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Music, Protest and Social Inclusivity: The Case of Ahmet Kaya as a Deviant Example of Protest Music in Turkey

ABSTRACT

This study examines Ahmet Kaya's significance as a protest singer-songwriter in Turkey, focusing on his unique position within the protest music scene of Turkey. Despite facing challenges and criticisms, Kaya used his music to voice the struggles of the oppressed, creating enduring documents of social strife. The research argues that Kaya's music exhibits a higher degree of social inclusivity compared to traditional Turkish protest music, attributed to his diverse musical-cultural background, relatable lyrical themes, emotional connection with audiences, and the socio-cultural transformation in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s.

The study employs Homi Bhabha's concept of 'cultural hybridity' as a theoretical framework. Central to this analysis is the application of Bhabha's 'third space' concept, which illuminates how Kaya's music creates a unique cultural intersection where diverse musical traditions and social experiences coexist and interact. The study also introduces the concept of 'musical mixture' to describe Kaya's innovative fusion of various musical elements, which contributes significantly to the social inclusivity of his work.

The multifaceted methodology for this study combines historical analysis, biographical research, musical analysis, and sociopolitical contextualization, introducing 'musical accumulation' as an approach to analyzing Kaya's style. The research involves review of historical sources, audiovisual archives, and interviews, analyzing Kaya's musical elements, lyrical themes, and collaborations.

The study highlights the relationship between music, protest and society, illustrating music's role in protest, identification, and inclusivity. 'Social inclusivity' emerges as a key parameter in understanding Kaya's broad appeal, suggesting new avenues for protest music studies. This research contributes to understanding how hybrid cultural forms shape political discourse and social identity in late 20th century Turkey.

KEYWORDS

Protest music

Social inclusivity

Ahmet Kaya

Social movements

Cultural hybridity

Musical mixture

*“One side of us sheds leaves,
The other blooms like a springtime garden’s gloss.”¹*

In the rich tapestry of protest music in Turkey, Ahmet Kaya stands out as a vibrant and complex thread, weaving together diverse musical traditions, political activism, and profound emotional resonance. This study emerges from a compelling question: What distinguishes Ahmet Kaya as a deviant example in the protest music scene of Turkey?² The answer, as argued in this study, lies in the remarkable social inclusivity³ of Kaya's music, a quality that set him apart from his contemporaries and continues to captivate audiences today.⁴

Born on October 28, 1957, in Malatya, Turkey, Ahmet Kaya's life and music were shaped by the tumultuous political landscape of late 20th century Turkey. The son of a Kurdish father from Adiyaman and a Turkish mother from Erzurum, Kaya's mixed heritage played a crucial role in shaping his musical identity and political stance. From an early age, Kaya displayed a natural affinity for music, despite lacking formal training or experience in traditional musical styles performed by *dengbej*, *âşiks*, or *ozans*.

Kaya's formative years coincided with a period of intense social mobility and political activism in Turkey during the 1970s. As a young man, he became involved in

¹ A stanza from the song *Öyle Bir Yerdeyim ki* (*Acılara Tutunmak*, 1985); lyrics by Hasan Hüseyin Korkmazgil and composed by Ahmet Kaya. The original lyrics of the stanza is “*Yaprak döker bir yanımız, bir yanımız bahar bahçe*” translated by the author.

² This paper is produced out of a subchapter from my doctoral dissertation entitled “Left-Leaning Protest Music Tradition in Turkey (1960s-1990s) and the Case of Ahmet Kaya” (Özer, 2022).

³ For the purposes of this study, the term ‘social inclusivity’ has been used instead of ‘social inclusion,’ which are used interchangeably in the literature. Social inclusion is defined as “the use of policies and programs to reduce inequality, exclusion, and disadvantage” within a society, and it is a process that aims to ensure equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of any dividing factors. It encompasses making all people in a society feel valued in civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes (What is Social Inclusion, 2024). On the other hand, I consider ‘social inclusivity’ as a term that refers to the ongoing practice and effort towards inclusion, rather than an official policy.

⁴ In this study, Kaya's capacity for social inclusivity is approached primarily through the lens of ethnic, class, and cultural identities, in parallel with the conditions of the period. However, it should be noted that Kaya's statements about women and particularly LGBTQ+ individuals in various speeches are disturbing, and as the author, I do consider these attitudes as a factor that questions his social inclusivity. While it is an important topic, I will only emphasize this point here. In fact, during that period, the issues around gender and sexual orientation were not widely addressed within the leftist/dissident movement but began to be questioned parallel to the rise of the women's movement in the 1990s and continued to be questioned with the emergence of new forms of protest and especially the rise of queer studies in the 2000s. In summary, discussing these parameters solely through the lens of Kaya without expanding the study to include the entire dissenting field may not be sufficient. This is not the subject of this article, but it is a topic worth bringing to attention.

organizational struggles, a commitment that would later infuse his music with a powerful sense of social justice and political awareness. His musical career began in earnest in the mid-1980s, a time marked by the aftermath of the 1980 military coup. In this climate of political repression and cultural upheaval, Kaya's music emerged as a beacon of hope and resistance.

The unfruitful post-coup period, characterized by the suppression of art and especially oppositional music, paradoxically created an opportunity for Kaya. With limited resources but boundless courage and talent, he launched his first albums, quickly gaining a devoted following. Kaya's music stood out not only for its political content but also for its unique blend of folk, *arabesk*, and pop/rock elements, a musical mixture that would become his trademark.

The research process for this study has been multifaceted, combining historical analysis, biographical research, musical analysis, and sociopolitical contextualization⁵. Through extensive review of historical sources, audiovisual archives, and interviews with key figures, including Kaya's wife, Gülten Kaya, I have sought to create a comprehensive picture of Kaya's artistic journey and its significance in Turkey's cultural and political life.

Through this exploration, I hope to shed light not only on Kaya's singular contribution to Turkey's protest music scene but also on the broader dynamics of cultural production, political resistance, and social change in late 20th century Turkey.

Key Concepts

Cultural hybridity, third space and musical mixture

At the heart of the analysis of Ahmet Kaya's music lies the theory of cultural hybridity, as articulated by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. This concept provides a powerful framework for understanding Kaya's unique position in Turkey's protest music and his

⁵ The data for this study focuses on three main aspects: i) the socio-political context of the period (Alişan Akpınar, personal communication, December 15th 2012, May 18th 2018, June 3rd 2020; Aral, F. et al., 2008; Gürpınar, 2012; Küçük, 2007; Salâh, 1984; Şenliler, 2016; Tekin, 2012; Yaman, 2013 et al.), ii) Kaya's individual life (Kaya, 2005; Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018, May 16, 2018; Süreya, 1989; Dünder, 1997), iii) the mixed character of his music, including the lyrical themes and his vocal style (Osman İşmen, personal communication, March 17, 2014; Kara, 2019) and iv) the debates around his musical style and quality (Aköz, n.d.; "Arabesk mi Protest mi?", 1987; Buğdaycı, 1987; Kahyaoğlu, 2003; Kozanoğlu, 1990 et al.) including the studies and debates around *arabesk* music during the period (Eğribel, 1984; Ergönültaş, 1980; Güngör, 1990; Özbek, 1991; *Özgün Müzik Dosyası*, 1991; Stokes, 1998 et al.).

appeal to diverse audiences.

