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THE
HIDDEN HISTORY
OF
TURKISH INDEPENDENT LABELS
IN
GERMANY

FROM THE 1960s
TO THE 1980s

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"We were never allowed to write the history books."

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*.
Justice against Epistemicide (2014)

Introduction

The first independent labels to be acknowledged in the history of the German music industry after WWII are usually German music labels of the early 1970s. In truth, however, the first, largest, and most commercially successful independent record company in Germany was Türküola. Founded by Yılmaz Asöcal in Cologne in 1964, Türküola made more than a thousand releases, selling millions of records and cassettes, primarily to Turkish communities in Germany and other European countries. Türküola was only one of a much larger number of independent Turkish record companies in Germany, numbering over 20 by the 1980s. Despite their extremely successful work, these labels remain largely unknown to the wider German public beyond Turkish communities and have been mostly ignored in the histories of independent record companies and pop music in Germany. The aim of this text is to shed light on this gap in knowledge by discussing its socio-historical conditions. Key questions are: Why have these labels remained hidden in music historiography to this day? And what is so special about them?¹

The discussion of these questions touches on a number of different disciplines—as is common in cultural studies. This text therefore follows a comparative and pluri-disciplinary approach (Chappatte/Freitag/Lafi 2017), combining perspectives from music, film, media, migration, cultural, and political studies, as well as from musicology. Thomas Weber's media milieu theory, which contextualizes media and their connections within cultural production, seems especially fruitful in this context (Weber 2013), as well as Kyle Devine's concepts of political ecology and hidden material histories of music (Devine 2019). These frameworks provide useful inspiration for the undertaking of analyzing the hidden history of Turkish independent labels in Germany not only as a market-related phenomenon but also as a socio-political and media-based one. These approaches will be further combined with the analysis of the discourse (or lack thereof) around these labels and the music and people associated with them.

Unless stated otherwise, all online sources in this text were accessed on April 29, 2026.

¹ We would like to thank Özgür Çiçek, Ercan Demirel, Cem Kaya, and Can Sungu for their support and inspiration during the course of this research.

In the first section, the theoretical basis for this research will be developed by discussing different concepts of independent labels, as well as the current state of research on Turkish music and its industry, particularly in Germany.

In the second section, the socio-historical conditions for Turkish labels in Germany will be explored. The focus here will be on the reasons why Turkish labels were not granted access to the relevant official promotion and distribution channels of the German record industry (such as hit charts, media, and stores).

Due to this lack of access, these labels had to invent their own promotion and distribution channels. What helped them succeed was the concept of 'doing independent.' The investigation of this concept and its origins will be the focus of the third section.

Independent Labels

In short, there are three different concepts for the definition of independent labels. They can be categorized as either media- and technology-related (shellack, vinyl, cassette; production facilities etc.), based on access to the market (promotion and distribution channels), or related to a specific mindset or attitude (DYI culture, punk ideology).

For this context—Turkish independent labels in Germany from the 1960s to the 1980s—the most pertinent question concerns market access, though the specific mindset involved here will also be examined.

At the beginning of the vinyl record era in the 1950s, so-called major-labels controlled the production, manufacturing, and distribution of vinyl.² If a vinyl record label did not control this process entirely, it was recognized as an independent label. In the 1960s, the idea of highly successful chart music began to be associated with the idea of major labels. Labels selling less popular non-mainstream music were more on the side of independent labels.

2 For the period prior to WWII and before the advent of vinyl records, as well as for the evolution of major and independent labels in the rise of pre-electrical and electrical recorded music, see Denning 2015: passim. For the developments after WWII related to new media (tape, vinyl record), new definitions of recording (the studio as an instrument), and a new kind of people involved (producer), see Osborne 2023: passim, esp. 80–90. Osborne provides a particularly solid, contextualized explanation of the rise of independent labels in the U.S. after WWII. Concerning the period prior to WWII, Osborne points to the fact that "the patent rights of the big three companies elapsed in the early 1920s, leading to a proliferation of record labels" (ibid.: 45), which, by 1942, had already resulted in "more than 100 independent labels" in the U.S. (ibid.: 58). By 1948, 19% of the hit records were already being produced by independent labels, and by the end of the 1950s, this figure had increased to 64% (ibid.: 82). In the UK, the situation was different: "By the end of the 1950s, there were four principal labels in operation," about 25 small labels shared only 2% of the retail trade in records (ibid.: 85). It was only with the advent of punk music that independent labels began to flourish in the UK, growing from 12 in 1976 to nearly 500 by the end of the 1970s (Hockenbrink 2024: 70). Compared to the U.S. and the UK, the German market was less developed for small or independent labels.

In general, major labels and independent labels were not in opposition. Independent labels used access to the market, especially the established promotion and distribution channels of the much larger multinational major labels. However, the term 'independent' points to a legal and, to a large extent, economic independence from the major media corporations. According to Charlie Gillett, one key criterion for separating major and independent labels is access to the market via promotion and distribution channels. Owning one or several such channels could make you a major label (Gillett 1970; Göbel 2004: 27–28; Elster 2021: 83).

Music-wise, the lower economic pressure on musicians associated with independent labels, particularly artist-run ones, can encourage experimentation and creative autonomy in music-making. However, music production with major labels is much more commercially driven, typically within a smaller, more conservative range of aesthetic possibilities (Göbel 2004: 28). To put it bluntly: For major labels, musical content is completely irrelevant as long as they can make a profit from it. This also explains why capitalist major labels have not hesitated to release anti-colonial, communist, or even anti-capitalist music (Denning 2015: 31–32, 148, 154). In contrast, independent labels care about the music and their—often minoritarian—audiences (N.N. no date).

Yet, the separation between major and independent labels remains somewhat artificial. There even exists an intermediate category, so-called 'major-independent labels,' depending on access to and ownership of promotion and distribution channels. This point will subsequently be relevant to the argument presented.

Since the late 1970s, the idea of independent labels has generally been closely connected to punk music and its DIY-spirit, enabling music production, promotion, and distribution alongside the established major-owned channels. However, the subject of this text—Turkish (major-) independent labels operating in Germany—calls this idea into question: There has been a significant amount of DIY-spirit and non-hegemonic underground practice within Turkish (major-)independent labels more than ten years before punk entered the scene. To a certain extent, the Turkish (major-)independent labels in Germany developed a prototype for punk music's independent label thinking—with punk music barely knowing of or referring to this prototype (see Gutmair 2023).

The Turkish (major-)independent labels kept their concept and practice of 'doing independent' out of sight, had to keep it out of sight, or were kept out of sight, as will be analyzed later.

