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Something for everyone? Changes and choices in the ethno-party scene in urban nightlife

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Introduction

Cities are becoming increasingly diverse, which is partly due to globalization and the concomitant international mobility of people. In Dutch cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam, the number of second generation youths aged between 15 and 25 is growing rapidly. According to Zukin (1998), migrants and ethnic minorities have had a singular effect on defining 'urban' cultures, both at work and play. As they have become more evident in public spaces, they have ensured that a variety of 'alternative' lifestyles have also become more visible, especially in the larger cities where these groups of people are concentrated. These lifestyles certainly change the urban landscape. New shops, hair salons and (take away) restaurants have opened to cater to the needs of the urban population. These ethnically diverse stores and eateries are very well integrated into cities. Indeed, many city dwellers now often take out Surinamese food, for example, and the Turkish food stores are no longer the sole preserve of the Turkish community.

The ethnic diversity of the urban population also affects its young members. This is especially noticeable in the expression of a growing diversification of lifestyles, musical preferences and dress codes. When it comes to the choice of music, the Dutch station FunX radio started broadcasting in August 2003, with the aim of filling the gap between the musical interests of large groups of urban youngsters and the music channels which were already in existence. FunX focuses on people aged between 15 and 35, and it is especially broad in its outlook, catering to the varied tastes of its ethnically diverse young urban listeners. The music that is played includes urban, Latin, reggae, oriental, Türk pop, bhangra, räi hip-hop and many other ethnic and cross-over styles. Moreover, the station's reporters are present every day at local schools, shopping malls and clubs, obtaining the opinions of its target group and enabling it to keep up with the latest trends. The station is hosted by young professionals from different ethnic backgrounds, and due to its musical programming and ability to involve its target audience, FunX radio has become the most popular station among the young (urban) generation in the Netherlands today (Spangenberg and Lampert, 2009).

As a result of the fragmentation of lifestyles and dress codes, many clothes shops and department stores have changed their merchandise and are now selling more diverse styles of clothing to cater to the varied tastes of their customers. It is clear that people actively express their identity through their lifestyle, clothes and music. At leisure, these consumption practices and identity markers, in all their forms, are being made explicit. Especially during a night out, young people carefully choose their favourite club or bar, that fits in with their musical and lifestyle tastes. Going out is an important part of the lives of many young people today, not only as a way to relax, but also as a way of meeting new people and having new experiences.

Changing nightlife

Since musical preferences and the choice of a certain bar, dance hall or club are very interrelated, it is probable that urban nightlife is also changing and becoming more ethnically mixed. A wide range of night-time activities now play a legitimate role within the urban economy. In the last ten years in particular, this night-time economy has expanded and diversified, attracting a more varied audience. As a result, the musical programming of urban nightlife in the Netherlands has undergone some interesting changes. One of these is the introduction of so-called 'broad programming', whereby varying styles of music are played in a club on different days of the week. The organization of theme nights with which to attract a 'multi-cultural' audience has also found its way into urban nightlife. At a *Mystic Grooves* party, for example, the DJ sweeps up the multicultural audience with a mix of dance tracks, Pakistani breakbeat and bhangra music. Furthermore, club owners are increasingly making use of external party agencies to come up with new and trendy concepts. Some of these organizations organize so-called 'ethno-parties', which are arranged by and for a single ethnic group. Initially, these parties took place in rented halls and other venues outside the city centre. A recent trend, however, is that popular, mainstream clubs are opening up their doors to these ethno-parties in order to not miss out on the growing number of ethnic consumers. To this end, club owners now rent their venues to ethnic party organizations on a regular basis.

These changes in inner-city nightlife confirm that clubs are now catering to a wide range of musical tastes in order to meet the cultural preferences of the ethnically diverse young urban population in the Netherlands. This change of approach also points to a more interactive relationship between the consumers and producers of nightlife. The former do not simply consume the parties that are organized for them, but also influence the types of events that are arranged. As a result, clubs organize different types and styles of parties, meaning that the young urban dweller has more to choose from when deciding where to go at night.

Unfortunately, these changes in urban nightlife do not seem to be equally beneficial to the entire young urban population. At the turn of the century, the media frequently reported on the discrimination that Turkish and Moroccan men faced at the doors of popular clubs in inner-cities (Komen and Schram 2005). A survey of the nightlife activities of Amsterdam's ethnic minority youths, aged between 16 and 26 (N= 482), revealed that more than 50% of Turkish and 70% of Moroccan men believed that they were discriminated against by bouncers and so-called 'doorbitches' (style selectors) (Geldorp 2003: 26). For a couple of years now, the door policies of the clubs in the larger cities in the Netherlands have faced heavy scrutiny and received a lot of media attention. Clubs are being encouraged to be transparent in this regard, and can even be fined or closed down by the local government if it receives too many reports of discriminatory practices. This growing attention and demand for transparency can only help to improve things, but does not necessarily mean that ethnic minority youngsters *feel* more welcome in Dutch urban nightlife.

