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

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Publication date
2011

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Bruin, S. (2011). *Something for everyone? Changes and choices in the ethno-party scene in urban nightlife*. Vossiuspers - Amsterdam University Press.
<http://nl.aup.nl/books/9789056296698-something-for-everyone.html>

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Chapter 9 Analyses and conclusions

There seems to be a theoretical and empirical divide within youth and popular cultural studies, whereby the consumption and production of culture are examined from more or less opposite perspectives. Within the body of work on clubbing and nightlife choices, the researchers who focus on the producers emphasize social structures as important mechanisms of division and variation, while those who study the decisions about nightlife and the experiences of consumers, predominantly focus on their agency and free choice. I have argued that in order to get a complete understanding of the variations in the nightlife choices that are made, and before any changes are studied, it is necessary to include the strategies of the producers, as well as the choices, preferences and behaviour of the consumers of nightlife, because the social structures and agency of each of them interact and influence the other.

In this analytical chapter, the strategies and choices of both the producers and the consumers are analyzed. I will start by examining the strategies of the former in order to demonstrate and explain the changes that have taken place in Dutch nightlife. Then, in the second section of this chapter, the choices and preferences of the consumers will be considered. By assessing the approaches of the producers, and the decisions and preferences of the consumers, I will be able to reach conclusions and answer the research questions which were formulated in the first part of this book: how do ethnic minority young people choose an ethno-party? And how do the choices of a changing urban population affect the supply side of the nightlife market? This will be done in the third and final section.

9.1 Changes in the producers of nightlife

Ever since the turn of the century, nightlife in the Netherlands has undergone some interesting changes, both expanding and diversifying. Contemporary consumers now have more choices in terms of which bar, dance-hall, movie theatre or club they want to visit. Likewise, the number of festivals, cultural activities and clubs has increased enormously. This expansion has led to growing

competition both between and within the diverse nightlife sectors. Many young people these days do not go clubbing every week, but alternate this with other events and make use of the various activities that contemporary urban nightlife has to offer. A night out is now a completely different experience to 20 years ago, with many different opportunities being available. The changes which have taken place can best be analyzed by painting a picture of how clubbing was organized and experienced before the turn of the century.

9.1.1 Clubbing in the early 1990s

Before the turn of the century, the most extensive and vibrant nightlife in the Netherlands was to be found in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and club owners in other (smaller) locales set their venues up by using these popular clubs as examples. There was genuine competition between the two cities to become the nightlife capital of the Netherlands. At that time, Amsterdam was part of the *Cool Capital Triangle*, along with Barcelona and Vienna. This title was used by the local governments of these three cities to promote themselves in the United States as the coolest places in Europe. *Paradiso*, *club Roxy* and *De Melkweg* in particular had a leading and trend-setting role in Amsterdam, while in Rotterdam, the huge and hip club, *Night-town*, also attracted many visitors. Outside these two cities, the number of available clubs was limited, meaning that a trip to either Amsterdam or Rotterdam to go clubbing was very popular.

In the early 1990s, in almost every club and dance bar, the DJs played the same type of music, namely house. This electronic dance sound split into a number of different streams at that time, such as *garage*, *hardcore house* and *mellow house*. From that point onwards, clubs started to use the term dance music for this type of sound, and this is now a phrase which can be heard in almost every club in the country.

In that period, the formal dress code with which to gain access to clubs was more or less the same in every venue. Young people with trainers, soccer shirts, or baseball caps were not allowed in¹⁴. During the 1990s, however, and based upon the image of the

¹⁴ Many clubs kept to this dress code, while the wearing of trainers and baseball caps became more and more popular among the young people who visited the

club, the style of dress of the dance crowds began to diverge between the different venues. Young people who danced in *de Melkweg* or *Paradiso*, for example, wore so-called ‘alternative’¹⁵ clothing, while the dance crowds in the *Roxy* sparkled in trendy and extravagant outfits. Bouncers granted access to the people standing in line whose clothes and style corresponded with the profile and image of the club.

Young people who went out regularly had a favourite club. This preference was not based solely on music, but also on the image of the venue and the likely crowd. In those days, the clubbing crowd at *Club Escape*, for instance, was totally different to that at *Paradiso* in Amsterdam. Clubs were more than a location where young people came together to dance, and many youngsters identified strongly with one specific venue. In the early 1990s, the clubs which young people visited often revealed a great deal about their cultural style and social status.

9.1.2 The changing nature of clubs

Since the mid 1990s, nightlife in the Netherlands has expanded enormously. More clubs have opened their doors, not only in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, but also in (smaller) towns in other parts of the country. Furthermore, the information about clubs and their programming has also changed, with club owners since the mid nineties starting to promote their events on the internet. The availability of the internet has made it relatively easy for clubbers to compare programs and seek out the party which best suits their expectations and demands in terms of the music that is played, the DJs and the style of event. Along with the growing number of clubs, the available information on the internet also increased the competition between venues. Moreover, the increasing diversity of tastes in music among the urban population shaped changes in what clubs programmed. Large sections of the populace no longer appreciated the dominance of dance or house music, particularly because other types of sounds, such as hip-hop, RnB and alternative

(hardcore) house parties that were predominantly organized in large halls and venues.

¹⁵ A style of dress inspired by artists playing grunge music, such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam

rock, were becoming more popular. Club owners anticipated these new popular music streams by changing the music that they played. Along with the rise of new forms of dance sounds, the growing number of clubs, the increasing popularity of hip-hop and RnB, and the damaged image of clubbing all led to changes in the clubbing experience. The image of a vibrant, exciting and innovative night out, where you can ‘shake off the difficulties of the week’, is very important. This image became blurred due to the growing media attention on the issue of discrimination against ethnic minority young men at the doors of clubs and the increased regulation of door policies by local governments.

