

WHAT'S SO GERMAN ABOUT IT?

Cultural Identity in the Berlin Hip Hop Scene

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*Dedicated with love to Barbara Jean,
who sacrificed so much to give me a wonderful life.*

ABSTRACT

Literature on the appropriation of hip hop culture outside of the United States maintains that hip hop engenders local interpretations no longer reliant on African-American origins, and this research project is an attempt to determine the extent to which this is the case in a specific local context. My thesis is an effort to move beyond the rhetoric of much of what constitutes the debates surrounding globalisation, by employing a research strategy combining theoretical analysis and direct engagement with the Berlin hip hop scene. My project not only aims to uncover the meanings young people in Berlin give to their hip hop practices, but intends to do so within a framework that does not ignore the discursive spaces in which these young people are operating. This is particularly relevant because of the complex ways in which race and ethnicity are related to German national identity.

Furthermore, this thesis is concerned with the ways in which the spaces and places collectively known as Berlin shape the cultural practices found there. While hip hop belongs to global culture, it is also the case that the city of Berlin plays a significant role in determining how hip hop is understood and reproduced by young people there.

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INTRODUCTION: WHY HIP HOP IN BERLIN?

This project has evolved from my on-going interest in examining how the concept of German national identity is represented in various forms of German media. This interest grew out of my experiences learning the German language and from living and working in Germany, and eventually led to graduate work in media studies at New School for Social Research in New York. This work focused on *Heimat* films of the post-war era and New German Cinema of the 1970s. In these projects I was particularly concerned with how the idea of being German in the years following World War II was impacted by the legacy of National Socialism and the subsequent United States (US) military occupation, and how the struggle to come to terms with the Nazi past was reflected in film. My decision to focus on film was based not only on the relative importance of German language cinema for German audiences during the periods under investigation, but on the unique features of film as a medium of representation, and on the ways in which the act of seeing a film created imagined communities among film audiences.

This was particularly relevant in Hans Deppe's film *Grün ist die Heide*, one of the most popular German films of the post-war era. In my analysis of Deppe's work I was searching for the ways in which Germanness was represented in the plight of an ethnic German family who had been expelled from their Pomeranian homeland by the Red Army at the close of the war, and who subsequently settled in West Germany. It was critical to note, for example, that when the film premiered, a quarter of the citizens of West Germany were ethnic German expellees from the East. Hence the film served as a psychic balm of sorts; not only did it affirm the perceived suffering of the expellees, but it reinforced for the rest of the West

German population the notion of German war suffering, making it possible for them to mourn the war as victims rather than perpetrators.

My experience of living and working in Germany, however, had raised other issues with respect to German identity, beyond those associated with the troubled past. As a black American woman for whom the tension between race and national identity has always been fairly acute, I was struck by the presence of an Afro-German population that seemed to be largely invisible in the German media, and whose history was mistakenly assumed by many Germans with whom I spoke, not to precede 1945. Indeed, I was intrigued by a black experience utterly different from that with which I was familiar in the US. I therefore initially considered a research project based on exploring representations of Afro-Germans in German film and television. Such an investigation, however, would have been beyond the scope of a Masters level research project, so I decided to save an exploration of race and representation in Germany for a full-length doctoral research project.

A subsequent trip to Germany in the fall of 1999 re-introduced me to German-language hip hop and consequently caused me to rethink the research proposal I had been in the process of developing. The issue of race and representation in Germany took on an entirely different meaning as I watched hip hop videos on television. While I still saw relatively few Afro-Germans on TV, I did see young white Germans who seemed to have adapted hip hop styles more in tune with life in Brooklyn than in Berlin. Of course, my reaction to hip hop in Germany – specifically the idea that hip hop could be thought of as more at home in one place than in another – had much to do with my own identity issues and the complex history of the appropriation of black popular culture in the US. Shifting the focus of my research proposal from an investigation of Afro-German representation in German media, I decided to explore how “blackness” was being represented by

young white Germans. I wanted to examine the transnational appropriation of black popular culture from the US and challenge the global/local dialectic central to globalisation theory. I was especially curious to know why black popular culture is hardly ever considered imperialistic, but something that is always appropriated.

Before formally beginning my doctoral studies, I moved to Berlin for further language instruction. I also used this as an opportunity to undertake a preliminary exploration of the hip hop scene, in an attempt to develop a more substantial understanding of what hip hop means in Germany. My time in Berlin confirmed my suspicions that the global/local dialectic is an inadequate model for theorising the cultural spaces that shape a city like Berlin. How does one even begin to define the local in a city that boasts inhabitants from all over the world? More importantly perhaps, living in Berlin forced me to reconsider my pre-conceived notions about what hip hop means to young people in Germany, and also led me to reconsider the nature of the research project itself. The globalisation discourse within which I was attempting to frame my research became less important as Berlin – and its complex history – became the new focus of my attention.

As I became familiar with the city, my initial reaction was that Berlin is a singular experience in Germany. This was not merely a question of its ethnic diversity, but the particular way in which the city itself seemed to attract people from all over the world with no other goal in mind than to claim Berlin residence. There are certainly economic factors that have contributed to this influx (particularly of young people), as Berlin has what is reputed to be one of the lowest costs of living in Germany. At the same time, however, it struck me that living in Berlin – and this was particularly true for certain neighbourhoods – seemed to offer an instant identity kit, which I found reminiscent of what is conveyed when I claim

that I'm from Brooklyn¹. As Berlin struggles to redefine itself in the post-Wall era and beyond, its residents – both old and new – derive a sense of being that is closely related to the evolution of Berlin as the new capital of Germany and a so-called “global city.” These observations have created an intriguing tension in the development of my research project. On the one hand, Berlin is the city it is because of global cultural flows that have been instrumental in creating an environment where any- and everything seems possible. On the other hand, Berlin occupies its own unique place in German history, perhaps most famously as the compelling symbol of a divided nation, and it may be argued that it is this very history that has contributed to Berlin's emergence as a global city.

More importantly, spending time in Berlin caused me to reconsider my focus on the way I had presumed “blackness” to be represented by young white German hip hoppers. As a result, I moved away from a strict consideration of the ways in which white Germans experience hip hop, to a broader consideration of how hip hop scenes are formed and maintained in such an ethnically diverse environment as Berlin. Granted, my initial reluctance to investigate hip hop among groups like Turkish youth had much to do with the fact that it is precisely this group which so often receives academic attention with respect to hip hop in Germany. To the extent that hip hop in Germany is analysed at all outside of Germany, it is usually to establish its function as a resistance strategy for marginalised groups of people. It had been my intention to move beyond this rather restricted and stereotyped reading of what hip hop means to young people in order to understand the role hip hop plays in the lives of members of the dominant population. By broadening my study, however, I wanted to uncover how a global cultural form is read by different

¹ Though it must be said that what it conveyed is in fact dependent on whatever pre-conceived notions the listener has, and is thus subject to change.

groups, with different agendas, and quite different perspectives on what it means to be German.

RETHINKING THE LOCAL

My research on race and cultural identity in Berlin's hip hop scene could not have been undertaken without considering the complex ways in which hip hop has entered the realm of global culture and been encountered by young people in Germany. Though discussions of the homogenising nature of globalisation have eased over time, much academic writing still seems to suggest that the intersection of global and local cultures has negatively impacted local identities. In *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, however, David Morley and Kevin Robins argue that "we should not idealise the local" (1995, 116). Morley and Robins explore the impact of new media technologies on European cultural identity, and do so by conducting a specific analysis of media in the UK. They argue that understanding the impact of globalisation means acknowledging that "the historical development of capitalist economies has always had profound implications for cultures, identities and ways of life" (1995, 111). In other words, globalisation isn't a new phenomenon. In their thoughtful analysis of the global-local nexus, they maintain that the concept of the local is relative:

...globalisation entails a corporate presence in, and understanding of, the 'local' arena. But the 'local' in this sense does not correspond to any specific territorial configuration. The global-local nexus is about the relation between globalising and particularising dynamics in the strategy of the global corporation, and the 'local' should be seen as a fluid and relational space, constituted only in and through its relation to the global. For the global corporation, the local might, in fact, correspond to a regional, national or even pan-regional sphere of activity. (1995, 117)

This concept of the 'local' as entirely relative to the global underpins my analysis of hip hop in Berlin. Despite what may be read as just another appropriation of hip

hop culture by young people outside of the US, I will show that the Berlin case is unique; that the engagement with hip hop culture in Berlin cannot be separated from the city's complex history; that hip hop in Berlin cannot be understood without considering the reasons young people are so easily inclined to distance themselves from German culture and belong to an imagined global hip hop community. What Morley and Robins posit and I will illustrate, is that theorising the impact of global culture requires a specific and focused discussion of the local space, which in this case involves a consideration of history as well as aesthetics.

HIP HOP AS A FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

As discussed earlier, my previous research on the relationship between German national identity and media was based on film analysis. In describing the path to the current research project I mentioned the impact of watching music videos in Germany. What struck me at that time was the way in which hip hop performances I saw on television seemed to be out of sync with what I knew about German identity. Hip hop music and culture appeared to offer ways of being only marginally related to German culture. There are two primary issues here: 1) the use of popular music as a means of self-definition; and 2) the specifics of hip hop music and culture which drive this process in a particular direction. In his work on music and identity Simon Frith bases his investigation of the ways in which popular music produces rather than reflects social groups, on two ideas,

...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*. (Frith, 1996, 109)

I'll return to these issues later in the thesis, but their importance is worth noting at this point, because of their significance to hip hop culture. Frith goes on to say,

What I want to suggest, in other words, is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities (the assumption of the homology models) but that they only get to know themselves *as groups* (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) *through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them. (Frith, 1996, 111)

What does this mean in terms of hip hop, with its emphasis on authenticity, street credibility, resistance, textual dexterity, performance, but above all community? Is hip hop the organising principle around which certain groups of young people in Berlin have come to understand who they are?

While I have shied away from a comparative analysis of the ways in which hip hop is practiced in the US and Berlin, engaging with hip hop as a cultural practice in Berlin means considering hip hop as a cultural practice in the US. This is particularly significant given that hip hop from the US maintains such a dominant position in the imaginations of young people who practice hip hop in Berlin, and remains the benchmark with which they construct concepts such as authenticity and position themselves in the Berlin scene. Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural production – specifically, his notion of the field – provides a useful framework for considering these issues, and I will return to this later in this section.

Since the mid-1970s, hip hop in the US has evolved from a live performance-based cultural practice into a globally mediated mainstream form of popular culture. In its infancy, artists engaged in hip hop – dancers, rappers, DJs, and graffiti writers – shared equal footing in a cultural practice linked inextricably to place :

Hip hop culture originated during the mid-seventies as an integrated series of live community-based practices. It remained a function of live practice and performance for a number of years, exclusive to those who gathered together along New York City blocks, in parks, and in select clubs such as the now-famous Harlem World or T-Connection. Early MCs (or "rappers") and DJs, graffiti artists, and break dancers forged a scene entirely dependent on face-to-face social contact and interaction. Indeed, the event itself, as an amalgam of dance, dress, art, and music, was intrinsic to hip hop culture during these years. As one might expect, the art's early years went largely unrecorded and undocumented. In 1979, however,

Sugarhill Records, a small label in New Jersey, released a single entitled "Rapper's Delight." (Dimitriadis, 2005, 1)

Dimitriadis goes on to refer to the release of "Rapper's Delight" as a "rupture" in hip hop discourse, moving hip hop from the spaces and places of New York to the rest of the world. He then cites Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," to reflect on the loss of hip hop's "aura" due to its increasingly commodified nature (Dimitriadis, 2005, 2-3). Aside from this subjective notion of aura, hip hop's worldwide success in its commodity form, impacted both its aesthetics and the notion of the hip hop community.

In Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, he considers social spaces within society by conceptualising the ways in which social agents are able to position themselves based on power, which in this sense refers primarily to capital and class. The horizontal plane is composed of social agents, who are able to position themselves in relation to each other based on their own accumulation of capital and power, represented in the vertical stratification of society. According to Bourdieu,

...a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (1992, 97)

Bourdieu's concept of the field is tied to his notions of capital and habitus. Using his analogy of the field as a game, economic and cultural capital are the resources that allow agents to play, and habitus contributes to the agent's ability to perceive the rules of the game and effect a winning strategy (1992, 98-100).

Though Bourdieu's work was chiefly concerned with the fields of art and literature, it lends itself to the social worlds which constitute popular music, and is

particularly relevant for those of us engaged in ethnographic investigations of youth culture. In fact, Bourdieu argues that,

...the notion of the field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual, even though one cannot construct a field if not through individuals, since the information necessary for statistical analysis is generally attached to individuals or institutions. It is the field which is primary and must be the focus of the research operations. This does not imply that individuals are mere "illusions," that they do not exist: they exist as *agents*—and not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects—who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field. And it is knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their *point of view* or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed. (1992, 107)

In trying to carry a research project meant to shed light on the ways in which young people in Berlin understand and practice hip hop, I have approached the Berlin hip hop scene as a field. This construct has allowed me to consider various individuals and institutions found in this field, but at the same time recognise the broader field of power, against and within which these agents struggle.

THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into three major sections. *Part 1: Developing a Research Project*, contains a review of the literature. Here I identify the literature that was critical in terms of answering the questions which I believed would help me understand the myriad issues involved in researching the Berlin hip hop scene. The second chapter in Part I is a detailed review of the methodology employed for this project.

Part II: Understanding the Issues, contains three chapters that provide a historical context for reading contemporary life in Berlin. In Chapter 3, "Berlin: Ideology and Diversity," I am concerned with exploring the historical roots for two contemporary phenomena: Berlin's ethnic diversity and the on-going East/West

divide. This chapter considers the impact of the city's division on its residents and the subsequent ideological evolutions of the two Berlins. The chapter then examines the history of guest workers on both sides of the Berlin Wall as well as other sources of ethnic migration. Chapter 4, "American Music and Post-war Identities," places the contemporary appropriation of hip hop culture in a historical continuum by examining an earlier negotiation with American popular culture during the post-war era. By considering earlier appropriations of rock and jazz by German youth, I offer a reference point for theorising music and everyday life in contemporary Berlin. The final chapter in the section, "Germany's Hip Hop Old School," gives a brief historical review of the processes by which hip hop first came to Germany and by which young people moved from being consumers of hip hop culture to producers in their own right.

Part III: Theorising Hip Hop in Berlin, draws on empirical data to develop a model for understanding how young people in Berlin have adapted hip hop as a local cultural practice. In Chapter 6, I present three case studies. Chapter 7, "German Citizenship and Berlin Identities," explores the concept of German national identity and the extent to which this impacts on the lives of young people engaged in hip hop practices. Chapter 8, "Hip Hop in Berlin," is an aesthetic examination of music and videos by key figures in the Berlin hip hop scene.

AIMS AND ISSUES

Given my previous research on German media and identity, it may seem a bit odd to have made the transition from an analysis of a 1951 *Heimat* film to an ethnographic investigation of the Berlin hip hop scene. In fact, the rather labyrinthine path I have taken from my previous work to the current project has always been determined by a desire to understand the extent to which German

media reflects the impact of National Socialism on the concept of German national identity. *Heimat* films of the post-war era and New German Cinema of the 1970s appeared in response to a devastating historical trauma and their Germanness was derived from their attempts to respond to a specific series of events in German history. In the case of *Heimat* films this response was characterised by escapist or utopian post-war fantasies of a Germany that had never existed, while the response of New German Cinema could be read as the rebuke of the child against the parent for the horrors of National Socialism. Is there a similar function in the emergence of hip hop in Germany?

Clearly, there are many issues at stake here, not the least of which is the role my own identity plays in researching Berlin's hip hop scene. Encountering black popular culture outside of the US is at times a perplexing affair, and this is particularly relevant when it comes to the hip hop music and videos from the US found in the charts and on heavy rotation on various music channels in Germany. I was initially troubled by what I considered to be my lack of objectivity with respect to the subject matter – an issue I did not consider particularly relevant in my previous research. I have since come to the conclusion, however, that my role as an ethnographic researcher does not require me to deny issues – such as race – which are raised in a cross-cultural research project, but rather to foreground and incorporate them into the analysis of my research process.

The pages that follow do not represent the history of hip hop in Berlin, nor are they meant to be a comprehensive survey of the entire Berlin hip hop scene. What I have undertaken is not an investigation of hip hop culture drawing on insights gained from examining the Berlin scene, but rather an investigation of identity and culture in Germany with insights gained from an examination of hip hop culture. This distinction is critical because it has determined how I have

approached my research project, both in terms of the methodologies used and the decisions and choices I made while in the field. That said, this thesis represents a moment in time in the Berlin hip hop scene; a moment framed by my experiences in the field, and by the historical questions I considered critical to my own understanding of contemporary Berlin. Moreover, it is a moment shaped by participants in the scene whose lives and stories are represented here, and without whom this work would not have been possible.

The experience of conducting this project has altered my life fundamentally. I am sure I did not completely understand the complexities of transnational field research while planning my research proposal, nor was I fully aware of the responsibility that such ethnographic research would entail. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that whatever difficulties and hardships ethnographic research may mean for Ph.D. students, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Not only are these benefits enjoyed by the student researchers whose lives are enriched by such experiences, but by the academy as well. For it is in stepping outside of academic institutions to engage with everyday life, that scholars reveal their continued relevance in a world that increasingly calls this relevance into question.

PART 1: DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROJECT

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned in the Introduction, this research project has changed considerably since the seeds were sown several years ago. The evolution of this project had as much to do with the time I spent in Germany trying to see how young people there made sense of hip hop, as with my engagement with the theoretical terrain on which an investigation of hip hop and German national identity could take place. It is important to note that this theoretical terrain was shaped by two different academic environments: the former Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology at the University of Birmingham, where I began my doctoral studies; and the Department of Film and Media Studies at the University of Stirling, where I completed them. Not only was the literature I reviewed impacted by two distinct academic environments, but more significantly, by two distinct phases in the research process as well.

A review of the literature has two primary functions: one is to prepare the researcher for the research project by identifying the relevant issues and debates; the second is related in that it allows the researcher to then locate her project within current scholarship. When I began to collect and review material for this project, I did so with both of these tasks in mind. Because of the project's ethnographic nature and the scarcity of English-language material on hip hop in Berlin, however, the preparatory function of the review emerged as more important. Before going into the field I tried to identify the issues I thought would inform my fieldwork experiences. The experience of being in the field, however, raised other significant issues about which I had either been ignorant or considered relatively unimportant. Rather than revise the questions that shaped my initial understanding of my research project, I have chosen to preserve them. In the conclusion I review how my

time in the field impacted on my initial concept of my project. This approach to the literature review is useful because it shows how research projects – and this may be especially true for ethnographic projects – are conceived and then develop over time.

In my initial consideration of young people and cultural identity in the Berlin hip hop scene, there seemed to be countless intersecting themes and issues – particularly when compared to my previous research on film. I wanted to understand the debates surrounding youth culture research, as well as those involving the notion of global culture. As the project was specifically concerned with the Berlin hip hop scene, I wanted to explore the city's history and those aspects of the contemporary Berlin that continue to make it such a compelling city. Moving from film analysis to the consideration of hip hop music required familiarising myself with the theoretical debates with respect to music and its relationship to identity. I also wanted to understand more about the ways in which youth culture is researched in Germany. Finally, I wanted to explore the notion that hip hop culture is black culture, as this seemed to have significant implications for the adaptation of hip hop outside of the US. These were the issues I initially considered fundamental. In what follows I consider the questions they raised and the literature I consulted in order to begin the search for the answers.

1.1 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CONDUCT ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON YOUTH CULTURE?

As Andy Bennett points out in a 2000 article for *British Journal of Sociology*, youth culture research has a troubled history, the roots of which lie in the influential work done in the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the late Seventies. Bennett cites the work of the CCCS as being

primarily responsible for the failure of researchers to employ and develop ethnography in youth culture research. While there was some ethnographic research carried out at the CCCS, Bennett argues that one of the major problems with research on youth culture done there, was the “sociological trend in imposing theoretical frameworks on the cultural significance of music and style from above...” (Bennett, 2000, 455). Central to the work of the CCCS was the development of subculture theory, and among the many problems now associated with this approach was its treatment of consumption. In their consideration of style in youth culture, theorists gave their own meanings to consumption, failing to consider the meanings which young people themselves attached to their consumption (Bennett, 1999, 2000, 2002; Miles, 1995 and 1998). More recent research on youth culture and popular music employs ethnography to address what Bennett refers to as the “plurality of issues and circumstances that underpin the identity politics of contemporary youth cultures” (2000, 11). In addition to Bennett, I was particularly drawn to the work of Sara Cohen, Mir Wermuth, and Greg Dimitriadis, whose work reveal both a willingness to engage directly with the subjects of their research and to foreground their research methods in the work they produce.

In *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (1991) Cohen focuses primarily on two local bands in the Liverpool rock music scene. She accompanies the bands to gigs and to meetings with record label executives, and spends time with them in their practice spaces and with individual band members at home. Cohen offers a fascinating look at what making music means to individuals and how these individual meanings subsequently impact on the bands to which they belong. And while her work also addresses the historical, social, and economic issues which frame the discursive spaces in which bands in Liverpool make their music, Cohen’s study is clearly driven by its ethnography. Bennett’s research on white hip hop culture in northeast

England (1999) and ethnic hip hop in Frankfurt am Main Germany (1999), is similarly characterised by its ethnographic approach. And like Cohen, Bennett also engaged in participant observation, working, for instance, in a pedagogical mobile music project in Frankfurt designed to teach young people to play musical instruments.

Ethnography is best used in conjunction with other strategies that offer a context for analysing the collected data. In her work on how the concept of authenticity impacts on hip hop communities in the Netherlands, Mir Wermuth (2001) uses an approach that combines ethnographic methods – participant observation and interviews – with a qualitative textual analysis of hip hop lyrics, and a quantitative content analysis of Dutch music charts. The strength of this combined approach is that it engages directly with young people in hip hop communities in the Netherlands, and at the same time acknowledges that these hip hop practices take place in discursive spaces where issues like race, ethnicity, and global culture intersect. Analysing the discursive frameworks in which young people operate is an essential element in understanding the meanings they attribute to their cultural practices.

For his work on hip hop texts in the lives of young people, Greg Dimitriadis spent two and a half years working at a youth centre in a small undisclosed Midwestern city in the United States, where he “developed and ran a weekly program devoted to discussing African-American vernacular culture” (Dimitriadis, 2001, 37). Dimitriadis also addresses the importance of combining research methods that employ both textual analysis and ethnography, which he argues, rarely occurs with respect to black youth:

What is needed, I argue, is an approach that looks critically at popular texts as well as at how young people are both enabled and constrained in their uses of these texts. This kind of approach is especially necessary in working with black teens and with black popular culture. Indeed, while rap music and hip-hop culture have redefined the popular

American landscape in fundamental ways, virtually all the work on black popular culture and rap music has been historical and textual. There has not been a single long-term ethnographic study of rap music in the daily lives of black youth. (Dimitriadis, 2001, 9)

While this may simply be a reflection of a general lack of ethnographic research in the area of popular music, Dimitriadis' observation is nevertheless a striking statement, made even more so given the large body of scholarly material increasingly available on hip hop culture.

The reliance on textual analysis is particularly problematic given the complex ways in which young people use media texts. According to Dimitriadis,

...young people today are using contemporary media to define themselves and to map their daily lives in ways that often confound adults. These texts...are circulating and being picked up in many different and often entirely unpredictable ways. These texts are no longer – if they ever were – embedded in stable social systems that draw participants into coherent and predictable modes of reception. Reception practices cannot be assumed *a priori*, nor can their effects be prefigured. Indeed, though control of signs and sign systems is an increasingly important part of success in this now-global information age, we have very little sense of how young people use these texts to construct their identities, their unique subjectivities, and their social networks. The default response, quite often, is to assume that we can read relevant information off of texts themselves and use this information to explain the lives of various social actors. The default condition here is to assume high levels of predictability from text to subject, a problem with much work in cultural studies and education. (Dimitriadis, 2001, 35)

Young people are anything but predictable, which may contribute to the reluctance of scholars to go into the field to do research.²

² Unfortunately, this reluctance has created a void in contemporary methodological texts specifically geared towards the study of young people and popular music. Certainly there is a long tradition of ethnography in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology which can be drawn upon to address some of these issues, but clearly more work needs to be done in order to give students in media studies and cultural studies methodological tools and resources designed specifically for these fields, which would then encourage more ethnographic research on youth culture.

