted from the rhetorical use of identity, sex, and nationality/ies. A critical methodology is employed to understand the hegemonic process that is occurring within these productions. The analysis of images and videos draws upon cultural studies-based interpretations of multiculturalism/transnationalism and bell hooks’ culture of domination adherent in “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” ideology. This key theoretical framework reveals the guise of utopian ideology to expose how EDM companies perpetuate normative heterosexual allure for profit. The hope for this research is to influence EDM participants and others to engage with this phenomenon critically.

Introduction
In recent years the prevalence of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) festivals worldwide as well as within the United States has become part of popular culture, both through its display in alternative electronic media and also mainstream media like National TV Networks and radio stations. Mainstream attention to EDM festivals on national TV is highlighted by a parody on Saturday Night Live (SNL) in a skit with a song titled “When Will the Bass Drop?” in which ridiculous characterizations of an EDM concert are portrayed to make fun of the audience, the artists, and the environment itself (thelonelyisland). The appeal for this event experience is reaching an even wider, ever more diverse audience. Increasingly, at EDM festivals participants demonstrate both a national and transnational presence by displaying flags that represent their diverse national origins. The EDM environment is meant to concentrate and form a cohesive body of thought and movement through the experience of the participants.
(May 8). The multiethnic and multinational identities represented in this music are comprised of an increasingly globalized market and are a direct reflection and reception of those who participate in EDM festivals. Ultra Music Festival (Ultra), an EDM company established in Miami, puts on festivals in nine different countries and reaches people through social media and other Internet-based information hubs. Its influence worldwide is reflected in the over 62 million YouTube views that are displayed in Ultra’s channel, which displays all performance and recap videos of their events. These events are capitalistic in nature, promoting and reaching huge audiences that pay more than three hundred dollars just to gain admission to the event. It is important to critically understand how these festivalgoers use their national flags in a youth movement that accepts capitalist connotations of their events and in turn also markets their national identities as a globalized sense of themselves in a “glocalized” space, communicating the commodification of transnationalism and the promise of sexual encounter.

The purpose of this research is to try to explicate how EDM aggregated its elements of euphoric utopia and how Ultra and Tomorrowland reiterate them as organizations. This experience is appropriated and reconstituted by the amalgamation of video clips with depictions centered on sexualized ethnic bodies and the brandishing of national flags. This research focuses on critically analyzing the communication of transnationalism and the desire for ethnic sexual encounters in commercial websites and YouTube videos that are configured to attract consumers.

The methodological framework for this research is first explained in connection to critical theory and bell hooks’ understanding of “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” within a Western culture of domination. Second, to understand how the movement came to be and has grown, a literature review of EDM and its phenomenological characteristics is presented. Third, an explication concerning identity, culture, transnationalism, and “Otherness” is offered in order to frame and explain how popular culture is an active process of construction. Fourth, a critical lens is applied to three sites in order to dissect the connotative or structured distortion EDM participants have of themselves and what they have experienced. Following this analysis is a discussion about what this phenomenon is constitutive of, and how it can be explored further. Finally, this research concludes with a discussion of what the analytical framework has brought into perspective about the Ultra’s EDM festival and the ideology it perpetuates.
Methodology
The preponderance of media in society is pervasive and it wields extensive power. It can help dictate concurrent discourses and interpretations of social life within our globalized world (hooks, Outlaw Culture 5). Cultural studies’ emphasis on the production and consumption of popular media provides a useful footing for a critical analysis (Littlejohn and Foss 400). Concepts and interpretations about popular media and identity will be drawn predominantly from a critical cultural studies perspective. One such concept, coined by Antonio Gramsci, is “hegemony,” which is characterized as the process through which ideologies are disseminated and then accepted by a larger mass of people within a cultural power structure that is capitalist in nature (Howell 78-80). In other words representations, ideologies, identities, and agency are dictated by a “dialogical process” that is imminent within “historical materialism” according to a long-standing critical perspective (Howell 79). This research draws upon assumptions of subjectivity that are characterized as “neomarxist,” as they reject Marx’s predicted revolutionary force of the proletariat and instead understand the circuit that is culture in the power dynamic of “hegemonic ideology” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 58; Howell 79).

