

# DIY under Authoritarian Politics: Indie Music Scene in Istanbul

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## Abstract

The ongoing political turmoil in Turkey is reflected in many areas of the cultural landscape, including the processes of music-making. With its immensely rich musical and cultural legacy that combines a rural and urban heritage, Istanbul has become home to many subcultures revolving around a variety of ethnicities and political acts. While the neoliberal urban control and gentrification agenda of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government is reshaping the cultural life in the city; a do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude in the music scene removed the barriers of a hierarchy of production while creating unique performance spaces and a sense of belonging and solidarity among its participants. This essay intends to examine the influence of authoritarian politics on the formation of DIY initiatives in Istanbul's indie music scene. I will concentrate on the period of 2013–2020, the start date signifying the paradigm shift that the Gezi Park protests (May 27–August 20, 2013) fostered, and the end date signifies the decline of the active music scene, with the COVID-19 pandemic preventing live music altogether. This project is a result of fieldwork conducted as a participant-observer of the scene, in addition to structured and semi-structured interviews. The results of the research will be discussed with a focus on the influence of the Islamist, neoliberal, and authoritarian politics of the government on the indie music scene of Istanbul.

## Introduction

Recording has always been a means of social control, a stake in politics, regardless of the available technologies. Power is no longer content to enact its legitimacy; it records and reproduces the societies it rules.<sup>1</sup>

Since the early days of the Turkish Republic, music and state politics have been deeply intertwined. Although the ruling party or ideology might change in different decades, using music as a means of political agenda, imposing regulations to control the mainstream music culture, or applying restrictions to particular musical genres or activities through authoritarian rules remained the same. In Turkey, both recorded music and performance spaces for live music reflected the politics dominating the zeitgeist of an era.

Istanbul has long been the center of live music in Turkey, with its strategic geographical location, prolific activities in the recording industry, and its rich heritage of many ethnic groups who once called it home. In the 2000s, Istanbul was a city in which one could visit three jazz gigs a night or attend live gigs of many local or international acts, and enjoy a diversity of music cultures, especially in the Beyoğlu area, at venues ranging from *Türkü*<sup>2</sup> bars to electronic music clubs. Cultural studies researcher Derya Özkan used the expression “Cool Istanbul” while analyzing the production of social space in the city and examined the transition from the colonialist narratives that defined Istanbul as an “oriental” or “third-world” city to a

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 87.

<sup>2</sup> The word *türkü* originates from “being Turkish” and means Anatolian folk song.

perception of Istanbul turning into a “global city.”<sup>3</sup> Actually, the “global Istanbul” phenomenon was strengthened with the Habitat II conference in Istanbul in 1996.<sup>4</sup> The cultural, artistic, and musical dynamism of Istanbul was confirmed when the city was chosen as the “European Capital of Culture” in 2010.

However, following the Gezi protests in 2013, with the rising authoritarianism of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, performance venues and musical practices started to shift. The AKP came into power in 2002 as a moderate Islamic party following the financial crisis in Turkey in 2001. However, particularly during their second term in power starting from 2007, they evolved into an authoritarian governing rule.<sup>5</sup> The Gezi protests, which began as a reaction to the commercialization of urban spaces in Istanbul, chiefly Gezi Park, were the response by a variety of non-governmental actors to the increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. The political use of sound in Turkey in terms of slogans, music and sound-making has excessively changed after the Gezi protests.<sup>6</sup> Besides, the aftermath of the Gezi protests left an imprint as ongoing solidarity became a fertile ground for DIY and independent music acts.<sup>7</sup>

This essay intends to examine the influence of authoritarian politics on the formation of DIY initiatives in Istanbul’s indie music scene. This research covers the period of 2013–2020, the start date signifying the paradigm shift that the Gezi Park protests fostered, and the end date signifies the decline of the active music scene, with the COVID-19 pandemic preventing live music altogether. This essay approaches music as a social and political action and utilizes Émile Durkheim’s concept of social solidarity to understand how the collective conscience altered under civic pressure and authoritarianism, and turned into artistic expression in the case of DIY musical acts of Istanbul.

The main methodology of this project is fieldwork consisting of two parts. More than anything, this work is a product of self-ethnography.<sup>8</sup> The second part of the ethnographic research lies in the oral narratives and ethnographic interviews conducted with participants of the DIY scene, relying on their testimonies and life histories.<sup>9</sup> The scope of this project is large, as it portrays the diverse practices of DIY initiatives in Istanbul in the post-Gezi era; thus, the sample to be included in the research will be confined to those relevant to the main research question.

Durkheim explained how social order was provided and acknowledged in societies based on two very different forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity refers to “the cohesion which

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<sup>3</sup> Derya Özkan, “From the Black Atlantic to Cool Istanbul,” in *Cool Istanbul: Urban Enclosures and Resistances*, ed. Derya Özkan (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2015), 16, <https://doi.org/10.1515/transcript.9783839427637.11>.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 12, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226775074.001.0001>.

<sup>5</sup> Özge Özdüzen, “Bearing Witness to Authoritarianism and Commoning through Video Activism and Political Film-making after the Gezi Protests,” in *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication*, ed. Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen, Umut Korkut (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 194, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvswx8bm.15>.

<sup>6</sup> Meri Kytö and Şirin Özgün, “Sonic Resistance. Gezi Park Protests and the Political Soundscape of Istanbul,” in *Unsichtbare Landschaften: Populäre Musik und Räumlichkeit*, ed. Giacomo Bottà (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2016), 95.

<sup>7</sup> Nur Gürbüz, “Re-shaping and Re-defining a Scene: The Rise of Collectivism in Istanbul Independent DIY Music Scene?,” *Keep it Simple, Make It Fast!: An Approach to Underground Music Scenes*, Vol. 3 (2017): 35–36.

<sup>8</sup> I have been an active participant of the indie music scene of Istanbul as a DJ, former music writer, and popular music scholar, and had a chance to observe these transitions personally. I was also a participant of the DIY scene as a backing punk singer in my teenage years and I personally know most of the members of the scene. To be able to write this work, I conducted an ethnography as a participant-observer of the scene. However, maintaining my position as a participant-observer without falling into the emotional trap of being an insider was the most challenging part of this work. My aim was to maintain the neutral position of a researcher while taking field notes after events. My field notes are taken during various musical events I attended between 2013 and 2020.

