

## “We Didn’t Forget to Take Our Shoes Off at the Door Just Because We Were Punks”<sup>1</sup>: The Early Years of Punk in Turkey

### Abstract

The proposed contribution focuses on an analysis of the debut of punk in Turkey within a framing that highlights its contexts and peculiarities. Considering punk not only as a musical genre but also as an underground culture with wider socio-political trends and implications, this study aims to assess, more broadly, the characteristics of this phenomenon during the years of its initial stages in the Turkish scene. Punk in Turkey started to appear at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, at first involving young people who had grown up and been socialized in political terms during a decade characterized by the extreme social consequences of the 12<sup>th</sup> September coup d’état. As a more general phenomenon, through the study of punk in this local form, it is possible to reconsider the strategies and needs of expression of antagonism and social malaise of a specific generation which, as in the case of Turkey, has usually been referred to as uninterested in socio-political dynamics. Although the local punk scene has attracted only limited attention to date, this case study offers a new perspective to rethink deeply the research approaches which consider generational phenomena as a homogeneous perspective, as well as the boundaries that shape and confine the expression of dissent.

**Keywords:** Punk, Turkey, Underground Cultures, Youth, Fanzine, DIY

### 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Punk is not solely a musical genre, it represents a complex cultural phenomenon which, with its strong anti-establishment attitude, blended political disappointment as well as youth malaise. As stated by Dick Hebdige in his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, “no subculture has sought with more grim determination than the punks to detach itself from the taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval”.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of the history of punk is dateable around the middle of the 1970s in the U.S.A, but it was in England that during the same years it emerged as an urban lifestyle with a strong class connotation. Thus, if many studies trace the genealogy of this kind of music from the rise of the American scene, in the U.K. punk became an urban working-class counterculture before then spreading to Europe. At that time,

- 1 Extract from an interview to Sercan from Headbangers. Boynik and Güldallı 2007, 378.
- 2 An earlier version of this article was presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual European Symposium on Turkey: The Concept of Culture and its Politicization in Turkey and the Diaspora, held in Vienna on 29-30 November 2019.
- 3 Hebdige 2002, 19.

by creating their own genre, the first representatives of punk used music as a tool to express reactions, revealing their own musical structures, ignoring instrumentation, musical norms and accepted rituals. This 'irregular' form of music, which abandoned elitist deference to technical skill, spread and developed rapidly in terms of performance. In fact, what is called the 'first wave' of punk exploded in the music panorama of the time with all its innovation and strong opposition to accepted conventions. Mainly based on a sense of outright rejection, this first period of punk ended very quickly, being marked out also by major-label deals for some epic punk groups. The introduction of punk in the harshly criticized mainstream music industry and the feeling of betrayal it produced, in addition to the inclusion in its sounds of different musical genres and the loss of its initial popularity, brought many to talk about the requiem of its authentic sense of denial and its original requirement of deconstruction.

However, far from being 'dead' at the end of the decade, punk started – in some of its manifestations – to embrace more political topics among which anti-racism, anarchism, anti-sexism, ecologism, anti-speciesism and crucially, a *do it yourself* (DIY) ethic. So punk regenerated itself in various approaches that presented a multiplicity of perspectives.<sup>4</sup> These approaches take distance from the traditional ideological commitments of the left and the right and some communities of punks became closer to anarchist ideas, starting a deep politization in attitude, in lifestyle, and in the message of their lyrics. Having established their own communication networks mainly with fanzines, punks set up their own independent record labels and distribution networks against the music industry, with DIY becoming the basic principle and toolbox for producing and sharing. The new period of punk, characterized also by the introduction of other subgenres such as Oi! and Hardcore,<sup>5</sup> or other thematic and more radical approaches such as Straight Edge and later on Riot Grrrl,<sup>6</sup> started to spread around and began to assume different shapes connected not only with music and politics but also with the fields of art, literature and fashion. To this extent, punk began to represent a subculture able to combine, into the yell of its sounds, different points of view joined together in the will of rejection of the status quo. Even though these various forms seem to share a common ground across countries, displaying a certain aesthetics and a common musical style, the variety of actors and expressions of punk emerging in the

4 See O'Hara 1992.

5 In the late 1970s and early 1980s punk began to diversify into various musical approaches. Among these, hardcore was characterized by the loudness and speed of the music taken to the extreme. Hardcore was more often connected with more radical contexts both in style and political approach. Another punk music subgenre was Oi!, with more slow rhythms compared to the Hardcore ones, which reintroduced the use of the refrain as slogan. Oi! chants generally expressed aversion to authority, hate against the police and stadium violence.

6 Straight Edge is a subculture of Hardcore punk emerged in the early-1980s whose adherents refrain from using alcohol, tobacco and other recreational drugs, in reaction to the addictions of the time. Riot Grrrl is an underground feminist punk movement that began during the early-1990s in the United States.

local contexts were mainly specific to and connected with the social and political dynamics of those places.

The outcomes of punk in the various countries were also the result of the interaction between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ of the phenomenon, that is, between the symbolic dimension produced in London and disseminated by the media and the material dimension of the country in which it was spread.<sup>7</sup> The consequences of this perspective were extensively visible in the self-perception of those who grew up far from the cosmopolitanism of London of the time, who were called to negotiate in everyday life the symbols of punk with their own cultural traditions. This process is particularly clear in places like Turkey, where punk starts to make its first steps at the end of the 1980s, becoming a more lively music scene during the 1990s. Considering the time in which punk music started to appear in the Turkish underground, this phenomenon has often been perceived through a comparative lens with abroad not only by the critics but also by the very people experiencing it. Such a distorted lens from one point of view made the Turkish scene looks less significant and showed it as being late when compared to the other places where the punk scenes thrived. From the other point of view, it sharpened the challenge of being a punk far from the safe environment of ‘accepted transgressions’. In other words, the perception that elsewhere there was a bigger possibility of expression and more lively punk scenes went parallel with the awareness that being punk in Turkey was much more difficult.

