Figure 1. Yahidne rave toloka.
SOURCE: REPAIR TOGETHER 2023

Raving, rebuilding, and resisting

RAVE TOLOKAS AS COMMUNAL ELECTRONIC MUSIC PRACTICES IN WARTIME UKRAINE

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Figure 2. Ivanivka rave toloka.

SOURCE: REPAIR TOGETHER 2023

abstract

This research examines the uncharted phenomenon of rave *tolokas*, where electronic dance music practice merges with cleaning war-torn villages in Ukraine, fostering community, resistance, and cultural identity amidst the full-scale war in Ukraine. It interprets rave tolokas as embodied, physical-affective experiences that intertwine dance and labor to restore cultural spaces. Through music and sonic material, participants actively confront war, challenging narratives of rave culture as escapism. Contributing to (ethno)musicology and conflict studies, this work highlights music's multifaceted roles in armed conflict. It draws on participatory digital ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews, addressing the challenges of conducting wartime research.

KEYWORDS: Digital ethnography, Ukraine, rave, reconstruction, resistance.

Approaching wartime musicking

> **This is like a super amazing experience because you feel the connection to the people. […] I like digging and staying in the line and transferring those bricks, it's like feeling super connected to people I'm near to. […] My personal feeling is that before the war it was kind of different. It was really something different. I would say that I did not feel this kind of connection, for example, when I just attended some event in a local club in Kyiv. […] But when you came to rave toloka, this was a completely different feeling, because of the feeling of this togetherness that we are doing something good, and we work hard and then we can dance hard. […] You not only have the feeling that you are doing something good, that you are helping people who are in need, but also you begin to be the part of community with the same values, with the same attitude to people, to war, to your position as a Ukrainian.**[1]

Daria's statement, along with Figure 1 – depicting a young woman dancing to a DJ set with turntables creatively stacked on ammunition boxes amidst a group of people simultaneously

gathering debris in broad daylight – captures the atmosphere of rave tolokas [толока]. This collective musicking merges the act of clearing up war-torn villages in Ukraine with the electronic dance music practice of raving. Taking inspiration from both an old rural Ukrainian tradition and contemporary urban music culture, rave tolokas intertwine dance, labor, and their pertaining physical processes. This article delves into the lived experiences of the hitherto uncharted rave tolokas, showing how this music practice fosters community-building, collective resistance, and cultural identification amid full-scale war.

Rave tolokas, also known as "clean-up raves", are organized happenings that combine the work of restoring war-ravaged villages in Ukraine with the electronic dance music practice of raving. They present a striking example of how people engage with music in war settings, employing dance as a means of aiding reconstruction in devastated areas. Consequently, this study places particular emphasis on the mediating roles of music and dance in fostering collective resistance and mobilizing communities during times of war. Throughout the paper, firsthand perspectives provide profound insights into individual experiences – such as Oleksii T.'s reflection, a sentiment echoed in later sections, highlighting the dual role of rave tolokas in supporting reconstruction and fostering communal joy through music: "You can do some volunteer job and then you can dance, and you will not feel guilty about that you are dancing".[2]

"'RAVE TOLOKAS' SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF A MUSIC PRACTICE THAT EMERGED AMIDST THE OUTBREAK OF THE FULL-SCALE WAR IN UKRAINE."

EXPLORING THE MULTIFACETED roles that music can assume in the context of armed conflict, research on the intersections of music, sound, violence, and war has garnered significant attention in recent years. Studies on war-torn and conflict-affected regions have explored various aspects, including music's function as a propaganda tool, a weapon of warfare or a means of resistance. Scholars have also examined the impact of war on musical traditions and cultural identities within diasporic communities, as well as the role of music in postwar reconciliation among traumatized populations.[3] Additionally, Martin Daughtry has described how the reconfiguration of a wartime aural environment necessitates the development of new listening skills,[4] while Carolyn Birdsall has shed light on the significance of auditory perceptions in wartime experiences, enhancing the concept of earwitnessing.[5]