Bhabha defines hybridity as a process that "emerges from and engages with (...) hollows in the democratic regime. The agency of hybridity is profoundly shaped by these discriminatory, disempowering hollows" (Bhabha, 1994: 159). In the context of protest music, this concept allows us to examine how Kaya's music emerged from and engaged with marginalized spaces in society, challenging established norms and binaries.

Central to Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity is the concept of the 'third space.' Bhabha describes this space as "the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha, 1994: 38). This space is not simply a mixture or fusion of two distinct cultural elements, but rather a new area of negotiation, meaning, and representation. The third space is where fixed identities and binary oppositions are disrupted, allowing for the emergence of new cultural forms and identities that are neither one nor the other, but something altogether different and new.

In Kaya's case, his music embodies this third space in multiple ways: Born to a Kurdish father and a Turkish mother, his very identity straddles cultural boundaries. His musical style, blending traditional Turkish folk elements with Kurdish influences, Western rock, and *arabesk*, creates a sonic landscape that defies easy categorization. This hybrid form allows his music to speak to multiple audiences simultaneously, creating a space where diverse listeners can find points of connection and identification.

The third space in Kaya's music is not just a passive zone of cultural mixing but an active site of cultural production and political resistance. By combining elements from different musical traditions and addressing controversial political topics, Kaya's music creates a discursive space that challenges dominant narratives and power structures. His songs often address themes of cultural identity, political oppression, and social justice, articulating complex identities and political positions that don't fit neatly into existing categories.

For example, in his song *Başım Belada* (I'm in trouble) in the album *Başım Belada* (1991), Kaya creates a third space by integrating diverse cultural and musical elements. He combines the melancholic tone of Turkish *arabesk* with rock instrumentation and

politically charged lyrics about persecution and resistance. The song also incorporates elements of the *delikanlı* (tough guy) attitude, evident in lyrics like “*tabancamı unutmuşum helada*” (I forgot my gun in the toilet). This phrase, using slang associated with street culture, resonates with the 'tough' demeanor often adopted by politically revolutionary youth of the time.

By interweaving these varied elements, Kaya constructs a complex cultural intersection where the personal and political, the traditional and modern, and the street-wise and revolutionary coexist and interact. This multifaceted approach allows his music to appeal to a remarkably wide range of listeners; from rural Kurdish communities to urban Turkish youth, from leftist intellectuals to working-class migrants familiar with street culture, and from politically active students to those navigating the challenges of ethnic and nationalist discourses in Turkey.

Building on this concept of cultural hybridity and the third space, I propose the term 'musical mixture' to describe Kaya's unique style. This goes beyond simple fusion, instead highlighting the complex accumulation of diverse musical influences that characterize Kaya's work. This 'musical accumulation' approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis that considers Kaya's diverse influences, personal experiences, and the sociopolitical context of his music.

Musical mixture in Kaya's case includes not only the combination of different musical traditions but also the integration of various vocal techniques, lyrical themes, and performance styles. For instance, in a single song, Kaya might combine the modal structures of traditional Turkish music with the instrumentation of Western rock while employing vocal techniques reminiscent of both Kurdish folk singers and *arabesk* performers.

This approach to musical creation results in a richness and complexity that resist simplistic categorization. It enables Kaya to create music that is simultaneously familiar and innovative, traditional and modern. The concept of musical mixture helps explain how Kaya's music could function as a third space, appealing to and uniting diverse audiences while challenging established cultural and political norms.

Kaya's approach to musical mixture bears similarities in the work of protest musicians

around the world, each creating their own unique third spaces through music. For instance, Manu Chao weaves together rock, reggae, ska, and traditional Latin American sounds, addressing themes of political resistance and migration (Fernandes, 2011). Similarly, Fela Kuti pioneered Afrobeat, blending Yoruba rhythms with highlife, funk, and jazz to craft potent political commentaries (Veal, 2000). In the Middle East, the Palestinian group DAM fuses Arabic poetry and folk music with hip-hop, rapping in multiple languages to confront issues of occupation and cultural identity (McDonald, 2013). These artists, like Kaya, serve as cultural bridges, using their music to span diverse traditions and speak to varied audiences. They share a commitment to political engagement, often giving voice to marginalized communities while reaching broader listeners. Their work defies simple categorization, combining elements from various musical genres and linguistic traditions to create unique sounds that challenge established norms. In doing so, they exemplify how musical mixture can be a powerful tool for protest music, transcending cultural boundaries and carving out new spaces for expression and engagement. Through their art, these musicians demonstrate the potential of hybrid musical forms to not only reflect complex cultural identities but also to actively shape and challenge societal narratives (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000).

Social inclusivity

The concept of social inclusivity is another key element central to understanding Kaya's unique position in Turkey's protest music. In this context, social inclusivity refers to the ability of music to appeal to and represent diverse social groups, transcending traditional boundaries of class, ethnicity, and political affiliation.

Theoretically, this concept draws from various sociological and musicological perspectives. Hesmondhalgh's (2013) work on music and social identity highlights how music can create connections across social divides, fostering a sense of collective identity. Roy and Dowd's (2010) sociological analysis of music emphasizes its role in creating and maintaining social boundaries, as well as its potential to bridge these boundaries.

Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) argue for an understanding of music that recognizes its capacity to articulate multiple social identities simultaneously. This perspective aligns closely with Kaya's ability to speak to diverse audiences through his music. The concept also resonates with Eyerman and Jamison's (1998) theory of social movements and

cultural transformation, which posits that music can serve as a medium for articulating collective identities and fostering social change.

This concept is particularly relevant to Kaya's case because his music achieved a level of popularity and resonance across different segments of society that was unusual for protest music of his time. While much protest music appeals primarily to specific ideological groups or social classes, Kaya's music found listeners among urban intellectuals, rural peasants, Turkish nationalists, Kurdish activists, and many others.

The social inclusivity of Kaya's music can be attributed to several factors: His use of musical mixture allowed listeners from different backgrounds to find familiar elements in his music. His lyrics, while often politically charged, also dealt with universal themes of love, loss, and human struggle, making them relatable to a wide audience. His persona, as an artist of mixed Kurdish-Turkish heritage who sang primarily in Turkish but increasingly engaged with Kurdish themes, embodied the complex, often contradictory identities of many Turkish citizens.

By examining Kaya's music through the lens of social inclusivity, we can better understand how his work challenged and expanded the traditional boundaries of protest music in Turkey. It allows us to explore how music can serve as a medium for creating shared spaces of meaning and identification across social and cultural divides.

The integration of these concepts provides a powerful analytical tool. Bhabha's (1994) notion of the third space, as a site of cultural negotiation and production, aligns closely with the idea of social inclusivity in music. Kaya's musical mixture, by incorporating diverse musical traditions and cultural references, creates a third space that facilitates social inclusivity. This space allows for the articulation of hybrid identities and the negotiation of social and political differences, making Kaya's music a site of cultural production that challenges established categories and fosters new forms of social connection.