Subjectivity, for the purpose of this research, can be understood as the constant formation of “social realities” in which people participate to create their own populist conception of themselves, otherwise known as their identity (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 399). People have the ability to form their identity from the representations, language, and other symbolic forms that they wish to identify with from media that contain dominant ideologies (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 399). This process becomes problematic once these realities or practices are subsumed, reiterated, and taken for granted by economic forces and even political agendas. Critical theory understands this as the “superstructure” that facilitates and surrounds a population (Howell 79). The agency granted by the public’s choices in everyday life through reflection of media and use of rhetoric leads this research to incorporate hooks’ critical and participatory call for change. The analysis of the EDM corporations, rhetorical images, and videos is enacted by directly naming their situated “superstructure” as hooks’ “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Littlejohn and Foss 362). Such analysis is undertaken in order to educate and reinforce a critical cultural studies perspective of the hegemonic process that has shaped the cultural product known as Ultra Music Festival (UMF) and Tomorrowland. This cultural product is grounded in the use and dissemination of media that can manipulate ideology.
Taking into account the fluidity of identity within postmodern theory is important in order to understand how these images and websites engender hooks’ theory of a “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” within EDM values of unification. Before moving on to a review of EDM literature, it is useful to explore how hooks situates the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” in Western culture. As hooks explains, Western culture is laden with misogyny and white supremacy within understandings of sex, race, class elitism, capitalism, and heterosexism, which is the normalized “practice of sexist domination” that reinforces heterosexuality through presumed heteronormativity (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 274; hooks, *Outlaw Culture* 116). The critical lens that is employed is associated with hooks’ critique of media and its power over cultural production, appropriation, and consumption, in a social framework—in this case primarily Western culture’s ideology of domination (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 273). This ideology of domination, as defined by hooks, is the idea that superiority and inferiority amongst citizens or people within Western culture is normative and their positions are meant to exist in a hierarchical fashion (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 274). The superior are deemed rulers over the inferior. This has consequences of pervasive exploitation and the “devaluation of reciprocity, community, and mutuality” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 274). This system is what hooks calls “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” It promotes elitist values within the hierarchies of race, gender, and economic status (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 274).

This paper is interested in the hegemonic process that combines issues of identity, race, multiculturalism, transnationalism, and profit, as well as being critical of Western media disseminating the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and constructing identities for profit. Consonant with hooks’ approach to combating the ideology of domination, this research uses what hooks terms *critique* and *invention* to help illuminate contradictions within the EDM festivals’ representations of identity and experience (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 279; *Outlaw Culture* 4). Critique is meant to contest the dominant ideologies and structures that are normalized and consumed through popular culture in mass media. hooks’ calls for rhetorical theorists to engage with popular culture because the “politics of domination inform the way the vast majority of images we consume are constructed and marketed” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 279). The goal of producing this rhetorical criticism is to “decolonize” the minds of oppressed people that have been shaped by the dominant culture, whereby they can assert their own interpretations and understanding of a particular social reality and reject the values and assumptions in “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 278). hooks places great emphasis on
invention, which is the “enactment” or active performance of rejection in the culture of domination in people’s own lives to create “nondominant alternatives” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 282). This paper encourages critique and invention by individuals that are participating in the EDM festivals’ assumed representations to help motivate a change in the mindset inculcated through the experience.

This study employs rhetorical and cultural theories and concepts within the purview of identity, sex, and transnationalism, and draws upon theoretical scholarship centered on popular culture and media by previous scholars including Keith Negus, Robin Kelly, Dick Hebdige, and bell hooks. Three themes are uncovered through the rhetorical analysis of the live footage, websites, and recap videos that weave throughout this work. They are *multiculturalism in association with ethnicity and nationality; vicarious experience of unification; and voyeurism of heterosexism.*

**Electronic Dance Music’s Allure**

It is important to understand what the environment and atmosphere mean to the audience members as well as the online community that participates in viewing and disseminating EDM-centered video productions that emphasize the role of the audience. Beverly May, a Canadian House and Techno writer and event promoter, describes the creation of these events and categorizes them according to a phenomenological approach that she has absorbed through her years of being part of the events. May refers to a theater-type feel in describing what House and Techno events are trying to encapsulate through their specialized settings, settings that are meant to provoke a “collective transformation” amongst participants (8). May sees this theater in a holistic way: “‘Theater’ in this sense refers to a cathartic or strongly emotive collective experience through an artistic medium: a search for heightened reality through fantasy. It means an exploration of lived or ideal experience rather than an artifice” (8).