1.2 WHAT IS GLOBAL CULTURE?

As Tony Mitchell's recent work on hip hop outside of the US indicates, hip hop has been taken up by young people around the world and can no longer be viewed strictly as African-American culture. It is, rather, a global cultural practice:

Hip-hop and rap cannot be viewed simply as an expression of African American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identities all over the world. (Mitchell, 2001, 1)

While I am not aiming to critique the debates surrounding globalisation, the concept of global culture is one that needs to be unpacked in order to move beyond the rhetoric of "global youth affiliations" to an understanding of how cultures encountered in the global marketplace enter and transform local cultures.

More recent scholarship in this area has moved beyond notions of cultural imperialism and the creation of a single global culture. For some, the process of globalisation represents hybridisation (Pieterse, 1995) while for others it evokes the metaphor of a global supermarket, where individuals are free to pick and choose those aspects of global culture they prefer (Mathews, 2000). At the heart of these considerations, however, lies some notion of global versus local culture. And while the impact of globalisation can be argued to have a liberating effect on some local cultures (Cvetkovich & Kellner 1997), the global/local dialectic fails to capture the nuances of the cultural changes witnessed around the world. Given these nuances and the contested meanings of globalisation, there is a compelling case to be made for abandoning sweeping notions of global change built on "center-periphery" models (Appadurai, 1998; Street, 1997) and considering instead "transnational connections" (Hannerz, 1996) and global cultural flows:

The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries). . . . The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics that we have only begun to theorize. (Appadurai, 1998, 32-33)

Appadurai's framework for theorising global cultural flows consists of dimensions he refers to as ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples (Appadurai, 1998, 33). Mediascaples describe not only the production and dissemination of information, but also the "images of the world created by these media" (Appadurai, 1998, 35), and it is here that hip hop is both produced and consumed. It is important to note, however, that mediascaples – or rather the information and images encountered there – are ultimately determined by economic and political factors, or perhaps more precisely, corporate considerations. Mediascaples in Germany are not the same as in Indonesia, but nor are they the same as in the US. Returning to Mathews' notion of the global supermarket, some shelves may be fully stocked with a variety of goods as well as name brands, while others may be bare or limited in their variety. In fact, individuals are free to choose only to the extent of the choices available to them and their ability to pay. This certainly has clear implications for how hip hop is disseminated and received around the world.

Previous discussions of hip hop culture have been centred quite firmly on hip hop culture in the US, but there is a growing body of academic work on the emergence of hip hop practices as global youth culture (Gross, 1994; Osumare, 1999; Bennett, 2000; Kaya, 2001; Mitchell, 2001; Ma, 2002). These works tend to frame their discussion of hip hop and its impact outside of the US around the notion of resistance; and this is particularly true of the discussion of hip hop's adaptation by Turkish youth in Germany (Elflein, 1998; Bennett, 2000; Menrath, 2001; Soysal, Verlan and Loh, 2002; Loh and Güngör, 2002). The underlying theoretical assumptions grounding these works is that cultural products transcend essentialism and are therefore capable of being "reworked" by whatever local group has appropriated them (Bennett, 1996; Cornyetz, 1994; Mitchell, 2001). These studies rely

primarily on textual analysis and historical review, though some work is supported by ethnographic research (Osumare, 1999; Bennett, 2000; Menrath, 2001).

Hip hop's very presence in the global marketplace, however, raises questions about its function as a strategy of resistance. As a multi-billion dollar industry in its own right, and a powerful influence on others – particularly fashion, advertising, and film – it is difficult to accept the argument that hip hop is resisting anything in the dominant power structure. Moreover, the insistence on reading hip hop as resistance can be read as a reluctance to acknowledge the complete commodification of a cultural practice, which according to Christopher Holmes Smith (1997), is in service to broader US economic interests:

In the post-industrial world of capitalist production, every place within global space takes on money-making significance – even the ghetto. The more power that any one product has to signify as many places as possible at any given moment increases its marketability, which in turn creates commodified identities and a proliferation of transnational, transcultural interactivity. The 'shit is real' economic constraints that have helped guide our discussion on current rap expressions make blunt commentary on these trends. In fact, one could argue that rap's emergence is linked considerably, if not completely, to the micro-level effects of America's efforts to consolidate its collective resources in the face of increased global economic competition. Since its earliest days, hip hop art has been cultivated by diasporic peoples whose travel – both real and imagined – has been initiated to negotiate historically-specific, local and global socioeconomic pressures. (Smith, 1997, 353)

Smith's argument that hip hop is one of America's "resources" in her fight for global economic dominance is provocative, particularly because it implies that resistance itself has been commodified on a global scale.

Does hip hop's presence in a global marketplace make it global culture? If, in fact, cultural practices encountered in the global marketplace are constantly being re-worked and re-interpreted, to what extent can they still be thought of as global culture? If hip hop engenders new meanings wherever it is practiced outside of the US, what's global about it beyond the name? Or do there remain essential elements no matter where hip hop is practiced which link it to other hip hop practices around

the world? Do hip hop practices outside of the US have an impact on hip hop in the US? Is there an imagined global hip hop community?

1.3 HOW DOES BERLIN SHAPE ITS CULTURAL PRACTICES?

Central to the concept of cultural production is an awareness of the spaces and places in which cultural practices occur. Sara Cohen's work on rock culture in Liverpool offers a clear analysis of how that city – from its geography to its economy – has impacted on the rock scene there:

It is not the intention of this book to suggest that the situation in Liverpool regarding rock bands was particularly unusual....What I would like to emphasize, however, are the ways in which those bands and the local music scene in which they participated, reflected not only characteristics of the music business in general, but those of Liverpool itself. (Cohen, 1991, 19)

Determining the extent to which Liverpool was reflected in the local music scene, required a keen understanding of the city itself. Cohen points to issues like public transportation and its impact on creating and maintaining a fan base for local bands, and in more historical terms, analyses Liverpool's role as a major port city in the development of its music culture. This type of analysis recognises that cultural practices are discursive in nature and this is not merely an abstract concept; the physical spaces of city have much to do with what takes place in them.

In Murray Forman's work on hip hop the issues go deeper than the consideration of a particular city, but to those spaces and places within the city which are mythically linked to hip hop culture. Forman uses a micro approach to analyse the symbiotic nature of the relationship between ghetto spaces and hip hop practices, and argues that this type of awareness is essential to understanding hip hop:

A highly detailed and consciously defined spatial awareness is one of the key factors distinguishing rap music and hip-hop from the many other cultural and subcultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention. In hip-hop, space is a dominant concern, occupying a central role

in the definition of value, meaning, and practice. How the dynamics of space, place, race, and cultural differences are articulated among youths of the 'hip hop generation' – including artists, producers, and executives working in hip-hop's diverse media forms – and how they are located within a range of social discourses emerge as phenomena worthy of concentrated analysis. (Forman, 2002, 3)

According to Doreen Massey, however, space, does not have to be thought of strictly in terms of the physical spaces represented by cities and neighbourhoods, but as “a complexity of interacting social relations” (Massey, 1998, 126).

Understanding how these relationships work in Berlin requires not only an examination of contemporary Berlin, but an investigation of the city's complex and troubled history. In Alexandra Richie's exhaustive work on Berlin, she likens Berlin's history to Goethe's *Faust*:

It is in its portrayal of constant striving without counting the cost that the legend of *Faust* can serve as a metaphor for the history of Berlin. With Mephistopheles at his side Faust embarks on a terrible journey of discovery....Berlin, too, has undertaken an extraordinary journey, and its persistent quest for change has left it either – as now – searching for a role, or indulging in overweening arrogance and aggression. Its chameleon tendency to follow each new great ideology or leader, or to lurch maniacally from one grand political vision to another, has left a mesmerizing but often tragic legacy. (Richie, 1998, xviii)

Richie is concerned not only with the history of the city itself, but with the role of the city in German imagination. From the capital of the Prussian Empire and the Third Reich, to the prevailing symbol of the Cold War and later German unification, Berlin has undergone enormous changes. Her analysis of the various factors which were responsible for the city's evolution include geography, religion, migration, and of course politics.

Since the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent German unification, there has been a growing body of work examining Berlin. These works tend to focus on the phenomenal construction projects taking place as the city is transformed from the Divided City of the Cold War era, to the capital of Germany (Marcuse, 1998; Cochrane and Jonas, 1999; Cochrane and Passmore, 2001; Gittus,

2002). However, as Cochrane and Jonas maintain, the problems in Berlin in the post-Wall era aren't merely infrastructural, but have to do with its identity:

Berlin is a particularly interesting example of a city which is seeking (indeed being forced) to reposition itself in the global arena, in the wake of a dramatic restructuring of global politics. Not only does it face the task of reinserting itself into a wider set of regional, national and international processes which are presently in a state of flux, but at the local level it also has to recreate itself as a united city. The latter task is especially problematic for a city which since World War II has been divided not simply by local jurisdictional boundaries but also by fundamental political boundaries. (Cochrane and Jonas, 1999, 146)

In a more recent article, Cochrane and Passmore (2001) discuss the tension between nation-states and globalisation, by examining Berlin's role as the capital of Germany and its emergence as a global city. Given the massive changes Berlin has undergone since 1989, as well as its mythic role in German history, it stands to reason that the city has to a degree shaped – and been shaped by – the cultural practices that take place there.

My initial readings in the area of spatial discourse left me with specific questions about the relationship between Berlin and its local hip hop communities: What is the relationship between Berlin's neighbourhoods and hip hop? Where are the clubs featuring hip hop music and acts? Is the city divided ethnically, and if so, how are these divisions related to hip hop communities? How does public transportation – particularly the night bus line – affect club life? In effect, what does hip hop look like on a map of Berlin and to what extent has this been determined by the city itself? How has the fall of the Berlin Wall impacted on the hip hop scene? Why is the hip hop scene in Berlin so underground when compared with those in other major German cities like Hamburg and Stuttgart?

1.4 HOW DOES MUSIC SHAPE IDENTITY?

As mentioned previously, my earlier work on German national identity and film was to a large degree driven by the unique characteristics of film as a medium of representation. But understanding how film can shape identity requires an understanding both of how film functions and the discursive spaces in which films are conceived, created, and received. While my current research project is not a musicological investigation *per se*, it is nevertheless critical to develop a similar understanding of the particular ways in which music can inform our ideas of who we are. Central to this understanding is a specific consideration of the ways in which hip hop music is performed and experienced and how these performances and experiences affect young people's sense of their identities.

The issue of identity construction is a central component to the theories that attempt to explain the profound societal changes that have occurred during modernity. According to theorists like Anthony Giddens (1991), modernity has had a profound effect on self-identity. He argues, however, that this is not a completely passive process as identity construction is a discursive practice: individuals create the social institutions of the modern age in which they are in turn created. Theories of identity construction in the late modern age are concerned with disavowing essentialist notions of the self and uncovering the "often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" in which identities are shaped (Hall, 1996, 4). Simon Frith suggests that as one such discourse, popular music creates a "web of identities" and demonstrates the extent to which social groups realise themselves by engaging in cultural activity (Frith, 1996, 121. See also: Willis, 1990; Maffesoli, 1996; Stokes, 1997). Or as Bennett states,

On the one hand, music informs ways of *being* in particular social spaces; on the other hand, music functions as a resource whereby individuals are able to actively *construct* those spaces in which they live. Thus, in a very real

sense, music not only informs the construction of the self, but also the social world in which the self operates. (Bennett, 2000, 195)

What is at issue here in the investigation of Berlin's hip hop communities, is music's ability to shape social worlds. As Simon Frith points out music "both articulates and offers the immediate experience of collective identity" (Frith, 1996, 273). This is clearly evident with respect to hip hop music, whose fans refer to themselves as belonging to the hip hop "nation" on a macro level, and to hip hop "communities" on a micro level.

Frith also suggests that music is uniquely suited for the transnational and transcultural appropriations with which it is associated.

But what makes music special – what makes it special for identity – is that it defines a space without boundaries (a game without frontiers). Music is thus the cultural form best able to cross borders – sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations – and to define places: in clubs, scenes, and raves, listening on headphones, radio and in the concert hall, we are only where the music takes us. (Frith, 1996, 125)

This is, of course, music's potential and often the reality of the musical experience. I would suggest, however, that particularly when the issue is identity, the process is not quite as fluid as Frith implies. There are socialising processes at work that preclude (or encourage) an individual's acceptance of – and even access to – various musical forms, and this is especially true for young people. Likewise, when musicians stray too far from the styles with which they have been associated, or new acts appear whose musical offerings seem to contradict the public's expectations (e.g. black rock musicians in the US), the response can be disappointing for the artists. Precisely because of the social worlds referred to by Bennett and Frith, it is often difficult to challenge the expectations of others, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the lives of young people, who often face enormous pressure to fit in with their peer groups.

Borders remain an issue with respect to the flow of cultural products because despite arguments to the contrary, national identity is still a critical organising principle for nation-states as well as their citizens. The issue of access, alluded to above, is also one which cannot be overlooked or discounted. Music is certainly “able” to cross borders, but this ability is for the most part, pre-determined by the music industry. Clearly, the internet savvy kid in Brooklyn can find German hip hop on the internet if she wants it (given that she knows such a thing exists) but it is highly unlikely that she will hear it on the radio in New York, or find it in her local record store.

In his introduction to *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, Martin Stokes raises some interesting issues with respect to music and national identity. He discusses the role of music in state-supported efforts to strengthen the concept of a national identity, as well as the power of music to serve as a resistance strategy for groups in opposition to the state (1997). In the examples he cites, however, the musical forms are by and large local. What is especially interesting about hip hop in Germany is that it was first encountered in the global marketplace. What then are the implications for German national identity? If hip hop has specific meanings for urban black youth in the US and a specific function in terms of shaping identities for these young people, have those meanings been reworked in the local German context? Or has hip hop been taken up by certain young people precisely because of the meanings they believe to be inherent in the culture? Are hip hop practices in Germany a means for instant identity construction for German hip hoppers? Can German government support for pedagogical hip hop projects be read as nation-building?

1.5 HOW DO GERMAN SCHOLARS INVESTIGATE GERMAN YOUTH CULTURES?

My outsider status frames the perspective from which I am investigating hip hop culture in Berlin. The issues I am trying to uncover and analyse arise partly from my own experiences and identity issues, and perhaps most importantly, the British and American academic environments in which I have worked. It is possible that the field of youth culture research – first developed in the US and Britain to study youth gangs – reflects concerns and issues in American and British culture and society and does not really offer a proper theoretical basis for understanding how German youth navigate the process of identity construction. This is particularly relevant with respect to the development of cultural studies in Britain:

From the beginning, British cultural studies was highly political in nature and investigated the potentials for resistance in oppositional subcultures. After first valorizing the potential working class cultures, they next indicated how youth subcultures could resist the hegemonic forms of capitalist domination. Unlike the classical Frankfurt School (but similar to Marcuse), British cultural studies turned to youth cultures as providing potentially new forms of opposition and social change. Through studies of youth subcultures, British cultural studies demonstrated how culture came to constitute distinct forms of identity and group membership and appraised the oppositional potential of various youth subcultures. Cultural studies came to focus on how subcultural groups resist dominant forms of culture and identity, creating their own style and identities. (Kellner, 8)

As Kellner illustrates, British cultural studies developed out of a specific investigation of working class culture in Britain. The issue here, however, isn't only whether or not British cultural studies provides an adequate model for theorising youth culture in Germany, but also what German approaches to youth culture research reveal about German society. It may even be that these approaches to youth culture research – and by this I am also referring to the academic disciplines in which this research is generally conducted – help constitute the discursive spaces in which hip hop in Germany is practiced.

There is a small body of work on German youth cultures, which is influenced by Anglo-American work in cultural studies. These works focus on hip

hop culture (Henkel & Wolff, 1996; Elflein, 1998; Kaya, 2001; Menrath, 2001;) and the techno music scene (Richard and Kruger, 1998; Vogt, 2005). Although Elflein's work charts something of the history of hip hop in Germany, he is mostly concerned with hip hop in immigrant communities. Similarly, Kaya's work on Berlin's Kreuzberg district is an examination of Turkish youth and their adaptation of hip hop culture. Both Elflein and Kaya consider resistance as a key element to immigrant appropriations of hip hop. My efforts have uncovered no full-length examination by a German scholar on white German hip hop communities.

Youth culture research in Germany is found primarily in the fields of education, psychology, and sociology, and its evolution is linked not only to the changing roles of young people in German society but to the establishment and development of these disciplines; with each discipline offering their own model and concept of youth (Sander & Vollbrecht, 2000; Abels, 2000; Ferchhoff 2000). Early investigators were concerned with the impact of urbanisation on the lives of young people at the beginning of the 20th Century, echoing the work being done by sociologists of the Chicago School, while later areas of interest were young people in the Third Reich and in the post-war era.

After Germany's defeat in World War II and subsequent occupation by US military forces, American popular culture became a dominant force in German society, and this impact was perceived to be strongest among young people. The rock and roll revolution captivated German youth to such a degree that many Germans considered it the Americanisation of German youth. Dieter Baacke, a renowned German scholar in the field of education, has written extensively on youth and youth culture. In his book, *Jugend and Jugendkulturen*, Baacke discusses the receptions of American popular culture during the Third Reich and in the post-war era.

Indisputable is this: all the crucial new impulses that shape youth culture in this country come from the USA.... During National Socialism everything that came from the USA was a sign of decadence. Jazz was a symbol for that: it was forbidden as "nigger music," as music from the gutter. After the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany this did not change considerably. In the 50s there were enough German nation-minded pedagogues who discriminated against every form of entertainment which came from the USA.³ (Baacke, 1987, 49)

Baacke does not, however, go on to link these attitudes – particularly those in the post-war era – to young people's fascination with American popular culture.

Making such a link is perhaps outside of the discipline in which Baacke operated, but it is an important consideration in understanding how cultural practices define one's sense of self. The dominance of fields like education to theorise youth cultures reflects perhaps a reluctance to engage in the discussion of broader issues like the relationship between culture and power (Baacke, 1998; Nolteersting, 1998; Münch, 1998).

In an illuminating article for *Cultural Studies*, Roman Horak discusses the difficulty for cultural studies to develop in Germany:

...there are certain tendencies to make the 'political' and 'social' as the subjects of the debate disappear behind 'culture.' Correspondingly, references to cultural studies very often remain superficial and based on secondary sources. In a double movement of rejection and acceptance, cultural studies are either treated as an English version of *Kulturwissenschaften*, or as something which may serve *Kulturwissenschaften* as, for example, a means of neatly clarifying certain cultural concepts. Cultural studies' political implications, pointed out clearly by Stuart Hall's saying that at its core was the interest in combining the study of symbolic forms and meanings with the study of power. . . seem to be very often either neglected or understood as 'extra-curricular' disruptive factors. (Horak, 2002, 885)

Perhaps the failure of cultural studies to develop as a widely accepted academic practice in Germany is to be expected. Cultural studies represents a strategy for theorising the relationship between culture as everyday lived practice and the discursive spaces in which these everyday practices occur. Horak maintains that the

³ My translation.

problem with the German reception of cultural studies resides in the failure to engage with the political and the notion of power.

1.6 CAN HIP HOP CULTURE STILL BE CONSIDERED BLACK POPULAR CULTURE?

In the summer of 2000, *The New York Times* published a series of articles dealing with race in the US. Featured in the series was a piece written by N.R. Kleinfield called, "Guarding the Borders of the Hip-Hop Nation." In his exploration and portrayal of the lives of selected members of Brooklyn's hip hop community – both black and white – Kleinfield offered an intriguing and at times perplexing glimpse of how race and cultural identity impact on the hip hop experience. At issue in Kleinfield's piece is the matter of racial identity and authenticity in hip hop culture, and the article reveals much about how young people accept or reject the idea of hip hop as strictly black popular culture.

Black popular culture is a complex concept; made even more so by racial identity politics in the US. Nowhere is this more evident than in the confusing and contradictory discussions of hip hop culture. In discussing the appropriation of hip hop culture by whites, many scholars seem to take as their point of departure essentialist notions of blackness and how it is signified, which results in problematic responses to the question of consumption of black culture by whites. I find this especially true in the work of many young black male scholars, who analyse the racist media discourse within which hip hop culture has evolved and prospered, but at the same seem to embrace stereotypes of black men at the core of the racism they are critiquing. In an article for *Pop Matters* titled "Confessions of a ThugNiggaIntellectual," Mark Anthony Neal maps the evolution of the contemporary black male intellectual as follows:

Todd Boyd, like many of his contemporaries including Robin D.G. Kelley, Michael Eric Dyson, S. Craig Watkins, Dwight McBride and Thomas Glave, are part of a generation of black male scholars who are redefining the style and influence of the traditional black male intellectual; a figure that has been influenced throughout the 20th century by figures like W.E.B. DuBois, Richard Wright, Horace Mann, Amiri Baraka, and most recently the duo of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West. Though Boyd, Kelley, Dyson, Watkins, McBride and Glave represent radically different personalities and modes of expression, they are all responsible for creating a new space within the academy and the public sphere for black masculinity to exist as a vibrant, vivacious, virile, and versatile entity. In other words, they have given rise for young black men to re-imagine themselves within the context of the academy, and it is in this spirit that I have begun to think of myself as a “ThugNiggaIntellectual.” (Neal, para. 2)

Among the many problems with the essay from which this quote was taken is Neal’s assertion that black male intellectual subjectivity is now to be characterised by features such as *virility*. It seems to have escaped Neal that black men have historically been reduced to sexual and “virile” beings by the dominant culture. This, however, is symptomatic of the efforts of many black scholars to “keep it real” while being firmly entrenched in the academy; a situation which reduces much of the academic writing on hip hop culture to what Dimitriadis refers to as “boosterism” (Dimitriadis, 2001, 9).

There is work however, which argues that black identity in the US has largely been defined by the dominant white power structure, and that furthermore, the commodification of black culture and its subsequent consumption by whites merely reinforces “black-as-exotic” stereotypes, since blackness has been reduced to “sexualized exotic and primitivistic images and signs” (Haymes, 1995; Hooks, 1992). Black culture then becomes the site of resistance for whites seeking an “oppositional identity” (Hooks, 1992; Swedenburg, 1992; Cornyetz, 1994; Haymes, 1995; Gubar, 1997; Cutler, 1999; Lott, 2000). This has special implications for hip hop culture. Jason Middleton and Roger Beebe, for example, point specifically to the appropriation of hip hop elements by white artists as an attempt to cash in on hip

hop's popularity with white youth, and they address the complex effect this type of appropriation has on the concept of authenticity:

...white performers need to project an image of authenticity in order to avoid being dismissed as 'wannabes' or 'poseurs' by the white listeners themselves. While authenticity for white rappers has hitherto largely been premised upon an imitation of the sounds, styles and affects of black performers, new strategies for marketing these hybrid acts are emerging which attempt to displace the threat of not living up to black standards; in so doing, these new acts erase the black cultural context from which the rap element of the hybrid is appropriated. (Middleton and Beebe, 2002, 161)

The presumption here is that hip hop is black culture, and the best strategy for white performers is not to attempt to duplicate black style, but to use those elements of hip hop which allow them to be themselves, so to speak. Work by Paul Gilroy, however, challenges the underlying notion of rap music as an essentially black American cultural product:

Rap is a hybrid form rooted in the syncretic social relations of the South Bronx where Jamaican sound-system culture, transplanted in the 1970s, put down new roots and in conjunction with specific technological innovations, set in train a process that was to transform black America's sense of itself and a large portion of the popular music industry as well. How does a form which flaunts and glories in its own malleability as well as its transnational character become interpreted as an expression of some authentic Afro-American essence? Why is rap discussed as if it sprang intact from the entrails of the blues? What is it about Afro-America's writing elite which means that they need to claim this diasporic cultural form in such an assertively nationalist way? (Gilroy, 1994, 125)

Gilroy's assessment of the ways in which some members of the academy privilege the African-American urban experience in their discussions of rap, need not be limited to African-American scholars (see Forman, 2002). While there are some lukewarm efforts on the part of scholars to address the stereotypes – and inherent criminality – in what is presented as hip hop these works are primarily aimed at valorising black popular culture rather than critiquing how it came to be defined in the first place (Rose, 1994; Boyd, 1997; Stapleton, 1998; Neal, 1999).