In his 2014 article titled "Ethnomusicology in Times of Trouble", Timothy Rice reflects on these contributions, addressing the need to study the aural environment and sonic practices more broadly, particularly in wartime contexts. This resonates through the sonic lifeworlds of Ukrainian civilians, who have had to adapt to new auditory conditions shaped by explosions, air raid sirens, and rocket strikes. The author also observes that ethnomusicology has been slower to incorporate the study of crises compared to related disciplines like anthropology. He attributes this lag to the scarcity of research providing clear evidence linking music to war atrocities, largely due to cultural perceptions that predominantly associate music with positive connotations such as pleasure and peace. Another contributing factor, according to Rice, lies in paradigmatic beliefs that music can only thrive within stable social environments.[6]

AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, at the core of this article, "rave tolokas" serve as an example of a music practice that emerged amidst the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. Studying the emergence of such a practice can not only help give insight into how organized violence can trigger the production of musical knowledge but also broaden our understanding of the nature of human music making. This aligns with Svanibor Pettan's research on the roles of music in the Croatian Homeland War, arguing that "wars and other violent conflicts stimulate musical creativity and thus call for the attention of researchers".[7] Adopting a pluralistic perspective on human music making, this study draws on Christopher Small's concept of "musicking"[8] as well as further ethnomusicological concepts applicable to conflict settings, such as Thomas Turino's idea of understanding music as social participation, which underscores the vital role of music in establishing connections with our personal lives, communities, and the surrounding environment.[9] These conceptual frameworks bring into focus how rave tolokas function as embodied acts of participatory practice and meaning-making, where musicking becomes a vehicle for emotional connection and collective resistance in wartime Ukraine.

Ethnomusicological online fieldwork?

In her 2010 study, Margaret Kartomi shares her perspective on war as a cultural process wherein musical life can change, evolve, and take on new directions. She further addresses the neglect of war studies in ethnomusicology, highlighting the challenges of access and security during fieldwork in conflict zones.[10] Since then, the advent of digital technologies has transformed the study of music in conflict situations, offering new avenues for research that make it possible to consider how local musicking realities are digitally mediated. Abigail Wood already recognizes the significance of digital spaces in people's everyday musical lives in 2008 and advocates for online-oriented approaches in ethnomusicology.[11] While Wood, drawing on email correspondence described as a disembodied textual mode of communication, points to limitations in spontaneity during her research, audiovisual capacities of contemporary online platforms can foster spontaneous participation and social interaction. This includes reacting to broader informational posts or more ephemeral shared content, as well as engaging in direct messages that can lead to face-to-face video calls.

This study employs online ethnographic methods, including participant observation and in-depth interviews with individuals involved in rave tolokas. Since online fieldwork in ethnomusicology is relatively novel, I draw on works such as *Digital Ethnography: principles and practice*.[12] These challenge the notion of the dichotomy between real and virtual, emphasizing the continuity between online and offline practices as deeply embedded in everyday life. They also help to develop an ethical framework for conducting online fieldwork in a war zone. Ilmari Käihkö's recent article on "chatnography", for instance, which explores interaction through social media and messaging apps, is particularly insightful as it addresses ethical implications of digital ethnography in the Russo-Ukrainian war context. Käihkö highlights the tension between easy remote communication and the drawback of an overwhelming flow of information and explores how digital research becomes intertwined with everyday life, raising moral questions about the impact of this constant connection on one's personal sense of disruption.[13]

BY CREATING accounts on Instagram and Telegram – the primary platforms for organizing, documenting, and sharing information on rave tolokas, which are public and open for anyone to join – I was able to identify participants, engage in online conversations, explore musical practices, and expand my network at the outset of my research in autumn 2022. I explained how I came across the profiles I contacted in relation to my research interests and disclosed my role as a researcher both in initial messages and on my platform profiles. While interactions with established contacts were frequent, easy, and spontaneous – due to the casual, low-threshold nature of chatting on these platforms – I encountered dilemmas regarding whether to enable or disable notifications for new messages. For example, navigating the blurred boundaries between public and private spheres, as digitally mediated interactions from the wartime research "field" created an internal expectation of being constantly available to check updates and respond to messages. These notifications also extended to social media activities, including live updates featuring audio-visual content from participants in rave tolokas, demonstrating the dynamic flow of musical practices in interconnected digital and physical spaces.

