The Construction Identity of "Jogja Noise Bombing" Music Community in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Identity Construction; Jogja Noise Bombing; Noise Music; Music Community

Music that is often listened to by many people generally has tonal harmony and is comfortable to listen to. However, there are some types of music that do not prioritize tonal harmony, one of which *is noise music*. Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB) is one of the *noise music* communities that developed in Yogyakarta. This community is a forum for noise music players in this city and is known for its experimental musical approach, using loud noises, ambient sounds, drones, circuit bending, and homemade synthesizers. Apart from being a space for self-actualization, JNB also plays a role in shaping and projecting a unique collective identity for its members. This research aims to understand how the identity construction of Jogja Noise Bombing community is formed through *noise music* and social dynamics within the community. Using a qualitative method with a constructivist paradigm and a phenomenological approach, this research involves observation, in-depth interviews with community members, as well as social media analysis and performance documentation. The results show that JNB's identity is formed through the merging of local elements of Yogyakarta with the global spirit of the noise movement. This research is expected to enrich the study of experimental music in Indonesia and open wider discussions about the relationship between music, identity and alternative culture.

1. Introduction

Music that many people enjoy typically features harmonious notes and provides a comforting listening experience. There are also types of music that do not focus on tonal harmony, such as noise music. Music that lacks rhythm, tempo, or melody generates distinct and chaotic sounds. This is the foundation of the term "noise" itself. The Oxford Dictionary defines noise as any audible sound, especially one that is loud, harsh, or unpleasant (Dictionary, n.d.). Noise music is an experimental genre that uses electronic instruments to create distorted and irregular sounds, which are often seen as futuristic (Utomo, 2020).

In Indonesia, noise music has emerged from the underground scene, existing alongside genres like Punk, Hardcore, Metal, Grunge, and Grindcore. These genres developed as unique forms of cultural expression and frequently highlight challenges to the values and norms of the mainstream commercial music industry. Numerous noise musicians recognize Sonic Youth and the Japanoise scene as significant early influences (Fermont & Faille Della, 2016). Novak (2013). states that noise music is strongly connected to underground music subcultures that challenge mainstream commercial standards.

Underground music itself is a form of cultural resistance that grows from dissatisfaction with mass-produced, commercialized music. The underground movement gives rise to creative and alternative approaches to performance and distribution, often taking place in informal or illegal settings (Surya Permana, 2022), According to Luigi Russolo's early notion of noise in his 1913 manifesto The Art of Noise, the industrial revolution had enabled modern man to appreciate the noise-generating sounds emanating from industrial machinery. Russolo considered these sounds to be a futuristic form of musical art (Russolo & Tencer, 2004)

Hegarty (2007), explains that noise challenges the boundaries of music itself. For him, noise is a judgment of what is acceptable as sound. As a genre, it disrupts traditional forms of listening and is often used as a medium of social and political critique. This makes noise music not only a form of artistic exploration but also a tool of cultural resistance.

In the Indonesian context, Utomo (2020), argues that underground music acts as a form of protest, especially during the New Order regime, where music became a medium to criticize socio-political conditions. Musicians expressed their resistance through performance styles, dress codes, and independent production methods. In Yogyakarta, a city known for its dynamic art scene, noise music has been part of the cultural landscape since the mid-1990s. The city nurtures a strong experimental music scene supported by communities like Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB), which originated in 2009/2010 (Menus & Stellfox, 2019).

Jogja Noise Bombing is an experimental music community that creates and promotes noise-based performances in public and alternative spaces. Inspired by graffiti bombing, JNB uses public areas for impromptu performances. Early on, the group faced challenges—many venues rejected them due to fears of damage or disturbance. However, JNB persisted, using mobile sound equipment powered through publicly available outlets to stage what they call "noise bombings." These actions not only express personal or collective frustration but also represent a form of reclaiming urban space through sound.

As described by Menus & Stellfox (2019), noise bombing reflects the chaotic, raw, and dynamic nature of Yogyakarta itself. Over time, the group expanded its reach, organizing both underground and legal events, and even hosting international noise festivals. Despite public stigma, JNB continues to explore new ways to make noise music more accessible while maintaining its subversive and experimental ethos.

According to Bennett (2004), music plays a central role in the formation of cultural identity, particularly among youth and marginalized communities. His study emphasizes that musical practices not only reflect identity but also actively shape it through everyday experiences, localized scenes, and subcultural participation. This perspective is relevant to understanding how noise music, especially within the Jogja Noise Bombing community, becomes a medium for identity negotiation in the face of dominant cultural narratives.

