

## “German-Turkish Club Scenes in Berlin”



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Before I start with my tour of the German Turkish Club scenes, I want to give you some key data about my informants:

I have followed different crowds with an age range between 18 and 40. It was striking that there have been also clubbers in their thirties and above in the different scenes. In terms of socio-economic position and professions, the range was as wide as the age: I met many Students, few single mothers, people in a higher income bracket such as doctors or Lawyers as well as unemployed people. I met couples, singles, straight and queer clubbers across the scenes. Clubbing was an important part of their lives, and not limited to a specific period of life. Nightlife events were mainly taking place Thursdays to Sundays, but daytime leisure activities in public settings were also widespread.

## Berlin

This map shows Berlin before the fall of the wall. As you can see, these districts - Wedding, Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Spandau - were actually peripheral at that time. These districts are still the main districts with a high number of residents with background from Turkey. With the fall of the wall 1989 the former peripheries suddenly became very central.



Fig. 1: Berlin map before 1989

## Gentrification processes

It's important to mention, that during my fieldwork period the cost of real estate and rents increased more than 20% in parts of the following districts: Mitte, Kreuzberg and Neukölln. Gentrification processes in Berlin have been speeding up during the last few years, especially in Kreuzberg.

The consequence is, that the low-income population in these districts is being pushed out. German Turks are disproportionately affected by that.

Increasing rents, conversions and new property relations push tenants out of their housings and the owners of venues out of their Cafes, Clubs and Bars. These rapid changes influence not only the composition of inhabitants, but also associated with that, social interaction and dynamics in nightlife. Gentrification processes have a tremendous influence on the German Turkish scenes, especially in Kreuzberg: some Bars and clubs, which have been an important part of my fieldwork, don't exist anymore, because they weren't able to pay the high rents any longer or the venues were bought from large-scale investors.

### Turkish pop music scene

Spatially, I can locate mainly two scenes.

The first is the Turkish pop music scene. The second is located in Kreuzberg.

We will now zoom into the city centre, having Kreuzberg as a point of orientation:

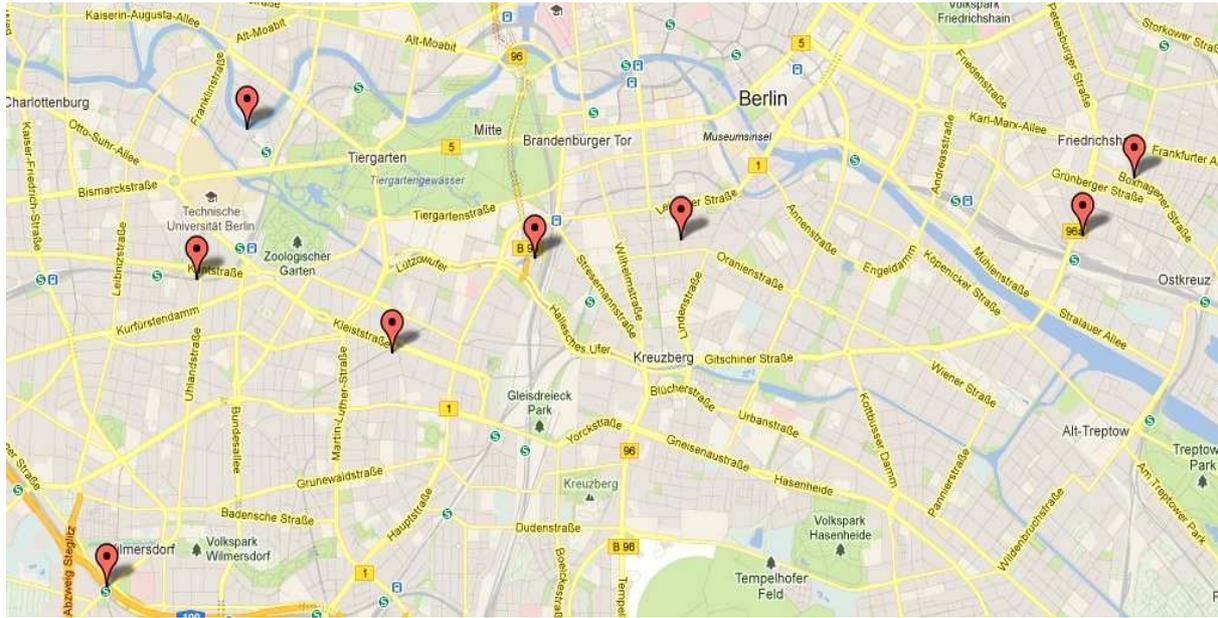


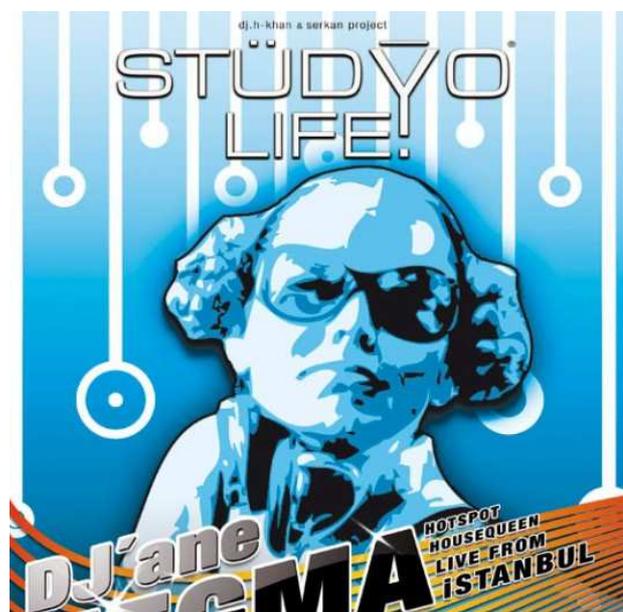
Fig. 2: venues of Turkish pop music scene

This map shows venues of the Turkish pop music scene I've studied.

This scene has no stable venues, but rather 'classy' clubs are rented for one-time concerts and single events. You can see that the parties move around Kreuzberg and the city centre.

The Turkish Clubbing scene started out with Turkish Pop music parties in the early 1990ies. This scene offered new spaces for a new target group. The majority of male German Turkish Clubbers have been facing gendered racism in the clubbing context for a long time, especially with door policies at mainstream clubs.

Serkan, who is an important organizer for Turkish Pop parties and concerts, told me that it took several years to establish Turkish pop parties within the wider clubbing context in Berlin.



These are some flyers from his events. By now he has built up a good reputation for his events, which has enabled him to rent 'classy' clubs and make them accessible for an audience who had none or at least hard access to these areas of nightlife before.

This does not mean that German-Turkish clubbers are not affected by discrimination and social exclusion anymore, but that the scene has established ways to get access to spaces their members were excluded from before.



Posters at the Club-entrance, advertising the next events<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Kreuzberg, where the scenes are located at stable venues, one has to stay up to date in order to know where the next Turkish Pop party is. The next event is advertised at the party venue itself with flyers and posters – or one has to be part of a network – as most events are advertised either via word of mouth or via the online social network Facebook.

Facebook has been used as a main tool not only by organizers of every scene I've explored, but also by clubbers in order to spread the word about the next nightlife activities.

The Turkish Pop music scene was the first scene in the context of German Turkish clubbing. Today there is a wider variety of different scenes that are mainly located in Kreuzberg, which is the second scene I have explored.

## **Kreuzberg Scenes**

Kreuzberg has gone through great transformations since the 1990ies. It is still known as the “Turkish district” of Berlin, as many guest-workers from Turkey have been settling down in this peripheral area since the 1960ies. Kreuzberg provided low cost living conditions and cheap housing, as the area was fenced in on three sides by the wall.

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<sup>1</sup> All photos in this paper are by Meltem Acartürk

With the fall of the wall in 1989, the former peripheries of *Kreuzberg* and *Neukölln*, became geographically speaking suddenly very central.

This historically based geographical change had an impact not only on Kreuzberg as a district in general, but also regarding its German Turkish clubbing scenes: with the central geographical position, a former marginalized district, with a long history of German Turkish socializing practices, food and shopping culture, got a positive and hip connotation, and therefore became attractive also as a touristic area.

