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Young Asian Dutch constructing Asianness

Understanding the role of Asian popular culture

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CHAPTER 3

Asian Parties in the Netherlands: (Re)producing Asianness in Dutch Nightlife

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Clubbing, one of the quintessential pastimes of adolescents and young adults in contemporary Western societies, has often been linked to the articulation of a variety of group identifications based on amongst others social class, sexual orientation, (life) style and (musical) taste (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; MacRae, 2004; Malbon, 1998; Thornton, 1995). Hence, in the Netherlands the clubbing and nightlife landscape offers a diverse range of venues and programming for different audiences and 'scenes' based on music and lifestyle preferences. In addition, an increasing amount of Dutch nightlife programming caters to specific ethnic-national groups, including people of Surinamese, Moroccan and Turkish origin (Boogaarts, 2008; De Bruin, 2011).

Since the 1990s so-called 'Asian parties' are held across the Netherlands. Rather than cater to one specific ethnic-national group, Asian parties cater to youth of diverse Southeast and East Asian ethnic-national origin including Indonesian, Chinese and Vietnamese. On average almost every week an Asian party is organized in the Netherlands with some attracting as many as 1200 visitors (see also Boogaarts, 2009; De Bruin, 2011). Thus, many young Asian Dutch come together at Asian parties where they may engender and articulate panethnic Asian rather than (or as well as) specific ethnic-national group identifications. Given the centrality of a notion of group identifications as well as the articulation thereof at club nights (e.g., MacRae, 2004; Malbon, 1998), it is important to investigate the relationship between Asian identifications or a sense of 'Asianness', and Asian parties. This seems to be even more important as the emergence of a sense of Asianness among young Asian Dutch may be linked to the advent of Asian parties in the Netherlands.

While many studies on club cultures and nightlife economy have provided valuable insights into the consumption thereof by clubbers as well as clubbers' motivations and social identifications (e.g., Boogaarts, 2009; Demant & Østergaard, 2007; MacRae, 2004; Malbon, 1998; Northcote, 2006; Thornton, 1995), fewer studies have explicitly and extensively directed attention to the producers and the production of club nights (e.g., De Bruin, 2011; Hollands & Chatterton, 2003; Thornton, 1995). Notwithstanding consumers' agency – and consequently the importance of researching clubbers' consumption of nightlife spaces – it can be argued that examining producers and production processes is essential for understanding club cultures and the group identifications articulated in and through them. After all, producers play a pivotal role in determining the look and feel of club nights and hence the possibilities for the articulation of group identifications at these. Research into how a sense of Asianness is facilitated by and at Asian parties should therefore start with looking closely at the producers thereof.

Investigating the producers of Asian parties may be exceptionally worthwhile as most are of Asian origin and have been or still are consumers of Asian parties themselves. Why and how they produce Asian parties may therefore be guided by economic rationale as well as their possible sense of Asianness. By means of observations at Asian parties and interviews with Asian party organizers, DJs, MCs and others professionally involved in

the Asian party scene, this study explores how Asian party producers' involvement in the production of Asian parties is driven by economic motives and whether and how it is driven by (and is at the same time an articulation of) their possible sense of Asianness. Ultimately, the objective of this study is to gain an understanding of the relationship between Asian party producers' sense of Asianness and the production of Asian parties and Asianness in Dutch nightlife.

Economic and Moral Motives in the Night-Time Economy

Clubbing has become one of the most important leisure pursuits and spending priorities of adolescents and young adults in Western societies. It is thus no surprise that the night-time economy attracts a growing flow of capital investments by large corporations, turning clubbing and club culture into proper business interests (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). In conjunction with this, the producers of club nights – e.g., the club organizers, DJs and MCs – have become increasingly entrepreneurial (McRobbie, 2002). Also, the interdependent relationship between producers of club nights, club owners, and the media, which Thornton (1995) already pointed to, seems to have only intensified over the years. Thus, McRobbie (2002) observes that thinking commercial and acting in self-interest are simply part and parcel of being a cultural producer in today's cultural field. And while McRobbie does not consider club producers to be part of the cultural field, she explicitly attributes the cultural field's commercialization to the growing influence of club culture and its entrepreneurial ways on it.

Following McRobbie (2002), it could be argued that producers of club nights are guided by self-interest and economic motives only, and that their main objective is to accumulate economic capital. However, Banks (2006) convincingly argues that cultural producers may be driven by economic as well as moral motives simultaneously. Thus, cultural producers may work to generate a profit while at the same time making an effort to achieve social or political goals. Banks (2006) argues that cultural producers can feel strongly connected to the 'community' they are a part of and act in a manner that is beneficial to the advancement of that community. This may certainly apply to the producers of Asian parties as they may engender a sense of Asianness, feel connected to the Asian Dutch community and may consequently be motivated to 'do good' for the Asian Dutch community.