The debates about race and authenticity are not limited to black American views on the white appropriation of hip hop. German literature on the

appropriation of hip hop culture responds to the relationship between hip hop's black American roots and the German adaptation with varying conclusions. Heike Blümner in her article, "Street Credibility und Rap," maintains that the popularity of hip hop in Europe has to do with identity projection (1999). Stefanie Menrath argues on the other hand, that for German youth hip hop is about resistance:

Identifying with black music represents a resistance strategy. This strategy, however, has been employed by white subcultures since the 50s. Taking on black culture and black music is a way of distancing oneself from mainstream culture, in order to be cool...⁴ (Menrath, 2001, 120)

Gabriele Klein and Malte Friedrich claim that hip hoppers in Germany are respectful of hip hop's roots, but that they would not trade their positions with urban black youth:

Few hip hoppers, however, want the socially marginalised position of urban blacks. They are faced with a paradox: an authentic experience without having to put up with the corresponding social position.⁵ (80)

Since its emergence in Germany in the 1980s, hip hop has developed along distinct trajectories – most of which can be defined by ethnicity. Dieter Elflein argues against defining hip hop along ethnic lines, in a brief history of hip hop in Germany written for *Popular Music*:

The music these bands produce is hip hop and nothing more. There is no need to propose different ethnically defined subgenres on the basis of the origin of particular music samples, because ethnically defined influences of musical structures are not only simplifying, but also run the risk of dividing what should be unified. In the case of migrant or immigrant hip hop in Germany, one has to acknowledge the existence of different musical, social and political dispositions, which are primarily due to the manner of production of this particular genre. In the end, the issue is this: anyone who wants to gather up musicians under an ethnically defined flag ...is, in practice, trying to become the dominant musical, political and commercial power in a scene which is, by its nature, various and pluralistic. (Elflein, 1998, 264)

In this article, Elflein is responding to the release of a German-language hip hop sampler titled, *Krauts with Attitude* (1991), and a Turkish-language sampler called

⁴ My translation.

⁵ My translation.

Cartel (1995). The issues Elflein raises in his article reveal much about the debates on hip hop in Germany. The idea that “the music these bands produce is hip hop and nothing more” seems to suggest that any variation on hip hop in Germany – and by that I mean the creation of subgenres – removes it even further from its American roots. Furthermore, Elflein argues that the *Krauts with Attitude* sampler, introduced German nationalism into German hip hop with negative effects:

Thus an adopted music 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. (258)

Issues of race and authenticity are also covered in Germany’s hip hop magazines. In an article for *Wicked Magazin*, an Afro-German hip hop duo from Berlin called Da Fource, address these issues in relation to the hip hop scene in Germany:

You know, we can’t stand these assholes out there who think that they’re part of the hip hop scene because they smoke weed, go to the jams, and wear baggy jeans. We are two real niggers and not fakers who are trying to represent. Man, the people out there are talking stuff like, “Your momma,” or “I’m a nigger,” and shit like that and they have no idea. I shit on fakers like that. They’re all supported by their Mommies and Daddies and have no idea about real street life. (Storm, 2001, 44)

Da Fource identify with hip hop’s roots in the US and dismiss what they perceive as “fakers” in the hip hop scene in Germany. The question though, of whether or not hip hop can still be considered black popular culture, is perhaps most challenged by the ways in which hip hop has been taken up by neo-nazis in Germany as a forum for their racist agenda (see Loh and GÜngör, 2002).

The controversy surrounding the emergence of so-called Nazi rap is related to the perceived distance between neo-Nazis’ racist ideology and hip hop’s black roots in urban America. Aside from the obvious problem of using music to promote racial violence, the issue here has to do with ownership. The debates about who owns hip hop and hip hop authenticity are heavily influenced by considerations of race and ethnic identity. But is it time to move beyond race in hip hop research? On

the other hand, is it even possible to discuss hip hop without considering, at least on some level, the issue of race? What does authenticity mean in the German context? Does class affect what hip hoppers in Germany consider authentic? Do Afro-German and Turkish members of the Berlin hip hop community possess more cultural capital in the scene because of their marginalised status?

1.7 CONCLUSION

As the preceding sections indicate, preparing to investigate hip hop culture in Berlin raised various questions I considered critical for a foundation upon which my research project could be constructed. Once I began my fieldwork, however, some of the issues I believed to be at the core of the research project – like the debates about black popular culture – became less pressing while other issues emerged in the field for which I was not adequately prepared. This was particularly the case with respect to German unification and its impact on Berlin. Though I was aware of the disillusionment experienced by many Germans since the Berlin Wall fell, I was surprised to encounter these sentiments among young members of Berlin's hip hop scene. Whatever the evolution of the various ideas that ultimately shape this thesis, however, it is important to note that it was my initial review of the relevant literature that shaped my methodological approach, as I discuss in the following chapter.

2. METHODOLOGY

As the preceding chapter describes, I undertook the review of relevant literature by posing a series of questions generated by an exploration of hip hop culture in Berlin. The questions discussed in the literature review are revealing in that they reflect the interdisciplinary approach I believed inherent in conceiving and carrying out my research. It was clear that what I was proposing was not simply a cultural studies project, because this would not have given proper consideration to the aesthetics of Berlin hip hop music. Nor was it a popular music studies project, because this would not have paid enough attention to the complexities of race and cultural identity in contemporary Berlin. The investigation of the Berlin hip hop scene thus required a methodological approach that reflected the complexities suggested by the research question.

It was clear from the outset that I would conduct an ethnographic investigation, and the literature on youth culture research only strengthened my resolve in this instance. Less clear was how I would partner ethnography with other methodological strategies that would provide the proper context for analysing the empirical data. Though I initially considered conducting discourse analysis of German academic literature on youth culture, I ultimately decided to place contemporary identity issues and hip hop practices in a historical context. This involved reviewing the roots of German national identity, the impact of the Berlin Wall, and earlier appropriations of American popular music by German youth. My initial literature review also exposed a dearth of material that actually considered the aesthetics of hip hop music. Since one of the areas I intended to explore was the relationship between the city of Berlin and its hip hop practices, it was impossible to ignore the extent to which a Berlin aesthetic was manifest. In the pages that follow, I

discuss my resulting methodologies and then reflect on the issues raised by my experiences in the field.

2.1 ETHNOGRAPHY

In their classic text, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, Hammersley and Atkinson define ethnography as follows:

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, 1)

The ethnographer's task is to get to know a culture and this is done by participating in the everyday lives of people. It can be argued that there is a limit to the knowledge a researcher can gain by employing this method, and moreover that any knowledge gained must be critiqued in terms of the subjective nature by which it was acquired. Given that ethnography is not an objective undertaking; that it represents a near-constant management of the relationship (and boundaries) between the researcher and the researched; that it is limited by the extent to which the researcher can gain and maintain access to the researched community, how then, can a researcher be certain that her efforts are indeed revelatory about the culture she has been researching? How can she be sure that what she believes she "knows" about a culture has not been unduly impacted by her own subjectivity and the limits inherent in the methodology? These are legitimate concerns and they could be said to emanate from one rather simple question: What does it mean to know a culture?

While the definition of ethnography offered by Hammersley and Atkinson seems relatively simple, the actual experience of going into the field to participate in people's lives in order to gain research material is actually quite complex. My attempt to get to know hip hop culture in Berlin was impacted by several issues,

chief among them being my own identity. As a black woman from New York my roles in the field were constantly being re-negotiated based on how people in various settings perceived me, and how I in turn perceived these people and settings. I do not mean to suggest that my racial and cultural identities were problematic, in fact, being a black woman from Brooklyn often worked in my favour in terms of gaining access to members of Berlin's hip hop scene. Likewise, the fact that I was an American scholar working on a Ph.D. at a British institution also proved useful when trying to meet German bureaucrats and other academics who regarded me with some degree of awe because of the willingness with which I seemed to have distanced myself from my roots in order to pursue my academic goals. Furthermore, the fact that I speak German was often a source of amazement and wonder both in the hip hop scene and in academic circles. In one instance I was asked if I was Afro-German; specifically, if I had a German mother and a black American GI father, which seemed to many to be the only plausible reason I would have bothered with the language. I will return to these issues later in this chapter, but it is important to note that cross-cultural fieldwork in a transnational setting is a demanding exercise, in which identity can never be switched off.

My ethnographic investigation of the Berlin hip hop scene was fairly straightforward and consisted primarily of interviews with members of the hip hop community and participant observation. As mentioned, this approach was primarily driven by the research question I was attempting to answer. In so far as I was an outsider to the hip hop scene in general, and the Berlin scene in particular, I was certainly limited in terms of knowing all of the issues affecting Berlin hip hop practices. Thus, the interviews were particularly useful in helping me identify these issues as well as providing further contact with key members of the scene. More importantly, these interviews gave names, faces, and stories to hip hop in Berlin.

Much has been written about what hip hop means to young people; much of this work has been undertaken by scholars with little or no contact to their research subjects. It was therefore revealing to speak directly with members of Berlin's hip hop scene, to hear what they had to say themselves about their understanding of and identification with hip hop. At the same time, participant observation allowed me to experience the Berlin hip hop scene for myself and to explore aspects about which my interview subjects may have been unwilling to speak or simply unaware. My observations included club visits, concerts and shows, as well as workshops in youth centres. These activities gave me the opportunity to see how hip hop is actually practiced in Berlin, and my observations occasionally put a different light on the pictures painted by my interviewees.

2.1.1 Interviews

I conducted twenty interviews between April 15 and August 25, 2003, eight during my return visit November 6 to December 5, 2003, and three in 2005. It had been my original intention to base the selection of interviewees on a broad representation of Berlin's districts. I had hoped to determine the extent to which the city's districts displayed significant differences with respect to their ethnic makeup and then if these differences had any effect on the presence or absence of particular hip hop practices. Before I began my interviews, however, I spent the months of January through April working on my literature review and researching the local scene.⁶ The time I spent getting to know the scene before I actually began to engage with members of the hip hop community was critical. While I didn't want to approach any of my interviewees with a "know-it-all" style that would have

⁶ I had conducted the bulk of my literature review prior to arrival, but from January through March I reviewed the relevant German literature.

implied I only needed them to confirm my own conclusions, I did believe it was important to show that I was not completely ignorant. These initial efforts revealed that my notion of approaching the city by districts would not necessarily have resulted in an accurate representation of how hip hop is practiced in Berlin.

I had already identified a young man I hoped to serve as my primary contact and I decided to conduct my first interview with him with the hope that he would be able to point me in the right direction for future interviews and opportunities for participant observation. Jan and I had met two years previously, when he served as the editor for a column I wrote for a hip hop website based in Berlin. In the years since our initial meeting, Jan and I had become friends and his hip hop career had taken a few interesting turns. His MC⁷ persona, Yaneq, was enjoying some local success, while at the same time he had just released his first book, *American Rap*, which is an examination of hip hop in the US based on his *Diplomarbeit* at Humboldt University in Berlin. My expectations for this interview were fairly high, since I knew Jan and got along with him quite well, and I believed that he knew the Berlin scene inside and out. The interview did go well as long as the discussion was focussed on Jan's impressions of hip hop in the US, but when I tried to steer the discussion to hip hop in Germany and in Berlin, specifically, I received brief and occasionally terse answers. This was in stark contrast to the very thoughtful and engaged answers he offered about hip hop in the US, and I was more than a little disconcerted by this turn of events. If my interview with Jan was so difficult, what could I expect from people whom I didn't know? Fortunately, however, this proved to be the most difficult interview of all.

Of course I didn't know this at the time, and was concerned immediately about the viability of a research project based primarily on my ability to get people

⁷ MC is another term for rapper and is short for Master of Ceremony. I use the terms "rapper" and "MC" interchangeably throughout the thesis.

to open up to me in conversation. Three weeks passed before I conducted another interview. During this time I finished my literature review and continued to research the scene in Berlin. At one point while surfing the internet I came across an organisation called Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion (BHHF), whose mission, according to the blurb on the homepage, was to spread the “true” meaning of hip hop. Deniz Bax, founder of BHHF, had recently been interviewed for an article I had read in a local magazine. The article dealt with Nazi rap and members of Berlin’s hip hop community were being asked to comment on a new book which suggested that racist elements were being incorporated into hip hop in Germany. Deniz’s mobile number was listed on the website, so I called him to see if he would be interested in talking with me.

In his role as founder of BHHF, Deniz was engaged throughout the city as a hip hop instructor at various youth centres. Given that I had been having difficulty trying to establish a connection with a youth centre, which I felt would be the best way to meet young people interested in hip hop, I believed that it was critical to my project that the interview with Deniz go well enough that I could secure an invitation to see him at work with the kids. He agreed to speak with me, and we arranged to meet one afternoon at a café in Kreuzberg.⁸ The location proved to be too loud and we decided to go to Görlitzer Park, a very large and busy park also in Kreuzberg. Deniz and I got on well and he proved to be one of my most important contacts. The interview was thoroughly engaging, and though later I would have cause to question many of the assertions Deniz made during this initial meeting, I left the encounter with a renewed sense of confidence.

Since I had not been able to rely on Jan for further contact into the hip hop community as I had anticipated, being able to establish my own contacts was

⁸ Kreuzberg is a Berlin district with a large Turkish population.

crucial. After my meeting with Deniz, I had only one interview with someone I knew prior to beginning my fieldwork. All the other interviews came about either through “cold calling” or being referred by someone I had interviewed. In fact, by the time I left in December I was being approached by individuals who had heard about me and thought that I should speak with them as well.

Although I had abandoned my district-based selection process, I was still determined to interview a broad selection of Berlin’s hip hop community. Within the broad context of the city’s hip hop scene, I decided to focus on producers rather than consumers, recognising of course, that this distinction is often blurred. This decision was based on the mechanics of finding interview subjects. Interviewing hip hop consumers – or fans – would have involved a highly subjective selection process. I also felt that those members of the scene who were actively engaged in music making – whether as performers, journalists, or promoters – were effectively shaping hip hop in Berlin. Hence, these were the individuals who I felt might best be able to describe the extent to which hip hop in Berlin had been inscribed with a “local flavour” so to speak.

As my research project represented an attempt to uncover how cultural identity impacted on hip hop practices, I did need to consider ethnic “difference” within this category of producers, and it was therefore necessary to engage in a selection process; I had to accept that this would involve a level of subjectivity. At the end of my first round of interviews, I had not been able to secure an interview with any Afro-German hip hop artists. I did interview a young African man who had been living in Berlin for about seven years, having moved there when he was fifteen, but I felt that the question of German identity was a non-issue for him, as he was grounded quite strongly in his West African identity. I felt that the absence of at least one Afro-German voice represented a serious flaw in my data collection

strategy, and this flaw was one of the reasons I decided to return to Berlin for a month in November. But while I understood how important it was for what I was trying to uncover, I nevertheless felt awkward contacting my sources to find an Afro-German MC willing to be interviewed. This seemed reductive in a way that led to a slight crisis of confidence in the project. I was concerned about being viewed by my sources as being overly concerned with race to the exclusion of other factors, and I wondered if race was indeed a legitimate issue. Fortunately, this was resolved once I spoke with an Afro-German MC who had very serious concerns about race and hip hop in Berlin.

It is important to note, however, that in the process of interviewing individuals involved in Berlin's scene, I did become aware of issues outside of the parameters I believed to be at the core of my project. Beyond the identity issues, which for me seemed rather obvious – race, gender, and ethnic background – and which I suspected might impact how hip hop culture was lived in Berlin, the interview process revealed another equally important factor in Berlin's hip hop practices and with identity construction in post-Wall Germany: East vs. West. This isn't to suggest that I hadn't considered the areas of the city which used to be East Berlin, and the extent to which hip hop practices there might be a reflection of an entirely different understanding of hip hop than what was being expressed in West Berlin, but after abandoning my geographical model, I did not actively seek interviews with East Berliners. Fortunately for this project, my failure to identify East Berliners, did not mean that I did not encounter them.⁹ In securing an interview with DJ André Langenfeld, for example, I discovered that he was in fact an East Berliner who had been the inspiration for numerous hip hop artists from the East.

⁹ I had identified interviewees who happened to be East Berliners, but this had not played a role in my selection process. These subjects were selected on the basis of other factors, but once we met it became clear how the East/West divide continued to play an important role in their lives.

This interview led to several others with East Berliners, which in turn led to contact with other members of the hip hop scene, in a process known as snowballing.

My interview partners were usually eager to help me with my research project and often made suggestions about other members of the scene, who might be suitable interviewees. As the number of interviews increased, so did the number of referrals. While I was grateful for these referrals, it was also important for me to employ a selection process that was not entirely driven by my contacts. As a result, the final list of interviewees (See Appendix I) reveals a selection process that took into consideration referrals offered by my contacts in the field and other interviewees, as well as the issues raised by my research project.

The interviews lasted from 45 – 90 minutes and while there were general questions based on information I had gathered about the subjects, I did not adhere to a strict list of questions. Rather, I looked for opportunities to develop questions based on the answers I received. I was also willing to answer questions from my interview subject about my research and my impressions of the Berlin hip hop scene, though it must be said that the depth of my answers depended on the interviewee. Some interviewees were only curious about what I was doing, while others seemed to be rather interested in both knowing about my research project and in hearing what an outsider thought about the hip hop scene in Berlin. Most of the interviews were conducted in German, others in English, with a few in a combination of both. I generally left the decision about which language was to be used up to the interviewee. I taped the vast majority of the interviews, and it was during the process of tape transcription that language actually became an issue for me. I realised that when I was conducting the interviews, I focussed on the responses of the interviewees in total, which included their facial expressions and body language in addition to their verbal responses. If I was speaking with someone

who understood English, my questions were often in English, though the responses were in German. I did not attempt to catch each word in the response, but to get the main points as I worked to formulate my next questions based on what had just been said. As I transcribed the tapes, I realised that there were sometimes words or expressions being used that I did not understand. This isn't to suggest that I never stopped an interviewee to say that I didn't understand something, but this was a judgement call. I didn't feel that it was important to understand every single word being said, but as I began to transcribe the tapes – an activity in which every single word is recorded – I understood more about how I managed not only the interviews themselves, but the language as well.

2.1.2 *Participant Observation*

As mentioned previously, I approached participant observation as a means of experiencing the Berlin hip hop scene for myself, and also as a way of determining the extent to which information I was being given in interviews was indeed reflected in everyday life. Moreover, as a research strategy, participant observation is especially suited for researchers who privilege the fieldwork experience over theoretical paradigms. According to Danny Jorgenson,

The world of everyday life as viewed from the standpoint of insiders is the fundamental reality to be described by participant observation. Put still differently, the methodology of participant observation seeks to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives. In placing the meaning of everyday life first, the methodology of participant observation differs from approaches that begin with concepts defined by way of existing theories and hypotheses. (Jorgenson, 1989, 15)

What is important to note here, is the emphasis on the lack of theory or a pre-determined hypothesis. While I came into the field with a research question, I had not identified any particular theory with respect to music and youth culture that I

wanted to substantiate, nor had I reached any preliminary answers based on the literature. Clearly in the construction of a research question, a statement is being made on some level about the phenomenon being researched. For the fieldwork experience to be worth the effort, however, it is important to focus on the research question and not on possible answers. Failure to do so renders one unable to truly participate in the everyday lives of the research subjects.

In terms of my own project, looking for everyday life in a hip hop context was not a simple undertaking. For the most part, hip hop is a performance-based cultural form and aside from concerts and shows, sometimes difficult to encounter. During the summer months of 2003, I did attend various shows and events, but I felt that I was actually doing more observing than participating and had serious doubts about the quality of the research material I was gathering. During this period, however, I developed friendships with two young men I had interviewed and as a result of these relationships, found opportunities to actively participate in the everyday lives of two very different members of the hip hop community: Marcus Staiger, president and founder of Royal Bunker, an independent music label; and Deniz Bax, mentioned previously in this chapter. Royal Bunker and BHHF are discussed in greater detail later in this work, but it is important to note here how participant observation functioned in these two entirely different situations.

The Royal Bunker office was located around the corner from my flat in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin. My interview with Marcus was one of the highlights of my work in the field and as I read more about Royal Bunker from other sources, I felt that the label would make an excellent case study. I explained to Marcus that I was interested in doing a case study on Royal Bunker and asked for permission to drop by and “hang out” in the office as my schedule permitted. I felt that being direct about what it was that I was trying to accomplish was the best strategy in this

particular case. Despite its extremely casual environment, Royal Bunker was nevertheless a business and I didn't feel that I could just show up regularly and remain indefinitely without an explanation and permission.

Once granted permission, a typical visit to Royal Bunker would begin about 10:00 am, when Marcus arrived at work. I would usually bring breakfast for Marcus and me and we would use this as an opportunity to talk before things in the office became too hectic. After breakfast I would remain in the reception area/living room making field notes, listening to music or reading (See Fig. 1). Royal Bunker maintained an open-door policy and I was able to observe a wide range of people and activities there. After a while though, it became clear that I was also becoming part of the landscape. Marcus began to approach me for advice and jokingly referred to me as a "supervisor" to visitors curious about me and my role there. The environment at Royal Bunker was perfect for my intentions. I was not in anyone's way and as time passed, I was encouraged to spend time there.



Fig. 1: Royal Bunker reception area

One of the highlights of my Royal Bunker experience came when I was invited by one of the label's artists (who is also member of the office staff), to watch a televised football match one night at a local sports bar. Knowing that I was based at a university in Scotland, Niko wanted to know if I supported any Scottish football teams. I felt the incorrect answer to this question would have been "no," therefore I answered that I was a Celtic supporter. Luckily, Niko wanted me to accompany him and his friends to watch a match between Bayern München and Glasgow Celtic. This invitation was important to me because it indicated the extent to which I was being accepted by the Royal Bunker group, and while football is not hip hop, it did represent a part of everyday life for many young men in the hip hop scene.

Unlike Royal Bunker with its fixed location, Deniz Bax's BHHF was wherever Deniz happened to be. After our initial meeting he invited me to visit his hip hop workshop the next day at a youth centre in Böckler Park in Kreuzberg, and later in the week at the Naunynritze Centre also in Kreuzberg. Though I visited both centres, I eventually decided to focus my efforts on Naunynritze, which was a non-smoking environment and where the hip hop workshops seemed to attract a younger group of participants. These younger participants actually attended workshops in both locations, but the differences in the two locations seemed to impact on their efforts. Many of the young men who attended the workshops at Böckler Park, however, did not attend the sessions at Naunynritze. This was perhaps due to the fact that the Naunynritze centre was managed more closely than the Böckler Park. It must also be noted, that as a female researcher, I felt more comfortable attending the Naunynritze workshops. Although Deniz professed a hip hop ideology which did not include swearing, gang violence or misogyny, in fact he was not able to control the young men at Böckler Park who rapped about whatever they wanted – usually sex, drugs, and violence – and who smoked

heavily. The young men at Böckler Park were also a bit older than the participants at the Naunynritze Center, and it was obvious that Deniz often had problems with them.

I attended workshops on Wednesday and Fridays afternoons from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. These workshops consisted of 5 to 10 adolescents ranging in age from 10 – 16, and with different levels of experience. The workshops focused on developing various skills including, rapping with a microphone, performing in front of an audience, writing lyrics, and beatbox.



Fig. 2: Dr. Rob and Dr. Isolight at the Naunynritze Workshop

Establishing rapport with the young people who attended Deniz's workshops was made easier by the fact that I was from Brooklyn. As they were all quite knowledgeable about hip hop, they had a special fascination for New York and wanted to hear stories about life there. Perhaps more importantly, however, they began early on to ask me to critique their performances. Obviously this was a

delicate matter. If I offered no critique at all, it might have appeared that I was ignorant about hip hop which would have diminished me in their eyes. If I offered critiques that were too strong, I may have had a negative impact on their self-confidence. Thus, I looked for simple things that would show that I was actually listening and wanted to give constructive feedback.¹⁰ I was also called on to establish my credibility by giving my own rap performance. Amani, a 13 year-old Egyptian-American girl raised in Berlin, suggested that since I came from Brooklyn I should know how to rap, thrusting the microphone in my hand. I tried to protest, but it was clear that this was a test of sorts, and I needed to pass. So with Ferhan accompanying me as a human beat box, I gave them a few verses of Run-DMC's "You Talk too Much," explaining that I was more into "Old School" than "New School" rap. When I finished I received an enthusiastic round of applause and Amani agreed to let me interview her.

As my relationship with the young people developed, they began to insist that I accompany them to their performances and events, and I was pleased to discover how much my presence meant to them. There was an instance when they were going to perform at a major event and Deniz had not invited me. I was reluctant to ask for an invitation because I knew that the tickets were expensive and I thought he might have trouble getting me on the guest list. At the Friday session before the Saturday event, Dr. Isolight, a 16 year-old Turkish youth came up to me and said that he hoped that I would come to the event on Saturday night to see the performance. When I explained that I didn't have an invitation, he told me that he had already taken care of it with Deniz, and that I was definitely invited and on the guest list.

