

HOME PAGE MY TIMES TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS [Get Home Delivery](#) [Log In](#) [Register Now](#)

**The New York Times** **Europe**  The Personal Address of Ameriprise Financial

World  All NYT

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

AFRICA AMERICAS ASIA PACIFIC **EUROPE** MIDDLE EAST

**What to do in Barcelona?** "Don't skip the Picasso Museum—the building alone would make the visit worthwhile." — *John*

See what travelers like you recommend. **NYTimes.com/Travel**

BERLIN JOURNAL

## Gay Muslims Pack a Dance Floor of Their Own



Jan-Peter Boehning for The New York Times

The crowd at Gayhane, a monthly party for Arab and Turkish gay men, lesbians and bisexuals at SO36, a Berlin nightclub. The event's name is fashioned from gay and "hane," Turkish for home.

By NICHOLAS KULISH  
Published: January 1, 2008

BERLIN — Six men whirled faster and faster in the center of the nightclub, arms slung over one another's shoulders, performing a traditional circle dance popular in Turkey and the Middle East. Nothing unusual given the German capital's large Muslim population.



Jan-Peter Boehning for The New York Times

Fatma Souad, a transgender performer and Gayhane's organizer, before dressing for a Gayhane party last week.

But most of the people filling the dance floor on Saturday at the club SO36 in the Kreuzberg neighborhood were gay, lesbian or bisexual, and of Turkish or Arab background. They were there for the monthly club night known as Gayhane, an all-too-rare opportunity to merge their immigrant cultures and their sexual identities.

European Muslims, so often portrayed one-dimensionally as rioters, honor killers or terrorists, live diverse lives, most of them trying to get by and to have a good time. That is more difficult if one is both Muslim and gay.

"When you're here, it's as if you're putting on a mask, leaving the everyday outside and just having fun," said a 22-year-old Turkish man who spoke on the condition of

anonymity out of fear that he would be ostracized or worse if his family found out about his sexual orientation.

Safety and secrecy come up regularly when talking to guests, who laugh and dance, but also frequently look over their shoulders. To be a gay man or lesbian with an immigrant background invites trouble here in two very different ways.

[More Articles in International »](#)

### Today's Headlines Daily E-Mail



Sign up for a roundup of the day's top stories, sent every morning.

 

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

**The New York Times**

**What to do in Barcelona?**

"Don't skip the Picasso Museum—the building alone would make the visit worthwhile." — *John*

[Click to see what travelers like you recommend.](#)

**NYTimes.com/Travel**

### MOST POPULAR

1. Giving Disorganized Boys the Tools for Success
2. Mind: The New Year's Cocktail: Regret With a Dash of Bitters
3. Editorial: Looking at America
4. Bright Ideas: Innovative Minds Don't Think Alike
5. Well: A Clutter Too Deep for Mere Bins and Shelves
6. Web Playgrounds of the Very Young
7. Bob Herbert: Still Reeling After All These Years
8. David Brooks: Road to Nowhere
9. Oil in North Dakota Brings Job Boom and Burdens
10. On a Remote Path to Cures

[Go to Complete List »](#)

**The New York Times** **BUSINESS**  
nytimes.com/business

**An enthusiast entrepreneur's new business**

Also in Business:  
[Taking a whack at making a car](#)

“Depending on which part of Berlin I go to, in one I get punched in the mouth because I’m a foreigner and in the other because I’m a queen,” said Fatma Souad, the event’s organizer and master of ceremonies. Ms. Souad, 43, a transgender performer born in Ankara as a boy named Ali, has put on the party for over a decade.

Ms. Souad came to Berlin in 1983 after leaving home as a teenager. She studied to be a dressmaker and played in a punk band, but discovered Middle Eastern music through a friend and began teaching herself belly dancing. Ms. Souad started Salon Oriental, her first belly dancing theater, in 1988, and threw the first Gayhane party — hane means home in Turkish — in January 1997.

The club was packed by midnight and still had a line out the front door. On stage, Ms. Souad mixed a white turban and white net gloves with a black tuxedo with tails and a silver cummerbund, her face made up with perfectly drawn eyeliner and mascara. Dancing, she was all fluid motion, light on her feet, expressively twisting her hands and swiveling her hips.

Under flashing colored lights, guests, some with dreadlocks and others with carefully gelled coifs, moved to songs by the likes of the Egyptian Amr Diab and the Algerian Cheb Mami. Beats from traditional drums crossed with electronic ones, as melodies from flutes and ouds intertwined. When several circle dances — halay in Turkish — broke out at once, the floor began to shake from the stomping.

One of the regular D.J.’s, Ipek Ipekcioglu, 35, said she got her start rather suddenly, when one of the founders of SO36 walked up to her and said: “You’re Turkish, right? You’re lesbian, right? Bring your cassettes and D.J.”