In essence, Kaya's musical mixture becomes the means through which he creates a third space, and this third space, in turn, enables the social inclusivity that characterizes his appeal. This theoretical framework allows us to understand Kaya's music not just as a reflection of existing social realities but as an active force in shaping new forms of social

and cultural identity in Turkey.

The Evolution of Protest Music in Turkey and Ahmet Kaya as a Deviant Example

The story of protest music in Turkey is a vibrant tapestry woven from threads of political struggle, cultural transformation, and artistic innovation. To understand Ahmet Kaya's position as a deviant example within this tradition, we must first trace the evolution of protest music in Turkey and the unique sociopolitical context from which Kaya emerged.

The foundations of modern Turkish protest music can be traced back to the mid-20th century, with the pioneering work of Ruhi Su (1912–1985). A classically trained opera singer who turned to folk music, Su played a crucial role in shaping the leftist musical tradition in Turkey. His approach to folk songs, incorporating Western classical techniques, was both innovative and controversial (Su, 2010 [1985]). Su's efforts can be understood as an 'invention of tradition,' a concept developed by Hobsbawm (2012). By reinterpreting traditional folk songs and especially *Alevi* religious music forms -*deyiş* and *nefes*- through a socialist lens, Su created a new musical language that spoke to the political and social issues of his time.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a further mobilization and transformation of the protest music tradition in Turkey. While *Alevi âşiks* (minstrels) continued to serve as an important channel for protest, this period was also marked by the emergence of Anadolu Rock, a genre that blended traditional folk music with Western rock influences. Artists like Cem Karaca, Selda Bağcan, and groups like Moğollar played a significant role in popularizing this new sound, which often carried political messages (Akkaya et al., 2008).

The military coup of 1980 marked a significant turning point in Turkey's political and cultural life. In the realm of music, this period, particularly the second half of the 1980s, saw both a reconnection with earlier protest traditions and a disconnection from some of its elements. The disconnection manifested in several ways, including a shift away from overt political messaging due to increased censorship and repression, the emergence of new musical styles that diverged from traditional folk-based protest music, and a generational gap between pre-coup and post-coup musicians, leading to different approaches to protest music.

Musically, this period also witnessed the introduction of instruments and vocal styles that

were not commonly used in previous eras. The 1980s saw the incorporation of *ince saz* (traditional Turkish music ensemble) instruments and more melodic singing styles into protest music. Furthermore, there was a shift in musical influences. While the rock music wave of the 1970s had been dominant, the 1980s brought in tones and sounds from Mediterranean music, influenced by the revolutionary movements in Latin America and the Mediterranean region. This new sound incorporated classical guitar, flute, and other instruments associated with these musical traditions, as well as a heightened sense of lyricism.

During this time, the concept of *özgün müzik* (literally; original music) also emerged, referring to a style of music that combined folk traditions with contemporary political themes (Kahyaoğlu, 2003). This period saw the rise of artists like Zülfü Livaneli and groups such as Yeni Türkü, Çağdaş Türkü, Ezginin Günlüğü et al. who blended traditional folk elements with more contemporary sounds as well as lyrics and [often] subtle political messaging. The harsh political repression following the coup led many musicians to adopt more nuanced forms of critique, often using metaphor and allegory to convey political messages (Değirmenci, 2006). At the same time, more overtly political groups like Grup Yorum began to emerge, representing a different strand of protest music that maintained a more direct approach to political themes despite the repressive environment. These diverse approaches to musical expression reflected the complex and often contradictory cultural landscape of post-coup Turkey, as artists sought various ways to navigate the new political realities while maintaining their artistic and political integrity.

It was into this complex and charged musical landscape that Ahmet Kaya emerged in the mid-1980s. From the outset, Kaya's approach to protest music set him apart as a deviant example. His deviation from the established norms of Turkish protest music can be observed in several key areas: Firstly, Kaya's musical style represented a radical departure from the dominant forms of protest music at the time. Kaya incorporated a wide range of influences in his music. His use of *arabesk* elements, which were often denigrated by leftist intellectuals, was particularly controversial (Kaya, 2005). This musical hybridity allowed Kaya to create a sound that was both familiar and innovative, appealing to listeners across different social and cultural divides.

Secondly, Kaya's vocal style set him apart from other protest singers of his time. His

distinctive style, which incorporated elements from different dialects and musical traditions, added a layer of authenticity and emotional depth to his performances. This vocal approach allowed Kaya to convey complex emotions and political messages in a way that resonated deeply with his audience.

Thirdly, while Kaya's lyrics often addressed political and social issues, they also dealt with personal themes of love, loss, and identity. Such a blend of the personal and the political in Kaya's songwriting allowed him to create music that was both politically engaged and emotionally relatable to a wide audience.

Fourthly, Kaya's cultural identity played a significant role in his deviance from the norms of Turkish protest music. As an artist of mixed Kurdish and Turkish heritage, Kaya's engagement with Kurdish themes and his eventual embrace of his Kurdish identity challenged the predominantly Turkish nationalist narrative in much of Turkish protest music. This aspect of Kaya's work became increasingly prominent in the 1990s, as the Kurdish conflict intensified and issues of cultural identity came to the forefront of Turkish political discourse.

Perhaps most significantly, Kaya's music achieved a level of popular appeal that was unusual for protest music of his time. Unlike many protest musicians who appealed primarily to leftist intellectuals and activists, Kaya's music resonated with a broad spectrum of society, from working-class urban migrants to middle-class intellectuals. This wide appeal can be attributed to the social inclusivity of Kaya's music, which allowed listeners from diverse backgrounds to find points of connection and identification in his songs.

Kaya's approach to protest music was particularly significant in the context of the 1990s, a period marked by the rise of identity politics and the intensification of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. His increasing engagement with Kurdish themes and his incorporation of diverse musical influences reflected the changing landscape of Turkey's politics and culture. At the same time, the controversies surrounding his work highlight the tensions and conflicts within society during this period.

The difficulty of categorizing Kaya's music within existing genres is perhaps best exemplified by the debate surrounding terms like *devrimci arabesk* (revolutionary

arabesk), coined to describe his unique style (Kozanoğlu, 1990). This terminological struggle reflects both the innovative nature of Kaya's approach and the challenges it posed to established categories of Turkish music.

In essence, Ahmet Kaya's approach to protest music represented a form of cultural hybridity that challenged established norms and expanded the boundaries of what protest music could be in Turkey's context. His ability to create music that was both politically engaged and socially inclusive set him apart as a unique and influential figure in the history of Turkey's protest music.

Musical Accumulation of Ahmet Kaya

The concept of 'musical accumulation' is proposed as a more appropriate analytical approach for understanding Ahmet Kaya's music and potentially other similar musicians instead of traditional notions of musical style. This approach is necessitated by several factors, such as the mixed character of Kaya's music, his diverse appeal, the inconsistent arrangements in his music, his lack of formal education and his cultural and personal context.

The term 'accumulation' is defined as what an individual or group keeps, practices, performs, and reproduces in relation to relevant cultures and traditions. It's not a passive collection but an active process of combining elements from various cultures and traditions, often reimagining or reinventing them. This process is closely tied to identification and a sense of belonging. Hence, musical accumulation as an analytical method allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Kaya's music, taking into account its mixed character, diverse influences, and the personal and cultural context of its creation.