Many clubs started to program different parties on different days of the week. This so-called broad programming widened the diversity of the styles of music played within a venue. Moreover, the door policies changed along with the programming, since every type of party prescribed its own preferred dance crowd, with concomitant dress codes. Instead of attracting one type of consumer, clubs started to appeal to more diverse audiences, with varied musical tastes and styles of dress. Many club owners did not, however, arrange all of these different types of parties themselves, but instead began to hire their venues out to external party organizations or DJ collectives.

New agents

The organizations which came up with new ideas for parties can be divided into two types: group-based and music-based agents. The former create new party concepts to attract a certain dance crowd, using music as a tool to make an event attractive to a particular audience. The multicultural party concept of *Mystic Grooves* is a good example. Likewise, the ethno-party organizations which arrange ethno-parties can also be seen as group based agents. Most of these companies, or DJ collectives, created party concepts either with the idea of bringing (ethnically diverse) young people together on the dance floor, or as a way of catering to a neglected group of (ethnic) youngsters. The club owners opened their premises up to these external party organizations in order to attract a specific group of consumers, and both these companies and the DJ collectives have

the knowledge, networks and connections to make their events a success.

Music-based agents created new party concepts around the performances of DJs and their specific musical style. The themes of *Nope is Dope* and *Girls love DJs* are just two examples of events which are created around DJ performances and the music played. The DJ line-up is essential to this model, and these parties are branded into popular concepts, with their own websites where matching merchandise such as T-shirts, caps and badges are sold. On these websites you can find photos of the dance crowds at previous events. These images leave those looking at them in no doubt about what the prescribed dress code and style is. Many popular clubs have now opened their doors to these successful party concepts and, as a result, these events are now organized in different venues and cities.

9.1.3 The ethno-scene as a specific new form of clubbing

The broad programming and growing tendency of clubs to hire their venues out to external companies have created new opportunities for ethnic party organizations. Instead of arranging their events in a community centre or a rented hall outside the urban nightlife scene, as they used to, these companies were given the opportunity to organize their events in inner-city nightlife. In all of the three ethno-party scenes described in this book, organizations first began to arrange events on a smaller scale outside the urban nightlife arena. For instance, the Turkish company *Sahmeran* and the Asian business *Santai* began life as student organizations. These companies were inspired and driven to expand their horizons when their first (ethnic) student party turned out to be a huge success. After a few experiences in local community centres or rented-halls, these organizations contacted clubs in the inner-city nightlife scene with a view to arranging their parties there. In the mid 1990s, the Asian party organizations were the first ethnic bodies to arrange ethno-parties in popular clubs. Most club owners did not object to an Asian party being put on in their venue, as they did not expect any trouble or aggressive outbursts with an Asian dance crowd. These pioneers paved the way for other Asian party organizations and, before the turn of the century, several other similar Asian companies

were also arranging events in popular clubs on a regular basis. Accordingly, the first ethno-party scene was created.

In contrast to the Asian party organizations, their Turkish counterparts had more problems gaining a foothold in popular clubs. Many club owners viewed the notion of a Turkish party as a hazardous enterprise, fearing the aggressive image of young Turkish clubbers. However, after five years of experience in organizing professional and successful parties in rented halls, in 2001 the Turkish company *Sahmeran* was granted permission to arrange a Turkish party in a club in Rotterdam. These events turned out to be both a huge success, as well as profitable for both the organization and the club owners. This company thus functioned as a cultural broker by demonstrating the success and popularity of such events to other clubs, and by doing so it paved the way for other Turkish organizations to be established. The success of this first Turkish party company inspired many other ethnic entrepreneurs to arrange Turkish parties in popular venues. Indeed, within two years, the three other Turkish organizations which took part in this study had been formed, and went on to arrange events in popular clubs in both Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

It is important to understand that the pioneers of the Asian party and the Turkish clubbing scenes paved the way for other ethnic organizations. Not only did they inspire other companies, but they also created room and opened nightlife up to a wider audience by setting a positive example. Along with the club owners, these organizations can be regarded as cultural brokers, or agents of change, who successfully introduced the incorporation of ethno-parties into the programming of inner-city nightlife.

In the Moroccan leisure scene, the assimilation of parties into urban nightlife worked slightly differently. First of all, there is only one organization which arranges parties in popular clubs. This company, *Marmoucha*, which worked closely with *Paradiso* in Amsterdam right from the start, is funded by the local government. Its initial goal was to make Moroccan music accessible and known to a wider audience. The organization focused primarily on cultural acceptance and recognition, and only at a later stage began to arrange parties for a young audience. Along with a cultural goal, the social aim of integrating young Moroccan people into clubs came

into being. The two other Moroccan organizations, however, primarily focus on arranging cultural activities for their attendees.

The creation of the ethno-party scene

The programming and marketing of the ethno-party organizations are crucial for the creation of a separate ethno-party scene in the clubbing arena. Most of the companies in this research promote their events as ethnic parties. Although they claim to be hospitable and accessible to members of other ethnic groups, their marketing and promotion is aimed at those belonging to their specific target audience. In the Asian and Turkish scenes for example, the flyers are only distributed in places where Asians or Turkish young people come together. Furthermore, by describing their event as Turkish, Moroccan or Asian, the organizations are appealing to a certain ethnic audience. As a consequence, these parties would not attract young people with other ethnic backgrounds who have no connection to those who go to ethno-parties. Furthermore, the music played at most of the events in the Turkish and Moroccan party scenes precludes the attendance of many young people from other ethnic groups.

Within an ethno-party scene, organizations compete with each other to remain popular and attract visitors. Because the parties only appeal to a certain ethnic category, the number of potential attendees is, therefore, limited. In the Asian party scene, the decreasing popularity of the events available, in combination with enormous competition between the organizations, has led to a reduction in the number of companies operating in this sector. In the Turkish clubbing scene, for instance, during the fieldwork period there was some sort of balance between the four organizations being studied and the people they appealed to. However, two years later, two of these companies have become more popular at the expense of the others; one of the organizations has dropped out of the scene altogether, while the other is making a new start under a new name and with a more 'Mediterranean' marketing concept. Accordingly, instead of defining its parties as Turkish, this company now uses the term Mediterranean on its flyers. It is only in the Moroccan circuit that the organizations are not yet in competition with each other. Instead, they complement each other and together try to create a

space where young Moroccan people can dance and listen to their favourite music.

