

## 9

# 'Keeping it Real' in a Different 'Hood: (African-)Americanization and Hip Hop in Germany

*Timothy S. Brown*

In the spring of 2003, a young Turkish-German filmmaker, Neco Celik, released his first film, *Alltag* ('Daily Life'). It tells the story of troubled youngsters on the mean streets of the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, aka 'Little Istanbul.' This neighborhood, long a stronghold of punk and other 'alternative' subcultures in Germany, is also a traditional home to families of Turkish *Gastarbeiter* (so-called 'guest workers' invited to Germany in the 1960s and 70s to help make up for the post-war labor shortage).<sup>1</sup> The German-born children of these immigrants occupy a place between the worlds; neither fully Turkish nor fully German, they identify more with the specific culture of their own neighborhood than with either of their two 'parent' cultures. But the neighborhood culture itself, as Celik shows, is a mixture, not only of Turkish and German cultures, but of U.S. culture—or perhaps more accurately, African-American culture. It is little surprise that the filmmaker with whom Celik is most often compared is Spike Lee; the culture in which he grew up, the culture of street-wise youngsters of Turkish-German Kreuzberg, is one fully enthralled by the sounds and styles of the U.S. ghetto. All the elements of the 'hip hop' lifestyle—rap music, graffiti, breakdancing, gangs—find full expression here, and Celik, himself a former gang-member and graffiti artist, makes no bones about the U.S. influence on youth culture in Kreuzberg. 'Everything has to do with American movies,' he explains. 'There's also the Turkish culture and our group mentality, but mostly it was American movies ... In the 1980's, everybody saw "Scarface," and everybody here called himself Tony Montana' (the name of the drug lord portrayed by Al Pacino in the movie). If Pacino's big-screen anti-heroes were—for Kreuzberg gansta 'wannabes' as for many of their U.S. counterparts—an irresistible parable of the self-made man of the streets, even more important for Kreuzberg hip hop, according to Celik, were the children of U.S. soldiers stationed in Germany who 'showed up as rappers at hip-hop parties' in the neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

Celik's comments on hip hop in Kreuzberg are more than just interesting asides from a young filmmaker—they are a report from the 'front lines' of a broad process of social and cultural change in post-war Europe that often goes by the name of 'Americanization.' U.S. military and economic

dominance after World War II—the argument goes—allowed it, among other things, to practice a sort of ‘cultural imperialism’ that overwhelmed local cultures with a flood of products and ideas, erasing old traditions and replacing them with new ones.<sup>3</sup> Yet however much the massive U.S. imprint on post-war Europe might resemble what one scholar has dubbed ‘Coca-colonization,’<sup>4</sup> the cultural imperialism model is inadequate for understanding the subtleties of the process by which something like hip hop finds a new home in a foreign culture. Few scholars seriously dispute anymore that the consumers on the receiving end of the U.S. ‘culture pipeline’ are intelligent enough to pick and choose, to bend U.S. culture to their own uses and give it new inflections.<sup>5</sup> Mass audiences are, of course, constrained by the choices made available to them by the corporate culture industry. But artists and underground music fans—note that the two are frequently one and the same—are nothing if not discriminating in their ability to choose elements of imported culture that have the greatest potential in their new setting. They are, in scholarly parlance, ‘active’ audiences, and those among them who—as in the case of Turkish-German rappers in Kreuzberg and elsewhere—take up microphone and beatbox, do so because they see an opportunity to create new identities for themselves out of the raw material of globalized culture.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars have used terms like ‘indigenization’ and ‘hybridization,’<sup>7</sup> ‘reterritorialization,’<sup>8</sup> ‘localization,’<sup>9</sup> and ‘selective osmosis’<sup>10</sup> to describe the active element in this transfer of culture from one setting to another. John Clarke, in a well-known work on subcultural style, coined the term ‘recontextualization’ to denote the process by which cultural objects which have been borrowed from different contexts are integrated in a new social context—thus: re-contextualized—and thereby given new meanings.<sup>11</sup> This is as good a term as any for what Germans do with hip hop—they take something created in a different time and place, with a meaning all its own—and give it a new meaning relevant to their own time and place. But why Black American culture, and why hip hop? Scholars disagree about whether there is an essential ‘Blackness’<sup>12</sup> that is communicated through cultural forms like rap music, and there is little doubt that hip hop in particular represents a fusion of cultural perspectives and productive techniques.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, hip hop can be said to be ‘affectively Black,’ in that in its predominant and original iteration, it is strongly expressive of the African-American experience. The important point is that whether or not hip hop represents some kind of authentic Blackness, the perceived ‘Blackness’ of the form is one of its chief selling-points for fans and performers. The question is: why? What use is this ‘Blackness’ to the kids who embrace it? What makes it so attractive, for example, to the Turkish-German kids of Kreuzberg? What makes it, for that matter, so attractive to German kids generally? Because Turkish-Germans aren’t the only Germans who love hip hop. Hip hop is *huge* in Germany; and that means it is huge among

