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Chapter 7 The Turkish Clubbing Scene

Turkish party, Saturday night, winter 2006

It is already past midnight when I enter Club Paradiso in Amsterdam. It took me quite some time to get in, as the queue was long. Most of my fellow clubbers were excited and already in the party mood, as they had previously attended the concert by Sezen Aksu, a very popular female Turkish singer. This Turkish party, the Sezen Aksu after party, was organized by 33 Events.

When I enter onto the main floor, DJ Silence is spinning the wheels and stirs up the dancing crowd with a smooth mix of Türk pop and RnB music. I wave at him when he looks in my direction. When I walk towards the bar, I bump into another familiar and famous Turkish DJ. After the usual chitchat, he offers to show me around and introduce me to his friends. An hour and a half later, I have shaken hands with at least 35 of his friends. I direct him towards the bar and offer to buy him a drink. My brain is working overtime because as well as all of the information provided by his friends, I have also picked up on bits of the music, and the way that people dance and dress. I am truly dazzled. Soon we go our own separate ways, which gives me the opportunity to sit in the corner and write down all of these impressions. Many field notes later I order another drink at the bar and then wade into the crowd again. The Turkish music dominates the dance floor. People are dancing everywhere; on the dance floor, at the bar, and on the balcony. They move their hips and shoulders fanatically to the rhythm of the music and their colourful and sexy clothes accentuate their movements. Instead of feeling out of place on the dance floor, I decide to hang around the bar and watch people for a little longer. Soon my feelings of discomfort disappear. Within no time I am engaged in small talk with my friendly, fellow clubbers.

By 4.am I am exhausted and head towards the exit. I count myself lucky that I can get home by bike. The cold winter breeze helps me to cool off and calm down after an exciting and very successful first night of fieldwork in the Turkish clubbing scene.

7.1 Introduction

A few years after the families of Turkish workers settled in large numbers in the Netherlands, parties were organized to celebrate family events such as weddings and birthdays. These still take place, and at these parties family and friends come together to eat, dance and catch up on all their news. Indeed. many of the respondents frequently mentioned such visits taking place at the weekends. Until the mid 1990s, these family events were the only opportunity for Turkish youngsters to dance with their peers to Turkish music. From that time on, however, people started to organize Turkish parties for young people in the Netherlands commercially. These initially took place in community halls outside the city centre. The organizers were inspired by the success of the Turkish parties taking place in Germany, where Turkish club venues had sprung up since the 1990s (Kosnick 2004: 3). At that time, many Dutch-Turks crossed the border to dance with co-ethnics to Turkish music. The first person to take the initiative to organize a Turkish party in the Netherlands was a student who heard his friends and colleagues talk about the need to come together and dance to Turkish music. He, therefore, started to organize Turkish parties, and although the location and sound quality could not compete with that of clubs, these first events were a tremendous success. Soon, other people picked up on this new and successful trend and also started to arrange similar events. As a result, Turkish party organizations sprung up all over the Netherlands.

What follows is a detailed description of the Turkish clubbing scene in the Netherlands. I will first provide an impression of its development, as well as its general characteristics, size and popularity. I will then describe in more detail the characteristics of each of the four party organizations that have been included in this study. In the third paragraph I will highlight the strategies that these organizations have employed to create their own niche within the Turkish clubbing scene. In the fourth paragraph, the focus shifts to the consumers of Turkish parties, and focuses on why and how young Turkish people choose a Turkish event to attend. In the final paragraph, I will dig deeper into the decisions the consumers make by drawing attention to the choices of a specific party within the Turkish clubbing scene.

7.2 The creation of a Turkish clubbing scene

Turkish party organizations began to arrange Turkish parties in popular clubs from the year 2000 onwards. The incorporation of such events in these clubs fuelled a shift towards professionalism, since the organizers had to meet the demands and customs of these venues. Furthermore, the organizers also had to follow the rules and regulations regarding opening hours, age, and drink and drugs.

There are various opinions about the origins of commercial Turkish parties for young people in the Netherlands. Most of the DJs and ethnic party organizers agreed that the need for these events was initiated by Turkish youngsters, who wanted a place where they could dance and listen to Turkish music without being under the supervision of their parents. Turkish music is not played on typical club nights, and Turkish parties thus attend to the musical interests of these consumers. Some of the DJs and organizers, however, share the opinion that these events appeared as a reaction against the discriminatory door policies of many clubs. Another frequently heard reason was that women in particular did not get permission to participate in mainstream nightlife. With the advent of Turkish parties, many parents allowed their daughters to go to such events under supervision of an older sister, aunt or brother.

All of these different reasons played a role in the success and popularity of the Turkish clubbing scene. For the entrepreneurs, however, it is of course profitable to set up a business in the night-time economy.

General characteristics

The crowds at Turkish parties are mainly comprised of young people with a Turkish background. Based on the interviews and participant observation, I would estimate that at least 90% of attendees are of Turkish descent. Those who are not are predominantly friends of these clubbers, who very occasionally join their Turkish acquaintances to experience a Turkish party, or are young Dutch people who come with a Turkish boy or girlfriend.

The reasons for the almost exclusive Turkish audience include the music that is programmed; at most of these parties, the (Turkish) DJs primarily play Türk pop. Often, this type of music is combined with the more global sounds of contemporary trance or

RnB, but in general a Turkish sound is played throughout the evening. Although more and more native Dutch people are becoming familiar with Turkish music due to their holiday experiences, this does not mean that they like to listen and dance to it for an entire night.

The audiences at Turkish parties are aged between 18 and 30, with a majority of being between 22 and 26 years old. There is an equal balance of male and female attendees. All of the professional and experienced party organizations have a so-called *Damsiz girilmez* rule, which means that men are only allowed in when they come with a female date. According to the party organizers, this rule, which is written on every flyer, is important to keep the numbers of male and female clubbers equal. Moreover, in the words of one of the organizers, it keeps out the men who: 'lock up their own sisters, daughters and wives at home and come here to harass the women'.