¹⁰ In Dr. Rob's case, for instance, I pointed out that he was an excellent rapper and that he wrote great lyrics, but that his delivery was a bit too fast. I told him that what he had to say was important, so he should slow down to make sure that people got his message. He took this advice to heart and thanked me quite warmly for it.

The time I spent in Royal Bunker and with the BHHF had a profound impact on my research project. Understanding how some young people in Berlin live hip hop and having opportunities to participate in their lives, moved my knowledge of the scene from the anecdotal to the personal and deepened my commitment to my research project.

2.2 HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

If my time in the field had a dynamic impact on the development of my research, so did my experience as a foreigner living in Berlin and trying to make sense of it as a city. In fact, my experiences raised numerous questions about German history in general, as well as about the history of Berlin in particular, and the historical analysis in Part II addresses the most relevant ones. Given the breadth of German history, the initial challenge was to narrow down the selection of issues for historical analysis. The decision to focus on Berlin's post-war history, American popular culture in post-war Germany, and early appropriations of hip hop culture in Germany emerged from my field work. These topics seemed directly relevant to contemporary hip hop practices in Berlin.

2.3 MUSIC AND VIDEO ANALYSIS

In addition to understanding the social spaces in which hip hop in Berlin takes place, it was important also for me to consider the practices themselves, which means analysing the musical output of selected Berlin artists. My concern here was not musicological analysis as such, but rather a broader consideration of hip hop aesthetics. My question was whether or not there is a particular Berlin aesthetic evident in the music and visual imagery. Given that I am not a musicologist, I was

initially reluctant to engage in this type of analysis. The problem was not just the inherent difficulty in trying to write about music from a non-musicological position, but trying to do so with what Simon Frith refers to as “scholarly authority”:

...to write authoritatively about popular culture, is to perform as a witness. For this part of their performance scholars must write from *within* a cultural process and cultural *engagement* (as consumer or connoisseur) involves different kinds of stylistic device (all apparent in this essay) – reference to one’s own memories, the deployment of the right kind of autobiographical fragment. The scholarly authority to write about popular culture in the first place (to display one’s knowledge) is rooted, after all, not in that knowledge but in experience, experience indicated either rhetorically (“I was there!”) or through the correct use of non-scholarly terms. (2006, 15)

Frith’s notion that scholars who write about popular culture perform as witnesses speaks directly to my reluctance to write about the music. Despite my role as a scholar, my analysis of the music is nevertheless shaped by my own subjectivity, which I felt impacted on my performance as a witness. Since I have been a casual listener of hip hop music since 1979, it should not be surprising that I have developed my own set of aesthetic preferences; and these preferences did not abandon me once I went into the field. As a result, one of the biggest challenges I faced when listening to hip hop in Berlin was developing the freedom to dislike a track from a Berlin artist, because I was worried that my aesthetic preferences – developed in response to hip hop from the US – were inappropriate in the Berlin context. It can be argued, however, that some level of subjectivity impacts on every aspect of this research project. Curious then, that the issue only seemed particularly acute with respect to the music, and not, for instance, with respect to the literature. Despite my lack of musicological training and the subjective nature of my analysis, I felt that it must be done if I was to understand how music shaped and is shaped in Berlin.

This examination of the music was undertaken with a simultaneous analysis of the corresponding music video. I selected tracks that had music videos because I

wanted to see how artists “performed” hip hop. I did not conduct a textual analysis of lyrics, though I refer broadly to the subject matter of the songs. Despite my German language skills, I considered a textual analysis to be a risky endeavour given the coded meanings prevalent in hip hop texts. I have encountered numerous errors by English-speaking scholars analysing English-language hip hop texts, and felt that a cross-cultural foreign-language analysis would inevitably lead to similar mistakes.

2.4 REFLECTIONS

As I consider the process by which I carried out my investigation of Berlin’s hip hop scene, there are two major issues which give me cause for reflection: the first has to do with going into the field, and the second has to do with cross-cultural research. In this section I attempt to unpack these issues and consider how they shaped my research project.

2.4.1 *Getting in, staying in, getting out*

Arriving in Berlin in December 2002, I had one friend in the hip hop community and had intended to rely on him for further contacts. As discussed earlier this was not to be the case. Fortunately, the process of getting into the hip hop scene was not difficult, and I soon became far more concerned about maintaining the network I had formed. This was definitely an issue that required some attention in Berlin. The Berlin scene is characterised by small hip hop crews all over the city with varying degrees of success, and who don’t get along with each other. It was often the case that I would leave what I felt to be a fantastic interview, only to find that the next interviewee scheduled that day, hated the artist with

whom I had just spoken. During the course of my fieldwork I learned to be extremely careful about what I said to my contacts in the field. While I never lied about the artists I had interviewed when asked by some of my interviewees, I never provoked artists by repeating negative comments I heard about them.¹¹

Maintaining the network also involved taking a real interest in the work done by the people with whom I was in contact. Since I interviewed artists, entrepreneurs, sprayers, activists, and journalists among others, this was not difficult. Each of the individuals I met gave me a unique perspective on hip hop in Berlin, and I enjoyed listening to their music, reading their articles, viewing their tags, etc. Once Marcus gave me an article he had just finished writing for a monthly hip hop magazine, *Juice*,¹² and after reading it, I challenged some of the assertions he had made about the US in general and New York in particular. He thought about what I said for a few minutes, then went back to his computer and re-wrote the passage in question. I had been reticent about saying anything at all, but clearly he appreciated the time and effort I spent on his article and took my comments seriously.

What should be noted, however, is the impact the pressure to get in and stay in the community under investigation has on the research process. Certainly the success of my research project depended on my ability to become welcome and accepted by the Berlin hip hop community but, that said, choices must often be made; choices that involve maintaining a place in the community rather than posing a revealing but disruptive question. In terms of my own research this was definitely an issue. For instance, there was only so far I was willing to push my interviewees on the topic of race. The issue of authenticity in hip hop is a controversial one, and

¹¹ There was one exception to this rule – Deniz Bax – but for reasons discussed elsewhere in this work, he considered negative comments about his work to be an indication of the impact he was having on the scene.

¹² For which he had been flown to New York to interview Ice Cube.

the argument is often made in the US that artists like Eminem are appropriating black culture and becoming wealthy in the process. White artists in Berlin are sensitive to these debates in the US, and growing arguments sparked by Turkish- and Afro-German artists about who really has street credibility in Germany. It became clear through body language and the type of answers I received, when artists were uncomfortable with a topic. In those instances, I would generally try to find a smooth segue to another topic. Along those same lines, there were moments listening to white German artists perform gangster rap, when I questioned the subject matter as a legitimate means of expressing the everyday experience of the middle class rapper giving the performance. When told that it was only “fun” I didn’t press the issue because I did not want to antagonise my contacts and disrupt the network I was building. But what is lost in missed opportunities such as these? What if I had pushed some of my contacts to the point of anger by continuing to challenge their responses? Would I have a more developed research project? Perhaps. On the other hand, this research project is the only one that I am capable of given the research question and chosen methodologies. This project is as driven by my identity as it is by those of the individuals I encountered in the field. Generally speaking, I am not confrontational, so there was only so far I was willing to go in order to get a response from an interviewee.

Getting out was a process that began when I returned to Scotland in December 2003, and it raises issues related to the emotional side of field work. With some contacts it was obvious that the relationships we had developed would not extend beyond my time in the field, but with others friendships had been formed. Amanda Coffey sums up the problem well perhaps when she writes,

Quite properly, leaving the field never happens completely, as that would be leaving ourselves, our pasts and our memories. Endings, and leavings are important aspects of the process of ethnographic fieldwork. Whether as a temporary or permanent measure all of us who engage in fieldwork experience the physicality and emotionality of leaving a place and a people

we have come to know well. It almost does not matter whether those experiences and memories are good or bad, and most of us will have some of each (even the good things are less good some of the time). The significance of leaving the field is much more bound up in what that symbolizes. Leaving implies that we were there in the first place. (Coffey, 1999, 109)

This simple, yet eloquent, assessment of the emotional work involved in managing this stage of the field work process accurately reflects my own experience. The work involved in getting out of the field isn't limited to the difficulty of saying goodbye to people with whom I had become very close. It also has to do with giving up roles I enjoyed playing. There will never be another time in my life like the months I spent in Berlin gathering data for my Ph.D. research.

2.4.2 *Cross-cultural research*

At the beginning of this chapter I touched on some of the ways in which my identity impacted on this research project. There were many instances during my time in the field when I had cause to reflect on Erving Goffman's, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. It was never a case of simply going into the field to conduct a research project. I was an American doing fieldwork at the start of the US-led war in Iraq, in a country that was vocally opposed to the war. But with brown skin and dreadlocks, I was never mistaken for a Bush supporter or a war monger. This had as much to do with my performance of a black woman from Brooklyn, as it did with a set of German expectations of how a black woman from Brooklyn would be politically positioned. I often found myself waiting to see how the script had been written before I began to utter my lines. I was given, for instance, far more credit for knowledge about the hip hop scene in the US than I possess, and for the most part did nothing to correct these misconceptions. On the other hand, when other issues arose which I felt revealed stereotyped views of black people in the US, I tried to

offer other possibilities for consideration. These issues not only impacted on the ways in which I managed myself in the field, but they have given me cause for concern with respect to the analysis of the data I gathered there. Is it possible to read meaning accurately in a cross-cultural research project such as this one? Or are there issues that transcend the limits of culturalisation?

In my efforts to determine what differences, if any, existed in the ways in which different groups in Berlin understood and produced hip hop culture, I was also challenged to see these differences within their own context and not as a mirror of difference as it is experienced in the US. I had to resist the urge, for example, to equate the Afro-German experience with the Afro-American one, even though this was often offered to me as a valid comparison by Afro-Germans and Germans alike. I had to learn to value my knowledge and experience but not to let that body of knowledge prevent me grasping the very obvious fact that I was in Berlin conducting my research project, not Brooklyn; and I had to expect and accept that what I saw and experienced in Berlin could have an entirely different meaning there than it would in Brooklyn. It is important to note, however, that this wasn't just a matter of race. For instance, I often found it difficult to resist the temptation to caution the young people at the Naunynritze centre about their behaviour, based on what I thought certain behaviour meant.¹³ Meaning is (mis)read constantly in everyday life.

Perhaps the challenge of reading meaning in a cross-cultural research project such as this one, is best simply acknowledged, with the hope that in the final analysis the research project speaks for itself. I am certain that I have never ignored these issues, though sometimes I have certainly struggled to resolve them. I remain

¹³ An example of this was my concern about Amani's behaviour, which I considered to be too provocative for a girl of her age (13). Deniz pointed out to me, however, that she was a shrewd young lady who knew exactly what she was doing and never let anything go too far with anyone.

heartened by my contacts in the field, who were absolutely thrilled that “eine Schwester aus Brooklyn”¹⁴ was doing an extensive research project on the Berlin scene and who were always interested in my perspective as an outsider.

¹⁴ Translation: Sister from Brooklyn

PART 2: UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

As the previous section illustrates, the development of this research project involved a broad consideration of issues, and a combination of methodological approaches. In Part 2, I identify and explore the historical issues I came to realise would help me understand hip hop culture in contemporary Berlin. My review of Berlin in the post-war era provides a context for understanding the city's racial diversity and the disappointment expressed on both sides of the former Wall since the *Wende*. By reviewing earlier negotiations with American popular culture and music in a divided post-war Germany, I consider the ways in which the struggle to re-construct German identity in East and West Germany impacted on the reception and practice of rock music. Finally, the consideration of hip hop's early appropriation is useful in terms of understanding how hip hop was initially encountered and then practiced. Though presented as historical issues, they are necessary reference points for my theorisation of the relationship between youth culture and hip hop in contemporary Berlin.

3. BERLIN: IDEOLOGY AND DIVERSITY

In Chapter 1 I introduced the questions that shaped the initial concept of this research project. Among these was the consideration of the relationship between the city of Berlin and the hip hop scene found there. There are other German cities – Hamburg and Stuttgart among them – which could be said to have more thriving hip hop scenes, featuring more successful artists and crews. But there is no German city that could be said to represent the rather tortured quest for German national identity to the extent that Berlin does. In *Ghosts of Berlin*, a fascinating work on Berlin’s urban landscape, Brian Ladd explores the city’s history and links it to the larger issue of German identity:

Two related facts – Berlin’s status as a national capital and its division – have made the civic identity of Berlin inseparable from the national identity of Germany since World War II. Since 1871 Berlin has been Germany’s capital – a status interpreted in different ways by different regimes, but one nonetheless acknowledged by the Hohenzollern monarchy, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the four Allied occupiers, the two post-war German states, and the unified Germany of the 1990s. (Ladd, 1997, 3)

Ladd concentrates on the buildings and monuments created (and destroyed) by these different regimes as a means of uncovering what can be described as the problem of German national identity. His thoughtful survey of the architectural debates surrounding the uses of space and the preservation of existing structures after German unification, reveals that it is virtually impossible to consider contemporary Berlin without looking to the past. But for a city whose roots lie in the 12th Century, this is indeed a formidable task. One alternative then, is to consider features of Berlin’s history which shed the most light on those aspects of contemporary Berlin most relevant to this study.

This research is concerned with the ways in which young people in Berlin use hip hop in everyday life to derive a sense of identity and belonging. Because hip

hop is still primarily associated with black youth from the US, one of my original aims was to see whether identifying with this cultural form revealed any particular attitudes to Germany. In other words, does engaging in hip hop practices in Berlin represent a deliberate way of *not* being German? Or has hip hop truly evolved into a global cultural form which can be re-worked by anyone who takes it up, and which lies beyond the grasp of attempts to link it to national identity?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my experience in the field gave me the opportunity to spend time with various members of Berlin's diverse hip hop community. This diversity challenged some of my original assumptions about who was engaged in hip hop culture and to what effect. When talking to a young Turkish man, for instance, Germanness was not an issue and had nothing to do with his embrace of hip hop culture. At the same time, however, he was quite proud of the fact that he had been shaped by two great cities: Istanbul and Berlin. It soon became clear that hip hop was read differently by different groups of people; that the "local" as it were, was far from homogenous. But the issue that struck me was the extent to which the former East/West division continues to play a role in how young people view the city and their own place in it. Slowly I began to realise that the euphoric scenes beamed around the world on November 9, 1989 of East and West Berliners embracing and dancing as they hammered away at the Wall, told only a fraction of the story.

That being the case, I chose to conduct a brief historical review of the city focusing on two issues: 1) the psychic cost to Berlin's citizens of the ideological and physical division known as the Berlin Wall; 2) the roots of the city's ethnic diversity and how these roots continue to shape contemporary attitudes about Germanness. This, I hoped, would help me understand how a young person born in Berlin after 1989 could identify himself as Yugoslavian *and* speak to me with such fear and

loathing about what used to be East Berlin. Certainly there are many ways to examine a city's history, and there have been volumes written on Berlin. The approach I am taking is not intended to be exhaustive or entirely representative in a historical sense. Rather, I am trying to understand how contemporary ideas about race and ideology have been shaped in Berlin. Perhaps Mary Fulton says it best in the conclusion of *History of Germany: 1918 – 2000*:

...if one accepts that all historical accounts are investigations into those aspects of the past which are of interest in the present, framed in terms of the concepts and questions of current debates, it should be possible to engage in rational inquiries which are, within given parameters, capable of moving our knowledge and understanding forwards. (Fulton, 2004, 301)

In the pages that follow I will review the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as examine the arrival and integration of guest workers in the 1960s. I suggest that these two themes are historical snapshots that reveal much about contemporary Berlin.

3.1 THE BERLIN WALL

Good-bye, Lenin!, directed by Wolfgang Becker, premiered in Germany on February 13, 2003. The film was an instant success and its popularity has been linked with the phenomenon known as *Ostalgie*. Based on the word nostalgia, *Ostalgie*¹⁵ refers to a sentimental longing for East Germany that has recently emerged in unified Germany. The film is set in East Berlin and tells the story of Alex, a young man desperately trying to provide and maintain the illusion of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for his mother who suffers a stroke and falls into a coma shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is feared that in her weakened condition, news of the GDR's collapse would prove too severe a shock for the committed Communist. After she regains consciousness and eventually returns

¹⁵ The prefix 'ost' means east in German.

home Alex, along with his family and friends, attempts to create the illusion of the GDR for the bedridden woman, even going so far as to produce fake news programmes. The film was enormously popular in Germany and abroad winning numerous prizes. Becker's version of East Berlin is unique among other films about the city because of what one reviewer says is the "film's radical revision of the Wall's narrative standing: in most other Berlin films the Wall is the problem; here it is its absence that causes complications" (Iordanova, par. 8).

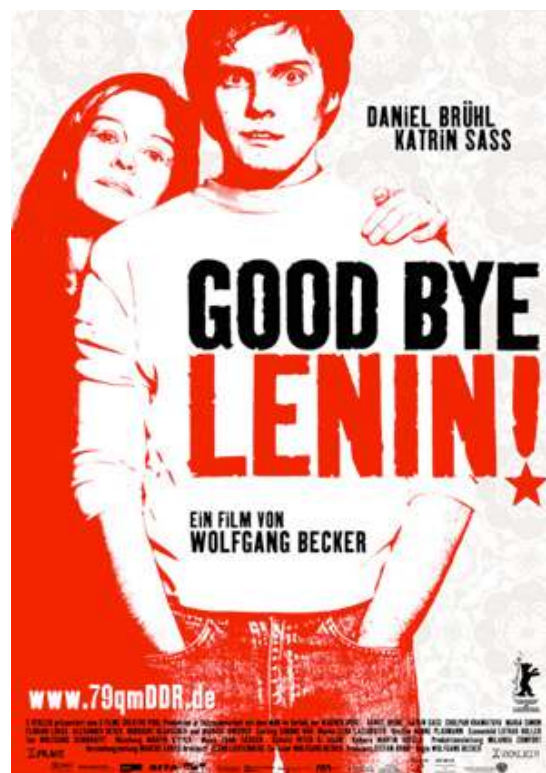


Fig. 3: Film poster for *Goodbye Lenin*

The success of Becker's film and the rise in *Ostalgie* are perhaps suggestive of the shifting narrative of German unification. As expected, *Ostalgie* is a controversial subject, generating fierce debate within Germany and abroad. Thomanek and Niven sum up the issues in this debate as follows:

The essential conundrum is whether or not constructions of east German identity are regarded purely as defensive reactions to insecurities in the present, and therefore as a kind of cushion to fall back on, or whether they are seen as legitimate expressions of an alternative political and social

culture. Clearly, the reconstructions of the past which result in passive and self-deluding retrospection are not positive. However, selective reappropriations of certain arguably positive aspects of socialist society – job security, low rents, right to a home – need not be coupled with a total transfiguration of past realities. Moreover, it is not just the GDR some east Germans look back on with longing, but also the time of the 1989 revolution (*Wende*), when they took to the streets to fight for greater freedom, and when certain forms of basis democracy evolved which resulted in a brief period of political influence. Two key features of east German consciousness, then, could be a heightened sense of social justice and of political rights. Rather than projecting these back into a lost past, many east Germans project them into a vision of a better future, so that the emphasis is forward-looking rather than backward-looking. (Thomanek and Niven, 2000, 4 - 5)

Even if *Ostalgie* is inspired by “a heightened sense of social justice and of political rights,” it nevertheless appears to be at odds with the expectations West Germans had for unification. Thus, the tensions and conflicting narratives driving unification discourse expose the chasm which divide(d) East and West Germany. I would argue though, that this divide is especially felt in Berlin due to the Wall – a physical barrier that separated neighbourhoods, families, friends and lovers; and an ideological barrier whose impact would not be understood fully until the physical one had ceased to exist.

That said, the following discussion is not merely a consideration of the different trajectories the Wall symbolised for East and West Berlin, but perhaps more importantly, of the ways each of these Berlins was situated with respect to the states in which they belonged. In the Introduction I referred to Berlin as a singular experience in Germany and in what follows I intend to explore the roots of that singularity. One of the keys to understanding why Berlin is special has to do with moving beyond a simple East/West dialectic to a broader look at the relationship between West Berlin and West Germany and East Berlin and East Germany. In other words, there is certainly a post-wall tension between East and West Berlin, but it can

be argued that this is the expected outcome of the *Wende*.¹⁶ Berlin's controversial place in Germany's historical narrative, however, was not only exacerbated by the Wall, but revealed the pre-existing tendencies in West and to a lesser degree East Germany to problematise the city.

3.1.1 *The West*

With the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 the tensions that had made the city one of the most prominent icons of the Cold War eased off to some degree. As the initial barbed wire fence went up around the perimeter of the Allied-controlled sections of Berlin, it was soon clear that there would be no serious diplomatic or military response, and two days later a more permanent concrete structure began to take shape. Moscow had correctly gambled on the Allies being unwilling to challenge them over the Wall's construction. In fact, John Kennedy, who would eventually speak to cheering crowds in West Berlin, was decidedly reluctant to risk serious confrontation with the Soviets. David Clay Large addresses this in his history of Berlin:

"We're stuck in a ridiculous position," [Kennedy] confided to his aide, Kenneth O'Donnell. "It seems silly for us to be facing an atomic war over a treaty preserving Berlin as the future capital of a reunited Germany when all of us know that Germany will probably never be reunited." (Large, 1998, 442-443)

Kennedy's position had shifted from one in which "the freedom of Western Europe hinged on the defence of Berlin" (Large, 1998, 443), to a commiseration with Khrushchev for the loss of East Germans using West Berlin as an escape route to the West; a loss which was having a crippling effect on the East German labour market.

¹⁶ *Wende* is the German word that has come to mean the fall of the GDR. It literally means the turning point.

In reality, the Berlin Wall relieved the pressure on Kennedy and other Allied leaders.

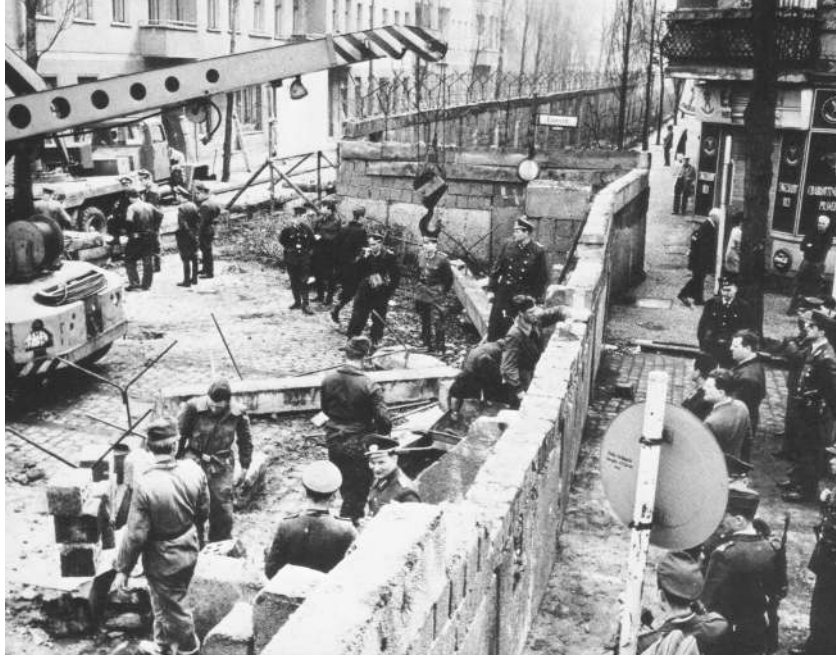


Fig. 4: Construction of the Berlin Wall (Courtesy World Socialist Movement)

For the purpose of this discussion, however, it is perhaps more revealing to consider how the construction of the Berlin Wall was handled by the two most prominent West German politicians at the time – Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Berlin mayor Willy Brandt – who were also opponents in the upcoming elections for the Chancellorship. According to Richie, Adenauer’s initial reaction to the Wall revealed both his dislike for the city and its mayor. Comparing his response to that of the Allied leaders, she states:

Adenauer’s response was little better. He refused to address the nation on television that Sunday, and he refused to go to Berlin. His behaviour reflected his hatred of the city; he was also in the midst of an electoral campaign against Willy Brandt for the Chancellorship. Elections had been scheduled for 17 September 1961 and Adenauer was loath to give Brandt any electoral advantage. When he addressed the nation on Monday he said that ‘there is no reason to panic’ and then launched into a personal attack against Brandt, even referring to his illegitimate birth and hinting that Ulbricht had staged this action simply to help Brandt at the polls. (Richie, 1998, 720)

In contrast, Brandt returned immediately to Berlin from a campaign trip in West Germany, and upon assessing the situation appealed directly to President Kennedy in a private letter. Brandt's controversial letter, in which he urged Kennedy "to show some support" (Richie, 1998, 722), effectively forced Kennedy's hand. Brandt had announced to the citizens of West Berlin that he had written to Kennedy – upsetting both Adenauer and Kennedy in the process – and restored some calm to the city by doing so. Brandt was concerned that an uprising by West Berliners would give the Soviets the excuse they needed to roll their tanks into West Berlin. Adenauer and Kennedy felt manipulated by Brandt but were nevertheless forced into responding to the concerns of West Berlin's citizens.