ethnic Germans,<sup>14</sup> and not just among some undifferentiated mass public of Germans that buys into whatever sounds—‘gangsta rap’ or Michael Jackson—that are foisted on them by the major record labels. Some of the most articulate and innovative rap in Germany is the product of ethnic German or multi-racial underground crews dedicated to rap for both artistic and political reasons, the latter having to do, among other things, with resistance to racial discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment. The term ‘African-Americanization’ in the title of this chapter is therefore not just clever word-play: Germans who love hip hop are responding not just to a different national (U.S.) culture, but to the culture of a racial and ethnic *other*. In hip hop, where the ‘Blackness’ of the form is fore-grounded as a form of resistance that ranges itself not only against ‘adult’ culture and society—as all youth cultures do—but often against ‘White’ society as well, a whole range of potential meanings become available. The purpose of this chapter is to explore some of these meanings, and to examine the various uses of hip hop—and of the ‘Blackness’ in hip hop—by Germans.

#### BEGINNINGS

Hip hop culture began to come to Germany as early as 1983. The influence of film was critical on German hip hop’s early development, leading to a strong emphasis on the more heavily visual aspects of the culture like graffiti-art and breakdancing. Nearly every contributor to a recent collection of first-hand accounts by German hip hop artists and producers cite the influence in particular of two films: *Wild Style* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984).<sup>15</sup> One consequence of the importance of film was that hip hop was able to penetrate both capitalist West and communist East Germany at around the same time. *Beat Street* was of particular importance in the East, where, as Opossum from the Leipzig group Zoo Sound explains, it was meant to illustrate for young people the evils of capitalism. Predictably, it ‘had exactly the opposite effect.’<sup>16</sup> In contrast to many West German rappers, who (to their credit) recognized that as educated, middle-class Germans they enjoyed a position of privilege that gave them little in common with oppressed Blacks in the U.S.,<sup>17</sup> East German rap fans tended to see a real parallel between ghetto life and their oppression as citizens of a communist dictatorship. As Joy of Zoo Sound observes: ‘We felt almost exactly like [the people portrayed in *Beat Street*]. Of course we had cash for a doctor, and here it didn’t rain [through the roof of] the apartment, and we didn’t have any gangsters on the street, but our life was just as dreary.’<sup>18</sup>

The ‘first wave’ of German hip hop initiated by these films around 1983 died down rather quickly, but the hardcore hip hop fans who remained after the breakdance craze faded from the media were central to the further development of hip hop in Germany—they supplied much of the personnel for the important German rap groups that began to develop in the late 1980s

and early 90s. If these groups shared an enthusiasm for the new art form coming out of the U.S. ghetto, they were united by little else; indeed, the development of German hip hop can best be understood in terms of an overlapping series of oppositions: between the 'popular' and the 'political,' between the 'underground' and the 'commercial,' between notions of art-for-art's sake and art as a tool for defining one's identity and place in society. All of these debates revolve around a more fundamental question: The question of how to be authentic, or, in hip hop terms, how to 'keep it real.' In this sense, perhaps, German hip hop is little different than in the U.S. But these questions take on a special character in Germany because of the way in which they are linked to the broader issues of, on the one hand, how to put this 'foreign' art form to use—that is, how to use it in a *meaningful* way—and on the other, the particular (historical and contemporary) problems of the multicultural society in Germany.

The complexity of some of these seemingly simple oppositions is reflected in the history of two of Germany's most important rap groups, Die Fantastischen Vier (The Fantastic Four), and Advanced Chemistry. Die Fantastischen Vier, from Stuttgart, were one of the first groups to rap in the German language. Their move away from what they saw as mindless devotion to the surface elements of U.S. rap—member Smudo complained of groups whose entire program consisted of little more than repeating 'Yeah Boy' and 'Say Ho' over and over again—was completed by 1988–89.<sup>19</sup> It was influenced in part by a trip to Los Angeles that reinforced the band's growing realization of the lack of any real connection between the experience of poor Blacks in the U.S. and middle-class Whites in Germany.<sup>20</sup> The insight of Die Fantastischen Vier that much of German rap was simply 'too American'—i.e. too derivative—to have any meaning for Germans informed the group's attempt to rap in their own language.<sup>21</sup> This attempt met with huge commercial success from the beginning of the 1990s, but success (and the largely 'trite' lyrics that lay behind it) led to widespread charges that Die Fantastischen Vier were nothing more than a pop group—'the German *Salt'n'Peppa*' as one rap insider puts it—offering an uncritical and 'Whitebread' version of rap.<sup>22</sup>