By using 'accumulation' instead of 'style', this analysis aims to overcome the limitations of traditional musical analysis that often overlook or undervalue mixed-genre music; provide a framework for understanding how musicians like Kaya create a unique sound by drawing from diverse musical traditions; expand the definition of protest music, showing how it can incorporate various musical elements while maintaining its oppositional character; offer a more nuanced understanding of how musicians build their musical identity and create music that resonates across diverse audiences.

Musical sources and influences

Born and raised in Malatya, Kaya was steeped in the rich musical heritage of the Malatya and Harput-Elâzığ region, an area known for its cosmopolitan and hybrid musical cultures. The music of this region, known as *ince saz*, is distinguished by its unique modal structures and instrumentation. It differs from other folk traditions in its use of instruments like clarinet, oud, and violin alongside the more traditional *bağlama*.

This regional influence is clearly evident in Kaya's repertoire. For instance, the traditional song *Mamoş* from his early repertoire showcases the distinctive melodic structure and ornamentation typical of the Harput-Elazığ region. Similarly, *Telgrafçı Akif* (Akif, the telegrapher) from the album *Beni Bul* (1995) is a traditional song that Kaya arranged in the *ince saz* style, demonstrating his deep connection to this regional musical tradition.

Moreover, Kaya's music bears the clear imprint of Azerbaijani musical traditions. This influence is particularly noticeable in the melodic character and 6/8 rhythmic patterns. Even many of his march-like songs are in 6/8 rhythm. Kaya often included one or two traditional Azerbaijani folk songs as covers or his own compositions in this style in many of his albums.

However, Kaya's musical influences extend far beyond these regional traditions. His cultural background and family history exposed him to the Kurdish *dengbêj* tradition and the Alevi *âşık-ozan* tradition, both of which left their mark on his musical style. The storytelling aspect of the *dengbêj* tradition and the poetic lyricism of the *âşık-ozan* tradition can be heard in many of Kaya's compositions.

Furthermore, Kaya's music was not confined to traditional forms. He was also influenced by contemporary genres such as rock and pop, as well as various world music styles. This eclectic mix of influences allowed Kaya to create a unique sound that bridged traditional and modern musical forms.

Despite this diverse range of influences, Kaya's music maintains a strong connection to the maqamic character of his geographical region. Many of his compositions, while not strictly adhering to all the properties of specific maqams, nonetheless reflect the modal structures and melodic patterns characteristic of this musical tradition.

In essence, Ahmet Kaya's music represents a complex synthesis of diverse musical traditions, from the regional *ince saz* and Azerbaijani influences to Kurdish and Alevi traditions, and even contemporary rock and pop. This musical accumulation resulted in a distinctive sound that was both deeply rooted in tradition and innovatively modern, allowing Kaya to create music that resonated across a wide spectrum of listeners.

Song types and musical elements

It's important to note the deliberate use of terms like '*türkü*-like,' 'march-like,' and 'ballad-like' when describing Kaya's music. This terminology reflects the hybrid nature of his compositions, which often incorporate elements from traditional forms without strictly adhering to their conventions. The '-like' suffix acknowledges Kaya's process of musical accumulation, where he drew inspiration from various styles and adapted them to create his unique sound. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of Kaya's work, recognizing both his musical roots and his innovations while avoiding the limitations of rigid categorization.

Kaya's repertoire encompasses a wide range of song types, each reflecting different aspects of his musical accumulation. His compositions, other than free airs and instrumental pieces, typically follow the song structure in verse-chorus form, sometimes with added intros, solos, and outros.

Kaya's folk-like or *türkü*-like songs draw heavily on traditional melodic structures and rhythmic patterns; yet are infused with contemporary sensibilities in their arrangements and delivery. His march-like songs demonstrate his ability to incorporate martial rhythms into the context of protest music, creating stirring anthems of resistance. These compositions follow the rhythmic structure of marches, often in 4/4 or 6/8 time, but usually lack traditional march harmonies. Songs like *Katlime Ferman* (Death warrant) on the album *Yorgun Demokrat* (1987) and *Kadınlar* (Women) on the album *Acılara Tutunmak* (1985) exemplify this style, with their steady rhythms and rousing melodies underscoring themes of solidarity and resistance.

Kaya's ballad-like songs reveal a softer, more introspective side of his artistry, often dealing with themes of love, loss, and personal struggle. Songs such as *Acılara Tutunmak* (Holding onto pains) (*Acılara Tutunmak*, 1985) and *Büyüdün Bebeğim* (You've grown up,

my baby) (*An Gelir*, 1986) showcase this style, where Kaya's emotive vocals take center stage, supported by arrangements that emphasize the emotional weight of the lyrics. These ballad-like songs often embody the essence of lyricism, bringing contradictory emotions like pain and joy to life simultaneously.

Perhaps most intriguing are Kaya's mixed-style songs, which defy simple categorization. Songs like *Yorgun Demokrat* (Tired Democrat) (*Yorgun Demokrat*, 1987) embody the essence of Kaya's musical hybridity, blending elements from various musical traditions to create something entirely new and uniquely his own. *Yorgun Demokrat* features a long and episodic introductory section presenting various musical influences, combining the narrative style of traditional folk music with more contemporary rhythmic patterns and instrumentation. Another notable example is *Giderim* (I'll go) from his 1998 album *Dosta Düşmana Karşı*. This song showcases Kaya's ability to blend traditional melodic structures with more contemporary pop-rock elements. The result is a powerful piece that speaks to both Kaya's roots and his evolution as an artist.

It's important to note that the classification of Kaya's songs is not always straightforward due to their mixed character. Some songs are too mixed to fit into any single category, mainly due to the role of arrangers. This mixed nature of Kaya's music aligns with his own description of his work as "a music constantly in search," which is indicative of its hybrid character.

This diversity in song types and musical elements reflects Kaya's process of musical accumulation, drawing from various traditions and styles to create a unique sound that resonates across diverse audiences. It also demonstrates how Kaya's music expands the definition of protest music, incorporating various musical elements while maintaining its oppositional character.

Modal structures and rhythmic patterns

A key aspect of Kaya's musical innovation lies in his use of modal structures within a contemporary musical framework. His songs often feature maqamic sequences (*dizis*) rather than adhering strictly to complete *makam* structures. The most frequently occurring *dizis* in his music include *Buselik*, *Kürdî*, *Uşşak*, and *Hicaz*.

For example, *Ağlama Bebeğim* (Don't cry my baby) (*Ağlama Bebeğim*, 1985) uses the

*Buselik dizi*⁶, creating a melancholic atmosphere that complements the song's themes of hope and socialist future. The *Buselik dizi*, with its characteristic half-flat second degree, adds a distinctive flavor to the composition. In contrast, *Başım Belada* employs the *Buselik dizi* in a different context, its distinctive intervals enhancing the song's sense of struggle and defiance.

Kum Gibi (Like sand) (*Şarkılarım Dağlara*, 1994) features the *Hicaz dizi*, its characteristic augmented second interval contributing to the song's emotional intensity. This use of the *Hicaz dizi*⁷ is particularly effective in conveying the song's themes of shared poverty and solidarity. The song *Arka Mahalle* (Back streets) on the same album is composed in the *Kürdî dizi*⁸, its unique tonal structure supporting the narrative of urban marginalization.

