

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Navigating danger through nuisance: Racialized urban fears, gentrification, and sensory enskilment in Amsterdam

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Abstract

In this article, I employ the notion of sensory enskilment to investigate the embodied relations through which White Dutch middle-class residents of the Indische Buurt, a rapidly gentrifying multicultural neighborhood in the east of Amsterdam, learn to tune in to sensory nuisance to discern safe and unsafe bodies and places in their surroundings. The analysis involves examining those institutional and interactional avenues of (unwitting) sensory learning through which habituated perceptual patterns of stigmatization that conflate the everyday sensory order of Moroccan-Dutch youths with feelings of urban insecurity are cultivated, produced, and consolidated. Studying the ways in which sensory knowledge is implicated in the reproduction of socioeconomic exclusions in contested urban territories can shed new light on discussions around urban sensory politics and draw attention to the enrolment of the senses in revanchist urban renewal.

INTRODUCTION

Hangjongeren terrorize residents of the Krugerplein in Amsterdam-Oost: "It looks like a war zone."

Firework bombs, destruction, and arson. Residents of the Krugerplein have been experiencing increasing nuisance from hangjongeren for several weeks. "It looks like a war zone," says one resident. "It is basically a form of terrorism."

Since months, there is unrest on the Krugerplein. Each night, *hangjongeren* set street furniture on fire, vandalize parked cars, and set off heavy fireworks. "The explosions are deafening," says one resident. "And it is getting worse." [...] The residents like to talk, but only anonymously. They are afraid of retaliation from the youths. "The loud bangs every night are terrifying. You can't feel safe anymore." Some residents are so fed up with the nuisance that they are looking to relocate. (AT5, 2020; my translation)

This story is only one recent example in a long string of sensationalistic media accounts that, since the early 2000s, have constructed Moroccan-Dutch youths (*hangjongeren*) as a particularly troublesome figure that makes urban life in ethnically diverse and contested city spaces at once annoying and dangerous (de Koning, 2016). These youths' iconization as the "new folk devil" (de Koning 2012, p. 63) has generated "a whole new politics of urban and social renewal" (van Swaaningen, 2005, p. 291) characterized by a "zero tolerance" approach toward those undesirable subjects or groups that are held responsible for degeneration, crime, and lack of security in Dutch cities (see also Aalbers, 2011; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). Existing scholarship on gentrification in The Netherlands has shown how the "*hangjongeren* problem"—as it is often referred to—has been taken up in urban policy and exploited by local authorities to justify and promote exclusionary urban restructuring in cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam (de Koning, 2013, 2015; Martineau, 2006; van den Berg, 2012, 2013). What this scholarship has failed to account for, however, is how the construction of Moroccan-Dutch youths as criminal and dangerous proceeds through "specific sensorial-racial dynamics of place" (Low, 2015, p. 307) that differentiate and demarcate bodies

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and spaces in urbanity. As exemplified by the media excerpt above, auditory discourses of noise nuisance and war-like scenarios have played a prominent role in the otherization of *hangjongeren* bodies as violent “space invaders” (Puwar, 2004) in the Dutch urban residential environment.

As part of a larger ethnographic study investigating the relationship between the local spatial realities of race and the politics of gentrification in Amsterdam through the lens of the senses, I researched the underexplored sensory dimensions of “anxious discourses” (de Koning, 2016, p. 128) surrounding *hangjongeren* disturbance and in particular the role of “racialized sensory criminalization” (González-Güeto, 2022, p. 520) in furthering exclusionary urban renewal. As explained by Joy Helena González-Güeto (2022), “racialized sensory criminalization” designates the ideological and discursive conflation of a specific sensory order with urban violence and crime. The criminalization of sensory misconduct “demonstrates the unrelenting rejection of [communities] that [have] a different sensory order from that of Whiteness, and one that is understood to be inferior and unacceptable” (530). Sensory criminalization is a major vehicle for processes of urban racialization in markedly diverse urban spaces. Its deployment in both institutional and interactional dimensions amounts to an act of racialized place-making that addresses the sensoriality of place and weaponizes sensory conflict as a means to maintain or restore the boundaries of white space in the city.

My case study for this research was the Indische Buurt, an historically mixed, multicultural neighborhood in the east of Amsterdam that recently underwent a rather aggressive process of state-led gentrification. In the course of barely 15 years, the area went from its stigmatizing reputation as a crime-laden ghetto at the mercy of immigrant criminal gangs (see, e.g., Redactie Het Parool, 2009, 2010) to being showcased as a prime example of Dutch multiculturalism (Smit, 2016, 2017). Even though the Indische Buurt is still at present a very diverse and mixed neighborhood, in recent years it has come to increasingly operate and be policed as a “white space,” that is a space where racialized and ethnic minorities “are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized” (Anderson, 2015, p. 10). Gentrification in the Indische Buurt was from the beginning envisioned as a corrective to a local population perceived as non-native, low income, and criminalized (van Eck et al., 2020). Initially, it was immigrant entrepreneurs who were seen as the cause of widespread degradation and insecurity and ended up being forcefully displaced from the area (Ernst & Doucet, 2014; Fiore & Plate, 2021; Hagemans et al., 2016). In my work, I showed how, in more recent years, the project of white place-making manifested itself in the ways in which authorities and White Dutch middle-class residents mobilize the sensory vocabulary of nuisance to demand and justify overtly punitive policing of Moroccan-Dutch youths hanging around in the streets, in an effort to secure and expand the boundaries of white space in the neighborhood (see Fiore 2021).