Studies such as Guerra, Turner, & Feixa (2021). emphasize that music is closely tied to territorial and communal identities. It carries collective memory, cultural values, and social expressions. Similarly, Wallach (2008) shows that Indonesian popular music genres contribute to constructing national identity and are heavily shaped by global cultural flows. These studies suggest that music serves as a powerful tool for negotiating modernity and local identity.

Noise music, despite its marginal position, embodies a form of resistance and self-definition. According to Atton in Woods (2022), the construction of communal identity in noise music depends on its continuous challenge to dominant musical and cultural codes. Weeks, as cited in Lubis (2019), emphasizes that identity involves both personal and social dimensions—it is constructed through interaction, experience, and self-reflection.

In this context, Jogja Noise Bombing represents a unique example of how a community constructs its identity through noise music. The members are united by shared values of experimentation, resistance, and solidarity. They exist on the margins of the mainstream yet use this position to redefine cultural norms. Identity, as Baumeister & Muraven (1996), state, is a composite structure shaped by interpersonal relationships, social roles, and a vision of one's potential. It is not static but is constantly evolving.

The identity construction within JNB is influenced by the social and cultural dynamics of Yogyakarta. The group's interaction with space, sound, and society contributes to the formation of a unique collective identity. As Karwowski & Kaufman (2017), argue, identity development emerges from differences and similarities shaped by interaction with others. This process makes identity not only visible but also socially recognized.

Despite limited academic attention to noise music in Indonesia, particularly in relation to identity construction, JNB offers a rich case study. Most existing literature focuses on musicological or historical aspects, overlooking how noise communities negotiate meaning and existence. Therefore, this research aims to explore how the Jogja Noise Bombing community constructs identity through collective interaction, noise performances, and alternative cultural expressions.

This study is guided by the central question of how the Jogja Noise Bombing community constructs its community identity through noise music amidst societal stigma and expresses their identity through alternative media while resisting the dominating influence of popular culture. In doing so, this research aims to discover how social interactions within the community, combined with the practice of noise performance, serve as a means of alternative cultural expression that continually shapes and reinforces their collective identity.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a field study method to understand the construction of collective identity in the Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB) community through the practice of noise music as an alternative cultural expression. This approach allows the exploration of views, attitudes, behaviors, and social norms through direct interaction with participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research was conducted in Yogyakarta, the center of JNB activities, from October 2024 to January 2025. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with two active members of the community, Martinus Indra Hermawan and Hilman Fathoni, and non-participatory observation. Photo, video and archival documentation supported the field data, while secondary data came from relevant articles, journals and publications (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016)

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model that includes data reduction, narrative presentation, and conclusion drawing, validated through cross-verification between sources (Miles, M., & Huberman, 1994). Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation by comparing interviews, observations, and documentation (Steven J. Taylor., Robert Bogdan., 2016).

3. Result and Discussion
Noise Practice as an Expression of Identity
This research aims to see how the Jogja Noise Bombing community constructs their identity through collective interactions, noise performances, and alternative cultural expressions. In this context, identity is understood not as a static entity, but as a process that continues to develop through social interaction, performativity, and cultural practices carried out collectively.

Figure 1. Screenshot from youtube about JNB performed in public area

Based on interviews with the two main interviewees-Martinus Indra Hermawan as founder and Hilman Fathoni as a member of JNB-the practice of noise in the Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB) community is not just a form of musicality, but a form of identity expression that is comprehensive and continues to develop. The noise music they play does not use conventional structures such as harmony, rhythm, or melody. Instead, their sound composition consists of experimental layers that are raw, spontaneous, loud, and even considered "disturbing" by some people. This is in line with the statement delivered by Martinus, "Finally we thought of Noise Bombing, so Noise bombing is the activity of playing noise in public areas using the electricity that is there. The feeling there was that at first, I just wanted to have fun playing noise music. It's just fun to feel free."

Meanwhile, Hilman Fathoni added that the main attraction of noise lies in its simplicity and freedom, Hilman said, "Because the music is abstract, it makes me curious. Feeling the simplicity and freedom because it is known to be abstract, I feel there are many opportunities to try something, the experimentation is small and it's nice to be able to combine sounds. It can also be collaborated."

This statement emphasizes that noise is a means of self-expression that is not limited by standard musical structures. This is in line with Stuart Hall's theory of representation theory, which states that identity is formed through the articulation of dominant social meanings (Campesato, 2019). Noise, as an aesthetic element, aligns with this theory by breaking & redefining the conventional boundaries of music and sound. Noise offers a medium for creative expression, critical opposition, and cultural change, making it an influential instrument for expressing identity in modern society.