DATA AND METHOD

Between March 2010 and December 2011 participatory observations were conducted at several Asian parties in or near Amsterdam. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals involved in the production of Asian parties. Through personal and professional networks of the first author, Asian party organizers, promoters, DJs and MCs were approached and eventually ten Asian party producers were interviewed. Most of the interviews took place in public spaces, including a library

and coffee houses, while two participants were interviewed in their private homes and one interview took place in the first author's home. The interviews lasted between 30 and 85 minutes and were conducted and transcribed in Dutch while salient quotes were translated into English for inclusion in this paper. The names of participants were changed to ensure their anonymity.

As with all qualitative research the role of the researcher and his or her subjectivities have to be acknowledged and reflected upon. The first author is of Asian origin himself and identifies as Asian Dutch as well. Furthermore, from 2000 to 2008 he was involved in the production of Asian parties and Asian Dutch social media himself. The first author's subject position may have had several consequences for this study. Since he was involved in the production of Asian parties himself, he has a relatively up-to-date working knowledge of, as well as networks in, the Asian party scene. This has been a great advantage in identifying which Asian parties to visit, who to approach for interviews and what questions to ask. Most producers knew the first author from when he was involved in the production of Asian parties himself – albeit sometimes superficially or only by name. Most likely these existing relationships have played a role in succeeding to recruit participants for this study: all the producers approached agreed to be interviewed (two producers could not be interviewed due to conflicting schedules). In addition, existing relationships as well as a perceived shared sense of Asianness may have contributed to swiftly build up rapport with the participants, which subsequently led to very open and candid interviews. This has particularly been the case with interviewing DJ Rockstar who is the first author's younger brother. A disadvantage of the first author's particular subject position may be that it poses a risk for an unbiased interpretation of the interview data. This point was addressed by continuously scrutinizing and reflecting upon the interview data and analyses thereof through discussions between the first and the second author. Furthermore, the first author ensured to remain a critical distance from both participants and data by engaging in critical self-reflexivity throughout the research process which ultimately also led him to analyse his own involvement in the Asian party scene.

Engendering a Sense of Asianness at and through Asian Parties

Before the Asian party producers interviewed for this study became involved in the production of Asian parties, they had been consumers thereof themselves. Asian parties have played, and continue to play, an important and in some cases pivotal role in the everyday lives of the producers. They all have vivid and pleasurable memories of visiting Asian parties, partly since for most of them Asian parties served as their gateway into Dutch nightlife. It was at Asian parties where most participants started their 'career' as nightlife consumers at a young age, sometimes as young as thirteen years old. When they were teenagers it was difficult to get into mainstream nightlife venues and club nights due to their young age. However, Asian parties were less strict about age and when the producers tagged along with older friends, siblings or cousins, they were allowed in. Following Thornton (1995) Asian parties can thus be regarded as cultural spaces where the producers could mingle with older clubbers, familiarize themselves with the codes

and conducts of urban nightlife, and be socialized into nightlife culture. Visiting Asian parties was the producers' first step into adulthood away from their parents, and can be seen as a rite of passage.

Asian parties were also the very first explicitly panethnic Asian Dutch public spaces the producers encountered. Some of the producers were already familiar with ethnic-national specific events including Chinese New Year festivities and so-called Indo parties. But before they started visiting Asian parties the producers had never consumed spaces deliberately aimed at people of diverse Asian origin. At Asian parties the producers interacted with many peers of different Asian origin and befriended them, and consequently the producers' current circle of Asian Dutch friends includes not just co-ethnics but people of different Asian ethnic-national origin as well. For young people one of the main motivations to visit nightlife spaces is to meet peers, especially since these spaces attract a relatively homogenous crowd of peers who have similar (music) tastes and lifestyles (Thornton, 1995). However, at Asian parties people with different musical tastes and lifestyles come together, and with regards to ethnic-national origin the crowd is less homogenous than for instance crowds at Turkish club nights (Boogaarts, 2008). Nonetheless, at Asian parties most of the producers experience(d) a high degree of physical similarity and cultural proximity between them and their peers of different ethnic-national origin as the following interview extracts illustrate:

I do feel like the people who are present at the party, they are people who look more like me. (...) yes it's easier to connect with them. (DJ Juice, DJ/promoter)

Often when you see a Chinese or Vietnamese or someone Asian [at an Asian party]... you don't know him but you start talking to each other, then there's a click right away... it has always been like that. (DJ Maze, DJ/promoter)

I don't know... I simply feel a connection [with other Asian Dutch]... Yes, that's because of my [Asian] roots. (...) It's just easier to socialize with one another. (Missy, DJ/MC/organizer)

What these interview extracts point to, is that at and through Asian parties these producers identify with people of different Asian ethnic-national origin based on perceived shared physical and cultural attributes. In turn, this facilitates the interaction with other young Asian Dutch and the development of friendships with them. This is further underlined by MC Flow, who explains how he felt about the first Asian parties he visited:

[Asian parties] really meant a lot to me. I had the feeling I belonged somewhere, that I had friends.

