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Fatih Çoker*

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3778-655X>

From Streets to Streams: The Historical Evolution of Turkish Rap in Four Waves

Sokaklardan Dijital Platformlara: Türkçe Rap'in Dört Dalga Boyunca Tarihsel Evrimi

Abstract

Turkish rap has emerged as one of the youngest and most influential genres in contemporary Turkish popular music. Its transformation from an underground subculture into a mainstream musical genre has profoundly reshaped its themes, lyrical content, cultural practices, and artistic styles. Despite its growing cultural and commercial significance, this historical transformation has received limited scholarly attention, particularly from a wave-based perspective. Addressing this gap, the present study employs qualitative content analysis based on multiple data sources, including 42 academic articles, 27 interviews, 3 book chapters, 5 newspaper articles, and 3 documentaries. The findings identify four major waves in the historical evolution of Turkish rap: the emergence of politically charged diaspora rap in Germany (1984–1999), the rise of Türkiye-based underground rap (2000–2009), the diversification and digital expansion of the genre (2010–2016), and the mainstream popularization and commercialization of Turkish rap following the rise of trap and drill (2017–2025). By proposing the first comprehensive wave-based historical model of Turkish rap, this study contributes to the literature by providing a systematic interpretation of the genre's cultural, musical, and ideological transformation.

Keywords: Turkish rap, Turkish hip hop, popular music, music history, cultural transformation

Öz

Türkçe rap, çağdaş Türk popüler müziğinin en genç ve en etkili türlerinden biri olarak gelişmiştir. Yeraltı kültüründen ana akım müziğe dönüşüm süreci, türün temalarını, söz dünyasını, kültürel pratiklerini ve sanatsal üslubunu önemli ölçüde değiştirmiştir. Buna karşın, Türkçe rap'in tarihsel gelişimi özellikle dalga temelli bir yaklaşımla yeterince incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu boşluğu doldurmak amacıyla nitel içerik analizi yöntemini benimsemektedir. Araştırma kapsamında 42 akademik makale, 27 röportaj, 3 kitap bölümü, 5 gazete yazısı ve 3 belgeselden elde edilen veriler analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, Türkçe rap'in tarihsel gelişiminin dört temel dalga bâlinde gerçekleştiğini göstermektedir: Almanya'da politik içerikli diaspora rapinin ortaya çıkışı (1984–1999), Türkiye merkezli yeraltı rapinin yükselişi (2000–2009), türün çeşitlenmesi ve dijitalleşme süreci (2010–2016) ile trap ve drill müziğinin yükselişi sonrasında Türkçe rap'in ana akımda yaygınlaşması ve ticarileşmesi

*Senior Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Rauf Denktaş University, Nicosia, North Cyprus, cokerrr@hotmail.com

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(2017–2025). *Çalışma, Türkçe rap için ilk kapsamlı dalga temelli tarihsel modeli önererek türün kültürel, müzikal ve ideolojik dönüşümünü sistematik biçimde açıklamakta ve literatüre özgün bir katkı sunmaktadır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türkçe rap, Türkçe hip hop, popüler müzik, müzik tarihi, kültürel dönüşüm*

Introduction

Contemporary Turkish rap is one of the most popular music genres in Türkiye today. Modern Turkish rap prevails on streaming platforms such as Spotify in Türkiye, attracting tens of millions of listeners and a substantial community. However, this genre remained largely underground and did not receive significant attention from Turkish listeners, media, and music companies for several decades in Türkiye. In that respect, the transformation of Turkish rap into its current popular form has been a long and difficult process. Since its origins as protest music in early 1980s, Turkish rap consistently evolved in its musical style, lyrical content, and artistic approach, ultimately transforming into its present mainstream form. Despite the great influence of this genre on the culture, music, and lifestyle of Turkish youth in Türkiye, its history has yet to be thoroughly examined with wave-based framework. This qualitative content analysis aims to explore the evolution of Turkish rap in four waves by examining various articles, interviews, books, newspaper articles, documentaries, and tv-shows regarding the genre.

Although the history of Turkish rap dates back to the 1980s, it has not received sufficient attention in academic research until recently. However, the emergence of Turkish rap as a popular music genre in Türkiye towards the late 2010s influenced this situation to a certain degree. The literature contains a number of studies focusing on different periods of Turkish rap with some historical and cultural perspectives.

Many of these historical studies focus on the early era of Turkish rap in Germany (Elflein, 1998; Kaya, 2002; Solomon, 2021; Şenel, 2015; Karabağ, 2019; Çınar, 1999). Karabağ (2019) and Elflein (1998) investigated the political and historical context that facilitated the emergence of the initial Turkish rap groups in Germany. The scholars also examined how this context had a great impact on the themes and lyrics of the first Turkish rap projects in Germany. Similarly, Çınar (1999) also analyzed the birth of Turkish rap with specific focus on *Cartel*, the most known Turkish rap group of the early period. Likewise, Kaya (2002) and Şenel (2015) approached to the topic of Turkish rap history with sociological analysis, focusing on the early Turkish rap groups and Turkish diaspora in Germany. Kaya (2002) examined the influence of the political climate on the music and themes of early Turkish rap, whereas Şenel (2015) investigated the impacts of entertainment venues on the formation of early Turkish rap of diaspora in Germany. Moreover, Solomon also provided a comprehensive historical analysis of birth of Turkish rap in Germany. The study illustrates the emergence of Turkish rap as

anti-fascist music within the Turkish diaspora in Germany, subsequently reaching to the motherland Türkiye. The studies conclude that the rising nationalism and discrimination transformed the early examples of Turkish rap into a political resistance instrument for the Turkish minority in Germany (Karabağ, 2019; Çınar, 1999; Elflein, 1998; Kaya, 2002; Solomon, 2021; Şenel, 2015). Thus, the existing research provides historical insights about the development of the early Turkish rap community and songs as a political critique against the rising discrimination in Germany by 1980s.

The literature also contains a limited number of ethnographic studies with some historical aspects focusing on the development of Turkish rap in Türkiye in 2000s (Lüküslü, 2011; Arıcan, 2005; Solomon, 2009; Solomon, 2005). Arıcan (2005) documented the conservative and progressive elements of Turkish underground rap through examination of its songs, diss culture and cultural events in early 2000s. Additionally, Solomon (2005, 2009) and Lüküslü (2011) analyzed the construction of musical identities within the Turkish rap underground community by documenting the characteristics, transnational ties, cultural practices and insights of that era in Türkiye. Despite the useful historical insights provided by existing ethnographic studies of this era, their historical aspects remain limited, particularly in the context of a wave-based framework for analyzing the evolution of Turkish rap.

Likewise, the studies with any historical aspects on the development era of Turkish rap Türkiye in 2010s are scarce in the literature. These studies are mostly composed of ethnographic (Budak & Ergun, 2022) and sociological (Üçer, 2013) research with some historical aspects on the development Turkish rap in 2010s. Budak and Ergun (2022) documented the cultural practices, musical characteristics, subgenres of underground and mainstream Turkish rap during mid 2010s in İzmir. The research provides some historical insights particularly regarding the transition process from underground to early mainstream form. Additionally, Üçer (2013) examined the culture and identity of Turkish rap by documenting the fashion culture, musical and cultural practices in Türkiye in 2010s. Even though, these studies provide some insights on the development of Turkish rap in 2010s, the numbers of studies on this period are still limited in the literature.

Moreover, Karanfil (2022) and Koç (2020) studied the transformation of Turkish rap into a mainstream genre by late 2010s. The scholars documented the rise of Trap, a subgenre, and the transformation of Turkish rap into a mainstream music in Türkiye. The studies analyzed the rapid shift in the fashion culture, musical and cultural practices in Turkish rap by late 2010s (Karanfil, 2022; Koç, 2020). Consequently, the research provided valuable insights into the nascent mainstream period of Turkish rap, yet offered limited historical perspectives, particularly within the context of a wave-based framework for analyzing its evolution.