In the long run, though, where did all of this political posturing actually leave the citizens of West Berlin? Although Vice President Johnson would visit West Berlin at Kennedy's behest about a week after construction of the Wall began, and Kennedy would declare himself a Berliner in front the Brandenburg Gate two years later, there were never any serious considerations about trying to block the path the Soviets had taken. In effect, the Wall lessened tensions with the West, and West Berliners saw their status as "flashpoint" on the world stage diminish.

As a result it was essential for West Berlin to reinvent itself both in terms of its position within East Germany, and with regards to its relationship with West Germany and beyond.

From the first days of the Wall it was clear that West Berlin had lost its dominant economic and political role in Germany. West Berlin needed a new role – one which would attract people and give the city a new international appeal without infringing four-power rule or reviving its old function as capital. The solution was to try to make it a 'world class' city of culture. The next thirty years would see frenetic investment in everything from performance art to architecture. West Berlin would become known as a city 'whose business is culture.' (Richie, 1998, 791)

According to Richie, West Berlin took as its model the Weimar Era, a brief but politically and economically disastrous period in German history, but which nevertheless represented a relatively safe space in terms of its cultural output. Since Weimar was eventually undone by the Nazis, it “could be celebrated without fear of appearing nationalistic or *revanchist*” (Richie, 1998, 792). This negotiation with the past would emerge as one of the most significant differences between how East and West Berlin came to terms with their new roles. Returning to Weimar meant sidestepping the difficulties of the Nazi Era and constructing a new identity for the city based on Weimar’s history as a period of international acclaim for German artists and scholars, and in which Berlin figured significantly.

The efforts to create a new role for West Berlin in West Germany relied heavily, of course, on West German subsidies. This was not restricted to the city’s cultural output, but designed to promote industry as well. I will return to this topic and its relation to guest workers later in this chapter, but it is important here to note the impact these subsidies had on the perception of West Berlin in West Germany and vice versa:

Not surprisingly, the situation in West Berlin inspired resentment throughout the Federal Republic. West Germans often spoke of the walled city as their “hair shirt.” Most had been willing to wear this garment back in the days when West Berlin seemed in imminent danger of being overrun by the Communists, but with the construction of the Wall an odd kind of “normalcy” had set in, and Berlin inspired considerably less empathy. Now it seemed another big city *am Tropf* (on the drip), with no end in sight to the dependency. In exchange for their subsidies, moreover, West Germans felt that they got little in the way of thanks from West Berlin. West Berliners, for their part, were at once proud and frightened by their alienation from the Federal Republic. They often insisted that only they could solve Berlin’s problems, yet when West Germans showed little interest in those problems, they felt snubbed. Increasingly, when West Berliners said *drüben* (over there) they meant West Germany rather than the world just over the Wall. (Large, 1998, 466)

These tensions worsened during the Student Movement of the late Sixties and Seventies as Berlin was seen as a breeding ground for disaffected young people bent on anarchy.

3.1.2 The East

While the fortunes of West Berlin fell relative to her previous status, those of East Berlin rose in comparison. East Berlin became the capital of the newly formed GDR and as a result, the process of constructing an identity for the city and its citizens was based on an entirely different set of motivations. But while the factors motivating the different paths each city took in terms of definition and identity were different, the paths themselves were in both cases framed by calculated approaches to dealing with the recent, i.e. Nazi, past. As discussed above, in the case of West Berlin, this was due to the efforts of West Berliners to create a new role for the city within West Germany, and resulted in a longing for the past glories of the Nazi-free Weimar Era. In the case of East Berlin, however, these efforts were largely driven by the state itself, and it was clear that the fate of East Berlin was directly related to that of the GDR.

According to Stuart Hall, the cultivation of cultural identity based on the concept of nation, is a discursive process:

A national culture is a *discourse* – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves ... National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it. (Hall, 1992, 292-293)

In the case of East Germany the task of connecting the present to the past should have represented an enormously challenging undertaking. To the extent that the country existed at all, it was as a response to Allied efforts to stabilise the region, which included the creation of NATO and the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In fact, under Ulbricht’s leadership, East Germans were forced to make a complete break with the past and were told “that the only thing [they] had

to be proud of was the fact that they had been liberated by the Soviet Union after the Second World War," a notion central to the Misery Thesis of Germany history (Richie, 1998, 728). Erich Honecker, who replaced Ulbricht as head of the Party in 1971, developed a completely different strategy for constructing an East German identity. His approach to the problem revealed his astute understanding of the link between culture and identity:

Erich Honecker was the first GDR leader to understand that East Germans needed an identity of their own, one that was based not on abstract Communist ideology but rooted in popular history. By removing all links between the GDR and the Nazi past Honecker had created a historical vacuum which he could fill as he saw fit, and he initiated a long gradual rehabilitation of forbidden history. His attempt to build a national consciousness was one of the most extraordinary aspects of life in East Berlin. (Richie, 1998, 741)

This was in stark contrast to the approach to German history that shaped the early years of the GDR. But by departing from the Misery Thesis of German history, which dominated the post-war years, Honecker recognised the power that culture, history and tradition could wield in shaping the GDR in the minds of its citizens.

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the resurrection of Prussia. Previously reviled because of the Nazis' appropriation of Prussian history as a means of establishing their own links to German tradition, Prussia re-emerged under Honecker. East Germany became the rightful heir to Prussian legacy – due in no small part to the fact that much of East Germany lay in what was formerly the Prussian state – and Berlin's role as the former seat of Prussian power was celebrated in East Berlin's current role as the capital of East Germany. This, too, was made easier by the fact that much of what constituted "Old Berlin" was actually situated in East Berlin. As a result, the Prussian architecture and monuments that survived the Allied bombing contributed a great deal to the construction of an East German identity.

But as in the West, East Berlin's new role created tensions between the city and the rest of East Germany. The evolution of East Berlin as the showplace of the GDR didn't occur without a huge financial cost, and many citizens in East Germany questioned the country's priorities. Large describes one such point of tension in the preparations leading up to the celebration of the city's 750th anniversary:

Berlin's impending 750th anniversary was also the catalyst for the restoration of the city's oldest district, the Nikolaiviertel, named for its Gothic church, St. Nikolai.... Although the restorers tried to recapture the district's historic flavour, a lack of resources necessitated the use of prefabricated concrete slabs on the facades, which hardly made for authenticity. West German visitors, whom the regime had desperately wanted to impress, condemned the endeavour as an insult to true historical restoration – a piece of pretentious Communist kitsch. Visitors from other parts of East Germany bristled at the expense. They were appalled that large sums of money were being expended on a show-project in the capital while the rest of the country continued to suffer from shortages of every kind. (Large, 1998, 500-501)

The strains between East Berlin and East Germany were not limited to the money spent on making East Berlin Party headquarters and on historical restorations. East Germans were, further, called on by the state to populate East Berlin. In one instance, concerned that East Berlin border guards would not follow orders to shoot citizens trying to escape to the West as the Wall was being constructed,¹⁷ Ulbricht brought in East German guards from a region of East Germany where “Western television signals did not reach” (Large, 1998, 453). These guards typically came from Saxony, Ulbricht's homeland. Later after the development of the Stasi,¹⁸ thousands of hardline Party members from Saxony would be brought to Berlin, as what native East Berliners called “the fifth occupation power,” with obvious reference to their Stasi roles as spies and informers on their fellow citizens.

¹⁷ Or try to escape themselves.

¹⁸ Abbreviation for *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, the GDR's secret police.

3.1.3 After The Wende

As mentioned earlier, the impact of the Wall could not truly be assessed until it had ceased to exist. Its presence had defined a city, and symbolised on a broader level the division of the German nation itself. With its construction, East Berlin and West Berlin were forced to redefine themselves relative to their positions in East and West Germany, and with its destruction Berlin had lost its identity. It was soon clear, however, that the *Wende* represented not so much the happy conclusion of a long and difficult period of German history, as the beginning of a new one – and for the purposes of this discussion – yet another challenge for Berlin and its citizens.

In the absence of the Wall and with its designation as the nation's capital, Berlin has undergone tremendous change since November 1989. But as to be expected, these changes have been fraught with controversy and underscore the difficulties with unification discourse. Rather than a union of equals, unification has come to symbolise the triumph of capitalism over socialism with clear effect:

...there is the problem of the 'loser-winner' schism. 1990 seemed to signify the triumph of western liberalisation over socialism. This sense of being the 'winners of history' is reflected in the arrogant behaviour of many west Germans or *Wessis*. Equally, the diffidence and self-doubt of many east Germans or *Ossis* are not the ideal psychological prerequisites for handling the west Germans. (Thomaneck and Niven, 2000, 3)

And as Berlin attempts to redefine itself as the nation's capital and a global city, it does so while trying to reconcile with its past; negotiating the historical legacies of the GDR, Third Reich, and even the monarchy. One of the more obvious sites in this negotiation process is the area of debate surrounding historical monuments. These heated debates over issues such as which monuments from the GDR should be preserved in a unified Germany, the lavish construction of Potsdamer Platz and the new government buildings, as well as the design and construction of a Holocaust

Memorial, expose the trouble with German history. In one impassioned exchange, which took place in an academic journal in the United Kingdom (UK), architects and urban planners addressed the massive construction projects taking place in Berlin and their wider implications for dealing with German history. Peter Marcuse began the debate with his article, "Reflections on Berlin: The Meaning of Construction and the Construction of Meaning."

Marcuse challenges the reasoning behind the decision to demolish the Palace of the Republic, not only the former home of the East German parliament but perhaps more importantly, a structure which figured significantly in the lives of East Berlin's citizens:

So what the Palace of the Republic in fact symbolized to a large part of Berlin's population was the priority of public space and public life over the private. The idea of combining the seat of the legislature with public theatres and publicly accessible restaurants and entertainment is the exact opposite of what is being developed in the new West Berlin government center, with its fortress-like concept and its careful attention to controlling access and use – not that there were not similar concerns in the GDR, but even so the form of the Palace of the Republic was designed to demonstrate openness rather than control. In this case also, to focus attention on the built form, rather than on the facts of the GDR/West German conflict, misses the point. It is the fact of the political leadership's desire to reject and suppress the potentially troublesome legacy of the GDR, not the form of the Palace of the Republic nor the best form for its replacement, that gives meaning to the discussion.¹⁹ (Marcuse, 1998, 335)

But the legacy of the GDR has been difficult to suppress. In effect, the "loser-winner" mentality referred to earlier, means that East Berlin and East Germany have been incorporated into the West, and whatever the form the "new" Berlin takes will be driven largely by Westerners who believe they have won the rights to both the nation's history and its future. And while Easterners and Westerners may no longer be separated by a physical structure, they remain divided nevertheless by what they call the "wall inside our heads" (Large, 1998, 33). Or as Laurence McFalls suggests,

¹⁹ See: Campbell, 1999; Häußermann, 1999; and Marcuse, 1999.

based on a series of interviews he conducted with East Germans, this is simply the result of forty-five years of living in the GDR:

When I indirectly asked my well-adjusted interview partners whether they had completely abandoned their old GDR values and identity, they all claimed – regardless of their ages, which ranged from twenty-one to eighty – that they were too old to give up their GDR identity and that they regretted not being able to keep living by at least some of the positive values from the past, such as solidarity and egalitarianism, in the new order. In other words, in their hearts they clung to values that they knew in their heads to be out of step with the times. (McFalls, 1997, 304)

The perpetuation of an East German identity in spite of the political, social, and cultural changes that have taken place since the *Wende* need not be read as the stubborn refusal to accept reality. On the contrary, this phenomenon reveals the extent to which an identity – shaped by forty-five years of state rule – can prevail; or perhaps more importantly, the ways in which multi-layered identities characterise contemporary life.

3.2 THE ROOTS OF DIVERSITY

In 1986 Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, and Dagmar Schulz co-edited a book entitled, *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*.²⁰ The book represented one of the first major attempts by Afro-Germans to deal publicly with being black in Germany. The book contains historical information as well as personal essays, which describe the lives and experiences of Afro-German women and their families. The women were inspired by Audre Lorde, a black scholar from the US, who went to Berlin in 1984 to teach a poetry course at the Freie Universität. In an article addressing her Afro-German heritage, Helga Emde quotes Lorde discussing her motives for the trip to Berlin:

²⁰ The book was later published in English as, *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women Speak Out*.

In the Spring of 1984 I spent three months at the Free University in Berlin teaching a course in Black American women poets and poetry workshop in English, for German students. One of my goals on this trip was to meet Black German women, for I had been told there were quite a few in Berlin.

Who are they, these German women of the Diaspora? Beyond the details of our particular oppressions, although certainly not outside the reference of those details, where do our paths intersect as women of color? And where do our paths diverge? Most important, what can we learn from our connected differences that will be useful to us both, Afro-German and Afro-American. (Emde, 1999, 38-39)

It is perhaps not surprising that in their attempts to begin the process of defining themselves as black in the context of German society, these women drew upon a black American feminist for inspiration and support. But as Leroy Hopkins rightly points out this should not be seen as an attempt “to imitate but rather the need to identify culturally with Blackness” (Hopkins, 1999, 15).



Fig. 5: *Farbe bekennen* cover (Courtesy of Fischer Verlag)

I will examine the Afro-German experience more closely below, but I have used it to introduce this section because it is a compelling point of departure for a discussion about ethnicity and identity and the problems of belonging in a society whose diversity is as complex as Germany's. Returning to Hopkins' point about cultural identification, what becomes clear is that Afro-Germans, unlike the 2nd and 3rd generations of guest workers, do not possess a uniquely Afro-German culture. Whatever difficulties they face due to their skin colour, Afro-Germans are German citizens; their language is German and their culture is German. This isn't the case for descendants of guest workers who, though they may have been born in Germany and have rights to German citizenship²¹, rarely identify themselves as Germans and in many cases cling to their own languages and cultures.

In the pages which follow, I intend to examine the nature of ethnic diversity in Germany in order to show how the different experiences of coming to and being received in Germany affect how young people today position themselves within German society. This is a critical step towards understanding the complexity of the "local" in Berlin and what that complexity means in terms of hip hop's emergence as a form of cultural expression there.

3.2.1 *Black Germany*

Rather than engaging fully with the complex history of Germany's colonial past, I am interested in establishing the historical (and perhaps genealogical) roots of contemporary Afro-Germans. That said, there are two periods of German history that lend themselves to a representative summary: pre- and post-World War II. In the years prior to World War II, Germany's legacy as an imperialist power in Africa

²¹ Details of the revisions to the German citizenship laws passed in January 2000 are included in the appendix.

ensured that there would also be an African presence in Germany. In the aftermath of World War II, Germany's humiliating defeat led to the country's division and occupation; an occupation that included black GIs from the US. My focus here is on the post-war experience. By concentrating on the post-war I do not mean to privilege one era over another, but it is my assertion that this era presents itself as a unique historical moment in Germany's evolution as an ethnically diverse society. The roots of this evolution were different in East and West Germany, but both states shared a reluctance to fully engage with the changes taking place in their respective societies.

According to Helga Emde, the Afro-German daughter of an American soldier she has never met, the relatively small size of the Afro-German population in the Weimar and Nazi eras afforded members of this community a sense of security. During the 1950s, however, the *Besatzungskinder*,²² as they were known by white Germans, served as a potent reminder of Germany's defeat and occupation.²³ As a result, the racial discourse within which these children derived their identities, reflected a narrow continuum of attitudes ranging from hostile to patronising:

The psychological effects of growing up as a Black child in post-war Germany can be more clearly understood by examining an article from a weekly newspaper in 1952, called *Das Parlament*. The headline was "What has become of the 94,000 'Occupation Babies'?" It reports, "Among the occupation babies, the 3,093 Negro mulattoes form a special group, presenting a human and racial problem of a special nature....The authorities of independent youth welfare agencies have for years been concerned about the fate of these mixed-blood children, for whom the climatic conditions alone in our country are not even suited. The question has been raised whether it would not be better for them if they were taken to their fathers' countries." (Emde, 1999, 34)

These attitudes were to have a tremendous effect on Afro-German children. In the first person accounts featured in *Farbe bekennen*, Emde and others refer to the

²² Translation: Occupation-babies.

²³ This recalls another period in German history when the Rheinland area of Germany was occupied by French forces—including blacks—after defeat in World War I, and resulted in the birth of many bi-racial children later known as the Rheinland Bastards.

difficulty of being able to develop positive self-images in a society that viewed them as problems. Similarly, in East Germany Afro-German children came of age in a society seemingly at odds with its pronouncements of “solidarity with the ‘oppressed peoples of the world’” (Piesche, 2002, 42). While racism certainly accounts for policies and attitudes that made it virtually impossible for black Germans to develop healthy self-images, the role of the state in the lives of all citizens in the GDR must also be factored into this equation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, nation-building was a critical element of political and cultural life in the GDR. Peggy Piesche draws a link between nationalism and education and the impact this had on Afro-German children:

Primary mediators of education and socialization, the schools in the GDR supported identification with the GDR’s own national culture. Introductions to national history and literature offered the students patterns of interpretation that were meant to help young people see themselves as members of this national and political body. Historical traditions from other cultures were only rarely addressed. (The situation in West Germany was much the same in this regard.) Access to these traditions was therefore not generally available to young black Germans in the GDR. (Piesche, 2002, 55)

By the mid-80s, however, many Afro-Germans (at least in the FRG) had begun to challenge the status quo. This involved identity work on a personal level, but also reaching out to the Afro-German community across Germany and the African diaspora around the world. Founded in 1985 and currently with branches across Germany, *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD)*²⁴ was one such effort. According to the statement on their website, the association’s objectives are: 1) to represent the interests of black people in Germany; 2) to promote black awareness; 3) to oppose racism; 4) to organise the networking of black people and their organisations and projects.²⁵ Groups like ISD symbolise the evolution and development of black consciousness in Germany, as well as a reconsideration of black heritage and the role of blacks in contemporary German society. It is the case, however, that by

²⁴ Translation: Association of Black Germans.

²⁵ My translation. Source: <http://www.isdonline.de/>

proclaiming their Germanness, some Afro-Germans do so at the expense of migrants whose relationship to Germany is certainly more ephemeral.²⁶

3.2.2 Guest Workers

The term guest worker refers to what was intended to be a temporary arrangement. In the aftermath of World War II, and particularly after the construction of the Berlin Wall, West Germany opened its borders to foreign workers. But rather than the short-term presence anticipated, ethnic minorities have in fact become part of the fabric of German society. It is important to note that the expectations of a short stay in Germany were shared by the workers themselves. The subsequent inability or reluctance for some to return to their homelands, follows what Stephen Castles refers to as the “logic of the migratory process,” and describes as follows:

...virtually all migrations, whether organized or spontaneous, start with movements of young adult workers. Success in the new country, or failure to save enough for a quick return, lead to increased family reunification. Once children are born to migrants in the new country, or grow up and go to school there, some degree of permanent settlement is inevitable. (Castles, 1985, 520)

The issue of permanent settlement is especially problematic in Germany; a country maintaining that it is *not* a “country of immigration,” which nevertheless has a significant migrant population. It can be argued that the problems of permanent settlement, and what that has meant for subsequent generations, is directly related to the process by which foreign workers were initially brought to Germany.

The recruitment process was managed by the *Bundesamt für Arbeit*²⁷ (BFA). The BFA had their own offices in each of the countries with which West Germany

²⁶ An interesting example of this was Advanced Chemistry, a hip hop group whose song *Fremd in eigenem Land* (Foreign in my own country) bemoaned the fact that they faced racial discrimination despite holding German passports. Critics argued that the fact that they had German passports was irrelevant, and that discrimination was wrong, period.

had recruitment agreements. This meant no direct hiring was undertaken by German firms, but that firms applied and paid fees to the BFA to find suitable workers. In turn, the BFA conducted all of the screening for workers and determined their eligibility (Castles, 1985, 518-519). But while the process itself was uniform, the difference between the recruitment agreements with European (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Yugoslavia) and the non-European (Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia) countries reveals the “first- and second-class” status of the contracts, a distinction driven in part by the issue of religion. The non-European countries were all Muslim.

Guest workers were recruited to help the country recover from the devastating effects of WWII, and as to be expected, the jobs they were given were often jobs that Germans would not perform. And while their labour was certainly needed, the “no foreigners” signs in restaurants and other establishments indicated that they were not wanted. Since Germany did not consider itself to be a country of immigration when opening its doors to guest workers in the 1950s, no identifiable effort was made to integrate them into German society. The long-term effects of that strategy (or lack thereof) are particularly noticeable in one area: language. I will discuss this issue in more detail later in the thesis, but it is important to consider the roots of language difficulty for migrants.

“Our parents had the problem that when they arrived, they could speak two or three sentences of German, and had to begin working immediately,” said Gandhi from the group Sons of Guestworkers. “Where were they supposed to find the time to learn German, how could anyone expect these people to understand life here and to participate in everyday life here, when they never had the time and space to learn the language? No one thought it was worth teaching them the language!”²⁸ (Loh and Gungör, 2002, 72)

While it may be the case that religion has played a decisive role in how migrants were treated once they arrived in West Germany, it is also the case that the failure to

²⁷ Translation: Federal Labour Office.

²⁸ My translation.

provide language instruction for guest workers has had a significant impact on the fortunes of second and third generations born and raised there.

Although the bulk of literature has focused on the plight of guest workers in West Germany, there is a small but growing body of research that addresses the situation in the GDR. As in the FRG, a pattern emerged in terms of the contracts offered to various countries. The difference though, had to do with whether foreigners were admitted to study or to work:

A two-class system developed in which the country of origin often clearly indicated whether a particular foreigner was studying or working. People from Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, and Iraq mostly came to study. In contrast, people from Angola, Mozambique, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Vietnam, and Cuba went into socialist production and started – according to the economic needs of the GDR – an apprenticeship in labor. (Piesche, 2002, 41)

As in the FRG, however, the lives of guest workers and students in the GDR was controlled by a system that did not recognise any need to integrate them into society. And whatever rupture with the Nazi past (and its inherent racist ideologies) GDR officials tried to effect, racism was inescapable for foreigners in the GDR. Laws against marriage, fraternisation, and political activity – among others – reveal the extent to which foreigners were seen as an element which had to be tolerated and nothing more. The long-term effects of such government policies on black Germans from the GDR, is an area ripe for further research.

4. AMERICAN MUSIC AND POST-WAR IDENTITIES

The aim of the previous chapter was to search for the historical roots of contemporary phenomena. This chapter is also concerned with looking to the past but with a different intent. As this thesis is concerned with cultural identity in Berlin, I considered it necessary to establish how diversity developed in Berlin and to look at how these differing histories might account for different attitudes and experiences among ethnic groups there. At the same time, it was also critical to uncover the issues that contribute to the tensions felt along the East/West divide. The key here is trying to understand why hip hop resonates so strongly with different groups of young people in Berlin and to what effect. Before exploring hip hop in Berlin, however, it is necessary to engage briefly with the history of American popular culture in Germany. While hip hop may be considered global youth culture, its roots lie in urban America and its popularity in Germany reflects what could be taken as further evidence of the Americanisation of German culture.

The term Americanisation is itself controversial and is often used interchangeably with globalisation, westernisation and modernisation. Volker Berghahn offers a reading of Americanisation, which suggests that it involves constant process of negotiation:

...“Americanization” never meant that ideas, practices, and patterns of behavior first developed on the American side of the Atlantic simply steamrolled into Germany, flattening and obliterating whatever existed before. Rather – and this cannot be stressed too strongly – the transfers always became subject to negotiation. What emerged from the process was not a simple replica of conditions in the United States, but a blending of those imports that came to be accepted, on the one hand, and indigenous traditions, on the other. They formed a peculiar mixture, the specific American content of which varied from issue to issue, from social group to social group, and from region to region. (Berghahn, 1999, 2-3)

What is intriguing about Berghahn’s notion is what it implies about the state of German consciousness during the post-war era. Despite a devastating defeat and

occupation by foreign civilian military personnel, Berghahn suggests that Germans nevertheless retained a clear enough sense of Germanness to be in a position to recognise which aspects of American culture were appropriate and which were not. Also noteworthy is his observation that the mix of American and German culture differed with respect to the specific cultural product and other factors such as class and region; this is particularly relevant with respect to popular music.