Starting with the so-called 'guest workers' in the early 1960s, the largest Turkish migrant community outside Turkey was established in Germany, growing to a population of over three million people today. In fact, there is not *one* 'Turkish community' but several diverse ones, which can be identified along different ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines (which can also intersect in various ways). The concept of being 'Turkish' is complex, given that it is based on a very young republican nation that tried to build something new out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Attempting to use European concepts of nation-state building could not suppress or eliminate the ethnic, religious, and linguistic plurality, differences, and conflicts in the long term. This also impacts artistic production (see Bozdoğan/Akcan 2012: passim, 70–82, 101; Bartsch 2011: passim, 38–40).

Yet, representation and acknowledgement of these large Turkish communities in the cultural life of German society has been and still is weak. German music history, for example, is mainly written by non-Turkish people. This may already be one of the reasons why it is written without considering Turkish music in and from Germany. When it comes to Turkish record labels in Germany, they are almost completely overlooked.

Things seemed to change for the better with the book *Made in Germany. Studies in Popular Music* (Seibt/Ringsmut/Wickström 2021), which at least contains a chapter on Turkish hip-hop and an interview conducted with a Turkish rap artist. Nevertheless, any Turkish music made in Germany prior and alongside hip-hop is not considered here at all, despite the impressive output by numerous artists and labels. Unfortunately, more recent publications on German pop music history by Jan Reetze (2022) or Dietmar Elflein (2022), for example, fall short of *Made in Germany*, excluding any Turkish music made in Germany. Other texts continue to ignore the innovation and groundbreaking contribution of migrants, especially Turkish ones, to the naissance of hip-hop in Germany (e.g. Lüthe 2024: 239; Wagner 2025). Murat Güngör, Hannes Loh, and Uh-Young Kim offer a critique of this approach to nationalizing German hip-hop history, which excludes (post-)migrants and their contributions, in their book *Remix Almanya: Eine Postmigrantische Hiphop-Geschichte* (2024: 61).

As part of a countermovement to this marginalization, *Songs of Gastarbeiter Vol. 2* (2022), conceived by İmran Ayata and Bülent Kullukcu, was not only a compilation of forgotten or ignored Turkish pop music made in Germany, but also of forgotten or ignored music by other migrant communities like Spanish, Greek, or Vietnamese communities. *Songs of Gastarbeiter Vol. 2* marks the beginning of a new historiography of (migrant) music made in Germany. Furthermore, Cem Kaya's documentary film *Aşk, Mark ve Ölüm. Liebe, D-Mark und Tod. Love, Deutschmarks and Death* (2022) is worth mentioning. The film not only promotes Turkish music made in Germany by tracing its history and focusing on its specific musical developments, but

also reflects on its hiddenness and exclusion from the German music market and the German media. In 2020, Christopher Ramm summed up the state of research on Turkish pop music in general: “It is striking how little attention academic research gave to Turkish pop and rock music of the 1960s and 1970s until very recently,” and he detected a general “lack of interest” (Ramm 2020: 273). This has changed significantly since about 2018, not least due to a new wave of English writing Turkish scholars (see Lund 2026/2020: 140–141). Yet current research falls short of providing a deeper understanding of the Turkish music market in general and of its specificities within Germany.

The history of Turkish migrant music culture that has emerged in Germany since the mid-1960s is, in general, almost completely absent from public perception. The literature published to date is very limited and archives are lacking.³ The music and culture of Turkish migrants has apparently not yet been considered relevant enough to be documented, archived, and protected.⁴ After about 60 years of Turkish music made and produced in Germany, there still exists no comprehensive history of Turkish music in and from Germany (see Lund/Lund 2026/2022)⁵—let alone a history of its music labels. A fact that has to be questioned and discussed.

In the following, we aim to elucidate the mechanism behind this ‘hidden’ history by analyzing the discourse (or lack thereof) about these labels and the music and people linked to them, in order to understand why these independent labels were blocked from the official distribution channels and why they have been written out of cultural and music history to this day.

Regarding hidden histories, journalist Adama Juldeh Munu states that “it suffices to say ‘hidden histories’ are either due to willful design to keep them hidden or the lack of reliable sources that makes proper enquiry possible” (Munu 2020). In our case, both explanations apply. In 2010, Martin Stokes observed that “the topic [of the Turkish music market] has been neglected, and facts and figures are hard to come by” (Stokes 2010: 16, see also Greve 2003: 82)—and things have not substantially changed since then. A reason for figures being hard to come by is that various interest groups have been manipulating them—upwards or downwards—for decades (Greve 2003: 112, 158). Therefore, non-transparency already begins within the Turkish music market itself.

3 For a useful introduction to Turkish migrant culture in Germany, along with Turkish music made in Germany, see Hazar 2021.

4 The same goes for Turkish migrant film and video culture (Sungu 2019: 6).

For a rare and very important archive documenting migrant culture in Germany, see DOMiD. Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland, <https://domid.org/> and the related Museum Selma (in planning), <https://www.museum-selma.de/en/>.

5 Martin Greves extensive and groundbreaking book *Musik der imaginären Türkei: Musik und Musikleben im Kontext der Migration aus der Türkei in Deutschland* (2003) especially covers the decades of the 1980s and the 1990s, while overlooking earlier decades.

Yet larger structures are at stake in Germany, as researcher Vanessa E. Thompson states: "In Germany, there is a systematic failure to recognize racism as a structural and institutional problem" (Thompson 2021: 52).⁶

One element of racism as a structural and institutional issue is the exclusion or disregard of Turkish music history in Germany by the country's historiography of music. But it goes even deeper: the "willful design" to suppress a certain history is linked to the fundamental structure that kept the life of Turkish music in Germany hidden—'access denied.' The independent Turkish labels in Germany and their special distribution system were created specifically because of an experienced 'access denied' to the existing structures for musical life. And this attitude of 'access denied' reappears when it comes to the historiography of German music. It is generally neither officially stated nor explicitly verbalized or reflected. 'Access denied' just happens. This is what Thompson means when speaking about "a systematic failure to recognize racism as a structural and institutional problem" (*ibid.*). What are the reasons for this structural denial of access and which larger "willful design" is shaping it?

'Access Denied'— Racism and Turkish Independent Labels in Germany

For the purposes of this article, the situation can be summarized as follows: the first German independent labels to be acknowledged in the history of the German record industry post-WWII usually are the following: Kuckuck, releasing records from 1970 onward (Peltsch 2021: 50); David Volksmund Produktion, founded in 1971 by the music group Ton Steine Scherben (Philipps 2020: 34); and Trikont, releasing records from 1970 onward (*ibid.*).

Interestingly, all three labels were also (music) publishing houses that started sidelines as labels—like Pläne, another early independent label in Germany. Early independent labels in Germany appear to have developed more from the realms of literature and political activism than from the music scene itself, with the aim of turning leftist activist literature into music,—which all of them did. At least in the beginning, the independent publishing houses were mainly releasing texts and only occasionally records. That may be one of the reasons why Pläne, perhaps the most literature-related of these labels, is usually not taken into account when it comes to independent music labels, despite releasing records at a very low rate since 1963.