Size and popularity

Although the idea of organizing a Turkish party was copied from Germany, there are some key differences between these events in the two countries. In Germany, parties for young Turkish people are arranged in separate Turkish club venues owned by the organizers, while those in the Netherlands take place in popular clubs which are hired for the night. Another difference is that each Turkish party organization in the Netherlands throws approximately eight to ten parties per year, while the German Turkish clubs are open every week. As a result, German Turks can dance at their own venue, which is exclusively for Turkish parties, on a weekly basis, while Dutch Turks go to a club that is part of the inner-city nightlife. Furthermore, Turkish parties are not equally spread out over the year. As a result, in some weeks, young people can choose between a few different Turkish events, while at other times there are no parties available to attend.

Turkish party organizations in the Netherlands

During the fieldwork in the winter of 2006, several Turkish organizations were operating in the night-time economy in the Netherlands. In total, I counted six, spread throughout the country,

which were arranging professional Turkish parties on a frequent basis: one in Arnhem, one in Hengelo, two in Rotterdam, and two in Amsterdam. As well as these six established companies, numerous new organizations began to arrange Turkish parties at that time. In Rotterdam and Amsterdam in particular, such companies appeared frequently, trying their luck. At the time of writing, in the winter of 2008, none of these new organizations had managed to really establish themselves within the Turkish clubbing scene and had stopped arranging parties. Moreover, there had also been some changes within the established companies. The organizations in Arnhem and Hengelo, for example, are taking a temporary break, one in Rotterdam has stopped operating and one in Amsterdam has started organizing parties under a new name and with a partially new management team. Now, instead of aiming at a Turkish audience, this company organizes so-called oriental, eclectic parties in which Turkish, Arabic and contemporary trance is played, attracting a more multicultural crowd. The organization in Rotterdam attracted fewer clubbers in 2007, and, according to the organizers, they were doing little to engage new people, because they were no longer enjoying the business. 'We grew out of nightlife and moved into another stage of life', as one of them explained.

Turkish party organizations in Rotterdam and Amsterdam

During the fieldwork in 2006, the Turkish clubbing scene was flourishing. I, therefore, chose to focus on the four established and most popular Turkish party organizations in the Netherlands, since people from all over the country were travelling to one of their Turkish parties in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. These organizations are: *Keyifland* and *Sahmeran* in Rotterdam and *33 Events* and *Club Mahsen* in Amsterdam.

Sahmeran arranged its first Turkish party in 1996. At that time, the organizer was a student who had picked up on the desire of his Turkish colleagues to party together. *Sahmeran,* therefore, was set up and began to organize events for this group. In these early years, the company's owner occasionally rented a venue outside the city centre. These parties were a huge success and along the way the business became more professional. So, since 2001, the man behind *Sahmeran* started to organize parties on a monthly basis in the

famous dance hall Club Tropicana in Rotterdam. On a busy night the party is attended by between 600 and 800 young Turkish clubbers, aged between 18 and 30 years old.
Keyifland entered the Turkish clubbing scene in 2002 and, according to its website, the key to its success was: 'That we started the *Keyifland* concept out of general discontent with Turkish parties. We couldn't find any good parties to go clubbin' to so we decided to throw the party ourselves'[9]. By arranging parties in the famous clubs Now & Wow and Night-town in Rotterdam, and by its specific music programming, the company targeted a trendy and hip audience. In the heyday of this organization, it was attracting 800-1000 visitors per party, in the age range 18 to 25 years. The average age of the visitors to *Keyifland* events was, therefore, younger than at *Sahmeran,* where the majority of the clubbers were older students, graduates or young professionals.

Club Mahsen in Amsterdam started out in 2001, and purposely organized small and intimate parties in a diminutive dance-hall in the city, with a capacity of 200-250. The goal was to generate an informal and relaxed atmosphere, with the company wanting to recreate the same relaxed ambiance found in local bars in Kuşadasi, Turkey. The majority of the crowd was comprised of clubbers aged between 25 and 35 years old.

33 Events is the youngest organization of the four, and first began to arrange Turkish parties in 2003. Within a few years, it had become the most popular and trendy Turkish party organization in the Netherlands. Before the company entered the Turkish clubbing scene, it had been arranging open air parties in Istanbul. When the organization moved to Amsterdam, it was, according to one of its owners: 'struck by the old-fashioned way Turkish parties were organized in the Netherlands'. In Istanbul, the DJs did not play Türk pop at all, instead mixing Arabic and Turkish sounds with trance, while in the Netherlands, Türk pop dominated. *33 Events* began by organizing parties in diverse, but always famous, clubs in Amsterdam, and in 2006 expanded into Rotterdam. The company attracts a young and trendy party crowd in the age range 18 to 25. Most of their events are sold out and bring together approximately 1200 people per party.

[9] Communication found on the website www.keyifland.nl in September 2005

7.3 Processes of competition and distinction

There is a sense of competition between the four party organizations. Each throws approximately eight to ten parties a year and the target group, young Turkish people aged between 18 and 30, is relatively small in the Netherlands. Moreover, not all of these youngsters go clubbing or want to go to Turkish parties. Like their native Dutch peers, a lot of young Turkish people no longer go out every week, instead saving their energy and money for a special event or party (Bellen 2004). This, of course, reduces the size of the group of potential consumers even more. To retain their popularity and ensure a steady number of clients, all of these party organizations have created their own niche within the Turkish clubbing scene, distinguishing themselves from their competitors with a unique concept consisting of musical programming, publicity, location and door policies.

Locality and functionality

According to both the party organizations and the clubbers, many young Turks prefer to travel by car. As a result, most parties were organized in clubs with large car-parks. This is also convenient for visitors from outside the city. The organizers also emphasize the importance of throwing a party in clubs which correspond to their image. Some venues have a trendy and cool reputation, while others are more cozy and intimate, and others still are more luxurious. Consequently, all four organizations put a lot of effort into hiring a particular club.

Sahmeran chooses to throw its parties in club Tropicana. This venue is predominantly rented out to external party organizations, companies and for career events. It is a popular venue because it has a stylish interior, its own car-park and a magnificent view of the boulevard of the Maas.