In my consideration of American popular music in Germany, I want to pay particular attention to that period of post-war history when jazz was being overtaken by rock and roll as the music that defined youth culture. My decision to focus on this point of tension has less to do with rock's relationship to hip hop as a cultural movement for young people, and more to do with rock's impact on youth culture in East and West Germany at a time when the notion of being German had been seriously compromised.

In the pages that follow, I explore American popular music in post-war Germany by considering the broader themes of reading meaning and making music. I want to consider how German understandings of American music shaped their understandings of America, both as a country and as a concept. Different notions of what American music meant – in terms of what it was thought to reveal about America as well as how it was perceived to affect German people – developed in East and West Germany. While the American occupation of West German soil would seem to indicate that American popular culture was more of an issue there, it is also worth exploring how East German officials were quick to exploit the overwhelming American presence in the West in an attempt to highlight the primacy of East German culture as pure German culture.

As important as how American popular music was understood in Germany, is how it has been re-produced there. Arguably, German youth who were inspired

to pick up guitars and form rock bands were no different than young people in many other countries during that era. What makes their efforts so intriguing is the consideration of whether or not they reflected a desire to break with the recent German past. Did the appropriation of rock in Germany equal a rejection of German culture, and if so was this the case in the East as well as the West? Or can the embrace of rock by young people in Germany be understood in terms of the same generational conflicts at play in Britain and America? In other words, was there anything about the appropriation of rock in Germany that was uniquely German?

4.1 READING MEANING IN JAZZ & ROCK

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, Germany had effectively ceased to exist, and the once-powerful nation was divided into occupation zones overseen by the Allied victors. Eventually, the ideological and political split that would come to distance the Soviet Union from West, would also guarantee an East/West fracture in occupied Germany. It was in this context – defeated, occupied, and split – that Germans in the East and the West grappled with the onslaught of American popular culture. It can certainly be argued that German responses to jazz and eventually rock during the occupation years were not much different than other negotiations with these forms of American popular culture taking place throughout Europe and even in America. What is intriguing about German receptions of jazz and rock though, was the way these criticisms were used on both sides of the Iron Curtain to locate “true” German culture in the wake of National Socialism.

4.1.1 Elevating Jazz

Jazz, referred to by Ralph Willet as “the sound of democracy” (Willet, 1989, 86), underwent an incredible transformation during the post-war era. Uta Poiger offers a fascinating account of West German critic Joachim Ernst Berendt’s efforts to mould jazz “into a serious artistic and philosophical enterprise removed from the realm of consumerism and consumer culture” (Poiger, 2000, 138). In his book, *Der Jazz* published in 1950, Berendt took on the task of redefining jazz in West Germany.

Berendt carefully narrowed the definitions for what he considered “authentic jazz.” He claimed that most of what was talked about as jazz was in fact not jazz at all. Jazz, according to Berendt, was not a dance music, and true jazz fans did not dance while listening to the music. Berendt thus disassociated jazz from the dance halls that had characterized the arrival of consumer culture in both Europe and the United States since the late nineteenth century. He also discredited those jazz fans who were dancing and romping around at jam sessions in post-war German Hot-Clubs and other jazz joints. For Berendt, listening to jazz was an intellectual experience, and in his complicated and inaccessible study, he went to great lengths to show that jazz music represented “the essence of the modern age” as well as any twentieth-century philosopher could. (Poiger, 2000, 138-139)

Certainly the evolution of jazz from “*negermusik*” to an intellectual art form, had much to do with new directions jazz musicians were taking, and this is particularly the case with respect to bebop. With bebop, jazz musicians were not concerned with entertaining audiences, but “considered themselves artists and sought to reject racial stereotypes of black performers” (Poiger, 2000, 141-142). This raises a provocative issue with respect to jazz criticism. While attempting to valorise jazz, critics had to avoid reviving the racist discourse of the Nazi era, and they were not always successful. There was a conscious effort by critics like Berendt to distance jazz from its African-American origins and establish its links to European, i.e., classical music traditions. In doing so, Berendt did not deny the contributions of African-Americans to jazz, but suggested that,

...jazz had gone beyond its African and African American roots to gain appeal around the world. He thus made jazz into a universalising experience. Perhaps it was not by chance that Berendt seemed to like cool

jazz even better than bebop. Played by both black and white musicians, and combining “white” and “black” musical styles, cool jazz quickly became the symbol of successful racial integration. (Poiger, 2000, 141)

Berendt’s reading of jazz and jazz culture cannot be separated from the issue of national identity in the post-war period. By reworking it into a more European form of musical expression, Berendt created a space in which jazz could be enjoyed by Germans who were sensitive to the notion of Americanisation; a sensitivity linked in part to jazz’s African-American roots.

While it may seem that West Germany bore more of the burden of American popular culture than East Germany due to the proximity of American military and civilian personnel, this was not necessarily the case. Germans on both sides of the Iron Curtain were forced to construct new identities. In East Germany this identity was developed in opposition to the West and framed, to a large degree, in terms of representing an alternative to the American influence and domination evident in West Germany. The transformation of jazz in East Germany, however, was anchored in a political reading of jazz’s roots and its links to the struggle over capitalist domination. In a newspaper article from 1956, an East German writer calls jazz the “weapon of the American Negroes in the decades long struggle against capitalist oppression,” and describes the responsibility of jazz fans in the East:

As socialism advances in our republic, we charge friends of jazz with the task of helping the American Negroes, men and freedom fighters like the great singer Paul Robeson or the Negro writer Langston Hughes, by making a small contribution to their fight for equality through the interpretation of their songs, their ideas, and their language.²⁹ (Schubert, par. 3)

Where West German critics regarded bebop as evidence of jazz’s intellectual capacity, East Germans came, then, to a different conclusion. It was, of course, the case that East German readings of jazz culture were inextricably linked to politics. Official East German policy towards jazz was complicated by the fact that jazz was

²⁹ My translation.

simultaneously considered, “an imperialist sub-culture on the one hand, and a cultural expression of suppressed minorities on the other” (Sommer, 2000, 24). East German critics like Reginald Rudolf championed blues and Dixieland, and denounced swing and bebop as “decadent” (Poiger, 2000, 153). His reading of jazz was constrained by contradictory government attitudes that were ultimately concerned with the development of German culture:

Rudolf located his arguments in favor of jazz firmly within the official cultural doctrine of the East German SED.³⁰ After all, the SED’s Central Committee had announced its fight against formalism and called for a search for an authentic German national culture in March 1951.... At the same time that he derided certain aspects of jazz, Rudolf stressed that African American folk music, including some forms of jazz, could fruitfully stimulate the development of a new “clean” German dance music. Rudolf followed a logic that jazz fans in the Soviet Union had employed with varying success since the 1930s. (Poiger, 2000, 151)

Despite the different responses to jazz by critics in East and West Germany, their underlying motivations were shaped by similar concerns. Jazz music, and the culture which developed around it during the early years of the post-war period, had an enormous impact on East and West German youth. While conservative attitudes leaned towards an outright condemnation of jazz and its effect on young people, jazz critics attempted to educate young fans. Their aim was to develop a jazz culture which bore little resemblance to what was being offered in American films and in clubs and concerts in larger cities like Berlin, with the hope of winning over detractors. By redefining jazz, however, critics effectively narrowed its appeal. Discussing the membership of a jazz club called the New Jazz Circle in Berlin, Poiger describes the role such groups played in constructing the young jazz audience:

...over 50 percent of the largely male membership of the New Jazz Circle were students, civil servants, or white collar workers, and another third were skilled workers and artisans. The great emphasis on respectability may well have discouraged young working-class Berliners from participating in the circle. Opinion surveys conducted for the US government by West

³⁰ *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party).

German polling institutes suggest that as narrower definitions of jazz prevailed, jazz became increasingly popular among young people from the West German middle and upper classes. (Poiger, 2000, 147)

Jazz critics like Berendt, Rudolf, and Wolfgang Jänicke – founder of the New Jazz Circle – were not only concerned with establishing jazz as a respectable form of German culture, but also with attacking the culture which was forming around American popular music. With the strict definitions German critics assigned to jazz and its subsequent lack of mass appeal among young people, jazz in Germany remained a rather bourgeois affair, and it wasn't long before rock and roll would dominate the scene, captivating young Germans and inspiring many to make their own music.

4.1.2 *Confronting Rock*

The criticisms that shaped jazz culture in post-war Germany were often framed in terms of distinguishing jazz from other forms of American popular culture. By suggesting that jazz music was not danceable and that it needed to be studied and listened to reverently in order to understand its intricacies, critics were distancing jazz culture from another form of American popular music sweeping across Europe: rock and roll. Rock presented enormous challenges in both East and West Germany. Like jazz, rock had its origins in African-American culture and seemed to challenge gender norms with respect to style and behaviour. But perhaps most worryingly for conservatives on both sides of the Iron Curtain, rock apparently gave German youth the platform on which to challenge the *status quo*, such that it was, during the Occupation. As with jazz, rock would eventually be “whitened” making it more palatable to conservatives and broadening its appeal across class boundaries. I am particularly interested, however, in the different ways the link between youth rebellion and rock music would be read in East and West

Germany and the impact this would have on how the notion of resistance developed in each country.

As Volker Berghahn points out, the collapse Germany suffered at the end of World War II “was not only military and political but moral and cultural” (Berghahn, 1999, 5). It is perhaps not surprising then, that young people in the East and West would respond so spiritedly to rock and roll – much to the dismay of parents, politicians, intellectuals and educators. According to Peter Kraus, a German rock star of the 1950s, a large part of the appeal of rock, was that it was made by young people:

For the first time music for young people was made by young people. That was the most interesting thing about it. In my childhood the only international musicians I knew were Fred Astaire or Frank Sinatra, and as Rock ‘n’ Roll came to us out of the US, I thought: Wow, someone is making a very simple music that comes from the guts – and he is our age! That was the deciding factor: not that the music was different, but the feeling that it was made for us by kids our own age.³¹ (Wagner, 1999, 13)

This was certainly a factor in rock’s popularity around the world, but in Germany one must also consider the extent to which a typical generational conflict had been exacerbated by the legacy of National Socialism. As young people came of age in the post-war era, they were also coming to terms with events of the recent past. That said, the consideration of whether or not the reception of rock in Germany was evidence of the rejection of German culture, or the enthusiastic appropriation of American culture, or both, is an important one because it reveals how young people can use popular music to shape identity; a process which can mean deciding who you’re *not* as much as deciding who you are.

In the case of celebrated filmmaker Wim Wenders, for instance, rock music represented a crucial element in deriving a “sense of identity.” For Wenders and

³¹ My translation.

many of his contemporaries this was impacted by rock's distance from German culture:

...American rock groups and their British counterparts, who added a particular working-class attitude and radical self-confidence to rock music, created an invigorating and irresistible force used by their German fans to fill the gaps left in their culture by the legacies of fascism. For Wenders, much of the cultural inheritance appeared to be contaminated. Even classical music seemed to have been compromised by the fact that the Nazis used the German musical tradition for ideological aggrandizement. Wenders confessed that he saw rock and roll to be "the only alternative to Beethoven (and I'm really exaggerating here) – because I was very insecure then about all culture that was offered to me, because I thought it was all fascism, pure fascism; and the only thing I was secure with from the beginning and felt had nothing to do with fascism was rock music." The reaction to classical music and its cultural status reveals a sense of guilt and shame by association that Wenders shared with much of his generation. (Kolker & Beicken, 1993, 12)

Wenders did not use rock music to become British or American, but to explore the possibility of other ways of being, which were inspired by the music. As stated above, the nature and quality of the rebellion seen in the appropriation of rock music by German youth was driven in part by shame and guilt. Wenders, however, also acknowledges that the music "had more to do with joy than anything else," which in itself was a departure from the German norm at that time (Kolker & Beicken, 1993, 12).

At the outset officials on both sides of the Iron Curtain were disturbed by the impact rock music seemed to have on young Germans. Of particular concern, were Hollywood films which featured rock music prominently in the soundtracks and which also offered strong visual cues of teenage angst and rebellion. Films such as *Blackboard Jungle*, *The Wild One*, *Rock Around the Clock*, and *Rebel Without a Cause* were the subjects of intense debate and scrutiny, particularly as their widespread release in West German cinemas³² seemed to coincide with the youth rebellions and rioting sweeping across Germany between 1955 and 1956. In West Germany a

³² Young people in East Berlin could see these films in the cinemas built along the perimeter in West Berlin before the Wall was constructed.

discourse on youth culture eventually emerged which was intended to address the state of young people in Germany, and which was shaped by academic research in the US on the one hand, and political pressure from East Germany on the other. The result was that rock music – and the rebellion it seemed to inspire – were collapsed into normal adolescent behaviour. Poiger's work includes an enlightening discussion of these issues.

What cannot be ignored in the discussion of West German youth and rock music in the late 1950s was the space young people occupied in the emerging consumer society. The so-called Economic Miracle that transformed West Germany from a rubble-strewn war zone into a shopper's paradise accounts, to some degree, for the changing attitudes about young people and rock music. Young people had become a significant market, and a critical element in the West German economic recovery.

Then began the great attack on young people's wallets – between 1957 and 1960 youth in the Federal Republic of Germany spent about 200 million marks per year on records, and 10 years later about 475 million marks per year.³³ (Kemper, 1999, 17)

West Germany's triumphant recovery was based heavily on its transformation into a consumer society. This transformation threatened East Germany both in terms of its own economic recovery and in its efforts to lay claim to authentic German culture. According to Poiger, while West Germany had "made Germanness compatible with the consumption of American cultural products, East German authorities sought to resurrect a Germanness devoid of Western influences..." (Poiger, 2000, 129).

Given that East German attitudes about youth culture and rock music were framed in the hostile climate of the Cold War, it is perhaps not surprising that official attitudes were shaped in response to events in West Germany and as a result

³³ My translation.

were often contradictory. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the consideration of the *Halbstarcken* riots that gripped West Germany in 1955 and 1956. In their assessment of the rioting young men and women, East German officials supported their rebellion as evidence of resistance against the West German system. Given, however, that *Halbstarcken* were heavily influenced by American music and style,

...it was contradictory that the FDJ³⁴ used this celebration of (male) resistance for a renewed indictment of American popular culture in West Germany. Whereas earlier statements had claimed that American popular culture directly militarized West German adolescents, East German officials now alleged an even more sophisticated conspiracy: West German authorities first used American culture to corrupt youths into “lasciviousness” and “inhumanity” and then responded by disciplining these adolescents in the military. (Poiger, 2000, 94)

In his analysis of rock music in the GDR, Edward Larkey situates the relative failure of the GDR popular music scene in terms of its responsive nature. This is a theme that I will return to in the section on making music, but it is worth noting here that the reactionary official attitude to rock music in the GDR was part of a larger and systemic flaw: the failure of authorities to conceive “a plan for cultural development based on the concept of culture as an industry in need of an industrial base” (Larkey, 2000, 43). East German officials were eventually forced to reverse their early position on rock music; a reversal Larkey attributes in part to the music of the Beat Era³⁵:

The wholesale rejection of rock and roll because it violated principles of socialist realism was followed by a phase that was characterized by the reluctant accommodation of the music of the Beatles and other bands of the beat era as manifestations of an urban folk culture merely “deformed” by the commercial popular music industry, but which still contained a core of folk authenticity and progressivity. This attempt to trace the lineage of rock music through progressive folk roots past the more rebellious rock and roll of the 1950s reflected the acknowledgement of Bob Dylan’s transition from folk to rock, as well as the Beatles’ collective

³⁴ *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth).

³⁵ A distinction was made between earlier forms of rock performed by artists like Elvis, and the later musical style introduced by the Beatles.

songwriting and composition on successively more sophisticated levels...
(Larkey, 2000, 53)

The position that rock music of the Beat era reflected its folk roots – and was therefore acceptable – echoed the earlier acceptance of certain types of jazz. In their ongoing effort to define German culture in the GDR, authorities relied on the notion of a German culture that reflected folk traditions.

Coming to terms with jazz and rock in East and West Germany represented identical challenges for both countries at the outset. Concerns about redefining German culture in the wake of National Socialism – while young people were entranced by American popular culture – was an issue for conservatives in the East and the West. As youth culture developed around these American imports, however, the different ideologies on which these countries were based would lead to different reactions to the music and have long-term implications for theorising youth culture in the East and the West. This divergence was due in part to the emergence of the “Cold War liberal” in the West and the increasing domination of the state over its citizens in the East. This is perhaps more apparent when considering how young people in East and West Germany moved from being rock consumers to being rock musicians.

4.2 MAKING MUSIC

It is difficult to approach the history of rock music in Germany without considering the concepts of authenticity and resistance. It is not my intention to judge the authenticity of German musicians or the extent to which their efforts represented a resistance movement. Rather, I am interested in how the concepts of authenticity and resistance shape young people’s approach popular music. In other words I am more concerned with identifying what young people believe constitutes

the “authentic” in music, and with mapping the discursive space which ultimately determines what constitutes resistance. That said, I intend to limit my focus of German rock to the period between the late 1950s and the late 1960s. In this limited review I want to examine how early efforts to make rock music, inspired initially by Elvis and Bill Haley among others, were eventually transformed by the changes in rock music attributed to the Beatles. This shift was not, of course, limited to Germany as the British Invasion had an enormous impact on the rock music scene in the US. It is my assertion, though, that the negotiation with the British Invasion that took place in the US – the birthplace of rock and roll – had a different meaning there than it did in Germany. Thus, while the changing nature of what constituted the “authentic” in Germany may appear to have been the same, it was actually driven by a uniquely German set of issues and concerns.

4.2.1 *Authenticity*

In “Reconsidering Rock,” Keir Keightley discusses the concept of authenticity and its relationship to rock music:

Authenticity is not something ‘in’ the music, though it is frequently experienced as such, believed to be actually audible, and taken to have a material form. Rather, authenticity is a value, a quality we ascribe to perceived relationships between music, socio-industrial practices, and listeners or audiences. Thus, what we feel to be ‘really rock’ might be ‘authentic rock’ for us, but not necessarily for everybody, nor for all time... It requires a sense of music’s external contexts, and a judgement of the ‘objective’ effect on music of such factors as record company marketing strategies, music-making strategies, music-making technologies, or the ongoing history of music’s broader stylistic changes. (Keightley, 2001, 131)

Keightley’s concept of authenticity provides a useful framework for considering music-making in East and West Germany in the post-war era. If authenticity is a relationship between music and listeners and dependent on “external contexts,” one can understand that what constituted authentic rock not only changed in each

Germany over time, but perhaps did so independently of what was going on in the other Germany. As discussed earlier in this chapter, jazz generated heated debates on both sides of the Iron Curtain; debates that were often centred on trying to define what was or was not jazz. These discussions and debates addressed the music as an American cultural import, which in its various forms, created different effects in East and West Germany. It can be argued that the search for authentic jazz was actually a search for the proper sort of jazz audience; a proper *German* jazz audience. With respect to rock and roll, and later Beat, the search for authenticity had less to do with critiquing what American and British musicians were doing, than with German efforts to imitate them, and these were judgments largely made by young people themselves. This situated Beat firmly in the realm of youth culture in both the East and the West, though the situation in the East would be complicated by state intervention.

Early attempts at making rock music in West Germany were imitative of Bill Haley and Elvis Presley. Ted Herold, one of Germany's first rock stars admits that he obtained his first guitar after seeing an Elvis film. It was 1956 and he was 14 years old. He taught himself to play by learning chords diagrammed in a music magazine, and two years later had a record contract with Polydor. According to Herold, Elvis represented the full evolution of rock and roll because previously young men identified with Bill Haley's music, but not with Bill Haley himself. With Elvis, guys wanted to look like him (Wagner, 1999, 26-27). Linguistically, however, Herold was not imitative of the US imports – he sang in German.³⁶ Critically, this damaged his authenticity in the eyes of certain rock fans. Uschi Obermeier, key figure of the '68 Generation, rejected him because of it: "Ted Herold and Peter Kraus

³⁶ He did occasionally cover Elvis tunes in English, but his hits were sung in German.

tried to make a German-style rock and roll, but that was awful for me”³⁷ (Wagner, 1999, 33).

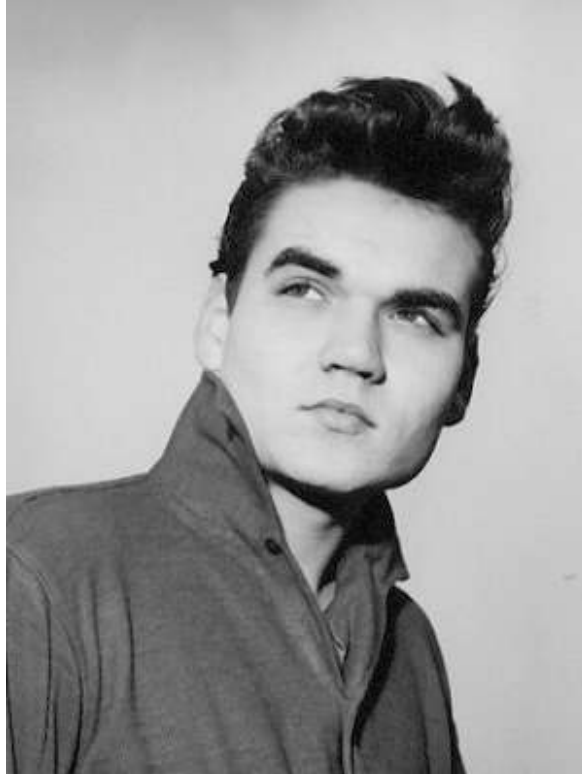


Fig. 6: Ted Herold (Courtesy of TedHerold.de)

The initial aversion to German lyrics was only partly related to the notion that “authentic” rock and roll should remain true to its English-language roots.

According to Achim Reichel, guitarist and singer for Sixties band The Rattles:

In the beginning it was clear: It can only be English. I didn’t experience the war, but when the people are lied to so often, they don’t believe anyone anymore, and they don’t need songs that they can understand. The English lyrics gave you the feeling of really being in the scene. Every generation rejects the world of their parents, and that’s still true today. I believe that people need pop culture in order to express this.³⁸ (Wagner, 1999, 46)

Reichel’s observation that “every generation rejects the world of their parents” has a particular resonance in the post-war era. In Weichel’s justification for rejecting

³⁷ My translation.

³⁸ My translation.

German lyrics, the language itself seems to have been tainted by National Socialism. For him, the German language symbolises the lies told to the German people during the Third Reich. Even in East Germany, where English was not taught in the schools, musicians struggled to understand enough of the lyrics so that they could be performed phonetically³⁹ (Wagner, 1999, 39).

While Elvis certainly inspired young people in East and West Germany, the Beatles had an enormous impact on music making. Poiger describes the shift from rock and roll to Beat music as follows:

By the mid-1960s the United States was beginning to lose its status as the source of the most controversial cultural imports in East and West Germany. On both sides of the wall, parents, educators, and party and state officials no longer worried about rock 'n' roll, but about so-called beat music that was produced by British bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. (Poiger, 2000, 215)

The distinction between rock and roll and Beat music is an intriguing one. Rather than a development in rock's evolution, the music produced by the Beatles (and other British bands) struck Germans as a completely new music style, and one which deserved a different name. The extent to which the separation of Beat from rock and roll lay in different attitudes to the US and the UK is difficult to determine. What is clear is that the relative simplicity of the Beatles' early music gave many young people the confidence to form their own bands. There was, of course, much more to their appeal than the ease with which young people could recreate their songs. According to Edgar Froese from Tangerine Dream,

The entire wave that came over from England was so fascinating because something was transported in the music: "Trust yourselves, don't wait for someone to tell you that you're allowed to something, be free and just do it." Suddenly, you could do things, when before you'd only thought: I'm scared, I can't do that.⁴⁰ (Wagner, 1999, 36)

³⁹ Though performing in English was actually forbidden in the GDR, the ban was not widely enforced until 1965.

⁴⁰ My translation.

In his study, *Rock in der DDR 1964 -1989*, Michael Rauhut describes the scene in the East, which like the scene in the West, was inspired by the spirit believed to be inherent in the Beatles' music:

In contrast to professional and semi-professional musicians, the amateur bands recruited teenagers, who would play for audiences of the same age. For these bands musical perfection was less important than the articulation of a certain spirit.⁴¹ (Rauhut, 2002, 23)

This spirit was not confined to the music and how it was played, but extended to matters of style, as well. Clothing, hair, and the mannerisms of Beatles and their counterparts in the UK were copied both by musicians and their fans. It wasn't enough to listen to or to play the music, one had to look like he or she was a part of the Beat Generation; a phenomenon which gripped young people in East and West Germany.