Finally, a few studies with historical perspectives analyzed the evolution of Turkish rap across various periods (Arıcan, 2021; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020). Kadioğlu and Özdal (2020) analyzed the transformation of Turkish rap from its emergence to its mainstream era, with particular emphasis on its current mainstream phase. The research indicates that Turkish rap have been significantly commodified by the culture industry, resulting in the loss of its counter-hegemonic characteristics during its mainstream era. Likewise, Arıcan (2021) investigated the evolution of Turkish Hip Hop and rap focusing on its transformation from its birth to its current form, with a particular emphasis on its development era before it gained popularity. The study highlights how the initial era of Turkish rap emerged as a political instrument against racism in Germany and evolved into an underground genre addressing a broader spectrum of social and political issues in Türkiye by the mid-2000s. The final phase of Turkish rap is marked by a relative reduction in political content and an increase in commodification (Arıcan, 2021; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020).

Although, these studies provide useful insights into the development of Turkish rap across several periods, the literature still lacks historical studies that employ wave-based framework. Therefore, the literature could benefit from further research that comprehensively examine the key turning points and the musical and thematic changes in Turkish rap since its emergence, within a wave-based framework. To fill this gap and contribute to the existing research, this study examines the development and transformation of Turkish rap music in four waves, musically and historically. The study provides a comprehensive understanding and insights of wave-based analysis into the evolution of Turkish rap lacking in scholarly literature. In this regard, this qualitative content analysis provides an analytic overview of Turkish rap music's emergence, development, and evolution.

The wave approach employed in this study offers comprehensive insights into the historical development and evolutionary processes of social movements, art, and culture across various contexts. This framework has been employed in gender and terrorism studies to analyze the historical progression of political movements in wave patterns (Rapoport, 2013; Munro, 2013). The study divides Turkish rap into four main waves, taking into account shifts in its musical and cultural elements and popularity (see Figure 1). The first wave covers the birth story of Turkish rap in Germany between 1980 and 1999. The second wave examines the development of early Turkish rap in Türkiye between 2000 and 2009. The third wave explains the diversity and development of Turkish rap between 2010 and 2016. The fourth wave conveys how Turkish rap transformed into its current popular music form after 2017.

To achieve its objectives, this study investigated the following research questions;

*How did Turkish rap evolve from its birth to its contemporary popular form?

*What are the four historical waves of Turkish rap?

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a qualitative content analysis approach to explore the evolution of Turkish rap through its four historical waves, from its early emergence in the mid-1980s to its contemporary forms in the digital era. This research aims to discover the circumstances that shaped the evolution of Turkish rap and its thematic and stylistic shifts during its four waves. Content analysis is suitable for this study as it facilitates the systematic evaluation of various text-based and multimedia sources, offering insights into the evolving narratives and representations within Turkish rap.

Data Collection

Table 1: Data Sources and Distribution

Data Type	Number of Items	Language	Year
Articles	42	Turkish and English	1984-2025
Interviews	27	Turkish	2006-2022
Television Programs	2	Turkish	2009-2011
Documentaries	3	Turkish	2007-2019
News Articles	5	Turkish	2005-2024
Book chapters	3	English	2011-2021

Table 1 presents the data obtained and examined for the study. Since the research aims to make a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of the evolution of Turkish rap, it used a wide variety of sources. The dataset comprises 82 visual and textual sources in Turkish and English, spanning from 1984 to 2025. The data includes various forms of sources such as academic articles, published interviews, television programs, documentaries, news articles and books.

There are many different kinds of written sources included in the data. It includes 42 peer-reviewed articles which were written in Turkish and English and published between 1984 and 2025. These articles cover various aspects of Turkish rap, including its sociology, philosophy, ideology, history, literature and musical styles. In addition to articles, the data includes 27 interviews conducted in Turkish and shared in digital format between 2006 and 2022. The interviews primarily feature notable Turkish rap artists, producers, commentators, and organizers from different eras of Turkish rap. In that sense, the interviews reveal the authentic perspectives to understand how the Turkish rap

evolved across various waves. Furthermore, four news articles published between 2005 and 2024 were included to examine the evolution of Turkish rap. Finally, 3 English-language book chapters, published between 2011-2021, were also included in data.

In addition to the written sources of the data, there are also a variety of visual sources included. The data includes two episodes from two Turkish television programs featuring notable Turkish rap artists as guests, broadcast between 2009 and 2011. Additionally, three Turkish-language documentaries produced from 2007 to 2019 were analyzed. The examination of the documentaries and television program episodes fulfilled the research objective by uncovering the discussions, insights, and characteristics linked to the various eras of Turkish rap.

A variety of platforms were examined to gather the data of the research. Firstly, a systematic search was conducted using the Web of Science, Taylor & Francis, ASOS, SOBIAD, TR Dizin and Education Full Text EBSCO databases to collect 42 articles and 3 book chapters. These databases were selected since they contain the highest number of musical, historical and cultural studies. The search terms used included ‘Turkish rap’, ‘Turkish Hip Hop’, ‘Turkish rap history’, ‘Turkish Hip Hop history’. Moreover, 27 interviews and 5 news articles were collected from various Turkish media outlets, hip hop platforms, and blogs. The interviews and news articles were selected based on their relevance to Turkish rap. The interviews were sourced from existing publications and digital platforms conducted by various individuals from 2006 to 2022. Furthermore, visual materials such as 3 documentaries and 2 television programs were primarily accessed through the digital archives of the respective television channels, and streaming services.

Data Analysis

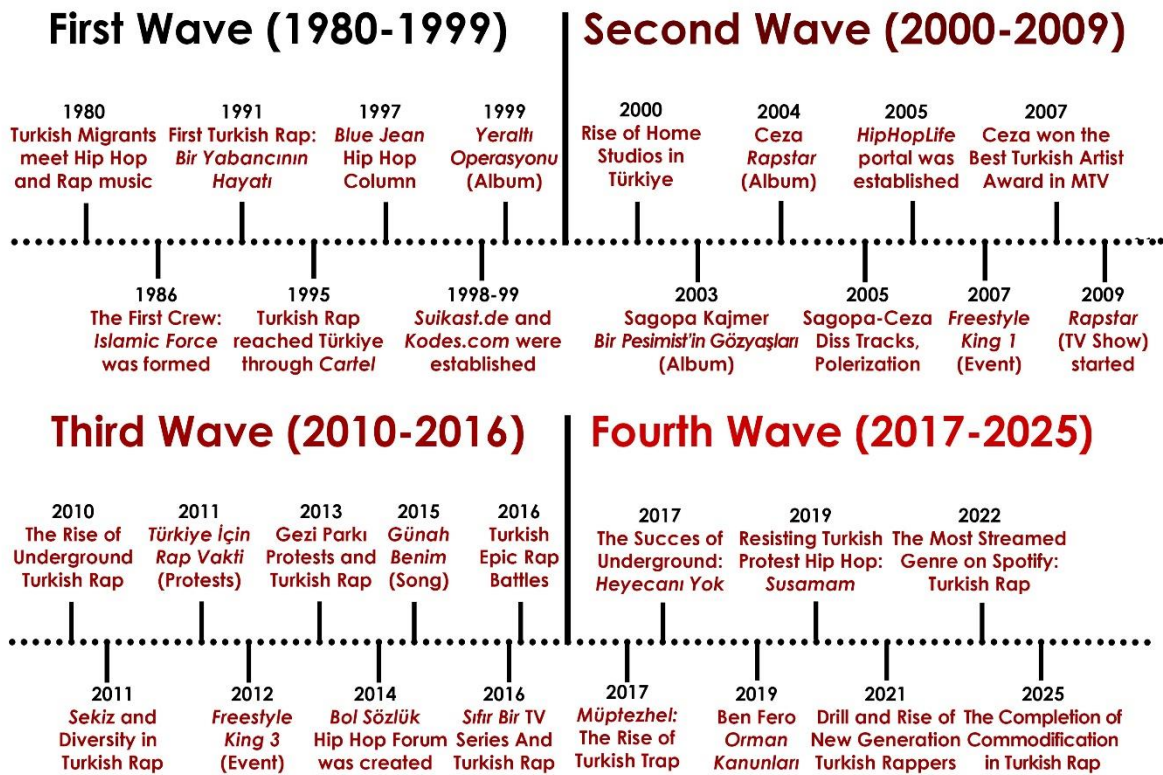
Two researchers systematically coded and analyzed all the data presented in this paper. The researchers employed the qualitative content analysis method for the analysis, which allows the comparison, contrast, and categorization of data (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The analysis aimed to explore the historical and cultural evolution of Turkish rap in four waves, locating major themes, changes in lyrics and musical form, and the factors and events that influenced the genre. The data was categorized and examined to facilitate the identification of patterns and trends across various time periods and data formats.