While demonstrating how the senses participate in the fraught context of gentrification in Amsterdam, my study engaged with racialized urban sensescapes of danger as already formed “sensory orders” (Vannini et al., 2012) that can be readily deployed to demand or

impose a new socio-spatial structure in (re)developing areas. In this article, I want to expand my study's findings by teasing out previously unaccounted for considerations around the concrete practices and trajectories through which these sensescapes are (unwittingly) produced, circulated, and take on “embodied relevance” (Low, 2015, p. 308) among White middle-class residents of the Indische Buurt. Building on scholarship on “sensory urbanism” (Jaffe et al., 2020) and “sensory enskilmment” (Grasseni, 2004, 2007), my analysis will shed light on how (more readily researched) processes of marking difference in the context of gentrification—namely, criminalization, racialization, policing, and place-making—can serve as avenues for the transmission and consolidation of sensory knowledge around which bodies and embodied practices belong in regenerated urban spaces.

For this analysis, I will revisit the ethnographic data I gathered during my research on gentrification, race, and the senses in the Indische Buurt. The fieldwork for this project started in April 2018 and consisted of a year of participant observation in a variety of public and semi-public spaces ranging from local streets, squares, and parks to shops, restaurants, cafés and other eateries, playgrounds, community gardens, and community centers. Observation was complemented with 20 ethnographic semi-structured interviews with local residents, policymakers, and other regeneration stakeholders. The fieldwork was preceded by a preparatory research phase consisting of media and policy analysis to identify relevant debates and themes and (re)trace the shifting representations of the Indische Buurt both before and during the regeneration. The research material I use in this article consists of thematically selected national and municipal policy documents explicitly conflating *hangjongeren* sensescapes with crime and excerpts from six interviews—four collected between 2018 and 2019, and two in the Spring–Summer of 2022 during a follow-up to the main study. The analysis presented here makes no pretense of generalizability, but is nonetheless representative of how sensitivity to racialized sensoria is cultivated in the making of the Dutch revanchist city. The hope is that this article will inspire further research into the role of sensory learning practices in revanchist gentrification and urban redevelopment.

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SENSORY LEARNING

Sensory studies are a very prolific and diverse field of scholarship that spreads across many different disciplines like anthropology, history, sociology, and geography to name but a few (Howes, 2013). The field has expanded so much since the so-called sensory turn of the 1980s that no satisfactory attempt can be made at providing a comprehensive overview of the multiplicity of voices now studying sensory experience. Despite the growing knowledge and attention to the role of the senses in shaping and informing our social and cultural lives, little is still known about what Anna Harris (2021) calls “sensory education,” that is the ways in which sensory awareness is learned and taught in expert and everyday settings. A restricted but prolific cohort of scholars has started engaging with sensing

as “a skillful and situated capacity, namely a skill that is learnt, embodied, and socialized in specific ways for distinct practices” (Grasseni, 2018, p. 217). Thinking of sensing as a skill rather than an innate ability is vital to draw attention to sensation as a social, bodily, and material practice that is learned with others and with the world (Harris, 2021). Tacit and embodied sensory knowledge is inextricable from social and cultural dispositions that regulate not only how and what we sense, but also how we experience and engage with our environment. A large portion of the existing scholarship on perceptual learning has mostly engaged with the enskilment of the senses in acquiring a craft (e.g., Grasseni, 2004, 2007; Pålsson, 1994; Rice, 2010; Trubek & Carabello, 2018). Here, however, I am interested in the underexplored “political and economic consequences of sensing practices and sensory training” (Harris, 2021, p. 14) in contested urban territories. How is sensory knowledge implicated in the reproduction of socioeconomic exclusions in gentrifying urban neighborhoods? How do government policies, media narratives, and policing practices educate residents' senses to identify undesirable bodies and behaviors in the public space of their cities? Finally, how can a sensory education cast new light on the numerous studies focusing on the ways in which “power relations in urban environments are expressed, mediated, and experienced through the senses” (Degen, 2008, p. 72)?

Questions around urban sensory politics have been tackled by scholars of sensory urbanism. This emerging field of scholarship has broadly investigated the role of the senses in the making of urban places, as well as emphasized “the extent to which the socio-spatial order of cities is a sensory order” (Jaffe et al., 2020, p. 3). This literature highlights the dynamicity of urban sensory landscapes as socio-material realities in constant transformation through the myriads of bodies, spatial practices, and uses of city dwellers (e.g., Law, 2001; Palipane, 2017). At the same time, sensory urbanism has shown that a focus on sensorial and experiential parameters of the city links the personal lives of its diverse users with broader structural changes in the city's politics and economics (Degen, 2014). These can manifest in the ways in which state authorities and their allies consciously adapt, manipulate, and frame the senses to market and brand urban places (e.g., Degen, 2008; Pardy, 2009; Summers, 2019), as well as in the “visceral micro-politics” (Pow, 2017, p. 270) and intimate socio-spatial contestations that shape and regulate urban exclusion (Low, 2013). Despite this growing interest in the role of the senses in the everyday politics of urban living and place-making, to date barely any attention has been devoted to the relationship between sensory enskilment and urban sensory politics.

This article attempts to bridge the disconnect between these two scholarly fields by problematizing how sensorial learning is entangled with the politicization and weaponization of the senses in contested and gentrifying urban spaces. Starting from instances of sensory conflict between White Dutch middle-class residents and groups of *hangjongeren* congregating in the streets of the Indische Buurt, I will bring into conversation scholarship on sensory enskilment and sensory urbanism to explore how sensitivity to a heavily racialized kind of nuisance is at once cultivated as an embodied

sensory competence and elevated to an organizing lens for white place-making. By reframing sensitivity to *hangjongeren* nuisance into a cultivated sensory practice acquired through subjective and embodied engagement with racialized security discourses and practices, I attempt to shed light on those processes of social and perceptual training through which White middle-class residents learn to perceive *hangjongeren* sensescapes as inherently dangerous, criminal, and violent.

