"Ich lebe für Hip Hop"

German Hip-Hop Music, Cultural Hybridities, and the "Berlin Moment"

Martin Lüthe

> "Wu-Tang and Graffiti on the wall in Berlin…" *(GZA 2000)*

Abstract *This chapter argues that the performances of hybrid, transcultural identities mark a cornerstone of hip hop and inform the debates within and about hip hop as a movement, practice, lifestyle, or culture. As hip hop is in essence about belonging and practice, about "doing something somewhere," it is also crucially about "doing identity," about creating a self in a world that is as much for you as it is against you. In the case of Berlin rap, hip-hop music videos enter a complex relationship with US hip hop and its repository of cultural gestures in their aspiration to put Berlin rap music on the map (roughly in the first decade of the 21st century). Ultimately, of course, this generational conflict hinges on a notion of performing and remixing authenticity that hip-hop culture had itself transported into the world and on the tension that arises when transcultural engagement meets 'keepin' it real.'*

This contribution looks at the transcultural and transatlantic relationships and connections hip-hop culture has facilitated since it became a powerful (and global) pop cultural and youth cultural force in the early-to-mid 1990s. Hip hop allows us to conceive of it as decisively

transcultural in the way that "it invites us to consider the intermingling of presumably distinct cultures and the blurry lines between them" and "individuals, communities, and societies that increasingly draw from expanded, tremendously pluralized cultural repertoires," as Afef Benessaieh (2010: 11) defines transculturality. More specifically, I set out to enhance our understanding of the significance of a specific set of performative gestures that have traveled the globe as part of hip-hop culture's rise to worldwide mainstream visibility. I use visibility in both senses of the term: to denote the global recognition of hip hop and, more specifically, the way the culture came to be represented, and represented itself, in the audiovisual media of the time.

My focus here is German rap music's relationship with the United States, and I relate this connection to the pervasiveness of the hip-hop music video as a media form. Music videos are themselves entangled with MTV becoming an international brand and outlet in the 1980s and 1990s, and to the more recent global "YouTube-ification" of pop cultures since roughly the mid-2000s. In Germany, MTV and its companion network Viva made the music video available to their target audience of teenage music fans in the early 1990s, and thus began to disseminate the performative gestures and styles of hip-hop culture and the hip-hop music video (Müller 1999: 74ff).

As hip hop is in essence about belonging and practice, about doing something somewhere, it is also crucially about "doing identity," about creating a self, or many selves, through (trans)cultural practice or performance. In New York City, Los Angeles, or Berlin, hip-hop culture—and the audiovisual gestures it disseminates—inform who we are, who we aspire to be, and how we belong; here, transcultural hybridity reigns supreme![1]

1 Early scholarship on hip hop emerged in the early 1990s and the study of hip hop constituted itself as a field right around the heyday of the boom bap era, see Gilroy 1993; Bartlett 1994; Rose 1994; and Potter 1995. A second wave of scholarship began to focus on, among other things, the question of hybridity, space, and religion in hip hop culture in general, see Forman 2002; Sylvan 2002; Perkinson 2002; and Miyakawa 2005. For an in-depth exploration of transcultural hip hop, or hip hop as a transcultural phenomenon in Delhi,

One of the ways in which hip-hop culture becomes transcultural is that it takes foot in a variety of heterogeneous locales as it travels the globe. Germany's history of hip hop began in close proximity to US army bases, including Heidelberg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and then a little later Hamburg, Cologne, Bochum, Dortmund, and the Ruhr Area. In the German hip-hop imaginary of the 1990s, Germany's capital and largest city, Berlin, was strikingly absent. This, of course, is not to say that hip-hop culture had no footing in Berlin, it just did not figure prominently in how the rest of Germany conceived of the Berlin music scene: the techno clubs and the Love Parade defined Berlin's place on the German pop music map.

Ultimately, however, hip hop in Germany came to be defined by an emerging scene and style from Berlin, namely its brand of so-called *Straßenrap* (street rap, or rap from the streets).[2] So what happened and what was at stake, I wonder, when Berlin-style street rap took on the German scene defined by an earlier generation? Performers like Kool Savas, Sido, and Bushido accused artists of a previous generation and from different places of being bourgeois, harmless, and ultimately weak, specifically because of the previous generation's affinities with (African) American styles. This, I will show, took shape through a renegotiation of crucial signifiers not only of the first and second generation of German hip-hop practitioners as originators, but also vis-à-vis some of the formative gestures of hip-hop culture typically associated with African American styles and an appreciation of so-called "Black style(s)" in the Black Atlantic World. Ultimately, of course, this generational conflict

India, see Singh 2021. For an earlier example of the role of American-ness or Americana in Black traveling culture, see Fleetwood 2005.

2 In analogy to, for example, the "post" in postcolonial studies, I believe—with M.K. Asanti 2008, the younger one—that we find ourselves in a post-hip hop moment. Not in the sense that hip hop is dead, has vanished, or lost its potential entirely, but rather in the sense that it might now be harder than ever to identify where hip-hop culture ends and pop culture starts. That being said, hip hop is still very much relevant and indeed, its pervasiveness as a pop-cultural phenomenon makes it all the more interesting to be addressed, analyzed, and criticized form within and without.

hinges on a notion of performing authenticity, which hip-hop culture had itself transported into the world, and on the tension that arises when transcultural engagement meets "keepin' it real."