The data for this study was first categorized based on which historical waves of Turkish rap it corresponds to. The evolution of Turkish rap is chronologically classified into four waves: Wave 1 (1984-1999), Wave 2 (2000-2009), Wave 3 (2010-2016), and Wave 4 (2017-2025). The four waves were

identified based on various criteria, including the increasing popularity of Turkish rap, shifts in musical style, lyrics, themes, generations and cultural practices.

Secondly, the data was examined again to identify its contribution to the debate on the evolution of Turkish rap. After thorough examination of the data, information and contributions obtained from the data concerning the evolution of Turkish rap were recorded as they relate to the four waves. Each piece of data was allocated to the relevant wave or waves, allowing clear distinction among the various phases in the evolution of Turkish rap. Microsoft Excel was used for analysis by organizing codes and categories regarding the four waves of Turkish rap (see appendix A).

Figure 1. Developmental Timeline and Four Waves of Turkish Rap.ⁱ



The first wave: the birth of Turkish rap and migrants (1980-1999)

Rap music has always been known as a genre where expression, activism and protesting are at the forefront (Aksoy, 2022; Lusane, 2004; Omri & Aksoy, 2023; Price, 2006). The birth of Turkish rap was not an exception to this aspect (Sarıköse, 2022; Solomon, 2021; Kuyumcu, 2020; Şenel, 2015). To comprehend the social foundation for the birth of Turkish rap, it is essential to analyze Germany in the 1960s. Rap music and Hip Hop culture met the children of Turkish migrant families in Germany well before it arrived in Türkiye (Yıldırım, 2022; Begonja, 2018). In the 1980s, the Turkish youth was

generally not welcomed in Germany's entertainment venues (Kurt, 2020). Therefore, the discos, where the Turks spent their time, were mostly operated by Americans (Şenel, 2015; Solomon, 2021). The Turkish youth was influenced by the music played in American discos in Germany, where they met rap music and Hip Hop culture for the first time (Ickstadt, 1999). The use of rap music as a form of resistance against racism by marginalized African-Americans in the US (Stovall, 2015; Price, 2006) set an example for the Turkish youth in Germany who were also minorities and subjected to racial discrimination (Karanfil, 2022; Yıldırım, 2022; Çınar, 1999). Turkish rappers of Germany perceived themselves as *the black people of Europe* and embraced Hip Hop culture wholeheartedly (Genç, 2015; Güney, Pekman, & Kabaş, 2013; Ickstadt, 1999; Kaya, 2002).

The rising racism started to affect the lives of Turkish migrant families deeply in Germany, as they became the targets of neo-Nazi attacks by the 1980s (Castles, 1984; Solomon, 2021; Şenel, 2015). The impacts of these racist attacks can be also found in the lyrics of the first emerging Turkish rappers in Germany (Arıcan, 2005; Kaya, 2002; Kurt, 2020; Solomon, 2011). The early Turkish rappers mostly dealt with themes such as *homesickness, racism, injustice, inequality, political commentary, gang violence, family* and *social problems* in their music (Goldsmith & Fonseca, 2019; Arıcan, 2021; Begonja, 2018; Özer & Özer, 2025).

The exposure of the Turkish migrants to racism in Germany and the spirit of rebellion in Hip Hop culture eventually turned the first Turkish rap songs into an instrument of resistance. Moreover, the rise in racist assaults prompted the Turkish Hip Hop youth from marginalized neighborhoods like Kreuzberg to form gangs, such as the 36 Boys, for self-defense (Güney, Pekman, & Kabaş, 2013; Genç, 2015; Kurt, 2020). As rap artist Killa Hakan also explained the most important purpose of these Turkish Hip Hop gangs was to “*fight against the Skinheads*” and protect the Turks from fascist attacks (Canel 2009).ⁱⁱ

The style of the first Turkish rap songs was very different from contemporary examples. The songs were often sampled from Turkish folk songs and the beats were embellished with Anatolian musical instruments including *Baglama* (Solomon, 2021; Kaya, 2002; Begonja, 2018; Ickstadt, 1999). Therefore, the first Turkish rap songs are considered as a form of oriental rap (Karabağ, 2019; Elflein, 1998; Kaya, 2002; Şenel, 2015). The influence of the migrant dialect of Turkish is also seen in the way the rap is sung, and this deeply affected the *flow* of the songs.

Groups such as Islamic Force, Karakan, Report2, Microphone Mafia, and Cartel were among the most influential Turkish rap groups of this period (Güngör, 2021). The first Turkish rap performers emerged in the mid-1980s. In 1986, Turkish youth in Germany formed the first Turkish rap group

called *Islamic Force* (Arıcan, 2005). However, the first songs of Islamic force were in English (Solomon, 2021). The first rap with Turkish lyrics emerged in 1991 with Alper Ağa's song *Bir Yabancı'nın Hayatı* (Elflein, 1998; Kurt, 2020). This song proved Turkish language was suitable for rap performances. In 1993, the group called *Microphone Mafia* broke new ground by shooting a music video for a song with Turkish rap lyrics. In 1994, the first rap album with Turkish lyrics was released in Frankfurt (Dindaş, 2005). Subsequently, the majority of Turkish MCs in Germany began composing their songs in Turkish. However, it would be in 1995, with the group *Cartel*, that Turkish rap became popular in Türkiye. Cartel, mostly consisting of young Turkish migrants, released the album *Cartel* in 1995. With this album, Cartel successfully blended rap with Turkish language, and Anatolian instruments and sold 300,000 cassettes in Türkiye (Kaya, 2002; Elflein, 1998). This album not only brought fame to Cartel but also introduced Turkish rap to millions of listeners in Türkiye for the first time. In this respect, Cartel's 1995 album was a milestone in terms of the recognition of Turkish rap, particularly in Türkiye. The album also inspired many young Turkish rappers who would carry the flag of Turkish rap in the following period. Today, Cartel's album is still seen as a great achievement by many well-known rap artists.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, Cartel's success was short-lived, and the crew was disbanded a few years after its formation.^{iv} Although rappers such as *Alper Ağa*, *Kabus Kerim* and *Erci E*, who emerged from the Cartel crew, later released their solo albums, they could not achieve the success *Cartel* had achieved. Cartel initially highlighted *Turkishness* as a minority and marginalized ethnic group in Germany and tried to draw a bulwark against racism. These efforts were mostly supported by anti-fascist groups in Germany. However, Cartel's anti-racist concept of *Turkishness* was perceived very differently in Türkiye in the 1990s (İckstadt, 1999), which was overwhelmed by the issue of *terrorism* and the *Kurdish question*. Although Cartel set out with an anti-racist agenda in the diaspora, due to its nationalist language and the political developments in Türkiye, it gained the appreciation and sympathy of mostly right-wing and nationalist groups in Türkiye (Kaya, 2002; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020; Çınar, 1999).