As Asher Ghertner (2015) explains, the constant depiction of individuals and groups through the language of nuisance in public and policy discourse consolidates a sensory vocabulary that influences the terms on which spaces and bodies in the city can be described and, hence, perceived. The more a specific kind of nuisance circulates, and the more it becomes normalized into a popular aesthetic sensibility for the partitioning and ordering of city spaces and bodies. In The Netherlands, nuisance has become an oft-repeated *leitmotif* in sensationalistic media stories featuring *hangjongeren* as violent “street terrorists” intimidating entire neighborhoods with their annoying and disruptive conduct (Pakes, 2012). Quickly incorporated into safety policy, nuisance has become a fundamental avenue for the criminalization and stigmatization of Moroccan-Dutch youths and their places of residence in Dutch cities (van Swaaningen, 2005). My claim is that the increased discursive institutionalization of *hangjongeren* nuisance in Dutch urban policy is generative of a series of state-led place-making initiatives, as well as formal and informal security and policing practices that (unwittingly) hone residents' sensory awareness to specific—and not other—instantiations of urban disorder (e.g., the noise of scooters vs the noise of nightlife). This cultivated noticing, I will argue, is that which provides gentrification with an invisible sensory infrastructure that facilitates its spread in the territory.

To prove this point, I will first start my analysis by showing how racialized sensory discourses of *hangjongeren* nuisance have been incorporated in a series of national and local policy documents. I will then move on to examine how the resulting institutional and interactional engagements with said nuisance in the Indische Buurt have helped establish a “community of sense” (Ranci ere, 2009) among White middle-class residents of the area with hostile sensory and affective dispositions toward racialized youths.

THE DISCURSIVE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF HANGJONGEREN NUISANCE IN DUTCH REVANCHIST URBAN POLICY

Over the past few decades, increasing immigration and ethnic diversity have been the focus of anxious politics across Europe (de Koning & Modest, 2017). In The Netherlands in particular, public debate has been dominated by concerns around Moroccan-Dutch young men who have been singled out as especially troublesome by Dutch politics and media since the early 2000s (de Koning, 2016). The concept of nuisance played an important role in the articulation of the “*hangjongeren* problem” in Dutch public discourse. Nuisance

refers here to the experience of encroachment associated with the sensory conduct of these youths in public space—namely hanging around in large groups, listening to loud music, racing with scooters, littering local squares, setting off firecrackers, and the occasional harassment. Sensory depictions of nuisance became such a fixture of media accounts on Moroccan-Dutch youths that they inevitably seeped into a series of national and local policy documents, studies, reports, and measures tackling mounting concerns around security in urban neighborhoods with sizeable immigrant populations (Beke & van Wijk, 2001; Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid, 2008; Leidelmeijer et al., 2010; Smeets & Bervoets, 2011). These documents did not just provide institutional and scientific confirmation of a broader discourse on “Moroccan street terrorists” (de Koning, 2012). They were also responsible for elevating transgressive sensory conduct to a security issue.

The report *Samenleven met verschillen*—living together with differences—(Gemeente Amsterdam and Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2012a, 2012b), which investigates the sources of social tension and conflict in neighborhoods with an ethnically diverse population, is archetypal in this respect. The document sketches a profile of *hangjongeren* that interweaves sartorial styles, embodied appearance, and sensory transgression with moral and safety violations. Troublesome Moroccan-Dutch youths can be identified from what the report defines as “their non-verbal characteristics, and namely: the clothes they wear [hoodies], the way they stand, the sometimes aggressive gestures they make when they talk to each other, their incomprehensible language” (2012b, p. 47).¹ These characteristics, the report continues, “are most often accompanied by noise and dirt nuisance. Young people talk loudly, have the music turned up loud, drive scooters back and forth, and throw rubbish on the street or in porches. Residents are annoyed by youths treating the street as ‘a garbage dump,’ daubing things, or taking up too much space” (47). The report warns that nuisance can also escalate into intimidation—yelling, whistling, spitting, name-calling, and reprisal (e.g., vandalized property, burglary)—especially after residents seek the support of authorities (47; 2012a, p. 61). According to the report, the situation would improve by reducing the number of youths loitering in the streets.

The excerpts above reveal how “complaints about sensory disturbances function as sociocultural expressions of rejection which are connected to power relations in the city” (Low, 2013, p. 221). By virtue of their perceived poor and/or excessive sensory conduct within the Dutch sensorium—centered on silence, quiet, and orderliness—the bodies of Moroccan-Dutch youngsters in The Netherlands are racialized into an “other” whose very presence poses a threat to good Dutch citizens and their way of life (see de Koning, 2016). Here, hoodies, scooters, small waste, spatial congregations, and talk emerge as sensory (visual, aural, and haptic) racial markers that reify Moroccan-Dutch deviance and exclude *hangjongeren* from the Dutch body politic. The White Dutch sensorium, in other words, becomes “a form of hegemonic sensory order that renders racialized others’ senses as not normal” (Sekimoto, 2018, p. 94). Furthermore, the document invokes sensory demarcation practices as a “ring-fencing

strategy” (Low, 2013, p. 233) aimed at differentiating the residential spaces of the White Dutch population from the socialization spaces that Moroccan-Dutch youths ought to occupy. This reveals the assumption that White Dutch people are entitled to live free from encroachment from others, and at the same time criminalizes *hangjongeren* as space invaders, as trespassers whose transgressive conduct threatens the integrity and propriety of White Dutch residential environments (see Martineau, 2006).