The hit that made Die Fantastischen Vier pop stars—'Die da'—came out during a period of crisis in Germany. During 1992–93, a rising wave of anti-immigrant sentiment in the wake of reunification crested into acts of arson and murder against Turkish asylum seekers. A firebomb attack on the house of a Turkish family in Solingen in May 1993 killed two women and three girls, injuring seven other people. Three Turkish girls died in a similar attack in Mölln in November of the previous year. These attacks occurred in the wake of a number of non-fatal assaults on homes for refugees in 1991–92.<sup>23</sup> It was in this context that another group, the group that would come to be billed—and to a certain extent take on the roll—of Die Fantastischen Vier's antagonists, came to prominence. This was Advanced Chemistry, from

Heidelberg. Like Die Fantastischen Vier, Advanced Chemistry rapped in German, but unlike Die Fantastischen Vier, Advanced Chemistry was multi-ethnic in makeup and outspokenly multicultural. Their leader, Torch, was the product of the marriage of a Haitian mother and a German father. He was (and is) a hip hop activist, appointed by rap-godfather Afrika Bambaataa to head the first German chapter of Zulu Nation, and heavily involved with the 'Rap against the Right' initiative.<sup>24</sup> Advanced Chemistry burst onto the hip hop scene with a maxi-single released in November 1992. The song, 'Fremd in eigenem Land' (foreigner in your own country), made a pointed statement about the position of immigrants in German society. In the video to the song, a band member brandishes a German passport in a symbolic challenge to traditional assumptions about what it means to be German. If the passport is not enough, the video implies, then what *is* required? German blood? This powerful critique of racism made Advanced Chemistry a sensation, and followed by the release of the *Advanced Chemistry* album, helped the group single-handedly create a strong German rap scene 'over night.'<sup>25</sup>

Mark Pennay argues that Advanced Chemistry and Die Fantastischen Vier can be seen as representative of two different traditions in German rap—one explicitly political or 'activist,' the other commercial and unpolitical.<sup>26</sup> But if the well-documented antagonism between the two groups does nothing to belie this assertion,<sup>27</sup> it might also be argued that it is less an attitude to politics *per se* than a basic disagreement about the relationship between art and commerce that separates them.<sup>28</sup> Die Fantastischen Vier made an all-out—and very successful—push for pop stardom, while Advanced Chemistry remained fiercely independent and 'underground' (by forming their own record label among other things). Thus, the tension between the two groups can be seen as part of a fundamental conflict between opposed productive approaches: 'major label' vs. 'Do it Yourself.'<sup>29</sup> Yet despite these differences, the two groups share something important in common: both are highly skeptical about 'Americanness'; that is, both have thought carefully about the problems inherent in adapting a foreign cultural form for use in Germany. A description of the problem by Torch of Advanced Chemistry could just as easily have been written by Smudo of Die Fantastischen Vier: 'What the Americans do is exotic for us because we don't live like they do. What they do seems to be more interesting and newer. But not for me. For me it's more exciting to experience my fellow Germans in new contexts ... For me it's interesting to see what the kids try to do that's different from what I know.'<sup>30</sup>

Yet the basic difference between these two pioneering groups remains important. For Die Fantastischen Vier, hip hop—or rather rap music—is art and nothing more (even if their critics in the underground rap scene might sometimes, at least initially, question Die Fantastischen Vier's artistic credentials). 'In Germany,' writes Smudo, 'there is next-to-no relationship between social conditions and the creation of music.'<sup>31</sup> Implicit in this

statement is the idea that the ethnic content of hip hop—its ‘Blackness’—is important only inasmuch as it supplied the motive force for the original artistic innovation (in its U.S. setting). For Advanced Chemistry, on the other hand, rap music is not only art, but also—through its connection with hip hop culture—politics. It represents a *mode of resistance*; one perfectly suited to combating the radical right in Germany, perfectly suited to recognizing and strengthening the growth of a multicultural German society. In this context, the ‘Blackness’ of hip hop marks it as a vehicle of general human emancipation—the art produced out of the African-American experience carries an emancipatory charge applicable in settings other than the original. Here, hip hop does not entail any kind of ethnic separatism; on the contrary, groups like Advanced Chemistry, with their diverse ethnic makeup and overt opposition to right-wing xenophobia, speak, as Andy Bennett puts it, in ‘the voice of the second-generation immigrant attempting to integrate into German society.’<sup>32</sup>