After the success of Cartel, new rap groups emerged in major cities in Türkiye such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Eskişehir, Mersin, and Adana (Solomon, 2005; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020). However, Turkish rap groups and listeners were mostly disorganized and disconnected from each other at that time.^v There was a lack of a network that would bring them together and promote the latest developments in Turkish rap. To solve this problem, Tunç Dindaş, known also as *Turbo*, started writing for *Jean Blue* magazine for its Hip Hop column in 1997. In his column, Turbo wrote about the latest developments in Turkish rap and informed his followers about demo songs, Hip Hop parties, and

graffiti art (Lüküslü, 2011).^{vi} Eventually, the Blue Jean column became the first Turkish Hip Hop platform to coordinate Turkish Hip Hop practitioners in Türkiye.

During this period of development, certain MCs, who would later be recognized as *masters* of Turkish rap, began to establish their reputations in late 1990s (Mişe, 2020). Ceza and Dr. Fuchs founded the music group *Nefret* in 1998 and this was followed by the *Yeraltı Operasyonu* album, which included artists such as Ceza, Dr. Fuchs, Sagopa Kajmer, and Yener Çevik (Sönmez & Kazan, 2023; Solomon, 2005). According to Dr. Fuchs, this album was the *first* step of the underground “*rappers' emergence from the underground to the overground*”.^{vii} Fuat Ergin, also born in Germany, began to establish his reputation in the Turkish rap scene with his 1999 album titled *Hassıkedir*. As the late 1990s approached, the members of the first generation who brought Turkish rap from Germany to Türkiye began to lose their hegemony over Turkish rap music. Turkish rap was evolving from its primitive form towards a more modern and professional line in terms of sound, technique, flow, and rapping style. Turkish rap, which was created in Germany by the Turkish migrants, rapidly flourished through the initiatives of rappers, born and raised in Türkiye, in the 2000s (Şenel, 2015).

The second wave: the adolescence of Turkish rap (2000-2009)

During the second wave, Turkish rap evolved beyond its initial form and style, diversifying and becoming widely produced and consumed across various regions of Türkiye (Karanfil, 2022). However, this progress came with various challenges. One of the biggest problems that Turkish rappers faced at the end of the 1990s was the lack of experiences of music studios with rap records. Most of the studios, where Turkish rappers recorded their songs, had little competency in rap production and arrangement. The fact that Turkish rappers had to work in arabesque or folk music-oriented studios greatly prevented them from achieving the results they expected.^{viii} However, the growing use of computers and the internet in Türkiye during the 2000s ultimately solved this issue. Technological advancements shifted the production of Turkish rap away from traditional studios, leading to the emergence of smaller music facilities, such as *home studios*.^{ix} The rise of home studios provided rappers with the necessary conditions to produce and share their music efficiently and independently. The ability of MCs to record demos at home and share them freely on the internet eventually democratized Turkish rap music and enriched its content. In that regard, MCs began to form Hip Hop crews to undertake various tasks including recording, making beats, arranging, and mixing-mastering in their home studios.^x

Despite the stagnation that followed Cartel's short-lived success, the number of Turkish rap performers and listeners steadily increased (Ergen, 2023). By the 2000s, followers of Hip Hop culture began to organize underground rap parties in almost every city in Türkiye. These small-scale events became the engine of Turkish Hip Hop and kept rap music community active in the 2000s (Solomon, 2005). In addition to the parties, a series of award ceremonies^{xi} were organized where the best Turkish Hip Hop performers received various awards (Arıcan, 2005). Moreover, Turkish Hip Hop followers also gathered on the streets or in parks to maintain Hip Hop culture through various activities including *Freestyle*, *Beatbox*, *Breakdance*, *graffiti*, and live music performances during that period. Due to the frequent gatherings of Hip Hop practitioners, some streets and parks became symbolic places for Turkish Hip Hop culture in Türkiye. In that regard, *Karanfil* street in Ankara became a favorite meeting point for Hip Hop followers in 2004, and it remained as the center of Turkish rap in Ankara for more than a decade.^{xii}

After a period of relative solidarity in the 1990s, the Turkish rap community rapidly polarized in the early 2000s. Racist attacks and marginalization in Germany had brought the migrant Turkish rappers together and maintained their solidarity. However, the Turkish rap community of Türkiye lacked such common political foundations. Although the Turkish rap community came together to introduce Hip Hop culture to Türkiye and to break prejudices, solidarity eventually diminished and polarizations gave way to diss tracks among rap groups by the 2000s. The first confrontation emerged between *Fuat Ergin* and *Fresh B* in 2001 (Solomon, 2005) and followed by the battle between *Kuvvetmira* and *Barikat* groups by 2002 (Arıcan, 2005). In 2005, the disses between *Sagopa Kajmer* and *Ceza* became a turning point for Turkish rap and divided the Turkish Hip Hop community into two poles. Although this polarization did not become as violent as the *Biggie-Tupac* rivalry, its impact on the Turkish Hip Hop community was intense. Dissing culture spread to the new generation of rappers and continued in the form of the *Olympos-Sefalet* conflict in late 2005. The polarization and diss tracks that emerged in the first half of the 2000s served to consolidate dissing culture in Turkish rap and paved the way for the *battle rap* which became very popular subgenre in Türkiye in the 2010s (Özer & Özer, 2025).

Another important aspect of the second wave was the increasing representation of Turkish rap in traditional media. Turkish rap started to find a place in movies and TV series, albeit limited during that period (Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020; Çetin, 2019). Additionally, Turkish rappers such as *Ceza*, *Ragga Oktay*, *Ogeday*, and *Fuat Ergin* appeared in various commercials in the 2000s. Turkish television channels including *CNN Türk* and *TRT* produced a series of Turkish Hip Hop documentaries during the same period. In 2009, Turkish rap reached the peak of its reputation in the media with the *Rapstar* TV show.

The Rapstar also contributed to the growth of the Turkish rap audience and introduced Hip Hop culture to a wider population in Türkiye. Although the Rapstar ended its broadcasting life very soon due to *disagreements between the juries and the producer*,^{xiii} it left a mark on the Turkish rap discussions during that period.^{xiv}

Despite all these achievements, Turkish rap still did not receive as much attention in traditional media as mainstream pop music (Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020).^{xv} Except for limited Turkish rap broadcast on *Kral TV* and *Dream TV*, it was still poorly represented on television. Deprived of these print and visual media tools, Turkish rap performers had to undertake the promotion of their albums themselves. The widespread use of the internet became the biggest platform for the promotion of Turkish rap music in Türkiye (Solomon, 2009). Popular underground rap songs were shared on various social media platforms such as *YouTube* during the second wave. However, still there was a need for Hip Hop platforms that could do a more comprehensive promotion, announcement, and organization. To meet that need, Turkish rap volunteers created many different digital Hip Hop platforms.

The most prominent early Hip Hop portals were *Suikast.de*, founded in 1998, and *Kodes.com*, founded in 1999. These portals did not only share songs with Turkish rap listeners but also released compilation albums, interviewed MCs and organized various Hip Hop events. It was followed by the establishment of *Raportaj.com* in 2002. *Myspace.com* became another popular platform for sharing Turkish rap in Türkiye, especially by 2004. MCs created free accounts on this platform and shared their demos with listeners. Additionally, Myspace also served as a socializing platform for rappers and paved the way for various collaborations among Turkish Hip Hop community (Ibid). In 2005, Ulaş Demiröz, and his crew founded the *hiphoplife.net* (Lüküslü, 2011) and the platform attracted a great deal of attention from Turkish rap listeners and MCs.^{xvi} The hiphoplif became a popular portal where underground Turkish rap albums were frequently shared, promoted, and downloaded. This portal remained as the leading Turkish Hip Hop platform until the mid-2010s. It released a series of collection rap albums under the name *Organize Oluyoruz* and featured the prominent underground MCs at the time (Gence, 2011) and organized *Freestyle King* events where rappers showcased their improvisational performances and competed.