6 For a structural analysis of exclusion based on a framework of migration politics and different models of 'integration,' see Abadan-Unat 2005: 338–345, esp. 342–343. Nermin Abadan-Unat shows that the economic 'integration' in Germany is not necessarily paired with a societal integration. On the contrary, exclusion reigns.



Fig. 1: Nuri Sesigüzel and Yüksel Özkasap receive golden records for extraordinary high selling rates, early 1970s. Photo: Selahattin Kaya. Source: Eryılmaz/Jamin 1998: 290.

However, this part of German music history, which favors the aforementioned German independent labels, does not tell the whole truth. In fact, the first, largest, and most commercially successful independent record company ever in Germany was Türküola. Founded in 1964, the company released more than a thousand singles, albums, and compilations by Turkish artists.⁷ The recordings were made in Turkey and Germany, primarily for Turkish communities in Germany and other European countries (Sels 2021: 24), but also for export to Turkey. The company sold millions of records, CDs, and cassettes across Germany, Europe, and Turkey, winning golden and platinum records (fig. 1).

Türküola was only one of a much larger number of (major-)independent Turkish record companies in Germany, including Minareci, founded in Munich in 1969, and Uzelli, founded in Frankfurt am Main in 1971.⁸

The first record by a Turkish-German label is not easy to track down. It probably was Metin Türköz' *Almanya'da Neler Var/Altmışlık Oma*, released on Areg Ses⁹ in 1965, or one of the other early Metin Türköz or Yüksel Özkasap records released in 1966 on Türküola's sub-label Türkofon.¹⁰

Many Turkish independent record labels were founded—both smaller and larger ones—with infrastructural backing by “Turkish studios which existed in many European cities” (Greve 2017: 44; Sels 2021: 17). Greve lists about two dozen independent Turkish record labels in Germany, about seven of which were major-independents, and one of which even represented up to 180 Turkish record companies for the German and the European market (Greve 2003: 78f and 81f). Teresa Vena as well as Esther Buss note about 500 to 600 artists, related only to Türküola, who have experienced a remarkable career from the 1960s on (Vena 2022; Buss 2022).

7 For a catalog, see <https://web.archive.org/web/20220701091240/www.diskotek.info/RecordLabel/Details/269>. See also Greve 2003: 515–534.

8 Like Türküola, these two other labels started not by releasing records but by trying to sell (Turkish) goods to the Turkish communities in Germany. It seems that Türküola entered the record market with releases around 1966, Minareci in 1974, and Uzelli in 1976. Thanks to Ercan Demirel for pointing this out to us.

9 See <https://www.discogs.com/de/release/12890503-Kayserili-Metin-Türköz-Almanya-da-Neler-Var-Altmışlık-Oma/>.

10 See <https://www.discogs.com/de/artist/4310048-Metin-Türköz> and <http://ykslozkasap.atspace.com/disko.htm>.

Of course, over time, these labels sold more than just vinyl records. Vinyl faded out in the 1980s; instead, cassettes began appearing on the shelves from the mid-1970s onward, followed by CDs from the 1980s onward.

Although we still do not have a clear picture of the Turkish music market and its volume in Germany, the outlines of an extraordinary and powerful release and distribution system can already be detected. If we consider that Turkish labels from Germany also sold to Europe and Turkey, like *Türküola*, the widely circulated anecdote of sacks of cash being dropped off each evening at the main *Türküola* store in Cologne begins to seem believable.

With his sub-label *Teledisc*, founded in 1968, *Türküola*'s founder *Asöcal* even tried several times to enter the German record industry's system. However, this sub-label was a failure, with only half a dozen releases, including German Schlager and English versions of *Anadolu rock* songs. Consequently, *Asöcal* gave up in 1980.¹¹ What remains is a stunning discrepancy between an extraordinarily successful label manager—*Asöcal* with *Türküola* and its Turkish music sub-labels—and a completely unsuccessful label manager—*Asöcal* with *Teledisc* and its Turkish and non-Turkish music for the German music market.

Since the Turkish labels in Germany had no access to the German record industry's relevant official promotion and distribution channels (such as hit charts, media, and stores),¹² they had to invent their own, primarily with grocery stores and general stores¹³ as main sales outlets and Turkish newspapers as promotional media (for the Austrian context, see Gebesmair 2009: 108–115).

In addition, the labels could rely on their customers' unusually good media setup. Mathilde Jamin states: "Even with otherwise very frugal lifestyles, many migrants [...] bought radio sets for their own use early on, which received Radio Ankara and 'Köln Radio' (the Turkish program of the WDR), record players to listen to Turkish music, cassette recorders that could also be used for 'spoken letters' and video recorders with which Turkish films could be watched [...]. These were the indispensable 'contact media' that formed a bridge to the homeland" (Jamin 1998: 217).

11 See the small label discography: https://www.discogs.com/label/225384-Teledisc-2?sort=year&sort_order=asc.

12 See Cem Kaya: "[...] these musicians were simply not invited to 'Wetten, dass ...?', to 'Dalli Dalli' or to the other big West German entertainment shows of the time. They weren't present, and accordingly one always felt very underrepresented oneself" (Quote in: Brake 2022). And in the same vein: "From the eighties on, the most famous Turkish singers played in the biggest German halls. Sold-out concerts. But nothing came of it on German television" (Krieger 2022). In contrast to Germany, *Baris Manço* could release an EP with songs in France as early as 1964 (see <https://www.discogs.com/release/2066350-Baris-Manço-Baby-Sitter>). The French record label *Rigolo*, founded by the Caribbean singer and entertainer *Henri Gabriel Salvador*, had no reservations signing a Turkish musician—something which could not happen in Germany before some sporadic attempts by major labels in the mid-1970s (see Lund/Lund 2026/2022: 214).

13 The combination of food and non-food articles, including vinyl records, in grocery and general stores was also used for the distribution of other non-Western music in other European countries. For example, an Indian vinyl record from 1971 sold in Rotterdam bears a record sticker declaring the seller as "Tropisch-Winkel 'TiBiTi', Rotterdam, Voor al uw Surinaamse, Indiase en Indonesische produkten en grammofoonplaten." For an example from Austria/Vienna, see Gebesmair 2009: 106–107. However, more research on the subject of independent distribution of other non-Western music in Germany and other Western countries is needed.