The producers felt a sense of togetherness and community at Asian parties and shared the feeling that they and the other visitors are 'one'. It has been argued that experiencing a sense of belonging and sameness is inherent to clubbing (e.g., MacRae, 2004; Thornton, 1995), hence the feelings of belonging and sameness that the producers experience(d)

at Asian parties could be located in the act of clubbing per se. However, notwithstanding the role of the latter, what the accounts of most of the producers underline is that their feelings of belonging and sameness are in particular related to their sense of Asianness. This is made clear succinctly by Asian party organizer Jeffrey:

[Asian parties are about] getting together [as one]. So if you're at an Asian party... yes well, they are *all* Asian. You won't go like: "you're Chinese", "you're Vietnamese" ... No, "we're *Asian!*"

Most of the producers interviewed identify as Asian at Asian parties, and they are thus articulating new group identifications that transcend older or more traditional ethnic-national identifications (e.g., Chinese or Vietnamese). This shared sense of Asianness appears to be more conducive to feelings of belonging at Asian parties than the act of clubbing per se. To facilitate Asian identifications, young Asian Dutch privilege perceived similarities between them and their Asian Dutch peers over perceived ethnic-national differences. Furthermore, they construct a new group 'identity' based on these perceived similarities, which is in line with the notion of 'identity' being imagined and socially constructed (Baumann, 1996; Jenkins, 2002; Mannitz, 2011).

As Mannitz (2011) has argued, the construction of new group identities requires special creative efforts from the social actors involved. This is especially true for young Asian Dutch as generally the everyday social contexts they engage with do not facilitate and endorse the development of a sense of Asianness. At home ethnic-national cultural identifications may be privileged, as for instance parents of young Chinese Dutch may want their children to be more 'Chinese' (Chow, Zwier, & Van Zoonen, 2008). Furthermore, despite the promise of cultural diversity and social and symbolic inclusion, at school, in public discourse, and in mainstream media and popular culture in the Netherlands the values and norms of the dominant cultural group are privileged, leading to a monocultural White imagination of Dutchness (Awad & Roth, 2011; Mannitz, 2011). Constructing a hybrid hostland-homeland identity (e.g., Chinese-Dutch) may be a way for young Asian Dutch to position themselves in and vis-à-vis the established sociocultural spaces they inhabit, as has been observed with other ethnic minorities (e.g., Bennett, 2000; Mannitz, 2011). But creatively more demanding and arguably more compelling is young Asian Dutch' solution to imagine panethnic Asian identities: completely new collective identities which are more detached from imaginations of homeland or hostland identities. Young Asian Dutch are thus clearly "demarcating their own sense of collective identity" (Bennett, 2000, p. 118).

The imagination of these new Asian identities requires the construction of a common narrative that resonates with young Asian Dutch, one that suggests historical continuity, coherence and unity to young Asian Dutch as well as 'outsiders' (Bennett, 2000). To speak with Hobsbawm (1983), young Asian Dutch have (had) to invent an Asian tradition. The notion of shared values and 'culture' serves this project. This is underlined when the producers are asked why and how they identify with Asian Dutch of different ethnic-national origin:

(...) we are all Asians. We understand each other. We have different countries [of origin], but we think alike, we have the same culture. (Jeffrey)

At home I speak Vietnamese to my parents and my parents believe that that should never change, that's how I have been raised. (...) It's like that for most young Asians, they have maintained their language and culture. (DJ Maze)

Indonesian Dutch Jeffrey and Vietnamese Dutch DJ Maze subscribe to the notion of shared 'Asian values' and 'Asian culture' as articulated in for instance 'similar upbringing' and 'similar relationships with parents'. According to them this forges a bond and an understanding between young Asian Dutch of different ethnic-national origin. DJ Maze further adds that Asians "have a sense of honor", "work hard" and "are focused on academic achievements". Other producers mention that Asian Dutch are "polite", "well-behaved" and "disciplined". By describing 'Asian culture' and people of Asian origin in terms of positive traits mainly, the producers construct an idealized Asianness. This betrays a conscious or unconscious internalization of the essentialistic notion that people of Asian descent are 'model minorities', a trope that has gained much currency in Western public discourse (e.g., Espiritu, 1992; Chow et al., 2008). Identifying as and being perceived as a member of a particular 'good' social group may generate symbolic capital for individuals (Bennett, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986; Halter, 2000). This may explain why idealized notions of Asianness and Asian Dutch as model minorities particularly resonate with the Asian party producers and other young Asian Dutch, and provide salient points for identifying as Asian.