#### ‘ORIENTAL HIP HOP’

Advanced Chemistry thus represents not a rejection of the idea of ‘Germanness,’ but a vision of a multicultural type of ‘Germanness.’ Hip hop is important not just because it is art, but because it is a weapon against racial chauvinism and ethnic nationalism. But nationalism is not absent from the German rap scene; on the contrary, there is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) conflict over national identity that finds expression, on the one hand, in charges that the attempt to form a ‘German’ rap culture is inherently exclusionary, and on the other, in the growth of a counter-nationalism in the form of ethnic-Turkish or so-called ‘Oriental hip hop.’<sup>33</sup> This conflict is in some ways a logical outgrowth of the fact that in Germany hip hop is an imported cultural form: taking the form over—making it ‘German’—is not easy when there is basic disagreement about what being ‘German’ means in the first place. To some Turkish youngsters who don’t feel particularly at home in Germany, taking an African-American art form and making it ‘German’ has little appeal. Is not the whole point of the art form resistance to racism and exclusion? Why take something African American and make it ‘German’ when you can just make it ‘Turkish’ instead? As one Turkish-German label owner interviewed by Andy Bennett put it: ‘The point about a lot of this German rap is it’s all about coloured guys saying look at us, we’re like you, we’re German. But I don’t feel like that, I never have. I’m not German, I’m a Turk and I’m passionately proud of it.’<sup>34</sup>

‘Oriental hip hop’ was the product of two innovations, one having to do with language, one with choice of source material. Turkish language rap, which began with King Size Terror’s ‘The Life of the Stranger,’ sprang from the same logic that produced German language rap, insofar as it represented an attempt to better employ hip hop for local effect. But the

impact of Turkish language rap was quite different than that of German language rap; by using a foreign language as a marker of a 'nationalism' within a nationalism,' Turkish-German rappers were making a very different response to the challenges of multiculturalism in Germany than a group like Advanced Chemistry. With the second innovation—the introduction of samples drawn from Turkish folk music style of *Arabesk*, the genre of 'Oriental hip hop' was born. The first recording of the genre was the single 'My Melody'/'Istanbul' by Islamic Force, released in 1992.<sup>35</sup> It represented a flowering of the sort of cultural syncretism for which hip hop is famous. As Eric-E of the Oriental hip hop group Cartel says: '[James Brown] is not Turkish; he is Black. I thought samples should be from our own music.'<sup>36</sup>

Yet with or without James Brown, German hip hop in its 'Oriental' guise represented a powerful rallying point, not for ethnic integration into the dominant society, but for ethnic resistance against it. Dietmar Elflein and others have argued that the rise of 'Oriental hip hop' among German-Turks was a response to the national chauvinism implicit in the rise of German rap generally, and in particular in the release of a well-known compilation album in 1991: *Krauts with Attitude*. What was 'German' about the album was not language; 12 of the 15 acts featured rapped in English—what was 'German' was that the groups involved were trying to make an African-American art form their own by claiming a new geographical and cultural location for it (symbolized by the album title's play on the name of the U.S. group Niggaz With Attitude). This 'nationalization' of German hip hop was problematic, however, for as Dietmar Elflein has pointed out, with the release of *Krauts with Attitude*, 'an adopted musical style became grafted onto a national identity which de facto locked out many of its participants. Given hip-hop's special attractions for immigrant youngsters as a different, non-German cultural pattern ... this nationalist move was particularly problematic.'<sup>37</sup> The key, as Elflein notes, is that the adoption of African-American culture could not, in itself, classify as a meaningful act of resistance for Turkish-Germans. To do that, it would have to speak to their special situation in Germany, to respond to their particular needs as a group caught between worlds, neither fully Turkish nor fully German. But how could hip hop represent a solution to the contradictions of ethnic Turkish existence if it was also massively popular with ethnic Germans? It could not, unless it could somehow be transmuted into an expression of the real particulars of this existence, that is, be made to reflect the ambiguities of life in a diaspora. This was the real reason behind the rise of 'Oriental hip hop.'