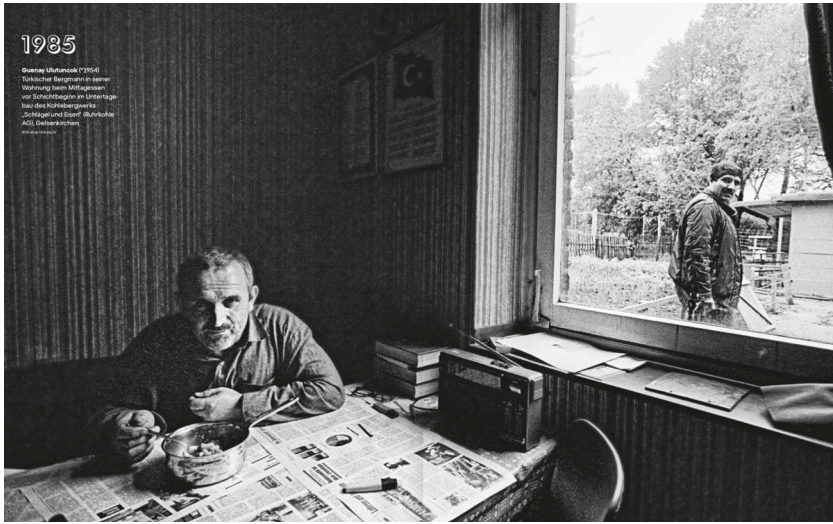


Fig. 2: Miner, 1985. Photo: Guenay Ulutuncok.
Source: Nocke 2021: 1.



Fig. 3: Worker in a multi-bed room. Film still.
Source: Willkopp 2022.

Fig. 2 shows the interior of a miner's quarters. Among the few objects in the room, the radio on the table stands out. Fig. 3 shows a worker in a multi-bed room with a turntable on a reserved chair.

According to Abadan-Unat's case study, 80% of the Turkish migrants in the early 1960s bought a radio immediately after arriving in Germany (Abadan-Unat 2005: 140). And according to John Berger and Jean Mohr in their case study, in the early 1970s approximately every fourth migrant worker, lodged in multi-bed rooms, had a portable record player to play records (Berger/Mohr 2016: 177).

Why did Turkish labels experience an ‘access denied’ when it came to the German record industry’s relevant official promotion and distribution channels? To answer this, we must return to our observation concerning structural racism. Which structure profits, one may ask? A capitalist structure built on cheap labor forces that requires justification for ultra-low and unequal payment. Could there be a more effective justification than convincing people that they are of little worth—and that their cultural identity, including their music, is equally worthless or insignificant? The logic of racism is a logic of devaluation—and profit (see Mbembe 2015).

In her documentary film *Yeryüzü Göçerleri* (1979), Gülseven Güven openly compares and parallels Turkish migrant people with Black people as slaves. The film even presents Turkish migrants as slaves within a slave trade organized by the Turkish state, which sells its people as labor force to work abroad in order to bring in valuable foreign currency, which the state desperately needs to compensate for the immense trade deficit. The status of Turkish migrants in the social hierarchy of German society is made clear in the film: “They are at the end of the list,” as the narrator puts it toward the end of the film. And in fact, Turkish people have often been colloquially referred to as “the N* of Europe,” to maximize their othering and devaluation (see Klee 1971); and their situation in Germany was judged as “a modern form of slavery” even by members of German political parties like the social democrats (SPD) (N.N. 1973).

Hence, Turkish migrant people perceived themselves as being treated like slaves by the Turkish state. In the lyrics of a migrant song, one singer complains openly about the Turkish state: “You have disgraced us before the world. You have sold us to Germany” (Anhegger 1982: 23).

Thomas Solomon sums up the status of Turkish people by describing them as “second-class non-citizens in Germany” (Solomon 2021: 112). And Hakkı Keskin points in a similar direction by stating that “undeniably, in the minds of most Germans, Germany’s Turks remain the country’s pariahs” (Keskin 1998: 19).¹⁴

If one takes Pınar Öğrenci’s video work *Glück auf in Deutschland* (2024) into consideration, confirmation of the visual invisibility of migrants, especially Turkish migrants, becomes evident.

Öğrenci’s video work addresses the photographic absence of so-called ‘guest workers’ in the depiction of the mining industrialization as it was undertaken by the German side, for example by the mining companies. According to her, the first images of ‘guest workers’ by German photographers to be found in the archives of the Ruhr Museum only date back to 1982—more than 20 years after Turkish migrant workers had entered the mines. Before that, they were simply not recognized and photographed because, despite their work in the mines, they were not seen as a relevant part of mining work and culture.

14 This problem continues, among other reasons because Turkey is still not part of the EU (see Prümm 2003). In “Meister İşçi Kavgası” (no date, prob. 1970s), the singer Metin Türköz introduced the character of a German foreman as a counterpart to the character of the Turkish migrant worker in the same song. The foreman hurls aggressive, harassing, and racist remarks in German at the migrant worker, humiliating him. The migrant worker in return sings in Turkish a sort of lament but also makes fun of the foreman.



Fig. 4: Disco Club in Gelsenkirchen, 1974. Photo: Manfred Vollmer.
Source: Eryilmaz/Jamin 1998: 311. Sign reads: "No entry for foreigners."

An examination of the Ruhr Museum's archival database actually shows that there are only about a dozen hits for the term 'Gastarbeiter' ('migrant worker') for photographs spanning decades, and not a single one for the terms 'Gastarbeiterin' ('female migrant worker'), or simply 'migrant.' Only at the beginning of the 1980s do photos begin to appear under the terms 'Türke'/'Türkin' ('Turk'/'Turkish woman').¹⁵ Before that, Turkish people remained invisible.

In his text for Öğrenci's exhibition at Galerie Tanja Wagner in Berlin, Alexander Koch notes:

"Öğrenci searched the photographic archive of the Ruhr Museum in Essen to look for visual traces of the first generation of guest workers and found—almost nothing. The Fördergemeinschaft für Bergmannstradition—Linker Niederrhein, an organization dedicated to preserving the traditions of mining communities, at least had a few photographs. In the decades between 1955 [...] and 1982, the mining industry and mining culture were captured in numerous sometimes lavish photo documentaries—but those exclusively show white German faces and bodies, staged as symbolic ideals for the purposes of Krupp & Co.'s lobbying and propaganda campaigns. In fact, the documentaries were bankrolled by the industry. Guest workers were literally edited out" (Koch 2024).

¹⁵ See <https://ruhrmuseum.de/digital/fotoarchiv>.

Here, a “willful design” comes in again, a “willful design” that may be linked to Boaventura de Sousa Santos theory of “abyssal thinking” (de Sousa Santos 2014: esp. chapt. 4), which here is turned into an abyssal practice of exclusion and denial.

Being structurally and socially marginalized, it is perhaps not surprising that ‘access denied’ is, in many ways, a fundamental experience for Turkish people living in Germany. They could not—and still often—cannot enter many cultural, educational, and recreational facilities (Sungu 2019: 7, 64–65). Their lives were shaped by a more or less unspoken separationist racism and classism (see Gutmair 2023: 277–280; N.N. 1973; fig. 4).