The heterogeneous cultural forms and practices we consider hip hop are themselves embedded within the Black Atlantic and the Black Pacific. These realms provide a dynamic space for cultural performances that are distinctly non-textual but put bodies in movement on screens and make them legible for different audiences across the globe. This performative realm I consider the complementary sphere of the Black Atlantic: the "Black(face) Atlantic" within it. I take my cues from the expansive and interdisciplinary scholarship on blackface performances; I specifically utilize the principal ideas put forth in Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993) and W.T. Lhamon's *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (2000) and bring them in conversation with each other and with hip hop itself. To be clear though, I do not attempt to dispute the origins of hip-hop culture as firmly rooted in African American and (Black) Caribbean cultural idioms, practices, and performances, or the specific culturally hybrid locales in NYC in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Rather, I wish to take seriously the complexities that are at play, once these gestures travel the globe to different audiences. Global audiences engage with these gestures to make sense of who they are, and they enact their identities in close correspondence with what they believe these idioms and performative gestures signify.

I will specifically build on one crucial element of Eric Lott's argument here as a point of departure, namely Lott's assessment of the complex drive of blackface as a simultaneity of fear and desire, a coinciding vilification and appreciation. According to Lott, it is these "contradictory racial impulses" (Lott 1993) that blackface reproduces, expresses, and brings to the stage and the cultural fore. I find this insight meaningful in two ways: on the one hand, Lott aspires to understand the cultural work blackface performances fulfill regarding their audiences, rather than only focusing on the shows' crude and racist mechanics. On the other hand, he allows this cultural work to be decisively messy, at times self-contradictory in terms of what we would now call affect and effect. This,

I believe, becomes especially true in the processes of hip-hop music's transculturalization in the German contexts I analyze here, which are emblematic of the intersecting transatlantic and cross-racial desires at play in Black cultural performances in the Atlantic world.

"Isch lebe für Hip Hop":[3] Transcultural Performativity and the Hip-Hop Music Video

While German language rap music and hip-hop culture established itself firmly on the two German music TV stations, namely MTV (Germany) and VIVA, during the 1990s, the origin of mainstream *Deutschrap* (German rap) is somewhat surprising and seemingly eclectic. The general consensus is that the success of German-language rap music would hardly be the same had it not been for the four White middle-class men from Stuttgart who called themselves Die Fantastischen Vier (The Fantastic Four) and had released their hit single "Die da" (Her, there) in 1992.[4] Towards the middle of the decade, Stuttgart also brought forth the collective that referred to itself as Die Kolchose (The Kolkhoz), consisting of the mainstream darlings Freundeskreis (Circle of Friends),

3 "Ich lebe für Hip Hop" translates as "I live for hip hop"; I intentionally misspell the title of the song here to indicate what the chorus sounds like when rapped in German by the featured artists from the US. This pronunciation already alludes to the complex processes of gestures within hip-hop culture, and rap music specifically, when they travel to different locales across the globe.

4 A case can be made that German music television would not have been the same without the success of "Die da" and the group behind it, partly because they not only put German rap on the proverbial map, but also because their "silly" video clip and their over-emphatic performance of what hip-hop culture meant to them ignited a debate about the status of hip hop, of rap, and about the rules and politics of the culture as subculture. This debate fits the Zeitgeist of a reunified Germany and the overall aesthetic and performance logics/agenda of German-language music television for a teenage audience, which really served as a laboratory for the business of private cable television in the newly reunified country. For more on the significance of "Die da" and on the exaggerated performance within it, see Breitenwischer (2021: 64ff).

who nonetheless managed to credibly claim an anti-mainstream attitude with the help of fellow crew Massive Töne (Massive Tones) and the Afro-German rapper Afrob. Beyond Stuttgart, Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Hamburg served as hubs of German rap, and Munich was largely considered to be home to the more quirky, ironic, and wordplay-based styles of acts like Blumentopf (Flower Pot) or Main Concept. Cologne and the cities of the Ruhrpott (the Ruhr area) proudly represented German-language rap's underground scene with crews like STF (Cologne) or RAG and Creutzfeld & Jacob (Dortmund/Bochum). Their music videos mostly aired during the shows dedicated to hip-hop culture and rap music, *Freestyle* (1993–1995) and later *VIVA Word Cup* (1996–1999). This simplified, eclectic map of hip-hop music in Germany during the first golden era of German-language rap from roughly 1996 through 1999, arguably showed little room for artists from Berlin.