According to May’s observation, the experience that festivalgoers attract themselves to is that of a utopian characterization that is then projected and represented as being part of their experience at the festivals. May describes the appeal in terms of a carnival, where the music adds to the intoxication of the audience, but the aesthetics of the event are like a “carnival—at its best, a celebration of youthful, wild energy; at its worst, a chaotic barrage of sensory titillation” (8). She sees the events as existing through the “thoughts and actions of the participants” that creates a “here-and-now” through a “collective heightened sense of living that the event signifies” (May 9). This collective
utopian sense of living with an added element of a globalized world can be clearly seen with the waving of national flags in recent recordings at events such as Ultra (2014) in Florida and Tomorrowland (2013) in Belgium.

Melanie Hill-Cantey writes about EDM as an overtly globalized form of music that originated from Chicago as the “offspring” of Disco. Hill-Cantey points to the African diaspora and the influence that it has had on African American music such as Blues, Jazz, and other musical genres that helped to sculpt Disco and in turn formed House music (4). House music venues in New York and Chicago in the 1980s, according to Cantey, were spaces in which the gay Latino and Black communities congregated and found acceptance, away from other mainstream music venues that were not necessarily sensitive to their homosexual identity. These clubs became a revolution for their respective gay communities where listeners of House—“House Heads”—from different places in society and ways of living came together to “celebrate life, love, and community” (Hill-Cantey 5). In the 1980s House music remained mostly underground in the United States but received much acclaim in the United Kingdom. Hill-Cantey also notes that the “House Movement” today is something that has “universal appeal” and has influenced many forms of music and pop culture (22). She also states that it provides “stylistic cues” on how to assimilate to today’s globalized society, because it is still composed of people from all “walks of life” and from all over the world, which connects back to May’s “collective” utopian living (Hill-Cantey 22).

House music itself is also categorized under the umbrella of EDM and has had over 300 different reiterations in magazine and record label publications between 1998 and 1999. This categorization is due to the various technologies that are implemented and which keep the music evolving, leading to the creation of new subgenres. Hill-Cantey credits EDM’s creation to Techno as an African American creation originating in Detroit (8). It is an innovation by “sonic futurists” and is described as a combination of the polyrhythms of African cultures with “alien sounds of new technology to form their music” (8). According to Hill-Cantey European Techno is disconnected from its roots in Detroit and is associated with the drug-fueled rave scene of the 1980s, lacking the soulful vocals and melodies of African American influences like Detroit’s Motown sound. Hill-Cantey adds, however, that Techno is not generally acknowledged as a Black genre by many African American writers on popular music, “as Techno is clearly produced transnationally and interculturally” disqualifying it as solely Black music (8). On the other hand, she acknowledges
its influence in the international community and accepts it as a creation by those of the African diaspora (Hill-Cantey 5).

**Transnationalism**

Transnationalism, as described by Victor Roudometof, involves complex layers and understandings that play into the lives of what in the 21st Century is understood as “cosmopolitanism,” which he defines as “a new moral and ethnic standpoint suitable for global life” (113). Roudometof writes about customs and activities that cross borders freely with different immigrant cohorts and multicultural manifestations that are now openly accepted and transformed in the urban landscape of cities (114). He looks at the globalized/glocalized landscape that encourages the intermingling and acceptance of all people and/or customs such as specialty stores and cuisine. By “glocalized,” he means the “internal globalization” of urban areas both public and private that create a transnational social space that changes peoples’ lives, regardless of them being transnational or not (Roudometof 114). He further explains “internal globalization as the process of creating the room or the space for these interactions [...] that is, it provides the preconditions, the material and non-material infrastructure for the emerging spaces of human interaction” (Roudometof 119). These spaces, according to Roudometof, in turn cannot be restricted to transnational labor markets; they actually extend into other spaces, “including spaces of transnational sexuality, popular music, journalism, as well as spaces fostering the construction of a multitude of identities” (119).

Cosmopolitanism or transnationalism is facilitated by social spaces that give people the available skills and understanding of the glocalization of the area and what it means to participate (Roudometof 115). On the grounds of EDM festivals it is the flags, artists, how the EDM sound is global itself, clothes, and ethnic bodies that communicate this to the participants. Referring back to the 62 million views on Ultra Music Festivals YouTube Channel and its parodying on SNL, the distribution of video imagery via the Internet also helps to educate the audience regarding their role as participants before ever stepping into the glocalized space.