Ms. Ipekcioglu spins everything from Turkish and Arabic music, to Greek, Balkan and Indian, a style she calls Eklektik BerlinIstan. She has been a full-time professional D.J. for six years and performs all over the world.

The space is decorated with bright yellow wall hangings depicting elephants, camels and even a flying carpet, with an intentional degree of kitsch, Ms. Souad said, and an intentional distance from anything Islamic. “We take care that religion is not mixed in here, not in the music either.”

Outside the boom of loud firecrackers can be heard, the first test rounds for the annual cacophony here that leaves New Year’s revelers ears’ ringing. Kreuzberg has been home for decades to large populations of Turks and Kurds, many of whom have very conservative religious values. Yet they have had to share the neighborhood that formerly abutted the Berlin Wall with many counterculture types, artists and anarchists and also gays and lesbians.

According to the city’s Schwules Museum, partly devoted to the history of gay people in the city and the country, “a lively homosexual subculture had developed in Berlin by the second half of the 18th century or perhaps earlier.” It was known as an oasis for gay men and lesbians in the Weimar period immortalized by the writer Christopher Isherwood and in the period when West Berlin was surrounded by the wall. Today, the city has an openly gay and highly popular mayor, Klaus Wowereit.

But gay men and lesbians from Muslim families say they face extraordinary discrimination at home. A survey of roughly 1,000 young men and women in Berlin, released in September and widely cited in the German press, found much higher levels of homophobia among Turkish youth.

“These differences are there,” said Bernd Simon, who led the study and is a professor of social psychology at Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel. “We can’t deny them. The question is how do we cope with them.”

“The answer is not to replace homophobia with Islamophobia,” he added, pointing out that homophobia is also higher among Russian immigrants and in other, less urban parts

[Like marriage, business takes work](#)  
[How to start your own small business](#)

#### ADVERTISEMENTS

All the news that's fit to personalize.

**Small  
Business  
Toolkit**  
GO >

#### The New York Times STORE



The Rose - An American Frigate  
[Buy Now](#)

The New York Times

Where to eat in San Francisco?

“The Brazen Head in Cow Hollow is a great, low key date spot. There’s no sign on the door, which adds to its allure.” – *khodges14*

[Click to see what travelers like you recommend.](#)

**NYTimes.com/Travel**

of Germany.

Kader Balci, a 22-year-old Turk from Hamburg, said: "For us, for Muslims, it's extremely difficult. When you're gay, you're immediately cut off from the family."

He had recently moved to Berlin not long after being cut off from his mother because he is bisexual. "A mother who wishes death for her son, what kind of mother is that?" he asked, his eyes momentarily filling with tears.

Hasan, a 21-year-old Arab man, sitting at a table in the club's quieter adjoining cafe, declined to give his last name, saying: "They would kill me. My brothers would kill me." Asked if he meant this figuratively, he responded, "No, I mean they would kill me."

"I'm living one life here and the other one the way they wish me to be," Hasan said, referring to his parents. He said he still planned to marry, but when he turned 30 rather than right away, as his parents wished. "I have to have children, to do what Islam wants me to do," he said. "I would stop with everything in the homosexual life. I would stop it."

He stood up from the table and called to his two friends. "All right, boys, let's go dance," he said. "We're here to have fun." And they marched off to the dance floor, smiling.

[More Articles in International »](#)

[Donate to the Neediest Cases today!](#)

Ads by Google what's this?

**[Teach English in Germany](#)**  
Certificate course in San Francisco with job placement assistance  
[www.transworldschools.com](http://www.transworldschools.com)

**[In Deportation Danger ?](#)**  
Chinese - Spanish Speaking Lawyers Offices All Over Texas-Mex Border  
[PEsquivell.Law.com/texasdeportlawyer](http://PEsquivell.Law.com/texasdeportlawyer)

**[Immigration Reform](#)**  
Nation's Oldest Reform Group Support True Immigration Reform  
[www.fairus.org](http://www.fairus.org)

**Tips**

To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

**Related Searches**

- [Berlin \(Germany\)](#) [Add Alert](#)
- [Homosexuality](#) [Add Alert](#)
- [Islam](#) [Add Alert](#)
- [Immigration and Refugees](#) [Add Alert](#)

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



**BUSINESS »**



[In Peru, on a Remote Path to Cures](#)

**WORLD »**

**In Berlin, a Dance Floor of Their Own**

Gay Muslims find a rare chance to merge their immigrant cultures and their sexual identities.

**OPINION »**



[Putting a Plague in Perspective](#)

**ARTS »**



[A Family Album Is One for the History Books](#)

**HEALTH »**



[A Clutter Too Deep for Mere Bins and Shelves](#)

**OPINION »**

**Editorial Observer: A Tale of Dirty Political Tricks**

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Automobiles](#) | [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)