The incorporation of *hangjongeren* nuisance into national and local security policy—a trend that Dutch criminologist René van Swaaningen (2005, p. 291) has dubbed “the penalization of nuisance”—has played a central role in the successful legitimization of urban revanchism and state-led gentrification in the eyes of the Dutch general public as an acceptable strategy to improve livability, generate social order, and reduce unsavory concentrations in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods (Uitermark et al., 2007). With the rise of pro-gentrification policy in The Netherlands in the mid 2000s, security and livability became increasingly entangled with a spatial “politics of banishment” (van Swaaningen, 2005, p. 296) aimed at clearing Dutch cities from nuisance-generating groups and removing them to out-of-sight places where they caused less harm.

The case of the Indische Buurt is emblematic in this respect. After briefly setting the stage by introducing some of the state-led place-making initiatives explicitly targeting racialized youths in the neighborhood, in the following section I will analyze the ways in which different types of security and policing activities—namely, nuisance resilience workshops, neighborly rumors, and policing and surveillance—become involved in the cultivation of residents’ sensory abilities to identify *hangjongeren* bodies as a safety threat.

SENSING THE FOLK DEVIL IN THE INDISCHE BUURT

As previously mentioned, the Indische Buurt is a formerly-immigrant neighborhood that recently became the target of intensive state-led residential and retail gentrification efforts aimed at breaking up the local concentration of racialized poverty by making the area more attractive to White middle-class households (Ernst & Doucet, 2014; Hagemans et al., 2016; Sakizlioglu & Lees, 2020; van Eck et al., 2020). Together with housing and retail, crime and security have played a central role in the gentrification of the Indische Buurt and its re-racialization as a white space. *Hangjongeren* in particular found themselves at the receiving end of racialized anxious discourses that positioned them as security and moral threats to the White bourgeois order in the neighborhood. Municipal figures show that *hangjongeren* nuisance has been a central issue in governmental engagements in the area since at least the early 2000s (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2005). In 2010, the Indische Buurt ranked among the top 10 Amsterdam neighborhoods with the highest level of juvenile delinquency—although, after 2011, figures started to improve (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2011, 2012, 2013). The neighborhood ranked sixth among the 20 “problematic” districts researched

in the aforementioned report *Samenleven met verschillen*, with 44% of interviewed residents reporting *hangjongeren* nuisance as the main threat to livability and security in the area.

In the wake of these reports, the local government in collaboration with housing associations planned a series of large-scale revitalization projects that explicitly targeted youth nuisance hotspots in the neighborhood. Sensory discordance between White Dutch middle-class residents and Moroccan-Dutch youths was explicitly mobilized by local institutions to justify and create consensus around exclusionary urban renewal in the area. Two examples are the regeneration of the Makassarplein and the Sumatraplantsoen, two large squares that were constructed as the neighborhood's "Achille's heel" in both policy and media accounts due to groups of *hangjongeren* who caused noise nuisance, trashed street furniture, and harassed residents (e.g., Oost-online, 2021; Stadsdeel Oost, Ymere, Eigen Haard, and de Alliantie, 2016). These large-scale revitalization projects do not just reflect the persistence of ethnic and racial bias around who belongs in public space and what constitutes desirable and acceptable conduct in the context of Dutch urban revanchism (see, e.g., Aalbers, 2011; van Gent & Musterd, 2016; Uitermark et al., 2007; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). They also shed light on the role of nuisance and sensory conflict more generally as main avenues for racialized place-making in contested urban territories experiencing gentrification. By elevating sensory disturbance to a legitimate parameter for territorial stigmatization, the penalization of *hangjongeren* nuisance makes it easier for authorities to justify special measures that further marginalize Moroccan-Dutch youths in the Indische Buurt while at the same time obfuscating the relations of power and exclusion intrinsic to the process (see Sakizlioglu & Uitermark, 2014; Wacquant, 2007).

Aside from large-scale revitalization interventions, the increasing discursive institutionalization of *hangjongeren* nuisance in the Indische Buurt gave rise to a series of formal and informal security and policing practices that, as I will show, became the (unwitting) vehicle for the transmission of sensory knowledge about racialized youths as criminal and dangerous.

Nuisance resilience workshops: State-sponsored personal security initiatives and the unwitting enrolment of racialized sensory knowledge

Sensing (in)security in the urban environment "is intimately related to cultural elaborations of – and habituation to – specific sensory regimes" (Osbourne, 2021, p. 46). This means that the embodied experience of sensory disorder—"a break in the patterns and orders in which we feel our surroundings" (47)—can give rise to feelings of insecurity and heightened perceptions of danger. Empirical studies of neighborhood disorder have shown how "perception informed by racial stereotyping and bias lies at the heart of residents' fear of crime and the prompting of broken windows-style policing strategies [... seeking] to curb even non-criminal signs or suppositions of disorder" (Bloch & Meyer, 2019, pp. 7–8; see also Quillian &

Pager, 2001). *Hangjongeren* disturbance in The Netherlands is very much subjected to the same kind of racially biased criminalization. According to Thaddeus Muller (2016), the preventive criminalization of urban disorder produced by Moroccan-Dutch youths is a strategy frequently deployed by White Dutch middle-class residents to legitimize their own demands to the police and municipal authorities to have these youths forcefully removed from public space. This is in line with what was stated by the Project Leader on Youth and Security of Amsterdam's eastern borough in an interview. When I asked whether she noticed any patterns in the residents who reported *hangjongeren* nuisance in the Indische Buurt, she answered the following:

If I can be completely honest, and maybe a bit brutal, the residents who report [*hangjongeren*] nuisance are mostly white. Immigrant residents do not file complaints so much. It could be that they don't know exactly how to do it. We mostly get complaints from highly-educated people who know their way to the municipality. But, lately, there is a new development. We receive many more complaints from expats. A lot of the complaints are from English-speaking residents. So, newcomers to the neighborhood are initially happy that they got a nice house. But then, and that's my opinion, they don't know how the neighborhood works and expect it to be quiet at night, whereas the people who live there for a longer time say "Well, it's Amsterdam! I know, it's annoying but I put earplugs on and close my window." But new residents say "It's summer, I want to keep my window open." And then they lose it because they cannot sleep. They sometimes have a point, because something is going on there. [...] But other times, there are residents who are so *obsessed* with all that happens in the street. They want to control everything and don't let anything go. I mean, move a bit away from your window and you won't see or hear anything anymore!²

This excerpt shows how racial bias toward Moroccan-Dutch youths, which manifests as a heightened sensitivity to instantiations of racialized sensory disorder, informs and shapes White middle-class residents' perceptions and actions in the Indische Buurt. Having come to believe that they are entitled to live without disturbance from others, White Dutch middle-class residents and expats demand the intervention of local authorities to safeguard their right to silence and install an idealized suburban aesthetic into other residential environments (see Martineau, 2006). At the same time, this excerpt reveals that government officials problematize White middle-class sensibilities toward *hangjongeren* nuisance as "obsessive," not skilled in what urban living entails, and in need of reform. Perceived as too contesting (or even racist), White middle-class residents come to constitute a problem for neighborhood officials.

To try and manage this overly vocal and assertive group, the eastern borough started offering “nuisance resilience workshops” – as the Project Leader for Youth and Security called them – a program of personal security training aiming to teach residents affected by *hangjongeren* nuisance how to deal with these youths while avoiding dangerous confrontations or escalating already tense situations. As I learned in an interview with the moderator, one central goal of these workshops was to deconstruct, together with the participants, the many stereotypes and prejudices that the term *hangjongeren* brings with itself.

[Residents] have to understand that the word *hangjongeren* comes with such a negative connotation that it prevents you from opening up to them. They have to realize that the word has damaging consequences. You have to acknowledge your prejudices before you can limit them.³

However, nuisance resilience workshops proved rather unsuccessful in producing mutual understanding between White middle-class residents and *hangjongeren*. As the moderator lamented,

Sometimes, [residents] understand that these youths are there because they don't have anything to do, or because there is no recreational center, or their house is too small. [...] But most of the people who come to the trainings are so angry. They don't want to learn anything and they won't learn anything. There is nothing you can do in those cases. They are angry because they want to live a quiet life but cannot sleep at night.

The Project Leader for Youth and Security shared a similar view when asked to assess the nuisance resilience workshop. Reflecting on their poor reception among White Dutch residents and expats of the Indische Buurt, she stated

When they realize that something is expected of them, they say “No no no, we don't want that. You [municipality] have to solve the problem for us. We don't want the nuisance, but we don't want to waste any time on training either.”

Due to their unpopularity, municipal funding for this project was discontinued in 2017 and, since then, nuisance resilience workshops have not been offered anymore in the Indische Buurt.

Nuisance resilience workshops emerge here as sites of intense political negotiation between the local administration and White middle-class gentrifiers in the Indische Buurt. The excerpts above suggest that these residents firmly resist ideological state-supported attempts to be educated to tolerance and, even more so, the underlying assumption that their complaints are grounded in racism (see Wekker, 2017). Rather than bridging differences and increasing mutual understanding, these workshops appear to have unintentionally heightened a sense of “us against them” and accentuated the existing cleavage

between middle-class Whites and racialized youths in the neighborhood. In my view, the ways in which the senses were mobilized during the workshops was central to establishing and enforcing a sense of “groupness” (Brubaker, 2002, p. 165) among workshop attendees that foreclosed the possibility of empathy toward *hangjongeren*.

Featuring a White middle-aged actor impersonating a rowdy *hangjongen* (see Goutier, 2018), the workshops deploy role play and sensory language to conjure and actualize participants' past embodied encounters with *hangjongeren* nuisance and then use them as immersive training scenarios through which residents can rehearse different response strategies.

When I give a workshop, I always come with an actor. We always start the session with a couple of scenarios. For example, [the actor] throws garbage around the room or makes a lot of noise. And then, together with the participants, we look at what works and what doesn't. [...] Then, I ask the participants if they have situations they want to share and we recreate them with the actor. [...] If someone experiences nuisance from scooters, no problem. We go around the room doing “Vroom, vroom, vroom!” We use our voices. Sometimes, we invite people from the audience to play the *hangjongeren* with [the actor]. [...] It is always a lot of fun when people from the audience impersonate *hangjongeren*. They are always really fun evenings!