Furthermore, the centrality assumed by the narrative of punk in the UK and the USA has often been reproduced in many socio-cultural studies usually circumscribed to these scenes. In fact, even though punk took peculiar shapes according to the culture it was rooted in, its appearance in other contexts has often been interpreted as an imported fashion.<sup>8</sup> In more ‘peripheral’ contexts, punk studies mainly stem from the memoirs of protagonists and many of the sources, usually preserved in personal archives, surviving only thanks to the attentions and care of members of the scenes themselves and their collections. As it happens also in other places far from the ‘core’ of more lively and recognized punk production, the punk scene in Turkey has attracted only very limited attention to date.<sup>9</sup> Thus this study, based on personal interviews of the author with some of the people involved in the punk scene of the time, several articles connected to this topic and the analysis of the first fanzines published during the 1990s, aims to trace a brief historiography of the rise of punk in Turkey. Nevertheless, an in-depth approach to this phenomenon is linked not only with the group it refers to, but with the specific period and the social processes in which it was embedded. The various manifestations of punk that ranged from music to the publication of

7 Masini 2019, 75.

8 Masini 2018, 203.

9 The only published research about the punk scene in Turkey is *Türkiye’de Punk ve Yeraltı Kaynaklarının Kesintili Tarihi 1978-1999. An Interrupted History of Punk and Underground Resources in Turkey 1978-1999* edited by Sezgin Boynik and Tolga Güldallı (2007). This work is a collection of interviews to the main protagonists of the punk scene in Turkey during the 1990s.

fanzines, from attitudes to aesthetics, from expressions to prohibitions, were in fact deeply linked with local political context and connected with the spread of iconic symbols. In this sense, their richness can reveal the irony, critical views, limits and will of expression of a generational cohort in a process, as it quoted in the article's title, of constant negotiation of its own identities.

## 2. The Political and Musical Transitions of the Eighties

Punk in Turkey started to appear at the end of the 1980s, at first involving young people who had grown up after the breakdown of the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1980 coup d'état. Transformations occurring in Turkey during the 1980s can be ascribed to wider systematic changes within the global order. The contrast political engagement / disengagement, which is broadly confirmed by today's historiography too, is often used to distinguish not only the decades of the 1970s and 1980s but also the youth profiles of these two eras.<sup>10</sup> More than a generational shift this transition represented a reshape of the youthful features which symbolized in itself a wider change of political paradigms. In fact, the forms of protest which rose during the 1980s were different from the militancy of the previous decades both in terms of targets and methods. The new political issues were sensitive to topics such as the sense of community, the recognition of fundamental rights, the defense of the environment and, using different kind of practices, brought new subjects closer to issue-based politics. Even if in very specific urban circuits, Turkey during the 1980s also witnessed at first the rise of the feminist movement, the first independent human rights associations and, at the end of the decade, a new environmental awareness.<sup>11</sup> The combination of very harsh repression as a consequence of the coup and the introduction of neo-liberal policies started with the Turgut Özal administration, leading the country to a rapid transition based on the expansion of private enterprise and the opening of international markets, which sharply increased social differences. Thus, introduced by the third coup in the history of the republic, the experience of Turkey with the spread of neo-liberal politics was accompanied by a set of strong prohibitions: in particular the prohibitions on questioning the ongoing transformation process and the new order, by repudiating opposition protests, compromises and any radical thinking.

Even though the overlap of the 12<sup>th</sup> September coup d'état consequences had a wider impact on society as a whole, the social change which occurred has often been observed on the reshaping of youthful behavior. In this sense, young people started to be considered individualistic, apathetic, egotistical and incapable of forming the youth movements that characterized previous generations.<sup>12</sup> Following the thesis of Demet Lüküslü, this was the time when the concept of 'the myth of youth', in which young

10 Masini 2019, 122.

11 See De Sanctis 2018.

12 Lüküslü 2013, 80.

people played an active role in political spaces, entered irreparably into a crisis.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, since the foundation of the Turkish republic, young people were designed as the vanguard of the Kemalist revolution. Also, the so-called 1960s and 1970s generations, played a central role in the narrative of the political struggles which occurred during the same decades. Given the cultural weight that youth assumed since the onset of the Turkish republic, followed by the attempts to mythologize the revolutionary struggles of ’68, the post-1980 generations have often been defined in terms of what they lack in comparison of the previous experiences.<sup>14</sup>

When punk music emerged in the world during the mid-1970s, Turkey was in a period of rising social opposition and the left movement start rapidly to proliferate among young people. Although these left groups differed ideologically from each other, there was a widespread perception of western music as part of cultural imperialism. At that time, Anatolian Pop-Rock, a synthesis which had been popular since the mid-1960s influenced by internationally popular rock bands,<sup>15</sup> started to lose its popularity. Names like Erkin Koray, Moğollar, Cem Karaca, who had played an important role in the diffusion of this kind of music and many famous personalities who guided the protest music of that time, decided – or in some cases were forced – to leave the country. Additionally, with the increase of political polarization and the rise of armed conflicts, it was no longer possible for musicians to go on tour or give concerts. Many clubs, for safety reasons, closed their doors to different genres with the exception of Arabesque music<sup>16</sup> which doesn’t have specific political contents. In the 1970s, the music sector in Turkey was not under a homogeneous market.