Let's zoom in to the very centre of Kreuzberg.

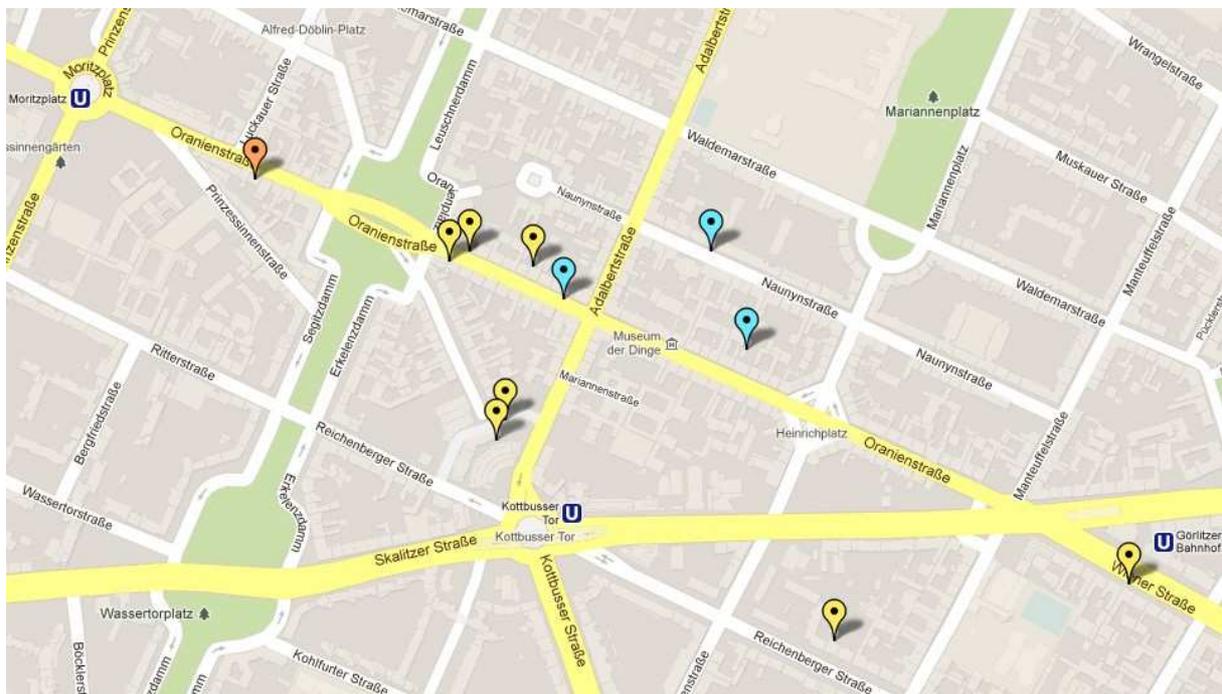


Fig.3: map of Kreuzberg scenes

This is the main axis that I am referring to, when I speak about the Kreuzberg scene: Kottbusser Tor/ Adalbertstraße/ / Oranienstraße including the area between Mariannenplatz und Moritzplatz. This part of Kreuzberg hosts several Cafes, Bars and Clubs for different scenes within a small radius.

It is striking that although the city provides a very good 24/7 public transport system, my informants from the Kreuzberg scenes did not move around much. They tended to stay mainly in Kreuzberg for clubbing, having their regular “Clubbing routes and routines”.

With the new central geographical position in combination with the sustained low housing costs, the district became more and more attractive, also for sub-cultural nightlife economies in my context, such as the Balkanbeats and Worldmusic scene and the Turkish Rock scene.

At the same time Kreuzberg hosts the queer-oriental-party concept “Gayhane” at S036, an important part of the post-migrant queer scene.

On this map we see that the different venues are located basically in a radius of about two kilometres. An interesting point, also in contrast to the Turkish Pop Music scene, is that Kreuzberg offers stable venues. But this does not necessarily mean that scenes stick to one single venue.

There are also venues that host several different scenes, such as the S036 does.