Between April and May 2023, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews in English, with participants providing informed consent for recording. The oral format influenced participant recruitment, as some individuals were hesitant to share their experiences in spoken English. However, conducting the interviews online also offered certain advantages – for instance, interviewees could easily look up translations during the conversation using their preferred electronic devices. These interviews, lasting an average of one hour, focused on various aspects of their experiences in the clean-up raves, including their motivations for involvement, feelings during participation, the significance of electronic music in this context, and interactions with local communities. Among the participants, four identified as cisgender female and four as cisgender male. Those who preferred not to be referred to by their real names were assigned pseudonyms, marked with an asterisk.[14] While the age range of individual interviewees spans from the 20s to 30s, their level of engagement with Ukraine's electronic dance music culture varies. This ranges from individuals who are less frequent attendees of raves to regular participants in the scene, including DJs actively performing sets. It is furthermore worth noting that, although I had not previously visited Ukraine prior to conducting this research, my personal background included familiarity with diverse electronic dance music cultures through regular participation in various contexts – such as attending events, listening to commonly associated music styles, and engaging with the histories of these cultural scenes. Consequently, this work is written from a personally situated perspective, grounded in observations gathered through digital platforms and the thematic analysis of online ethnographic interviews.

Ukraine's nightlife transforming into daytime reconstruction effort

> **You have a building, it has a couple of sections, and in one section there is a stage with the artist. The artists change like once in an hour, like 40 minutes. And there are usually a bunch of guys who are dancing now, then they go in to do some work and other guys come in their place and it all happens, you know, very naturally and organically. [...] And it can be like you know, in the parts of the section of the building, someone is raving, and someone three or five meters away is doing the work. So, it's like parallel processes and they do not interrupt each other. [...] You can hear the music from the other section while you perform the work, and you can dance in the process.**[15]

The way Veronika sheds light on the nature of the work process at rave tolokas and the impression of a loose yet smooth process of effectively cleaning up the cultural sites is shared by other participants such as Oleksii M.: "I found that it's kind of anarchy, but everyone is well organized, no one just sits in the corner".[16] On a voluntary basis people tackle different work tasks, helping wherever needed and collaborating for efforts requiring more manpower.

INVESTIGATING THE SONIC and musical responses of people under conditions of armed violence can not only expand our knowledge of wartime violence, but also contribute to our understanding of how people "use music and sound phenomena to give meaning to their reality in contexts of war",[17] as Luis Velasco-Pufleau notes. The newly emerged clean-up raves present a particularly interesting response as they are contributing to reviving parts of the sonic lifeworlds that many young Ukrainians enjoyed before the outbreak of the full-scale war in February 2022. Reflecting on his participation in a rave toloka, Oleksii T. shares: "In my head this was like a kind of festival, but with volunteering in the first place, of course".[18]

Amidst a rearranged wartime soundscape, Ukraine's rave culture has managed to persist, albeit in an altered form. The as-

piration to help war-ravaged communities engendered a volunteer movement that was inspired by both contemporary urban music culture and an old rural Ukrainian tradition. "Rave toloka" designates a happening that couples the electronic dance music practice of raving with the labor of cleaning up bombed-out buildings. In international media coverage therefore referred to as "clean-up rave", the phenomenon was initiated by the organization *Repair Together* and named "toloka" to honor the eponymous Ukrainian folkloristic tradition. Interestingly, only a few of my interlocutors were familiar with the toloka custom before starting to attend rave tolokas – Daria shares her understanding of the term:

> **It has been in our local usage for centuries, I think, and toloka means when your neighbors, when people who live around you, were all gathering to do something, like to clean up what is needed to be done. And they were celebrating, sharing dinner together, like building this community.**[19]

The toloka tradition equals a collective labor practice. It evolved since the 15th-century among peasant populations who cultivated a custom of mutual aid for urgent work, such as raising barns, cutting timber or reaping harvests.[20] In the early 19th century, the toloka had become emblematic of a cultural conduct within rural communities, characterized by mutual neighborly help.[21] Typical features of traditional tolokas – such as taking place on Sundays, being carried out regardless of gender, and being rewarded in form of a meal – have been adapted in rave tolokas.

"THE TOLOKA TRADITION EQUALS A COLLECTIVE LABOR PRACTICE. IT EVOLVED SINCE THE 15TH-CENTURY AMONG PEASANT POPULATIONS."

It was at the end of April 2022 that a group of young Ukrainians founded the volunteer organization Repair Together to help restore demolished villages that had been liberated from Russian occupation in the Chernihiv region, a northern area of Ukraine that was heavily affected during the early stages of the full-scale invasion. The initiative started to hold regular tolokas in affected communities every weekend. It soon came up with the idea of organizing rave tolokas, introducing the unprecedented combination of volunteering and raving. Rave tolokas not only served as a substitute for the cancelled festivals that would have otherwise animated the country's thriving electronic music scene but also came to play a pivotal role for drawing attention to Repair Together's mission. Captivating videos depicting hundreds of raving volunteers in villages across northern Ukraine quickly went viral on TikTok and Instagram, attracting international interest and generating a surge in donations and helping hands for the organization's work.

UNLIKE REGULAR TOLOKAS, rave tolokas are characterized by their setting in and around destroyed houses of culture, "Dim Kul'tury" [Дім Культури]. These are cultural institutions that were once central to Soviet public life and remain common in Ukrainian villages and towns. In the summer 2022, Repair Together organized three rave toloka weekends in two villages in the Chernihiv region that had fallen victim to missile strikes, artillery fires and occupation as part of Russia's failed offensive on Kyiv. The first two, held in July, focused on restoring the house of culture in the village of Yahidne, located about 140km northeast of the capital. The third and, according to my interviewees, largest rave toloka took place in early September in the neighboring village Ivanivka.

THE COMMUNAL SPIRIT inherent in the toloka tradition appears to have transferred to rave tolokas, forging connections not only among the young volunteers but also with the local residents. For the most part, rave tolokas have been warmly embraced by the village communities. As with the old custom, the hosts express their gratitude to the volunteers through offerings of coffee, tea, or homemade treats. However, their involvement goes beyond gestures of appreciation, as locals spanning various age groups also participate in the collective labor and dance happening. Through both its regular and rave tolokas, Repair Together has remained committed to initiating reconstruction by clearing debris, and the three rave tolokas achieved remarkable success in restoring the cultural houses of Yahidne and Ivanivka.

Like most interviewees, Marianna participated in both regular and rave tolokas. Reflecting on cleaning up the cultural centers, she remarks: "You don't feel ashamed that you're dancing there because you're happy that this place was liberated".[22] Many cited a sense of guilt as motivation for joining rave tolokas, especially male participants, who felt the need to contribute without taking up arms. Daria speaks openly about the moral dilemmas faced by Ukrainian civilians and how Repair Together helped restore a sense of belonging:

> **When the war started, I mean the full invasion war started in 2022 actually, the society in Ukraine asked themselves a lot of questions like: Are we allowed to live our life happily during the war? During that time when we know that our soldiers are struggling, are defending our country? [...] Besides the feeling of being involved in something big and cool, besides the feeling of doing good for other people, I've made new friends, I've made new connections and I've lost this feeling of loneliness.**[23]

Recognizing the heterogenous entanglements between rave culture and social upheaval, Ukrainian rave tolokas challenge various trends in research on rave culture as they do not present a temporary retreat from political restraints but rather an active way of facing the reality of war through their extraordinary function of restoring war-ravaged cultural institutions.