The fact that most of the producers share a sense of Asianness by no means implies that they ignore possible differences between people of various Asian ethnic-national origin, or that they do not engender more 'traditional' ethnic-national sensibilities themselves. The producers are aware of possible differences and sometimes make them explicit during the interviews, but they emphasize similarities rather than differences. This reveals a commitment to, and believe in, the idea of an Asian Dutch 'community-in-difference' (Baumann, 1996; Mannitz, 2011) which they themselves are members of. Furthermore, the producers consciously articulate their panethnic Asian and ethnic-national identifications in conjunction with one another. They position themselves as for instance Chinese or Indonesian as well as Asian rather effortlessly and attach different meanings to their sense of Asianness and their sense of Chineseness, Indonesianness and so forth depending on social context. This is strikingly illustrated by the account of Indonesian Dutch MC Flow who "has always felt Indonesian". His Indonesian Dutch parents gave him an 'Indonesian upbringing' and he has always been surrounded by Indonesian relatives. For MC Flow this Indonesian sociocultural context has played an essential role in negotiating a sense of Indonesianness in Dutch society. But MC Flow also articulates a sense of Asianness and he consciously differentiates between this and his sense of Indonesianness:

I feel Indonesian yes. (...) Very often I would join my parents when they visited friends or relatives and were having dinner at their places. It made me feel Indonesian. (...) That Asian feeling is actually something outside of my family. That is something that you do outside of the house when you're together with different Asian cultures. So, then you're not just with Indonesians, but also with Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and so forth. To me, that's the Asian feeling; mixing with different cultures.

MC Flow and other producers show a high degree of self-reflexivity where their cultural group identifications and the articulations thereof are concerned. Furthermore, through and at Asian parties they have developed the competence to negotiate intra-Asian differences in favor of a newly imagined collective and more cosmopolitan Asianness. Following Baumann (1996) and Mannitz (2011) it can be argued that the producers are very well capable of deliberately constructing, combining and shifting between different cultural group identifications and giving (new) meaning to these identifications depending on social context.

What ultimately becomes clear is that Asian sensibilities are not generally encouraged or facilitated within the home and the family of young Asian Dutch. Thus, having a cultural space outside the home where young Asian Dutch can come together is essential for the creation and articulation of a sense of Asianness. Asian parties serve that purpose for the Asian party producers as these were the first spaces where they could meet young Asian Dutch of different Asian ethnic-national origin and engage in the imagination, negotiation and consumption of Asianness. Hence, Asian parties can be seen as 'laboratories' where the producers could experiment with their Asian identities (Jansz, 2005) and where this new Asianness could be materialized and expressed. Without Asian parties, these producers may not have engendered a sense of Asianness and formed panethnic Asian friendships.

Making Profits and Careers in and Through the Asian Party Scene

As discussed above, through visiting Asian parties the Asian party producers were socialized into the 'Asian scene'. As Asian party consumers they accumulated (embodied) 'Asian' cultural capital; they learned what 'Asianness' entailed and how to 'act Asian'. In addition, they built up 'Asian' social capital by meeting and befriending Asian Dutch peers. The producers felt a sense of belonging at Asian parties and thus for them the transition from consuming to producing Asian parties felt 'natural' and logical. Bryan, an Asian party organizer and manager of Asian artists, explains why he started to organize Asian parties:

I am Asian myself and I have been part of this [Asian scene] for years. So I know what the [audience] want and what the market is [like]. And it is an interesting target audience, also because they are in my network.

Bryan mentions his Asian origin as a reason for getting involved in the production of Asian parties. But more salient are his knowledge of, and networks in, the Asian party

scene which he developed as a long-time consumer of Asian parties. Without these he would not have started organizing Asian parties, regardless of his Asian origin. Clearly, the stocks of cultural and social capital Bryan and other producers accumulated at and through Asian parties provided them with the (business) opportunity to become involved in the production of Asian parties themselves. The accumulation of Asian cultural and social capital may not have been strategic and deliberately meant to generate business opportunities from the start, as initially this most likely occurred while the producers were 'simply' consuming and enjoying Asian parties like other clubbers. Still, the producers' self-reflexive accounts of how and why they got involved in the production of Asian parties reveals that they are very much aware of the value of the knowledge and networks they have acquired while and through consuming Asian parties. Theirs is a deliberate act to make these carefully gained capitals 'work' for them and to transform their Asian cultural and social capital into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

From the accounts of the Asian party producers it becomes evident that to a degree their actions and dispositions are guided by economic self-interest. In this sense the producers resemble the owners of the club venues they use, who are first and foremost entrepreneurs who hold profit maximization among their main objectives (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; Thornton, 1995). Club owners only facilitate Asian parties in their venues because they believe young Asian Dutch are a lucrative 'target audience', and the producers interviewed for this study are aware of that. But rather than critically assessing the club owners' motives, the producers endorse them. In fact, they too approach the production of Asian parties in a professional business-like manner. This is emphasized by the fact that during the interviews the producers refer to young Asian Dutch as a 'target audience' too, and they talk extensively about Asian Dutch' spending behavior, turnover figures, and attendance numbers, which they take as indicators for success. The congruence between club owners' and producers' economic objectives is made explicit by the following excerpt from an interview with Asian party organizer Jeffrey:

I always keep track of the average spending. I find that very important for myself and for the club owners. At a regular party the [average] spending [per person] is 11 euros. (...) At Asian parties the average spending is between 13 and 16 euros.