The one of important features that distinguished underground Turkish rap of this period was its oppositional and activist aspects. In the 2000s, performers of Turkish rap penned songs that addressed many global and local social issues. These political songs usually covered various topics including war, peace, racism, capitalism, imperialism, corruption, poverty, environmental issues, bribery, drug addiction and so forth. Just as the birth of rap in the US had protest roots (Price, 2006;

Nava, 2022), Turkish rap was also known for its stance against racism in Germany (Arıcan, 2021). This activist culture and political commentary were preserved in a number of Turkish rap songs of the 2000s (Arıcan, 2005). On the other hand, Turkish rap addressed not only global social issues but also local concerns. The early protest rap examples of the second wave Turkish rap were followed by numberless protest Turkish rap songs by various underground rap groups by the mid-2000s. Although Turkish rap community occasionally embraced various themes including success stories, violence, criminality, or love in the second wave (Özer & Özer, 2025), its counter-hegemonic stance remained as a significant part of its characteristic (Arıcan, 2005).

The monopoly of the first-generation MCs and groups such as *Sagopa Kajmer*, *Ceza*, *Yener Çevik*, *Ogeday*, *Fuat Ergin*, *Norm*, *Istanbul Attack*, *Barikat*, *Kadıköy Acil*, and *Mode XL* over Turkish rap scene started to weaken in Türkiye by late 2000s. The success of these pioneers was followed by various underground rap groups, including *Sefalet Records*, *İhtilal*, *Orontez*, *PMC*, *Batarya*, *Olympos*, *Dikkat Records*, *Doğu Akdeniz*, *Bakırköy İstasyon* and *258 Noise*, established in many different cities in Türkiye. These underground MCs started to make their voices heard more effectively through social media and parties, and Turkish rap eventually became more diverse as the new and young groups came to the fore.

There was also some minor progress on the commercial side. The number of banderols for Turkish rap albums increased during the second wave. However, most underground rappers still continued to distribute their CDs independently without banderols during that period.^{xvii}

As 2010 approached, Turkish rap flourished in terms of technique, sound, and narrative, but its production quality still lagged behind that of its counterparts in the US. Underground rap groups were established and groups of listeners emerged in almost every city in Türkiye. According to Turkish rap artist Nomad,^{xviii} the number of Turkish rap listeners in Türkiye in 2009 was at least between 50,000 and 60,000. However, considering that there were 90,000 members on Sagopa Kajmer's fan site alone in 2008 (Lüküslü, 2011), it is obvious that the total number of Turkish rap listeners was much higher during that period.

Consequently, as Turkish rap completed its adolescence, the underground rappers began to release albums with banderols, organize big parties, and appear in movie soundtracks, commercials, and traditional media, albeit in a limited way. However, despite the progress, Turkish rap was still far from being a popular branch of music in Türkiye at the end of this period (Aksoy, 2022). Turkish rap listeners and Hip Hop volunteers were still part of a small subculture struggling for social and cultural acceptance. However, this reality changed completely towards the end of the 2010s.

The third wave: the maturity phase of Turkish rap (2010-2016)

The third wave refers to a time when underground rap experienced a significant increase in popularity, and Turkish rap showcased a high level of musical diversity and critical elements. One of the most important developments of this period was undoubtedly *Sekiz* project. In 2011, 8 MCs with different styles and from different cities came together to collaborate on a joint project called *Sekiz*. It brought many different styles, listeners, and cities of Turkish underground rap together and achieved great success in short period of time. It achieved another triumph by swiftly introducing Hip Hop culture to thousands of young individuals.

Nevertheless, there persisted a profound bias against this subculture and rap music in Türkiye. Although Turkish rap had succeeded in increasing its influence among young people, it was still a music that parents in particular still approached with prejudice (Lüküslü, 2011).^{xix} Turkish rap enthusiasts identified themselves as part of the Hip Hop culture and expressed this through their clothing and their slang. However, the tendency to wear baggy clothes coming from Hip Hop culture also fed the prejudice against Turkish rap community.^{xx} Apart from loose clothing, other factors associated with rap by the society such as *Americanization, drug use, violence and gang culture* also fueled the prejudice against Turkish rap (Üçer, 2013; Lüküslü, 2011). Turkish Hip Hop communities took a series of steps to challenge these prejudices and gain acceptance from the society. One of the most notable of these initiatives was the marches and protests organized under the name *Türkiye İçin Rap Vakti* in 2011 (Takvim, 2011). Turkish rap and Hip Hop followers organized various marches and gatherings and issued press statements in many parts of Türkiye, especially in big cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and Eskişehir. The banners displaying the phrase “*I don't dress loosely, society just has a narrow perspective*” became the rallying cry for these protests and struggle against the prejudice of society.

During the third wave, Turkish rap struggled to emerge from its underground status and access larger listeners and opportunities. During the 2010s, there was a significant increase in the number of albums with banderols by underground MCs of Turkish rap. Music labels, that had only worked with the most known figures in Turkish rap in the 2000s (Solomon, 2005), began partnering with less popular underground musicians in that period. Besides, Turkish rap also saw a notable improvement in the quality of music videos and music production in the 2010s.

The third wave also witnessed the culmination of musical diversity in Turkish rap. In that regard, Turkish rap and Hip Hop culture flourished during this golden age, both artistically and culturally. Turkish rap songs of the third wave exhibited a diverse range of musical styles, encompassing various

genres. The fact that rap was fed by a wide variety of musical styles provided Turkish rap listeners with a wide range of options. Especially after *Sekiz*, this reality became even more apparent.

Another factor that contributed to the musical diversity was the cultural characteristics expressed in the songs. The components of Hip Hop culture including *break dancing*, *graffiti*, *beatboxing*, *DJing*, and *freestyle* became increasingly prevalent cultural practices among young individuals in Türkiye. During the early 2010s, it was prevalent to encounter scratching in Turkish rap songs, as well as witness break dance performances, graffiti artwork, and Hip Hop outfits in music videos. These musical and cultural practices served as a means of expressing the presence and identity of the listeners and performers of Turkish rap in society. The most of the Hip Hop practices and values were internalized by the followers of this subculture in Türkiye at that time.

In this respect, Turkish rap listeners created several online forums to express Hip Hop culture and exchange thoughts on developments of Turkish rap with other members of this subculture. The most prominent of these forums were *Yeraltı Operasyonu Sözlük* and *Bol Sözlük*. In contrast to other digital Turkish rap platforms during that period, these forums operated as democratic platforms, relying on the comments and reviews provided by the listeners. In these forums, Hip Hop volunteers engaged in conversations about various aspects of Hip Hop culture, wrote reviews of recently released Turkish rap tracks, and established relationships with fellow Turkish Hip Hop enthusiasts.

These efforts were not limited to online platforms but also manifested in print media. During the third wave, there was a remarkable increase in the number of print media outlets publishing about Hip Hop culture and rap music in Türkiye. The Turkish rap column in *Blue Jean*, which began in 1997 with Turbo, was followed by many magazines by dedicated to rap, including as *HipHop TR*, *Flow*, *HitHop*, *HipHopSkool*, *Word Up*, *6 Pilli Fanzin*, and *Turkish Rap magazine*.