**Global Community in Cultural Studies**

In “Understanding Global Communities in Cultural Studies,” Inderpal Grewal explains that the use of the term “transnational” is connected to terms like “global community” and “international community” (332). The terms are taken from other fields of study like geography and political scholarship that connote
different expectation and details in congruence with their respective studies. For the purpose of this research, rooted in cultural and communication studies, they will reference the spatial and historical notion of the “West” in terms of the technological connectivity that has propelled their use (Grewal 334). The terms are reflective of the geographical, political, and power-driven empire that requires an interdisciplinary approach to help wrestle with the phenomena in order to enhance theoretical approaches in cultural studies and communication studies (Grewal 334). It is important to also note that news media, such as those on the Internet and internationally distributed print, usually connect the idea of the “international community” to the “West” as a “moral community” (Grewal 335). This conception of the “West” is also congruent with what hooks calls “Western culture.” This highlights where EDM festivals primarily access their audience, which is from Internet based advertisement and blogs that are used to propel an enhanced notion of normative values. The formation of power described by these terms emanates from the repeated iterations of their meanings that create the global consensus and a moral community (Grewal 335). This understanding of the Internet-based global community lends itself to the concept of transnationalism because of the reiterations that formulate underlying assumptions and a connection to the idea of the West—a culture where media, according to hooks, is under the primary direction of a white supremacist ideology.

**Nationalism within Transnational Arenas**

Transnationalism is not a stand-alone concept. It plays into a moral conception of Western culture that is hegemonic and rampant across the globe, owing to globalization and “international communities.” Transnationalism must be understood as simultaneously standing for and next to in for and next to nationalism, as the primary site to be discussed is in Florida, on U.S. land. Grewal’s research examines postcolonial concepts in order to explain how the spatial and historical iconicity of “the West” continues to maintain its sovereignty through the colonizing practice of consumption of the Other, non-white subjects (536). This is made possible through the new technological advances that create discursive connectivities that in turn ground hegemonic practice (Grewal 356). As previously noted, YouTube and other Internet platforms are the primary tool for its creation and dissemination.

Grewal points to the concept of “multiculturalism” in America and how it affects the “self-producing and regulation” of U.S. nationalism’s ability to produce subjects (537): “As superpower and policeman, multicultural nation as
well as a site of hierarchical racial and gendered formations, America, the nation-state, and American nationalism produce identities within many connectivities in a transnational world, whether as an imperial power or as a symbol of freedom and liberty” (Grewal 335). The overarching purpose of Grewal’s work is to explain that in the twenty-first century the idea of nationalism in different sites is being constructed by media or new forms of technology within a transnational scope (536). This is also seen as an action of creating normative definitions of what those nationalities are within transnationality. Grewal points to sites in “social life” where everyday commonplaces and cultural experiences seem to have nothing to do with “state power” in creating a normalization of race and gender (535). The EDM festivals have this effect on national and transnational identities that are created by participating in the synthesized spectacles that they are. The subjects themselves are not fully aware of what the formulation of the event actually imposes on their identities: an event built on the desire to experience multiculturalism through sexual venture.

**Sexuality in Transnationalism**

The discussion about gender, sexuality, and the ramifications of how they can be perceived from an ethnic or racial perspective is important to understand through critical theory. bell hooks has understood the notion of sexual desire and experience to be one of fetish and consumption of the Other—with “Other” in this formulation being synonymous with non-white bodies and/or perspectives (hooks, “Eating” 367). It is the white supremacist ideology that imposes itself as the domination of any other ethnicity or race in order to enhance experience. The “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” through hooks’ lens, is understood as interlocking structures of sexism, racism, class elitism, capitalism, and heterosexism (Foss, Foss, and Trap 274). This system is not only perpetuated by “white folks,” it is also internalized by Others, and then those values are enforced onto the social realities of everyone in Western culture. This self-imposed cultural domination is enacted in a ritualized fashion through everyday events and/or situations (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 275). This connects to what Grewal (2007) discusses about sites in the social sphere that are used to encompass similar hegemonic values and interests in nationalism and transnationalism.