Keyifland, on the other hand, deliberately chooses popular clubs in Rotterdam's mainstream nightlife, moving from Club Now & Wow, which was owned by Ted Langenbach, a key trendsetter in Dutch nightlife, to another popular venue, Night-town.

33 Events has different club venues in Amsterdam for the different themed parties it organizes. Due to the tremendous popularity of its parties, these are hosted in large clubs which are

carefully selected to reflect the company's hip and trendy image.
Club Mahsen arranges its parties in a small venue named Aknathon in Amsterdam, which is outside the city's mainstream nightlife. It purposely organizes small events for between 200-250 people, in order to create an informal and relaxed atmosphere. In 2006, it moved into a small club in the city centre.

Music programming: negotiations between Germany and Turkey
Music programming is a key factor in the organization of a party. The ignorant observer might expect to hear the same Turkish music at every event, but this is certainly not the case in the Turkish clubbing scene. Most of the organizers had particular ideas about how their parties should sound and were inspired by similar events they had seen elsewhere. The parties by *Sahmeran* in Rotterdam were copied from Turkish parties in Germany, where many large events are organized in clubs with multiple rooms, with different types of (Turkish) music in each of them. Likewise, at a *Sahmeran* party, different types of music are programmed in the two rooms available for the event. In the main area, a DJ stirs up the crowd with a mix of Türk pop and world music. One of the DJs, who performed at most of the parties, was flown in from Germany for this purpose. In the room on the second floor, a live performance of traditional Turkish music was alternated with Türk pop.

Keyifland, the other organization in Rotterdam, did not have any live music at all. The DJs, however, were famous for their trendy ways of mixing music, creating new sounds by blending Turkish music with eclectic house. According to the organizers, the goal was to go beyond the old fashioned notion of playing Türk pop in a club. However, most of the DJs were instructed to retain the Turkish rhythm and beat in whatever they produced.

33 Events in Amsterdam puts a lot of effort into creating a complete concept of hip and trendy music, stage acts, and popular DJs and VJs. According to its website, the company's goal was to introduce 'trend setting, cultural and art loaded initiatives, a different kind of entertainment with Turkish influences[10]'. In its musical programming, the organization follows the trends of the ultra hip nightlife in Istanbul. During the interviews, one of the

[10] Communication found on www.33events.com at December 2006

organizers told me that they program a maximum of two hours of Türk pop at their parties because 'in a popular club in Istanbul you will not hear Turkish music [at all]'. Occasionally, they book DJs, artists or performers from Istanbul to underscore their connection to the vibrant and exiting nightlife in the Turkish party capital.

Club Mahsen in Amsterdam, on the other hand, drew inspiration from the small and intimate bars in Istanbul and Kuşadasi, where Türk pop, Turkish folk music and gypsy music is played, with the company wanting to copy the warmth and hospitality of these venues. As a result, theme parties, which were based on ideas such as gypsies or folk music, were organized.

Door policy

As I have described in Chapter 5, despite the different steps which have been taken to increase the transparency of door policies, a lot of men from ethnic minorities believe that they are not welcome in many clubs. However, those who think that organizing Turkish parties resolves problems at the door will be quickly disappointed. Turkish parties also have a very strict door policy, with the one rule that all four of the organizations examined herein have in common is that men are only allowed in when they bring a female date. Furthermore, the presence of a dress code is also widespread in the Turkish clubbing scene. The right mix of people is usually chosen at the door, with a view to maintaining the particular profile that the organization is aiming for. Each of the four party organizations had their own dress codes.

The popular company, *33 Events* in Amsterdam, was notorious for its door policy.

A dress code was seen as essential in order to ensure that the wrong crowd was not targeted, as one of the organizers revealed:

> 'We have a very strict dress code, we don't want these backward machos at our door who come here with their gold necklaces and Gucci pants and harass the girls while locking up their own sister at home'.

According to one of the owners of *33 Events*, the goal was to offer Turkish youngsters cool and stylish parties, not only for their

amusement but to also get them more acquainted with trendy nightlife. This 'educative' mission was expressed in very strong terms. By putting on trendy parties, he explained, the organization wanted to change the so-called backward mentality of many of the young Turkish people living in the Netherlands. Apparently, the company not only sees itself as party-planners, but also as cultural brokers who are trying to diminish the gap between backward and trendy westernized youngsters. This sounds very noble. However, the critical observer may raise doubts about whether these so-called 'backward Turks' want to go to such parties and, if they did, whether they would be allowed in by the bouncers. Moreover, due to its popularity, *33 Events* found itself in the luxurious position of being able to select its clients critically on dress code, since every party was sold out in no time.

Sahmeran in Rotterdam started as a party organization for students and aimed to attract the more educated consumers. This was borne out by its door policy. The *Damsiz girilmez* rule was in play, but an exception is made for men who are in the possession of a student card. Furthermore, the organization used to have a strict dress code, which demanded neat and trendy outfits and prohibited the wearing of jeans. Due to the growing popularity of jeans, however, it had to abandon this rule, although it still claims to only welcome people who dress well. At the entrance, impressive looking bouncers check the potential crowd out at the door and inside the club several security guards maintain order.

Club Mahsen, on the other hand, had a friendlier door policy. It claimed to look more at the individual guests at the entrance to the venue and promised a customer-friendly policy in which all of those in attendance feel welcome and comfortable. This is possible because with 200-300 visitors, these parties are relatively small. Moreover, this approach is also feasible because these events attract a regular group of clubbers, with whom most of the organizers of *Club Mahsen* are acquainted.

Like *33 Events, Keyifland* in Rotterdam claimed to target the more hip and trendy clubbers. It used to select strictly on dress code, but due to declining numbers, these rules were completely abandoned.