This apparent absence of Berlin-based rappers in the German mental map of rap changed dramatically and quickly around the turn of the millennium. In 2000, two German DJs/producers released tracks and albums that would irrevocably put Berlin on the map for two very different reasons and with very different styles:

a) The Düsseldorf-based DJ Plattenpapzt (Record Pope) recorded an album, which featured established and lesser-known rappers on the tracks, and a Turkish-German rapper's contribution to the album was chosen to be released as a single: the song was titled "King of Rap" by a lesser-known rapper from Berlin by the name of King Kool Savas (KKS), born Savas Yurderi. On the slick production, boom bap-type, head-nodding beat, KKS spit two verses, two different bridges, and rapped two choruses, fundamentally changing German rap. The flow, the slang, the ruggedness of the language, and the message that Savas had come for the throne made everything before it sound immediately "old," "tame," and "weak," in Savas's own words. At the same time, however, a Berlin-based DJ/producer by the name of DJ Tomekk produced and released music for the first time with a slightly different angle than Plattenpapzt.

b) Tomekk's debut album proudly claimed to mark the *Return of Hip Hop* and was released in 2000 after two of the previously released singles had garnered much attention and success. Strikingly, even though Tomekk was from Berlin, he decided to feature a variety of MCs on his tracks, none of whom represented Berlin. In fact, Tomekk's unique style was to produce danceable, slick, and booming beats and to bring together German-language rappers with American rappers (of significant standing) on the album, often on the same track.

Accordingly, his first single featured legendary Public Enemy crew member and hype man Flava Flav alongside German rappers Afrob and MC Rene. The latter being one of the originators of German-language rap who had all but disappeared from cultural visibility in the late 1990s. The music video clearly underscored Tomekk's intention to connect New York and Germany, as the song's hook repeatedly lets audiences know. The opening shot of the video clip shows Afrob walk through an airport in Berlin, as emphasized by an on-screen caption, before he is held in custody by German police and uses his one phone call to call a payphone in NYC. Tomekk answers, only to put Flava Flav on the line later. The MCs rap their verses through the landline and thus connect New York and Germany lyrically and visually through the wire. In hindsight, it seems that the music video and its commercial success established a formula for Tomekk, both in terms of song production, artist collaboration, and music video aesthetics.[5]

Echoing or anticipating the tenets of discussions in debates about transculturality, Stuart Hall (1992: 28) identifies Black diasporic cultural forms as always already "the product of partial synchronization, of engagement across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than

5 There is a lot to unpack here, but the topoi of transatlantic travel, the power of hip-hop culture as a practice to transculturally connect practitioners from different places across the globe, a somewhat shy but explicit reference to Tomekk's Berlin base, and the concept of English and German verses alternating on a single track in a call-and-response style served as the crucial ingredients of Tomekk's style around the turn of the millennium.

one cultural tradition," and as "hybridized from a vernacular base" in his essay "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" In hip hop, we find this excessively in Wu-Tang Clan's oeuvre, and in the way they fused Asian Kung fu movie lore with their immediate environment. Wu-Tang Clan interweaves the Kung fu aesthetic and outlook with the landscape of NYC, as well as with the belief system of the Five-Percent Nation of Islam. This becomes especially evident on their 1997 sophomore album *Wu-Tang Forever*. These gestures gain an additional layer when hip-hop culture then travels to other locales, and White German rappers and producers collaborate with hip-hop culture in general and Wu-Tang Clan specifically. One member of Wu-Tang Clan, GZA a.k.a. the Genius, played a crucial role in putting Berlin on the German hip-hop map in Tomekk's second music video release, "Ich lebe für Hip Hop." This featured GZA, Sunz of Men, Curse, and Stieber Twins: artists from NYC, Minden (Westfalia), and Heidelberg.[6] The video is set in Berlin and the mise-en-scène crucially contributes to the plot of the video, in which—once again—the MCs are portrayed as heroes, with the German police as villains trying to impede the success of hip-hop culture. The latter is represented by a tape circulating from artist to artist in an obvious allusion to the selling of drugs on the street.

In a sense then, Wu-Tang Clan and Sunz of Men—like Flava Flav and KRS-One on other feature tracks in the Tomekk oeuvre—contributed in two ways as ambassadors of "the culture." This is how the video for "Ich lebe für Hip Hop" frames them: they are rapping in a setting resembling the United Nations, providing much needed aid to local artists. Thus, Tomekk not only brings these US heavyweights to Germany, but he specifically places them in Berlin. The lyrics to these songs frequently establish a connection between NYC and Berlin, at times metonymically to represent the birthplace of hip-hop culture, with the US on the one hand, and Germany—as the transcultural continuation of hip hop's course—on the other.

6 I am on the fence about how these videos and the tracks have aged, but I think one thing is for sure: it is part of a cycle of hip-hop music videos shot in Germany that put Berlin on the German rap map.

What is more, the songs' structures, such as the call-and-response between English verses by US artists and German verses, alongside the plots in the respective videos, underscore the relationship between US and German hip-hop culture, rap, and lyricists. Let us also take the significance of the lectern seriously here: GZA might be preaching to the choir, but he is most certainly spreading the word and might also be performing hip-hop development assistance. The video translates the call-and response pattern into the lecture hall/church when Chris Stieber gets up on his chair and raps his response from the audience. This audiovisual choice strikes me as emblematic of the processes at play in transcultural hip hop, where local artists often inhabit a space we could refer to as the "production/reception nexus."