<sup>9</sup> I owe much gratitude to the musicians and music industry professionals who shared their experiences and opinions with me: Ali Özdemir, Burak Yılmaz, Çağrı Erdem, Eray Düzgünsoy, Görkem Arıkan, Hakan Tamar, İpek Odabaşı, Kamil Ertürk, Murat Mrt Seçkin, Sibel Engingök, Şevket Akıncı, Tayfun Polat, Ulaş Şalgam and Ümit Üret.

unites the elements of an inanimate body,” and organic solidarity refers to “that which makes a unity out of the elements of a living body.”<sup>10</sup> Mechanical solidarity is only possible for small-scale groups sharing a collective consciousness and represents the absorption of individual personality into the collective personality, while organic solidarity defines the division of labor in large-scale groups and societies and possible “only if each has a sphere of action which is peculiar to him; that is, a personality.”<sup>11</sup> Organic solidarity implies a mutual recognition of differences and diversity, and the need to cooperate and rely on one another in the pursuit of individual and collective goals. Solidarity also refers to the unity and mutual support displayed by individuals, communities, or organizations toward a common cause, goal, or belief, and is often associated with movements that foster a sense of belonging and community among people. Sociologist Håkan Thörn discussed the meaning of solidarity within the context of the anti-apartheid movement, and concluded that the solidarity is defined as collective identity referring to “whatever one was doing, whatever one was participating in—an organization, a demonstration, a boycott—it was defined as an act of solidarity.”<sup>12</sup> Taking those approaches on solidarity into account, this essay aims to understand the solidarity experienced within these DIY acts in the contemporary urban space.

This article examines the influence of state politics on music within the context of the central research question: “How did authoritarian politics during the period of 2013–2020 in Turkey contribute to the emergence and evolution of DIY initiatives within Istanbul’s indie music scene as a form of artistic expression and social action?” However, it is important to note that the relationship between music and politics has been a subject of extensive scholarly research in Turkey, highlighting how certain music genres reflect the socio-political history of the country.<sup>13</sup> One prominent aspect of this relationship is protest music, which encompasses concerns, themes, and lyrics that focus on social injustice and critique of political matters. Sociologist Ozan Eren states that the Anatolian Pop movement played a pioneering role in the development of protest music in Turkey.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, there exists a distinct category of protest music in Turkey referred to as “*Özgün müzik*” (authentic, genuine music), which incorporates Western string instruments into Anatolian folk music structures, features melodies reminiscent of *arabesk*, and addresses lyrical themes related to social issues such as injustice, oppression, and ethnic discrimination.<sup>15</sup> Notable figures within this genre include left-wing bands such as Grup Yorum and Grup Kızılırmak, as well as the Kurdish singer-songwriter Ahmet Kaya.

The Gezi protests ushered in a new array of musical expressions within the realm of protest music, featuring a diverse genre spectrum spanning from rap to indie pop. A notable phenomenon observed during this period was writing new lyrics to traditional Anatolian folk songs with the themes that reflected the ideologies of the Gezi protests, in addition to composing new songs as a response to rising authoritarianism.

<sup>10</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1933 [1893]), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 131.

<sup>12</sup> Håkan Thörn, “The Meaning(s) of Solidarity: Narratives of Anti-Apartheid Activism,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 423, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070902919959>.

<sup>13</sup> See Orhan Tekelioğlu, “The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: The Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 194–215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209608701111>; Münir Tireli, *Türkiye’de Grup Müziği: 1980’ler* (İstanbul: Arkaplan Müzik Basın Yayın, 2007); İtör Toksöz, “‘Do You Hear the People Sing?’ Music as a Means of Peaceful Protest in Turkey,” in *Music, Power and Liberty: Sound, Song and Melody as Instruments of Change*, ed. Olivier Urbain and Craig Robertson (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755695249.ch-005>; Ozan Eren, “Türkiye’de 1960’larda Müzik Alanı ve Protest Müziğin İlk Nüveleri: Anadolu Pop Akımı,” *İstanbul University Journal of Sociology* 38, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.26650/SJ.38.1.0002>.

<sup>14</sup> Eren, “Türkiye’de 1960’larda Müzik Alanı ve Protest Müziğin İlk Nüveleri,” 135.

<sup>15</sup> Arabesk is a popular music genre emerged in Turkey in the late 1960s, bringing Arabic and Egyptian music influences together with freer forms of Turkish art/folk music.

In fact, a new label, coined on social media as “Gezi songs,” emerged to encapsulate this distinctive form of musical expression. Ethnomusicologists Meri Kytö and E. Şirin Özgün explored how sound played a significant role in the Gezi Park protests, not only being integrated into the large-scale demonstrations but also serving as a tool to express resistance. According to them, throughout the protests, songs were utilized as powerful vehicles to convey multiple messages, while the deployment of diverse types of noisemakers captured the attention of the Turkish public through media, exposing them to alternative ideas and narratives they may have otherwise chosen to ignore.<sup>16</sup> Prior research conducted by Nur Gürbüz explores the growth of collective efforts in Istanbul’s independent music scene, focusing on two distinct DIY initiatives: Bant Mag and Tight Aggressive.<sup>17</sup> While Gürbüz’s article provides an insightful ethnographic account of the undertakings of these two initiatives, it neglects to offer a comprehensive sociocultural reading of the political context that facilitated the increase in collective action in the aftermath of Gezi protests, leaving a gap in music scholarship, which this study endeavors to bridge.

### The Scope of the Study: Indie Music Scene and DIY Initiatives in Turkey

Indie is an abbreviated version of independent, and an initial meaning of the term refers to artists and bands who are not signed under major record labels, who therefore have more control over their artistic processes while embracing a do-it-yourself spirit rooted in the punk movement. Even though the independence from major labels is a fundamental concept to define indie music, it is not enough to completely describe the genre.<sup>18</sup> David Hesmondhalgh defined indie as a counter-hegemonic music genre that emerged from a network of post-punk companies with a more particular set of sounds and looks compared to post-punk acts of the era, such as “jangly” sounding guitars, a focus on sensitive lyrics rooted in the singer/songwriter tradition in rock and pop, and minimal focus on rhythm track.<sup>19</sup>

Tayfun Polat discussed the meaning of indie music in Turkey with a comprehensive approach in his book *Indie Music in Turkey: An Introduction*, and oriented towards a more industry-related definition rather than a musical-characteristics-focused one.<sup>20</sup> Musicologist Aykut Çerezcioglu defined the determining factor in the indie music category as not the musical characteristics of the music but the meaning attributed to the music, which is formed by individuals with common aesthetic values and common discourses who keep themselves outside the mainstream.<sup>21</sup> There are crucial indie rock bands from Turkey, such as Away Days, Sakin, Büyük Ev Ablukada, Yüzyüzeyken Konuşuruz, Ars Longa, Nihil Piraye, and Palmiyeler, that reflect a guitar-based indie sound with sentimental lyrics and draw influences from the British indie rock bands of the 1980s. However, this essay draws upon the initial meaning of the term and puts the DIY efforts at the center while defining the indie music scene in Turkey.