Advertising and promoting a party

The choice of location, the rules regarding the door policy, and the music programming are all part of a concept around which to create and organize a certain type of party. This concept reflects the notion of how a Turkish party and the visitors to it should look. This is seen in the promotion of the event on both the internet and on flyers. Both *33 Events* in Amsterdam and *Keyifland* in Rotterdam, which are the two organizations which put a lot of effort into creating a cool and trendy party, promote their events in English on their flyers as well as on their websites. Furthermore, they often use very sexy pictures of women on the former. Likewise, as an indicator of what their crowds look like, in the picture sections on their websites, both companies only display photos of beautiful and sexily dressed young men and women, which were taken at previous parties. *Sahmeran* in Rotterdam, however, predominantly promotes its parties in Dutch, both on its website as well as on its flyers. As well as Dutch, much of the information on the company's website is written in Turkish. Its flyers also look different and do not contain photos of sexy women, instead having written text and a picture of the live artists who will be performing or have performed at its events. The flyers for *Club Mahsen* in Amsterdam are very colourful and promote the feeling of a beach holiday. On both its website and its flyers, the audience is addressed in Dutch.

By promoting their parties in English and using sexy pictures, the two largest Turkish party organizations follow the advertising and communication trends of mainstream nightlife. Especially in the larger cities in the Netherlands, the entire communication and promotion of nightlife is in English to give it a more international image. For the two other companies, the use of the Dutch or Turkish language was a conscious decision to attract a particular group of consumers. *Club Mahsen* in Amsterdam, for instance, targets an older audience with a preference for the intimate ambiance of Turkish bars and Turkish folk music. *Sahmeran,* however, wants to attract a more professional and educated crowd, which is reflected in its door policy, with the requirement to show a student card, and its dress code. Furthermore, with its programming of live music in a second room, the company not only attracts young people who are better educated, but also the more conservative

consumers who prefer traditional Turkish music.

Just as in the Asian party scene, the flyers and posters are distributed in places where the target group congregates, namely Turkish restaurants, bars and markets. On the internet, the majority of the companies' advertisements can be found on Turkish websites as well as on community sites that are visited by a young Turkish audience[11].

7.4 Choosing the Turkish clubbing scene

In this paragraph, I will shed light on the personal factors that play a role in the decision to choose to participate in the Turkish clubbing scene. In section 7.4.1, I will highlight the social mechanisms of the processes of identification and differentiation. In this respect, the role of the social characteristics of age, ethnicity and the educational attainment of dance crowds and their friends are analyzed in terms of their experiences of feelings of belonging. The (hidden) social rules within a scene are also addressed, because they largely determine the atmosphere in a club and thus have an impact on feelings of belonging. The second aspect, personal factors, concerns cultural elements. In section 7.4.2, attention is paid to how the social mechanisms referred to above are displayed culturally. The music that is programmed, and the ways people are dressed and dance, play an important role in the identification and differentiation within a dance crowd and dance party. Finally, in section 7.4.3, the restrictions imposed by economic resources and the regulatory role of parents, which can determine choices negatively, are unravelled.

7.4.1 The social dimension

Most of the Turkish clubbers had extensive networks and used the Turkish parties to catch up with their friends. At every Turkish party I attended, I saw lots of people greeting each other, sometimes with a hug, or other enthusiastic responses. Clubbing was a way of shaking off the 'difficulties of the week', a way of escaping from the rigours and stress that these young people experienced in their daily lives. Being together, dancing and joking were key factors in confirming and reaffirming relationships. Many respondents

[11] For example, www.hababam.nl, www.turksagenda.nl, www.turksuitgaan.startpagina.nl and www.lokum.nl.

reported that they go to a Turkish party with their friends to catch up and to also meet and make new friends. The intense form of socialising gives an intimate dimension to the friendship among peers.

Friends

The female respondents in particular often said that they go out to have fun with their (female) friends. They claimed to know many of the other people at a Turkish party, but preferred to hang out with their close circle of friends. In fact, for the more experienced and slightly older female clubbers, the presence of many acquaintances was a reason not to go to a Turkish party often, as one female respondent explained:

> 'You don't want to go there [to a Turkish party] every week, because you always see the same faces, and before you know [it] they are becoming too close, you know, it is good to go there once in a while, to catch up but not to get too much into it'.

The male respondents, on the other hand, emphasized the opportunity to catch up with friends and acquaintances as a reason to go a Turkish party. Many of the men went to a party in a small group and, as soon as they got inside, the socializing with their friends and acquaintances began. A lot of the men also explained that they had become friends with other men they had met at such an event. Another striking difference between the male and female respondents was that almost all of the latter were introduced to the Turkish clubbing scene by their cousins or older sisters, who were often also their closest friends, while most of the men visited the parties with friends from their neighbourhood or school.

Almost all of the respondents claimed that they go to Turkish parties with friends of the same ethnic background. The men and women all agreed that the composition of their group of friends was an important factor in their nightlife choices. It appeared that young people who claimed to have a more mixed group of friends were more likely to participate in different nightlife scenes and venues, varying from a Turkish, to a Salsa, to an RnB party. In particular,

the students or recent graduates (male and female) had an ethnically mixed group of friends with whom they visited different types of parties, both within and without the Turkish clubbing scene. Young people with predominantly Turkish friends, however, generally only went to Turkish parties. This shared Turkish background seemed to push them automatically into the Turkish clubbing scene. The phrase: 'because my friends go there' or 'usually my friends call me to join them' was often used as an explanation of their nightlife choices.

Feelings of belonging

During the interviews, many young people said they felt *comfortable* or *at home* at a Turkish party. These feelings were due to the presence of many friends and acquaintances, but also because the respondents felt that being part of the dance crowd was not something they always experienced in mainstream nightlife. Many emphasized that Turkish people understand each other because they share the same culture. As one young male respondent explained:

> 'You know, when you go to a Turkish party you meet all these people that are like yourself, who understand you because we are the same. They are not asking me questions about my religion or about drinking alcohol, while others do.'

Apparently, this clubber feels like he is being watched and questioned at mainstream club nights, something he does not experience in the Turkish clubbing scene. It was striking how often the respondents mentioned these feelings of being misunderstood when they participate in regular night-time activities.