At that time, the Turkish music economy was neither dominated by globally acting major labels, nor by nationally acting state-controlled ones, but instead by many independent labels, some of them led by Turkish musicians.<sup>17</sup> That is why, although very few rock records were pressed and punk was not a considered genre yet, the Sex Pistols’ 1977 album “Never Mind The Bollocks Here’s the Sex Pistols” came out in Turkey during the same year in vinyl format. The charm of punk began to be felt in Turkey too and one year later the expression ‘Punk Rock’<sup>18</sup> was used for the first time in a Turkish album on the cover of Tünay Akdeniz ve Grup Çığırışım’s plate “Mesela Mesele & Dişi Denen Canlı”. Even though here the term ‘punk’ was not grounded in a real turn in musical sound and Tünay Akdeniz and Çığırışım group did not make punk

13 See Lüküslü 2009.

14 Neyzi 2001, 420.

15 Anatolian Rock or Anadolu Rock is an umbrella term for different kind of music which combine different styles of Western pop and rock, psychedelic, funk, disco, folk or progressive with Anatolian folk music. See Lund 2019.

16 Arabesque or Arabesk is a musical synthesis of both Turkish classical and folk music with western popular music and Arabic music. This style, which started to rise in the second half of the 1970s, generally articulates a collective mode of melancholy.

17 Lund and Lund 2015, 182.

18 Even if it did not appear on the original cover of Sex Pistols’ “God Save The Queen”, the expression ‘Punk Rock’ was added on the Turkish version published in 1978 by the independent label West W 8A.

music, their album is sometimes accepted as and considered to be the first Turkish punk record.<sup>19</sup>

The possibilities for cultural contestation were made severely worse after the 1980 coup. At that time many people were imprisoned, many emigrated abroad, and the ones who remained were subjected to state repression and censorship. In the post-coup period, the attempts to break the administration's ties with the past caused important changes in the field of music too. The production of musical genres fueled by political developments in the country was prevented with a consequent diminishment of left political discourses in musical idioms. Then, with the prime ministry of Özal who came to power in 1983, Arabesque music was carried to the mainstream.

During the 1980s, and without being connected yet to a local music scene, the perception of punk initially came to the Turkish press as an aesthetic model symbolizing charm and deviance at the same time. The word punk was used in the Turkish newspapers both as a funny 'eccentric outfit' in reference to London aesthetics and style, and as a 'deviant' and 'disgusting' image generally employed as a pretext to show the immorality of western customs.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the expression '*Punk gençliği istemiyorum*'<sup>21</sup> (I do not want Punk youth) pronounced by then-president Kenan Evren – the chief of the 12<sup>th</sup> September military coup – can be considered as an explanatory example of the semantic meaning taken by this word. Punk became also an adjective synonymous of any kind of 'marginal' and 'strange' external appearance, habits and behaviors coming from abroad.<sup>22</sup> Compared with the previous decades, the young generation of the 1980s was now seen as a possibly disturbing element for the social order as programmed by the regime, which aspired to create a 'uniform' youth 'suitable' for the new Turkish society. Nevertheless, the attempt to uniform the variety of youth expression to more tolerated and accepted costumes did not work completely. During the second half of the 1980s, before the appearance of the first punk bands in Turkey, heavy metal started to represent a new space of musical contestation.

While in Turkey this decade was mainly shaped by the aftermath of the military coup, abroad important changes were taking place in the music scene. Punk had lost both the shocking effect of its first years and its mainstream popularity, moving closer to the underground musical scene and establishing its own distribution and communication networks. At the same time heavy metal gained popularity with the movement

19 See Bayrakçeken 2018; Güzel 2018.

20 Milliyet 20th November 1977.

21 Milliyet 21st December 1984.

22 Kemal Sunal, one of the most important movie artists of the period, was in fact depicted as a 'punk' while, in the 1985 movie *Katma Değer Şaban*, was played a stereotypical character who grown up in Germany and degenerated under the influence of that society. Or also Billur Kalkavan, a famous Turkish artist which was introduced by the press as one of the first punk character in Turkey, in one interview (*Hayat Dergisi* 3rd November 1983) states that she saw punks on her travels abroad and had her hair cut and dyed inspired by them because she found infinite freedom in this style. However, in the same article, she describes the punks abroad as unemployed and dirty and states that a punk culture is not suitable for the Turkish society.

NWOBHM (The New Wave of British Heavy Metal) that was attracting international attention. During the same period in Turkey, heavy rock bands started establishing themselves, even though finding musical instruments and equipment still represented an obstacle. The devaluation of the Turkish lira, along with a raise in import taxes and a general decrease in purchasing power, made European and American music imports outside of the reach of most Turkish consumers.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the scarcity of venues for concerts, the low number of live performances and the lack of interest on rock bands from music companies prevented these groups from gaining a larger audience.<sup>24</sup>

The broadcast of rock programs and other kinds of alternative music was extremely rare on Turkish radio and TV which were already under the monopoly of the state. Indeed, music devices and albums entered in Turkey mainly through people who traveled abroad or Turkish migrant workers who visited the country during holidays. This situation ushered in an informal way of accessing music: the culture of the bootleg cassette tape.<sup>25</sup> One of the first people in Istanbul to develop this practice was Tünay Akdeniz who, at the beginning of the 1980s, opened a music shop and started selling cassettes copies of popular heavy metal bands ordered abroad.<sup>26</sup> Similar stories would gradually become common in other neighborhoods of Istanbul such as Bakırköy, Beyazıt, Kadıköy and Taksim; as well as on the street stands of other cities such as Ankara, İzmir and Bursa. In this cassette tape culture, one representative character, especially for the punk scene of Istanbul, was Kemal Aydemir, known as ‘İngiliz Kemal’ (Kemal the Englishman) who went to live in London in the 1970s witnessing there the lively punk scene.<sup>27</sup> When he returned to Turkey, he brought a record archive which in many interviews is remembered as one of the first accesses to punk music. In addition to their effective contribution to the circulation of music and stories across borders, these personalities, together with some of the key places where these exchanges took place, assumed an iconic role in the imaginary and in the narrative of punk in Turkey.