That this is true is no surprise; the basic maneuver at the heart of 'Oriental hip hop' is the basic maneuver of rap everywhere it has traveled away from its point of origin—the act of using the art form as a way of creating a new and more useful identity. The globalization of Black culture is frequently spoken of in terms of the concept of 'diaspora'—diaspora as a scattering of peoples, and diaspora as a web of practices linking those

peoples simultaneously to local places of origin and to the original African homeland. And it is precisely where immigrants face their own situations of diaspora—where, like the Turks in Germany, they can be said to make up ‘diasporic communities’—that the ‘Blackness’ in hip hop resonates most strongly. Here, it supplies not only a connection to new and exciting currents of mass-mediated youth culture, but a ready-made model of ethnic solidarity and resistance against ‘the powers that be.’<sup>38</sup>

In an in-depth study of ‘hip hop youth’ in Berlin’s Kreuzer district, Ayhan Kaya notes the way that this model of ethnic solidarity is made to resonate with the particular concerns and traditions of the Turkish-German community:

What they call ‘Oriental’ hip-hop provides these youngsters with a ground where they can express their imaginary nostalgia towards ‘home’ ... as well as to manifest their attachment to the ‘undiscovered country of the future.’ In other words, ‘Oriental’ represents the symbolic dialogue undertaken ... between ‘tradition’ and ‘translation,’ between ‘there’ and ‘here,’ and between the local and the global.<sup>39</sup>

The appropriation of African-American culture occurs simultaneously with an appropriation of elements drawn from a mythic Turkish past, the latter expressed particularly through attachment to the folk music style of *Arabesk*. With its bittersweet longing for a homeland left behind—a homeland most Turkish-German youngsters could never have seen except perhaps on vacation—*Arabesk* expresses a nostalgia and cultural pessimism that dovetails perfectly with hip hop’s invention of community through stories of displacement and loss. The central musical innovation in ‘Oriental hip hop’—the rejection of African-American samples in favor of samples drawn from Turkish *Arabesk* and pop—is emblematic of the blending of diasporic Black culture and diasporic Turkish culture.

Oriental hip hop must also be seen as part of a broader rebellion of second- and third-generation Turks in Germany against what many see as a stifling policy of multiculturalism that privileges assimilation while glossing over the built-in disadvantages facing Turkish-German young people. Many Turkish-German artists and intellectuals express a growing militancy about the place of Turks in German society, drawing in many cases on the language, cadences, and sensibility of hip hop. Emblematic of this trend are the novels of one of Germany’s leading literary figures, Feridun Zaimoglu, who in *Kanak Sprak* (1995), and *Kopfstuff* (1998), employs the creolized Turkish-German spoken by the disenfranchised youth of the hip hop generation. In naming this dialect using a racist German term—he dubs it ‘Kanak Sprak,’ or ‘nigger speak’<sup>40</sup>—Zaimoglu claims respectability for a diasporic vernacular while making a pointed statement against the alleged racism of German society. This same project of reclamation also informs the sensibility of ‘Kanak Attak,’ a broad-based anti-racist project for which



Zaimoglu is a sort of 'spiritual leader.'<sup>41</sup> The sort of anti-assimilationist stance represented by 'Kanak Attak' is expressed with blunt elegance by another leading Turkish-German figure, rap impresario Cool Savas: 'We're no minority,' he says; 'We live here. It's that simple.'<sup>42</sup>

But the situation is, of course, far from simple. Turkish-German youngsters' embrace of imported visions of the 'thug life' represents a rebellion against the traditionalism of the parent generation, but it is a rebellion that simultaneously draws upon elements of the traditional culture, precisely because these elements *act as markers of difference in the German context*. Attachment to a mythical Turkish past—and to current expressions of Turkish culture like *Arabesk*—become part of a dual armament: on the one hand hip hop—the insurgent art form of the oppressed 'original man' *par excellence*; and on the other, Turkish tradition—above all Turkish language—with an element of foreignness that adds 'kick' to the rebellion already present in hip hop to begin with. The 'ethnic identity' that emerges out of this synthesis—even if it draws on 'authentic' elements of Turkish culture—is a pure construct. Dietmar Elflein emphasizes this artificiality in his discussion of the Turkish-German rap group Cartel, whose album, released in 1995, featured a Turkish flag on the cover in not-so-subtle imitation of the *Krauts with Attitude* album. What Cartel attempted to do, according to Elflein, was 'to gather up the excluded parts of the hip hop community under the banner of an artificially constructed ethnic minority which was supposedly "Turkish".'<sup>43</sup>