Social rules and flirting

Checking out the crowd, flirting, dancing in a sexy way, or flirting by eye-contact is part of the deal when you go out. Accordingly, social interaction plays a key role during a night on the town. In every scene, this takes place along established lines and there are hidden rules and codes. Some of these relate to courtship and flirting. Unlike in pubs, conversation in nightclubs is generally kept

at a superficial level, and consists mainly of short stories, small talk, gossip and joking.

During the interviews, both the men and women confirmed that they look around and check out members of the opposite sex, although all of them were of the opinion that potential life partners were not likely to be found during a night out. Some of the females said they didn't pay any attention at all to men when they are out, fearing that they would meet the 'wrong type of guy'. These 'wrong' types, the young women explained, were described as being machos, with a backward and old-fashioned mentality and no respect for women:

> 'You cannot tell by the way they look. But some men, you know, they still think that women who go out are the so-called 'fallen-women', you know sluts and whores'.

Or, as a 26 year old female clubber told me:

> 'There are guys, who lock up their own wives and or sisters, go to a Turkish party,
> drink too much, chase everything in a skirt and watch every step you make so that they can talk bad about you the next day'.

In the eyes of these men, women who go out are not respectable and are, therefore, treated accordingly. The expectant attitude of the women also has an impact on the behaviour of the men. Some men explained that it was very hard to approach a woman who interested them at a party without a proper introduction by a mutual acquaintance. Others accused the women of being snobbish and unapproachable.

Furthermore, flirting or kissing in public is definitely not the done thing in the Turkish clubbing scene.

One respondent found this out to his cost:

> 'I was drunk and she was a very nice girl and then I kissed her, but I shouldn't have done that because the next day several friends called me. At the party nobody would say that you should not do that or warn [you] in any way, but everybody will condemn it. It damages your reputation. Even a few weeks later at the next party my friends who weren't even there called me to account'

Social control

Social control is another unspoken, yet very important, aspect of the Turkish clubbing scene. Almost all of the respondents had very strong opinions about how social control affects their behaviour and the atmosphere at a Turkish party. The way you dress, dance or act, the people you talk to and the amount of alcohol you drink can all give rise to gossip and ruin your reputation. The women in particular complained about perceived social control, and for some it was even a reason not to go to Turkish parties anymore, or to only go occasionally. Within small clubbing scenes it is common for people to know and, as a result, keep a close eye on each other and gossip. After all, nightlife is all about seeing and being seen. Interestingly, the social control at Turkish parties goes beyond the borders of nightlife and is fed back into the wider Turkish community. If, for instance, a young woman dresses too provocatively, or has too many daring interactions with men (according to others), her family will be told about her behaviour. Some of the female participants explained that their first few parties were fantastic and exciting, but after a while they became less enthusiastic because of this social control. Other women did not experience it so negatively, and said they had found a way of dealing with it and took it for granted. They simply stated that it was part of their culture and that it also makes the parties safer, because most of the men keep their distance and treat the women respectfully. Men experience social control as well, but they have more latitude. Their nightlife actions are not reported back to their family.

7.4.2 The cultural dimension

Long before people enter a club, the preparations for the night begin, with the right outfits, hair and make-up being carefully considered. Young people predominantly communicate their identity through their taste in music and by the way they look. This is even more important during a night out.

Music

Many clubbers described a sensation that they experienced while clubbing of being in a state or place that is in some way removed from the 'normal times', spaces and social relationships of their everyday lives; in other words, being in a realm of fantasy, fun and freedom. These feelings can be traced back to the ways in which the clubbers listen to and understand the music in the clubbing experience. As well as the movement of the body, the music, the rhythm and the dance also involve a massive stimulation of the senses and emotions. Music was prioritized, being cited as the most important reason why participants went to a particular party. One of the respondents said:

> 'When I hear Turkish music, my blood starts to warm up and I cannot sit still anymore. This occurs as soon as I enter the club and hear the Turkish melodies. Then I have to dance'.

Apparently, this respondent feels emotionally connected to Turkish music, which makes her choice of the Turkish nightlife scene very obvious. Most of the participants said that they listen to Turkish music at home almost all of the time, watching Turkish MTV and downloading Türk pop from the internet to keep up with the latest hits. Statements about music 'being in my blood', or 'being a part of who I am' were used often by the respondents to express their relationship with Turkish music. Türk pop or other Turkish sounds are not played at mainstream club nights, however, and this is thus an important reason to choose to go to a Turkish party.

The young people I interviewed said often that they loved to listen to Turkish music, and especially modern Türk pop or dance, because it connected them to their Turkish background. For some, it was principally a nostalgic reminder of the holidays they used to

spend with their family in Turkey. One female respondent claimed not only to have a close relationship with Turkish music, but said that the togetherness at these parties made her feel good:

> 'This music also brings along some sort of nostalgia. Last week at a party of 33 Events I stood on the balcony and looked down thinking: Wow, look at all these people, how great that we Turks all can go crazy on this music and that we can create such a positive vibe'.

Being at a Turkish party and listening and dancing to Turkish music gave her a feeling of connection with the dancing crowd and with her Turkish ancestry. She identified with the clubbers on the basis of their shared Turkish background.

Most of the respondents viewed the use of Turkish instruments and the more dramatic melodies in this music as important. Often, they contrasted Türk pop with American chart and dance music. The opportunity to listen and dance to their favourite sounds was, therefore, an important reason for the respondents to choose the Turkish clubbing scene.

Dancing

Türk pop has a very different tone and rhythm to popular western music, and thus requires another style of dancing. Both men and women shake their hips and shoulders frequently to the rhythm of the beat. The majority of the time, the women dance in small groups with each other, occasionally holding hands while they do so. At some parties, in a separate room away from the main stage, live music is played. In this area, the crowd dances the *halay* (oriental circle dance), which is predominantly performed at weddings and other family orientated parties.

Music and dance cannot be separated from each other, and the respondents also used them interchangeably as important reasons to participate in the Turkish clubbing scene. Many of the young clubbers connected music and dance with feelings of nostalgia for their country of origin, or saw it as a pleasant reminder of the holidays they had spent in Turkey.