The quest to achieve an authentic Beat aesthetic posed a major problem for music makers in East Germany: access to musical instruments and equipment. In order to overcome this challenge, musicians were forced to use their imaginations and adapt existing instruments and technology or purchase them illegally on the black market.

The GDR's musical instruments industry was hopelessly challenged by the demands dictated by international developments. As a result, the bands were forced to rely on their own ingenuity. More precisely, a band's viability depended on the technical skills of its members....If one reviews the members of early GDR Beat bands, one finds musicians who were electricians, radio or television technicians, and often for this reason accepted into the group.⁴² (Rauhut, 1993, 52)

Rauhut's study includes fascinating accounts of young musicians in the GDR building their own electric guitars and using transistor radios as amplifiers. In Larkey's study of popular music in the GDR, he examines the hypocritical stance the government was forced to take with respect to the black market. According to

⁴¹ My translation.

⁴² My translation.

Larkey, the government encouraged musicians to “keep up with latest sounds from the West,” and thus had to turn a blind eye to illegal imports, which in turn undermined its authority (Larkey, 2000, 44). Despite these difficulties and challenges, Beat music flourished in the GDR and the number of bands grew dramatically. In Berlin, for instance, the number of Beat bands grew from 50 at the end of 1964 to over 300 less than a year later (Rauhut, 1993, 98).

In terms of music making, Beat bands relied heavily on cover versions of Western material, a phenomenon Rauhut attributes to a reverence for the music rather than a lack of creativity. The multiple challenges for Beat bands in the GDR were to produce these covers in English, with instruments and equipment that approximated the originals, and with evidence of the same spirit Beat music was felt to incorporate. The strength of the Beat movement, however, would soon present a more formidable challenge than those outlined above, namely intervention by the state. Once again, the two Germanies would take separate paths in their determinations of the role of popular music in the lives of young people.

4.2.2 *Resistance*

Given its theoretical legacy the term resistance is somewhat problematic. With its origins in subculture theory developed in the CCCS during the 1970s, resistance – as defined by British scholars – is difficult to apply to a post-war German context. Given the large body of material that has emerged re-evaluating subculture theory in its original British context, it is perhaps obvious that these shortcomings might be multiplied when applied outside of British culture and society. Andy Bennett argues, for instance:

The CCCS approach generates a number of problems, the first and perhaps most crucial of which is the resulting emphasis upon the role of mass-produced consumer items, such as popular music and visual style, in the articulation of forms of working-class ‘resistance.’ Certainly, the

contention that working-class youth were at the centre of the new style-oriented post-war youth culture is difficult to dispute....More questionable, however, is the CCCS's contention that such styles were uniformly used by working-class youth in a strategy designed to resist the structural changes taking place around them. This is because such a contention rests on the rather tentative notion that, having gained an element of freedom to pick and choose between an increasing range of consumer items, working-class youth was somehow driven back to the fact of class as a way of articulating its attachment to such commodities. (Bennett, 1999, 602)

Resistance then, is grounded in a very British investigation of class in post-war British society, and, as Bennett argues, is already problematic in that context. An uncritical application of the concept as a means of understanding post-war German society would be equally troublesome. It is not, however, a notion which should be completely disregarded. For as mentioned previously, the issue here is trying to determine the ways in which young people in East and West Germany believed that their embrace of Beat music subverted the dominant society, and situating those beliefs within a broader social and political context. Thus, my discussion of resistance moves beyond subcultural theories of class and consumption to a more general consideration of the ways in which youth appropriation of music and style functioned in relation to the two German states.

Beginning in 1963, a more liberal position with respect to Beat music and young people was evident in the GDR. In 1963 the Politbüro released a communiqué that called for a more tolerant approach to "youth-specific forms of pleasure and social life"⁴³ (Rauhut, 2002, 25). The government's foundation of a special commission on youth led to the *Deutschlandtreffen der Jugend* in 1964, a nationwide event which brought young people from East and West Germany together for the first time since the construction of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁴ The SED's position was in many ways shaped by the realities of everyday life. Despite the

⁴³ My translation.

⁴⁴ This event was the basis for the establishment of the East German pop music radio programme DT64.

erection of the Berlin Wall, popular culture from the West continued to flow into the East, and the relaxation of restrictive policies on young music makers and their fans, was in many ways a capitulation to a movement that was difficult to control.

Spontaneous music-making by East German youths on a mass level was partly responsible for the grudging accommodation by the SED and the government to the Beatles in the mid-1960s, but was insufficient to dispel prejudices sufficiently to allow free access to audiences, airwaves, dance floors and concerts. (Larkey, 2000, 53)

During this phase, East German groups with English names and English lyrics flourished. Moreover, the state-run record label Amiga was permitted to license and release a Beatles album, as well as two samplers featuring East German Beat bands.

This proved to be a short-lived period. The popularity of Beat music and style troubled the more conservative members of the SED. In fact, the Cold War was becoming colder as the Viet Nam War escalated, and as a result, tolerance for Western popular culture was evaporating in East Germany (Wagner, 1999, 40). Despite the fact that the Beat movement was rooted in British acts, they were nevertheless linked with the US (Poiger, 2000, 216). Matters deteriorated in September 1965 when concert-goers in West Berlin rioted following an aborted performance by the Rolling Stones, literally destroying the concert venue. Though the riot had taken place in the West, officials in the East used it as evidence of the inherent unsuitability of rock music. They responded by cancelling a band competition sponsored by the FDJ and revoking the licenses for many Beat bands. The situation culminated in Leipzig on October 1965, when 2,500 young people gathered to protest the new restrictive measures. The demonstration was met with a considerable show of force by the police, with several Beat fans being arrested and sent to prison or work camps. Shortly afterwards, at the Eleventh Plenary of the SED in December 1965, the Beat Era in East Germany officially came to an end. Further licenses for Beat bands were revoked, and those bands that remained had to

change their names if they were English, as well as banish all English lyrics from their repertoires. The new restrictions were not only for musicians, but any young people whose style seemed to reflect a Beat aesthetic. For instance, in a move supported by the FDJ young people with long hair could be picked up by the police and taken into custody where their hair was cut against their will.

In the years that followed, the GDR's position on popular music and youth culture continued to vacillate between periods of liberalization followed by the implementation of restrictive measures intended to maintain the State's role as arbiter in all matters of cultural policy. In response, young music makers in the GDR could either work within the prescribed state apparatus, or in the flourishing underground scene:

In addition to the art-oriented but pop-influenced concepts, which included participation, learning and playing by doing, and producing physically oriented sounds and rhythms, many young people went into their parents' garages to establish punk, new wave, or guitar-based bands. One reason that they preferred to play for friends and classmates was that there was no opportunity for them to play for public audiences due to rigid licensing restrictions.... Their lyrics, instrumentation, and sounds were at odds with the aesthetic ideas of cultural officials, and with those officially licensed musicians the younger generation pejoratively called "*Staatsrocker*" (state rockers – the officially recognized and licensed bands). (Binas, 2000, 28)

According to Binas this underground scene was not confined to live performances, which took place in private homes and churches; musicians also recorded cassette tapes, which were advertised in underground magazines. Their efforts stood in stark contrast to musicians operating within the GDR's system of control who had access to concert venues, state-controlled radio, music studios, and equipment. This isn't to suggest, however, that some of these musicians did not find ways to articulate criticism against the repressive system. As Larkey points out in his study, circumventing the editorial boards that reviewed all lyrics written by bands in the GDR, meant relying on metaphors to express frustration with various aspects of life in the GDR.

While culture was being politicized in the East, Poiger argues that it was being depoliticized in the West. Cold War Liberalism, discussed earlier in this chapter, did not mean though that the activities of young people in West Germany were not scrutinised. So while it may have been in the interests of the West German intellectuals and government officials to adopt a more tolerant attitude to the explosion of Beat culture among West German youth, these attitudes often contrasted with those of parents – as well as school and church officials – who were highly suspicious of Beat’s moral impact on young people. Complicating matters in West Germany, however, were several issues including the rivalry with East Germany for the claim to be the representative of *true* German culture, the struggle to overcome the legacy of National Socialism, and the impact of American popular culture.

Given the particular dynamics of politics and culture in West Germany, it is perhaps not surprising that efforts to depoliticize culture were eventually met with resistance by young people. Youth culture and consumption had been used as a weapon in the Cold War, as West Germany attempted to demonstrate the superiority of its system over the East German one. The 1965 debut of “Beat Club,” a youth-oriented music television programme – guests included Jimi Hendrix – led to a significant change in the ways in which youth culture was marketed in West Germany, and in the ways in which the role of young people in society was theorised.

While at the beginning of the Sixties only a minority of young people preferred American or Western popular music, by the end of the decade they had become the majority. Moreover, young people were considered trendsetters with an advantage over the older generation, who were themselves increasingly influenced by Western music and fashion styles.⁴⁵ (Poiger, 2003, 19)

⁴⁵ My translation.

The radical movement that emerged in West Germany in the late Sixties forced a re-evaluation of the role of consumption in the lives of young people. This movement, largely influenced by events in the US, challenged what was seen as the hypocrisy of Cold War liberalism, which sought to depoliticize youth culture on the one hand while “prescribing the correct taste in music and hairstyles” on the other (Poiger, 2000, 219). Furthermore, West German radicals attacked the very notion of consumer culture, which had been so instrumental in the construction of a West German identity in the post-war era. But as McFalls suggests, the long-term effect of this movement was actually beneficial to West German democracy:

...West German identity in the 1950s and 1960s grew so closely attached to economic performance that students of political culture questioned whether West Germans were anything more than fair-weather friends of the FRG's democratic institutions....The children of West Germany's economic miracle workers, the so-called 68er Generation, also dared to pose the same question. The resulting generational conflict, however, gave rise not only to the terrorism of the 1970s but to a whole new participatory political culture best represented by the Green Party. (McFalls, 1997, 301)

In contrast to the radical movement in the West, which was largely driven by students and intellectuals, working class youth led the movement in the East. The difference lay in the role the State played in educating its citizens, which meant that students in the East were less likely to risk their studies. This was particularly evident in the protests that occurred after the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968.

4.3 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the role American popular music played in the lives of young people during a significant period in German history. Both the reception and appropriation of popular music in post-war Germany were tied inextricably to broader issues related to the re-construction of German national identity in the aftermath of World War II. Each of the new German

states laid claim to be the site of authentic German culture, and the impact of American popular culture on young people was a particularly sensitive issue. The different responses in East and West Germany – driven by a specific set of political, economic, and social concerns – accounted for different negotiations with popular music by young people. This chapter's consideration of youthful appropriations of popular music in the 1950s and 1960s has not been undertaken with the intention of mapping an aesthetic trajectory from rock music in the post-war era to contemporary hip hop in Berlin. Rather, my concern here has been with understanding how social groups in Germany have previously been formed around popular music. This is an important point of reference for the following chapter which reviews the introduction of hip hop in Germany in the mid 1980s.

5. GERMANY'S HIP HOP OLD SCHOOL

The final chapter in Part II reviews hip hop's emergence and early appropriation in Germany. As in the previous chapter, I am trying to identify a historical point of tension. In Chapter 4 this involved identifying the era in which rock and roll eclipsed jazz as the music that defined youth culture. The current chapter examines how the first generation of hip hoppers in Germany moved from consuming an exotic cultural form originating in the streets of urban America, to creating a hip hop culture of their own. Unlike the majority of young people I interviewed for this project, the first-generation of young people who took up hip hop in Germany initially experienced it as an American cultural export, in the form of films like *Wild Style* and *Beat Street* and records like the Sugarhill Gang's *Rapper's Delight*. As they then began to experiment with breakdancing and graffiti writing, and later MCing and DJing there was nothing German with which they could compare themselves. This is one of the primary distinctions that separates them from subsequent generations of hip hoppers in Germany, who have been able to develop hip hop scenes in response to influences from both in- and outside of Germany. Reviewing the first-generation of hip hoppers, however, is not a particularly straightforward exercise, for as Sascha Verlan and Hannes Loh state in the definitive history of hip hop in Germany, *20 Jahre Hip Hop in Deutschland*:

The first 10 years of hip hop in Germany lie in secret. It's not possible to listen to the records, to flip through the magazines, or to watch the videos in order to understand how the Old School hip hoppers viewed themselves, which people were important, and how they slowly developed the little scene. Hip hop lived outside in the hangouts of the writers, in the training spots of the breakers, and in chaotic jams in the youth centres where battles occurred and where kids met and exchanged ideas.⁴⁶ (Verlan and Loh, 2002, 87)

⁴⁶ My translation.

They go on to say that trying to uncover the history of the early years of the German scene means relying on the subjective accounts of past experiences. Despite these difficulties, Verlan and Loh have written a fascinating account of hip hop's early years in Germany, and this chapter relies heavily on their efforts.⁴⁷

This chapter is not only concerned with identifying the process by which young people in Germany began to develop their own hip hop scenes, but with examining how ethnic and cultural differences impacted on these early efforts. As the previous chapter has shown, the development of jazz and rock in Germany was heavily influenced by the post-war political situation, which divided Germany and led to different negotiations with popular music and youth culture in the East and West. When hip hop debuted in East and West Germany in the mid-Eighties, its appearance did not generate the same type of social upheaval as jazz and rock in the Fifties and Sixties. This does not mean to suggest that controversies did not arise around hip hop culture. These controversies, however, typically arose from within the scene itself and were in many cases driven by issues related to Germany's growing cultural diversity.

5.1 TRAINING FILMS

Wild Style was the first hip hop film and it remains a classic. Shot as a quasi-documentary, the film premiered on German television in 1983 and had an enormous impact on the development of hip hop culture in Germany. Directed by Charlie Ahearn, *Wild Style* featured a cast that included hip hop legends such as Grandmaster Flash, Fab Five Freddy, Rock Steady Crew, and Cold Crush Brothers. *Beat Street*, produced by Harry Belafonte and premiering a year later, was a more ambitious project. Although it was a commercial film – starring Rae Dawn Chong

⁴⁷ It must be noted, however, that most of their attention is devoted to the scene in the West.

and Guy Davis – it also featured many prominent members of New York's hip hop community including Afrika Bambaata, Kool Herc, and New York City Breakers. The key to understanding the impact of these films lies in the visual cues they provided. It was one thing for young people in Germany to hear rap music on the radio, but quite another to see the vibrant street culture of which the music was only an element. Once the films were available on home video, budding hip hop enthusiasts studied them closely in order to learn break dance moves or to copy graffiti pieces:

The overwhelming desire to decipher the New Yorkers' techniques released an astonishing creativity in the hip hop kids. Marius No. 1... sat in 1983/1984 with grease-proof paper taped to the television screen and traced graffiti from *Wild Style* and *Style Wars* with a pencil.⁴⁸ (Verlan and Loh, 2000, 96)

Other members of the Old School generation describe freezing images on screen and photographing them or playing back the video frame by frame to understand the complicated B-Boy⁴⁹ moves. And as significant as the technical aspects they were keen to master, young people were also struck by what the films conveyed about public space and fashion in urban America.

Another important consideration related to their visual impact, was how these films were read by Afro-German and migrant youth. With their depictions of Bronx ghettos inhabited by black and Latino kids who didn't seem to fit into American society, *Wild Style* and *Beat Street* offered migrant youth in Germany a vision of the creativity and determination with which young people in the films responded to life.

The film *Wild Style* was on the television, *Beat Street* was in the cinemas, and B-Boy Crews even performed on *Wetten, dass..?*⁵⁰ For many migrant kids it was immediately clear that they had become witnesses to a movement that spoke to them as well. In the documentaries and films they saw young people of their age, who obviously had little to do with mainstream

⁴⁸ My translation.

⁴⁹ B-Boy is another term for break dancer.

⁵⁰ This is a popular German television programme. The translated title is, Want to Bet?

American society, who hung out on the streets because there wasn't enough space at home, whose parents had little money, who ran around in ripped clothes, and who had invented a new toy that was suddenly coveted on all sides.⁵¹ (Loh & Güngör, 2002, 92)

But while it is certainly clear that migrant youth in Germany often identified with black and Latino youth, the identification with young people who seemed outside the mainstream of American society was not as simple as has often been implied. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the experiences of different ethnic groups in Germany were impacted by many different factors which affected how these groups position themselves in relation to the dominant majority. In fact, identifying with hip hop music and culture does not require identifying with black people or their experiences, as a DJ from Berlin points out:

There's a big difference between Afro-Americans and Turks here in Germany. If my grandfather had been brought here in chains, then I would see it differently. But given the fact that my parents came here willingly – and at the time were quite grateful to have the opportunity to build a new life – it would be unfair to German society to say that we feel just like Afro-Americans do in America.⁵² (Loh and Güngör, 2002, 103)

The visual cues offered by these films were not lost on young people in East Germany, and this was particularly the case for *Beat Street*, which was released in cinemas across the GDR and quickly became a cult film. Because of Harry Belafonte's political stance and humanitarian work, the East German government was willing to reverse their initial reaction to hip hop as another product from the capitalists in America. With the release of *Beat Street*, hip hop was re-read as a protest movement by marginalised youth against capitalist society and therefore suitable for East German youth. Like their counterparts in the West, young people in East Germany also identified with the film, and felt in some cases that their situation as East Germans gave them a better understanding of hip hop than was possible in the West:

⁵¹ My translation.

⁵² My translation.

I asked DJ Opossum what he thinks of the notion that hip hop in the GDR and later in east Germany, has more in comparison with the roots in New York, than hip hop in the West ever could. This "We built it up from nothing" attitude which Scorpio⁵³ always refers to. "Exactly," agreed DJ Opossum, "the hip hoppers in the West have no idea what this 'nothing' really means."⁵⁴ (Verlan and Loh, 2002, 302)

Clearly, hip hop resonated with different groups of young people in Germany, but as Dieter Elflein notes, this could also be attributed to hip hop's competitive nature:

These different forms of cultural expression had one thing in common: they were highly competitive. In these socially and economically marginalized youth groups, everyone tried to be the best in their favourite discipline in pursuit of peer group status. (Elflein, 1998, 256)

But while Elflein seems to suggest that competition is a strong factor in hip hop's appeal to migrant kids, there is no reason to discount this issue with respect to German middle-class kids.

5.2 JAM CULTURE

The earliest negotiations with hip hop in Germany typically centred around breakdancing. This may be attributed to the fact that breakdancing required no special tools, as was the case with graffiti writing and DJing; or special knowledge, as it was initially assumed that rapping was something that had to be done in English. Within a year of *Wild Style's* release the Breakdance World Cup was held in Stuttgart and attracted over 6,000 B-Boys. By 1986, however, the breakdance boom was effectively over. Though the reasons for the sudden lack of interest are hard to determine in retrospect, a case can be made that interest in breakdancing was usurped by other elements of hip hop culture.

As the large number of participants at the Breakdance World Cup would seem to indicate, gatherings of hip hop enthusiasts were hugely popular. In fact, one

⁵³ Scorpio is a member of the legendary rap group Grandmaster Flash.

⁵⁴ My translation.

of the most successful and enduring phenomena to emerge from the Old School hip hop scene was the “jam.” The roots of the jam can be attributed to the rise of the youth centre as a space for young people who were interested in hip hop culture. Before hip hop became popular in Germany, youth centres were primarily the domain of migrant kids. As Loh and Güngör describe in *Fear of a Kanak*⁵⁵ Planet, this was the only space these young people had where they felt at ease:

For many migrant kids the tea rooms, and the kicker and billiard tables in the youth centres were the only leisure time activities that they had access to. Moreover, they didn't have to pay an entrance fee, and no one looked at their hair colour, their skin colour or their clothes.⁵⁶ (Loh and Güngör, 2002, 97)

Increasingly, the youth centre was also the only space where hip hop was on offer, and tensions often developed between German middle-class kids, who were effectively forced into youth centres in order to pursue their hip hop ambitions, and migrant kids who considered the youth centres their territory. Nevertheless, youth centres became points of contact for different groups or cliques of hip hop enthusiasts, and while this often resulted in huge debates about hip hop's future direction – and who was most qualified to make that determination – these spaces were seminal in the development of regional hip hop scenes. In time, these regional scenes would lead to the development of the jam: interregional hip hop events where B-Boys, Writers, DJs, and MCs gathered to battle, show off their skills, and exchange ideas.

According to Verlan and Loh, jams were not concerts in the traditional sense of the term, in which artists performed for an audience:

Almost everyone was an active participant and wanted to rap, break, scratch or beatbox. The writers brought their black books in which they had sketches, pictures and photographs pasted, and which they gave to other writers as a type of guest book, in which they were asked to draw a sketch

⁵⁵ Kanak is a derogatory term for migrants, particularly those from southern Europe and Turkey.

⁵⁶ My translation.

or a tag. There wasn't an audience in the classic sense. Every participant was busy with his thing and eager to present his moves, skills, and styles to the others. Each participant represented himself, his crew, and his city.... For anyone who accidentally stumbled upon a jam and expected a concert, where one group performed followed by a short pause before the next group, this would have been a bewildering spectacle. Actually, it made no sense at all to go to a jam without having something to contribute.⁵⁷ (Verlan and Loh, 2002, 106-108)

The first major jam took place in 1987 in Dortmund and was attended by hip hop enthusiasts from across West Germany. In its wake the jam culture emerged. The major cities forming the "Old School Hip Hop Axis" were Hamburg, Gießen, Mainz, Heidelberg, and Munich, and young people travelled between them from jam to jam building a hip hop scene in West Germany (Verlan and Loh, 2000, 103).

At the same time, however, the evolution of the jam culture contributed to the perception that hip hop in Germany was becoming exclusive. The nature of the jams meant that many young people simply could not participate. These were kids whose parents would not permit unsupervised overnight travel or who could not afford the transportation and accommodation expenses to travel out of town for weekend-long hip hop events, or both as was the case for many migrant kids:

The social and familial relationships of the hip hop kids were quite different. That meant that many could not experience the travelling culture characteristic of the Old School scene. "Most of us grew up with four or five siblings," recalls Ade. "We had to struggle and we certainly couldn't afford to travel to every jam. Where was the money supposed to come from? Like I said, those were the rich kids who were at the jams. With the monthly allowance we got from our parents, we couldn't afford those train tickets."⁵⁸ (Verlan and Loh, 2000, 133-134)

For young people who were fortunate enough to live in a major city, there was of course the possibility of attending a major jam at least once a year, but it can be argued that the character of the jams – an in effect hip hop culture – became shaped by those who had the means to travel extensively. This is critical because attendance at jams later became a criterion for determining who was a "real" hip hopper. While

⁵⁷ My translation.

⁵⁸ My translation.

young people with means travelled interregionally, those without concentrated their efforts in local youth centres and parties; a situation which led to what Verlan and Loh describe as the parallel development of hip hop scenes which had little contact with each other.

According to the authors, the jam era only lasted about four years with the period 1987-1991 representing the "Golden Years." During this period, jams were chaotic events devoid of any type of hierarchy, where B-Boys, DJs, MCs and Writers shared the same spaces, and perhaps more importantly, the same stature. The eventual emergence of the MC to the position of centre stage reflects similar developments in the hip hop scene in the US. In any case, the MCs' relative dominance meant that the term hip hop eventually became more associated with the music than with the other elements.

While hip hop enthusiasts in East Germany did not develop the same type of jam culture as in the West, there were nevertheless opportunities for them to gather. There is very little documentation about the development of hip hop in the GDR, but in his article, "Rap is in the house: HipHop in der DDR," Mike Wagner (1999) describes the national rap contests which brought young people from across the GDR to Radebeul, a suburb near Dresden. Unlike the jams, the Radebeul rap contests in 1988 and 1989 were organised events in which participation was determined beforehand. Rappers who wanted to take part in the contests sent demo tapes to "Vibrationen," a weekly hip hop radio show on the national youth radio station DT 64. The events were organised by Alexander Morawitz, who was a rapper by the name of Electric B, and his manager, Peter Figas. The rap contests attracted about 2,500 fans from around the country, though there was only space for 1,000 people in the sports hall where the event was held. In response to the

enthusiastic response to the one-day event in 1988, the contest was extended to two days in 1989.