In adopting this 'symbolic ethnicity'<sup>44</sup> one did not necessarily have to be Turkish: 'The "Turkish" identity proposed was a mythological one.' As Elflein points out, one well-known group in the genre, Da Crime Posse, was composed of two Turks, one German, and a Cuban. The Turkishness of the Cartel album, and of 'Oriental hip hop' in general, Elflein concludes, was basically a marketing ploy.<sup>45</sup> Cartel was particularly successful in Turkey, where Cartel's flaunting of the Turkish flag not only made them big stars (their record sold 30,000 copies) but darlings of the radical right searching for militant expressions of Islamic identity (to the apparent dismay of the group's leader).<sup>46</sup> Cartel was successful in Germany, as well, in creating a vehicle for ethnic-Turkish militancy. As the rapper Fuat puts it: 'Until that time a Turk simply didn't glare at the camera and give the finger.'<sup>47</sup>

The made-up Turkish identity associated with groups like Cartel was not just an attempt to eke out a place in German society, nor simply to create an identity for themselves, but rather an attempt to set themselves up as an analog to the African-American community in the United States. It was an attempt, that is, to use the 'Blackness' in hip hop to form a sort of 'defensive ethnicity.' But, as the embrace of Cartel by the radical right in Turkey suggests, this move is far from unproblematic. Nor is it uncontroversial in the German hip hop community. One well-known German rapper in Kreuzberg complains, for example, of what he calls 'Turkish fascists' in the Kreuzberg

hip hop scene, noting that a sizable minority ‘identify themselves strongly with negative hip hop clichés. That’s the problem, they see themselves as “White niggas,” they think they are exactly like the Blacks in [the U.S.]’<sup>48</sup>

But if this Turkish ‘resistance identity’ is an artificial construct, that is, after all, the whole point: If Turkish-German hip hop kids in Kreuzberg were really Turkish they wouldn’t need to construct an identity in the first place. It is precisely because they live in a situation of uncertainty that they need to resort to reinventing themselves—say, as ‘gangstas.’<sup>49</sup> But because many of their White fellow-rap fans also want to be gangstas, Turkish-German youngsters have to become gangstas with a twist—a twist that both reifies and makes bearable their separateness in German society. And this underlines why rap music is such a perfect tool for the immigrant, post-colonial, or ‘diasporic’ community; in most youth subcultures, attachment to dominant culture is guaranteed by a common ethnic and cultural heritage, and therefore can be cast aside in search of new identities. With immigrants, connection with the dominant (White) society is insecure, and the cultural baggage of the parent culture is not so much a hindrance to be discarded as a resource to be utilized; it is needed as the *stuff* of a new identity that can be posed against White society. And with rap, images of a rebel ‘ethnicity’ are right there in the music: nationalisms, styles of dress, a radical otherness drawn on the one hand from the ‘hood,’ and on the other, from a mythic homeland free of the corrupting influences of the mean streets where the oppressed are put on ice by society.

The appeal of this synthesis to ‘diasporic’ Turkish-German youngsters is obvious. And it should also be obvious that scholars who emphasize the non-monolithic nature of cultural globalization—that is, who note the various ways in which meaning can be created by the receivers of globalized culture—are right on target. Following Andy Bennett’s distinction between assimilationist and anti-assimilationist German hip hop<sup>50</sup> [his idea, my terms] and Dietmar Elflein’s notion of competing ‘nationalisms’ within German hip hop,<sup>51</sup> I think it might be useful to think about three broad, overlapping categories of ‘application’ when talking of hip hop as an element of globalized Black culture. First, there is the importance of hip hop as a site on which to develop an oppositional stance toward society; this is something that it shares in common with other youth subcultures, and need not be explicitly political. Dietmar Elflein uses the term ‘dissidence’ to describe a world-wide community of young people who identify themselves naturally with the oppressed of the earth.<sup>52</sup> The groups on the *Krauts with Attitude* compilation, Elflein points out, make up part of this community, as do, I would add, Die Fantastischen Vier (their opinions about the social content of rap not withstanding). Here, the ‘Blackness’ of hip hop is less important for its ethnic nationalist charge than for its ability to stand in for various types of oppression. This brand of German rap, rooted in personal expression, and political only insofar as it connects with Elflein’s ‘dissidence,’

carries the potential for massive mainstream appeal, as witnessed by the current success of Die Fantastischen Vier.