Breaking out of the ethno-party scene

It is interesting that some of the ethnic party planners are trying to break out of their particular ethno-party scene. Indeed, two of the Turkish organizations and one of the Asian companies examined herein were increasingly promoting their events outside the ethno-party circuit. One important change in their concepts was the reduction of ethnic specificity. So, as I mentioned earlier, one of the Turkish companies is now promoting its parties as Mediterranean, while the other advertizes its events as having a 'slight Turkish flavour'. Moreover, when it comes to the programming of music, these organizations are taking aim at a wider audience, outside the ethno-scene, by playing a variety of both ethnic and popular music. Indeed, the Asian company which is trying to break out of its particular ethnic party scene has completely erased all references to it; nowadays, it uses the English translation of *Santai*, which means 'relax', to attract the attention of the visitors to its website.

The developments in clubbing demonstrate how new opportunities have opened up for ethno-party organizations. Moreover, in a short period of time, these companies have become more professional in order to meet the demands of the clubs. They now hire professional DJs, are registered as professional organizations at the Chamber of Commerce, and work with professionally trained bouncers. As a result, they have become a part of the program of events in popular clubs. Due to the popularity and success of these ethno-parties, the number of companies has grown, and together they have carved out a new niche in the clubbing environment. As development never stops, for some organizations this ethno-party scene has already become too small. Indeed, some ethnic party planners are trying to break out of this sector altogether by making changes to their advertizing and musical programming.

9.1.4 Ethno-scenes and changing rules in clubbing

Although many parties in contemporary popular clubs are arranged by external party organizations or DJ collectives, the venues retain

responsibility for safety and security, whatever the activity. Consequently, club owners carefully control the party concepts and the door policy. These door policies, and the social and cultural rules of the ethno-party circuit, differ in some respects to other dance scenes or parties. Because ethno-parties have become part of the broad programming of popular venues, the rules in clubbing have also changed. Club owners and ethno-party organizations are now involved in processes of negotiations to find a balance between the preservation of the profile and image of a club and the implementation of the special requirements and rules of the ethno-party.

Gate keeping

A consequence of the incorporation of ethno-parties into popular clubs was that the companies organizing them had to specify their entrance policies. Since the resident bouncers are in charge of who gets into the venues, they have had to be instructed carefully about the target audiences. Most party organizations hire an extra (ethnic) bouncer to help the resident door-men to make the right decisions. What, however, came to the fore during the fieldwork is that two types of rules of entry can be distinguished. The first are set up per ethno-scene and are created to maintain the specific characteristics thereof. These are formal rules which are written on flyers and websites. Regulations of the second type are drawn up to create a specific sphere *within* each ethno-scene, with the aim of attracting a particular group of visitors within the particular ethnic group.

The formal rules of entry differ in every ethno-scene. In the Turkish clubbing circuit for example, all of the party organizations have put in place the so-called *Damsiz girilmez* rule in order to keep male and female numbers at their events balanced. Women can get into the parties in groups, but men have to be accompanied by a female to gain access. At most of the events in the Asian party scene, the selection taking place at the door is on the basis of the ethnic background of those in the queue. As most of the Asian party organizations want to create a social space for Asian young people to come together, the doormen are instructed to grant access to this group, as well as to other ethnic youngsters with Asian friends. Those who do not fit this profile are told that the party they are

about to enter is for Asians. The bouncers will not refuse to let these people in, but will try to discourage them by making them aware that they do not fit the profile of the party. In the Moroccan leisure scene, the door policy differs per event. Because no alcohol is served, and the parties take place during the day and evening, people of diverse ages are allowed in. Having a Moroccan background is not used as a selection criterion, as most of the organizations have the goal of making Moroccan music known to a wider population. The only rule of entry that all of the companies communicate explicitly is that people with an aggressive attitude, or those who are obviously intoxicated, whether due to alcohol or drugs, are not going to get in.

As well as these rules, which are set up per scene, some of the individual party organizations implement informal policies to create specificity within the ethno-scene and attract a certain type of dance crowd. In the Turkish clubbing circuit for example, all four organizations have different criteria related to style of dress. One prefers neat and tidy outfits, while another prescribes trendy clothing. Similar differences in dress codes can also be found at other club nights outside the ethno-party circuit. In the Asian and the Moroccan scenes, however, there are no differences in dress code between the individual organizations. Indeed, the only difference within the Asian scene is that some companies do not check the ID of their visitors, meaning that they attract a younger audience than the organizations which are strict about ensuring that potential clubbers are at least 18.

The differentiations in the door policies within the Turkish and Asian scenes highlight the awareness of competition and the need for companies to distinguish themselves from their rivals. By having different rules, they create a specific space for a specific crowd and, thereby, safeguard their position within the ethno-scene. The rules of entry that are drawn up to attract a specific section of the particular ethnic group highlight the uniqueness and exclusivity of a party. The same mechanisms of creating (an image of) exclusivity are also visible at other events outside the ethno-party scene.

9.1.5 Branding and selection

In the previous sections, I mentioned on several occasions how ethno-parties differ from those in other scenes, but how, at the same time, many of the ethnic organizations that are involved in arranging them have to deal with the same types of processes of distinction and innovation to beat the competition and maintain an image of putting on popular and exclusive events. Both within and without the ethno-party scene, party organizations and club owners are constantly making changes in the branding of their concept or club in order to keep up with the latest trends. However, there are some differences in how club owners and companies brand their venues or concepts these days.

Branding and selection within the ethno-party scene

In a way, all ethno-party organizations tell their visitors that their parties offer something ‘different’, and in some cases have ‘special’ social and/or cultural rules compared to events outside the particular ethno-scene. This specific form of branding is aimed at attracting a certain ethnic dance crowd and securing a company’s position in the constantly changing, competitive field of clubbing.