Thus, if punk emerged in the UK and USA as a reaction to mainstream music and conventional social norms, while heavy metal was already spread to a wide audience, toward the end of the 1980s punk appeared in Turkey as a discovery of young people who, in their search for alternative music, encountered heavy metal first. This discovery started with groups like Sex Pistols, Ramones, The Exploited, and D.R.I., who were featured in foreign heavy metal magazines and were easier to find in the tape stands. Furthermore, punk / hardcore music became available to the Turkish public thanks to

23 For a comprehensive research on Turkish metal see Hecker 2012.

24 The first heavy metal album to be completely sung in Turkish was “Babaaanne” (Grandma) released in 1986 by the band Whisky. This album was followed by “Pentagram” released in 1990 by the speed / thrash-metal band Pentagram (Hecker 2012, 62-67). Thanks also to the commercial success of “Pentagram”, the music industry started to show more interest on rock and metal genres.

25 Ibidem, 37-40.

26 Yılmaz 2019.

27 Sanaç 2006.

contacts abroad and by the ensuing practice of exchanging cassettes between friends. If at the beginning this process was concerned mainly with musical research, by this time it had also expanded on a theoretical level.

### 3. Being a Subculture after a Military Coup

Considering the censorship and the limited music market of the time, the underground music cultures in Turkey were struggling to find their own identity, while drawing on heavy metal, punk or hardcore<sup>28</sup> at the end of the 1980s was not yet such a defined or explicit practice. Therefore, the establishment of the first groups, the first fanzines, meeting points, venues, and generally speaking the earliest output of punk in Turkey should be assessed as a part of a larger process that includes also other kinds of underground musical genres.<sup>29</sup>

The first punk bands were founded mostly in Istanbul and other metropolitan cities such as Ankara and Izmir, which were economically more advanced and in a process of rapid urbanization. There, punk became to circulate in small groups of young people – mainly boys aged between 17 and 20 years old –, mostly from middle-class families, who had access to English and could afford the costs of the music equipment. Therefore, punk appeared in Turkey not entirely as a working-class subcultural youth resistance, but mostly as a refusal on the part of young people of both the conservative norms and alienation of the emerging consumer society. Indeed, the rapid urbanization processes experienced by the country, the large young populations and, in particular, the re-emergence of cultural capital displays as a result of uneven income distribution, make it difficult here to place the youth subcultures of the time within the strict lines of class that are generally used for other contexts.<sup>30</sup> As such, examples like punk which, when it started to appear in Turkey, had already been politicized in western countries as a counter-cultural phenomenon, attracted young people to identify with larger communities abroad, following in particular its symbolic rebellion.

The first known punk band in Turkey was Headbangers, founded in 1987. Although this group, which included a larger community of friends, gave only a few concerts and recorded only one song,<sup>31</sup> it has been one of the most talked about punk bands for years. One of the main reasons of its popularity was the mohawk haired “Manav Is-

28 Since in Turkey hardcore and punk's subgenres were particularly intersected and coexistent, in this paper the word 'punk' has generally used to signify both, except when it is expressly specified.

29 The influence of metal music was intensely reflecting also in the sounds of punk bands established in the early 1990s. Among them the group Athena, which became famous in the mainstream music industry, was founded as a thrash-metal band. In their second album “Holigan” (1998), they preferred a music style based on ska-punk.

30 Kloskowska 1988, 15.

31 The song “Suratına İşemek İstiyorum” (I Wanna Piss on Your Face) from Headbangers take place in the collective 7” vinyl EP “Sevdasız Hayat Ölümdür” (Life Without Love is Death) published in France in 1994.



mail”, one character from the band whose radical looks were pretty controversial for the time. Indeed, entrusting to the body its own narrations, punk testifying how this space had acquired an unprecedented political centrality and had become a battleground. This conflict was particularly visible since at that time in Turkey growing hair, having piercings, wearing black or badges on a denim jacket were harshly criticized aesthetic choices and represented one of the core realm of what Keith Kahn-Harris describes as the “*production of transgression*”.<sup>32</sup> Owing to their appearance, punks in Turkey have been subjected to regular verbal and physical violence and the aesthetic externalization of punk became a way to reclaim diversity as a sign of recognition. Other than Headbangers, Noisy Mob from Istanbul; Hong Kong Virus, Spinners, The Guts from Ankara; and I.D.E.A. from Izmir are all examples of punk bands that were formed before 1990. Among them, only Spinners – notably the first all-woman punk band in Turkey – managed to release a demo, 1991’s “Dig The Hole, Forget The Sun”.