A do-it-yourself attitude in music represents the production, distribution, and promotional processes that are rooted in punk, post-punk, and indie scenes. However, more than an association with any particular genre, DIY scenes have historically often been affiliated with distinct desires concerning the democratization

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<sup>16</sup> Kytö and Özgün, “Sonic Resistance,” 78.

<sup>17</sup> Gürbüz, “Re-shaping and Re-defining a Scene,” 25.

<sup>18</sup> Vincent J. Novara and Stephen Henry, “A Guide to Essential American Indie Rock (1980–2005),” *Notes, Second Series* 65, no. 4 (2009), 816, <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.0.0178>.

<sup>19</sup> David Hesmondhalgh, “Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre,” *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999): 35–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/095023899335365>.

<sup>20</sup> Tayfun Polat, *Türkiye’de Bağımsız Müzik: Başlangıç* (İstanbul: Kara Plak Yayınları, 2021), 37–41.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Turkish texts are the author’s.

<sup>21</sup> Aykut Çerezcioglu, “Indie Müzikte Tanım ve Sınıflandırma Problemi,” *Folklor/Edebiyat* 20, no. 78 (2014): 100.

of the culture, and self-sufficiency.<sup>22</sup> As the main focus of this work is DIY initiatives, who do I accept as a DIY organization?<sup>23</sup> I had three main evaluation criteria: I looked for initiatives that were self-sufficient in their skillsets, such as organizing, promoting, and performing their own activities. Second, all of the DIY initiatives on that list were started by musicians, DJs, and radio programmers, who personally contribute to the expansion of the scene and who manage and promote their own creative activities or projects. The last and foremost critical criterion is that I expect these organizations to have no sponsorship deals.<sup>24</sup>

## State Regulations That Created an Impact on the Music Scene in Istanbul

Tom Parkinson argues that indie music is among the genres that can be associated with recent opposition to authoritarian rule and moral interventionism in Turkey, and indie musicians have perceived an ideological affinity between the aesthetics of indie and the values of liberalism, internationalism, and resistance to both conservatism and consumerism and have employed these aesthetics in expressing a counter-hegemonic orientation and identity.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Turkey, musicians, promoters, and anyone who participates in the production processes in the music scene were deeply influenced by the decisions of the AKP government, and many indie musicians were opposed to state politics by either commenting on their social media accounts or including protest lyrics in their songs.<sup>26</sup> As this research aims to understand the influence of Islamist, neoliberal, and authoritarian politics on the indie music scene of Istanbul, it is worth looking back to the history of the enforcement of the government in the 2000s that influenced Istanbul's indie music scene in direct or indirect ways.

Before the 2010s, Istanbul's Beyoğlu (name of the district), Taksim (name of the square), İstiklal (name of the street) was the music center of the indie scene of İstanbul. With studios in the Tünel area and concert halls (such as Babylon, Peyote, Gitar Café, Bronx), it was the space where many musical subcultures emerged and found a place for themselves. However, the music scene located there has also become victim to the authoritarian state politics. The AKP strengthened its power in 2002 after winning the majority of seats in the parliamentary elections. Since then, a focus on the rise of Islamic identity, an exclusion of republican codes and ethics, and Ottoman aesthetics in planning and architecture became more obvious in its policies.

From 2008, Beyoğlu's standing as a music hub started to change with the urban political mobilization projects. The first opera building of Turkey, AKM (Atatürk Cultural Center), which was the signature building of the musical reforms attained with the Westernization processes in the early days of the Turkish Republic, shut down in 2008. Another urban renewal project was the Emek Movie Theatre in Taksim, and

<sup>22</sup> Ellis Jones, *DIY Music and the Politics of Social Media* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 7, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501359675>.

<sup>23</sup> The initial examples of the DIY movement in Turkey can be found in Sezgin Boynik and Tolga Güldallı, eds., *Türkiye'de Punk ve Yeraltı Kaynaklarının Kesintili Tarihi 1978–1999 (An Interrupted History of Punk and Underground Resources in Turkey 1978–1999)* (İstanbul: Bas Yayinevi, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Nur Gürbüz, in "Re-shaping and Re-defining a Scene," accepts indie music magazine Bant and the festivals organized by them as DIY events. However, since they work with corporate sponsorships, they don't meet the criteria of my research.

<sup>25</sup> Tom Parkinson, "İndiistanbul: Counter-hegemonic music and third republicanism in Turkey," *Popular Music*, 37, no. 1 (2018): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143017000563>.

<sup>26</sup> After the Gezi Park protests, many protesters were detained because of their social media posts proving their participation at the demonstrations. It is important to note that many musicians maintain the fine line to protest and not put themselves in a position that the state directed by the AKP government legally sues them.

its demolition began in 2010 to build a shopping mall in the location, which created a significant wave of activism.

John Lovering and Hade Türkmen defined the gentrification attempts, undergoing a dramatic restructuring of the AKP as “bulldozer neoliberalism.”<sup>27</sup> The urban transformation process of Beyoğlu began with the Tarlabası urban renewal project in 2004 and the Galataport project that started in 2015. Tarlabası, a deprived neighborhood in the old commercial and cultural center of Beyoğlu in which many minorities such as Romani people, African immigrants, and Kurdish citizens resided, went through a renewal process that resulted in the displacement of low-income residents, destruction of historically significant buildings, and loss of community cohesion, and gentrified with a cultural and tourism-based renewal strategy while excluding the social aspects of urban renewal. This was an excruciating process for the inhabitants of Tarlabası. The Galataport project consisted of constructing a new terminal for cruise ships, constructing a luxury hotel, and reconfiguring public spaces.

Another blow to the business owners of the lively Beyoğlu district was the “Table Operation” in 2011, namely, the ban on tables and chairs on the street. This decision sparked a massive reaction, because sitting and enjoying outside in numerous bars, cafes, and restaurants, even in winter, was one of the primary attractions visitors enjoyed in Beyoğlu. In 2013, the law restricted giving licenses to places selling alcohol within 100 meters of a mosque or school, with the exception of establishments already located near mosques and schools.<sup>28</sup> In 2013, the government passed laws limiting retail licenses from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., and the alcohol licenses of small shops were affected by the process.