In the Moroccan leisure scene, the branding thereof as ‘special’ plays an important role in appealing to potential visitors. In Moroccan circles, the image of Dutch nightlife and clubbing is often very negative. So, in order to make a Moroccan party attractive, the organizations had to come up with a concept which offered Moroccan people a place to come together to dance and listen to Moroccan music without the negative connotations and image of mainstream parties. Moroccan party companies have made important changes in the organization of their events to match the demands of their clients. They have changed their opening and closing hours, for example, and do not sell alcohol. Likewise, special women’s only parties are put on to create a space for those who do not feel comfortable or are not allowed to dance in the presence of men. These ‘special’ organizational adjustments correspond to the branded ideology which states that Moroccan parties offer a safe place for Moroccans to come together and dance and listen to their favourite music.

In the Turkish and Asian ethno-scenes, the emphasis is not so

much on being special in comparison to other dance nights, but on differentiation. In the Turkish clubbing scene in particular, the organizers strongly convey the message that they offer something 'different'. This 'difference', which is worked out through the music that is programmed and the DJ line ups, is put forward as being innovative and trendy, and something which cannot be found at events outside the Turkish clubbing arena. Most of the Turkish organizations have branded their parties as exotic or Mediterranean to give them a more global image. By doing this, most of these companies are trying to move away from the backwards and old fashion image that the Turkish community has in the Netherlands.

In the Asian party circuit, differentiation in relation to other dance scenes concerns the ethnic background of the dance crowd. All of the Asian party organizations explicitly carry the message that they want to create a social space for young Asian people to come together. An Asian party is, therefore, branded as an event for young people with Asian ancestry. The company which wants to break out of this ethnic scene, accordingly, no longer promotes its parties as Asian, instead emphasizing the English translation of its original Indonesian name *Santai*, namely 'relax'.

Branding and selection of clubs

Before the introduction of broad programming, most clubs had a certain profile which attracted a specific dance crowd. In particular, the popular clubs in the larger cities in the Netherlands were so-called branded institutions, with a specific image. Now that many clubs offer a range of different types of parties, with their own unique and branded concepts, the image of the club as an institution has changed, and the original profile of many venues has become blurred by the diversification of their programming. After all, it is not only the programming that has become more varied, but the door policies have similarly been affected. Different styles of parties have their own sets of entry requirements regarding dress code and the preferred social and ethnic make-up of the crowd. This means that different types of young people, with different musical tastes, ethnic backgrounds and styles of dress, now visit the same clubs, but on different days and at different times.

A consequence is that many clubbers no longer identify with

one venue. Instead, a great number of them relate to a style of music, party concept, or DJ, and visit different clubs and cities in order to dance at their favourite events to music played by their favourite artists. Clubs are losing their image of being branded institutions which attracted a certain type of crowd. Instead, many venues now actively convey the message that they have become a place for different types of consumers and now offer a range of cool and trendy parties on different days of the week.

Critiques of broad programming

Some people criticize the growing tendency of club owners to rent their venues out to external organizations, highlighting the increasing commercialization of nightlife, with the same successful party concepts being arranged by these companies in several clubs and cities. Club owners, on the other hand, defend their new way of programming by arguing that it has opened nightlife up to more diverse audiences. Furthermore, many club owners claim that they are preserving the profile of their venue by critically assessing the organizations they hire their premises out to and by putting on their own club nights.

Another point of criticism related to broad programming concerns the increase in the number of different styles of parties. As young people now have more parties to choose from, the audience per event has become more homogeneous. According to some critics, nightlife in the Netherlands is heading towards *party apartheid*, where events are arranged for every age and social and ethnic group of young people separately. These critics clearly prefer parties where different types of young people come together, and in doing so learn about other cultures.

9.1.6 Conclusions

One of the aims of this chapter was to analyze how the choices made by the changing urban population affect the supply side of the nightlife market. In order to do this, in this first section I have focused on the changes that have been taking place in Dutch nightlife, and how the producers and, more specifically, the ethnic party organizations have pushed forward new developments in clubbing. What has become clear is that diversity is structurally anchored in clubbing these days.

This is evident in the broad programming put on by clubs and the number of different branded styles of parties that are organized. In order to deal with increased competition, exclusiveness and innovation have become key terms in the advertisement of the individual party concepts. The need for differentiation to secure a position in a highly competitive field can also be seen in the ethno-party circuits. The ethno-party organizations have created special and separate arenas by setting themselves apart from other dance scenes, and by emphasizing that their parties in the particular ethno-scene are ‘special’ or ‘different’. At the same time, these ethno-party organizations may each draw distinctions *within* a specific ethno-scene in order to secure their own position.

An important consequence of the new ways in which clubbing is organized in the Netherlands is that ‘clubbing’ as a night time activity now takes many different forms. Visitors to different clubbing scenes do not share the same ‘clubbing culture’. Indeed, all of these separate scenes have different hierarchies of coolness, different social and cultural rules, different door policies and different musical programming. As a result, clubbing has become fragmented, with a variety of meanings, experiences and habits in all of the varying scenes. The term ‘party apartheid’ has been used to criticize this diversification and refers to the diminishing tolerance among clubbers for the presence of ‘others’ at a party. It is argued that young, contemporary party people are increasingly looking for places and clubs where the clubbing crowd is homogeneous in respect of age, sexuality, style and ethnicity, and that club owners are encouraging this tendency by organizing parties for every age and social and ethnic group of youngsters. Clubbing as a night time activity has become fragmented, and clubs have become places for all sorts of clubbing events and clubbers, but at different times and on different days of the week.

9.2 Choosing your party: consumer analysis

Now that we know more about the changes that have taken place in Dutch nightlife, it is time to learn more about how ethnic minority young people choose to participate in the ethno-party scene, and how the structural and personal factors interact in this kind of ‘structured nightlife choice’.