A lot of the women said that they spent almost all of their time dancing at a party to evoke those happy feelings. As one woman explained:

> 'At home I always listen to Turkish music; it has more emotion and when I go out I also want to listen and dance to Turkish music. It makes me happy and it gives me a bit [of] a sensation as if I am back in Turkey. I go to these parties to dance and the music and dancing just gives me a good feeling, a certain state of mind you know'.

Dress code

Seeing and being seen, and putting on an act, dressing to impress, and any other form of impression management are central features in nightlife. For both the male and female respondents, shoes, clothing (make-up), and hairstyle are the most important aspects of presentation. The transformation of the self often begins several hours before going out. When I was present at these parties, it became clear to me that most of the men and women were carefully dressed according to the latest fashions, and had spent a lot of time and effort in putting together the right outfit, with shoes and jewellry, topped off with a stylish hair do. During the interviews, the dress code and the look of the male and female clubbers was often contrasted with that of their native Dutch peers.

As one woman explained:

> 'We [youngsters of Turkish descent] like to dress up before we go out. You want to show yourself off, and by putting a lot of time into dressing up, you make the occasion special. It makes you feel special. We don't go out that much, if we do, we dress for the occasion, while Dutch youngsters go out more often. Therefore it is not special for them anymore'.

By contrasting the clubbers at regular club nights with those participating in the Turkish clubbing scene, and by pointing to the similarities between herself and this Turkish nightlife, this woman is justifying her choice.

From my observations, and during the conversations I had with these young Turkish clubbers, I noticed a variety in the extent

to which they exposed or covered up their bodies. Some women were dressed extremely sexily, in cropped tops and short skirts combined with high heels, while others were more covered up, wearing trousers or long skirts. Overall, though, the women were dressed according to the latest fashions, which they combined with an oriental touch. They had bought their outfits in popular and commercial stores like Hennes & Mauritz or Zara, where they picked out the more colourful clothing and topped it off with large necklaces, bracelets and earrings, which gave them a more exotic look compared to the clothing style of native Dutch clubbers. The men at the Turkish parties were also carefully dressed and styled. A frequently heard term used to describe them was 'metro men'. According to glossy magazines, the styling of the hair, the purchase of trendy outfits and applying moisturizers are now part of the daily routines of these men. Many of the female respondents also pointed to the presence of another type of man, namely the *machos*. This is a term that is not used in a positive sense, and is applied to men who are full of themselves, and who wear gold necklaces, ill-fitting suits, or Armani trousers, and shirts in garish colours with prominent logos.

Masters of the scene: DJs & heroes

In the choice of consumption items, such as a particular style of dress, music, and leisure time activities, a lot of young people are inspired by the behaviour and look of pop stars, actors or other famous people. Many of the respondents said that they watch Turkish music channels to keep up to date with the latest trends and sounds.

As one male respondent explained:

> ' I really like to watch these Turkish music channels, they keep me informed about the latest releases of my favourite artists, but I also watch the video clips to look at haircuts, dance moves and stuff.'

The internet was also frequently mentioned as a source of inspiration for outfits and haircuts.

Striking in this scene was the popularity of the DJs who played at the parties. Many of the respondents said they looked at the DJ line-up before deciding where to go to. They viewed the DJ as the 'person in the know' when it came to what was a good party, and during the interviews they often talked of them as true artists or pop icons. If the respondents were not familiar with a specific party organization, the DJ line-up was an important factor in deciding whether that particular event was worth checking out. They shared the opinion that famous DJs, such as DJ Silence, DJ Ercan or DJ Hakan C, would not play at lousy parties.

7.4.3 Restrictions

A decision about which party or club to attend is not only informed by personal preferences and a circle of friends, but also by the options that young people have available to them. The number of these options varies according to the different levels of accessibility of nightlife for an individual clubber. Some have limited access to money to pay the entrance fee, do not have access to transportation, have negative experiences with the door policies of clubs, or might not even be allowed by their parents to go out. These restrictions determine choices and options negatively.

Door policy

I have previously addressed the door policy issue from the perspectives of club owners in mainstream Dutch nightlife and the Turkish party organizations. However, those who are genuinely affected by door policies are the consumers. When asked questions about this in terms of mainstream nightlife, almost all of the respondents said that they were familiar with discrimination at the doors of popular clubs. They have all *heard* stories from their friends about the rude behaviour of bouncers, although very few had actually *experienced* being refused entry to these mainstream clubs themselves. In fact, none of the female respondents had ever been refused entry at the door of regular club venues by bouncers. Although only a few men had actually not been allowed into a popular club, almost all of them feared a confrontation with the bouncers when they were standing in line. For some, these feelings of insecurity certainly played a role in their decision to participate in

the Turkish clubbing scene. As one male clubber explained:

> 'I do not want to try, you know, it is so denigrating if the bouncers refuse you entry. I do not even want to try; the idea of getting refused makes me very agitated'

One Turkish party organization even stated that Turkish parties: 'offer a good alternative for regular nightlife where they [Turks] are being refused at the door'. The choice of the Turkish clubbing scene is, for some men, influenced by their negative feelings or experiences towards the door policies at mainstream venues. For the women, this issue played no role in their choice between the Turkish and the regular clubbing scenes.

As I have mentioned before, Turkish parties also have rules of entry. The *Damsiz girilmez* rule makes this scene inaccessible for men without female company. In fact, you will always find a group of young men hanging around near the entrance of a club where a Turkish party is taking place. They approach small groups of women and ask them to accompany them so that they can get into the venue. These young men generally offer to pay (drinks or the entrance fee) for the women, most of whom told me that they would never accept these invitations. As one female clubber explained:

> 'If a man cannot get a female date, it means that he is not friends with women and that in his family women are not allowed to go out. You do not want these old-fashioned types at the party……It is usually the machos who harass the women or drink too much or smoke hashish who stand outside the door.'