Figure 3. Ivanivka rave toloka.

SOURCE: REPAIR TOGETHER 2023

Rave reimagined: New narratives through cultural rebuilding

While certain Electronic Dance Music Cultures (EDMCs) have undeniably acquired political significance in various socio-cultural contexts, their primary purpose remains the collective production of affect for an escapist, hedonistic experience. In stark contrast, what distinguishes rave tolokas is their extraordinary function of restoring war-ravaged cultural institutions. This observation suggests a noteworthy shift within rave culture, where music practice and sonic material are engaging with significant acts of resistance.

RAVE CULTURE, often associated with techno underground, hedonism, and counterculture, has attracted considerable interest from anthropological, sociological, and musicological scholarship. Themes such as alternative lifestyle, grassroots organization, and anti-establishment youth culture have shaped discussions of EDMCs, with escapism remaining a central concept in most analyses. While dominant narratives in EDMC research revolve around rave culture providing a temporary diversion from daily existence in capitalist society, early studies largely portrayed it as politically neutral escapism. In his 1997 article on rave culture, Simon Reynolds views rave as apolitical due to its emphasis on hedonistic weekend escapes from "real" life, resulting in the absence of a social change agenda.[24] Though Brian Wilson recognizes rave culture's challenge to prevailing value systems linked to consumption and social order in 2006, he similarly concludes that it lacks political intent as it does not embody a social change ideology.[25] In contrast, Riley et al. propose that through the lens of neo-tribal theory, EDMCs can be considered as alternative forms of political participation, where rave culture functions as a politics of survival by establishing spaces of communal hedonism and pleasure.[26]

The historical neglect of dance cultures like disco, house or rave within cultural studies research has been highlighted by cultural anthropologist Graham St. John, who attributes this oversight to an earlier focus on youth-subcultural class resistance.[27] The prolonged perception of rave culture as apolitical may therefore additionally stem from the fact that its audience does not necessarily connect through class struggle narratives. Rave draws its origins from dance music scenes such as 1970s disco, followed by Chicago house, Detroit techno, and British acid house of the 1980s. While these musical genres inherently carry significant socio-political perspectives, the emergence of acid house as intimately tied to rave culture was driven by

a counter-hegemonic movement in response to the politically charged climate of late 1980s Britain under conservative Thatcherite governance.[28] Rave culture has since gone global and taken on many manifestations – from underground warehouse parties and outdoor field raves to festivals and commercial club culture – challenging simplistic counterculture/state dualisms and leading to a transformation that Anderson and Kavanaugh describe as the "rave-club culture continuum".[29]

IN HIS BOOK on contemporary global raving cultures, St John chronicles how non-commercial forms of EDMC in particular offer subversive sites where themes of activism and resistance to mainstream cultural norms persist, ranging from pleasure principles and counter-colonial interventions to politicized elements such as illegally repurposing spaces or consuming banned substances.[30] Beyond specific collectives or festivals that embody the desire for social change, there are various present-day examples of rave culture that present forms of resilience and resistance within specific local political contexts. For instance, Georgia's "Rave-olution" under the slogan "we dance together, we fight together" emerged as a direct response to specific instances of oppression and government actions that threatened personal freedoms, with people rallying and dancing together in the face of oppressive measures imposed by conservative authorities.[31]

"RAVE CULTURE, OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH TECHNO UNDERGROUND, HEDONISM, AND COUNTERCULTURE, HAS ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST FROM ANTHROPOLOGICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, AND MUSICOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP."