JNB's performance practice, known as noise bombing - spontaneous performances in public spaces that are often performed without permission - is a form of cultural intervention into urban spaces. They use public electrical outlets to create an alternative stage. In an interview, Martinus said, "initially why don't we make our own events in public spaces. Finally, we looked for electrical outlets, then we played there and brought amps."

Hilman added that moving from one location to another is not an obstacle, but a form of adaptation to the social context. The community does not define its identity by its physical location, but by its togetherness in creating shared experiences. As Hilman said, "We started hanging out and meeting a lot. Then we got together with Indra Menus and finally came up with the idea of noise bombing. Then we have a facebook group chat, let's try playing on the street, it seems exciting. So we brought our amps, we didn't use research first, then we went to tby, to ugm, to mr.burger and brought simple tools, exciting exclamations, there was plug and play electricity."

From this practice, researchers have found that performance is not just about performing, but also about reclaiming spaces that are often exclusive to popular cultural expressions. Space can also be positioned as a contested arena for identity creation and negotiation, influenced by the interplay of temporality, spatial dynamics, social connections, and societal processes in the formation and negotiation of racialized identities (Reddy & Gleibs, 2025).

Community Social Structure and Interaction Dynamics

The JNB community has a fluid and horizontal social structure. There is no standard organizational structure such as a chairperson, secretary, or official division of tasks. All activities are based on collective initiative and a sense of shared responsibility. Martinus explained, "JNB is not a strict community, in the sense that there is no chairman or member, there are people who like noise who just enter, unless there is a project like a festival, someone takes care of the media, someone takes care of the project manager, takes care of the venue ... We are also open to collaboration with other communities." Followed by Hilman's explanation, "The interaction is organic, formed because we both like the same thing and have fun together. Initially, we met fellow noise players, then together we made Jogja Noise Bombing."

Figure 2. Post about JNB collaboration with college institution

The collective identity formed in JNB is built from organic and fluid interactions without genre or seniority limits, and is strengthened through joint activities such as exchanging releases, discussions, hanging out, and being open to collaboration with other communities that are far different from the JNB community. Social relationships within the community are very important for building identity. These encounters occur within a community, which offers a collective framework for socialization and the formation of a shared identity. This provides a framework for understanding how identities are formed and maintained through a dynamic and interactive process (Sobhaninia, Buckman, & Ortiz-Garcia, 2025).

1) *Response to Rejection and Reframing Practices*
As part of the process of overcoming the social stigma associated with noise as "disturbing" music, JNB has used non-confrontational and adaptable strategies. Noise practices carried out in public spaces are often met with resistance, whether from the surrounding community, venue managers, or even security forces. However, the rejection does not necessarily stop the community's activities. On the contrary, it is considered part of the dynamics that strengthen collective ties.

Martinus explained, "It's nice to feel free, if someone doesn't like it, it's fine, if they tell us to stop, we stop, but as long as we can walk, we're happy... At most when we play, we are told to stop but we are never repressed... There is no impact, we will never be allowed to play on the street forever, because if we are stopped, we can move to another place." Hilman also added, "We don't force people who don't like us to like us. And we don't consider it a challenge."

In interpersonal communication theory, this kind of response can be read as a reframing strategy, which is an attempt to turn negative meanings into positive forces. Community can reinterpret adverse events, such as rejection or failure, as opportunities for progress showing more resilience. This recontextualization maintains internal unity and strengthens the community's shared identity and purpose (Sobhaninia et al., 2025). This demonstrates high levels of social and psychological resilience and strengthens community cohesion internally.

2) *Self-Production as Alternative Cultural Communication*
Apart from the performative aspect, JNB is also active in the production and distribution of alternative media. They produce physical releases in the form of cassettes, CDs, and digital documentation uploaded to online platforms. They also publish documentation of their activities as a form of community archiving and publication. These activities are done independently and