Although Germany is a capitalist society, the potential revenue that Turkish people could bring to cultural, educational, and recreational institutions was not welcomed.¹⁶ Doors were closed for Turkish people (Abadan-Unat 2005: 237), even as consumers or clients, because they were regarded as a disturbance and devaluation for the consumption process for, and by, many other people in Germany.¹⁷ Racist and classist thinking overshadowed even commercial interests (see fig. 4). This might also help explain the almost complete absence of Turkish products, music, film, and culture in the general public life—whether in German media (television, radio, newspaper), in stores (also music stores), or cultural venues (such as cinemas, art and design museums etc.).

To survive culturally and resist this exclusion, Turkish people had to establish independent structures for their everyday lives, including their musical lives.¹⁸ They had to think and use ‘doing independent.’ What began with halal butcher shops soon expanded: other food such as bread, pastries, and cheese, as well as objects of everyday Turkish life, were made available for Turkish people by the many independent Turkish grocery and general stores all over Germany (Abadan-Unat 2005: 246–247). They did not—and still do not—belong to any of the few big German food chains that have taken over the market over time.

16 Even brothels denied access to Turkish people (Üstün 1998: 185).

17 Several factors may have contributed to the perception of Turkish people as a disturbance in the consumption process: More than half of the Turkish migrants had only a rural education and training, without proper schooling. Therefore, illiteracy was a huge problem. They came from the Anatolian hinterlands and were regarded as bringing with them the smell of poverty (about the smell of poverty, see Abou 2020/2021: 53), as well as the look of rurality combined with unbridled manners of Anatolian peasants, who had only briefly been ‘washed’ urban—and that merely through living in ‘rurban’ *gecekondu*, peripheral informal settlements where whole rural villages relocated and lived a more or less ‘rurban’ life. Moreover, the smell of poverty was also connected to the kind of work many of the Turkish migrants practiced in Germany: work related to dirt, like mining, slaughter, fish processing, garbage collecting, or cleaning. For more information about how German people and other non-Turkish people in Germany perceived Turkish people in the early 1970s, see N.N. 1973. Here, one can also draw a parallel to the so-called *Ugly Laws* of the 19th century in the U.S. and in Europe, which structurally separated public space and its institutions into a bourgeois part and a non-bourgeois part for all the rest, such as poor people, sick people, people of color, migrants etc. (Hilal 2024: 202–203). And of course, the bourgeois section had an exclusive door policy preventing people perceived as non-bourgeois from entering.

18 According to Abadan-Unat, Turkish migrants in Germany had established a relatively high number of 22,000 small business enterprises by 1985, primarily dedicated to the needs of their Turkish fellow citizens (see Abadan-Unat 2005: 86–87).

Driven by a basic need for musical life, Turkish people approached music much like food and daily necessities: they built an independent structure for the promotion and distribution of their music, often linked to already existing independent grocery and general stores. Because of this independence, non-Turkish people living in Germany—who never interacted with Turkish shops—often remained unaware of the Turkish music life. This led to a structure of co-existence with few points of contact, as musical activist Sebastian Reier observed in 2020:

“Millions of Turkish sound media are sold in the Federal Republic of Germany from the late sixties on. There are no reviews in [German] music magazines, nor are there any pop-cultural considerations in the feature pages. The star cuts in *Bravo* [the most popular German music magazine] are reserved for Western pop stars, and supra-regional television appearances by Turkish musicians can be counted on two hands. Companies like *Türküola* are also not taken into account when determining the charts. Turkish music remains in its parallel universe; very few Germans come into contact with it” (Reier 2020).

Earlier, in 1998, Nedim Hazar, author and member of the rock music group *Yarınistan*, made a similar observation: “Our presence of more than 35 years did not and does not find—with a few exceptions—any reflection in the music [of German society]. The music produced by Turks in Germany does not find its way into the general market. Yes, one must even speak of a second, parallel existing market” (Hazar 1998: 287).

Daniel Bax was probably the first to address the invisibility of Turkish music in Germany in the German press, in an article from 1995. According to him, the lack of success of Turkish music among non-Turkish people in Germany had less to do with aesthetic reasons than with structural ones:

“Turkish music appears almost exclusively on domestic labels, and production is nationally limited. Although large quantities of Turkish CDs are pressed for the European market in southern Germany—at the *Destan Müzik* company in Esslingen, for example—they are sold exclusively in local Turkish stores. There, a CD typically costs only 10 Marks. Neither major music department stores like *WOM* nor special stores supporting world music like *Canzone* at Berlin’s *Savignyplatz* carry them” (Bax 1995: 15–16).¹⁹

¹⁹ It seems that, until the singer *Muhabbet*’s success with his CD *R’n’Besk* (2006), CDs by Turkish singers had seldom been offered for sale in mainstream music stores in Germany. *Muhabbet* reflects on the problem of Turkish media distribution and the distribution of his own music, which—confusingly for his Turkish audience—was, for the first time, being sold in German media stores like *Saturn* and *Media Markt* instead of the usual Turkish co-shops (*Muhabbet* in *Kaya* 2022).

Coming back to Munu, the hiddenness of Turkish music in the public consciousness of non-Turkish people in Germany could indicate either the lack of a relevant body of music, the lack of knowledge about an existing body of music, or the lack of a will to engage with an existing and known body of music. The situation is undoubtedly complex, as indicated by the fact that Türküola was only one of a larger number of Turkish record companies in Germany. More than 20 new record companies were founded in the 1970s and 1980s following Türküola (Greve 2003: 78–79). Therefore, the absence of a relevant body of music in terms of quantity and success cannot have been the problem. Yet could this vast body have existed without non-Turkish people in Germany knowing anything about it? Yes, it could, because Turkish music in Germany had been rendered invisible and inaudible. As described already, this was due to German media structures, due to Turkish and non-Turkish people living in a more or less distant co-existence, and due to a combination of ignorance and a lack of interest in any kind of Turkish music on the part of non-Turkish people.²⁰ Or, in the more diplomatic words of Hazar: “But in my opinion, the reasons for the lack of mutual influence, and not only in the field of music, but also in other cultural fields, are to be found in the process of processing the phenomenon of migration by the Turks, but especially by the Germans” (Hazar 1998: 287). He points to the media structure as an example of this development:

“In this way, the German public was then also relieved, which until then had no further interest in questions of the culture and art of Turkish migrants anyway. This was the beginning of cultural ghettoization, which was later reinforced by the emergence of the television channel TRT-International and other Turkish television programs that could be received via satellite antenna. In this way, two million [Turkish] fee payers voluntarily gave up rights that should have been granted to them by the German radio and television broadcasters” (ibid.: 292).