Moreover, Turkish rap prominently fostered an opposition against mainstream culture during the third wave period. Turkish rap was commonly referred to as *anti-pop* and gained reputation for its opposition to popular culture (Sönmez & Kazan, 2023; Solomon, 2015; Solomon, 2005). Many Turkish rap songs released during this wave contained explicit references to the mainstream music industry and critiques of the capitalist system. In this regard, the Turkish Hip Hop community exhibited a great deal of determination to protect the oppositional, critical and anti-system elements of Turkish rap and Hip Hop culture. The Turkish Hip Hop community often condemned the MCs who collaborated with the mainstream and pop music artists during the third wave (Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020). Nonetheless, despite the existence of counter-hegemonic discourses and political commentary in the lyrics of the second wave, non-critical themes like as criminality, violence, and success narratives also remained

significantly prevalent in the songs (Özer & Özer, 2025). Another notable aspect of this period was the growing musical variety of Turkish rap styles. Although the Turkish rap songs produced in the third wave were shaped by numerous different musical styles, some of these subgenres became more prominent. The most prominent subgenres of Turkish rap included *Battle rap*, *Protest rap*, *Melanko rap*, *Funky rap*, *Gangsta rap* and *Storytelling*. Aside from the main sub-genres mentioned, several additional sub-genres such as *Reggae*, *Arabesque*, *Rock*, *Metal*, *Punk*, *Techno*, *Dubstep* and *Jazz* have merged with Turkish rap, resulting in the creation of new sub-genres (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 The Subgenres of Turkish Rap in the Third Wave and Their Representatives.^{xxi}

Melanko Rap	Storytelling Rap	Funky Rap	Protest Rap	Battle Rap	Gangsta Rap	Other Subgenres
Sagopa Kajmer, Canfeza, Taladro, Sokrat St, Şanişer, Azap Hg, Kolera, Kaptan, Yeis Sensura, Sehabe etc.	Joker, No.1, Saian, Kayra, Sansar Salvo, U.L.A.Ş, İndigo, Çağrı Sinci, Stabil, Ağaçkakan, Karaçalı, Da Poet, Yener Çevik etc.	Beta, Şehinşah, Pit10, Kamufle, Anıl Piyancı, Frekans, Ezhel, Flowart, Jagged, Vurgu, Red, Keişan etc.	Saian, Gazapizm, Norm Ender, KC; Hayki, Şanişer, Ozbi, Şiirbaz, Rapzan Belagat, Çağrı Sinci etc.	Fuat Ergin, Joker, Allame, Bela, Derya, Patron, Hayki, Santi, Acarkhan, Saian, Defkhan, Sayedar, Radansa, Tahribad-ı İsyan, Hidra etc.	Killa Hakan, Mode XL, Sansar Salvo, Kadıköy Acil, Cash Flow, Massaka, Kodes, Fate Fat etc.	Arabesk- rap, Dubstep- rap, Crunk, Reggae- rap, Rapcore, Horrorcore , Nu-metal, Tekno-rap, Jazz-rap, Spoken Word etc.

During the third wave, Turkish Hip Hop also flourished, reaching its golden age in terms of its cultural, social, educational, artistic, and oppositional attributes. During this era, Turkish rap served not only as a means for young individuals to express their rebellion or explore their identity, but also as a tool for self-education and personal growth. The historical, philosophical, political, and literary themes and lyrics, particularly in Turkish protest rap, contributed greatly to the vocabulary and general knowledge of many young Turkish rap listeners at that time.

This uncompromising anti-popular culture and oppositional stance of Turkish rap portrayed itself during the Gezi Park protests and the Turkish general election in 2015. The protests that began in Istanbul's Gezi Park in 2013, aimed at safeguarding the environment, human rights, democracy, political liberties, and expressing discontent towards the government, gained momentum throughout Türkiye due to the influence of social media (Gündoğan, 2019). These protests also had considerable influence on the Turkish Hip Hop community (Kadioğlu & Özdağ, 2020). From the very beginning of the Gezi Park protests, numerous Turkish Hip Hop enthusiasts and MCs joined the demonstrations and expressed strong support for the protestors. Turkish rap community was in Gezi Park, on the streets and, according to rapper Ezhel, exactly *where it is supposed to be*.^{xxii} At that time, the majority of

the songs released about the Gezi Park protests were produced by Turkish rap artists. These critical and activist aspects of Turkish rap remained prevalent in the most of the Turkish rap tracks in the subsequent years.

By the mid-2010s, Turkish rap had reached a point where it was poised to dominate the Turkish music industry. This progress was made possible by three main remarkable initial breakthroughs. The first breakthrough occurred with the introduction of *Epic Rap Battles* concept, which began to gain popularity on *YouTube* in Türkiye in 2016. The most notable characteristic of this concept was its greater entertaining, theatricality,^{xxiii} and catchiness rendering it particularly appealing to the younger audience. Due to these characteristics, Turkish Rap battles quickly achieved millions of views on social media platforms and developed a substantial fan base among youthful audiences (Budak & Ergun, 2022). This remarkable success of Turkish rap battles was followed by various entertaining theatrical rap projects on computer games and movies by Turkish YouTubers. The appearance of Turkish YouTubers producing Turkish rap songs further boosted the popularity of Turkish rap among the youth.

Another significant advancement was the growing presence of Turkish rap in conventional media. In the third wave, Turkish rap gained greater attention in conventional media, particularly through reality talent shows like *Yeteneksizsiniz Türkiye* and *O Ses Türkiye* (Dursun, 2016). Numerous Underground Turkish rappers participated in these music and talents shows to reach a wider audience by 2015. Undoubtedly, the increased presence of Turkish rap in the media had a beneficial influence on the Turkish rap audience and led to a noticeable rise in the number of rap listeners during the third wave.

The third development was the unexpected success of underground Turkish rap songs released in 2015 and 2016 (Aksoy, 2022). A number of underground MCs produced tracks such as *Günah Benim* that reached hundreds of millions of views in a short period of time. Turkish rap gained significant popularity during the final phase of the third wave, securing a growing audience and establishing itself as a popular music genre. The growth in popularity also reflected to Turkish rap events, with the attendance in major cities like İzmir, reaching thousands (Budak & Ergun, 2022).

Nevertheless, this rapid boom also resulted in certain challenges. Turkish rap successfully maintained almost all of the sub-genres and components of Hip Hop culture that it had cultivated during the second and third waves. Moreover, despite the presence of non-critical themes in the lyrics, it did not fully compromise its oppositional, educational, and social aspects. Nevertheless, the Turkish rap saw a significant transformation during the fourth wave, shifting from a critical, oppositional and

underground perspective to a more mainstream genre (Sarıköse, 2022; Mişe, 2020). As a result, the unique musical and cultural diversity that had been cherished during the third wave was essentially diminished in the short period of time. Subsequently, Turkish rap faced a period of heightened popularity followed by a decline in terms of its ability to express, cultural representation, diversity, and artistic quality in the fourth wave.

The fourth wave: transformation of Turkish rap into mainstream music (2017-2025)

In 2017, *Ezğhel* released *Müptezhel* album which *marked* the beginning of a new era in Turkish rap (Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020).^{xxiv} *Müptezhel* blended reggae sounds with *Trap* style which is an electro subgenre of rap music that originated in Atlanta in the 1990s (Duinker, 2019). Trap was not popular in Türkiye in the third wave at that time. The popularity of Trap music in Turkish rap boosted tremendously after the success of *Müptezhel* (Koç, 2020). The rise of Turkish Trap accelerated as more prominent rappers adopted this subgenre in subsequent years. Trap eventually assimilated the most of Turkish rap styles and emerged as the dominant subgenre in the Turkish rap industry by early 2020.

The rise of Turkish Trap also marked the beginning of the standardization of Turkish rap (Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020). The standardization in Turkish rap was further intensified with the emergence of Drill, another subgenre, in Türkiye by 2021. Following the rise of Turkish Trap, Drill has emerged as the second most popular subgenre in Türkiye with the efforts of the new generation MCs. In 2017, there was only one Turkish rap artist on Spotify Türkiye's top 10 most streamed artists list (Hürriyet, 2017). However, the number of Turkish rappers on the list has climbed to seven in 2022 (Gazete Duvar, 2022). Currently, Turkish rap artists hold a prominent position in streaming music platforms in Türkiye. Nevertheless, the success of Turkish rap resulted in certain artistic, musical, and cultural losses.

Adorno (1975) argued that under the context of capitalism, music, along with other creative forms, is not primarily an aesthetic phenomenon but rather a commercial one. In other terms, the culture industry commodifies music and turns it into a mere commercial object. Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) argued that music is not only bought and sold as a commodity, but also undergoes a process of standardization in the capitalist economies. The cultural industry undermines the autonomy and authenticity of artists and art by promoting a standardized production style across several fields of art (Adorno, 1975). The impact of this phenomenon is evident in contemporary Turkish rap. The Turkish rap scene witnessed a significant decline in artistic, cultural, and narrative diversity with the emergence of Trap and Drill subgenres. Mainstream Turkish rap was heavily

commodified to align with the demands of the culture industry, reducing it to a mere instrument of commerce (Sönmez & Kazan, 2023; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020; Mişe, 2020). Therefore, contemporary Turkish rap largely lost its social and artistic aspect in its fourth wave.