Rhythmically, Kaya's songs incorporate a wide variety of patterns, ranging from traditional Turkish rhythms to more contemporary meters. *Ağlama Bebeğim* uses a 4/4 time signature with a *düyek usûl*, a traditional Turkish rhythm that adds a distinctively local flavor to the composition. *Katlime Ferman* employs a 12/8 rhythm, creating a flowing, almost march-like quality that underscores the song's themes of resistance and sacrifice.

In a more complex example, *Sorgucular* (The interrogators) on the album *Başkaldırıyorum* (1988) uses a 9/8 (3-2-4) rhythm, demonstrating Kaya's ability to incorporate traditional *aksak* (uneven) rhythms into his protest songs. This rhythmic complexity adds a layer of sophistication to the song's critique of interrogators and systemic oppression.

Instrumentation and arrangement

Ahmet Kaya's musical journey, as reflected in his instrumentation and arrangements, tells a story of evolution and experimentation. In his early period from 1985 to 1986, Kaya's sound was anchored in a blend of modern and traditional, with drum machines and synthesizers providing the foundation, while traditional instruments like *bağlama*, bouzouki, *mey*, and *zurna* took the lead. This period also saw the introduction of Western instruments such as flute, oboe, bass guitar, and guitar, creating a somehow fusion of

⁶ *Buselik dizi*: La, si, do, re, mi, fa, sol (or sol sharp), la. Used in natural minor, harmonic minor, *buselik* and *nihavend makams*.

⁷ *Hicaz dizi*: La, si flat, do sharp, re, mi, fa (or fa sharp), sol, la. Used in *hicaz makam*.

⁸ *Kürdî dizi*: La, si flat, do, re, mi, fa, sol, la. Used in *Kürdî makam*.

sounds.

The role of arrangers was crucial in shaping Kaya's sound throughout his career. In his early albums, Sezer Bağcan was instrumental in creating the initial fusion of traditional and modern elements. However, it was Kaya's long-term collaboration with Osman İşmen, beginning with the album *An Gelir* (1986), that truly defined his musical style. İşmen's arrangements often featured introductory passages that were sometimes disconnected from the main body of the song, creating a distinctive and recognizable style.

As Kaya's popularity grew between 1987 and 1991, so did the complexity of his instrumentation. Working with professional studio musicians and İşmen's arrangements, Kaya's music incorporated more pop/rock elements while maintaining its traditional roots. This period was marked by experimentation, sometimes leading to stylistic inconsistencies, and the introduction of *arabesk* and *alaturka* elements in some arrangements.

The period from 1992 to 1998 saw Kaya pushing his musical boundaries even further. The arrangements, still primarily handled by İşmen, became more experimental [though not always with success], incorporating influences from rock, Latin pop, and even country music. At the same time, there was a renewed focus on local forms and folk traditions, with increased integration of Alevi and Sufi musical elements.

Throughout his career, Kaya's arrangements typically included introductory sections, interludes, and the use of various lead instruments to carry melodies between vocal sections, creating a rich and layered musical landscape. The evolution of his sound, guided by his arrangers, reflects both his personal growth as an artist and the changing musical landscape of Turkey during his career.

Vocal style

Ahmet Kaya's vocal style combines technical skill, cultural influences, and expressive techniques, creating his distinctive sound in protest music. His bass-baritone voice showcases a remarkable range, transitioning effortlessly between soft, resonant lows and powerful, emotive highs.

Kaya's articulation is clear and precise, employing natural voice resonators and a mix of

chest and nasal resonance. His vocal technique includes the use of falsetto for emotional depth. His pronunciation and articulation are deeply influenced by his regional and cultural background, often using non-standard Turkish pronunciations and incorporating Kurdish phonetic elements.

His expressive techniques are particularly noteworthy. Kaya skillfully manipulates rhythm and emphasis of syllables for prosodic effect. In chorus sections, he employs vocalizations, hiccups, and breath sounds to convey intense emotions, reminiscent of traditional laments.

Kaya's vocal style blends elements of traditional Turkish folk singing with influences from Arabic music and *arabesk* style. This unique combination, coupled with his technical prowess and emotive delivery, allows him to create performances that resonate deeply with listeners.

Across his repertoire, Kaya demonstrates versatility. In the song *Şafak Türküsü* (The ballad of dawn) on the album *Şafak Türküsü* (1986), he uses a declamatory, almost speech-like delivery. *Acılara Tutunmak* showcases his use of melismatic passages for emotional effect. *Munzurlu* (He, from Munzur) on *Tedirgin* album (1993) features vocal ornamentation typical of traditional Kurdish music and represents almost lament-like quality, while *Giderim* on the album *Dosta Düşmana Karşı* (1998) demonstrates his ability to convey complex emotions through subtle changes in vocal timbre and phrasing.

Table1: Main aspects of Kaya’s vocal style

Aspect	Characteristics
Voice Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bass-baritone with soft lows and powerful highs
Vocal Technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled in octave transitions • Effortless switching between chest and head voice • Use of natural voice resonators in lower registers • Clear articulation without exaggerated mouth movements • Employs falsetto for hiccup-like effects • Utilizes a mix of chest voice and nasal resonance
Pronunciation Articulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes narrow pronunciation of certain vowels such as ‘a’ • Resonates and vibrates consonants especially during the consonants such as ‘m’ • Uses dialect influences in pronunciation • Employs non-standard Turkish pronunciations (e.g., ‘mavi’ with short ‘a’, ‘mawzer’ instead of ‘mavzer’) • Incorporates Kurdish phonetic elements (e.g., ‘w’ instead of ‘v’, ‘x’ instead of ‘k’)
Expressive Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulates rhythm and emphasis of syllables for prosodic effect • Uses vocalizations, hiccups, and breath sounds to convey emotions like grief and pain • Increases pitch in chorus sections to reflect emotional intensity
Cultural Influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocal style reflects his regional, familial, and cultural identity • Incorporates elements reminiscent of Arabic music and <i>arabesk</i> style • Uses vocal techniques similar to traditional laments

Main lyrical themes in Kaya’s songs

Ahmet Kaya's lyrical journey reflects a profound engagement with Turkish literature and the evolving socio-political landscape of his time. In his early career, Kaya drew inspiration from established leftist poets like Sabahattin Ali, Ahmed Arif, and Nazım Hikmet, setting their powerful words to music. This choice of poets reflected his initial political leanings and the charged atmosphere of post-coup Turkey.

A pivotal moment came in 1987 when Kaya began collaborating with his brother-in-law, Yusuf Hayaloğlu. This partnership marked a shift towards more contemporary themes, with Hayaloğlu's lyrics capturing the pulse of Turkey's social and political realities. Alongside this collaboration, Kaya continued to explore a diverse range of poetic voices, from Attila İlhan and Can Yücel to the young prison poet Nevzat Çelik, whose works featured prominently in Kaya's breakthrough album *Şafak Türküsü*.

Kaya's own lyrical voice emerged strongly throughout his career, addressing pressing social and political issues of his time. This blend of original compositions and carefully curated poems from various sources contributed to the broad appeal and depth of his music, allowing him to connect with diverse audiences while maintaining a distinct artistic vision.