The punk and hardcore scene in Turkey had a significant increase in popularity in the 1990s. At that time the underground music culture began to expand thanks to the growing number of listeners gathered around the cassette stands and music shops; the increase in access to music sources; the growth in the number of gigs,<sup>33</sup> which in Istanbul were held mainly in rock bars such as Bilsak and Gitanes; the spread of demo album culture; and the release of fanzines. Whereas during the earlier days of the scene, the lack of groups and venues meant that metal bands and punk bands would generally share the same stage, around this time, various strands of the underground began to diverge. In parallel with an increasing process of sensibility on political issues, people involved in the punk hardcore scene started to organize their own concerts in order to better express themselves. However, this transition, as it appears from many interviews, has not been fluent nor peaceful and often resulted in clashes between the adherents of the two scenes.<sup>34</sup> At that time Moribund Youth,<sup>35</sup> one of Turkey’s first hardcore bands, starting to organize some more exclusively punk gigs, then “The first punk / hc fest of Turkey”,<sup>36</sup> was organized in Ankara, with the participation of groups such as Moribund Youth, Spinners and Violent Pop. Even though they were only sporadic events, these examples can be considered to be the first signs of a gradual separation

32 Kahn-Harris 2007, 48.

33 Gig is an informal term mainly used in referment to music events and concerts. This term is generally applied to performances held in a smaller venue and with a smaller audience then a concert. Among punks, gig is a broadly accepted term used to identify the specificity of their live performances.

34 See Boynik and Güldallı 2007.

35 In 1991 the band Moribund Youth (later called Turmoil) released “No!” which is one of the first hardcore demo published in Turkey. During a gig in 1992 the band was sharing political flyers on contents such as human rights, animal rights, and ecology. This is one of the first sign of the interaction between punk music and political attitude. For the image of the original flyer see Boynik and Güldallı 2007, 195.

36 This is the name of the event as it appears in the official poster dated 4 July 1992. Private archive.

between punk and metal scenes, which from then on began to diversify in terms of performances and audiences.

During the first half of the 1990s, thanks also to the popularity assumed by Akmar Pasajı – a music and book shop arcade in the district of Kadıköy where metalheads and punks from different parts of Istanbul used to gather – bands like Necrosis, Ask It Why? (Formerly S.A.D.) Radical Noise and Rashit were all set up. At the same time, groups started to emerge in other districts of Istanbul too. Among them were CMUK,<sup>37</sup> Dead Army Boots,<sup>38</sup> LSD, Alcohol, Dispute, Tampon, Regorge, 2/5 BZ,<sup>39</sup> Empty Cage and Crunch (later renamed Kranch). Using mostly the speed of Hardcore, sounds this dynamism significantly affected the increase in the audience on punk stages and its references start to be more explicit. The similar role assumed in Istanbul by Akmar Pasajı, was held in Ankara by Yüksel Caddesi, a central street which became a meeting point for different underground communities.<sup>40</sup> Through this scene, bands like Slamdive, Flatground, Pogos Not Fight (PNF), Something's Wrong and Sokak Köpekleri were established. Beyond Istanbul and Ankara, Voice Of Illegal and Less from Izmir, and then later, out of the metropolitan centers, Pick-axe from Adana and Scream from Konya were proof of a gradual decentralization of the phenomenon.

All these music groups were led by men, with the only exception being Tampon. This band was the second punk group in Turkey composed of only women after Spinners. In a male-dominated scene these two early examples of all-women bands were an outcome of a broader process of changing social relationships that started to affect also the generation coming of age in this era. Nevertheless, despite more awareness of discrimination against women and the everyday personal experience of gender inequality in the Turkish society, neither of these bands were established as explicitly feminist punk groups.<sup>41</sup> At that time, whether because the influence of the feminist movement in Turkey was still connected with specific circuits, or because the transnational punk scene was discovering its feminist identity during the same years, the minor presence of women in the punk scene in Turkey was not openly debated. If Spinners disbanded after few years, Tampon has continued its existence right up to today, with a gender-

37 Despite its short lifetime and only a few concerts, the CMUK band is known as one of the most characteristic punk band of that period and their songs continuous to be played today. Among these “Dinozor Taşağı” (Dinosaur Balls) performed by Rashit and “Dolapdere” (Dolapdere) performed by Tampon.

38 Later on, the members of this group started to show fascist and nationalistic positions founding a new group, which uses racist and xenophobic statements.

39 2/5 BZ is a multimedia project created by Serhat Köksal. This project was also featured in the John Peel's late evening show on BBC One on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1994.

40 The young people that use to gathering around Akmar Pasajı and Yüksel Caddesi were usually referred as “Akmar Gençliği” (Akmar Youth) and “Yüksel Caddesi Gençliği” (Yüksel Street Youth). See İnci 2012 and Doğan 1994.

41 Nowadays, punk in Turkey demonstrates a new awareness on feminism and all-women bands with a clear feminist approach start to arise. Among them, one of the well-known Riot Grrrl band is Secondhand Underpants found in 2006. For new approaches to feminist punk politics in Turkey see Gürbüz 2021.

mixed lineup including Punk Aslı,<sup>42</sup> a representative character of punk in Turkey, as a frontwoman.<sup>43</sup>

With the second half of the decade punk in Turkey experienced a new phase. Music-based fanzines begin to reach a wider audience; ‘alternative’ styles begin to be noticed by the mainstream; the number of meeting places, especially in Istanbul’s Beyoğlu district, started to increase. Here the small group that previously used to gathered around Deniz Kitabevi, a key music and book shop, began to grow and find new places of congregation. Thanks also to music stores like Kod Müzik located in Atlas Pasajı,<sup>44</sup> access to albums of independent record labels became easier. At the same time alternative local bands start to be produce Turkey too. Before this period, in fact, the few records in vinyl format of Turkish punk bands had been released abroad.<sup>45</sup> However, due to the disconnected connections and most importantly because of the scant interest of the domestic audience, this arrangement could not continue longer. As the market of underground music developed in Turkey, Kod Müzik produced the first punk and hardcore albums released in the country such as “Sevdasız Hayat” (Life Without Love) from Ask It Why? and Radical Noise; “The Love Album” from Crunch and Rashit’s “Telaşa Mahal Yok” (No Need to Fuss). At the end of the decade also “Holigan” from Athena, the first ska-punk album in Turkey, was released. It was in particular this album together with the Rashit’s one that gave an important contribution to a wider circulation of punk music which at the end of 1990s started to reach also the mainstream.