The regulatory role of parents

As well as a restrictive door policy, parents usually also play a role in the nightlife activities of their children. Some do not give their sons and daughters permission to go out at all, while others impose restrictions in terms of time, location and who they are allowed to go with. Young Turkish women in particular were more restricted in their nightlife choices. Most of the female respondents explained

that they got permission to go out when they reached the age of 20,[12] but only to a Turkish party and accompanied by an older sister or cousin. Only after a while did they get more freedom in their nightlife choices, with their parents letting them make their own decisions about where to go to and with whom. Accordingly, for most young Turkish women, their nightlife activities are initially restricted to the Turkish clubbing scene.

Of course, not all women experience these restrictions, with some claiming to have an open relationship with their parents, who let them make their own decisions, while others said that they never would get permission to go out, so they did so secretly. The male respondents, on the other hand, said they didn't talk at all to their parents about going out; it simply wasn't an issue. They just went out on a Saturday night.

Economic resources

Both consumers and organizers agreed that due to the wide availability of Turkish parties in Rotterdam and Amsterdam these days, most Dutch Turkish youngsters prefer to party in their own city or the one closest to home. Predominantly, the older and more experienced clubbers explained that a few years ago they had to travel all over the Netherlands to find a Turkish party. Some even crossed the border to attend such events in Germany. Now, however, Turkish parties are much more accessible. Turkish party organizations charge an entrance fee of between 12 and 15 Euros, which corresponds to what it costs to get into a mainstream club event. Most of the respondents complained that after the introduction of the Euro, nightlife in particular had become much more expensive, with entrance fees and the price of drinks rising enormously. This applies to both the Turkish clubbing scene and nightlife in general. Most of the young Turkish Dutch clubbers I spoke to claimed that they go out less, often due to the price-rises, but this factor has no impact on the choices they make between the Turkish and the regular clubbing scenes.

[12] This is rather late compared to native Dutch youngsters, who mostly get permission to go out at the age of 16

7.5 Politics of distinction among the consumers of the Turkish clubbing scene

All of the respondents were very keen to draw distinctions between the four Turkish party organizations studied herein and their audiences. In the previous section, the focus was on the choices Turkish youngsters made between the Turkish and the mainstream clubbing scenes, while here I will now address the decisions that young people make *within* the Turkish clubbing arena. Their previous experiences and so-called cultural knowledge are used to select their favourite Turkish parties and create divisions within the Turkish clubbing scene.

Music

According to Bennett (2000, 181-182), the meaning of music is 'a *product of its reception and approbation by audiences'*. Furthermore, he also argues that music can be viewed as a process through which groups negotiate their identity with others. But here, the question of who the other is can be raised. Are 'the others' people with a different ethnic background who, nevertheless, share an interest in Turkish music, or are they Turkish young people who prefer another type of Turkish sounds. The answer to this question varied between the respondents. During the interviews, the Turkish youngsters not only pointed to the differences between themselves and their native Dutch peers, but also to differences in the groups of consumers of Turkish parties. It was striking that this process of differentiation on the more individual level almost always arose from a negative attitude. These clubbers justified their preference for one organization over another by pointing to the musical programming of the other companies as being too traditional, or too trendy, or there was too much Turkish music, or there was not enough. Striking was the often referred to inter-relationship between musical programming and the crowds. All of the young people emphasized the differences between the music played at the diverse Turkish parties. Some of them explained that they did not go to *Sahmeran,* for instance, because they did not like live music.

As one respondent said:

> 'Live music doesn't belong in a club, if I want to hear live music I'll go to a concert'.

While, for another respondent, the presence of live music was an important reason to choose a *Sahmeran* party.

Identifying with the dance crowd

The young people who went to parties in both Rotterdam and Amsterdam emphasized that the dance crowds at these events were the same. According to these respondents, the same faces can be seen everywhere, because the group of young people who go to Turkish parties is very small. However, the youngsters who only visited parties arranged by their favourite organization had strong opinions about the differences between the crowds at these events. The variations between the responses of the male and female clubbers regarding clothing style and appearances were striking. When the men described the male audience in general, they often pointed to the resemblance with themselves, frequently using the sentences: 'trendy and looked just like myself' or 'I always dress casual and relaxed just like the others' to describe the outfits of the male crowd. Almost none of the male respondents made distinctions between the clothing styles of the women at a party. They often used words like sexy, good looking and trendy to describe them in more general terms.

The female respondents, on the other hand, described themselves in opposite terms to their female peers. They used the words relaxed, well and carefully dressed, but not too overdone, to describe themselves, while claiming that many of the other female clubbers were vulgar, overdressed and sluttish. Another recurring feature relating to the outfits of 'other women' was the wearing of headscarves. At one Turkish party I visited (which was organized as an after-party following a concert by the very famous 'Queen of Turkish pop', Sezen Aksu) there were some women present who wore headscarves. Weeks, and even months, later, some of the young Turkish women I spoke to criticized both the women with the headscarves as well as the organization which allowed them entry.

As one female clubber clearly explained:

> 'If you decide that you are ready to wear a headscarf, good for you! But it is not a fashion item; it demands a certain lifestyle, one that does not coincide with clubbing, with dancing at a place late at night, with men, where alcohol is being served.'

In the current public debates in the Netherlands, the issue of veiling is seen as a sign of gender inequality (Duits and van Zoonen, 2006), but also as a signal of difference. The veil forcibly reconstructs the 'otherness' of Islam. These processes of difference related to the wearing of a veil are also a topic of heated debate in Turkey. Apparently, in the Netherlands, Turkish parties are, in the eyes of the young Turkish clubbers, the domain of a more westernized lifestyle and, therefore, automatically not the right place for veiled women.

Local differences in the dance crowd

As well as contrasting their own outfits with those of their fellow clubbers, many young people also drew distinctions between the dance crowds at parties in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Those who only attended events in Amsterdam stated that the people at *Keyifland* and *Sahmeran's* parties in Rotterdam were more traditional, or tried to dress trendily and look cool without paying attention to beauty and personal style, resulting in a sluttish and vulgar look. The Amsterdam clubbers, however, described the crowd at the parties in Rotterdam in terms like: backwards, old-fashioned machos and peasants for the male visitors, and words like trashy and wannabes to describe the women in stereotypical terms. This was contrasted to their own crowd, which they said was generally hip and trendy. They claimed to be dressed according to the latest fashions, in combination with Turkish elements, to create a personal style. It is unsurprising that the Rotterdam Turks also had a strong opinion of the dress code of those who attended Turkish parties in Amsterdam, accusing these peers of being snobbish and pompous, while describing themselves as 'down to earth party people'.