Turkish people and German-Turkish people could experience one remarkable exception to the usual ‘access denied’ when it comes to the second half of the 1980s. This exception has to do with U.S. soldier’s bars and clubs in Germany. ‘No entry for foreigners’ was not the slogan here; on the contrary: Solomon explains that it was Black U.S. soldiers who brought hip-hop to clubs for U.S. soldiers in Germany, and these clubs and discos were open to non-Germans, unlike the other ones in the cities. Turkish people and German-Turkish people, as well as other migrants, immediately profited from this accessibility. As early as 1992, meetings were organized for American, German, and Turkish youth, where Turkish rap musicians were invited on stage and celebrated (Loeb 1992: front page).

20 On the question of the invisibility of Turkish people in Germany as well as of Turkish migrant identity, see Güney/Pekman/Kabaş 2014: 132–134.

As a result, hip-hop could reach Turkish communities faster than German ones. In sync with the U.S. rap rebellion against discrimination and marginalization, Turkish youth in Germany began to develop their own version of hip-hop in the late 1980s, featuring Turkish lyrics and incorporating *Anadolu pop* music samples (Solomon 2021: 112; see also Odabaşı 2016). Once the doors are open, things could start to develop.

The History of 'Doing Independent' as a Concept and Practice

But as doors were closed most of the time, this brings us back to 'doing independent' and its history. As a practice and attitude in dealing with media and markets, 'doing independent' in our context has been developed in three main systems, which are partly interconnected: the 'bond system' of Yeşilçam cinema²¹ in Turkey, starting at the end of the 1950s (Refiğ 2017/ 1971: 68), the 'İMÇ system' of independent Turkish vinyl record labels in Turkey, starting in the early 1960s,²² and the 'co-shop system' in Germany and throughout Europe for independent video cassette and music distribution of independent labels, expanding in the early 1980s (Sungu, 2019: 11). Comparable systems in which 'doing independent' was also developed are the *gecekondu* system for architecture and housing, the later *Düğün TV* media system for broadcasting, and the cassette vending machine system for restaurants and cafés.²³

21 Named after the Yeşilçam street in Istanbul, where the film companies were located. In short, Yeşilçam cinema can be characterized as a kind of parallel to Bollywood cinema, which it actually followed through its connections with Egyptian cinema (Gürata 2004: 55–82).

22 Denomination related to the İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı building at Unkapanı (1960), Istanbul, an international modern style trading center.

23 In architecture, the *gecekondu* system refers to the specific system of self-constructed squatter settlements built overnight (which the law allowed for) by rural-to-urban migrants in Turkish cities. Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan state: "Gecekondus have been perceived either as urban wounds or the outcome of a popular solution to the housing crises, as [...] niches of self-help" (Bozdoğan/Akcan 2012: 169). The *gecekondu* system constituted an independent, informal, and mostly illegal market for construction and housing, connected to the semi-legal market for anonymous contractor apartments, both of which dominated the urban landscape in Turkish cities—without any architect or any urban planning being involved. Regulatory state or municipal authorities rarely intervened, instead neglecting or ignoring these markets and their developments since their beginnings in the 1940s (see *ibid.*: 164–169). Maurus Reinkowski interprets the *gecekondu* system as a form of occupation of land mainly based on solidarity networks (*hemşehrilik*) and the idea of social upward mobility. The settlers were not necessarily poor but often left the countryside with property and capital to invest in housing and new businesses in the city (see Reinkowski 2022: 195, 197). *Düğün TV* and its media system, established by Mehmet Çoban, is an example for 'doing independent' broadcasting. The independent conglomerate developed from a satellite broadcasted wedding TV in the nighties. It included not only broadcasting but also the sale of products via a shopping TV channel (Hazar 2021: 58–61). The cassette vending machine system was developed by Yilmaz Aras who founded the KATEK (Kassetten-Technologie) Vertriebs-GmbH in Berlin. Designed similarly to cigarette machines, the cassette machines offered a curated selection of Turkish music cassettes based on the location and the expected audience. With over 60 machines, the system had grown considerably in Berlin in the mid-1990s—yet the rise of the internet halted further expansion (Hendrich 1996).

1. *The 'bond system' of Yeşilçam cinema*

In short, this unique system operated between 1960 and 1980 as follows: "Theatre owners in Turkey in the 1960s pre-sold the tickets and then financed the making of the films" (Akser/Durak-Akser 2017: 59; see also Erdoğan/Göztürk 2001: 535 and 538). Due to a lack of capital on the part of the producers, the Turkish film industry invented an independent system of film financing and film producing. Murat Akser and Didem Durak-Akser explain it the following way:

"The financial investment originated from an advance-on-receipts system, which depended on Anatolian theatre owners.

Indeed, the so-called 'bond system' was named after the bonds signed by the producers, who borrowed money from the theatre owners by pre-selling the screening rights of the films.

In return, the theatre owners could dictate what kind of films were made and which star should be assigned to a particular project" (ibid.).

The roots of the system date back to the 1940s, when the Turkish government prohibited the import of popular Egyptian films (to prevent the Turkish people from becoming 'Arabic') and set up a decree on taxation that reduced the tax on Turkish films significantly compared to the tax on foreign films. This led to the establishment of a profitable domestic film industry in Turkey at the end of the 1940s (ibid.: 59–60).

Filmmaker Halit Refiğ already reflects on this system, its special economic mode of production and its independence in 1968:

"Since Turkish cinema was not founded by foreign capital, it is not the cinema of imperialism. It is neither the cinema of the bourgeoisie, since it was not founded by national capitalism, nor the cinema of the state, since it was not founded by the government.

Turkish cinema is a 'people's cinema' since it is based on labour rather than capital and was born out of Turkish people's need to watching [sic!] films" (Refiğ 2017/1968: 66).

Two years later, he concludes by pointing to the fact that Turkish cinema depends solely on the audience, stating that "this bond system [...] was based on the agreement that a film's expenses would be reimbursed only after the film was made and the tickets sold. As the real bond owners were the audiences, these films were supposed to be made according to the taste of the Turkish audience" (Refiğ 2017/1970: 68). In another text, he notes: "Today [in 1967], what makes the production of more than 250 movies a year in Turkey possible is not the presence of a certain capital but the bonds calculated according to the number of people who will pay to watch the film. From this perspective, Turkish cinema is a cinema of the people" (Refiğ 2017/1967: 66).

The 'bond system' of the Yeşilçam cinema allowed for a worldwide-unique, economically independent production and distribution mode. From today's point of view, one could call it a sort of crowd funding *avant la lettre*. It served as a model and paved the way for the parallel development of an independent music market in Turkey and Germany, with so many independent music labels.

2. *The 'İMÇ system' of independent Turkish vinyl record labels*

As early as around 1900, 78rpm shellac records entered the Ottoman empire. The field was dominated almost exclusively by multinational, European-based record companies like Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft, Lindström, Odeon, Beka, Lyrofon, Favorite, Gramophone Co/His Master's Voice, Columbia, Pathé, and many more (see Greve 2003: 25; Greve 2017: 36; Ergun 2018: 84).²⁴ These companies produced records of Ottoman music but also of Eastern and Western music and hybrid entertainment music styles, like Turkish tango²⁵, for the Turkish music market.