The collaborative practices observed in the work process of rave tolokas reveal links between the revival of the communal toloka tradition and the perpetuation of group togetherness as a fundamental aspect of rave culture. Feelings of connectedness emerge as a reoccurring theme in conversations with participants, as Alina* describes: "This is the magic of this project, this togetherness".[32] Reflecting on the atmosphere at the group work, Oleksii M. further expands on shared values such as gender equality, also evident in the absence of gender division in work tasks, and a commitment to LGBTQ+ acceptance, concluding: "It's about solidarity that everyone is appreciated here and the interests and lifestyle of everyone is respected there".[33] As explored further in the next section, the music and its broader sonic environment culminating in a multisensorial experience is crucial to an understanding of this sense of unity and belonging. The profound bond that emerges from the fusion of engaging in physical labor to deep electronic beats, all with the purpose of rebuilding a nation under attack, is central to the feeling of togetherness, as Oleksii M. moreover reflects:

> **When one country wants all Ukraine to have a blackout, without electricity, they want to threaten us. They want us to be shocked, they want us to be, like, frozen. And you show that: okay guys, you do it, but see – we may have fun, we may listen to electronic music, and everything you do means nothing to us. You won't defeat us, you won't break us down.**[34]

Clean-up raves share certain aspects with different rave cultures we know of, yet they push the boundaries of EDMCs in unprecedented ways. With the goal of revitalizing houses of culture in Ukrainian villages, they take place in mainstream bodies of culture and publicly invite people to combat the invasion by collectively restoring communities in broad daylight. Rave tolokas thus not only have an intergenerational effect by involving locals as part of the communal toloka custom but also challenge the notion of rave as an all-night dance affair. This reflects the broader transformation of Ukraine's electronic music scene, where curfew restrictions have led to the adaptation of nighttime gatherings into daytime events, often with proceeds supporting the military or humanitarian efforts. While the endurance of the collective experience over an extended period of time remains a crucial aspect, it is important to note that what enables the endurance in rave tolokas is not the consumption of substances, often associated with rave culture, but rather the elements of collectivity and pulsating beats – Oleksii T. comments on this as follows: "You don't have any drugs because it's just not possible to do some complicated and dangerous task. [...] You need to be aware of everything that's happening around you".[35] In a similar vein, Daria highlights how rave tolokas challenge the prevailing negative perceptions associated with drug use within rave culture: "I think those changes are affecting the perception of underground culture".[36] This underscores the potential of the music practice to reshape public opinion and foster a commitment to voluntarism.

Engaging in the techno workflow

The body is particularly significant in rave tolokas, because not only do participants dance, they also engage in physical labor. In her recent study, Maria-Adriana Deiana interprets rave as an embodied register of war and provides insights into analyzing affective dimensions of dance practices in situations of armed conflict.[37] By exploring musical and sonic affects, ethnomusicological scholarship has extensively studied the links between embodiment and emotion across diverse socio-cultural contexts,[38] contributing to an understanding of affect in electronic dance music spaces in particular as what Luis-Manuel Garcia describes as "a bundle of sensory and embodied feelings that leak into emotional registers".[39] The connectedness ravers feel is deeply

influenced by the multisensorial and embodied sonic experience of collective dancing, where affects navigate "between motility, incorporeal intensity and visceral perception", as Martin Zebracki writes.[40] Oleksii T. provides insight into his bodily experience and perception of collective intimacy at rave tolokas:

> **It's kind of a collective flow. [...] Imagine like 300 people doing this at the same time and communicating, so they're sharing to each other what they feel during the moment. [...] It's about feelings – because listening and feeling the music – it helps you to feel deeply and open yourself wide to everyone and to the job that you're doing.**[41]