Here Jeffrey unambiguously positions himself as a proxy for the club owners, keeping a close eye on their interests. Focusing on the bar spending is also in the producers' own interest as club owners may decide to discontinue particular Asian parties if revenues are lower than expected. Furthermore, some organizers receive a percentage of bar revenues and hence benefit directly from higher spending on beverages. So, while Asian party producers are independent entrepreneurs rather than employees of club owners, their close and interdependent relationship does point to the co-optation of Asian party producers into the mainstream nightlife economy. This is in concurrence with Thornton's (1995) suggestion that even 'alternative' or 'underground' club cultures are not isolated from 'the mainstream' and may depend on it, and it underlines the notion that cultural producers are driven by the logic of the market (McRobbie, 2002).

All the producers interviewed regard young Asian Dutch' high spending on beverages as a unique selling point vis-à-vis non-Asian Dutch clubbers, and some speak of this in rather admiring terms. Thus, while Missy, a well-known MC with years of experience in organizing mainstream club nights, explains how Asian Dutch clubbers' spending behavior at the first Asian party she organized surprised her, it is also clear how impressed she was by this:

They have a lot of money, especially the Chinese. And they drink a lot. I never expected that so many bottles of whiskey would be finished. The tequila was completely finished, the beer was almost finished! (...) I have noticed how Chinese spend more money [than other Asians]. They keep on spending!

Interestingly, Missy's observation that Chinese Dutch spend more than other Asian Dutch has led her to focus more on Chinese Dutch, for instance by advertising in Chinese Dutch media. This is salient because Missy herself is not of Chinese but of Indo-Dutch and Moluccan origin, and because this seems to conflict with the idea that Asian parties are nightlife spaces meant for Asian Dutch of various ethnic-national origin, not just (mainly) Chinese. Thus, economic objectives guide Missy's actions as she focusses on the clubbers who spend the most, even when this may have consequences for the panethnic Asian makeup of the audience at her Asian party as well as for the participation of her co-ethnics. Again, this reaffirms the notion that 'cultural production is increasingly driven by the imperatives of market and consumer culture' (McRobbie, 2002, p. 525).

Most Asian party organizers act in a professional, business-like manner and spend as little as possible on the production of their Asian parties in an effort to maximize profits. They try to keep things 'simple' and stick to a tested formula rather than taking risks and adding new elements to their Asian parties. This is acknowledged by Missy, when asked how she feels about the various Asian parties:

Missy: They all look alike. It's just a different name, the same DJs, the same music.

RK: Can you distinct them from regular parties?

Missy: Oh yes. Yes, that's just because Asian people go there. But other than that... no, not really.

Observations conducted at Asian parties confirm Missy's account; at most Asian parties the same DJs play the same popular Western r&b, hip hop and house music. While at for example Turkish Dutch club nights Turkish music is played (Boogaarts, 2008), at Asian parties Asian music is not or sporadically played. A few organizers, including Missy, may book additional singers and dancers of Asian origin, and other markers of Asianness such as Asian decorations and food stuffs are present at some Asian parties. However, in general organizers will not spend (much) money on these extras as they have found these are not needed to attract young Asian Dutch to their Asian parties. Thus indeed, Asian parties do not differ much from one another nor from non-Asian mainstream club nights, in terms of setting, styling and music, and this has been the general practice for many years.

As Missy remarked, Asian parties' main difference from mainstream club nights is their Asian Dutch audience. While the majority of clubbers at Asian parties are of Asian origin, the interviews and observations do, in fact, reveal that overall the share of non-Asian Dutch visitors at Asian parties has increased over the past few years. This is partly due to less strict door policies. In the past, non-Asian Dutch who were not accompanied by Asian Dutch friends were regularly denied entrance to an Asian party. At present, however, non-Asian Dutch who are not with Asian Dutch friends are generally allowed in. This is clearly guided by economic motives as Nick, who runs an Asian Dutch online community that supports the Asian scene, explains the rationale behind loosening the door policies at Asian parties:

Asian parties are not doing that well anymore so [there is] less [strict] door policy. In the past you couldn't get into the Escape (a popular Asian party – RK) if you weren't Asian because it would sell out anyway. (...) It's getting less [now] so you want to get everyone inside to have enough visitors.

However, Thornton (1995) observes that the main attraction of club nights is the prospect of being among people 'like oneself' and getting the feeling one belongs to a select group of people who know about a certain club night and who are allowed in. Indeed, Asian party organizers realize all too well that Asian Dutch youth – their core target audience – are attracted to their Asian parties because they facilitate feelings of Asian community and sameness. Thus, to preserve the Asian character of their Asian parties and to avoid the risk of alienating Asian Dutch visitors, the organizers do make sure that the majority of their audience remains of Asian origin. They do so by for instance targeting their marketing and promotion efforts at Asian Dutch only. Still, what is evident is that the ratio between Asian Dutch and non-Asian Dutch visitors has changed over the years because of economically motivated production decisions.

