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

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Epilogue

After keeping up with the latest in urban nightlife in the Netherlands for four years, and conducting in-depth research into the ethno-party scene, one might expect me to be an expert on the coolest parties and the latest nightlife trends. However, after more than a year of writing behind my desk, a quick internet search revealed that some of the organizations included in my study have left the scene, while some have altered their course, and other new companies have been established. Furthermore, many of the party concepts I used as examples of broad programming have been replaced by other new and cooler versions. Does this reflect the limited preservability of a study of nightlife? Has my detailed ethnographic fieldwork already become outdated? I do not think so. In fact, these changes perfectly support one of the conclusions of this study, namely that contemporary nightlife is always on the move and constantly developing. Moreover, I believe that my findings still represent a valid and accurate analysis of the types of processes that characterize today's urban nightlife.

Nightlife and the process of integration

A related issue upon which opinions and policies are subject to constant change and innovation is the integration of immigrant groups into Dutch society. This study of the nightlife activities of and the choices made by ethnic minority young people was not put in place to make a contribution to the growing amount of literature on integration, or to take part in any 'integration debate'. However, many respondents spontaneously brought up issues related to assimilation, acceptance, and how they saw themselves as second generation youths in relation to 'their integration' into Dutch society. Going out and clubbing is important in the lives of many young people, and negative experiences during a night out have an impact on how these youngsters act and make choices during the day. Consequently, it is interesting to interpret these research findings from an integration perspective, and to analyze whether what I discovered contributes to our knowledge of the integration of new groups into Dutch society, and, if this occurs, how. In this epilogue, I want to explore what nightlife and the choices and

opportunities that ethnic minority youngsters make and have therein reveal about the nature of the integration process in that domain.

In order to be able to interpret the research data from an integration perspective, I will use the heuristic definition thereof: 'the process of becoming an accepted part of society', as defined by Penninx (2007: 4). In this heuristic outlook, Penninx distinguishes three dimensions of becoming an accepted part of society, namely the legal/political, the socio-economic and the cultural/religious (2007: 4). All three dimensions contribute to obtaining a complete picture of the process of integration of immigrant groups. Related to the topic of my study, however, I will interpret my research findings within the latter dimension. This element pertains to the domain of the cultural and religious rights of immigrants, and revolves around questions of do they: 'have (equal) rights to organize and manifest themselves as cultural, ethnic or religious groups? And whether they are recognized, accepted and treated like other comparable groups and enjoy the same or comparable facilities?' (Penninx 2007: 5). In addition, this definition of integration, and specifically this cultural/religious dimension, makes it possible to also interpret the integration process from the perspective of the immigrant groups. This can be achieved by asking questions about whether *they feel and experience* that they have become an accepted part of society and whether *they feel and experience* that they have equal rights to organize and manifest themselves as cultural, ethnic or religious groups etc. Interpreting the integration process from the perspective of immigrant groups perfectly fits this study, in which the experiences of and choices made by ethnic minority young people are centralized.

Firstly, I will focus on the cultural/religious dimension of the integration process by interpreting what 'becoming an accepted part of society' means for ethnic minority young people so far as their nightlife choices and options are concerned. Based upon their remarks during the interviews, the focus will be on how these youngsters view their own nightlife choices and opportunities. Then, I will explore the opportunities available in the structure of contemporary nightlife through which immigrants and the ethno-party scene can 'become an accepted part of society'. Here, the focus will be on both the strategies of the producers and organizers

of the ethno-party scene in terms of their programming, and whether they treat ethno-parties as an accepted part of nightlife (society). Interpreting the integration process from the perspective of both the consumers and the producers will provide us with an understanding of whether and how ethnic minority young people and the ethno-party scene have become an accepted part of society in this domain.

The integration process of ethnic minority young people in nightlife
Although I cannot make any representative statements about entire immigrant populations, it has become very clear that in every group which took part in this study, the aspiration to participate in or become a part of mainstream nightlife was certainly present. Most of the respondents said that the incorporation of ethno-parties into popular clubs was a genuinely positive development, since it not only improved the quality of the parties, but also made their party experiences 'more real'. For many, dancing to their favourite (ethnic) music in a popular venue gave them a feeling of belonging and acceptance by the club owners. The Turkish and Moroccan respondents in particular often made clear that they preferred dancing in a popular venue. They appreciate the opportunity to show that they have something good to offer and that their parties are vibrant and vivid. Most of these respondents also said that they would enjoy the participation of more native Dutch clubbers in their events. However, almost none of them said that they take their native Dutch friends to an ethno-party, because they assume that they would not enjoy it. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the Asian respondents, on the other hand, did not express the desire to either share their parties with their native Dutch peers or demonstrate their unique and vibrant clubbing scene to anyone else. They just liked to dance with their friends and ethnic peers in a popular club.