Second, there is the more explicitly political brand of hip hop that combines a *political* critique of existing social conditions with a celebration of a transplanted version of hip hop as a means of *cultural* resistance. In the German context this might be seen to correspond with groups like Advanced Chemistry—self-consciously multicultural rap that seeks to combat right-wing xenophobia. Both of these categories are consistent with membership in the dominant ethnicity, although more commonly they are associated with groups of mixed ethnicity (free interplay of races and cultures being the whole point of the enterprise). The third category would be rap that is explicitly put to use by youth of immigrant communities who, in response to what Ayhan Kaya calls ‘structural outsiderism,’ seek to create and embrace their own, exaggerated outsiderism as a means of self defense. In the German context, this category is represented by ‘Oriental hip hop.’ Hip hop is particularly suited to the last group for several reasons. First, as an art form that relies heavily on the spoken word, it is ideally suited to the telling of stories—a practice that is of great importance to groups whose story is left out of the dominant narrative. Second, as an art form that relies heavily on borrowing and appropriation through electronic sampling, rap music is ideally suited to the incorporation of diverse elements—like *Arabesk*—into a new synthesis. It is therefore of particular interest to groups—like the Kreuzberg Turks—who live an uneasy existence between and across cultures. Finally, as an art form that expresses a powerful spirit of resistance against oppression, especially the oppression of an ethnic minority by an ethnic majority, hip hop offers a ready-made model of underdog ethnic nationalism that is highly appealing to groups who have to deal with being ‘strangers’ in a strange land.<sup>53</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Between roughly 1961 and 1973, large numbers of Turkish workers were recruited to make up for Germany’s post-war labor shortage. As of 2002 there were approximately 2.1 million Turks in Germany (3.4 percent of the population); *Britannica Book of the Year* (Chicago: Britannica, 2003). On Turkish immigration to Germany see Jenny B. White, ‘Turks in Germany: Overview of the Literature,’ *Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*, July 1995.
2. *New York Times*, April 12, 2003.
3. On models of cultural imperialism see Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21ff; Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory. An Introduction* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press and University Press of New England, 1996), pp. 164–5, 171–80, 205, 210.
4. Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

5. Tony Mitchell, *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), p. 11.
6. Andy Bennett, 'Hip Hop am Main: The Localization of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture,' *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 21 (1999), pp. 77–91, 86.
7. James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture. A Global Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
8. Andy Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music* (Buckingham [England]; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), p. 94.
9. Bennett, 'Hip Hop am Main.'
10. Pennay, 'Rap in Germany,' in Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise*, p. 111.
11. John Clarke, 'Style,' in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals* (London: Routledge, 1975).
12. Andy Bennett summarizes the current state of the field nicely when he writes that 'it is no longer viable to speak in terms of rap and hip hop as being exclusively "Black" cultural forms,' Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music*, p. 93. For a detailed discussion of the debate on essentialism see Tony Mitchell's introduction to Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise*. See also Negus, *Popular Music in Theory*, pp. 100–13.
13. See Negus, *Popular Music in Theory*, p. 109; Mitchell, *Global Noise*, pp. 4–5, 10; Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 4–5.
14. Here 'ethnicity' is being used a synonym for 'race'; 'ethnic German' refers in this context to White people of German heritage.
15. Sebastian Krekow and Jens Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges. Die deutsche HipHop-Szene* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf Verlag, 2000).
16. 'Die Leipzig Story,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 89; see also various accounts of the impact of *Beat Street* in the GDR, pp. 79, 246, 264, 346.
17. See comments of Smudo from *Die Fantastischen Vier* below.
18. 'Die Leipzig Story,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 89.
19. Smudo, 'Ich sehe da nicht viel neues. Hoffentlich irre ich mich,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, pp. 31–2.
20. Pennay, 'Rap in Germany,' p. 127.
21. Smudo, 'Ich sehe da nicht viel neues,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 34.
22. Marcus Staiger, 'Einleitung,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 12.
23. Hoyerswerda, September 17–22, 1991; Schwedt, Eberswalde, Eisenhüttenstadt, Elsterwerda in October 1991; Rostock-Lichtenhagen August 23–27, 1993. In some of these attacks the assailants were cheered on by the local population. On neo-Nazism and anti-foreigner violence in post-war Germany see Christophe Butterwege, *Rechtsextremismus, Rassismus und Gewalt: Erklärungsmodelle in der Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1996); Dieter Schüpp, Josef Kopperschmidt, Hans Pöttgens, Hrsg., *Rechtsextremismus und Gewalt: Phänomene, Analysen, Antworten* (Mönchengladbach: Fachhochschule Niederrhein, 1994); Ulrich Wank (ed.), *The Resurgence of Right-Wing Radicalism in Germany* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996); Hans-Gerd Jaschke, Birgit Ratsch, and Yury Winterberg, *Nach Hitler. Radikale Recht rüsten auf* (München: C. Bertelsmann, 2001); Diethelm Prowe, 'Fascism, neo-Fascism, new radical right?' in Roger Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism. Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Arnold, 1998).
24. The initiative started in 1993 as a response to the wave of right-wing violence against Turkish immigrants and asylum-seekers. Dietmar Elflein argues that Rap gegen Rechts was relatively short-lived and ineffectual, but a quick perusal of the world wide web suggests that RGR was still going strong as recently as 2001. Dietmar Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes to Turks with Attitudes: Some Aspects of Hip-Hop History in Germany,' *Popular Music*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1998), pp. 255–65, 258.