Turkish record labels did not show up on a larger scale until the late 1950s, after vinyl as a medium and 45rpm technology had become available. It appears that the Turkish label Grafson, founded in 1958, began releasing vinyl 45rpm records by the singer Zeki Müren in 1959 (see Greve 2017: 37).²⁶

After its opening in 1960, the huge modern architecture block of the İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı at Unkapanı was becoming the center of the Turkish vinyl record industry and its record labels followed in the early 1970s. With the record releases of the very successful *Altın Mikrofon* [Golden Microphone] song contest from 1965 onward (Ergun 2018), numerous local, often musician-owned²⁷ Turkish record labels began to flourish and "were

24 An exception to the dominance of Western record companies was Baidaphon, a Lebanese label based in both Berlin and Beirut.

25 Turkish tango emerged in the 1920s as a hybrid between local popular styles like *longa*, *şarkı* and *türkü*, and tango, which came to İstanbul via Eastern Europe (see Bartsch 2011: 143).

26 See also <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1230186-Zeki-Müren?year=1959>.

27 Stars, but also lesser known musicians, had their own labels, including, for example, Orhan Gencebay, the co-owner of İstanbul Plak and later the owner of Kervan Plak (releasing records from top ranking artists like Bedîa Akartürk, Erkin Koray, Ajda Pekkan, Kamuran Akkor, Neşe Karaböcek, Ferdi Özbeğen); Zeki Müren, the owner of Müren Plak; Neşet Ertaş, the owner of Ertaş; İbrahim Tatlıses, the owner of Tatlıses; Mehmet Pekün, the owner of Pekün Plakçılık; Mıhrıcan Bahar, the owner of Bahar; etc. In Germany, even very small artist-run labels emerged, like Coşkun Ada with Ada Fon, Basri Tankaya with Tankaya Müzik, or İbrahim Işıl with Bambi. And with Yüksel Özkasap, the most prominent diasporic singer and wife of Asöcal, a singer's hand and mind were involved in Türküola as well. According to Peter Manuel, musician-owned record labels already developed in the 1920s in Egypt: "In order to gain greater control over the recording process and profits than was usually available from contracts, a few artists [...] bought interests in recording firms or established their own companies. For popular artists who successfully negotiated recording contracts, the business was extremely lucrative—much more so than any other performing opportunity" (Manuel 1988: 146).

providing an avenue of creative expression” (Özbek 1997: 174), something that global major corporations most likely could not have provided in the same way.

There is something special about the Turkish music market compared to other countries participating in the world's first wave of hybrid pop music, which combines global pop with local popular music elements. The Turkish music market was almost completely independent, with some important domestic major-independent companies as well as a substantial number of smaller domestic independent players releasing music to a highly dynamic market (Votel 2013). The main reasons multinational major-labels were cautious, backed out, or stayed away from the Turkish music market included a constantly unclear legal copyright situation,²⁸ which called licensing and local pressing in Turkey into question, as well as high import taxes on foreign goods, making imported foreign records expensive.²⁹

The infrastructural backbones for Turkish music have been domestic recording studios as well as domestic pressing plants, two of which were operating in 1963, increasing to eleven by 1969 (Ergun 2018: 84). Ali C. Gedik sums it up: “[...] the introduction of 45rpm manufacturing technology in the 1960s [...] enabled a domestic music industry and massive local consumption of music for the first time” (Gedik 2018: 94).

The effects on the development of Turkish pop music were outstanding. Independence from multinational major labels provided the above-mentioned “avenue of creative expression,” with music made according to the imagination, tastes, and needs of the musicians and the audiences. The magnitude, diversity, and variety of hybrid pop music styles and sub-styles in Turkey, which grew dynamically from the 1960s until the military coup in 1980, is probably unique compared to other non-Western countries of the same period. Perhaps no other non-Western country—except Brazil—can offer such a creative pop music development based on an independent music market (see Tupinambá de Ulhôa/De Marchi/Torres Borges 2024: 44, 48, and 50). Brazil indeed offers a comparable range of styles and sub-styles, based, especially in the 1970s, on another structure dominated by foreign as well as strong domestic major labels, but also including independent and artist-run labels (see *ibid.*).³⁰

28 It seems ignoring legal issues and pirating have been part of the Turkish music business, as well as part of the film and video business. Here, the characteristics of the business drift into mafia-like structures, including the use of violence and crime (see Yıldırım in bi'bak 2019: 51–53; Greve 2003: 435f).

29 Still, the Turkish music market—as regular adds from foreign major-labels during the 1970s and 1980s in the leading music magazine *Hey* show—was not isolated from Anglo-American, French and Italian pop music. Western pop music was present all the time, though not dominating the market. Instead, there was a balanced co-existence of foreign and Turkish pop music, with a tendency favoring Turkish pop music, as the charts in the *Hey* magazine demonstrate over the years. According to these charts, this changed in the late 1980s and 1990s in favor of Western, Anglophone pop, paralleling neo-liberal, globalizing politics.

30 Many artists realized that they could produce their works independently, financing the recordings and distributions themselves. *Boca Livre* (1979), the first album released by the quartet *Boca Livre*, demonstrated the commercial potential of independent label productions: the album managed to sell over 100,000 copies the year it was released.

Michael Denning sees the early worldwide emergence of independent labels and markets in the 1920s and 1930s as the “beginning of an industrial decolonization” (Denning 2015: 115) through import substitution. Quoting Brian McCann, he argues that “the Brazilian recording industry was one of the most successful Latin American cases of import-substituting industrialization in the 1930s” (McCann in *ibid*; see also Tupinambá de Ulhôa/De Marchi/Torres Borges 2024: 13, 43).

The Turkish and Brazilian independent pop music labels and markets can be seen as—consciously or unconsciously—driven by a decolonial agenda, which, on the basis of import-substitution, allows them to create and control their own markets and their own music.

Regarding Turkey and the vinyl record period, Greve describes “an avalanche-like opening of the market: in 1966 there were 20–30 record companies in Turkey, in 1987 there were 120, and in 1995 there were almost 500” (Greve 2003: 77; see Pesen 2024: 91).³¹ Many of them were—and some still are—located in the İMÇ building, a symbol of the density and richness of the Turkish record industry. The ‘İMÇ system’ stands for a highly dense, interconnected, and powerful independent music market in Turkey.

So, with Turkish people migrating to Germany from 1961 onward, it was no surprise that they brought with them their practice of ‘doing independent,’ based on their experiences of the Yeşilçam cinema ‘bond system’ and the ‘İMÇ system’ of independent Turkish vinyl record labels. One of these people was Yılmaz Asöcal, the founder of Türküola.