The broad oppositional stance expressed in the lyrics of the punk songs of the time concerned in particular the State, authority, capitalism and militarism. Similarly, traumatic social events of that period were confronted, such as the massacre of Madımak<sup>46</sup>, which is addressed in songs like Rashit’s “Hitlerin Köpekleri” (Hitler’s Dogs), Pogo’s Not Fight’s “Madımak’ta İnfaz” (Execution in Madımak) and Radical Noise’s “Çığlık” (Scream). Among the songs which dealt with personal problems, Headbangers’ “Su-

42 See Beşer 2015.

43 Although Tampon has been active on the stage since the 1990’s, the band was able to release its first album only in 2017: “Planet Tampon” – Vinyl LP (Prof Sny Records, Czechia, 2017).

44 Atlas Pasajı is an arcade in the district of Beyoğlu in Istanbul which by the mid-1990s housed among other shops, Kod Müzik, Deniz Kitabevi (before located in Narmanlı Han) and Mod a secondhand clothing shop, becoming a pivotal place where to find music, fanzines and clothing accessories related to punk.

45 Among them: Turmoil / Acoustic Grinder (Belgium) – Split 7” Vinyl Ep (Grinding Madness, Belgium, 1994); Radical Noise / Necrosis – “End of Sustain” – Split 7” Vinyl Ep (View Beyond Records, Czech Republic, 1994); “Sevdasız Hayat Ölümdür” (Life Without Love is Death) – Compilation 7” Vinyl Ep (Tian An Men 89 Records, France, 1994); Rashit / Ask It Why? – “Kadıköy’den Hareketler” (Actions form Kadıköy) – Split 7” Vinyl Ep (Darbouka Records, France, 1996).

46 On 2nd July 1993 a mob, mainly affiliated to fundamentalist and radical religious movements, torched the Madımak Hotel in Sivas, a province of Turkey, which hosted a group of leading artists, scholars and intellectuals who were in town to attend an Alevi festival. During the attack 35 person died on the fire.

ratına İşemek İstiyorum” (I Wanna Piss on Your Face) or CMUK’s “Dinozor Taşağı” (Dinosaur Ball) talk about the pain of loving separation. From the same band drug dealing is covered in “Dolapdere”, while Tampon’s “Hortum Süleyman” (Süleyman the Hose) denounces the violence perpetrated against trans people in Beyoğlu’s police stations. Notably, the bands established in the first period in particular, preferred the use of English in their lyrics, chosen mainly to reach the audience abroad, to avoid the outside attention on political texts or because Turkish was not considered suitable for this kind of music. Later on, though, some of the well-known bands start to use Turkish too, building a stronger connection with the audience.

With only rare exceptions, most of the bands previously mentioned did not go beyond a few recordings of rehearsals or live concerts and were active only for short periods of time.<sup>47</sup> Due to limited financial resources, the compulsory military service a widespread use of drugs and the difficulty in establishing practices such as occupation of private spaces or the creation of alternative economies, for punks in Turkey at that time was very difficult to translate theories into concrete actions. In the absence of other spaces, this scene tried to find its own identity through channels of self-production.

#### 4. A New Space of Self-Production: The Culture of Fanzines

Fanzines are self-produced “magazines for fans” which became one of the main channels of communication and dissemination for many underground subcultures, thus widening the debate on music as well as on a more conceptual level.<sup>48</sup> The main characteristic of fanzines was one of urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, with memos from the front line<sup>49</sup> which summarized the irony, interests, criticisms and perspectives of a given subculture in a language understandable by the reader community. With the exception of some limited cases of amateur publishing,<sup>50</sup>

47 Although many groups established in the 1990s do not have recorded their own demo or albums, it is possible to listen some of their songs in several compilations released afterwards. Among them: “Turkish Hardcore Compilation” – Cassette (%30, Turkey, 1993); “Sevdasız Hayat Ölündür” – 7” Vinyl Ep (Tian An Men 89 Records, France, 1994), “Telaşa Mahal Yok! – Turkish Hardcore Punk Compilation” – Cassette (TMY, Turkey, 1995); “Various – Sound Of The World: Turkey” – Cassette (Acousmie, France, 1995), “Türkiye’de Punk Ve Yeraltı Kaynaklarının Kesintili Tarihi 1978-1999 – CDR (BAS, Turkey, 2007); “Timeless Infusion – Zamansız Zerk” – CDR (Mevzu Records, Turkey, 2019).

48 The written resources about punk in Turkish were very limited. At that time the only reference book was Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* published in Turkey in 1988. Previously, a shorter content about punk was included in *Müzik Ailesinin Nefreti: Heavy Metal, Punk, New Wave* in 1985. For a more comprehensive and specific publication on punk we have to wait the Turkish translation of Tricia Henry’s *Young Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* published in 1999.

49 Hebdige 2002, 111.

50 Antares, which began its publication in 1971, is recognized as the first fanzine ever made in Turkey. This publication was born out from the need of some science fiction writers who

the first music fanzines to appear in Turkey with a decisive awareness of self-reproduction and exchange processes were *Mondo Trasho*, which published its first issue on May 1, 1991 and *Laneth*, which came out in the same month.<sup>51</sup> Given the contemporaneity of their release, both these publications claim for themselves the record of being the first in the genre. Nevertheless, *Mondo Trasho*, both for its editorial richness and for its graphic aesthetics much appreciated by the punk generation of those years, and *Laneth* for its wide diffusion to a significant number of readers thanks to the growing heavy metal culture, were the main examples of this concept of publication. Due to their innovation, the release of these two fanzines was an inspiration for many other fanzines that were to follow.