Three observations regarding the video clip from "Ich lebe für Hip Hop" strike me as additionally relevant to my argument:

1. The emphasis on hip hop as a culture that is bigger than just rap music: the frequent displays of graffiti specifically, but also the status of the DJ and the cuts and breaks he delivers on the turntables.
2. The way in which the video alludes to some classics of the genre and, for example, places Curse and German rapper Afrob—in a different DJ Tomekk video of the time, namely "1,2,3,… Rhymes Galore" (1999)—in altercations with the German police (fig. 1 and 2). This setting serves as a visual reference to the notorious "Straight Outta Compton" video clip by NWA, which figuratively and literally put Compton on the map.
3. The race/class intersection, which the video represents, brings to the fore the German discourse within and about hip-hop culture at the time.

Figure 1: Curse rapping toward/at the police

(Modul/BMG, 1999/2000)

Figure 2: Afrob being held in custody by the police

(Modul/BMG, 1999/2000)

While observation 1 is quite straightforward in a song called "Ich lebe für Hip Hop," it is noteworthy how the video captures Berlin's graffiti culture and some of its street culture in the plot point related to the circulation of the tape. Again, the status of the police in fig. 2 strikes me as an adaptation of a familiar hip-hop video trope to the German context; in fact, Curse's "in your face rap" vis-à-vis the police is not only reminiscent of the aforementioned classic "Straight Outta Compton," but it also evokes the Roots' ironic how-to manual for rap videos in their clip of "What They Do." What these citations hint at is the more general, at times complex, processes of adaptation, identification, and appropriation in hip-hop videos.

I use adaptation as the most innocent, descriptive term here to indicate the use of a performative gesture familiar from elsewhere: here, German rappers make use of literal anti-police rap to claim their authenticity as (German) rappers. Adaptation implicitly performs a sense of a shared reality or lifeworld with those who deployed the set of gestures originally. In this sense, they enact a sense of identification with other rappers. This, of course, happens across the board in pop music: audiences and performers alike identify with other performers when they engage with their material; or, to put it more eloquently in Simon Frith's terms:

> My argument here, in short, rests on two premises: first, that identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, that our experience of music—of music making and music listening—is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*. Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics.[7] (Frith 1996: 109)

7 We identify with the heartache of Adele, the Backstreet Boys, or Boyz II Men, the anger of Metallica or Slipknot, or the layered emotionality of Beyonce. However, I would add that I take the term identify very seriously in the way it relates to "the creation of a sense of self."

And because authenticity—realness and keeping it real—operates as the fundamental currency in much of hip-hop culture, these performances of identification become a complex issue: is Curse performing his anti-police rap based on his own experience, or as part of a repertoire of gestures rap and hip-hop culture have provided him? Both might be the most satisfactory answer, but the complexity of identification remains, and it speaks to the third observation regarding the video: the race/cultural appropriation nexus. Appropriation is a complicated term and is now commonly used to designate a lack of authentic experience in a person's self-fashioning with the help of cultural gestures they adapt.[8]

I consider two things crucial to keep in mind here: historically, pop cultures have always been syncretic, hybrid, layered, but still blatantly racist at the same time. These processes are not mutually exclusive. Second, I read hip-hop culture's obsession with the "real" and "realness" not only or primarily as a response to late postmodernism (as some critics have done), but as a floating self-awareness of the impossibility of Black subjectivity in a world of racial capitalism, following the trajectory from Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Cedric Robinson (1983; 2019) to Achille Mbembe (2017) and Ruth Gilmore (2022). A racial capitalism that has, since the mid-1960s decisively turned towards the exploitation of Black bodies and Black expressive cultures for the purpose of entertainment, while simultaneously disposing of and killing Black bodies in the name of profit and policing. In that sense, racial capitalism with its undergirding evil of a racist carceral state, i.e., Black mass incarceration, has never stopped keeping it real.

So, when Tomekk, Curse, and Afrob make use of allusions to the carceral state in the German context, the transcultural complexities of hip-hop culture really become evident. Strikingly, while Tomekk was considered neither "real" nor "really from Berlin," his efforts to connect

8 For a White German American studies person, this of course opens a whole can of worms, and I am not here to judge individual examples; but, yes, the history of hip hop's success in the world also serves as a reminder of the appropriation of Black cultural gestures across the globe; this is also why I utilize the idea of a "Black(face) Atlantic."

hip-hop music with German street culture make him a valid example of what happened when Berlin put itself on the German rap map. Arguably, one of the most crucial differences between what Savas and Tomekk represented can be found in the way they viewed the African American impact on German rap and hip hop. After all, while Tomekk courted New York big-shot-MCs to rap on his tracks, Savas rapped, "Deutscher Rap ist dick schwul [sic] und bitet Ami-Müll aus Angst."[9] So, even though Kool Savas had only moved to Kreuzberg as a kid, he encapsulates the specific Berlin-bravado perfectly and made it visible to the rest of Germany and hip hop specifically.