hooks’ research points to the “experiencing” of the Other as one of sexual consumption and domination—as hooks put it, “fucking” the Other as a shopping fetish to grow out of white American innocence (“Eating” 368). The
description that hooks provides is one of college age white males who are under the assumption that Others have “more life experience” and are more worldly, sensual and sexual (“Eating” 368). The encounter that is sought after by the white males is one of a “claiming,” or using the colored Other’s body as a symbolic frontier that will allow them to transgress and reconstruct their masculine norms (hooks, “Eating” 368). The transformation for whites that ensues is one of breaking with their white supremacist past and the affirmation that they are progressive in their “cultural plurality,” seeing themselves as non-racists that wish to grow from being acted upon through sexual experience instead of dominating (hooks, “Eating” 368). This again resonates with Grewal’s idea of multiculturalism and how it is used as an identifying feature of nationalism within transnational sites. This critical approach will be further explicated subsequently.

Gender only further complicates the misdirecting of the consumer to the desire for contact or experiencing of the Other in the internalized mechanism that exists in the white supremacist ideology that is experienced and then imposed in a transnational space. In line with hooks, this current work sees the commodification of certain experiences and identities as nullifying critical consciousness or political integrity that exists in those experiences (“Eating” 375): “The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (hooks, “Eating” 380). This is the interconnection of critical and cultural studies within the conceptualization of transnationalism that is highlighted in the rhetorical analysis that follows.

EDM, Drugs, and “Tribal Consciousness”
Bryan Rill explores how identity in “Electronic Dance Music Culture” (EDMC) helps participants (re)form their understanding of themselves (139). Rill tries to see how “in-the-moment” experiences are difficult to fully understand and put into words. He calls this the EDM trance state, which is experienced while in “Temporary Autonomous Zones” (TAZ) that are created in the central part of the dance floor at EDM festivals (140). Rill goes on to identify the drug induced experiences as “an alternate reality of dancing, release, and free expression” (141). Citing many accounts of being immersed in this movement, freedom, and selfIdentity, he describes it as an intensely cultural experience after which participants come out changed. Such identities are created from an array of cultural availability in a global market that has many images for what an
individual can constitute as himself or herself. In his recounting and categorizing of people’s understandings of themselves within the festivals’ dancing arenas, most of Rill’s research participants, and including himself, are from the state of Florida, the state that is the host for Ultra Music Festival in the United States. The self, according to Rill, experiences more about the world through bodily, sensory experience (Rill 144). This sensory experience comes from the music hitting and vibrating, creating a moment in time that is disconnected and aiding in experiencing the totality of one’s own body while on a filled dance floor (Rill 149). The drug of choice for participants, methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA), facilitates these euphoric understandings of one’s self within the dance floor and their surroundings, creating what Rill calls a “tribal consciousness” (156). For Rill, the creation of a tribal consciousness explains how, although participants are in autonomous spaces, they are also aware of their surroundings as a collective body.

Such an understanding of space and self-identity are a bit controversial. For Roudometof, transnationalism is focused on the understanding of one’s symbolic cues and assimilation to a global world (114). Rill argues that the drug-induced euphoria is really what brings the community together (153). It is understood that Roudometof is considering spaces that can include popular music, but he is not specifically dealing with that topic; he is more concerned with urban cities that have a large global community of immigrants. Rill, on the other hand, is examining qualitative accounts of experiences on the dance floor and how understanding of one’s self is more important than an understanding of the global aspects of the space. For the purposes of this research, the focus is primarily on the transnational and glocalized approach. Although drugs are prevalent, they do not answer the question of how the participants understand their transnational participation by using flags to dictate their predisposed social capital on the dance floor—a dance floor that is videotaped and then streamed via the Internet to help connect the participants to their nations of origin. This creates an exciting and voyeuristic portrayal of ethnic bodies at the mercy of each other’s sexual desires.

EDM as a Global Force
The viewers’ and participants’ portrayals of themselves are important to the socially constructed understanding of the festivals’ and flags’ meanings in relation to being a glocalized space. EDM as a movement and musical genre has influenced citizens of many countries. The conglomerate of flags is their display of what has moved them to not only understand to some extent how EDM has
circulated around the globe, but how it is a rich global force. The African diaspora that helped cultivate Blues, Rock-n’-Roll, Jazz, and Disco has promulgated understanding among globalized people that music can freely move between countries and cultures with the help of electronic mass media. Mass media that changes formats, what once was in the form of vinyl, tapes, CDs, is now archived on the Internet. This hyper-understanding of a globalized movement and sound is what influences participants to don national flags in a spirit of unity at these festivals.