The Turkish examples of these publications appeared in the 1990s when neo-liberal policies came to settle under a new cultural economy. Therefore, the release of the first fanzines in Turkey during the 1990s was not a coincidence. This was in fact the period when the socio-economic transformations that were introduced in the 1980s expanded to all aspects of everyday life. At the same time the boom of the media sector provided the rise of new types of relations with the determination of wealth and the concept of ‘private life’ being ever more prevalent. The process of this ‘explosion of words’, as described by Nurdan Gürbilek, on the one hand included the exteriorization and the opening of a debate on issues that had not been given such exposure before in public media, while on the other it decreed a greater control by the state in the personal sphere and in consumer habits by repressing intimate relations into spectacle.<sup>52</sup> In these circumstance, fanzines were established as ‘anti-media’ publications outside of the mainstream.

In the 1980s, when heavy metal music started to get noticed in Turkey, there was no special or periodical broadcast that listeners could follow for the genre.<sup>53</sup> Just before the fanzine breakthrough, in the face of the control of radio and television broadcasting and in the post-coup repressive climate, humorous magazines also played a very important role in terms of producing social content with criticism of politics, sexuality and society itself, reaching 300-400 thousand weekly readers, primarily among young people.<sup>54</sup> In this context cartoonist Abdülkadir Elçioğlu, aka Aptülrika (a combination of his name and the thrash-metal band Metallica), was really crucial. In his strip called

found no space to publish their stories due to the dominant populist-realist literature of the period. See also Sarıdoğan 2020.

51 *Mondo Trasho* and *Laneth*’s issues were republished in two volume named respectively *Yeni Nesil İçin Mondo Trasho Arşivi* and *The Worst of Laneth*.

52 See Gürbilek 1992.

53 Some short articles appeared in a few music and youth magazines such as *Hey*, *Gong*, *Ses*, or *Seventeen* or in some short-lived supplementary magazines. However, the contents here were translations from various heavy metal magazines popular abroad. The first magazine that offered original content on rock music in Turkey was *Stüdyo İmge*, which was first published in 1985. Even if *Stüdyo İmge* was a remarkable example, it remained rather distant from the local underground music scene.

54 See Marcella 2021.

Grup Perişan,<sup>55</sup> which appeared first for the humor magazine *Gırgır* and then for *Hıbr*, Aptülrika focused on the social problems and tribulations of university youth and their different lifestyles. Being himself a heavy metal and rock fan, Aptülrika started to use the empty margins of the magazine, a corner which was called ‘Meridyen’, to publish concert and new demo announcements, more detailed information about groups, discographies, lyrics and cartoons of different group members. Thus, due to the absence of other regular publications, Meridyen took on a central role in the spread of rock and heavy metal culture among young people who already followed Turkey’s humorous magazines.<sup>56</sup>

The beginning of the new decade, despite being a time of a tightly controlled cultural climate, at the same time saw new channels of underground production emerge. Among them fanzines had the function of voicing some fragmented youth experiences. Despite the importance of their release for the small underground community, the production aims of Turkey’s first two fanzine Mondo Trasho and Laneth diverged on a fundamental point. When metal music became more popular among young people there was a need for an independent magazine where metal music listeners would be able to express themselves more easily against being targeted with the familiar trope of “*children of the devil*”<sup>57</sup>, with which metalheads were pointed out especially in the conservative press. Therefore Laneth, which was released between 1991-1994, did not have the first intent to be published as a fanzine and it kept on as an independent music magazine.

Unlike Laneth, Mondo Trasho was released with a conscious critique of the settled media-centered everyday life of the period. The initial idea of Esat Cavit Başak, the creator of Mondo Trasho, was to bring together his works and the ones created with the participation of his friends and put them out as a fanzine. With their motto on the cover, “The Chief Enemy of Creativity is Good Taste”, a statement by Picasso, Mondo Trasho had a circulation of around 500/600 copies per issue until 2002. Although this fanzine was identified with the punk scene, it turned out to be a ‘conceptual’ fanzine that contained many different topics such as independent music, literature, cinema and used irony in a balanced way, not appealing to a specific subcultural group. Mondo Trasho, through the accessible (un)aesthetics of punk, was rather a reaction to both artistic elitism and the image-based consumption discourse of the time.<sup>58</sup> The innovation in terms of visuals and content of this fanzine, and its ironic point of view, often referred to trash culture, influenced many people and paved the way for the publication of many other music-oriented fanzines which by that time moved from the centralized aesthetical criticism, with the intention to voicing particular subcultures.

One of the first fanzines to be published in Turkey with a specific target on punk music was *Regorge*, which was released in September 1991 only in one issue by the

55 A selection of the most representative strips of Grup Perişan was published in the book Grup Perişan. 1989’dan 1995’e Seçmeler.