"Du wärst der schwäbische Nelly": Hip-Hop Hybridity and the Streets of Berlin

The more descriptive sections above already hint at the argument I am trying to make in this final section: I read Tomekk's collaborative music videos from roughly the first three years of the new millennium as representative of a German and Western European infatuation with African American cultural idioms, and so-called Black music specifically, which was formative and remained important throughout the first decade of German-language rap in Germany. This, then, marks the first and largely affirmative period in German-language rap as a transcultural phenomenon and practice. The move towards Berlin as Germany's epicenter for rap music, which Tomekk's music contributed to, also inaugurated a new relationship with the African American "Ur-text" of rap and a second period of German-language rap as transcultural. In other words, when Berlin became known for its brand of so-called *Straßenrap* (street rap, or rap from the streets) the performative identities not only

9 My translation, which does not flow at all, would be, "German rap is fat gay and bites US trash out of insecurity." I retain the homophobic slur here because I do not feel the German word for gay, "schwul," should be naturalized as an insult, although it is clearly used in that manner. I sincerely hope that this decision makes sense and does not offend any readers.

took on the German rap scene as bourgeois, harmless, and ultimately weak, but actually—in true Berlin style—claimed a unique identity at least in part based on a decisive break from North American rap music and hip-hop culture.

When Savas claimed a place for himself, his crew M.O.R, and Berlin on "King of Rap," he not only aspired to rid himself and German rap from a long-standing admiration of American styles and trends, but also dissed some of the grandees of German-language MCs, most notably Advanced Chemistry's Torch. The generational conflict between the first one-and-a-half generations of German-language MCs and the new generation became apparent on "King of Rap" and continued to become even more pronounced and evident as more rappers from Berlin reached commercial visibility.

Even though Kool Savas was never signed to the independent label Aggro Berlin, it quickly emerged as a household name and as the epicenter of commercially visible street rap from Berlin. The artists and executives utilized the familiar narratives of hardcore rap and independent labels (ironically, typically situated in the US), hinging on creative freedom and a rags-to-riches attitude. With street rap, the streets also entered the boardrooms of the recording industry in Germany. The videos by rappers signed to the label put forth a very distinct aesthetic and two artists especially, Sido and Bushido, reached impressive and lasting mainstream success, also because the bourgeois critics and gatekeepers of print media outlets took to scandalizing German street rap and marking it as potentially harmful to young listeners, as obviously vulgar, misogynistic, and violent. Here, of course, the German critics unintentionally echoed the conservative concerns of the previous decade during the culture wars in the US. The German *Leitkulturdebatte* (our culture wars) was thus also premised on the mainstream visibility and success of previously marginalized folks in the media. So, as the Berlin street rappers rhetorically aspired to distance themselves from the US, and to stake their claim based on their unique positionalities within the city of Berlin, discussions with the rappers and subsequent debates about them replicated debates familiar to US audiences of hip-hop music. Bushido, arguably more so than Sido, explicitly engaged in

a one-man battle with the culture of hip hop, which he now wished to fully make his own. There is an obvious tension here, as the title of one of his early singles released in 2005 gives away, "Nie ein Rapper" (Never a Rapper). This is not an insult targeting an imaginary foe, but rather a proud self-expression; Bushido and SAAD rap: "Ich war nie ein Rapper, ich hab' für die Straßen gekämpft!" (I never was a rapper, I was fighting for the streets!)

The video utilizes familiar performative gestures from the canon of the hip-hop music video genre: the camera angle, even the gritty black-and-white aesthetics, the urban terrain, and two young men rapping at the camera clothed in what Germans have deemed "streetwear," including athletic sweaters, loose-fit denim, baseball caps, hoodies, name-brand sneakers, and sweatpants. Lyrically, however, the claim of the song's hook that the two were "never rappers" introduces the crucial distinction between themselves and the hip-hop scene in Germany associated with the previous generation. The lyrics create a whole array of assumed antagonists: among them the police, but also, and crucially, other rappers and the German and transnational hip-hop scene. The close affiliation between German bourgeois rappers and the way they collaborated with and idolized North American rappers emerge as less intuitive reasons for SAAD and Bushido to diss the scene. Arguably, this provides Berlin rappers, and especially those associated with the labels Royal Bunker, Aggro Berlin, and later ErIsGuterJunge (HeIsGoodboy), with their claim to an authentic identity beginning around 2005.