Electronic dance music plays a central role in interpreting rave tolokas as collective corporeal activities and physical-affective experiences. While in historical accounts of the toloka tradition the role of music is not mentioned, it can be presumed that the emergence of rave tolokas has been influenced by technological advancements and the DIY ethos of rave culture. Apart from grassroots mobilization and non-hierarchical organization, the DIY ethos of rave culture is manifested and adapted in various ways within rave tolokas: war-stricken cultural centers as venues for music-making, collaborative participation through both dancing and working, and DJs developing unique styles that merge with sounds associated with war destruction. Hillegonda Rietveld suggests that electronic dance music, as a broad category that has evolved over the past four decades, is deeply rooted in a technocultural framework, where the sounds featured in the music contribute to an affective quality inherent in digital music technologies.[42] Clean-up raves can therefore be understood as a technologically mediated activity, where DIY elements are taken to another level, with the war-torn environment not only repurposing ammunition boxes as turntable supports but also influencing the overall sonic experience. According to Oleksii M., the sounds of cleaning up become an integral part of the music experience, creating an "organic mash-up of real sounds and electronic music".[43] The music emanating from the large speakers set up in the damaged cultural sites liberated from occupation merges with the sounds of shoveling war rubble and ravers stepping through bullet remains lying on the ground – Dmytro reflects: "You know, bullets were giving some strange sound, like snow in winter".[44] Reorienting the urban soundscape of Kyiv's and other cities' electronic dance music spaces, Figure 2 depicts participants grooving to this unique aesthetic.

THE SONIC TRAITS found in many musical aesthetics of EDMCs, including repetitive beats, deep bass frequencies and other stimulations, profoundly impact the embodied collective experience of heightened affect. Garcia highlights how electronic dance music generates affective responses in the body's haptic senses: stimulating tactile sensations through vibrations, sonic components like percussion, texture, and timbre play a significant role in fostering feelings of embodied intimacy and social connectedness.[45] Drawing on years of experience as a DJ, Dmytro describes clean-up raves as an "incredible experience of a party because you help people to work"[46] and reflects on his experience as a performer:

> **Rave toloka is about audience too because you should play music to people who are working hard. [...] I started to play, and I was watching how audience react on my music. I was looking for, for the ideal tempo or, you know, ideal music, ideal level of aggression in this music. [...] I felt the moment and after that I was like in meditation, like in strong trance.**[47]

Dmytro's description of trance reflects what Morgan Gerard describes as a liminal quality of rave experiences, where DJs can guide dancers through fluid interactions between mental, musical, and physical states, enabling heightened focus, flow, and physical endurance through music.[48] Similarly, Alina* found great satisfaction in using her music to inspire and motivate the volunteering ravers. With her keyboard, synthesizer, and microphone setup, she aimed to create the perfect atmosphere by blending "Italian disco with a little sip of acid".[49] In addition to the music's affective impact on fostering a sense of togetherness, the beat and bass support the physical labor of restoring the war-damaged sites. When discussing the role of electronic music in the clean-up raves, my interviewees draw parallels to work songs and marching music, emphasizing the integral role of electronic music in facilitating synchronized and efficient work practices. This sentiment is captured in a quote by Oleksii M.: "It kind of leads the workflow of clean-up. [...] If you dig pieces of bricks with a shovel you have a rhythm to dig it",[50] and by Ivan*, who comments on the recurring motif of passing bricks in a line:

> **With like 50 people in a line, from tractor to inside in the building and each person takes one brick or two, gives it to another and it's really smooth. People just take it from right side, take the brick, turning it to the left, giving it to another person. And it really looks like connected to music.**[51]

In the face of adversity during war, participants consistently highlight the energizing and motivating effects of the fast and repetitive nature of electronic dance music during labor-intensive activities. The distinct collective musicking experience found in rave tolokas serves as a pioneering subject for the study of rave culture.