Alcohol consumption had ideological connotations more than the health concerns in Turkey. Consuming alcoholic beverages was associated with laicism and secularism; abstaining from it was perceived as an extension of religious motives. Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country, and alcohol is a delicate topic due to religious and cultural reasons, since Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol. However, Turkey is also a secular country that allows alcohol to be sold and consumed by adults. Because of the cultural stigma surrounding alcohol consumption and the Islamic politics, the AKP government increased taxes on alcoholic beverages and imposed restrictions on their sale and advertising. As a result, many festivals were canceled or prohibited from serving alcohol. In 2012, Efes Pilsen One Love Festival, which had been sponsored by the beer brand Efes Pilsen for 11 years, experienced threat of cancelation because of the alcohol ban on festivals.<sup>29</sup> I was among the audience then, and the concerts started on the second day of the festival due to the unexpected alcohol ban, the difficulty in dealing with organizational details, and the response from the conservative residents of the neighborhood.

The gentrification process aimed at the Beyoğlu district also resulted in an indirect influence on the relocation of large insurance firms such as Aksigorta, Generali Sigorta, or the leading mobile phone operator in Turkey, Turkcell. The former manager of the COOP Bar in Beyoğlu, Kamil Ertürk, explained: “White-collar workers who are attracted to the underground culture were the main source of revenue of a concert hall. When they left Beyoğlu, this was a real problem for the survival of these venues supporting indie music.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> John Lovering and Hade Türkmen, “Bulldozer neo-liberalism in İstanbul: The state-led construction of property markets, and the displacement of the urban poor,” *International Planning Studies*, 16, 1 (2011): 73–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2011.552477>.

<sup>28</sup> “İspirto ve İspirtolu İçkiler İnhisarı Kanunu,” *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, June 11, 2013, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/06/20130611.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> “Eyüp'te helal festival: One Love'da içki yasağı resmen açıklandı!,” *T24 Bağımsız İnternet Gazetesi*, July 14, 2012, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/evupte-helal-festival-one-loveda-icki-yasagi-resmen-aciklandi.208441>.

<sup>30</sup> Kamil Ertürk, personal communication, February 2, 2020.

In 2013, the Gezi protests began as a reaction to the government's plan to redevelop the park into a shopping mall and quickly escalated into broader anti-government rallies, with protesters calling for greater democracy and freedom of expression. There were violent clashes between police and protesters. The demonstrations lasted several months and led to widespread public debate in Turkey. As a political mobilization against the AKP government's top-down interventions on the cityscape of Istanbul and the government's strict control of the media, the Gezi protests created a collective will to actively question and challenge the government's plans to gain complete control.<sup>31</sup>

Another devastating impact on the music scene occurred as an indirect result of rising terrorism in Turkey from 2015–16. Turkey had experienced several deadly attacks by ISIS (The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), including suicide bombings, shootings, and vehicle attacks. Over 400 people were killed in the attacks on Ankara (at a peace rally), Suruç, and Istanbul. As a resident of Istanbul during those years, I can affirm that even using the subway felt like a life-threatening experience.

Due to the gentrification process, terrorist attacks and threats to Istanbul's center, there was a drastic decline in live music events in the Beyoğlu area. In 2014, Babylon, the main concert hall in Istanbul supporting indie and jazz acts, left the Tünel district. Many performance halls had to shut their doors because of the oppression in the post-Gezi era in Istanbul.

There is a concept called *Milli Yas* (national grief) in Turkey to describe the collective mourning and sorrow experienced by Turkish citizens following a major tragedy or disaster that has affected the country. If there is a terrorist attack, suicide bombing, or national disaster in which there was loss of life, there is an official declaration of national grief, and any musical events are canceled to pay respect to the deceased. In an Islamic country, playing music during the call to prayer is deemed a disrespectful act due to Islam's complicated relationship with music that isn't religious. After 2013, the political instability caused many life-threatening events, and the music industry was one of the leading industries influenced by those devastating incidents. From 2013 to 2020, many festivals and concerts were canceled using the concept of national grief, while other celebratory events, such as football games or wedding ceremonies, were allowed.

Beginning in April 2020, Turkey imposed some restrictions on live performances and music events due to the pandemic. With the issue of a circular letter numbered 8556 published on May 30, 2020, playing music in entertainment venues after midnight such as restaurants, bars, and tea gardens was banned.<sup>32</sup> Even as the restrictions loosened up in other public gatherings as of 2022, the strict bans, regulations, and restrictions imposed on live music events continued in Turkey. From March 2022, 14 music festivals were canceled in Turkey including long-established events such as *Zeytinli Rock Festivali* and *ODTÜ Bahar Şenliği*.<sup>33</sup> As a reaction to those cancelations, and the ban and restriction on music life, 1,134 musicians presented a petition against the music bans and made a press announcement in 2022 called "*Müzik susturulamaz, müzisyenler susmaz*" (Music cannot be silenced, musicians will not shut up).<sup>34</sup>

Lyndon C. S. Way stated that Turkish pop had its own share of the AKP government's politics through

<sup>31</sup> Özge Özdüzen, "DIY Media and Urban Citizenship: Intersectional Post-Occupy Media Activism in Turkey," in *Authoritarian Neoliberalism and Resistance in Turkey*, ed. İmren Borsuk, Pınar Dinç, Sinem Kavak, Pınar Sayan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 194, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-4213-5\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-4213-5_9).

<sup>32</sup> "Türkiye Barolar Birliği'nden müzik yasağı hamlesi," *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, May 18, 2022, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/son-dakika-turkiye-barolar-birliginden-muzik-yasagi-hamlesi-1937288>.

<sup>33</sup> "Türkiye'de Son 4 Ayda 14 Etkinlik İptal Edildi! Hangi Festivaller İptal Edildi, İptal Gerekçesi Neydi?," *Listelist*, August, 25, 2022, <https://listelist.com/festival-yasaklari/>.

<sup>34</sup> "Bin 134 sanatçıdan ortak açıklama: Müzik susturulamaz, müzisyenler susmaz," *T24 Bağımsız İnternet Gazetesi*, June 7, 2022, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/bin-134-sanatcidan-ortak-aciklama-muzik-susturulamaz-muzisyenler-susmaz,1039021>.

canceled live performances, blocked artistic content, suspended social media and removed music videos, or arrested or publicly harassed musicians.<sup>35</sup> The oppression on music venues and live music regulations resulted in almost-complete devastation on the indie music scene in Istanbul. Where the performance of live music was restricted via various means by the government, people started to engage in collectives and DIY initiatives to engage in a creative atmosphere, which led to both artistic and political transmission of knowledge.