The transcultural hybridity proposed by the Berlin rappers cannot be found in the infatuation and appreciative copying of North American rap. Rather, the in-between-space SAAD and Bushido claim to make them who they are is the German hip-hop scene and, by extension, Germany at large. Strikingly, this articulation of a self not belonging here or there resonates with hip-hop culture and has arguably fueled hip-hop culture in the US and elsewhere since its inception. Even though Bushido's dad is Tunisian, the visual representation of the Lebanese flag, which coincides with the line "Einer von denen, die es niemals schaffen, ihre Heimat zu sehn" (I am one of those, who will probably never see their home country/country of origin). This designates a return to a

hybrid German identity, which had been part of German hip-hop culture from the get-go. However, there are obvious differences between Torch's insistence that he indeed holds a German passport, "Ich hab nen grünen Pass, mit nem goldenen Adler drauf!" (I hold a green passport with a golden eagle on it!), his identity as a "Heidelberger Haitianer" (Haitian from Heidelberg), and Bushido's amalgamation of an identity strongly rooted in the streets of Berlin while being strongly out of place in Germany and "homeless," despite hip-hop culture. The promise of hip-hop culture for the first generation of German hip hoppers had, after all, always been that it might become a home away from home: a place of belonging despite not belonging anywhere else, with hip hop as a transcultural community. This is what Bushido's identity operates in opposition to: German hip hop does not provide a home for him or his peers, the streets of Berlin do. Of course, this serves as yet another example of an uneasy translation of a trope in hip hop's cultural imaginary, namely the North American ghetto transposed to a European context.

Thus, the self-stylization of Berlin rappers since what I refer to as the "Berlin moment" is also based in fashion. The new style cannot be part of global hip-hop aesthetics, but only loosely premised on the streetwear idiom. This is why Bushido obsesses over baggy pants, he detests them as a gimmicky appropriation of African American styles by White, middle-class Germans. As Moritz Ege has demonstrated, Bushido's affiliation with Picaldi, a then-Berlin-based fashion label, speaks to another pop cultural conjuncture. Ege calls this "the post-Prolet era," (the post-pleb, post-prole) which he localizes and dates in Berlin and within the very scene I engage with (2013). I have argued elsewhere that the cultural pervasiveness of a German *Gheddo* (ghetto) in rap music of that time (and arguably up to today) provided, and continues to provide, German culture with one of the few discursive spaces in which the increasing wealth and income gaps, poverty, migration, and class are addressed frequently, rigorously and with a powerful affective regime attached to it (Lüthe 2019).

Of course, here Bushido plays the game of realness, and the problem of authenticity informs his every move. Bushido does not formulate a critique of the capitalist appropriation of Black styles, but he shares a sense of unease with the acts of transculturation within hip hop, which

at times also inform leftist critiques of hip hop's global success story. Still, Bushido only ups the ante of one of the driving forces of hip-hop culture: its claim to provide an authentic voice to the disenfranchised and forgotten. In addition, the neoliberal rags-to-riches fantasy that Eko Fresh around the same time begins to call "The German Dream," serves as a cornerstone of hip-hop-based youth culture of post-Hartz-reform Germany. These reforms initiated by the Social Democratic Party arguably, and somewhat ironically, represent Germany's complete embrace of the neoliberal pro-austerity political practice of cutting welfare and social safety nets in general (McManus 2022: 68ff). In addition, even though this might be simplistic or crude, Bushido and his German/Berlin-Dream affiliates have introduced a crucial component to hip-hop identities this side of the pond, namely that of the businessman and the neoliberal "proletarian" entrepreneur of the self. The message is "we do not belong, we should not have succeeded, but because we kept it real as gangsters, we are now rich." "Vom Bordstein zur Skyline" (From the Pavement to the Skyline), the title of Bushido's first solo album, thus makes all the sense in the world, and the album pursues similar world-making aspirations as some of the most successful German male rappers today, such as Capital Bra, RAF Camora, and 187 Straßenbande (187 Street Gang). On the level of lyrical content and music video aesthetics, this is Aggro Berlin reinvented, updated, and taken to the extreme for today's youth. The music sounds different, and the drugs are new as well.

Bushido's ten-minute-long diss track against former protégé Kay One, "Leben und Tod des Kenneth Glöckner" (Life and Death of Kenneth Glöckner), provides insight into his self-fashioning. He is equally disgusted by Kay One's initial poverty and economic dependence as he is with his selling out (his snitching): the "sin" that made Bushido record the track in the first place. What is more, however, Bushido reads the fact that Kay wanted to be a German/Swabian version of Nelly in baggy pants and a doo-rag as the real mirror into the empty soul of his

opponent. Kay One's only claim to identity, according to Bushido, is that it is non-existent.[10]

These German diss tracks condense the affective allure of gangsta rap across the world. They thus encapsulate the intrinsic connection between a sense of self and other to firmly position oneself in opposition to and the simultaneous affective regimes of anger, aggression, angst, superiority, and belonging. Hip hop has maybe always been about expressing a self that is rooted within hip-hop culture; a self that belongs there, where others do not.

In Lieu Of a Conclusion: Affect, Generation, and Post-Realness?

Tricia Rose's foundational text *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) not only introduces hip hop as a scholarly object but raises a variety of intersecting concerns that I revisit here in conclusion: my triad of affect, generation, and post-realness serves as a clumsy nod to Rose's prisms of "flow, layering, and rupture" in *Black Noise*. She writes:

> What is the significance of flow, layering, and rupture as demonstrated on the body and in hip hop's lyrical, musical, and visual works? Interpreting these concepts theoretically, one can argue that they create and sustain rhythmic motion, continuity, and circularity via flow; accumulate, reinforce, and embellish this continuity through layering; and manage threats to these narratives by building in ruptures that highlight the continuity as it momentarily challenges it. These effects at the level of style and aesthetics suggest

10 This specific diss of Kay One having no real identity to fall back on references one of the most popular and respected diss tracks in German-language rap's history: Kool Savas's 2005 diss track against the aforementioned Eko Fresh, in which he raps: "Player-, Lover-, Türken-Rap oder Gangster, entscheide Dich; Du weißt es nicht, den Du hast keine Identität!" (Player-, Lover-, Turkish-Rap, or Gangster, make a decision; oh, you can't, 'cause you have no identity!).