This aspiration of becoming a part of the regular nightlife scene and opening the ethno-party circuit up to 'others' is difficult for several reasons, the first of which concerns the social and cultural preferences of the consumers of ethno-parties. In the Asian party arena, for example, the social preference of the crowds to party with co-ethnics prevents the organizers from advertizing their events

to those outside the Asian party scene. Then, in the Turkish and Moroccan scenes, the cultural set up of the parties reduces the likelihood that many young people from other ethnic groups would participate; the music played, the dress code and the style of dancing arising from the cultural codes of the ethnic groups are difficult for outsiders to master.

The restrictions or cultural codes drawn up inside the immigrant groups also hinder any exchange of members in the ethno-party scenes. For instance, the opening and closing times and no-alcohol policy in the Moroccan leisure scene are accepted by its Moroccan audience, but prevent it from really becoming a part of mainstream nightlife. The specific social rules in all three scenes make it difficult for members of other ethnic groups to become part of other dance crowds because they are unfamiliar with the social rules and codes.

Changing ideas

The incorporation of ethno-parties into regular clubs stimulates changes in the ideas and experiences concerning nightlife on the part of the participants in it. Instead of partying with their friends in a rented hall or a community centre, they are now able to dance in popular club venues. An effect of this is that these young people become more acquainted with mainstream nightlife. Particularly for the women in the Asian and Turkish scenes, the rise of ethno-parties has provided them with greater and new opportunities and choices. In the 1980s, many Asian women were not allowed by their parents to go to a club. Nowadays, for many of these young women, going out is just as self-evident as it is for their native peers. The same tendency can be seen in the crowds at Turkish parties. These days, more women are given permission to attend events outside the Turkish clubbing scene. Indeed, according to most of the experienced female clubbers, going out and visiting clubs is now increasingly accepted by many Turkish families. This does not mean that all Asian or Turkish women are allowed to participate in mainstream nightlife, but it does point to the development of ideas and thoughts about it. Perhaps the rise of the Moroccan leisure scene will also function as a stepping stone for young Moroccan women in the future, but only a follow-up study will tell us more.

The integration process of ethno-parties in the structure of nightlife
In the previous chapter, it was concluded that diversity today is structurally anchored in clubbing, and that different styles of parties and different dance scenes are created to cater to the needs and desires of different groups of clubbers. The creation and incorporation into mainstream nightlife of the ethno-party scene can be viewed as an example of just one of the many different dance scenes included in the broad programming of clubs. Accordingly, it is arguable that this incorporation of the ethno-party scene into the programs of popular clubs means that nightlife has become more accessible to many ethnic minority young people, and that ethno-parties have in turn become an accepted part of nightlife. However, the specific social and cultural arrangement of these events, which corresponds to the needs and preferences of those inside these ethnic groups, leads to a specific party culture and organization, making participation by other groups difficult. As a result, the ethno-party scene tends to become a separate 'niche' market in clubbing.

Some of the respondents complained about discriminatory practices and feelings of being unwelcome in mainstream nightlife. The young Moroccan and Turkish men in particular expressed negative ideas and revealed negative experiences related to the door policies of regular club nights. For some of these men, the ethno-party scene is the only opportunity to dance in a popular club venue. The ethnic niche market of clubbing is, for these young men, a rather closed arena, and does not encourage their integration into the wider nightlife scene. It is possible that the creation of the separate ethnic niche market of clubbing, which corresponds to the needs formulated by those from within the groups, does not encourage club owners to either organize other parties which will attract ethnic minority young people, or lead to them accepting the presence of more ethnic minority young men in their venues. However, the incorporation of ethno-parties into mainstream clubs also leads to changes in the ideas and experiences of the owners and bouncers of these venues. They become more acquainted with an ethnically diverse crowd, and positive experiences with ethno-parties and their audiences are likely to have a positive effect on the door policies for mainstream club nights. This was also commented upon by some of the Moroccan and Turkish respondents, who pointed to positive

 changes in the attitudes and behaviour of those working the doors. According to these men, growing numbers of bouncers are now making more well-considered decisions about who they will allow into their venues.

To conclude, the incorporation of ethno-parties in their current form into regular clubs contributes to the aspirations of the majority of those in attendance to participate in mainstream nightlife and, thus, become an accepted part thereof. However, the specific social and cultural organization of the ethno-parties leads to a specific party culture, which makes participation on the part of members of the ethnic groups easier and more enjoyable. However, this is less straightforward for other ethnic clubbers. At this point in time, restrictions from inside the groups create boundaries and prevent the ethno-party scene from becoming completely integrated into Dutch mainstream nightlife. This is because it limits the inclusion of other groups of people, which is something that the young Moroccan and Turkish clubbers particularly aspire to. When it comes to the constant changes and interactions between the ideas and needs of both the producers and the consumers of nightlife, the process of integration will continue. The incorporation of the ethno-party scene into the programming of popular clubs is an important step in the integration process for many ethnic minority young people in inner-city nightlife. What is more, it is also a solid foundation upon which further positive integration developments can be based.