An analysis of Ahmet Kaya's discography reveals a thematic evolution that mirrors both his personal journey and the changing socio-political landscape of Turkey. His lyrical themes can be categorized into four distinct periods, each reflecting the unique circumstances of its time and Kaya's evolving artistic and political consciousness:

The Breakthrough Period, spanning from 1985 to 1986, is characterized by themes deeply rooted in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup. Songs from this era reflect the experiences of political prisoners, the struggle against oppression, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. *Ağlama Bebeğim* speaks to the separation of families due to political imprisonment, its lyrics "Don't cry my baby, your [father] will come back" reflecting the pain of those left behind and the hope for reunion.

The Popularization Period, from 1987 to 1991, sees Kaya's lyrics begin to explore life after imprisonment, the disillusionment with post-coup society, and broader social critiques. *Yorgun Demokrat* captures this shift perfectly. The song expresses the weariness of leftist activists in the post-coup era, with lyrics like "I'm a tired democrat, my heart is full of sorrow" giving voice to the disillusionment of those who fought for democracy but found themselves marginalized.

The Kurdish Movement Impact Period, spanning from 1992 to 1998, marks a significant evolution in Kaya's lyrical themes. During this time, he begins to engage more explicitly with Kurdish issues and broader social themes. His lyrics become more politically direct,

addressing the Kurdish conflict, social inequality, and the plight of marginalized groups. *Şarkılarım Dağlara* (My songs are to the mountains) (1994) is a powerful statement of solidarity with the Kurdish people, the mountains serving as a symbol of both refuge and resistance.

The final period, the Exile Period from 1999 to 2000, reflects Kaya's experience of exile, his longing for his homeland, and his reflections on the events that led to his departure from Turkey. The posthumously released album *Hoşçakalın Gözüm* (Farewell my dear) (2001) encapsulates the themes of this period. The title track is a poignant farewell to Turkey, with lyrics expressing both love for the homeland and bitter disappointment at being forced into exile.

Throughout these periods, certain themes persist in Kaya's work: Love and relationships are often used as metaphors for broader societal issues or political commitments. The struggle for justice and equality remains a constant thread, evolving from personal experiences of imprisonment to broader social critique. The theme of alienation and exile, initially internal (feeling alienated in one's own society), later becomes literal in his final years.

Kara (2019) provides a comprehensive analysis of these thematic elements in her work *Bir Politik Anlatı Olarak Ahmet Kaya Şarkıları/Açık Yaranın Sesi* (Ahmet Kaya's songs as a political narrative/The voice of open wound) (2019), where she examines how Kaya's personal experiences are reflected in his lyrics and how his songs function as voices of resistance and 'the voice of unhealed wounds' (*kapanmayan yaraların sesi*). This interpretation aligns with the way Kaya's lyrical themes evolved to encompass both personal and collective experiences of struggle, resistance, and alienation.

This complex weave of influences and evolving themes (see table 2) not only charts Kaya's artistic growth but also provides a powerful lens through which to view Turkey's intricate social and political transformations in the late 20th century.

Table 2: Lyrical themes

Periods		Album	Year	Main Themes
1. Breakthrough (1985-1986): September 12 Coup, jail life and inmates	1	<i>Ağlama Bebeğim</i> (Don't Cry My Baby)	1985	<input type="checkbox"/> Unending jail life <input type="checkbox"/> Hope (Future is socialist) <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness (We were defeated in the struggle) <input type="checkbox"/> Patriotism (nationalism) <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-, Unfaithful Lover
	2	<i>Acılara Tutunmak</i> (Holding On Pains)	1985	<input type="checkbox"/> Unending jail life <input type="checkbox"/> Hope (Future is socialist) <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness (We were defeated in the struggle) <input type="checkbox"/> Patriotism (nationalism) <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-Lover
	3	<i>Şafak Türküsü</i> (Ballad of Dawn)	1986	<input type="checkbox"/> Unending jail life <input type="checkbox"/> Hope (Future is socialist) <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness (We were defeated in the struggle) <input type="checkbox"/> Patriotism (nationalism) <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-Lover
	4	<i>An Gelir</i> (The Moment Comes)	1986	<input type="checkbox"/> Unending jail life <input type="checkbox"/> Hope (Future is socialist) <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness (We were defeated in the struggle) <input type="checkbox"/> Patriotism (nationalism) <input type="checkbox"/> Longing (for children, lover)
2. Popularization (1987-1991): Life after prison, disappearing youth, inmates being tested outside, tired democrats and portraits.	5	<i>Yorgun Demokrat</i> (Tired Democrat)	1987	<input type="checkbox"/> Defeat <input type="checkbox"/> Life after coup <input type="checkbox"/> Love, separation, longing
	6	<i>Başkaldırıyorum</i> (I Revolt)	1988	<input type="checkbox"/> Unfaithfulness <input type="checkbox"/> Contradiction between a prisoner's expectations and outside Life <input type="checkbox"/> Manifestos
	7	<i>İyimser Bir Gül</i> (An Optimistic Rose)	1989	<input type="checkbox"/> Longing for ex-lover <input type="checkbox"/> Contradiction between a prisoner's expectations and outside Life <input type="checkbox"/> Civil war, Struggle, Fear <input type="checkbox"/> Love, Separation
	8	<i>Sevgi Duvarı</i> (The Wall of Love)	1990	<input type="checkbox"/> Love <input type="checkbox"/> Longing <input type="checkbox"/> Separation <input type="checkbox"/> Struggle, Despair
	9	<i>Başım Belada</i>	1991	<input type="checkbox"/> Life conditions after the coup

		(I'm in Trouble)		<input type="checkbox"/> Criticism for 'pseudo-intellecuals' <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting a revolutionary at childhood
3. Further popularization and impact of Kurdish movement (1992-1998): Struggle, guerilla, revolutionaries and disadvantaged sections of the society such as workers, mothers, et al.	10	<i>Dokunma Yanarsın</i> (Don't Touch or You'll Burn)	1992	<input type="checkbox"/> Struggle (guerilla, eşkıya, child worker, agricultural worker) <input type="checkbox"/> Hope <input type="checkbox"/> Unrecognized, betrayed revolutionary
	11	<i>Tedirgin</i> (Uneasy)	1993	<input type="checkbox"/> Struggle (guerilla, eşkıya) <input type="checkbox"/> Unfaithfulness <input type="checkbox"/> Destiny of slumps
	12	<i>Şarkılarım Dağlara</i> (My Songs are for the Mountains)	1994	<input type="checkbox"/> We will defeat imperialism despite its cost. <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-Lover
	13	<i>Yıldızlar ve Yakamoz</i> (Stars and Sea Sparkles)	1995	<input type="checkbox"/> Struggle <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom
	14	<i>Beni Bul</i> (Find Me)	1995	<input type="checkbox"/> Struggle <input type="checkbox"/> Death <input type="checkbox"/> Unfaithfulness and unrecognition
	15	<i>Dosta Düşmana Karşı</i> (Against Friends and Foe)	1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Unfortunate destiny of revolutionary <input type="checkbox"/> Unfaithfulness of people <input type="checkbox"/> Struggle (eşkıya, guerilla)
4. Exile (1999- 2000)	16	<i>Hoşçakalın Gözüm</i> (Farewell My Dear)	2001	<input type="checkbox"/> Exile <input type="checkbox"/> Reproaching unfaithfulness