In this study, these personal factors have been divided into two dimensions, the social and the cultural. In addition, I identified a third key factor which determines choices negatively. Accordingly, herein, the regulatory role of parents, door policies and economic resources have all been identified as restrictions which limit the choices available to consumers. During the fieldwork in the three ethno-party scenes, economic resources did not seem to play much of a role in the nightlife choices of the majority of the respondents, and only the women were restricted in where they could go by their parents, while the men faced limitations as a result of the door policies of clubs. Consequently, the restrictions can be reduced to gender specific boundaries in terms of the accessibility of clubs and parties. The social dimension refers to the factors which are related to the processes of identification and differentiation. The social characteristics of groups of friends, the social rules of a scene, and feelings of belonging have all been identified as the most important factors influencing these processes. The factors in the cultural dimension refer to how these social mechanisms are displayed culturally. This concerns the cultural tastes and customs of a scene and its audiences, such as musical programming, ways of dancing and styles of dress. The role of each of these dimensions proved to be quite different in the three scenes.

In this second paragraph, I will first draw attention to what makes the ethno-party scene attractive to its consumers, and I will also highlight how the features of age and gender influenced the choices that they made in all of the three scenes. I will then compare the choices and preferences of the crowds at the events in the three ethno-scenes to each other, since in the nightlife choices they made, the respondents attached different weight to the three dimensions referred to above. Finally, in the third section, I will analyze how differences between the three dimensions may also lead to diversity in the ethno-parties *within* a scene.

9.2.1 The attraction of ethno-party scenes

In all three scenes, the respondents pointed to familiarity with a dance crowd and a party, or even party organizations, as important reasons for participating in the particular ethno-party scene. This familiarity comprises feelings of belonging to a certain (ethnic)

group or dance crowd, and knowledge and acceptance of the social rules related to interaction and flirting.

The fierce media attention on the negative behaviour of ethnic minority young people created a growing sense of ‘otherness’ and heightened feelings of belonging to their own ethnic group. Most of the time, the respondents spoke in general terms about ‘we’, when referring to co-ethnics in the ethno-party scene, and ‘them’, when talking about their native Dutch peers in other dance scenes. For most Asians, it was essentially a *feeling* of being different, of having a different ancestry and background, which they translated into jokes and specific choices of words. For the Moroccan and Turkish respondents, the sharing of a specific lifestyle set them apart from the native Dutch population. Not having to explain why they drink (or, do not drink) alcohol, or why they were not allowed to attend a party late at night was seen as an important asset in their relationships with co-ethnics.

Informal rules of clubbing and self regulation

Parties and clubs have their own sets of informal social and cultural rules. The social rules of a scene relate to the norms and moral codes concerning what is appropriate behaviour, while the cultural rules are taste related and prescribe what the right styles of music, dancing and dress in a specific scene, or at a specific party, are. These final types of rules create what Thornton (1995) called ‘hierarchies of hipness’. Knowledge of both these social and cultural mores is essential if clubbers are to become part of a specific crowd and scene, as commented upon earlier (MacRae 2004). This knowledge and acceptance of the implicit rules of a scene play a role in identifying with it *and* in the differentiation of it from others.

In all three ethno-party scenes, the implicit social rules regarding flirting and kissing in public differed to other dance arenas. In the Moroccan and Turkish scenes, the respondents explicitly told me that flirting and kissing in public at a party is not appropriate. In fact, they all agreed that social interaction at an event with unfamiliar members of the opposite sex, or without a proper introduction by a mutual friend, will damage your reputation. The young men and women who met interesting members of the opposite sex have to resort to other ways of making contact, such as

secretly and discretely making eye contact and trying to find out a name, age and address. This information may then be used later to connect via one of the many internet communication sites. The same way of dealing with members of the opposite sex and flirting was also noticeable in the Asian scene, although the respondents did not want to talk about it. These social rules towards flirting and interaction create a different atmosphere from the one at other mainstream dance parties, where, in the Netherlands, men and women are relatively free to speak to whoever they want. Indeed, flirting and even kissing at a party is not a rarity and is certainly not seen as shameful behaviour.

The cultural rules relating to dancing and style of dress in the Asian party scene match those of other RnB dance arenas. The clothing style of the visitors to the Moroccan and Turkish circuits was, however, different. In the Moroccan scene in particular, many of the women wore long and concealing clothing. Moreover, the music that is played dictates a certain way of dancing. As the music in these two scenes differed to that programmed elsewhere, this also had an effect on how people danced. Indeed, the style of dress and the dancing of the crowds in both the Turkish and Moroccan scenes give a party a totally different feel, and make it difficult for those outside these two ethnic groups to learn about them and, therefore, become a part of what is going on at these events.

Age, gender and ethnic background

It was interesting that in all three groups, the respondents who endorsed the importance of familiarity were the ones who mainly had co-ethnic friends and only participated in the ethno-party scene. Those who had ethnically diverse friends, however, also attended parties outside the ethno-party circuit, and they did not regard issues of familiarity and safety as important. In fact, most of these men and women did not appreciate this familiarity, viewing those who attended the ethno-scene as petty, bourgeois and old-fashioned; they only participated in it to be with their friends or to dance to ethnic music. Overall, it was mainly the older and more experienced women in the Asian and Turkish scenes, and the men in all three, who were critical of the social and cultural rules. On the other hand, the Moroccan women in general, and the young women in the Asian

and Turkish scenes, had fewer 'other' friends with whom they went out. During the interviews, these women also said that they attended fewer parties outside the ethno-party scene than the men, and they appreciated the social and cultural rules of the events they attended. Such differences within groups corresponded closely to the perceived restrictions and the number of parties the respondents had visited in the ethno-party scene.

Limitations in choice

In general, the women also experienced different restrictions to the men. For example, none of the women said that they had, or expected to have, difficulties with the door policies of mainstream clubs. They had all experienced, or thought, that the bouncers working at these venues were very friendly and hospitable. Instead, many of these women were restricted in their choice of nightlife by their parents. Almost all of those in the Moroccan and many of those in the Turkish scenes were only allowed to attend events in the ethno-party circuit. In the Asian scene, it was only the very young women who did not have permission to go to mainstream club nights. However, many of the female respondents revealed that they did not feel comfortable at regular dance parties because they had been the victims of demeaning remarks made by young native Dutch men. These young women only participated in the Asian party scene.