What becomes clear is the centrality of highly instrumental and economic motives in the production of Asian parties. This affects the actions of the producers and ultimately the content of Asian parties. The prospect of gaining monetary profits and developing a career in the night-time economy has prompted these producers to become involved in the production of Asian parties and to stay involved. This is made rather explicit by DJ Rockstar who started his career at Asian parties and is now successful in Dutch and international mainstream nightlife:

For Asian parties I like to charge my regular fee, because they are also paying for my [mainstream] reputation of course. (...) There are many Asian party organizers who are willing to pay my regular fee. So I don't have to lower my fee.

From time to time DJ Rockstar still plays at Asian parties, mainly because he can make good money there. While for mainstream club nights DJ Rockstar regularly has to reduce his fee, at Asian parties he can earn a higher fee. This, however, is not a motive for DJ Maze, DJ Crunch and MC Flow. As they are not (yet) successful and well-known

outside the Asian party scene like DJ Rockstar and Missy, they do not earn high fees at Asian parties. But Asian parties do provide these producers with the opportunity to gain valuable skills, knowledge and experience that they need to develop a profitable career in the entertainment industry at large – just as Asian parties did for DJ Rockstar and Missy. Thus, while in the past Asian parties were often produced by young Asian Dutch who did this ‘on the side’ while studying or holding a ‘proper’ day job, today an increasing number of Asian party producers hold a professional career in the entertainment industry or aspire to develop one. For them, producing Asian parties is more likely ‘business as usual’ and part of a wider career in the entertainment industry. This ultimately underlines that to a certain degree Asian party producers are driven by highly instrumental and economic motives.

‘Giving Back’ to the Asian Dutch Community

It is evident that all the Asian party producers interviewed are to varying degree guided by self-interest and economic motives, and act as ‘regular’ entrepreneurs. But as suggested by Banks (2006), cultural producers may also be driven by non-instrumental or moral motives and may prove to be more than ‘simply’ entrepreneurs. This may certainly be the case for Asian party producers. All but one of the producers interviewed are of Asian origin and their involvement in the production of Asian parties may thus also be guided by their engagement with their own sense of Asianness and their feelings of belonging at Asian parties. Hence, notwithstanding their economic motives, Asian party producers may be driven by ‘Asian motives’ as well.

During the interviews the producers talk about the changes that have come about in the Asian party scene over the past few years. Of the changes they have witnessed, the most salient one seems to be the growing involvement of club owners and other professional night-time and entertainment industry entrepreneurs who have no links with the Asian party scene. If anything, this has led to a more professional and entrepreneurial approach to producing Asian parties. Some Asian party producers are rather critical about how this may affect the Asian party scene:

Nick: There’s nothing social about it. (...) I think that’s a pity.

RK: Why do you think that’s a pity?

Nick: I think it’s a pity because it misses the whole purpose.

RK: What do you mean by purpose?

Nick: Something social, giving something back to the community, organize something for them. Now it’s more purely commercial.

MC Flow expresses similar concerns about the perceived commercialization of the Asian party scene:

I think that people are more concerned about making money off it than to bring forth togetherness.

Nick, MC Flow and a few other producers express their concerns about the perceived growing role of economic objectives in the Asian party scene, as they feel that organizing Asian parties should also, or even mainly, be about 'doing good' for the community. However, these producers do not simply reject economic motives altogether. They are fully aware that professionalization and commercialization can be beneficial for Asian parties too and have indeed brought about new opportunities for them and other Asian party producers. In fact, they work closely with club owners who prioritize profit maximization and they operate deliberately and effortlessly within the economic confines of their field. Nonetheless, these producers do believe economic motives are prioritized over moral motives which they regret. Whether or not economic motives have in fact become more important in the Asian party scene over the years is difficult to ascertain, but the observations offered by these producers attest to the fact that they themselves subscribe to certain moral objectives when producing Asian parties. This is in concurrence with the suggestion that cultural producers may be driven by moral as well as economic motives (Banks, 2006). For MC Flow and the other more 'critical' producers, gaining financially is clearly not the only motivation for producing Asian parties; they also show a strong desire and commitment to reach out and 'give back' to the Asian Dutch community.

All the producers who are driven by Asian motives as well, mention that they find it important to provide young Asian Dutch with their 'own' cultural space where they can come together. This is similar to for example British Asians who regarded 'Bhangra' events as "one of the few opportunities (...) to be together in a space that was essentially their own" (Bennett, 2000, p. 117). Thus, for the producers driven by Asian motives, creating a meeting place for young Asian Dutch is the main moral objective of producing Asian parties. It can be argued that this desire to bring young Asian Dutch together is linked to these producers' own sense of Asianness and their own experiences as consumers of Asian parties. As discussed earlier, Asian parties were the first and most important spaces where the producers met and befriended peers of different Asian origin and felt at home among them, and where they articulated novel Asian identifications. The producers are thus passionate to provide other young Asian Dutch with a space in which they can (continue to) experience the same feelings of Asianness, togetherness and belonging.