3. *The ‘co-shop system’ for the independent distribution of Turkish independent labels in Germany*

Since German-Turkish record labels did not have access to the relevant official promotion and distribution channels of the German record industry, they teamed up with grocery stores and general stores as their main points of sale in a kind of co-shop system, and with Turkish newspapers as media displays (see Greve 2003: 81; Sels 2021: 17). Only a few stand-alone Turkish record shops existed in some larger German cities like Cologne, Munich, or Berlin. Yet over time, about several hundred co-shops emerged across Germany, with an estimate of up to 400 by the late 1980s (see Greve 2003: 83). Fig. 5 shows such a co-shop with a lot of cassettes displayed in the shelves.

31 In 1970s Brazil, the economic opportunities offered by the state motivated a new wave of multinational record labels. WEA signed the main MPB stars and became one of the biggest record sellers in the market. Gradually, large multinational record companies took over the market share of small and medium-sized Brazilian record companies, which specialized in market niches. This resulted in a new market structure split between multinationals and Brazilian record companies (see Tupinambá de Ulhôa/De Marchi/Torres Borges 2024: 44).



Fig. 5: From the series "Türken in Deutschland" ("Turkish people in Germany"). Behind the counter, numerous music cassettes are on display. Photo: Candida Höfer, 1978/1979, © Candida Höfer/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Source: Nocke 2021: 18.

According to Metin Uzelli, his father, Muammar Uzelli, the founder of Uzelli, established "a distribution channel with eight big busses. These busses were selling [...] cassettes in every corner of Germany, to [...] Turkish grocery stores" (Uzelli in Rigney 2020). Additionally, a mail order system was established: "[...] my father was putting out full-page ads in Turkish newspapers almost every day. And people had the chance to order via post. They could choose the cassettes from these ads" (ibid.). In addition to being a distributor, Muammar Uzelli also became a manufacturer of cassettes at the end of the 1970s in order to strengthen his independence.

The development of Turkish independent record labels based in Germany should be understood in connection with another medium: film. At first, film on celluloid, then film on videocassette. Of course, Turkish films received the usual 'access denied' for regular programming and screening in all German cinemas.³² But as early as the 1960s, the idea of temporarily taking over German cinemas emerged from the Turkish practice of 'doing independent' combined with mercantile agility. Some enterprising film people had the idea of renting existing train station cinemas for certain time frames to show Turkish films to a Turkish audience. The cinemas and the cinema halls were mostly rented completely on weekends for early screenings, with

32 This changed only in the 2000s, when Cineplex cinemas in Germany began programming and screening Turkish films for Turkish communities as part of their strategy to expand the cinema audience.



Fig. 6: Turkish film screening on a Saturday at lunchtime in a German cinema, mid-1970s. Photo: Selahattin Kaya. Source: Eryılmaz/Jamin 1998: 240.

Turkish staff also placed at the box office (see Sungu 2019: 7). Therefore, without owning a cinema infrastructure, Turkish films could be shown to a Turkish audience in Germany (see fig. 6).

The whole game changed significantly with the advent of film on video cassette. Video cassettes became a mass medium in Germany by the end of the 1970s. According to a research study conducted in 1982, there were already twelve big Turkish manufacturing companies and another twenty smaller video labels in business at the time, and the trend was upward, mushrooming rapidly (*ibid.*: 12). Towards the end of the 1980s, around a hundred branches in Berlin alone sold video cassettes (*ibid.*: 12, 55). Many of these branches were not stand-alone video

rental stores but co-shops registered under other branches like travel agencies, hairdressers, banks, or rag shops. These shops had marked sections for video rental and sales, as well as point of sales for music, both often as a complement to their main assortment (*ibid.*: 11–12). In general, all kind of Turkish shops in Germany frequently had a video and a music section. Some of the labels even released both video and music, like the major-independent Destan Müzik from Esslingen, that produced, manufactured and distributed video cassettes as well as music cassettes and CDs. In the co-shops, several things came together: food, objects for everyday life, Turkish press, Turkish film and music media, and other aspects of Turkish musical life, like concert promotion and ticketing. This kind of independent distribution of Turkish film and music media was unique to Germany; no other migrant group had established anything comparable—and they did not have to do so. For example, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, or Spanish films and music were not confronted with an 'access denied' at the doors of the official promotion and distribution channels. They could freely enter the market in Germany.

Conclusion

Born out of exclusion and necessity within the context of structural and institutional racism, Turkish and German-Turkish musicians, who would never be signed by a German or international record company for the German market, called for Turkish independent record labels as well as

independent promotion and distribution channels. These labels evolved alongside the first wave of Turkish labor migrants in the 1960s, nearly a decade earlier than German music history typically acknowledges as the beginning of independent record labels in Germany. However, it is not only German music historiography that needs updating but also the mindset that accompanies it. A mindset that should finally confront racism as a structural and institutional problem.

And last but not least: one should not forget that essential parts of Turkish music were produced and distributed exclusively and entirely through Turkish labels in Germany—music that had a hard time in Turkey itself.

Greve notes that “before the beginning of the rise of religious Islamic music in Turkey in the 1990s, recordings of *ilahi* and *Mevlevi* music were produced almost exclusively in Europe” (Greve 2017: 44). But those were not the only types of music concerned, because “in the 1980s most Kurdish and Zaza music cassettes [additionally to vinyl records and CDs] were produced in Europe and secretly distributed in Turkey” (ibid.: 46). Hazar further explains that “Kurdish music and literature from 1980 to the noughties developed primarily in Germany and other EU countries—precisely where it was able to develop freely. For the Kurds, this was a rare opportunity to record songs in their language, which was then banned in Turkey” (Hazar 2021: 45). Güngör, Loh, and Kim even describe the years from 2010 to the present as a “Kurdish turn” (Güngör/Loh/Kim 2024: 275, 282) for hip-hop in Germany, as many rap artists of Kurdish descent have emerged in the charts, promoting their Kurdish heritage (ibid.: 276–278, 280–288.). And in 2024, Rose Campion’s and Sheyda Ghavami’s publication *Kurdische Musikerinnen in Deutschland: Ein Song- und Storybook* marks the start of an academic reflection on Kurdish music and (female) Kurdish musicians in Germany (Campion/Ghavami 2024).

Considering the development of *arabesk*, Ralph J. Poole writes about Bülent Ersoy after her gender affirming surgery:

“Being forced to leave the country due to persecution, she, however, successfully continued to perform in West Germany until her return in 1988, initiating yet another development of Arabesk culture: the rising translocation of Arabesk musical production to Western European countries like Germany and the—at times illegal—re-import and distribution of those very products through the channels of a vast black market in music-cassettes” (Poole 2022: 247).

Therefore, the history of Turkish pop music in and from Germany—which still needs to be written—should also address the racisms and various forms of discrimination in Turkey and their entanglement with the racist structure in Germany, as these had a decisive influence on the development of Turkish pop music and its context in Germany.

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