**Sites of Analysis**
The primary sources that are relevant for this research are mostly Internet based participation sites that display videos, pictures, and blogs about the crowd’s participation on the dance floor during the performances of different DJ sets and performance times. These types of recordings are essential to the designs of this paper because they show how this phenomenon is happening at different events that are in separate spaces and on separate continents in multiple countries. The separation and connection provides the ability to be global and also local, providing festivalgoers a glocalized space in which to interact and participate. Participation is the bringing of an eclectic assortment of national flags to the event and waving them superficially. Considered from a critical perspective, participation is more of a desire to experience the Other and become a transnational citizen or to vicariously participate in doing so by watching online. It grants the festivalgoers access to self-regulated growth, what hooks describes as the domination of Others and what Grewal calls an inclusive multiculturalism in nationalism through transnational sites. The constructed hegemonic ideology is hooks’ reference to maturing from “white innocence” (“Eating” 368), a maturing that is internalized and can occur regardless of race, nationality or ethnicity within Western culture.

**Music Festivals**
The focus here is on pictures and videos of two events, Tomorrowland and Ultra Music Festival. Tomorrowland is in its eleventh year, originating as an event that takes place in Belgium in a town called Boom. It also has a sister festival called Tomorrowworld in Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia, which launched two years ago (Tomorrowland.com). Ultra Music Festival is in its seventeenth year and has events in Miami, Chile, Buenos Aires, Brazil, Ibiza, Europe, South Africa, Korea, Japan, and soon, Taiwan (Ultrasoundmusicfestival.com). Ultra has recently started to offer online streaming of the events for those who wish to watch at home. Both
of these events evidence an overwhelming number of National Flags that are taken to and shown off at the festivals. Ultra also releases recap videos after their festivals. One such video is analyzed below in order to demonstrate the rhetorical production enabled by the organization’s idealized distortion of participants’ identities.

**YouTube Live Performances**
In a YouTube video provided by Ultra of the performance of Martin Garrix, it is apparent that national flags are being waved and shown off by dozens of festivalgoers. During the clip, at seventeen minutes into the video, there are Latin American flags being raised and waved alongside European flags as well as US and Canadian flags (see Figure 1), all dispersed on the dance floor. The video has over 23.4 million views and has been available for viewing since April 1, 2014 (Garrix, YouTube.com). The magnitude of the viewing audience of a fifty-seven minute live performance is immense. Consonant with May’s view, the social construction that is occurring is one of cohesiveness and unity. It is very apparent, as everyone is moving in unison with the music and waving their flags with flamboyant pride. There are many close-ups of people holding their flags and wearing clothing with their flag’s colors. The audience responds by yelling into the camera, knowing that they will be recorded and broadcast via the Internet, globally connecting them to the nation and people their flags represent. The event is held in the metropolitan area of Miami, which has heavy migrant populations. The space in the middle of the city surrounded by
skyscrapers is a glocalized space that contains all the necessary elements for Others to partake in the global community. U.S. flags are also waved as part of this global community. The children of immigrants or immigrants themselves display flags of both their nations of origin and the U.S. flag. They understand themselves to be part of a new global world where cultures can intermingle and places like Miami can be associated with more than one identity. This multiculturalism in connection to EDM’s utopian idealism is exemplified by lyrics such as, “raise you’ hands up and drop your guns” (Garrix, YouTube.com). The choice of these words is strategic in creating the utopian idealism that is part of the glocalized space, which is harboring National Flags known to be waved during wartime and that in turn brings thoughts of military arsenals, hence guns. The bricolage of flags is continuous throughout the whole performance.

There is one obvious and voyeuristic heterosexual tone in the selected scenes, apparent in the whole audience as the prominent gender association in the festival. This is something that should be pointed out especially since the creation of these places once was attributed to a widely gay community of Blacks and Latinos. The mainstream appeal is geared aggressively toward heterosexual audiences through the predominant portrayal of young women in skimpy outfits. There are also female models dancing on stage next to the DJ. This exemplifies hooks’ perspective regarding the desire to experience the Other to consume who they are in order to become multicultural and create new attributions to one’s self identity—the desire for experiencing Others in a sexual manner. This sexually driven experience’s huge corporate sponsorship is apparent by the sheer magnitude of the stage and dance floor that is riddled with advertisements for different companies.