The Asian party producers are committed to ensure that everyone feels at home at their Asian parties so as to create a sense of togetherness and belonging. For example, when MC Flow is emceeding at Asian parties he employs his lyrics and public announcements to facilitate a sense of inclusion and togetherness:

I want them to feel at home. So I will say "All the Asians let me hear you!" and then you'll hear the entire club [scream]. And that will bring forth a sense of togetherness. It's not just Vietnamese, Chinese or Indonesians separately. In the end it's about everyone being together. (...) At that moment everyone feels Asian.

Asian party producers' desire to facilitate a sense of Asianness, togetherness and belonging may also affect the music policy. Nick explains why some of the producers are reluctant to play Asian music at Asian parties:

There are many Asian groups [at Asian parties]. Whose music do you select? If you select Chinese [music] it becomes a Chinese party.

As the producers subscribe to the ideal of an Asian Dutch community-in-difference (Baumann, 1996; Mannitz, 2011) they make it their mission to create a space in which people of diverse Asian origin can comfortably mingle, feel united, and articulate collective Asian identities that transcend ethnic-national boundaries. The producers believe that playing for example Chinese or Indonesian music may cause segregation along ethnic-national lines and disrupt the panethnic Asian atmosphere at Asian parties. Thus, these producers' decision to mainly play Western instead of Asian pop music can also be seen as guided by moral motives and not just economic ones.

Asian motives also play a role where selecting DJs and MCs for Asian parties is concerned. In general, most DJs and MCs performing at Asian parties are of Asian origin. To an extent this can be explained by the earlier discussed observation that Asian party organizers are risk averse and stick to a tested formula, and that includes booking the same Asian Dutch DJs and MCs over and over again. However, some producers make it clear that they believe most or all DJs and MCs at Asian parties should in fact be of Asian origin. These producers approach Asian parties and the production thereof from a 'for us, by us' perspective and they try to involve Asian Dutch peers in this as much as possible, as DJs, MCs or otherwise. This is exemplified by Jeffrey as he explains why he mainly books DJs and MCs of Asian origin for his Asian parties:

(...) it adds to the [Asian] character of our own party. Like, it's *our* party, we have to do it together.

Jeffrey clearly shows a strong sense of community and Asianness, which is materialized in the booking of DJs and MCs who are part of the Asian Dutch community themselves. The opportunities this provides to Asian Dutch DJs and MCs are welcomed and acknowledged by the DJs and MCs in this study as they all started their (semi-)professional careers at Asian parties. Asian parties have enabled them to develop their DJ and MC skills in the comfort of a nightlife space they are familiar with, and knowing they are among their Asian Dutch friends and peers. Thus, by being committed to book DJs and MCs of Asian origin and by providing them with a space to develop their skills, Asian party organizers do good for the Asian Dutch community and show to be driven by Asian motives as well.

While at most Asian parties live entertainment is limited to DJs and MCs as to minimize production costs, some producers do find it important that Asian parties feature Asian Dutch singers, dancers and other performers as well. Bryan for instance, is quite articulate about programming additional Asian Dutch acts:

I think that if you organize something Asian and you don't do anything with that [Asian aspect], then I'm like "what's so Asian about it?" I do think that for example an Asian act... a Filipino singer, a Chinese act or a Lion dance... yes, that would make it Asian.

Bryan argues that performers of Asian origin are crucial and without them an Asian party cannot be considered 'proper' Asian. But programming Asian Dutch artists is not just about rendering Asian parties 'more Asian' and to distinguish them from mainstream club nights, it is also about providing Asian Dutch artists a stage. Nick for example, has produced a professional dance contest at an Asian party. He explains that his goal was to give Asian Dutch amateur dancers the opportunity to perform in front of an audience, receive feedback from professional dancers and judges, and develop their dance skills. Ultimately, to a certain degree producers like Nick are committed to create a cultural space where aspiring Asian Dutch DJs, MCs, singers, dancers and other performers can develop and show their artistic talents. Furthermore, it is also the producers' goal to show young Asian Dutch that there is a lot of talent among their peers. The producers hope this will inspire young Asian Dutch to develop and employ their own artistic talents. In this sense, the producers clearly make an effort to contribute to the advancement of the Asian Dutch community by using Asian parties to empower young Asian Dutch.