## DIY Initiatives in Istanbul's Indie Music Scene

In this section, I will share the findings of my ethnographic research. Through a total of seventeen interviews, consisting of thirteen structured and four unstructured interviews, I engaged with music industry professionals, members of musical DIY initiatives, indie label owners, and musicians. As shown in the table below, there were fifteen musical DIY Initiatives actively organizing music events in Istanbul as of 2020. Five of these groups started their activities before 2013, while ten were founded between 2013 and 2020. The most prominent venues that supported these initiatives were Peyote Nevizade, Karga, Pixie Underground, Arkaoda, and COOP.<sup>36</sup> All these venues featured a stage for live performances, with the exception of Pixie, which was a club, but experimental musicians performed there on an additional small stage. The genres taking place differ in variety, but the most common ones are experimental, electronic, punk, noise, indie rock, metal, hardcore and hip-hop. Based on my observations at the events, electronic stands as an umbrella term for downtempo electronica, sub-genres of house and experimental electronics. Some of these acts only engage in organizing concerts, while others such as M4NM also run an indie label that releases albums, and Tight Aggressive has an event venue in Kadıköy that operates within DIY ethics.

	DIY Initiative	Founded in	Music Genres
1.	Ævom	2016	Noise rock, hardcore, electronic
2.	A.I.D.	2015	Free improvisation, experimental, noise
3.	Beton Orman	2004	Reggae, dub, dancehall
4.	Build Your Tribe	2019	Techno, electronic
5.	Burgazada Progresif Müzik Festivali	2015	Psychedelic, indie rock
6.	Chaos I'm Your Mistress	2016	Riot grrrl, punk
7.	Electric Fence	2017	Metal
8.	In the Void	2011	Punk, alternative rock, indie, reggae, electronic
9.	Mezar Organizasyon	2014	Death and black metal
10.	M4NM	2009	Hip-hop and rap, electronic, and experimental
11.	Parazit Kollektif	2016	Punk, hardcore
12.	Partapart	2012	Indie, electronic
13.	Robonima	2015	Experimental, noise, electronic
14.	Tight Aggressive	2014	Punk
15.	Wargasm Istanbul	2008	Punk, post-punk, hardcore

**Figure 1:** DIY Initiatives in Istanbul who were active between 2013 and 2020

<sup>35</sup> Lyndon C. S. Way, *Ideology, Control, and Resistance in Turkey Since 2002*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 7.

<sup>36</sup> As of 2023, only venues in the Kadıköy neighborhood in the Anatolian part of Istanbul, Karga, and Arkaoda still support the indie scene in Turkey. All the concert halls listed above in the Beyoğlu neighborhood shut their doors because of the difficulties of surviving under an authoritarian regime and financial problems stemming from the economic crisis. Peyote Nevizade is still operating. However, another management took over, turning the venue from an indie temple into a mainstream bar.



Among those initiatives, A.I.D. (Art Is Dead), founded by Çağrı Erdem, İpek Odabaşı, and Görkem Arıkan, started its activities in 2015.<sup>37</sup> Its philosophy is mainly influenced by anarchist writer Hakim Bey's *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*.<sup>38</sup> I was an observer, supporter, and participant of their activities from its founding days, performed in their festivals as a DJ, and gave seminars at their events.<sup>39</sup> Three founding members of A.I.D. are DIY electronic musicians, so they constructed their own sound systems in places such as homes, garages or factories. The initiative also had a DIY approach to catering, with the support of catering initiative Mutfak Underground, and they published a fanzine called A.I.D. Zine. At the end of the concerts, a box or jar would be passed among the audience, and people contributed to the music fee depending on their budget. The money collected was distributed among the musicians. With their activities, they attracted an audience from the academic music scenes of Istanbul, experimental and noise music enthusiasts, and free improvisers and contributed to the experimental music scene of Turkey in a significant way. The members of the initiative explained the impact of authoritarianism on the rise of the DIY scene in Istanbul during the post-Gezi era:

Probably the most significant effect of the authoritarianism is the polarization of the people living in Turkey, and in this process, their cultural and general inexperience in freedoms has become more apparent. The loss of faith in the government and the decreased expectations led people to engage in collective activities and motivated them to take the lead and engage in creative activities. Although A.I.D. was not specifically planned for this, it actually emerged in an environment where such an energy was prevailing.<sup>40</sup>

The only DIY group on the list that dedicated their activities to hip-hop and rap, M4NM was founded by four rappers/producers. They produce music together, organize activities, and run a music label to release their recordings. Their founding member, rap musician Ağaçkakan (Burkay Yalnız) is known for his politically outraged, existentially conscious, and poetically dark lyrics. He explains the rise of the indie scene:

When we were founded in 2009, independent labels with a similar mission weren't more than the fingers of one hand. There wasn't such a cultural liveliness. Of course, there were indie bands, but not many indie labels or DIY initiatives. Many labels, collectives and initiatives were founded in the last ten years. This was both the reason for and result of something. First, musicians don't have to be part of mainstream companies to reach their audiences. Second, those mainstream labels don't release anything other than targeted to the mainstream taste in Turkey. So, musicians who couldn't find a place in the music industry built a place for themselves.<sup>41</sup>

Another DIY initiative, Robonima, aims to gather independent artists regardless of genre under the umbrella of a collective to try to foster good communication and solidarity among members of the creative industries by bringing musicians and artists from all disciplines together. Founder of the initiative Önder Kılınc explains the impact of state politics on the music scene:

Especially in the post-Gezi period, the country's poor economy led to downsizing in the music industry. While this situation reduced the number of significant organizations where the international stars played, eyes suddenly turned to figures in the local scene. Local artists who

<sup>37</sup> Originally, A.I.D. was founded by four members. The fourth participant prefers to remain anonymous. In this research, the names of the members of the DIY initiatives were left anonymous unless they specifically stated otherwise.

<sup>38</sup> Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson), T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> On August 24, 2017, I gave a presentation on "The Influence of Black Power Movement and Spirituality on Free Jazz" at the MultiRAID2 Festival organized by the A.I.D. community. I also performed as a DJ at their events on August 27, 2017, in which I played a melodic techno set, and on March 24, 2016, I played a free jazz selection.