Kaya's working processes and collaborations

Ahmet Kaya's musical journey was shaped by various influences, with his wife Gülten Kaya playing a pivotal role in his artistic development and creative process. She introduced him to influential poets and musicians. She was an active participant in Kaya's creative process, often engaging in deep discussions that sparked his creativity. As she recalled, "We could talk until morning over the phrase 'a blind boatman saw the murder' in the poem *Cinayet Saati* (The time of murder) on the album *Şarkılarım Dağlara* (1994). What does 'I saw, my ears saw' mean? What did it mean for someone's ears to see? We could talk for hours on this sentence" (Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Kaya's composition process was intuitive and emotion-driven. Gülten explained, "Sometimes he wouldn't pick up an instrument at home, and sometimes he would play

like crazy." His approach to songwriting was primarily lyrics-oriented. As Gülten described, "He would work by starting from an image, the story and by transforming these into an emotion. 'An emotion that would catch him!' That was his starting point and what mobilized him mostly" (Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Kaya's approach to songwriting was primarily lyrics-oriented. Gülten explained, "He would work by starting from an image, the story and by transforming these into an emotion. 'An emotion that would catch him!' That was his starting point and what mobilized him mostly" (Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018). This process is exemplified in songs like *Korkarım* (I'm afraid) (*Dosta Düşmana Karşı*, 1998), where the melody came first, followed by the lyrics - a reversal of his usual method.

Beyond his partnership with Gülten, Kaya's collaboration with arranger Osman İşmen was particularly significant. Their working process involved Kaya recording his compositions on tape and sending them to İşmen, who would then work independently on the arrangements. İşmen himself acknowledged the unique quality of Kaya's compositions, stating, "What moves an arranger is the material, the composition" (Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Another key collaborator was lyricist Yusuf Hayaloğlu, Gülten Kaya's brother. Their collaboration was characterized by a shared cultural background that allowed for a deep understanding of common themes and emotions. Hayaloğlu described their approach: "We didn't have a problem to belong to an intellectual world and to isolate ourselves from the street. On the other hand, we did not have a problem to make ourselves accepted in those worlds. So we were very free" (as cited by Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

The songwriting process with Hayaloğlu often involved separate work followed by collaborative discussions. Their songs frequently drew inspiration from current events, personal experiences, and the lives of those around them. For instance, in crafting the lyrics for *Giderim*, Hayaloğlu incorporated elements specific to Kaya's life, such as his love for dogs and birds, to capture the essence of Kaya's emotions (Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Gülten Kaya attributed the success of these collaborations to their shared cultural

background: "They were the children of the common culture who used to cry and laugh at the same things and affected by the same" (Gülten Kaya, personal communication, April 12, 2018). This common ground allowed Kaya and his collaborators to create music that resonated deeply with a wide audience while maintaining its authenticity and emotional depth.

In essence, Kaya's working processes and collaborations with Gülten Kaya at the heart of his creative journey were characterized by a deep emotional connection to his material, a spontaneous and intuitive approach to composition, and partnerships that were rooted in shared cultural experiences and understanding. These elements combined to create the unique and powerful musical legacy that Ahmet Kaya left behind.

Relationship with the Music Industry

Ahmet Kaya's relationship with the Turkish music industry was complex and often fraught with tension, reflecting the broader political and cultural conflicts of his time. As an artist who straddled the line between commercial success and political activism, Kaya navigated a difficult path within Turkey's music scene.

Kaya's emergence in the mid-1980s coincided with a period of significant change in the music industry. The post-coup era saw a rapid commercialization of popular music, with major labels increasingly focused on marketable, apolitical content. In this context, Kaya's politically charged music presented both opportunities and challenges for industry players.

Initially, Kaya's unique blend of traditional and contemporary styles, coupled with his powerful vocals and emotive performances, attracted the attention of several record labels. His early albums, such as *Ağlama Bebeğim* (1985) and *Acılara Tutunmak* (1985), were released through smaller, independent labels that were willing to take a chance on his unconventional style.

As Kaya's popularity grew, larger labels began to show interest. However, this increased visibility also brought greater scrutiny of his political content. Some labels pushed for Kaya to tone down his political messages, leading to conflicts over artistic integrity. Despite these pressures, Kaya largely managed to maintain control over his musical output, often at the cost of foregoing more lucrative contracts (Gülten Kaya, personal

communication, May 16, 2018).

The 1990s saw Kaya achieve significant commercial success, with albums like *Şarkılarım Dağlara* (1994) selling hundreds of thousands of copies. However, this success was accompanied by increasing controversy. Many of his albums faced bans or restrictions, limiting their distribution and airplay. The music industry's response to these challenges was mixed, with some labels standing by Kaya while others distanced themselves from the controversy (Kozanoğlu, 1990).

Kaya's relationship with the industry was further complicated by his increasing engagement with Kurdish themes in his music. This not only made him a target for political criticism but also posed challenges for marketing and distribution within Turkey. Some industry figures saw Kaya's Kurdish-themed work as a liability, while others recognized its potential to tap into an underserved market (Gürpınar, 2012).

The culmination of Kaya's troubled relationship with the mainstream Turkish music industry came with the controversy surrounding his announcement to record a Kurdish song in 1999. The backlash from this announcement not only led to his exile but also resulted in many industry figures and institutions distancing themselves from him.

Paradoxically, Kaya's contentious relationship with the music industry may have contributed to his enduring popularity and influence. His perceived authenticity and willingness to sacrifice commercial success for his principles enhanced his credibility among fans and fellow artists alike.

In the years following his death, the music industry's approach to Kaya's work has shifted. His music has been reissued and celebrated, with many artists across different genres citing him as an influence. This posthumous recognition highlights the complex legacy of Kaya's interactions with the music industry, demonstrating how an artist's impact can transcend the commercial constraints of their time.

Social Inclusivity in Ahmet Kaya's Music

The concept of social inclusivity is central to understanding Ahmet Kaya's unique position in Turkey's protest music. Unlike many of his contemporaries, whose music appealed primarily to specific ideological groups, Kaya's work resonated with a remarkably diverse

audience. This broad appeal can be attributed to several key factors that contributed to the social inclusivity of his music.

Firstly, Kaya's musical hybridity played a crucial role in his ability to connect with diverse listeners. By incorporating elements from various musical traditions - including traditional/regional folk, Kurdish music, *arabesk*, and Western rock - Kaya created a sound that was simultaneously familiar and innovative. This musical fusion allowed listeners from different cultural backgrounds to find points of connection in his music.

Secondly, Kaya's lyrical themes, while often politically charged, also touched on universal human experiences. His songs dealt with love, loss, exile, and the search for identity - themes that resonated across social and political divides. Even when addressing specific political issues, Kaya often framed them in deeply personal terms, allowing listeners to connect emotionally with the material regardless of their political orientation.