A joint performance by David Guetta, Nicky Romero, and Afrojack at Tomorrowland in 2013 shows an even bigger stage that is green, mimicking a forest theme, and features huge screens. The audience is enormous, and just like in the 2014 Ultra video, the national flags are from the Americas and European countries. They are displayed proudly in the air (Afrojack, YouTube.com). This video has received over 11 million views on YouTube. The audience is again very conscience of being filmed in this glocalized area, and they welcome it. The festival is located between multiple countries that are known for the EDM movement: Germany, France, and The Netherlands. This centralized area provides people with the ability to come from all over Europe as well as the world. The title itself, “Tommorrowland,” presents a utopic ideal of unification and is an allusion to the future and not the present, to a movement that is global. Two minutes into the video it can be seen that there
are dozens of flags draped over guardrails on display for everyone to record and see. There is a bigger Israeli presence as well in this video, as access to the concert is closer than that of the Ultra Music Festival in Miami.

**Website Platforms**
The Internet websites that display these festivals to the world again provide a utopic ideal in their imagery that allows for a vicarious experience of the events. When users log on to Tomorrowland.com, it takes them to a home page donning a map of the globe, on which is shown the events that the company offers, Tomorrowland in Belgium and Tomorrowworld in Atlanta (Tomorrowland.com). After a user chooses the event, s/he is taken to a page with all the information that a participant needs for travelling to and staying at the festival for the weekend. There are different packages tailored to a participant’s budget and location. This tourist approach is meant to increase the monetary gain from the festivalgoers while also facilitating their utopic experience. Corporations are aiding in the participation of this idealized and glocalized space. There is even a section of the Internet page that is called People of Tomorrow, where the backdrop is a picture of countless flags at the festival and the message on the forefront is about a bridge being built in honor of the diverse international participants who attend the festivals (Tomorrowland.com). They are encouraged to write a message to the world on this bridge. They are celebrating “global unity,” once more giving the participants the available tools to see themselves as participating in this glocalized space; to see themselves as being part of a movement for global unity through the EDM festivals along with the vicarious experiences elicited through the websites.

Evident on Ultramusicfestival.com, there is a hyper-international-connectivity feel to the design and layout of the website. Some content includes the constant streaming of EDM festivals that are taking place in different parts of the world at one of the nine international events. The website emphasizes the global effect that these musical festivals have on the EDM world. At the bottom of the webpage, there are links to various festivals in different locations around the world. This is set up to help participants see themselves as being part of a global force that can easily disseminate information worldwide to a huge EDM audience. It again gives perspective to the participants of the Miami Ultra Music Festival and their willingness to bring the flags of their national origins, designating the universality and worldwide connectivity of EDM culture through electronic media as its main goals. There is an option that shows the
various corporate sponsors of these events that highlights its capitalistic associations around the world. Both the audience and the festival organizers understand the corporate role in facilitating funding for the events. Participants choose to use this corporate money, which helps pay for the festivals and the live streams, to facilitate their own “glocalized” portrayals of unity through multiculturalism by the carrying of flags.

Finalized Sexual Tonality
All of the previous participant-attributed qualities of EDM festivals are interesting and, it can be argued, broaden the experiences of many people, but they fall short of critically dissecting what is being created by the organization. After most of these events, Ultra releases a recap video that shows highlights of experiences and interviews of some DJ’s and mostly white participants that were at the Miami festival (UMF TV, YouTube.com). This synthesized 2014 Ultra recap video is concerning because of the hegemonic undertones that it carries (UMF TV, YouTube.com). One scene in particular demonstrates all of the previously mentioned criticisms of U.S. transnationalism. It communicates the connotations of its production that engulfs all of Ultra’s images and corporate affiliations. Screen shots of the scene (see Figures 1 and 2) show a row of eight

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 2**

bikini-wearing multi-ethnic female bodies that are carrying distorted flags of different countries that participate in hosting Ultra Music Festivals. The flags feature the same colors and shapes as they normally do, but embedded in their centers is Ultra’s logo. This portrayal is key in connecting to the idea that
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multiculturalism is available to an audience that is located under the subordination of the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” as theorized by hooks (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 274; Grewal 537). It is also connoting the chance to experience the full contact with Others in order to fulfill new normative assumptions within a transnational setting. This scene depicts what is actually being sold to audiences and participants. It is a forgery or perverted association of past phenomenological aspects of EDM via depictions of multiculturalism, vicarious experience of unification, and voyeurism of heterosexism.