<sup>40</sup> A.I.D. (Çağrı Erdem, Görkem Arıkan, İpek Odabaşı), personal communication, February 19, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Ağaçkakan (Burkay Yalnız), personal communication, February 18, 2020.

could not find a place in the mainstream had the opportunity to carve out a space for themselves. In addition, while the changing sociocultural structure over time cheapened and non-politicized the music produced in the mainstream, repression and censorship led to the emergence of more edgy, more politicized and louder products in the independent scene. However, it must be said that with the increasing climate of fear in recent years, non-politicization (at least in terms of content) has also permeated the independent scene.<sup>42</sup>

In 2016, many international acts canceled their concerts in Turkey because of the threat of terrorism, and a coup attempt occurred on July 15, 2016. That was the period in which concert venues started to book Turkish bands as headliners. In 2017, Zorlu PSM (concert hall) located inside the Zorlu Center (a huge shopping mall) started a concert series called “*Lokalize*” (localized) in which they booked local indie bands. As some of the music writers concluded in personal communications, the rising inflation rates during those years made it difficult for venues to book international acts, which caused even the concert halls motivated towards capitalist rewards to book local indie bands as headliners.

The fourth DIY organization I interviewed, Build Your Tribe, defines themselves as a queer and feminist art collective. Their mission is to organize events in which any form of creative expression is welcomed with enthusiasm, where there is no place for discrimination, and where everyone feels safe and can afford to pay for the event. Their aim is to create a performance space for queer and female artists who don’t have an equal chance of representation in the music scene. According to them, the repressive environment forces people to be more expressive, binds them together and politicizes them.<sup>43</sup>

In The Void, one of the initiatives started before the Gezi protests, began its activities in 2011. With Beton Orman, it is one of the most established of those DIY initiatives. As a DJ, I prepared mixtapes for In The Void and performed at their events.<sup>44</sup> In The Void had a wide genre selection. The concerts held by the committee had a special place in Istanbul by bringing different musical subcultures together. In their events, rap musicians, techno DJs, indie rock, or reggae musicians shared the same stage and interacted with each other with curiosity and respect. Founder of the initiative Sibel Enginkök explains the capitalist pursuits and the gentrification zeitgeist of the AKP government:

The musical center of Istanbul had moved from Beyoğlu to Kadıköy because the AKP government intended to change the profile of Beyoğlu to a concrete, grey, monotonous, conservative, Islamic site of attraction. However, Beyoğlu is a place where people from all over the world get together.<sup>45</sup>

During my ethnographic survey, I also tried to understand if the musical center of Istanbul had transferred from Beyoğlu on the European side to Kadıköy on the Anatolian side as a consequence of the gentrification process and with the threat of terrorism. DIY initiative Mezar Organization dedicated their activities to organizing death and black metal concerts, also confirms there was a decrease in number of performance

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<sup>42</sup> Önder Kılınc, personal communication, February 17, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Build Your Tribe, personal communication, February 17, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> When I performed in the events of A.I.D. and In the Void as a DJ, I performed based on voluntary approaches without the payment of a fee from the organization. Usually, I made myself a ground rule not to perform under a certain fee. Since DJing is an occupation with many social benefits and attracts many enthusiasts who are willing to play for free, the club or bar owners tend to decrease DJ fees, since they can find someone to play just for pleasure or the cultural capital attained by socialization in the music scene. I took it as a social responsibility and ethical tenet never to perform without being paid and not to decrease the general fees for DJs in order to support the DJing scene in Turkey. However, when I was playing for the DIY organizations, I didn’t expect any monetary return, since I knew those organizations were voluntary. To support the indie music scene, sharing experiences with like-minded indie musicians and DJs, as well as constructing a safe space away from the oppression on the streets created enough satisfaction for me to participate in these events.

<sup>45</sup> Sibel Enginkök, personal communication, January 15, 2020.

venues in Beyoğlu because of the economy depending on shopping malls and the gentrification led by the AKP government to ensure that. Mezar was founded in 2014 and define themselves by the motto “Yakında Buralar Ölüm Kokacak” (Soon, it will smell like death here). Metal is a crucial part of Turkey’s underground DIY scene, the founders of that DIY, Gizem and Serkan Mezar took the pseudo surname that means “grave” in Turkish. They share their reaction toward the oppression in music venues:

There are many repercussions of the AKP government’s political actions and regulations on the music life and the local scene of Istanbul. We can talk about some direct and indirect examples. There is a tax implication on nightlife venues, which is constantly increasing. Thus, many venues disregard underground acts to earn more money. Besides, an increase in the prices of alcoholic beverages negatively influences the audience. In addition, the hate speeches by the government and their tendency for discrimination and marginalization also have an effect on music life. Our mission is to create a stage for performing, organizing and listening to music, which was created as a reaction to religion, inequality and discrimination. So, sometimes venues are scared of giving us a stage because we talk about these subjects.<sup>46</sup>

As the initiative’s members also mentioned, authoritarianism profoundly impacted the live music scene and restricted their creative expression. In addition to musicians gathering to organize music events by paying attention to engaging in all levels of production, indie labels, and internet radio also are crucial ingredients of Istanbul’s indie music scene. Indie labels that were active in Istanbul as of 2020 can be listed as Audioban, Avosync, Bilgi Music Label, Domuz Records, Dunganga Records, Inverted Spektrum Records, Kafadan Kontak Records, Kare Müzikevi, M4NM, Mevzu Records, Müzik Hayvanı, Olmadı Kaçarız, PB Müzik Yapım, People Make Music, Personal Space Records, Shalgam Records, Sit Down and Dance, Table Records, Tamar Records, Tantana Records, Tarla Records, Tektosag Records, and Voodoo Records. The genre selection of those indie labels also ranges from techno to psychedelic rock, from experimental to indie rock. It is also important to note that indie internet radio stations such as Radyo Modyan, Root Radio and Noh Radio greatly supported the scene.

The gentrification attempts of the government in the Beyoğlu district dissolved the musical center of Istanbul, and the oppressive and restrictive regulations on nightlife made it challenging for live music spaces to survive. However, in addition to that, the paradigm shift in the music industry in the past twenty years towards digitalization and online streaming has been another factor resulting in the expansion of the scene through rising numbers of indie labels, musical DIY initiatives, and indie radio stations. Tayfun Polat, perhaps the most crucial informant of this study, is a DJ and radio programmer who can be defined as an expert on the indie music scene of Turkey. He explains the rise of the DIY scene with a focus on the impact of digitalization:

There seems to be an increase in the number of DIY initiatives after the Gezi era. However, I think this is misleading. Of course, Gezi was a central influence on internalizing the collectivism. During Gezi, people learned that they could create better content when they were together and make it loud. But the main reason for the increase in such DIY initiatives is the age of digitalization. The internet changed all the paradigms of the music business. Because in the digital world it is hard for musicians to be visible on their own. But these collaborations enable them to be seen and work together on the production, promotion, dissemination and organization of music events. That decreases the individual load.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Mezar Organizasyon (Gizem Mezar, Serkan Mezar), personal communication, February 18, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Tayfun Polat, personal communication, February 14, 2020.