It is evident that most of the Asian party producers in this study are not guided by economic motives only; to varying degree they are also guided by moral motives that are inextricably related to their sense of Asianness. These Asian motives are materialized in a panethnic Asian project or mission these producers subscribe to. Their mission entails 'giving back' to the Asian Dutch community with the ultimate goal of empowering young Asian Dutch and advancing the Asian Dutch community. This is in concurrence with Banks' (2006) findings and suggestion that there are indeed cultural producers who are committed to 'do good' for their community. In doing so these Asian party producers are similar to minority ethnic media practitioners (Husband, 2005), sociopolitically engaged British Asian musicians (Huq, 2003) and other actors in cultural fields who are making an effort to advance their ethnic communities. For these Asian party producers one of the most important objectives is to (re)create a cultural space where young Asian Dutch can come together and articulate their sense of Asianness. Furthermore, through the production of Asian parties in general, and through providing Asian Dutch performers a stage in particular, these producers contribute to the visibility of Asian Dutch among Asian Dutch themselves as well as Dutch society at large. They thus contribute to improving the sociocultural status of Asian Dutch in the Netherlands and positioning them vis-à-vis Dutch mainstream society.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the producers of Asian parties in the Netherlands. The main objective was to investigate the relationship between Asian party producers' possible sense of Asianness and the production of Asian parties and Asianness in Dutch nightlife. With the exception of one Asian party organizer all the producers interviewed for this study are of Asian origin and show a sense of Asianness, albeit to varying degrees. Importantly, Asian parties were the first panethnic Asian cultural spaces these producers consumed. It was there where they met Asian Dutch peers of various Asian origin, felt at home among them, and engendered a sense of Asianness for the first time. This underscores the importance of popular culture for cultural identification processes in the everyday lives of youths. Also, through consuming Asian parties the producers gained knowledge about the Asian party scene and extended their network of Asian Dutch friends and acquaintances. These stocks of valuable Asian cultural and social capital provided the producers with the opportunity to become involved in the production of Asian parties themselves. Clearly, the prospect of making profits and developing a career in the night-time economy attracted the producers, thus it can be argued that from the start of their careers as Asian party producers they have been driven by self-interest and economic motives. However, most of these producers are driven by moral motives as well; they show a dedication to 'give back' to the Asian Dutch community – some more than others – and this is related to their (shared) sense of Asianness. These particular producers subscribe to the idea of a panethnic Asian project and regard it as their mission to advance the Asian Dutch community.

For most of the producers in this study, producing Asian parties is not only a means to make money or develop a career in the night-time economy, but also a means to articulate their sense of Asianness and to serve and advance the Asian Dutch community. The main 'Asian' objective of these particular producers is to (re)create a cultural space where young Asian Dutch of diverse Asian origin can get together, feel at home, and articulate a sense of Asianness. The Asian parties they produce constitute that cultural space, one that privileges and facilitates a particular Asianness that is centred on the cosmopolitan idea of community-in-difference and panethnic Asian unity. It is an Asianness that the producers themselves have consumed and engendered from their first visits to Asian parties. Hence, what the producers are ultimately engaged in is the reproduction of that Asianness in Dutch nightlife. This Asianness is located in the people at Asian parties, i.e., the clubbers, DJs and so forth of Asian origin. That is, first and foremost, what Asian Dutch clubbers consume at Asian parties: other young Asian Dutch. Thus, at Asian parties Asianness is not particularly located in symbolic markers of Asianness such as 'Asian' decorations or Asian music. It would be interesting to investigate how young Asian Dutch consume, experience and articulate Asianness outside Asian parties. Do they consume Asian films, Asian popular music and other symbolic material to develop their sense of Asianness? How do they do this? And what meaning do they attach to this Asianness? Future research should address these issues.

Finally, what the findings of this study point to is the central role played by highly instrumental and economic motives in the production of Asian parties. The actions of the producers are unmistakably deliberate and aimed at transforming their cultural and social capital into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This would be in concurrence with McRobbie's (2002) argument that club cultures are commercialized and devoid of any social or political goal. However, through their sense of Asianness the producers feel connected to the Asian Dutch community and show a commitment to 'do good' for it as well. Thus, ultimately this underlines Banks' (2006) argument that it is very well possible for cultural producers to pursue both economic and moral objectives. Furthermore, without commercialism there would most likely not have been as many opportunities for Asian party producers. If anything, the producers are at least able to produce and disseminate a particular Asianness which would otherwise not have been the case. In turn, this Asianness, however commercial it may be, is deliberately and happily consumed by young Asian Dutch clubbers and is thus highly meaningful. This however, is also not to suggest that uninhibited commercialism and neoliberal logic should be celebrated uncritically. Clearly, Asian parties can exist because young Asian Dutch are considered a lucrative target audience. Other social groups who are not perceived as profitable or desirable may not be offered a cultural space in the night-time economy, as McRobbie (2002) and Chatterton and Hollands (2002) have already noted. Thus, the relation between commercialism and the cultural field remains complex. However, it is unproductive to simply dismiss any and all commercial motives as 'bad'. Given Thornton's (1995) suggestion that popular culture and commerce are inextricably linked together, it seems to be more fruitful to further investigate how economic and moral objectives as well as commercial agents and cultural producers actually work together to create cultural spaces that diverge from 'the mainstream' and add to cultural diversity in particular local settings.