Through hands-on exercises, these workshops serve as multisensorial group learning events where participants, under the guidance of moderators and other workshop attendees, develop and consolidate a shared environmental awareness to the racialized sensory grammar of urban (in)security. Participants, in other words, get to work together on what it is they notice in the urban environment and are thus instructed to attend to specific—and not other—sensory manifestations of urban disorder so as to navigate danger in their surroundings. What is more, simulations openly invite participants to engage in embodied and multisensorial practices of racial impersonation that do not just make a mockery of *hangjongeren*'s supposed ethnic habitus, but also potentially increase White middle-class residents' sense of distinctiveness and in-group bond against racialized others (see Wekker, 2017). By legitimizing White middle-class senses of (in)security and complaints about nuisance, these workshops become a site for the unwitting institutionalization of the White Dutch sensorium as a valid instrument for identifying and governing racialized urban deviance.

The case of nuisance resilience workshops proves that Dutch local institutions encounter similar difficulties in the “affective governance” (Vollebergh, 2020, p. 112) of White middle-class dispositions toward non-Dutch ethnic minorities as they do with their working-class counterparts (Wekker, 2017). At the same time, it calls for careful consideration of how the unintentional enrolling and transmissions of racialized sensory knowledge in state-sponsored personal security initiatives can impede the emergence of tolerance and reinforce hatred toward racialized others.

Informal community policing: Neighborly rumors as tools of sensory vivification and reorientation

Local residents' resistance to nuisance resilience workshops speaks to the difficulty of interrupting—let alone unlearning—deeply ingrained racializing perceptual habits and affects that are socially and historically acquired through sedimentation and habituation. Indeed, the production of sensory stigma happens through a long process of subtle, even implicit sensory enskilment that associates specific sensescapes with moral failure (González-Güeto, 2022). In my research, I observed how one informal community policing practice—namely, neighborly rumors—became a vehicle for the cultivation of sensory orientations functional to the recognition and reification of criminalized racial otherness in the Indische Buurt. The following excerpt from my interview with Henk,⁴ a middle-aged highly-educated White Dutch man who settled down in the Indische Buurt already in the mid 1980s, clearly illustrates this point.

Two or three years ago we had really... I would say a critical situation. There was really *a gang*. To what extent they were criminal, I don't know. But they were hanging around here, making noise. They were using the square to meet and then there was hanging around, mistreating women, shouting at women in a misogynistic way. I know some of my neighbors really had troubles with them. They were really aggressive. [...] There was a lot of shouting and noise and the idea they would intrude in your building, would use drugs or whatever. Or would hang around and be kind of intimidating for some people, for women in particular. [...] But the police responded really well. They said, "if there is trouble, phone us and we will come immediately." I have the idea that they more or less controlled it.

Here, we witness how racialized narratives of *hangjongeren* deviance travel and are shared in routine spaces and activities—like entering or exiting the building. Consisting mostly of "emotionally charged anecdotes linked to the senses" (Vollebergh, 2022), these stories function as tools of "sensory vivification" (Low, 2015, p. 306) that entice Henk to see, hear, and feel the same way his neighbors do in their encounters with *hangjongeren*. While Henk does not report ever being personally harassed or victimized, the incidents shared by his neighbors appear to play a role in re-orientating how he perceives the "shouting and noise" produced by these youths from a mere disturbance to a manifestation of crime *in potentia*—namely, home intrusions and sexual harassment. Through these stories, sound encroachment caused by *hangjongeren* conjures in Henk the sense of an impending physical threat—"the idea they would intrude in your building [...] and be kind of intimidating for some people." The creeping sounds, in other words, come to be perceived as acts of racialized touching, as an undesired contact that violates the integrity and propriety of the White middle-class home and (female) body. The circulation of rumors and the sensory vivification and reorientation they produced in residents like Henk encouraged an

atmosphere of preemptive criminalization that was functional to demand the removal of these youths from the square.

Lisette, an elderly White middle-class Dutch woman who lives since the mid-1990s in an owner-occupied apartment situated on a small garden square, points to the same relationship between neighborly rumors and cultivated racialized sensorial readings. In particular, Lisette's account problematizes how rumors have heightened her sensitivity to a group of *hangjongeren* gathering on her square and, subsequently, her sense of insecurity in a neighborhood she always loved and felt at home in.

In 20 years in this neighborhood, I never felt unsafe. You know, I myself am old now. But I have heard from my Iranian neighbors... They have two beautiful daughters. I heard that these girls are often catcalled or harassed by *hangjongeren* in our square. I told them that they never bothered me, but they said "Well, they do bother our girls!" I have to say that this, lately, makes me feel... Well, maybe not completely unsafe. But yeah, these *hangjongeren* in our square... What I last heard is that they tried to open a delivery van when the deliverer walked away, and everyone could see them. They also leave rubbish in the square, which we clean up every day. This makes me feel a little more unsafe.⁵

The grievances lamented by Lisette also appear to originate from racialized narratives circulating among neighbors that mobilize the same rich sensory language we encountered in Henk's interview. By elevating hanging around, noise disturbance, and disruptive conduct to racial markers that sensorily differentiate the bodies of these youths as criminalized and deviant, these stories served as sensory lessons that guided Lisette in the rediscovery of her own environment. The woman's continued exposure to these rumors directed her perceptive attention to those sounds, sights, and haptics that mark *hangjongeren* not only racially but also criminally. This cultivated noticing led her, in turn, to change her affective disposition toward the youths in her square from benevolent or maybe indifferent—"they never bothered me"—to anxious—"this makes me feel a little more unsafe."

Based on the above, neighborly rumors can be seen as "invoking a common reality and sustaining a common emotional tone" (Mepschen, 2016, p. 122) among residents, where *hangjongeren* feature as the "mutual"—but perhaps inflated—"focus of attention" (119) around which a community of sense assembles. Lisette's reference to her Iranian neighbors is also noteworthy here, in that it signals how racialized sensory criminalization in the Dutch context develops across ethnic lines. I will come back to this point later in the text.