Despite this rapid growth, adherents of Turkish Hip Hop culture believe that Trap and Drill genres fail to represent Turkish Hip Hop culture and its values. However, this audience, which preserved the elements and values of Hip Hop culture, became a minority in the rap community as Turkish rap became a mainstream music (Sarıköse, 2022). Today, there is a widespread belief among the MCs, who embrace Hip Hop culture, that Turkish rap lost its meaning and became a commodified instrument of popular culture.^{xxv}

Most Turkish rap listeners today do not fully embrace Hip Hop culture, as they were introduced to Turkish rap through recently popularized mainstream subgenres such as *Drill* and *Trap*. During the fourth wave, there was a significant rise in the number of MCs in the Turkish rap community who only relied on rapping as their source of income (Sarıköse, 2022). The lavish lifestyles and substantial earnings of the popular Turkish rappers undeniably motivated young musicians to pursue these subgenres (Mişe, 2020). Thus, the culture industry established a vicious cycle in which mainstream Turkish rap continuously supplies itself by incorporating fresh and youthful musicians.

The standardized traits of Turkish Trap and Drill in the fourth wave, which significantly shaped the forms of Turkish rap, can be summarized in a few key elements. The one of the most important features of the fourth wave of mainstream Turkish rap genres is that they exhibit a predominantly uniform musical and technical style (Sarıköse, 2022). The most artists of these sub-genres produce songs with similar sounds, beats and vocal techniques. An illustration of this is the prevalent use of auto-tune and mumble vocal techniques in popular Turkish rap, which greatly masks the authentic voices of the MCs and contributes to the standardization. Similar standardization process is observed in beats too. Both Trap and Drill have their own common sounds, VST plugins^{xxvi} and drum kits. Therefore, it is exceedingly challenging for Mainstream Trap or Drill genres, which predominantly follows certain sounds, VSTs and instruments, to exhibit an advanced musical diversity. Consequently, the extensive range of musical diversity within Turkish rap, which emerged in the second wave and thrived in the third wave, nearly vanished by in the fourth wave.

Another manifestation of standardization appears in clothes, accessories, symbols and music videos of the Turkish Drill and Trap. Adherents of the Drill choose for hooded sweatshirts, ski masks, and tracksuits, in contrast to the baggy clothing commonly associated with Hip Hop and the previous waves. Furthermore, as part of the *flexing* culture of material wealth, it is very likely to come across

chain necklaces, designer's clothes, money thrown at the camera, alcoholic drinks and luxury cars in the music videos. Similar elements can also be observed in Turkish Trap music (Karanfil, 2022; Koç, 2020). Turkish Drill music videos often revolve around male gang members wearing ski masks and tracksuits. Typically, Drill rap videos are filmed in front of a car using dynamic camera methods. This filming technique is observed in the majority of Turkish Drill music videos of the fourth wave.

While Trap music videos exhibit greater diversity compared to Drill, they are nonetheless significantly affected by the standardization. Drug consumption and the portrayal of women as sexual objects are prevalent and standardized occurrences in Turkish Trap and Drill music videos (Işık, 2018; Sarıköse, 2022; Köten & Akdemir, 2021; Sönmez & Kazan, 2023). The fact that Trap music originated from drug houses in the US and evolved with drug culture (Karanfil, 2022) led to the drug theme being more intense in Trap than in other genres.

The prevalence of drug-related themes in Turkish Trap music is also evident in its lyrics and content, which contributes to a decline in critical and educational aspects. Unlike prior waves, mainstream Turkish Trap does not, for the most part, significantly contribute to counter-hegemonic ideas in the Turkish Hip Hop community. On the contrary, through the process of commercialization, these mainstream genres became the leading musical instrument of the culture industry in Türkiye. The first three waves of Turkish rap established a more challenging appearance, primarily focusing on social, personal, and political issues along with non-critical themes. It helped to educate, empower and inspire its audience by addressing these concerns extensively. However, in the fourth wave, these attributes were predominantly replaced by contrary concepts. Mainstream Turkish rap commonly explores subjects including entertainment, drug use, party culture, sexuality, wealth, sexism, luxury, criminal activities, individualism, and success (Özer & Özer, 2025; Gürel, Demirdöven, Aktürk, & Yaman, 2025). Turkish Trap and Drill artists commonly flaunt their financial status by mentioning their lavish clothes, jewelry, alcohol, and automobiles, both to their audience and rivals (Sönmez & Kazan, 2023), thereby exhibiting a variant of *Pop Rap* (Benitez, 2015). Undoubtedly, these themes previously were used into Turkish rap on multiple occasions in the previous waves. Nevertheless, it was during the fourth wave that these themes became dominant and standardized, ultimately gaining hegemonic popularity in Turkish rap.

In other words, Turkish rap abandoned its *lyricism*^{xxvii} to a great extent in the fourth wave. Contemporary Turkish rap songs underwent a significant transformation, shifting from their prior emphasis on aesthetic considerations, intricate and literary storytelling, to a level of simplicity comparable to a *nursery rhyme*.^{xxviii} The objective of this shift is to produce popular songs with simplified

content that offer higher sales potential. In popular music, lyrics and rhythms generally aim to be memorable and repetitive (Thompson, 2017; Sarıköse, 2022). Given that popular music produced by the cultural industry serves commercial objectives, it functions as a form of entertainment that fills leisure time (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Consequently, in the fourth wave of Turkish mainstream rap, narrative, message, artistic, political, and aesthetic considerations are no longer the major priorities (Mişe, 2020). Hence, the Turkish Trap and Drill songs, which emerged as a prominent symbol of popular music, exhibit significant disparities in both narrative and content when compared to earlier waves of Turkish rap (Ergen, 2023; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020; Sarıköse, 2022).

Nevertheless, the presence of diversity, artistic attributes, and the capacity for educational and social criticism within Turkish rap did not entirely vanish. Although mainstream rap music such as Drill and Trap mostly dominated and transformed Turkish rap in line with the principles of capitalist cultural industry, many songs that produced during the fourth wave proved that Turkish rap can still be an effective instrument of social criticism and source of art and aesthetics (Aksoy, 2022; Koç, 2020; Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020; Ermiş, 2023; Mişe, 2020). In this respect, there is still expectation that Turkish rap may potentially return to its previous diversified, aesthetic, artistic, and critical form in the near future.

Conclusion

This study investigates the historical evolution of Turkish rap through a four-wave analytical framework, offering a comprehensive account of how the genre transformed from a political expression of the Turkish diaspora in Germany into one of Türkiye's most popular contemporary music forms. To answer the research questions, the study employed a qualitative research design, systematically analyzing 82 textual and visual sources including academic articles, interviews, documentaries, television programs, news reports, and book chapters in Turkish and English.

The findings indicated that Turkish rap emerged in Germany as a form of self-expression for marginalized Turkish migrants and as a style of oriental music. It quickly spread to Türkiye and garnered significant attention during the end of the first wave. In the second wave of Turkish rap of the 2000s, the genre faced numerous challenges. Despite lacking support from traditional media and facing social prejudice, Turkish rap managed to overcome these obstacles and successfully expanded its audience, enhanced the quality of its productions, and made a significant impact in Türkiye. During the 2010s, Turkish rap gained significant attention and began producing highly political, rebellious, and musically diverse content. This was mostly influenced by the emergence of alternative rap styles and

the growing popularity of social media among young people. During the fourth wave, Turkish rap experienced a significant rise in popularity and production, due to the emergence of subgenres like *Trap* and *Drill*. However, it significantly diminished in terms of its musical diversity, artistic expression, critical aspects and rebellious stance that inherited from the previous waves. While there are numerous underground MCs and Hip Hop enthusiasts in today's music market who try to preserve the protest and artistic elements of Turkish rap, the mainstream Turkish rap mostly became repetitive, standardized, and commodified due to the impact of subgenres such as *Drill* and *Trap* in Türkiye. Consequently, Turkish rap underwent a transformation and became a component of the culture industry during the fourth wave.