collectively, without the support of the mainstream music industry. This reflects the spirit of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) as part of a resistance strategy to the cultural industry.
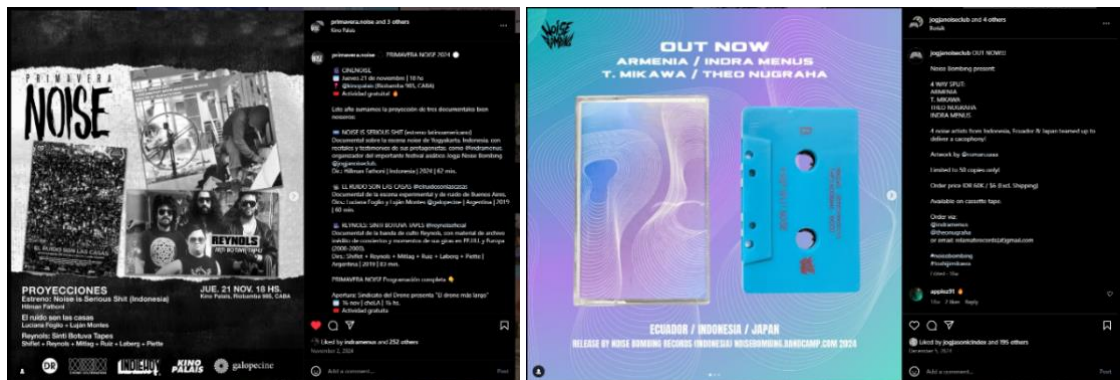

Figure 3. Post about publication screening program documentary JNB and JNB physical releases

In line with Fiske's study, which underlines that popular culture is produced by people rather than imposed on them, thus facilitating the subversion of existing cultural narratives, and this subversion is a form of resistance, as people reinterpret and reuse cultural artifacts to realize their identities and issues (Fiske, 2010). In this case, the production of alternative media by JNB becomes a form of articulation of cultural identity and resistance by creating its own narrative and distribution.

3) *JNB Identity as a Continuous Social and Cultural Process*

The identity of the JNB community is not static but evolves over time. They have shifted from being a street act to an international festival, which still carries the spirit of noise as an alternative form. Martinus calls this a form of community evolution: "There is an evolution... from being unconnected to being connected to the noise scene."

Figure 4. Screenshot from youtube JNB Fest 2024

The JNB community does not form its identity from external recognition, but from a constantly renewed collective experience. They show that music, especially in experimental forms such as noise, can be a powerful means of social articulation. Their identity is not just formed from differences to others, but from the process of meaning-making together within the community.

The concept of inclusive community involves creating a space where all members, regardless of their background, can participate and feel valued. This is achieved through practices that promote inclusivity and meet the needs of marginalized groups (Azzopardi & Grech, 2012). JNB makes this space a place to reconstruct identity through interaction, sound exploration, and alternative cultural production. As Uzuegbunam, and Chikezie Emmanuel say, the media, encompassing music and cinema, stimulates discourse on social concerns and identities, frequently contesting stereotypes and advocating for alternative narratives (Uzuegbunam, 2021).

4. Conclusion

This study sought to examine how the Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB) subculture formulates their identity through noise music, especially in relation to societal censure and prevailing popular culture. The research demonstrated that identity formation within JNB is an ongoing and dynamic process grounded in communal engagement, performative practices, and alternative forms of cultural expression.

Instead of conforming to traditional musical standards, JNB employs noise—a sound that disrupts harmony and melody—as a means of self-expression and collective unity. This musical innovation serves as a mechanism for negotiating significance and recovering cultural territory. The notion of "noise bombing," characterized by spontaneous performances in public settings, signifies the community's opposition against spatial and cultural marginalization, converting urban environments into platforms for expression and identity affirmation.

The results indicate that the identity of the JNB community is formed through informal, non-hierarchical interactions. The lack of formal organizational frameworks facilitates flexible engagement, allowing identity to develop naturally from collective behaviors, shared ideals, and cooperative initiatives. This paradigm opposes the uniformity of cultural creation and prioritizes autonomy, inclusivity, and experimentation.

In the face of rejection or public unease, JNB members exhibit adaptation and resilience rather than combative behavior. Their capacity to transform unfavorable opinions into inspiration for ongoing effort highlights the robustness of their internal cohesiveness and collective dedication.

Moreover, JNB's involvement in self-production—by issuing cassettes, preserving performances, and autonomously disseminating content—strengthens their cultural independence. These behaviors not only safeguard their story but also facilitate the formation of a unique cultural identity that lives independently of mainstream acceptance.

In summary, the identity of Jogja Noise Bombing is formed via a combination of resistance, collaboration, and performative experimentation. This research confirms that noise music, despite its peripheral status, functions as a significant locus for identity development, allowing groups such as JNB to counteract prevailing cultural influences and proclaim their existence through alternative cultural expressions.

5. Acknowledgment

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