The results of the ethnographic research confirm many of these acts created a safe space for themselves through music, a sense of belonging and solidarity among its participants. Musical subcultures became a refuge for musicians to deal with the psychological effects of the authoritarianism in the culture and politics of Turkey. As members of the punk and hardcore DIY initiative Wargasm emphasized, the depression and negative emotional states that political oppression caused in Turkey created a wave of collectivism in the scene.<sup>48</sup>

### Notes from the Field: “We Play for Our Pain and We Play to Resist!”

On March 19, 2016, there was a concert called Özgür Kazova “B.ossless S.weater + B.ossless M.usic” at the MultiRAID music festival organized by A.I.D. Özgür Kazova is a textile production factory defining itself as a collective formed in the aftermath of the Gezi resistance. It is a solidarity cooperative based on communist principles, so that everyone in the organization receives equal payment for their labor: The technicians, translators, and models for the sweaters were paid in identical amounts. This event was a part of the MultiRAID music festival, a six-day gathering of more than one hundred artists and non-artists from all over the world that occurred between March 17 and 22, 2016. The textile factory is located in Rami, Eyüp district of Istanbul, where the majority of the neighborhood’s residents are Islamist conservatives.

On the day of the concert, a suicide bombing occurred in Istanbul’s Beyoğlu district in front of the Governor’s Office.<sup>49</sup> The attack happened at 10:55 a.m. at the intersection of Balı Street and İstiklal Avenue, which is a central shopping street attracting thousands of tourists every day. Five people died in the attack, with thirty-six people injured. The bomber had links with the jihadist militant group ISIS.

Following the news about the bombing, the A.I.D. committee had many discussions on whether to cancel the event because during the Gezi Park protests and the following period, there were many cancellations of concerts as part of the *Milli Yas* concept, with the national declaration of grief. There was an ongoing discussion on social media among musicians and audiences about whether music can be perceived as pure fun or pleasure. There is a consensus among informants of that study that it is a safety measure to cancel large gatherings in a country under threat of terrorism. However, allowing football games and condemning music events also made people from different social groups suspect that the AKP government uses those attacks as an excuse to ban music events.

The main organizers decided to continue the concert, but we had to be very careful. My duty was to take some musicians from Kadıköy to the Kazova factory in Eyüp. Some were in tears, and it was an act of courage to take the ferry across the Bosphorus that day. Usually, there is a risk of follow-up bombings, and government authorities advise to stay away from crowds. There was a massive concern when we got to the venue because some organizers couldn’t reach musicians who were staying in Beyoğlu. Some friends called the hospitals to understand whether the musicians were injured in these suicide bombings, and everyone was very concerned. Eventually, relief swept through as news arrived confirming their safety and imminent arrival at the concert venue. Meanwhile, musicians and sound engineers were setting up the sound system.

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<sup>48</sup> Wargasm, personal communication, February 17, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> “Istanbul explosion: At least five dead as tourist shopping area Istiklal Street hit by suicide bombing in Turkey,” *The Independent*, March 19, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/istanbul-explosion-injuries-reported-as-tourist-shopping-area-hit-by-blast-in-turkish-city-a6940706.html>.

The organizing committee agreed to uphold an alcohol-free policy for the event, mindful of not causing discomfort to the Islamic residents of the neighborhood.

Six experimental acts performed that day. The central theme of the event was solidarity and resistance. The concerts were designed as a duet between the textile machines and improvisers and experimental noise musicians. The performance started with a speech by Serkan Usta (master technician) on the story of political resistance at the Özgür Kazova, and continued with the B.S.B.M Orchestra (B.ossless S.weater + B.ossless M.usic) comprising eighteen musicians led by Şevket Akıncı (guitarist, improviser, and music educator) who guided the free improvisers. Actually, Akıncı composed a template for that specific event, informed the performers before the concert, and the piece was in the form of a guided improvisation. The orchestra consisted of a percussion section, a string section, a reed section, two electric guitars, two computers, a theremin, a saw, and two megaphones. Özgür Kazova workers also participated in the improvisation with their voices and the sound of the textile machines.



**Figure 2:** Şevket Akıncı directing the improvisation by the orchestra<sup>50</sup>

On the day of the concert, I shared a post on Facebook stating: “We are not going anywhere. We play for your pain, and we play to resist!”<sup>51</sup> Şevket Akıncı made a comment on the picture:

Today, we resisted at Özgür Kazova! Thanks to all the musicians who participated. I’m talking to those who condemn us from their armchairs on why we didn’t cancel the event: MUSIC IS

<sup>50</sup> Photograph by the author. Clockwise: Şevket Akıncı (improvisation facilitator), Lucie Giraud (vocals), Anıl Eraslan (cello), Maya Felixbrodt (violin), Ruben Tenenbaum (violin), Norbert Stammberger (saxophone), Cihan Gülmez (saxophone), Çağrı Erdem (guitar), Sylvain Streiff (guitar).

<sup>51</sup> Facebook post by the author, March 19, 2016.

NOT ENTERTAINMENT! We're playing as a symbol of resistance! We played with our anger, we played with our rage, we played with our pain!<sup>52</sup>

That day was one of the most emotional days of my life as a researcher and member of the audience; people gathered in an act of solidarity under life-threatening conditions—on that day, music was a pure political reaction towards freedom of expression.

**Audio link:** <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/fulcrum.sn00b133k>

**Audio Example 1:** The field recording of the performance by the A.I.D. members

### **Concluding Remarks: Solidarity as a Collective Identity**

The AKP government's implementation of neoliberal and Islamist urban control, coupled with the use of police brutality to enforce it, along with Prime Minister Erdoğan's speeches and actions that further exacerbated societal divisions, resulted in significant political oppression for the residents of the country. Such a climate of authoritarianism resulted in trials against journalists, academics, and military personnel and forced any opposing views to remain silent. However, the Gezi Park protests, which represented a secular movement rejecting polarizing politics, brought people from various social divisions together, fostering a wave of solidarity.