It is important for critical and cultural studies scholars to see these events’ landscapes as amalgamations that distort many of the previously discussed perceptions into the simple buying of a three hundred dollar ticket—a ticket that is selling women represented as ethnic/racial bodies ready to be consumed and shopped for by prospective festivalgoers. The ideology of consuming the Other is circulated aggressively here. Most importantly, it is noted that this white supremacist ideology is projected onto the Other’s own identities and their desires. Immigrant children are consumed by the assimilation of capitalism and the performance of this maturing out of “white innocence” through their representation via a distorted National Flag (hooks, “Eating” 368). This is a product of transnationalism in Western culture. The vicarious experience and hegemonic rhetoric in images is perpetuated and indiscriminately taken in by ethnic identities and all who participate. This can be seen as troublesome when we consider that it is a three hundred (plus) dollar ticket that is being sold in order to experience this first hand. It is selling a type of transnational sex tourism to American and global youth under the ideological guise of unification through multiculturalism and transnationalism.

Discussion
The attention, and the profit, that has come from EDM festivals has led to a new social construction of a “glocalized space” within the festivals as an expected part of the experience. The corporations and the overall “digital capitalism” involved in the advertisement and portrayal of the festivals lend understanding to a new form of “globalized containerization” (Lipsitz 251). This containerization is meant to appeal to everyone that has access to electronic media. Therefore, providing live streaming of these festivals is essential to glocal/global idealism. It is the capital gains that encourage the increased portrayal of international audiences not in a naïve way by either party, but rather, as a symbiotic relationship. It is an uncritical acceptance by the audience that makes this type of multicultural containerization an agreed portrayal, and
thus, a new social and capitalistic construct that characterizes the EDM movement. Perry Finley created a list on an EDM blog, stating that a national flag is one of the key objects to have when one wishes to participate at these festivals (Thatdrop.com). The audience is responsible for taking the flags along with their utopic idealism, as EDM is a long-standing musical genre that has reached out globally, encouraging people to understand their own national identity as being created as part of that global world—a global world that is connected electronically through the Internet and other forms of electronic mass media.

Gender and other identities are communicated in an overtly sexual manner. This is problematic because of the mass consumption and overall acceptance of the EDM experience as one of spirituality and self-growth. The distortions that are portrayed by the organizations that promote these festivals have only monetary compensation in mind. The actual cultural and ethnic enrichment is not clearly defined or even given an actual voice by the consumers. It is decided for them and then distributed in a “containerized” fashion. Heightened awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and unwelcomed sexual encounters in the form of “date rape” escalating within organizations such as universities and the military is something to consider when looking at this movement, which primarily consists of a college-age demographic. EDM began as an empowering site for Black and Latino gay communities and other marginalized communities and is now a commodity in the form of a ticket pass. A pass to ritualize and expect to be met with half naked encounters of the Other reinforcing the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchal” ideology within all ethnic enclaves and populations. Is this really a site of new forms of global unification, or is it just a rebranding of “Othering” in the form of sexual subjugation that has taken advantage of the historical background of EDM? This research views the latter as the obvious answer.

Conclusion
This research is important because it brings a critical approach to a cultural perspective about a cosmopolitan movement within the popular music arena of EDM and sexualized transnationalism. The participants and their flags are communicating something new about their presence on the dance floor for the world to view via the Internet, YouTube, or any site that promotes or pays for the recorded footage of the event. By lending their image and communicating their ethnic power, EDM festival participants are allowing organizations to use their bodies to propagate desire and distort nationalities in the name of profit
and capitalism. Since cameras are now more prevalent at the events through new technologies such as smartphones and online streaming, recognition of these transnational identities is part of the events’ ambience, as EDM is known to be an ethnically and internationally welcoming genre. It is important to maintain a critical perspective on how audience members and consumers are subjected to reformulations of hegemony under the veil of new transnational idealisms in the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”

Works Cited