Thirdly, Kaya's vocal style and delivery contributed significantly to the inclusivity of his music. His distinctive voice, with its ability to convey deep emotion, created a sense of authenticity and intimacy that appealed to a wide range of listeners. Moreover, his use of different linguistic elements - including regional Turkish dialects and, later in his career, Kurdish - allowed him to connect with diverse linguistic communities within Turkey.

Fourthly, Kaya's personal background and public persona played a role in his broad appeal. As an artist of mixed Kurdish and Turkish heritage, Kaya embodied the complex, often conflicted identities of many Turkish citizens. His journey from a working-class background to national fame resonated with many listeners who saw in him a reflection of their own aspirations and struggles.

The social inclusivity of Kaya's music is perhaps most evident in the diversity of his audience. His listeners included urban intellectuals and rural workers, Turkish nationalists and Kurdish activists, leftist revolutionaries and apolitical music lovers. This broad appeal was not without controversy; Kaya often faced criticism from different quarters for not adhering strictly enough to particular ideological or aesthetic standards. However, it was precisely this ability to transcend traditional boundaries that made his music so powerful and enduring.

Kaya's approach to social inclusivity evolved over the course of his career, reflecting

changes in both his personal journey and the broader sociopolitical context of Turkey. In his early work, this inclusivity was often implicit, emerging from his unique musical style and his ability to address universal themes through personal narratives. As his career progressed, particularly in the 1990s, Kaya became more explicit in his engagement with issues of cultural diversity and social justice. His increasing incorporation of Kurdish themes and his outspoken advocacy for Kurdish rights, while controversial, expanded the scope of his inclusivity to embrace a more overt politics of identity.

The social inclusivity of Kaya's music had significant implications beyond the realm of art. By creating a musical space where diverse identities and experiences could coexist, Kaya's work challenged dominant narratives about Turkish national identity and social cohesion. His music provided a platform for marginalized voices and experiences, particularly those of the Kurdish community, to enter mainstream discourse. At the same time, by framing these issues in terms of shared human experiences, Kaya's work had the potential to foster empathy and understanding across social and cultural divides.

However, it's important to note that the inclusivity of Kaya's music was not without limits or contradictions. His increasing focus on Kurdish issues in the latter part of his career, while expanding his appeal among Kurdish listeners, also led to backlash from some Turkish nationalist quarters. The controversy surrounding his announcement of plans to record a Kurdish song, which ultimately led to his exile, highlights the challenges and risks associated with attempting to bridge deep-seated social and political divides through art.

Despite these challenges, the social inclusivity of Ahmet Kaya's music remains one of his most significant legacies. By creating art that spoke to diverse audiences while addressing pressing social and political issues, Kaya expanded the boundaries of what protest music could be and do in the Turkish context. His work demonstrates the potential of music to serve not only as a vehicle for political expression but also as a means of fostering dialogue and understanding in divided societies.

Conclusion

Ahmet Kaya's legacy as a protest musician in Turkey is both profound and complex. Through his innovative approach to music-making and his commitment to addressing social and political issues, Kaya challenged and expanded the boundaries of protest music

in Turkey. His work stands as a testament to the power of art to engage with complex realities while maintaining a deep emotional connection with diverse audiences.

The concepts of cultural hybridity, musical mixture, and social inclusivity have been central to our analysis of Kaya's work. These frameworks have allowed us to understand how Kaya was able to create music that was simultaneously rooted in tradition and innovative, politically engaged and emotionally resonant, specific to Turkey's context and universally appealing.

Kaya's musical journey, from his early days as a voice of the post-coup resistance to his later role as a symbol of Kurdish cultural expression, mirrors the complex social and political transformations of late 20th century Turkey. His evolving artistic choices - in terms of musical style, lyrical content, and public persona - reflect his ongoing engagement with the changing realities of society.

The social inclusivity of Kaya's music offers important insights into the potential role of art in divided societies. By creating a musical space where diverse identities and experiences could coexist, Kaya's work challenged dominant narratives and opened up new possibilities for cross-cultural understanding. At the same time, the controversies surrounding Kaya's work, particularly in the later stages of his career, highlight the challenges inherent in attempting to bridge deep social and political divides through art. The backlash against his engagement with Kurdish themes demonstrates the limits of inclusivity in a highly polarized society and the risks faced by artists who challenge established norms.

Kaya's approach to protest music, characterized by its hybridity and inclusivity, offers valuable lessons for understanding the role of art in social and political movements. His work demonstrates that effective protest music need not be limited to narrow ideological expressions or specific musical traditions. Instead, by embracing diversity and complexity, both in musical form and lyrical content, protest music can reach broader audiences and engage with social issues in more nuanced ways.

The concept of 'musical accumulation' introduced in this study provides a useful framework for analyzing the work of musicians like Kaya who draw from diverse cultural and musical traditions. This approach allows us to move beyond simplistic notions of

fusion or influence, recognizing instead the complex, ongoing process of cultural synthesis that characterizes much innovative music-making.

Furthermore, Kaya's career offers insights into the evolving relationship between music, identity, and politics in multicultural societies. His journey from a broadly leftist protest singer to a symbol of Kurdish cultural expression reflects the increasing importance of identity politics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. At the same time, the persistent universality of his appeal suggests that music can transcend identity categories, creating spaces for shared experience and mutual understanding.

The study of Ahmet Kaya's music also highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of protest music itself. Rather than seeing protest music as a fixed category with clearly defined characteristics, Kaya's work encourages us to view it as a dynamic, evolving form that responds to changing social and political contexts. This perspective opens up new avenues for research into the relationship between music and social movements, particularly in contexts of political repression and cultural conflict.

Looking forward, several areas emerge as promising directions for future research: First, there is a need for more comparative studies that place Kaya's work in the context of protest music traditions from other parts of the world. Such research could shed light on the ways in which artists in different contexts navigate the challenges of creating politically engaged art in repressive or divided societies.

Second, further investigation into the reception and impact of Kaya's music among different audience groups could provide valuable insights into the real-world effects of socially inclusive protest music. This could include studies of how Kaya's music has been interpreted and used by various social and political movements in Turkey and beyond.

Finally, the concept of social inclusivity in music, as exemplified by Kaya's work, merits further theoretical development: How can we understand the relationship between musical form, lyrical content, and social inclusivity? What are the limits and possibilities of inclusive protest music in promoting social change?

In conclusion, Ahmet Kaya's contribution to protest music goes far beyond his role as a singer-songwriter. His work represents a significant intervention in the cultural and political landscape of Turkey, challenging established norms and opening up new

possibilities for musical expression and social engagement. By embracing hybridity and inclusivity, Kaya's music offers a model for how art can address social and political issues while fostering dialogue and understanding across diverse communities.

As Turkey and other societies continue to grapple with issues of cultural diversity, political representation, and social justice, the lessons from Kaya's life and work remain relevant. His legacy invites us to consider how music and other forms of cultural expression can contribute to building more inclusive and equitable societies, even in the face of significant political and social challenges.

Ultimately, Ahmet Kaya's music stands as a powerful reminder of the potential of art to not only reflect social realities but also to imagine and help create new ones. In a world increasingly divided by political, cultural, and economic barriers, Kaya's vision of music that speaks across these divides offers both inspiration and a practical model for artists and activists seeking to use culture as a tool for social change.

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