25. Pennay, 'Rap in Germany,' p. 120.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
27. See the dismissal of Advanced Chemistry's activist brand of rap in Smudo, 'Ich sehe da nicht viel neues,' in Krekow and Steiner eds, *Bei uns geht einiges*, pp. 41–6.
28. The question of hip hop's (or any art form's) connection to commerce is complex; on the commercial mediation of hip hop see Rose, *Black Noise*, chapter 1. For a discussion of some of the larger theoretical issues involved see Negus, *Popular Music in Theory*, chapter 2.
29. An interpretation shared by many members of the scene; see comments in 'Textor,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 334. The idea of 'Do it Yourself' (DIY) first rose in association with punk rock in the 1970s and has underpinned subsequent grassroots music movements—above all rap—even if the term remains largely associated with punk. The basic elements and larger implications of the DIY approach are ably summarized in Ashley Dawson, "'Do Doc Martins Have a Special Smell?' Homocore, Skinhead Eroticism, and Queer Agency,' in Kevin J.H. Dettmar and William Richey (eds), *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 125–43.
30. Torch, 'Was mich and Hip Hop in Deutschland am meisten ankotzt, ist Deutschland,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 52.
31. Smudo, 'Ich sehe da nicht viel neues,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 41.
32. Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music*, p. 145.
33. The term appears to have been coined by the group Cartel as part of the 'Oriental Hip Hop Project' announced in conjunction with the release of its first album in 1995; see Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes,' p. 260. The term has since been picked up by other artists to denote their blending of Turkish ('Oriental') and African-American influences; see Ayhan Kaya, '*Sicher in Kreuzberg*,' *Constructing Diasporas: Turkish Hip-Hop Youth in Berlin* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2001), p. 211.
34. Quoted in Bennett, 'Hip Hop am Main,' p. 84.
35. Interestingly, the lyrics on this recording were in English; see Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes,' p. 262.
36. Quoted in Kaya, '*Sicher in Kreuzberg*,' p. 198.
37. Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes,' p. 258. See also Kaya, '*Sicher in Kreuzberg*,' p. 185.
38. See Kaya, '*Sicher in Kreuzberg*,' especially chapters 2 and 6.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
40. The actual German word is 'Kanake'; shortening the word to 'Kanak' may be seen as analogous to American hip hop's reclaiming of the word 'nigger' by changing it to 'nigga'; Kaya, '*Sicher in Kreuzberg*,' p. 189.
41. Something of the flavor of the group's anti-multicultural anti-racism can be gleaned from the following passage from its website: 'Although Kanak Attak is a predominantly migrant movement it should not be seen as the "cool voice" of the ghetto. That's how they would like it, the commercial vultures of the cultural industries, who are searching for "authentic" and "exotic" human experiences to be sold to those living in the grey mainstream of everyday German society. Here the figure of the young, angry migrant fits perfectly; the person who endorses the "out of the ghetto" mythology that assures complacent liberals that German society is meritocratic after all, and which in turn is used to great commercial success by the German music and film industries in falsifying the "German Dream".' Available at <[http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/about/manif\\_eng.html](http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/about/manif_eng.html)>; internet.
42. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 22, 2003, Nr. 25.
43. Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes,' p. 260.

44. H. Gans, 'Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January), pp. 1–20.
45. Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes,' p. 260.
46. Kaya, 'Sicher in Kreuzberg,' pp. 183–4.
47. Fuat, 'Der Letzte Bonobo Panzer,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 262.
48. 'Das P-Pack-Interview Mit Danny,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 213.
49. The unreflective adoption of the idea of the 'gangsta' by gang-oriented hip hop enthusiasts in Germany has been the subject of much criticism within the scene. See comments on the Kreuzberg 'gangstas' in 'Das P-Pack-Interview Mit Danny,' in Krekow and Steiner (eds), *Bei uns geht einiges*, p. 213.
50. Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music*, p. 145.
51. Elflein, 'From Krauts with Attitudes,' pp. 258–60.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
53. Tony Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 1996).