The yellow dots stand for Cafes and Bars which turn also into Clubbing-spaces, the Blue ones for Clubs, which can also host different scenes and the Orange one here is a Turkish Rock Bar that only hosts Turkish Rock events, most of the time with live music.

Here on this map the venues are marked by their type, not by the scenes, as a venue can host multiple scenes, or can change its face depending on the time of day: during daytime it’s a cafe, by night it transforms into a Bar or a Club.

The challenge how to categorize these venues already hints at a characteristic of these scenes: Social encounters in leisure venues are possible any day, any time. There are mainly two factors that are supporting that:

Firstly: the spatio-temporal factor.

This means that many of my informants from the Kreuzberg scene also lived either in or at least close to Kreuzberg, which made it possible to meet up spontaneously. The possibility of meeting people did not depend on a specific day or time nor was it only limited to nightlife activities. At the same time many of my informants were students or worked part-time, which made it possible for them also to hang out at their regular Cafes during daytime, mostly with a direct transition into nightlife, as their regular Clubs and Bars were just around the corner.

Secondly, the economic factor in Berlin, especially in Kreuzberg at that time, offered and supported the possibility to take part in public life even on a small budget. Drinks, food and entries were very cheap, with ten Euros it was possible to spend a whole day and night at different venues.

## SO 36



Pictures above are showing a Turkish-Rock-Concert (left corner) and a Worldmusic Party (right corner) at the Club SO36 (middle). The photo of the Club entrance was taken during daytime. Also the queer-oriental Gayhane parties take place at this venue, but due to protection reasons of their clubbers, it is strictly forbidden to take pictures at Gayhane parties.

Let's take SO 36 as an example. Venues such as SO36 or Möbel Olfe are important and stable institutions for Berlin's Queer scene. The existence of "Gayhane" at SO36 for almost fifteen years now underlines this. It is interesting that the German Turkish party scenes in Kreuzberg partly intersect with the Queer party scene.

This is also helped by the spatial dimension:

Venues such as SO36 host different events catering to different scenes: Gayhane, Turkish Rock concerts and also Balkanbeat and Worldmusic parties take place at the very same venue.

As these events take always place at SO36, there is a high identification with this venue and a regular crowd emerges. For a regular crowd it is also easier to join other party events at the same place, as they are already familiar with the venue as such, so there is a cross-over effect.

The intersection of the different scenes flows in various directions:

It is not only that straight, mostly female, German Turkish clubbers enjoy the atmosphere and music at a queer oriental party. Also queer German Turkish clubbers are part of other scenes, such as the Turkish Rock scene or World music scene. Some clubbers I've accompanied through the fieldwork period, enjoyed also electronic music scenes, but this was interestingly enough only a minority.

What the majority of my informants were looking for was a certain level of familiarity within their scenes. In my fieldwork context the notion of 'familiarity' goes beyond the familiarity of the bakery or Cafe we go to every day next door.

The 'comfort zone', by which I mean is the spatial but also social and cultural area that one feels familiar with, it is not only limited to a single event or one single venue, but as we've seen, it is rather spread all over a whole, single geographical area. This wider 'comfort zone' combined with the spatio-temporal and economic factors, allows hanging out with and meeting people in a wider radius. At the same time, to create a 'comfort zone', cultural factors are very important, such as the Turkish language, for singing songs together or for general conversations and dance such as a popular dance called Halay, which is a form of circle dance.

Having a tight and large social network was very important to my informants, not only in order to stay up-to-date about upcoming events and for circulating information about jobs or housing, but also to seek help and support in other parts of their lives.

As a regular clubber in Kreuzberg, it is possible to become part of a wide social network very quickly, as the willingness to get to know each other is very high, both among men and women. The bigger the (regular) social Network is, the bigger the chance to run into people one knows during nightlife activities. This creates an atmosphere of security and protection. But the flipside of such a tight and large social network is Social control. Public Leisure interactions in Kreuzberg are never anonymous, which influences social behavior in public to quite a degree.

There is much more to say, of course, but I hope with this quick journey you have gathered some insights across the various post-migrant scenes in Berlin. Thank you.