56 Hecker 2012, 47-50.

57 Sabah 14th October 1990.

58 Altun 2005, 90.

members of the hardcore band Moribund Youth. In *Regorge* a new idea of sharing was introduced by including the addresses of the featured acts and also some of the underground punk record labels, thus opening a channel of communication with different networks abroad. After a while, the effects of this correspondence started to be reflected in other fanzines too and led to the birth of a network of opinion and contact exchange. Over time, the tendency to publish excerpts from foreign magazines was to be replaced with interviews made through correspondence with underground bands abroad, album reviews and concert commentaries. Along with other early fanzines such as *Gorgor*, *Anestezi*, *Yanetki*, which mainly focused on underground music – where punk and metal continued to coexist – also fanzines with personal issues and a more political approach began to appear. *Disguast*, which had personal and socio-political content or *Yüzde Otuz*, a sarcastic and agitative political fanzine, where music was held more in the background, are two representative examples. In addition, although it was not a punk fanzine, also noteworthy is *Coelacanth*, which had more anarchistic and anti-war political content and was prepared by a collective team.<sup>59</sup>

Fanzines of this time also created a graphical aesthetics of punk. The ‘cut and paste’ technique had been carried out in Turkey as if in line with a consolidated punk graphic tradition. Gradually, collages prepared with letters and images cut from newspapers and magazines began to be replaced by similar styles, visuals and typographies influenced by foreign punk zines. The processes of transfers within punk circuits abroad had an influence also in terms of content and affected not only the fanzines but also their readers. In particular, thanks to the foreign fanzines, an awareness began spreading among hardcore-punk listeners about certain social and political issues such as ecology, animal rights, gender discrimination, or homophobia, which in the same period was not so widespread even in the anarchist and radical left groups in Turkey. However, in the early Turkish examples personal matters and criticisms of mainstream media, authority and violence were more frequent, although these subjects were treated as humorous and sarcastic rather than with direct and more explicative articles.

Towards the mid-1990s, when the local punk scene started to find its own identity, fanzines with only punk content, that went beyond the exclusively musical focus, started to come to the fore. Among them *Dış Mibrak*, *Eblek Hardcore*, *More Hardcore*, and *Pisscore*. Depending more on conviction and ethical choices and less on class condition, these fanzines’ approach was largely a response to the alienation and social decadence of the decade. At the same time there were also fanzines like *Punx Pest*, *Truth?*, *Action Speaks Louder Than Words*, prepared entirely in English with the purpose of exchange with foreign fanzines and DIY circuits abroad. Indeed, these cheap publications aimed to challenge the relations of production in the music industry and beyond, and the barrier between producer and receiver. In addition to the postal circuit, the punk zines were mainly sold in some bookstores that supported left-wing publications. Fan-

59 Inside the team that prepared this fanzine there was also Osman Murat Ülke, against whom an investigation was opened for “alienating the people from military service” for two articles he wrote in the *Coelacanth*. Ülke was the first person in Turkey arrested for being conscientious objector.

zines that had been left to bookstores reached also left-wing and anarchist groups, who were generally further from underground music but were interested in these magazines in terms of content and format, and later on also fanzines with left and anarchist content started to emerge. When the street stands of copied cassette tapes evolved into small music stores in different passageways, these places became sales points for fanzines too. Nevertheless, the existence of the mentioned punk zines was relatively short. Two of the most long-running examples are *Gorgor* (published in 7 issues between 1992-1994) and *Disguast* (published in 13 issues between 1992-1995). Apart from these examples, some others were published with different names and most of these examples were not able to persist as regular periodicals, while many were released only as one-offs. That is also why it is difficult to find a comprehensive written documentation regarding the local scene of the time. These kinds of publications, which reached an average circulation of 50-100 copies per issue, began to decline in the late 1990s due to the spread of the internet and easier access to musical resources, but their visual aesthetic and attitude continue to influence many works today.

## 5. Conclusion

In punk's inability to be strictly defined as a subculture, as a political movement, as a genre, we see the possibilities for the articulation of social identities which cannot be captured in hardened constraints.<sup>60</sup> Thus, as Goshert states, punk is better seen as a series of performative traces.<sup>61</sup> Even if a set of musical rhythms, ideological tendencies – especially when we refer to anarcho-punk –, or counter-market strategies, could be recognized as part of its praxis, these elements are unable to comprehend the fluidity and the constant transformations of this phenomenon. The impossibility of containing punk in narrow categories is particularly visible in contexts like Turkey, where punk emerged among small groups of urban middle-class young people, as an outcome of alternative music research and exchange processes with DIY circuits abroad, gradually assuming different shapes and interpretations. Appearing at first as a musical genre, punk in Turkey started to expand its awareness and to find new spaces of self-narration, leaving us a representative documentation of its production. In this sense, a historical reading of punk, showing renewed forms of commitment situated far from the categories of 'political' of the previous decades, led to a challenge to the homogeneous assumption used to define the post-1980s youth.

The early years of punk in Turkey offers an example of the enmeshed relationships between anti-establishment target phenomena and the state of oppressive order. Indeed, during the 1990s punk remained a rather limited and circumscribed music scene. In the absence of more autonomous spaces where the channels of socialization could nurture other kinds of collective experiences too, the contingencies of youth subcultures were deeply affected from the socio-economic processes of the country, namely a

60 Goshert 2008, 87.

61 Ivi, 101.



period of harsh repression where there was little space for personal and collective opposition. Lacking a more integrated network which could provide the tools for a more convinced reaction to the strong social pressures, for many young people, punk ended up representing only a transient adolescent experience. However, punk introduced important and innovative debates that helped pave the way for new approaches and interpretations in Turkey in terms of the relationship between music and the political.

Within the 2000s the advent of the internet led punk to reach a wider audience, enhancing it with new ideas and contributions. Therefore, it intertwined with other styles and political identities, welcoming many people and new music bands of the following generations. In fact, if at the end of the 1990s many of those who were involved in the scene turned away from music, another generation came out continuing to transform the representation of this phenomenon in line with their needs and perspectives, still using the scream of punk as a tool of dissent.

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