Alternatively, the men in all three groups were not restricted in their choice of nightlife by their parents. Instead, many of them did not feel welcome or accepted in the mainstream clubbing circuit. The men who took part in the Asian scene said that they felt that they were being looked at when they went clubbing at a conventional RnB party with a large group of Asian friends. This created feelings of insecurity. Some of the men who participated in the Moroccan and Turkish scenes also said that they do not feel comfortable or welcome at mainstream club nights, but most of them also complained about being refused entry to many such clubs. The Moroccan men in particular frequently mentioned discriminatory practices at the door of regular events as a reason for participating in the ethno-party scene.

In general, the characteristics of the individual clubbers played an

important role in the choices they made. Age and ethnic background influenced the selections of both the men and the women, but in different ways. Furthermore, the extent of this influence, and whether it created limitations in the nightlife choices made, was different for the three ethnic groups.

9.2.2 Comparing visitors to the three ethno-scenes

Asian party scene

The majority of the respondents in the Asian party scene only identified social factors as important. Partying with friends and co-ethnics was given as a reason to go to an Asian party. They used these events as a social space where they could meet their friends from all over the country. Because most of them partied in large groups, they preferred an Asian party over a regular one because they feel comfortable and less like they are being looked at. Although not many talked about this openly, many young Asians also used Asian parties to meet new people. The social rules referred to above created feelings of safety for many (female) visitors, because of which they preferred these parties. Most of those who go to Asian parties do not, however, continue to do so for long; even after a year or two, the majority of the women are no longer involved. Some move on to other scenes and others stop clubbing completely. Maturing in the scene means growing out of it for many, since it does not provide any special or additional elements. The presence of friends and acquaintances, and the moral codes concerning interaction and flirting, create feelings of belonging in relatively new clubbers, but at the same time evoke feelings of restriction and childishness in those who are more experienced. The women noticed these dynamics more often than the men.

Turkish clubbing scene

In the Turkish clubbing scene, the cultural elements of a party were identified as being very important by most of the respondents, and the programming of Turkish music played an essential role in their choices. According to the majority, the music, way of dancing and style of clothing created a complete experience and an ecstatic sensation.

Most of the subjects identified strongly with the cultural rules of this clubbing scene. In fact, they dissociated themselves from the cultural norms of the style of dress and dancing of their native Dutch peers. As well as the cultural dimensions of a Turkish party, which were the main attraction for many, social factors and restrictions also played a role in the decisions to participate therein.

The social aspects of being together and partying with co-ethnics was named as a factor as well. There was, however, also some ambivalence among the Turkish respondents about their acceptance of and identification with the social rules of this scene. Just as in the Asian party circuit, the more experienced (female) clubbers complained more about the limiting effect of the social norms, while these led to feelings of safety for the new and younger (female) clubbers. In general, the men in this scene said that they were not limited by the social rules, and shared the opinion that they had a greater impact on the women. Because the Turkish clubbing scene also has specific cultural features, many respondents remained in it. Moreover, for some of them, the restrictions they faced had a similar effect.

As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, some of the women were only allowed to attend Turkish parties, while others claimed that they had attended different nightlife events. None of the men were restricted in their nightlife choices by their parents, but some preferred the ethno-party scene because they did not feel welcome at mainstream club nights. Some complained about the discriminatory practices of the doormen, while others felt unwelcome and unsafe. However, the cultural dimensions of the Turkish clubbing scene were, for the majority, the most important reason for taking part in it.

Moroccan leisure scene

In the Moroccan leisure scene, similar dynamics to the Turkish party circuit were visible in the motivations behind participation therein. Firstly, the cultural features of Moroccan parties were identified as being their most important asset. In particular, the opportunity to dance to Moroccan music was seen as being especially vital. For some of the women, the dress code, which included the option of wearing a headscarf, was another reason to participate in this scene.

The cultural aspects, with the early opening and closing times, the prohibition of alcohol and the ‘women’s only’ parties were another important reason to attend a Moroccan party, especially for the women. None of the women I spoke to participated in other dance scenes. Most of them were not allowed by their parents to go out late at night and visit clubs. Others explained that the organization of mainstream nightlife, with its late opening hours and the serving of alcohol, did not match their Islamic lifestyle. Just as in the Turkish clubbing scene, the men in this one did not experience any limitations imposed by their parents in terms of their choice of nightlife, but many of them had difficulties when it came to getting into mainstream parties. Perceived discriminatory practices at the door of clubs, and a general feeling of not being welcome, prevented many of the Moroccan men from joining in with the regular dance scenes. Only a small minority of them said that they did not have any negative feelings towards conventional parties. These men attended events in both the Moroccan and the mainstream nightlife sectors.

The social aspect of being together and partying with co-ethnics was also named as a factor in their choice of nightlife by both men and women. The explicit social rules regarding social interaction and flirting were unlike those accepted by all of the respondents in the other two scenes. Although not all of them agreed with these rules, they all accepted them as being part of the norm and the moral codes relating to what is appropriate behaviour. So, for many respondents, all of these factors played a part in their choice of the Moroccan leisure scene, but the cultural elements and the restrictions were identified as being the most important.

9.2.3 Diversity within the scene

On several occasions I have previously addressed the intentions and techniques of the ethno-party organizations when it comes to distinguishing themselves from each other. These companies promote the idea that they offer something unique, or even exclusive, to their crowds, which is necessary to survive in a highly competitive field. The visitors to an ethno-party have particular demands and preferences regarding the events they attend, and the organizations make changes to their programming and door policies

to cater to and reflect these requirements. Indeed, in all of the three scenes, different combinations between the two dimensions and the restrictions experienced led to changes in the parties taking place within them.