> affirmative ways in which profound social dislocation and rupture can be managed and perhaps contested in the cultural arena. Let us imagine these hip hop principles as a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation: create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them. (Rose 1994: 39)

None of the above becomes meaningful unless used "as a blueprint for social resistance" (ibid.: 39). The "social" that Rose is interested in is crucially produced and policed by experiences rooted in racialization, with its ultimate pseudo-neutral signifier of Whiteness, but also in the ways hip hop itself has impacted the social and cultural performances within its communities across the globe and, as a shortcut, has made audiences "feel" what it is to be within this world.

In terms of affect then, hip-hop music and culture have a lot to offer: graffiti writing not only enables artists to consider themselves artists, but also provides the effect of the thrill of the illegal and the outcome of writing oneself into being. Breakdancing openly celebrates a sense of belonging, both with the crew and in the cypher, and offers a similar affective attachment as, for example, other sports and activities premised in physical competition: excitement, working-out, exhaustion. Making music and listening to it shapes who we are, who we want to be, and how we feel about being in the world.

"Hip Hop in Deutschland, ich frag mich, wer bellt da; wisst Ihr morgen noch, wer heute Euer Held war?" (Hip Hop in Germany, look who is barking; do you today remember who your hero was yesterday?), as Torch had it on one of his features on a Tomekk-track (2000). And whether or not we and the current generation have forgotten about our heroes of the past, the trailblazers of German-language rap and hip-hop culture of the 1990s, the current scene is more diverse than ever. Following the success of SXTN, in 2019 Berlin rapper Juju released the most successful German rap album by a female artist. The contribution of female rappers ranging from the styles of Shirin David via Schwesta Ewa all the way to Sookee, indicates that we are currently witnessing an age of increasing visibility of female German-language rappers in Germany. While not all these rappers continue the long tradition of Black feminist and woman-

ist voices in rap music (Collins 2000/2009), Sookee, for example, brings gender and queer studies consciousness to the German rap stage. This, I believe, has a lot to do with the changing generational outlook of German rap.

Some of the transcultural concerns of early rap—how German am I, how German can hip hop be in the first place, does hip hop need to be translated to the German context in order to be palpable?—have all but vanished. Capital Bra now proudly declares that he is "Capital aus Ukraine und nicht Drake aus Canada" (Capital from Ukraine and not Drake from Canada) in one of his songs "Benzema" (2018). On the whole, then, the uneasiness that haunted early hip hop in Germany, especially regarding Whiteness, German-ness, and the US as a place of origin seem to have taken a back seat and maybe intergenerational conflicts have taken its place. After all, the history of hip hop in Germany and the variety of identities it has enabled to be articulated and performed is so rich by now, that the necessity to engage with US American and African American originators has all but disappeared.

In the 21st century, the internet and YouTube have replaced the army bases and the youth centers and the need to root hip-hop identities in Germany in the local. Massive Töne's and Freundeskreis' "Mutterstadt" (Mother Town) has given way to Tua's "Vorstadt" (suburb): a place that could be anywhere in Germany (even though it is also in Stuttgart).[11] Strikingly, the latter, a song about growing up and growing out of the suburb, lyrically and musically trace German rap history from the suburbs of the 1990s to the contemporary moment in the third verse of the

11 Arguably, Tua's "Vorstadt"—the German suburb—sits at the intersection between what the suburb signifies in US culture, its imagined racial homogeneity/Whiteness, its alleged peacefulness, its relationship with private property and homeownership, and what the suburb signifies in French cultural history in the notion of the "banlieu" as an ethnically diverse, economically precarious, and isolated place outside of the city. The lyrics delineate this complexity and tension between the suburb as harmless and dangerous, as both connected to urban life and as distinctly not part of the city, as representing a more limited spectrum of diversity typical of mid-size German towns and cities.

song, which is also set apart musically through a choppy, cloud-style beat and rap.

In this chapter, I focused on the first and second generation of male German rappers and how they performed transcultural hip-hop sensibilities for German-speaking audiences. If we take the street rap era and the Berlin take-over of German rap to have formed the second generation of German-language rap, we find ourselves now in a third-generation moment of German hip hop. Sookee, SXTN, die Orsons, Edgard Wasser & Fatoni, and Danger Dan & the Antilopen Gang can rightfully assume that their audiences long for new perspectives and identities within rap music. The carnivalesque Orsons, the self-ironic and meta-aware Fatoni and Edgar Wasser, and the queer activist Sookee explicitly articulate identities vis-à-vis the older generations, who now primarily serve as emblems of hip hop's past and of days gone by. Age has become an issue in Germany, too. When Edgar Wasser jokes about the fact that his comrade Fatoni caters to a generation of old White German critics of rap music in their 2021 song "Künstlerische Differenzen" (Creative Differences), it makes me feel old, too.