Institutional policing as a means of performative perceptual training

My interview with Lisette also points to institutional policing practices as another potential vector of sensory education. In particular,

the following excerpt sheds light on the ways in which neighborly rumors and institutional policing feed into each other in sustaining and promoting racialized sensorial readings of urban insecurity in the Indische Buurt.

Once I was at the Dappermarkt [a street market near the Indische Buurt] – I often go there to do my groceries – and I read a letter from the municipality saying that there are a lot of robberies there lately. Someone there told me they steal gold and silver necklaces [she makes the gesture of snatching my necklace with her hand]. And I think “oh God!” Of course, it's a small group who does that. But everyone knows that this kind of crimes are perpetrated by Moroccan youths.

Public safety messages are a policing strategy frequently deployed by Dutch municipalities and police departments to inform residents about specific security concerns and let them know about what authorities are doing in that regard. These messages can be either sent via post to all residents of a specific area or, as in this case, affixed in public spaces like markets to inform all space users who do not reside in the vicinity. As we see above, the message encountered by Lisette at the market provides the occasion for the sharing and circulation among stall owners and other customers of rehearsed racializing narratives of *hangjongeren* deviance that once again conflate violent touching (street robberies) with racialized touching. To make sense of this impending threat, Lisette and her interlocutors tune in to an already-available set of racialized sensory frameworks that will supposedly help them locate danger in their surroundings and prevent victimization. Her matter-of-fact statement that only “Moroccan youths” are capable of such violence reflects how internalized sensory imaginaries of racialized urban deviance gain greater legitimacy and truth value the more they travel along (institutionally facilitated) networks of residents (Ghertner, 2015).

Jeroen, a young White Dutch middle-class newcomer to the Indische Buurt, also problematized how his exposure to institutional policing practices—this time in conjuncture with sensationalist media accounts—helped him recognize danger in his neighborhood by laying down a racialized visual grammar for reading bodies and places in urban space.

I always liked [the Indische Buurt], and felt at home here. It did feel a bit less safe when there was the coffee-shop⁶ still in the street, and when the square was not renovated yet. It was a bit less legible, maybe.

Legible in what sense?

In the sense that I wasn't sure what kind of places these places were, and what happens there, who worked there. So basically, I didn't know the neighborhood very well, I didn't really know people around

here, I didn't really know the neighbors. Like, there was this bar in the street that was raided a few years ago. [...] There were some stories in the media of it being frequented by criminals. And apparently, they were dealing drugs there as well, so it was a bit shady. [...] It used to be very busy there, lots of cars were waiting. Nowadays it is much quieter, I would say. There were lots of complaints. There were cars parked on the street and a lot of people hanging around. And there used to be [security] cameras [all around it], which were placed in response to the complaints. [...] Now, I became better at seeing things that are out of the ordinary. I kind of recognize people who are dealing drugs or doing other stuff they are not supposed to do. I became better at reading the way people move, they are waiting. Cars being parked in particular places.

Jeroen refers here to Café Plan B on the Makassarplein, one of the two squares that underwent massive renovations following residents' complaints about *hangjongeren* nuisance and crime (see start of this section). Often described in the media as a meeting point for Moroccan drug dealers and criminals (Redactie Het Parool, 2016; Vugts, 2016), this bar was forcefully closed down in March 2016 after a police raid that led to the arrest of seven people. In this excerpt, Jeroen relates his own feeling of insecurity to his inability “to read” the context of a square with a lot of immigrant residents and immigrant-owned businesses—a clear manifestation of implicit racial bias. To tackle the square's reputation as a crime-ridden area and reduce fear by White middle-class newcomers, local authorities imposed what Torin Monahan (2010, p. 10) has termed a “marginalizing surveillance” specifically targeting “populations considered to be risky, dangerous, or untrustworthy thereby reifying identities of suspicion and legitimizing the ongoing selective deployment of surveillance.” Media coverage of the raid provided further direction on how to read racialized spaces during the redevelopment process (see Mele, 2016). This interview thus shows how, in the time when this coherent read was still in the making, White middle-class residents like Jeroen felt unsafe for fear of overstepping racial boundaries that would put them at risk of victimization. Once the institutional read was installed, White fear partially subsided as they were given the means to visually discern between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and thus safe and dangerous people and areas.

These last two excerpts suggest that the perceived threat embodied by *hangjongeren* does not simply precede and arouse fear in White middle-class residents. Rather, institutional policing practices are “just as productive of the racialized social threats they imagine as [they are] reactive to those threats” (Bloch & Meyer, 2019, p. 1110). Capitalizing on the hegemonic sensory apparatus of Dutch racism, institutional policing practices can contribute to the performative cultivation of those attentional orientations that sustain racialized sensory criminalization and the subsequent reification of criminalized racial otherness in urban space.

Minoritized residents and resistance to sensory education

My predominant focus on the racialized enskilment of White middle-class sensoria in the context of Dutch revanchism should not make us lose sight of the fact that minoritized communities in The Netherlands also experience *hangjongeren* sensescapes as problematic. As I indicated above, racialized sensory criminalization is not exclusive to White middle-class residents but rather assembles an ethnically diverse moral community that subscribes to the hegemonic ideal of the respectable Dutch middle-class neighborhood as quiet, clean, and orderly. Existing scholarship has also emphasized “the haunting shadow” that racialized narratives of *hangjongeren* criminality cast on minoritized communities in The Netherlands—including the Moroccan-Dutch—and the summary dismissal of “bad Moroccan youths” as a strategy to perform and reclaim respectability (de Koning & Vollebergh, 2019, p. 396; see also Pinkster et al., 2020).