Within the Turkish clubbing scene, the social aspects of the ethnic group and their cultural preferences regarding music and dress code were combined in such a way that the four Turkish party organizations arranged different types of events. Visitors to these had different ideas about the so-called 'hierarchies of hipness' (Thornton 1995). Many of those who went to the Turkish parties organized by *33 Events*, for example, saw themselves as trendy with an urban mentality, while they described the visitors to *Sahmeran* parties as backwards and traditional. They not only referred to the clothing style of the crowds, but also to their attitudes and behaviour. These prejudices and different ideas about hipness also existed the other way around. Visitors to *Sahmeran* accused the consumers of *33 Events*' parties of being 'too pretentious' and 'too Western', while they often described themselves as 'down to earth party people'. In particular, those who had a clear preference for one party organization had strong opinions about those who attended other Turkish parties. During the interviews, these respondents also constantly pointed to the differences within the Turkish population, with the local differences between the 'Amsterdam Turks' and the 'Rotterdam Turks' being particularly emphasized. These differences were not related to educational attainment, but more to attitude and mentality. The respondents who went to several different Turkish parties, however, did not make such strong remarks about differentiation within the Turkish population and between the attendees at the various Turkish parties. Instead, they referred in more general terms to differences which can be found in any population and the fact that the same faces can be seen at all of the four companies' Turkish events.

In the Moroccan leisure scene, differences are promoted by a strong relationship between the social and restrictive factors experienced by those in attendance. Because many of the young women were not allowed to dance in the presence of men, some organizations arranged so-called women's only parties. Going out late at night was also problematic for many women and, therefore,

almost all of the companies scheduled their parties during the day or in the early evenings. This also made it possible for many women to attend a Moroccan party without asking permission from their parents. These differences in the Moroccan events were principally aimed at making them accessible to women. Some of these changes led to age differences in the make-up of the crowds. The ‘women’s only’ parties for example, were attended by women from all age groups, while those organized by the *Argan Youth Centre* attracted a very young audience, and the *Marmoucha Maghreb* dances were visited by young people aged between 20 and 30 years old.

In the Asian party scene, differences in the social characteristics of the target audience created diversity within it. One of the party organizations had a reputation for only attracting people with a Chinese background, while the other two companies had a more ethnically mixed audience. Another difference mentioned by the respondents was the young age of the crowd at one of the parties compared to the other two. The respondents did not, however, point to any other social or dress code differences, and nor did they mention any differences in musical programming.

9.2.4 Conclusions

The choices made by ethnic minority young people to participate in the ethno-party scene are based on a complex consideration of the personal factors and preferences of the consumers on the one hand, and the opportunities and constraints created by the producers of nightlife on the other. An analysis of a cross-section of the three scenes demonstrated how the gender and age of the individual clubbers had an impact on their nightlife choices. When I compared the motivations of the consumers of the three ethno-party scenes, differences related to social and cultural interests and perceived restrictions came to the fore. What has become clear is that not all of the young people in the three groups have equal opportunities in terms of the events available for them to choose from. In other words, some groups of ethnic young people are more restricted in their nightlife choices than others.

In general, young Asians faced the fewest restrictions. None of these respondents felt unwelcome or discriminated against by the bouncers operating in mainstream nightlife, and nor did the majority

of women have restrictions imposed on them by their parents about where they could go at night. Furthermore, the young Asian respondents did not experience a cultural misfit in terms of music and dance. Consequently, the nightlife choices of the majority of the Asian respondents were not structured, and nor were they limited by the availability of parties in the mainstream nightlife sector.

Of all of the three groups, the Moroccan youngsters reported the most restrictions in their nightlife choices. However, dancing to Moroccan and Arabic music played an important role in their decisions to choose the ethno-party scene. As Moroccan music is not played at mainstream club nights, those who prefer to dance to it automatically have to participate in the Moroccan leisure scene. As this is relatively new and very small, these young people do not have many parties to choose from. Moreover, the nightlife choices made by many of the young men were related to the limited access they had to the regular clubbing scene, while reported restrictions from their parents and the perceived mismatch between their lifestyle and the nature of conventional parties restricted the choices made by the women. Accordingly, the decisions about where to go made by many of the men and women in the Moroccan leisure scene are necessarily limited in scope, and the majority cannot easily attend parties in different scenes.

In the Turkish clubbing scene, the restrictions and options which determine the decisions about whether to choose the mainstream or the ethno-party sectors varied greatly among the respondents. Some of the men and women participated in both scenes. In general, they attended parties in the Turkish clubbing scene when they went out with co-ethnics and wanted to dance to Turkish music, and they went to mainstream parties with an ethnically mixed group of friends. These young people did not report any restrictions imposed upon them by their parents, and nor were they affected by the door policies at mainstream club nights. These young people have many options to choose from; there are large numbers of Turkish and mainstream parties available to them. Another group of Turkish respondents only participated in the Turkish clubbing scene. The women in this second group were either not allowed by their parents to go to parties elsewhere, or they

were not interested in doing so as they preferred to dance to Turkish music. Moreover, some of the men said that they only go to Turkish parties because of a preference for the Turkish sounds that are played there. Others, who only participated in the Turkish clubbing scene, did not have access to mainstream nightlife, either because they were refused entry to these parties, or they *feared* discriminatory practices at the door and did not feel welcome. For these young men, their choice of nightlife is structured by the producers thereof.

9.3 Social structure and agency in nightlife choices

Not only has nightlife become more varied, due to the incorporation of ethno-parties into mainstream clubs, but the ethno-party scenes have also diversified. This diversification is stimulated by both the consumers and the producers of ethno-parties. The former are so varied in terms of their social make-up, cultural tastes and the restrictions imposed upon them that differentiations within each scene have appeared. These are created by the organizers, who have made changes to their programming and companies which correspond to the diverse needs of the consumers. They are able to do this because they maintain a close relationship with their clients. By taking such an approach, each organization caters to the needs and preferences of a specific section of the ethnic group, and distinguishes itself from its rivals, thus maintaining an advantage in an increasingly competitive field. Accordingly, the specific organization of the ethno-parties within each of the three ethno-scenes is the result of a close link between the producers and the consumers of nightlife. They influence each other, and together they shape, form and reform the ethno-party scene.