Overall, this study contributes a systematic historical model that clarifies the key turning points shaping Turkish rap's evolution from the 1980s to the present. It demonstrates that Turkish rap is not merely a musical genre but a dynamic cultural practice shaped by migration, social inequalities, technological shifts, and market forces. Future research may further explore how emerging digital subcultures, new production technologies, and evolving youth identities will influence the trajectory of Turkish rap in a potential fifth wave.

Author Contributions

Fatih Çoker solely conceived and designed the study, conducted the research, analyzed and interpreted the data, prepared the manuscript, revised its content, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest related to this study.

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Appendix A

Content Analysis Data Table (Parenthetical: (Trak15, n.d.).

Source	Waves	Data Type	Subject
Oran and Cömert (2023)	Second, Third, Fourth	Article	Linguistics
Çetin (2019)	Second	Article	Linguistics
Kuyumcu (2020)	Second, Third, Fourth	Article	Literature
Kurt (2020)	First, Second, Third	Article	Literature
Köten and Akdemir (2021)	Second, Fourth	Article	Gender
Yıldırım (2021)	Third, Fourth	Article	Psychology
Genç (2015)	First	Article	Culture and Jargon
Karabağ (2019)	First, Second	Article	History and Identity
Sanköse (2022)	Third, Fourth	Article	Culture and Sociology
Güney, et al., (2013)	First, Second	Article	Culture and Sociology
Şenel (2015)	First	Article	Culture and History
Lüküslü (2011)	Second	Article	Ethnography
Ergen (2023)	Fourth	Article	Culture and Sociology
Özer and Özer (2025)	First, Second, Third, Fourth	Article	Genres and Themes
Gürel et al., (2025)	Fourth	Article	Genre: Trap/Drill
Solomon (2005)	First, Second	Article	Ethnography
Budak and Ergun (2022)	Third, Fourth	Article	Ethnography
Arslan and Kırhoğlu (2019)	Second, Third	Article	Genre: Arabesk
Sönmez and Kazan (2023)	Fourth	Article	Genre: Arabesk
Karanfil (2022)	Fourth	Article	Genre: Gangsta/Trap
Dursun (2016)	First, Second, Third	Article	Genre: Islamic
Bahadır and Pirgon (2022)	Second, Third	Article	Genre: Islamic
Okay (2021)	Third, Fourth	Article	Genre: Islamic
Özdemir (2016)	Second, Third	Article	Genre: Islamic
Aksoy (2022)	Fourth	Article	Genre: Protest
Ermiş (2023)	Second, Third, Fourth	Article	Genre: Protest
Mişe (2020)	Third, Fourth	Article	Genre: Protest
Koç (2020)	Fourth	Article	Genre: Trap
Elflein (1998)	First	Article	Culture and History
Kaya (2002)	First	Article	Culture and History
Solomon (2021)	First	Book Chapter	History
Solomon (2009)	Second	Article	Ethnography
Kadioğlu and Özdal (2020)	Third, Fourth	Article	History
Arıcan (2021)	First, Second, Third	Article	Sociology and History
Çınar (1999)	First	Article	History
Ickstadt (1999)	First	Article	Culture
Begonja (2018)	First	Article	Culture and History
Üçer (2013)	Second, Third	Article	Sociology
Arıcan (2005)	First, Second	Article	Culture and History
Solomon (2010)	Second	Article	Gender
Solomon (2015)	Second	Article	Culture and Genre
Solomon (2011)	First, Second	Book Chapter	Genre: Islamic
Goldsmith and Fonseca (2019)	First	Article	History
Işık (2018)	Third, Fourth	Book Chapter	Drugs and Music
Sever (2016)	Third	Article	Pedagogy
Adil (2021)	Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Besta (2018)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Çevik (2019)	First, Second, Third	Interview	Rap Artist
Ceza (2006)	First, Second	Interview	Rap Artist
Ceza (2010)	First, Second	Interview	Rap Artist
Demiröz (2015)	First, Second, Third	Interview	Organizer
Dindaş (2018)	First, Second, Fourth	Interview	Graffiti Artist
Dindaş and Sezer (2011)	Second, Third	Interview	Graffiti Artists
Ergin (2019)	First, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Ezhel (2013)	Second, Third	Interview	Rap Artist

Ezhel (2017)	Second, Third	Interview	Rap Artist
Ezhel (2018)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Fuchs (2015)	First, Second, Third	Interview	Rap Artist
Grogi (2021)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Heja (2020)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Joker (2020)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Jöntürk (2006)	First, Second	Interview	Rap Artist
Kayra (2019)	Second, Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Kerim (2017)	First	Interview	Rap Artist
Manas (2017)	Second, Third	Interview	Rap Artist
Mirac (2020)	Second, Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Ozbi (2018)	First, Second, Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Sagopa (2022)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Saian (2019)	First, Second, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Salvo (2016)	Second, Third	Interview	Rap Artist
Sinci (2020)	Second, Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
TRAK (2022)	Third, Fourth	Interview	Rap Artist
Beyazshow (2009)	Second	Tv Show	Music and Culture
Başka Yerde Yok (2009)	Second	Tv Show	Music and Culture
Fuchs (2007)	First, Second	Documentary	History and Culture
Tüccar (2011)	First, Second	Documentary	History and Culture
Canel (2019)	First, Second, Third	Documentary	History and Culture
Dindaş (2005)	First	Newspaper article	History
Gazete Duvar (2022)	Fourth	Newspaper article	Music and Culture
Hürriyet (2017)	Fourth	Newspaper article	Music and Culture
Takvim (2011)	Third	Newspaper article	Music and Culture
İstanbulberlin Hattı (2023)	First	Newspaper article	History and Culture

ⁱ Figure belongs to the author.

ⁱⁱ Killa Hakan, Harbi Getto: Killa Hakan, directed by Arda Canel (2019; Motion Picture) <https://youtu.be/LRnIVSXYlwk> – for the details, see the appendix.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sagopa Kajmer (2022); Ezhel (2018); Ozbi (2018); Yener Çevik (2019); Tankurt Manas (2017) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{iv} Kabus Kerim (2017) – for the details, see the appendix.

^v Tunç Dindaş (2018) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{vi} Tunç Dindaş and Duygu Sezer (2011) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{vii} Dr. Fuchs (2007) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{viii} Jöntürk (2006); Sevilay Tüccar (2011) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{ix} These types of studios were recording studios that independent musicians usually set up in their rooms at home with low budgets.

^x Dr. Fuchs (2015) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xi} The most known example was the *Turkish Hip Hop Oscars*.

^{xii} Ezhel (2017) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xiii} Ceza (2010) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xiv} Beyazshow (2009) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xv} Ceza (2006) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xvi} Ulaş Demiröz (2015) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xvii} Sansar Salvo (2016); Grogi (2021); Çağrı Sinci (2020) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xviii} Nomad (2009) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xix} Yener Çevik (2019) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xx} Harun Adil (2021) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xxi} Figure belongs to the author.

^{xxii} Ezhel (2013) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xxiii} Typically, two MCs or performers impersonate two contrasting historical figures or subjects and engage in a freestyle battle performance in Epic Rap Battle projects.

^{xxiv} Heja (2020) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xxv} Fuat Ergin (2019); Saian (2019); Evren Besta (2018); Joker (2020); TRAK (2022); Heja (2020); Mirac (2020); Sagopa Kajmer (2022) – for the details, see the appendix.

^{xxvi} It refers to third party software used in beat making and mix mastering.

^{xxvii} This term emphasizes the importance of high quality content, narrative and message in rap songs.

^{xxviii} Mirac (2020) – for the details, see the appendix.