However, during my fieldwork I encountered explicit resistance against what was felt as the conscious inculcation of stigmatizing sensory values that were instrumental to the institutional project of white place-making in the Indische Buurt. This came up especially in my interview with Madely, a Surinamese-Dutch woman in her early forties who was born and grew up in the neighborhood. Elaborating on the relationship between groups of Moroccan-Dutch youths in public space and feelings of insecurity, the woman said

Now, that's weird. 'Cause I never ever felt [insecure]. The opposite is actually true for me. When I was 15 or 16 and I was going to the city center to party with friends and I took the tram back home [...] I was so happy when I saw those groups of Moroccan youths there, because I thought “Oh, thank God I'm not alone! If something happens, they will help me!” So, I was very happy when I saw them grouping together, because I had... I was happy when there were people around. And that's maybe something... I think a cultural difference. That I like to see a lot of people, and my mum as well, she is happy when she sees and hears people gathering. But the Dutch, it's a real apart sense [sic]. I don't know how to explain it, but I think there is sometimes a mismatch. [...] I never felt unsafe, never. But I can imagine that... I don't have that experience but I can really imagine that when people are afraid of you and they are getting fed that you act a certain way... [...] It was the government, who was... [...] I think that the government used that [fear] to improve the neighborhood. And they succeeded.

Madely explicitly identifies the incompatibility between White Dutch and minoritized residents' sensescapes as the source of perceived insecurity in the Indische Buurt. While the correlation of certain visual, sonic, and haptic stimuli—the sight and sounds of racialized masculine bodies congregating in public space—were perceived as

intrinsically synonymous with insecurity and danger by White Dutch middle-class residents, these same sensory inputs were experienced as familiar and reassuring by other racialized residents acutely aware of inhabiting a White nation (see Osbourne, 2021). On the one hand, then, this interview indicates that racial positioning heavily influences and shapes the way people sense (Obasogie, 2014). On the other, it signals instead that while part of the minoritized residents subscribe to the increasing institutionalization of White sensoria as a legitimate measure to identify safety and danger in the city, others actively resist this prevailing sensory regime by reversing the negative values attached to racialized sensory markers so as to make claims on the city and resist the displacement they have been subjected to (see Howes & Classen, 2014; Summers, 2021). This illustrates the rich dynamics of sensory contestation put in motion by the racialized politics of gentrification and increased policing of bodies perceived to be unruly and undesirable in the regenerated urban environment.

CONCLUSION

Sensory criminalization often serves as an important vehicle for the racialized demarcation of space in contemporary cities (González-Güeto, 2022). In this article, I have focused on the criminalization of *hangjongeren* sensescapes in the Indische Buurt in Amsterdam, a formerly degraded immigrant neighborhood that is now undergoing a substantial process of state-led gentrification. Rather than simply accounting for how the senses participate and sustain exclusionary urban renewal in the area, I have bridged scholarship on sensory urbanism and sensory enskilment to elucidate upon the production, cultivation, and transmission of sensory and affective orientations among White Dutch middle-class residents that conflate Moroccan-Dutch youths' sensescapes with urban disorder and insecurity.

The policy documents and interviews I analyzed above highlight how institutional and interactional engagements with *hangjongeren* nuisance in the Indische Buurt can become unwitting vehicles of sensory enskilment through which White middle-class residents become sensorily proficient in recognizing and reifying racialized youths in public space as disorderly and, hence, threatening. A focus on sensory enskilment in the context of urban revanchism thus reveals how social structure becomes incorporated as a “*visceral bedrock of know-how*” (Wacquant, 2005, p. 467; original emphasis) enfolded into the very organization of the perceptual system and materialized in the urban environment through embodied perceptual habit. Overall, these accounts testify to the capacity of anxious racializing narratives about *hangjongeren* to function as constitutive social practices capable of (re)composing the sensory field in which perception occurs (Obasogie, 2014), thus favoring the cultivation of perceptual capacity to sense danger in specific instantiations of racialized urban disorder. Sensing practices and sensorial training are, in other words, fraught with political and economic consequences that implicitly reinforce and sustain urban processes of racial stratification and discrimination.

Ultimately, this article proves that sensing practice and sensory training can serve as a potent—although subtle—tool for exclusionary place-making, especially in neighborhoods undergoing dispossession by gentrification. Studying the ways in which sensory knowledge is implicated in the reproduction of socioeconomic exclusions in contested urban territories can shed new light on discussions around urban sensory politics and draw attention to the enrolment of the senses in revanchist urban renewal. In particular, this recognition that gentrification is bound with more or less formalized practices of sensory learning provides a new vantage point which views gentrification as itself a process of “embodied enculturation” (Harris, 2021, p. 14) that iteratively (re)produces those collective sensibilities and dispositions instrumental to its own success. Becoming aware of how our cultivated sensory and affective orientations can confirm and uphold existing geographies of power in the city is a vital first step toward defusing the structural injustices that gentrification feeds on.

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ENDNOTES

¹All excerpts from the report *Samenleven met verschillen* are translated from Dutch by the author.

²All excerpts from the interview with the Project Leader for Youth and Security of Amsterdam's eastern borough are translated from Dutch by the author.

³All excerpts from the interview with the workshop moderator are translated from Dutch by the author.

⁴All names are pseudonyms.

⁵All excerpts from the interview with Lisette are translated from Dutch by the author.

⁶A coffeeshop in The Netherlands is a commercial establishment where people can legally buy cannabis for personal consumption.

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