Conclusion: Electronic dance music as a site of war resistance

Beyond the acknowledged role of electronic music in aiding the work process through its embodied sonic qualities, the unifying experience within rave tolokas is further enhanced by electronic dance music having become an integral part of Ukraine's cultural landscape – often interpreted through the recurring narrative of it playing a role in "shaping the image of a modern country".[52] This heightened meaning as a cultural battleground is also re-

flected in slogans like "we will rave on Putin's grave" – as heard, for instance, in the track "Rave On Putin's Grave" by *Paat*. (feat. *Nata Teva*)[53] – and in interviewees' depiction of techno as part of Ukrainian cultural identity, contributing to the formation of a self-defined national identity in opposition to Russian dictate.

THE UKRAINIAN FLAG hanging from the DJ booth in Figure 3 hints at music's frequent function of strengthening cultural identities in societies during times of war. The emergence of Kyiv as a key center of rave culture amid the Maidan Revolution and Russia's initiation of war in Ukraine in 2014 left a profound impact on the cultural sphere of the nation. Examining efforts to preserve musical heritage amidst destruction, Nelli Samikova emphasizes the significance of Ukraine's musical identity in fostering national identification, and illustrates the emergence of "ethno-pop" and "pop-folk" music styles.[54] Similarly, analyzing the 2010s while studying the interplay between globalization and national revival processes, Andriy Bondarenko focuses on electronic music, tracing the evolution of "folk electronics" and highlighting the how artists integrate "sounds of Ukrainian folklore" into electronic music to reinforce national identity.[55] In this context it is interesting to consider how the resurgence of folklore within rave tolokas extends beyond the adaptation of the toloka tradition and can also be observed in the music performed at cleanup raves, where Ukrainian (neo-)folk music elements are incorporated into various electronic music styles, as Daria describes:

> **When the full invasion war started, I feel that we are much more discovering the old Ukrainian music. […] Like even the traditional music, the folk, the everything, and the combination of folk with electronic music […] So, during the rave toloka, there are different types of music played, but I feel that everything that we can hear is connected to our local scene and this is super inspiring that we are not trying to search for some cool music elsewhere, but we are coming back to our roots.**[56]

As efforts to preserve musical heritage as a part of Ukrainian culture amidst destruction becomes a relevant means of distancing oneself from the aggressor, rave tolokas can consequently be interpreted as a form of resistance through the establishment of a self-defined cultural expression. Dmytro, who played at two rave tolokas, elaborates: "I mix some old songs, mix some ethnic elements, like ethnic instruments in my sets."[57] More broadly, he shares his view on Ukraine's wartime EDMC as a form of societal upheaval, a portrayal of participation in rave tolokas as synonymous with experiencing both joyful and determined resistance, which emerges prominently during interviews:

> **Not all the people here in Ukraine expect that you have the right to be happy, even in the middle of the war. […] So, this is not only resistance, this is even a riot and this is like a form of the cult of life. This work helps us, helps Ukrainian people to remember as well who they are. […] We are remembering our language, we are remembering our cultural heritage.**[58]

This article explored the experiences and meanings associated with rave tolokas in war-torn Ukraine, shedding light on the diverse roles music can play in armed conflict. It showcased how rave tolokas question current narratives in rave culture by directly engaging with the realities of war and rejuvenating war-damaged cultural institutions, transforming Ukraine's nightlife into daytime reconstruction efforts. Additionally, it examined the affective togetherness that participants experience through the combined act of dancing and working. The incorporation of the DIY ethos from rave into rave tolokas highlighted their capacity to assimilate the sonic environment of the war-torn landscape, culminating in a distinctive and resistant expression of Ukraine's cultural panorama. Future research avenues could include a focused investigation into the themes of cultural revival and national identity; an analysis of digitally mediated experiences and responses to the rave tolokas, especially those that were live-streamed and accompanied by parallel events in different countries; as well as a detailed reflection on online ethnographic methodology, considering both the impact of digital spaces on wartime musicking and the potential of expanded digital ethnography methods in applied ethnomusicology.

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