They pointed to the outfits of the Amsterdam Turks as 'too pretentious' and 'too Western'.

Most of the youngsters viewed the variations in the crowds as local differences. They replicated the general stereotypes that the native inhabitants of Rotterdam are hard workers, while the people of Amsterdam are sophisticated and culturally minded. As one Rotterdam Turk explained:

> 'We live in Rotterdam, the city where everybody is honest and works hard; you know down to earth kind of people. But in Amsterdam, the people think they are all that, but the only thing [that] they are is arrogant'.

A young man living in Amsterdam had his own version of these local differences:

> 'There are differences you know. Rotterdam consists of predominantly working class people. Nothing wrong with that, but they do not look outside their own community. They might look trendy on the outside, but inside they stick to their traditional values, while I think that in Amsterdam, we are more open and free'.

When I asked whether these variations were mainly caused by differences in educational background, almost all of the respondents waved this notion away. They explained that it was mainly differences in the *attitudes* or *mentality* of the crowds at the four types of Turkish parties; it had nothing to do with educational attainment. According to the Amsterdam Turks, this attitude could be best characterized as a difference in outlook between urban and rural youngsters. While some of them were from rural areas themselves, they emphasized that they had adopted an *urban mentality*. This mentality, as opposed to a rural outlook, is characterized as modern and Western, instead of traditional and old-fashioned. They all agreed that it is not educational standards which have an impact on your mentality or attitude, but that your family and upbringing is influential. Most of the young Amsterdam clubbers were very determined in their opinions and gave me

examples of university students they knew who were very traditional in their ideas, or they told me about poorly educated friends who were very modern. The Rotterdam Turks also denied the importance of educational attainment. Their stereotyping of themselves and their Amsterdam peers was very different. They described themselves as 'down to earth' and 'true to their cultural heritage', while they accused the Turks in Amsterdam of being 'snobbish' and 'denying their ethnic roots'.

The denial of the importance of educational background in favour of the hedonistic or style based discourse of attitude or mentality is often repeated by field researchers. However, I cannot ignore the overlap between the educational attainment of the respondents and their self-descriptions and descriptions of others. In general, the more highly educated youngsters portrayed themselves as modern and urban and the 'others' as rural, backwards and traditional, while the less well educated respondents claimed that the others were 'snobbish', but they viewed themselves as down to earth.

Turkish organizations

When I asked the Turkish clubbers about the differences between the four party organizations, all of them gave me a description of the differences in the music and the dance crowds referred to in the sections above. Only a few pointed to the characteristics of the party organizations themselves. Those who did were the young people who had close relationships with one of the owners of these companies. Youngsters who did not have any personal affiliation to any of the organizations did not address them at all, being more orientated towards the characteristics of the party, such as the music, door policy and the dance crowd.

7.6 Summary

At the time of writing, in the winter of 2008, young Turkish people can go almost every week to dance to their favourite Turkish music at specially organized Turkish parties. To beat the competition and attract Turkish consumers, the four organizations that are included in this study create their own version of a Turkish party. By their concepts, door policy and musical programming, each of these

companies attracts a specific group of consumers. They also keep a close eye on each other and keep themselves informed about what their rivals are doing.

For the Turkish audience, the cultural elements of a Turkish party were considered to be very important. Dancing to Turkish music in a well dressed crowd was viewed as an important reason to choose to participate in the Turkish clubbing scene.

So far as the social factors are concerned, the young Turkish men and women I spoke to differed in their nightlife experiences and the motivations behind their nightlife choices. In general, the young men stated that the presence of friends and acquaintances was important, while most of the women claimed that they keep close to the friends they attended the party with. Both the men and women mentioned social control as a negative factor of Turkish parties. The women in particular did not feel free to talk to men they didn't know. They did not trust them and were afraid of being treated badly or gossiped about. This attitude also had an impact on the men. All of them explained that it is not possible to approach a woman without a proper introduction by a mutual friend.

Men and women also had different experiences regarding the restrictions they faced. Overall, most men did not have to deal with many limitations imposed by their parents, while the majority of the women did at some point have such problems. Moreover, when it comes to the door policies of mainstream nightlife, the men and women again had different opinions and experiences. Many Turkish men shared the feeling that they were not welcome at regular clubs. It was striking that almost all of the male respondents were of the opinion that it was more difficult to get into a Turkish party than to a mainstream event, as a result of both the rule which states that all men have to bring a female date to a Turkish party, and the strong emphasis on style of dress. The female respondents, on the other hand, did not mention any restrictions regarding door policy. Moreover, the young women who occasionally attended parties in the mainstream clubbing scene said that they had never been refused entry.

In general, the men and women experienced the Turkish clubbing scene differently. For most of the former, the social factors were very important reasons to choose a Turkish party, while for the

majority of the women cultural factors played a more important role in their choice of this scene.

Due to the large number of party organizations which operate in this market, most young people also have to make choices *within* the Turkish clubbing scene. The choice of a specific party within the Turkish club circuit was strongly influenced by the different styles of music played (global vs. Turkish, pop music vs. traditional music), the expected crowd (hip vs. sophisticated, trendy vs. old-fashioned), the image of the Turkish party organizations (trendy vs. traditional) as well as the location (Rotterdam vs. Amsterdam, popular clubs vs. party centres).

Apart from the differences in organization and musical programming, it was striking that the respondents mentioned local variations in the party crowds. Many of the Amsterdam Turks distinguished themselves from their Turkish peers in Rotterdam and vice versa. Only the young people who visited parties in both cities emphasized similarities. It can thus be concluded that the wide availability of Turkish parties, as well as the strategies used by the party organizations to create their own type of event, has an impact on the choices that young Turkish people make for a specific party within the Turkish clubbing scene.