The findings of my research indicate that there has been a significant rise in the musical DIY scene in Istanbul since the Gezi era as opposition to the rising authoritarianism. Although the origins of musical DIY initiatives in Turkey can be traced back to the 1990s, particularly within punk communities, it is worth noting that the chaotic political atmosphere, which reached its peak during the Gezi protests, further strengthened the sense of sharing and solidarity within the music community. These protests acted as a catalyst for the growth and organization of self-promoted musical activities. As the authoritarian enforcement of the government increased, the phenomenon of people coming together in small communities to express themselves through music and artistic projects also increased. In dire times, people gathered under small creative initiatives to create a space to expressing themselves. As Ağačkakan stated: "The AKP government's actions gathered the rage in one focus. The taxes on nightlife and the brutal actions of the police restricted performance spaces for the music scene, but it also resulted in a counteraction. People seeking solutions started organizing themselves under DIY initiatives."<sup>53</sup>

The DIY formations that were active in Istanbul from 2013 to 2020 show characteristics typical of Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity. The solidarity demonstrated in organizing, performing, and participating in such events embodies organic solidarity, as each member of the group contributes unique skills such as music performance, sound system construction, catering, event promotion, event cleanup, hosting musicians, and more. As evidenced by the musical DIY formations in Istanbul, the solidarity within these groups, whether as active participants or supportive listeners, fosters a shared collective identity. The act of creating music becomes a manifestation of political identities, irrespective of the musical style or lyrical content. Some musicians find platforms within these activities, known for their highly political lyrics, reacting against authoritarianism and religious oppression. However, regardless of the lyrical content, mere participation in these activities constitutes a form of resistance against oppression within the music scene.

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<sup>52</sup> Şevket Akıncı, Facebook post, March 19, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Ağačkakan (Burkay Yalınız), personal communication, February 18, 2020.

Durkheim described mechanical solidarity as the identification of group members and the construction of collective consciousness through shared values and meanings. As group dynamics become more complex, solidarity shifts toward specialization and interdependence, giving rise to organic solidarity. In such a setting, solidarity turns into being consciously aware and feeling empathy for the struggles of different classes in society and engaging oneself in a web of support for those in need, but it is a reciprocal act; it not only includes giving but also receiving. During the course of my fieldwork, I observed that both the musicians and the audience members demonstrated a propensity for actively engaging with the event in a manner that surpassed mere passive consumption, instead collaborating to establish a shared experience and foster a sense of community.

Solidarity within these activities can be expressed through various forms of action, including volunteering, donations, collective action, promoting equality, and engaging in organizational tasks based on individual skills and capabilities. When I narrate my observations or experiences from the field, I chose to use “we” as the subject. I chose to participate in these activities not merely to make academic observations but as an organic process to immerse myself as a participant in the scene, fostering a sense of belonging within the community and serving as a way to cope with the negative psychological impacts resulting from the shifting political atmosphere of the country.

Another notable observation from these DIY organizations is the diverse audience they attract, encompassing people from various musical cultures and backgrounds. Since the capitalistic goals are not the focus of DIY initiatives, the common orientation is on artistic expression. DIY formations in Istanbul transcend genre boundaries, reflecting the city’s vibrant live music scene with a wide range of popular music genres originating from North America or Europe, including rap, techno, indie rock, metal, punk, noise, and free improvisation. Some of the members of these formations have daytime jobs in which they earn their living, some try to make a living as musicians, or some don’t have to work because of their family’s financial support. The majority of participants fall within the age range of 20 to 40 years old.

My research indicates that the musical center of Istanbul shifted as a result of the gentrification process, with the added challenge of the threat of terrorism during the aforementioned years. However, contrary to what some of my informants suggest, I can’t entirely agree that the center shifted from Beyoğlu on the European side to Kadıköy on the Anatolian side. Instead, it appears that the musical center has become more fragmented. It is no longer characterized by concentrated areas where studios, performance halls, bars, and labels coexist. Rather, certain venues such as Zorlu PSM have become prominent for live music acts, while music performance venues in Kadıköy have become a temple for DIY events.

Another significant factor contributing to the rise of DIY formations in Istanbul over the past decade has been the paradigm shift within the music industry, characterized by the digitization of sound and advancements in music production techniques. Concurrently, the indie music community in Turkey embraced DIY methods amid the digitalization trend of the era. The past two decades have marked the era of indie record companies and self-released albums. Istanbul’s indie scene has recently gained global visibility through a wave of Turkish psychedelic and Anatolian pop acts regularly touring Europe. Additionally, the accessibility of affordable tools for music production and distribution has been a key catalyst in the growth of the indie music scene.

To conclude, the transformation of political reactions into musical actions, as well as the solidarity demonstrated within the inner workings of musical DIY initiatives, exemplified the division of labor among small-scale musical acts. Besides, such a significant loss of confidence in the state instigated individuals to congregate in small groups and partake in musical, artistic, cultural, and political endeavors that relied solely

on self-sufficiency. The DIY attitude in the music scene of Istanbul removed the barriers of the hierarchy of production while creating unique performance spaces for its participants, fostering an atmosphere of shared responsibility, empathy, and cooperation.

Looking retrospectively from the vantage point of the year 2023, as this research paper is prepared for publication, it becomes evident that the music bans enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by economic crises, political turmoil, and the absence of social support infrastructure, have not only affected Istanbul's indie music scene but have also permeated throughout the wider spectrum of Turkey's music scene. The prohibition of live music has placed workers in the music industry in a precarious position. In fact, as revealed by the research report on "The Working Conditions and Income Levels of Music Industry Workers in Turkey," 86% of musicians did not receive any financial assistance or social support in 2020 when all live music events were stopped due to COVID-19 regulations.<sup>54</sup>

Further research could delve into the recent dynamics of Istanbul's indie music scene, investigating how artists have reacted to and negotiated authoritarian constraints, examining their approaches to resistance, adaptation, or compromise, while also exploring the role of social media and streaming platforms in facilitating promotion, networking, and bypassing traditional channels of censorship or control. Additionally, an investigation into the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, religion, and other identity factors within DIY initiatives could shed light on how these elements are impacted by authoritarian politics.

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<sup>54</sup> Selda Dudu, Evrim Hikmet Ögüt, Özge Ç. Denizci, "Türkiye'deki Müzik Emekçilerinin Çalışma Koşulları ve Gelir Durumları Üzerine Araştırma Raporu" (The Research Report on the Working Conditions and Income Levels of Music Industry Workers in Turkey), 2022, <http://kulturemegi.com>.



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