About this book

Discussions of divisions and exclusion from nightlife usually imply that assumptions are being made about young ethnic minority clubbers and their musical tastes, attitudes and behaviour. They are sometimes perceived as victims of a discriminatory door policy, while also being blamed as trouble makers who do not know how to behave in clubs. Such generalizations frequently come up in the media, but are not substantiated by systematic, empirical research. In fact, research into the experiences and choices made by ethnic youngsters regarding their nightlife is very scarce in the

Netherlands, an exception being the marvellous, but outdated, study by Sansone (1994) of the lifestyles of young Surinamese people. Moreover, the nightlife experiences of members of the ethnic minorities have not received much scholarly attention elsewhere, although there are some exceptions here too, such as the studies by Back (1996), Bennett (1997), Alba (1997) and Huq (2006).

This research aims to fill this lacuna by investigating the complex nightlife choices that ethnic minority youngsters make when it comes to ethno-parties. More generally, I will also analyze the changes that are taking place in inner-city nightlife because of the changing urban population. This research is designed to shed light on both the dynamic interplay between the consumers and producers of nightlife and the dynamic relationship between social structures and agency in the nightlife choices of young ethnic people. More specifically, this work revolves around changes to the availability and form of contemporary nightlife that is being promoted by the increasing diversification of its patrons, the changing relationship between consumers and producers, and the nightlife experiences and choices of ethnically diverse consumers. Are cities in fact places which have something for all tastes? How do ethnic youngsters decide where to party? How are their choices affected by the availability and accessibility of nightlife? To what extent are ethnic minority young people able to make changes to urban nightlife? What is the relationship between the diversification of the urban population and urban change? These are the questions which lie at the heart of this research.

Studying nightlife

Nightlife research in the Netherlands is very rare. I certainly won't forget the reactions of many of my fellow PhD students and professors during conversations about my work. Some claimed that it sounded like 'fun' research to carry out, and that hanging around at parties is a 'relaxed' way of conducting a study. Others just raised their eyebrows and asked me: 'why? They clearly doubted the value of research into the nightlife experiences of members of ethnic minorities and the changes that are taking place therein. However, social division is an important and much appreciated concept in sociology. It is used to position young ethnic people in multi-ethnic societies, and is studied extensively in schools, neighbourhoods, or

the workplace. Yet social divisions also exist in nightlife, and there are several reasons why nightlife research into ethnic minority youngsters is relevant. I will argue that what happens at night is a reflection of what happens during the day, and it is for this reason that studying nightlife, a core activity in the lives of many young people, is so important. Furthermore, many sociologists agree that it is crucial to study the changes that are taking place in the urban landscape, not only in terms of restaurants, shops and the ethnic composition of neighbourhoods, but also when it comes to night-time experiences. This latter issue has largely been ignored by Dutch researchers. Accordingly, with this work, I will bring a new dimension to studies of the changes that are taking place in the urban landscape as a result of the growing ethnic diversity of its population.

Outline of the book

The book is in three parts, the first of which introduces the study in more detail. Chapter 1 presents an overview of nightlife research and clubbing. Here, the focus is on the theoretical concepts of the study of young people's lifestyles. A distinction is made between research into 'subcultures', which concentrates predominantly on social structures, and studies in which the agency and autonomy of the participants is the central focus. In the second chapter, I reflect on existing nightlife research. I will make a distinction between work conducted from a producer perspective and that approached from a consumer point of view. The analyses of these two theoretical chapters form the basis of my analytical framework, which I present in Chapter 3. Therein, I will draw out in detail my analytical model for the study of structured nightlife choices. The final chapter (Chapter 4) in this first section of the book describes the methodological strategies and decisions made in this study.

Part II of the book presents case-studies of three ethno-party scenes in the Netherlands: the Turkish clubbing scene in Chapter 6; the Asian party scene in Chapter 7; and the Moroccan leisure scene in Chapter 8. Before considering these arenas in detail, in Chapter 5 I will expand upon the rules and regulations which apply to urban nightlife in the Netherlands, and I will also provide a detailed description of the changes that have been taking place in the Dutch

nightlife. In these four fieldwork chapters, I will draw upon both ethnographic material and secondary sources.

Finally, part III of the book ties together the previous sections in order to answer the research questions concerning structured nightlife choices and the changes that are taking place in Dutch urban nightlife. In Chapter 9, and to answer the main research questions informing this study, I will analyze the strategies of the producers as well as the choices and preferences of the consumers of nightlife. In the Epilogue, the research data will be interpreted from an integration perspective in order to consider whether, and if so how, my research findings contribute to what is known about the integration of new groups into Dutch society.