9.3.1 Producers, clients and brokers

The ethnic party organizations were the first to organize (successful) events in popular clubs, thereby making the establishment of ethno-party scenes in popular venues possible. In the Asian party and Turkish clubbing scenes, the notion of organizing an ethno-party was developed by a couple of students, who responded to the need of many of their colleagues to dance together to their favourite music and be among their own ethnic group.

At first, these parties were arranged in rented halls or community centres. However, after the initial success of these events, the students began to organize themselves more professionally and contacted club owners with a view to hiring their premises for their parties. This was an important step forwards in the creation of a professionally organized ethno-party scene. According to the party companies, almost all of the attendees preferred a popular club to be the venue for 'their' party because it made the party experience more real. This was also an important step forwards in terms of their career for the DJs playing at these events.

Both the ethnic party organizations and the club owners who opened their doors to these initiatives paved the way for other such companies and other club owners. They can, therefore, be viewed as 'agents of change' or cultural brokers, who set in train the creation of the ethno-party scene as an integrated but separate part of the programming of the clubs operating in city nightlife. An important reason why the ethno-party scene is still a separate element of the events programmed by clubs is related to the cultural and social needs and demands of the consumers. In the Asian scene, the attendees strongly expressed the desire to keep their parties for their own group of people. In fact, for the majority of these respondents, the presence of many co-ethnics played an important part in their decision to choose particular parties within the Asian scene. In terms of the dynamics of what the participants defined as Asian, we have seen that the Indo clubbers, who were there from the very beginning, felt like they were being pushed out, because the majority of those in attendance at Asian parties today are young people of Chinese descent. In the Turkish clubbing and the Moroccan leisure scenes, both the social and cultural codes and rules from within the ethnic groups played a role in how their parties were organized. The social rules concerning interaction and flirting, and the cultural rules and customs related to music, dance and dress, set these two scenes apart. This is even more noticeable in the Moroccan scene, where restrictions and cultural codes from within the Moroccan community led to the events being organized in such a way that they are accessible to Moroccan women.

In all three ethno-party scenes, the ethnic specificities in the organization of the parties set them apart from other dance

scenes. In fact, I would argue that the ethno-party scene is a separate 'niche' area of clubbing, with its own crowds, organizations, social and cultural rules and customs. For many of their clients, the party organizations and DJs in this ethnic party niche create a safe clubbing environment. At the same time, this niche becomes too small after a period of time for many participants, particularly those (males and older women in general) who have alternative types of clubbing available to them. Some organizations and DJs also try to break out of this ethnic niche by changing their marketing strategies or music, leading to their clients simply ceasing to attend and eventually moving on to other scenes.

So, with the incorporation of ethno-parties into the programming of popular clubs, most of the ethno-party organizations (especially in the Asian and Turkish scenes) follow the trends and customs in mainstream nightlife. However, the specific social and cultural needs and demands from inside the ethnic groups set this scene apart, and make it a rather closed and limited ethnic 'niche' area of clubbing.

9.3.2 Theoretical implications of the study

The creation of the ethno-party scenes was due, on the one hand, to a need for cultural expression and social interaction with co-ethnics, and on the other, to a lack of cultural representation and perceived discrimination in mainstream nightlife. In my theoretical discussion of the study of nightlife, I pointed to the tendency of many nightlife researchers to focus predominantly on either the producers or the consumers thereof. Those who concentrated on the experiences of the latter produced frameworks, such as 'neo-tribes' (Bennett 2000), 'post-subculturalist' (Muggleton 2000), life-style (Miles 2000), taste culture (Thornton 1995) and club culture (Redhead 1997), to capture and analyze the fluid boundaries and floating memberships of young people (Bennett 1999: 600). In such approaches, which have been grouped together under the name of post-subcultural theory, the structural elements of youth culture are more or less ignored. This can be partly explained by the critical stance taken against the earlier, influential class-based subculture theory expounded upon by the Birmingham School. However, this study clearly demonstrates that a sole focus on the experiences and behaviour of the people

already inside a club produces incomplete results. This is because such an approach ignores the structural elements of night life. At the same time, a sole focus on the strategies that the producers of nightlife use to divide young people into separate scenes does not do justice to the agency and autonomy of the consumers, who are able to make active nightlife choices. From both the producers and the consumers' perspectives, ethnicity, age and gender do influence the nightlife options available and choices that are made.

In the theoretical exploration of this book, I pointed to the lack of academic attention paid to the nightlife activities of ethnic minority young people, since most nightlife studies addressed the so-called 'white middle class urban youth'. I argued that ethnic minority youngsters make different choices and have different opportunities during a night out. This study has clearly demonstrated that ethnicity and gender do play a part in the nightlife choices made and the options available to many of the ethnic minority young people who attend ethno-parties in the Netherlands. I have also demonstrated that many ethnic minority youngsters cannot just move in and out of different types of parties and scenes. Restrictions from within the group, as well as perceived discrimination at the doors of mainstream club nights, limit the opportunities open to those who want to attend parties in other scenes.

9.3.3 Conclusion

Within my framework of structured nightlife choice, both personal factors as well as social structures have been included. An in-depth analysis of the three ethno-party scenes and their consumers has clearly demonstrated the importance of including the motivations and preferences of consumers and the strategies of the producers of nightlife in any examination of the nightlife choices made by ethnic minority young people. This study fills an empirical gap in contemporary nightlife research, in which studies of the 'white middle class urban youth' are over represented. My work clearly reveals that the post-subcultural approach, with its emphasis on free consumption practices and choices, and which is currently dominant in studies of youth culture and lifestyles, does not adequately explain the actual practices of choice and participation by many ethnic minority young people.

Factors which restrict participation, as well as structures which shape opportunities to express a cultural identity, certainly influence the choices made and the options available