It begs the question, of course, what does it signify that a whole generation of German hip-hop practitioners—like me—do not get tired of sharing what hip hop means to them? Have we become the old White dudes in German society that hip hop once potentially enabled us to criticize? Maybe growing up with rap music and hip-hop culture is still easier than growing old with it. And maybe the "can't stop, won't stop" mentality of hip-hop culture forces us to still do what we do and to continue to be who we are: as part of, and thanks to, hip-hop culture and the world it created.

Discography/Videography

Bushido. *Vom Bordstein bis zur Skyline*. Aggro Berlin, 2003, compact disc.

Bushido. "Leben und Tod des Kenneth Glöckner." Ersguterjunge. YouTube video, posted in 2013. (The music video has since been deleted from the artist's channel.)

Bushido and Baba SAAD. "Nie ein Rapper." *Carlo Cokxxx Nutten II*. Ersguterjunge, 2005, compact disc.

Capital Bra. "Benzema." *CB6*. Bra Musik, 2019, compact disc.

Die Fantastischen Vier. "Die Da." *Vier Gewinnt*. Columbia Records, 1992, compact disc.

DJ Tomekk vs. Grandmaster Flash featuring Afrob, Flava Flav and MC Rene. "1,2,3,… Rhymes Galore." *Return of Hip Hop*. Modul/BMG, 1999/2000, compact disc.

DJ Tomekk featuring Curse, GZA, Sunz of Men, Stieber Twins. "Ich lebe für Hip Hop." *Return of Hip Hop*. Modul/BMG, 2000, compact disc.

DJ Tomekk featuring KRS One, MC Rene, Torch. "Return of Hip Hop." *Return of Hip Hop*. Modul/BMG, 2000, compact disc.

Fatoni and Edgar Wasser. "Künstlerische Differenzen." *Delirium*. LoL Records, 2021, compact disc.

King Kool Savas. "King of Rap." *Full House* (Plattenpapzt). Jive, 2000, compact disc.

Massive Töne featuring Afrob and Freundeskreis. "Mutterstadt." *Kopfnicker*. MZEE Records, 1996, compact disc.

Massive Töne. "Das Urteil." *Die John Bello Story*. Optik Records, 2005, compact disc.

Tua. "Vorstadt." *Tua*. Chimperator Productions, 2019, compact disc.

Wu-Tang Clan. "Bring Da Ruckus." *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*. Loud Records/BMG Music, 1993, compact disc.

References

Asante, M.K. Jr. 2009. *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Benessaieh, Afef, ed. 2010. "Multiculturalism, Interculturality, Transculturality." In *Amériques transculturelles – Transcultural Americas*: 11–38. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ch78hd.4.

Breitenwischer, Dustin. 2021. *Die Geschichte des Hip-Hop: 111 Alben*. Ditzingen: Reclam.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2009. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge Classics.

Ege, Moritz. 2013. *"Ein Proll mit Klasse": Mode, Popkultur und soziale Ungleichheit unter jungen Männern in Berlin.* Frankfurt/New York: Campus.

Fleetwood, Nicole R. 2005. "Hip-Hop Fashion, Masculine Anxiety, and the Discourse of Americana." In *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, edited by Harry J. Elam, Jr. and Kennell Jackson, 326–45. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Frith, Simon. 1996. "Music and Identity." In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, 108–127. London: Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n7.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2022. *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*. London: Verso Books.

Hall, Stuart. 1992. "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" In *Black Popular Culture*, edited by Gina Dent, 21–33. New York: Dia Center for the Arts.

Lhamon, W.T. 2000. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lott, Eric. 1993. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lüthe, Martin. 2019. "Bedrooms, Bathrooms, and Beyond? MTV Cribs, Hip Hop und Reichtumsperformanzen im privaten Kabelfernsehen in den 2000er Jahren." In *Reichtum in Deutschland: Akteure, Räume*

und Lebenswelten im 20. Jahrhundert, edited by Eva-Maria Gajek, Anne Kurr and Lu Seegers, 272–285. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783835343276-272.

Mbembe, Achille. 2017. *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

McManus, Ian P. 2022. *The Repoliticization of the Welfare State.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Müller, Eggo. 1999. "Populäre Visionen. Ein Sampler zur Debatte um Musikclips und Musikfernsehen in den Cultural Studies." In *Viva MTV! Popmusik im Fernsehen,* edited by Klaus Neumann-Braun, 74–91. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp

Robinson, Cedric J. 1983/2000. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition.* Durham: The University of North Carolina Press.

Robinson, Cedric J. 2019. *On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance,* edited by Ed. H.L.T. Quan. New York: Pluto Press.

Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America.* Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Singh, Jaspal Naveel. 2021. *Transcultural Voices: Narrating Hip Hop Culture in Complex Delhi*. Bristol: Multilingual Matter.