5.3 LANGUAGE AND GENRE

In considering the prominence of the MC, the issue of language comes to the forefront. As mentioned previously, initial attempts by MCs in Germany were usually in English. While many credit the foundation of German-language rap with the hugely successful German group, *Die Fantastischen Vier*,⁵⁹ the first recorded rap in German was by a group of migrant kids called Fresh Familee, whose song "Ahmed Gündüz" tells the story of a guestworker's experience in Germany (Verlan and Loh, 2000, 133). Nevertheless, the impact of *Die Fantastischen Vier* was enormous and coupled with the change in the political climate due to the *Wende*, seemed to signal a fundamental shift in the hip hop landscape. Elflein sums up the situation as follows:

The original phrase 'hip-hop in Germany' mutated into '100 per cent German hip-hop' and then into the German term *Deutscher Hip-Hop*. After the enormous success of the Fantastischen 4, terms like *Neuer Deutscher Sprechgesang* (new German recitative) and *Neue Deutsche Reimkultur* (new German poetry) began to be used. Thus 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. (Elflein, 1998, 258)

Die Fantastischen Vier are often compared with the Sugarhill Gang, both in terms of the type of music they produced and the fact that they were extremely successful "representatives" of a scene in which they were actually outsiders.

⁵⁹ Translation: The Fantastic Four.



Fig. 7: *Die Fantastischen Vier* (Courtesy of Bumbanet)

The conflation of language, identity, and rap in Germany is complex. While it is the case that many migrant youth rapped in English or in their “native” language it is also the case that others preferred rapping in German, which was also the case for Afro-Germans. It wasn’t the language itself that was problematic, but the way language was used to construct a hip hop community which seemed to be the exclusive domain of middle-class German kids – like *Die Fantastischen Vier*. The decision to rap in English or in Turkish was often a reaction to the perceived “Germanisation” of hip hop, according to Ade:

Suddenly there are all these German middle-class kids, who talk about “authenticity” and “keep it real” and buy expensive name brands with

daddy's money. The worker flavour of the early days disappeared, and at the jams you noticed that it wasn't just about the sneakers anymore, but the baggy jeans, the hoodies, the baseball caps. These changes happened because of the *Fantastischen Vier's* success. Many kids were knowingly excluded. For example, nobody paid attention to the kids who attended *Hauptschule* and didn't really identify with the German language. That was the reason hip hop was our thing. No one gave us the chance to participate in German society, and our reaction was: Okay, fuck you, we'll rap in English or Turkish. Then *you* can't understand us, and then perhaps *you'll* understand what it's like not to be able to communicate.⁶⁰ (Verlan and Loh, 2000, 144)

Linguist, a member of the Old School group Advanced Chemistry, compares the issue of language in the hip hop scenes in Germany and France:

French nationalism functions differently than German nationalism. In German it is always defined ethnically. Therefore, you get the phenomenon that there is French rap and its protagonists are all black rappers. With "German rap" on the contrary, one makes a connection to a blond-haired blue-eyed rapper. That's where the language problem comes in. Unlike German, French is an international language.... I speak French very well, although I was not brought up in France. For me French was always an African language.... It's similar to English.... But German is the language of the Germans, and that means genetic Germans.⁶¹ (Loh and Güngör, 2002, 143)

The success of *Die Fantastischen Vier* not only signalled the pre-occupation with the rise in nationalism, which seemed prevalent in the wake of German Unification, but also with the commercialisation of rap music. In fact, it can be argued that these were actually two closely related phenomena. It must be noted, however that the celebration in the music press and record industry of "home-grown" rap talent, as it were, did not mean the complete exclusion of non-German talent. What it did mean, though, was that the hip hop scene became increasingly fragmented along ethnic lines and these divisions also influenced early attempts to develop distinct genres of rap music in Germany. But what many migrant kids who were active in the scene found especially frustrating, was that this was a situation driven primarily by outside perceptions rather than by members of the hip hop community

⁶⁰ My translation.

⁶¹ My translation.

An interesting example was Advanced Chemistry, a group made up of three Afro-Germans: Torch (German/Haitian); Toni L (German/Italian); and Linguist (German/Ghanaian). In 1992 they released a track called "Fremd in eigenen Land"⁶² which described the frustrations they felt as Afro-Germans in German society. After the song's release Advanced Chemistry were often featured in anti-racism television campaigns and music samplers designed to combat the rise in right-wing extremism after unification. The combination of the song and the campaign effectively cast them as socially conscious hip hoppers, despite a body of work that also included battle and party rap. Verlan and Loh describe how Advanced Chemistry was situated in relation to *Die Fantastischen Vier*:

One bought the records from Die Fantastischen Vier and danced and partied like crazy, but with Advanced Chemistry one could catch a glimpse into the heart of a second or third generation migrant kid. And a little whiff of the ghetto also blew into one's face. Advanced Chemistry was practically forced into their role as the alternative to Die Fantastischen Vier, social criticism versus party, underground versus Mainstream, "Fremd im eigenen Land" gegen "Lass die Sonne rein,"⁶³ and it was clear which one would actually have more success with the public. (Loh and Verlan, 2002, 71)

The popularity and success of *Die Fantastischen Vier* unleashed a storm of controversy in hip hop communities across Germany, and deepened the divisions between hip hop genres.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The first generation of hip hop enthusiasts in Germany moved quickly from being consumers of what was initially considered an exotic cultural form, to producers in their own right. Whether breakdancing, DJing, graffiti writing, or rapping, young people across East and West Germany responded to hip hop's various elements and built scenes in which they explored what hip hop could mean

⁶² Translation: Foreigners in our own land.

⁶³ Translation: Let the sun in.

in a German context. As hip hop in Germany became more and more popular, and rap groups like *Die Fantastischen Vier* emerged and established how commercially viable German-language rap music could be, the specific German context in which hip hop culture had been developing became increasingly fractured along ethnic and cultural boundaries. Even with these differences, it was clear that hip hop was a cultural movement that spoke to young people across a broad spectrum in Germany, despite the varied readings and meanings young people gave to their hip hop practices.

PART 3: THEORISING HIP HOP IN BERLIN

The three chapters in Part II were conceived as a response to questions that were raised by my experiences living in Berlin. Prior to 2002 when I began my fieldwork for this project, I had lived in Berlin from 2000-2001, and visited briefly in 1995. The stay between 2000 and 2001 began when I received an eight-week language grant to study at the Goethe Institute. My impressions of the city were so favourable, I returned to New York after my course was finished to earn enough money for an extended return trip to Berlin. This return was partly motivated by a desire to use the year in which I had deferred my Ph.D. studies in order to do a preliminary investigation of the city which was to be the subject of this investigation. At the same time, however, my fascination with the city played a significant role in my decision to return. Although this stay in Berlin was not “official” in terms of my research, it certainly shaped the research project that was to follow.

Significantly, I lived and worked in Kreuzberg – the largest Turkish community in Germany. The bar where I worked was owned by a young man from Senegal, frequented by West Africans, and located only twenty-minutes by foot from my apartment. Thus, one of my immediate impressions was a sense of neighbourhood, as everything I needed was in walking distance: home, work, shops, cafes, an art-house cinema, and friends. The other was the city’s amazing diversity. Though Kreuzberg is predominantly Turkish, there were people there from all over the world. And like me, there seemed to be quite a few people who had only recently moved to Berlin, had marginal (and often illegal) employment, and seemed quite happy to be there. One reason for this was the low cost of living, evidenced by the fact that I could afford my share of the rent in a very nice flat

working only two weekends a month. Having lived previously in Frankfurt and Essen, Berlin struck me as a very inexpensive city, and one with a vibrancy I had not experienced in other German cities. At the same time, however, I encountered many residents whose daily experiences with racism and discrimination had left them bitter and insecure. This was often the case among the patrons who frequented the bar and considered it a “safe” place where they could relax, hear West African music, and offer each other support and a sense of community.

My schedule at the bar was Friday and Saturday nights every other weekend, so I had an enormous amount of free time to explore both my neighbourhood and the rest of the city. I wandered about in Kreuzberg quite a bit, trying to reconcile the thriving Turkish community with the post-war history responsible for its existence. I also spent time in districts that had been East Berlin, looking for traces of the Wall and trying in vain to understand how the two Berlins had co-existed; or watching chic new boutiques and cafes open in otherwise run-down blocks, signalling the slow but steady and relentless process of gentrification. In retrospect, I must admit that as much as I thought I was investigating Berlin, I was actually experiencing the city as an expatriate American rather than as an ethnographer. The US, particularly New York, was the lens through which I saw Berlin. I unwittingly (but constantly) compared people, prices, attitudes, clubs, public transportation, food, graffiti, and clothing in Berlin to their counterparts in New York in an effort to understand what made Berlin special. It wasn't until I returned in December 2002 that I began to develop in my role as an ethnographer, which meant experiencing everyday life in Berlin on its own terms.

Unfortunately, the freedom and wonder with which I experienced Berlin between 2000 and 2001 initially deserted me upon my return in 2002. As a relatively new Ph.D. student and budding ethnographer, I was painfully self-conscious in my

role. Where I had previously revelled in my exploration of the spaces and places that make Berlin such an intriguing city, my new role left me insecure about my ability to critically observe everyday life. I was reluctant to take notes as I felt that this drew too much attention to myself, and perhaps more troubling, I developed an acute shyness which impacted on my ability to engage with people I met during my expeditions. Furthermore, I constantly wondered whether anything I saw or experienced was really “important” enough for Ph.D. research, and as a result I second-guessed myself continually. My new identity as a doctoral candidate seemed to bring with it an enormous pressure to see and experience the city in an entirely different manner than before. That is to say, I felt challenged to see Berlin as a scholar. This was more than disconcerting, particularly because the city itself had not changed noticeably, but apparently I had. Or so I thought. Fortunately, this phase did not last long. The reality of my research project gradually forced me to begin the process of learning to trust myself in the field. I had to get on with it, so to speak. This meant acknowledging the fact that although I was an inexperienced ethnographer, I was ethnographer nevertheless. It also meant recognising that the issues that had seemed important to me before I began my formal training were still critical once the project began to take shape.

The previous section’s historical review was inspired by everyday life and reflects the ways I experienced the city. These experiences, and the perspectives which shaped them, are arguably specific to my own struggles with respect to identity and belonging. These issues provide a reference point for the following analysis of Berlin’s hip hop scene, and like Part II, these chapters reflect my impressions of Berlin. There are countless possibilities in terms of theorising hip hop in Berlin, and what follows is an approach driven by my review of scholarly literature and by my time in the field. Part III does not offer the final word on

Berlin's hip hop scene, in fact, it can be argued that I have raised as many questions as I have attempted to answer. That said, it does offer a selected reading of Berlin's hip hop practices – as well as the discursive spaces in which these practices occur – in an effort to shed some light on the intersection between culture and identity in post-Wall Berlin.

6. CASE STUDIES

In the pages that follow I present three case studies: Royal Bunker, an underground hip hop label; Hip Hop Mobil, a pedagogical project; and Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion, a multi-cultural hip hop crew led by a Turkish rapper.

6.1 ROYAL BUNKER

As discussed earlier, the decision to concentrate on the scene in Berlin was driven less by what I knew of hip hop in Berlin at the time the decision was taken, and more by what I knew about the city itself. In fact, the extent to which I knew anything about German-language hip hop in 1999 was largely confined to artists from Hamburg, Stuttgart and Frankfurt. My initial forays into the Berlin hip hop scene in the summer of 2000 left me with the impression that it was largely underground, which seemed to suit the participants with whom I spoke. I was told that the scene in Berlin was “real” and that artists there had not “sold out” like artists in the cities mentioned above. By the time I returned to Berlin in December 2002 to begin my fieldwork, the scene had undergone a significant change. While there was still a decidedly underground element, the number one hip hop artist in Germany at that time was Kool Savas, a rapper from Berlin’s Kreuzberg district. Savas’ chart success generated fierce debate within the scene about selling out, but there was no mistaking the simultaneous delight and satisfaction that the *Hauptstadt*⁶⁴ was finally on the hip hop map. This had certainly been a goal of some members of the Berlin cultural scene. In May 2001 I was asked to translate some marketing materials for the Berlin Hip Hop Summerschool, in which the obscurity

⁶⁴ Translation: Capital city.

of the Berlin hip hop scene in comparison with other German and European cities was addressed:

The Berlin Hip Hop scene is the oldest and most creative in Germany and Europe, even though, or perhaps because it has produced few real stars. It is a trend-setting and exciting part of the city, but beyond Berlin it has not yet managed to find the recognition it deserves, and in Berlin has not received the support it needs. With the generous support of the Berlin Capital City Fund, we will address these deficits beginning in June 2001 with a 5-day concentrated and concerted action...

The organisers of the Summerschool were determined to promote hip hop in Berlin; a determination driven by the belief that Berlin is the most interesting city in Germany, and should therefore have a hip hop scene to rival Hamburg or Stuttgart. The relation between a city and the cultural practices that take place there is perhaps a bit exaggerated (or forced even) in the motivation behind the Hip Hop Summerschool, but this example serves as an important introduction to the examination of a Berlin hip hop institution, the Royal Bunker label.



Fig. 8: Marcus Staiger, Founder Royal Bunker (Courtesy of Royal Bunker)

Founded in 2000 by Marcus Staiger, Royal Bunker represents a critical development in the evolution of hip hop in Berlin. Along with the Masters of Rap

(MOR) crew, and taking his cue from underground punk labels in Berlin, Marcus provided one of the first successful examples for hip hop artists and producers of how to circumvent the major labels. Independent labels have become more commonplace in Germany since Marcus founded Royal Bunker, and there are certainly other hip hop labels in Berlin that have enjoyed more financial success. Despite the difficulties which have plagued the label recently, however, Royal Bunker remains one of the most dynamic labels in Germany, and the label's history offers an excellent opportunity for considering the role of the independent label in the development of the Berlin hip hop scene, as well as the relationship between the city of Berlin and its hip hop practices.

6.1.1 *Birth of a Label*

Marcus moved to Berlin from Stuttgart in 1991, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Though he moved to Berlin because of a relationship, he remained after it failed because of the possibilities the reunited city seemed to offer. He describes his early years in Berlin as quite difficult, and he worked a variety of jobs to support himself. These ranged from building scaffolding for construction projects to installing telephone connections in the former East Berlin. He was also involved in the illegal club scene that dominated Berlin night life after the *Wende*, including one that was operated with electricity he stole from the Ministry of Health. He briefly studied philosophy and economics at Free University, but found university life difficult.

I come from a working-class family. Yeah, I have my *Abitur* but it's really difficult for children from non-academic families to succeed at the university. I think it's something like only 7% of these kids in Germany actually make it through university.

Marcus attributes the insecurity related to his background, with his reluctance to pursue his dream of a radio career.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, he gained radio experience while at the university, and also worked for Radio Fritz, a public radio station based in Potsdam. His radio work and as a journalist for various underground hip hop magazines brought Marcus into contact with members of the Berlin hip hop scene. A popular meeting point for members of the hip hop scene at that time was Hip Hop Haus, a youth centre devoted to hip hop culture. Hip Hop Haus not only offered workshops for young people who wanted to learn how to rap or develop DJ skills, but also a studio and production opportunities for more experienced rappers and DJs. In fact, Kool Savas recorded his first big hit "Lutsch mein Schwanz/Schwule Rapper"⁶⁶ in the Hip Hop Haus. Though Marcus is highly critical of social workers using hip hop to reach young people, Hip Hop Haus clearly provided a space for hip hop enthusiasts to gather, exchange ideas, and develop their skills. It was there that Marcus met Kool Savas, Fuat, and MK One, all of whom were to play a significant role in the creation of the Royal Bunker label.

Kool Savas had travelled to Los Angeles with the Hip Hop Mobil and returned to Berlin fascinated by the freestyle evenings in the Good Life Café.⁶⁷ Marcus agreed that the opportunity to perform was critical in terms of the development of a rapper's skills.

There were other freestyle events in other cities, and I thought that this was really important. There has to be a place where rappers can meet for open mic sessions. This is how rappers develop. I've always considered it kind of a school. Even if the performance is only for fifteen people or so. Sometimes that's harder than a real show. We needed a place where people could practice on a weekly basis.

According to Marcus, shortly after he seriously began to consider organising a freestyle evening he met Jimmi, a Nigerian with a small bar with a back room which

⁶⁵ His insecurity was not totally unfounded. Radio colleagues warned him that his south German accent would be problematic.

⁶⁶ Translation: Suck my cock/Gay Rappers.

⁶⁷ Later known as Project Blowed.

was perfect for what he had envisioned. The room had a small stage and with a DJ booth, and could accommodate about 50 people. The name of the bar was Royal Bunker.

In comparison to the contemporary Berlin hip hop scene, which is highly fractured, the freestyle evenings at Royal Bunker were extraordinary in terms of the breadth of artists who came together to participate. For more than a year rappers from all over Berlin gathered in the back room of the Kreuzberg bar on Sunday evenings to perform their latest work or to battle.

“In Berlin everyone would have just stayed in their own clique,” recalls Reaf, who was the DJ in Bunker at that time, and who is currently connected with Jackpott Records. “In Bunker it was different, there were people there from every social class and from every district. For a short time there was a cool vibe there. It didn’t last long, but certainly at the beginning.”⁶⁸ (Marquart, 2005, 66)

A DVD recently released by Royal Bunker, *Gegen die Kultur*, contains footage of these evenings, which were quite uneven in terms of audiences they attracted. In one particularly humorous scene, a young rapper sits on the floor of the stage, cradling the microphone in his hands as he leans against the wall rapping to an audience of about five people. Other footage reveals capacity crowds eagerly cheering rappers engaged in fierce rap battles. Though the documentary clearly shows that there was often tension between certain rappers and crews, the freestyle evenings never became violent, this despite the Berlin rappers’ reputation for instigating violence at concerts and shows throughout Germany. Credit for maintaining the relatively peaceful atmosphere during the open mic sessions is attributed to Marcus, who is described as having moderated the sessions “with a lot of humour”⁶⁹ (Marquart, 2005, 66). As important as who gathered in Royal Bunker every Sunday evening to rap, was the style of rap that was prevalent. According to

⁶⁸ My translation.

⁶⁹ My translation.

the *Juice* article on the Royal Bunker the freestyle evenings at Royal Bunker introduced a new style of rap to Germany:

In Bunker something new emerged, a kind of rap, which at that point was still unknown in Germany: exaggerated Battlestyle with a previously unheard of hardness and standard. “The art and style rapped in Bunker,” said Staiger, “didn’t exist in Germany. Of course Konkret Finn had a relatively hard gangsta style. But to stand up and say, ‘We do Battle-Rap’ – that was new for Germany. The mentality was totally shaped by the West Coast Underground...⁷⁰ (Marquart, 2005, 66)

The freestyle evenings eventually came to a close when Jimmi lost the lease to the bar for “forgetting” to pay the rent. Rather than search for a new venue, Marcus looked to fill another perceived gap in the Berlin hip hop scene.

Marcus knew that rappers were having difficulty finding labels to release their music, and decided to form a label with some of the artists from Royal Bunker. The idea was to release cassette tapes, a relatively inexpensive alternative for a new label. Marcus and his partner MK One, formed Mikrokosmos and they released their first cassette in 1999, a sampler of Berlin artists titled *Berlin Nr. 1*. In an interview with me in 2003, Marcus described the strategy with which the label was conceived.

It was all done out of need. No one wanted to release this music, so we had to figure out a way to do it ourselves. One of the problems in Berlin was that people had really big ideas, but then couldn’t carry them out. They wanted to release vinyl, but then they got into serious debt and fell flat on their faces.... We started with 100 tapes and all of the money that we earned was used to produce the next batch.

Shortly after the release of *Berlin Nr. 1*, Marcus and MK One split, due to differences in opinion on how to develop the label. Marcus favoured a strategy that meant being more selective and concentrating on a few good acts. He changed the name of the label briefly to Monopol before settling on Royal Bunker, effectively taking the label back to its roots.

⁷⁰ My translation.

6.1.2 Royal Bunker Underground Tape Label

The breakthrough for Royal Bunker came with the release of *Berlin Nr. 1 Vol. 2*. Kool Savas, who was featured on the tape, was gaining a reputation outside of Berlin, thanks largely to the release of the single: “Lutsch mein Schwanz/Schwule Rapper.” Marcus accompanied him to concerts around Germany and sold the tape at his shows.

Wherever Savas had shows, we drove there and sold tapes. Here in Berlin we went to concerts from other artists and sold tapes before the shows. I mean it was the “legendary” out-of-the-trunk strategy. Yeah, we stood out there before the jams advertising, “Berlin Rap, one hour, only 10 Marks.”

Following the success of *Berlin Nr. 1 vol. 2*, Marcus began releasing solo tapes of the various Royal Bunker artists. The next milestone was the release of MOR’s *NLP* on CD and vinyl. As with other Royal Bunker productions, the MOR project was DIY effort. It was recorded in an apartment with a normal concert microphone and then later re-mastered and mixed in a studio. Fumanschu, one of the artists featured on the CD, described a creative/recording process that seemed to be driven by time restrictions. In an interview with me in 2003 he said that some of the artists were still writing their tracks up to the point they were to be recorded. If a rapper hadn’t finished composing their lines by the time the tape was rolling, he didn’t make it onto the track. In any event, *NLP* was a project put together by rappers who had honed their skills in the Royal Bunker open mic sessions, but which was clearly dominated by Kool Savas. The MOR debut sold 25,000 copies and reached 65 in the German album charts in 2001, which according to *Juice* required a higher sales figure at that time than today.

Kool Savas was not contractually bound to Royal Bunker, as he had released “Lutsch mein Schwanz/Schwule Rapper” on another Berlin label called Put Da Needle. With the success of the MOR debut, Savas broke with the MOR crew and Royal Bunker, starting Optik Records. I visited Optik Records in the summer of

2003, though I did not have the opportunity to meet Savas. According to Mike, who managed the Optik Records office, Savas had offers from both Sony and BMG to develop his label, but opted for BMG because they offered him more freedom in terms of acquisition and development of new artists. In an interview in *Gegen die Kultur*, Savas indicated that he had been frustrated with what “underground” seemed to imply in terms of how to run a label and wanted to do something more professional. The situation at Royal Bunker was at times as chaotic as Savas’ comments imply. During the critical phase of the label’s growth, for instance, Marcus had no dedicated office space. *Gegen die Kultur* captures this period in an amusing scene in which Marcus is shown in one of the spaces he rented – the back room of a bookstore – with a friend’s child who is helping him fold the covers to be inserted into the cassette cases. It wasn’t until the end of 2001 that Marcus quit his job to concentrate his efforts on the label. The label had become a full-time job, and one that was meant to support Marcus and his family.⁷¹

The growth of the label has had its down side. In the early days, no one knew what to expect, thus it was enormously exciting when the ideas and hard work put into the label began to pay off. When we met in the summer of 2003 I asked Marcus if he wanted Royal Bunker to continue growing. For Marcus, this meant developing a structure which would ensure continued growth if the label were to be sustained. At that time he had not had to borrow money or take out any type of credit to run the business, and this seemed an excellent position for an underground label. He answered that as much as he enjoyed his financial position, not growing would mean that the label would probably die.

The size of the firm has a lot to do with its acceptance by the media. The same music from two different firms is heard differently. We’ve also had the problem recently: “Oh yeah, Royal Bunker, those cassette tape guys from Berlin,” even though we haven’t released tapes for over a year. Okay, then I have to admit that I want Royal Bunker to be taken seriously as an

⁷¹ He is married and has two small children.

independent label – a large and stable independent – and that means that the size we have right now is too small.

The days, however, when Marcus had to deliver boxes of tapes to record stores around Berlin himself have long passed. Direct sales of MP3s, tapes, CDs, vinyl and other merchandising are possible from the website, and Marcus maintains an open door policy where fans are welcome to stop by to make purchases or to simply check out the label's home. For distribution to record stores throughout Germany, Marcus relies on a firm based in Köln called Groove Attack and their contract with Royal Bunker gives them 25% of sales. The relationship with Groove Attack, however, is not merely one in which they insure that Royal Bunker product finds its way into music stores. Groove Attack's representative for Royal Bunker – a position known as the Label Manager – has been enormously influential in terms of dictating how Royal Bunker is marketed. Marcus is the first to admit that this relationship has recently created significant problems for the label, but he also admits that the biggest problem is that he is not a businessman, which leaves him susceptible to outside suggestions about how to conduct his business. In at least two instances, he allowed himself to be talked into pressing a much larger quantity of new releases than he had planned. In both cases the label lost a lot of money, and his current financial trouble can be traced directly to these releases.

Growth of the label also generated internal problems he has found difficult to manage. The label had seven releases in the first six months of 2003, and Marcus worried that fans would soon get tired if they were overwhelmed with too many releases. Moreover, he recognised that with so many releases coming so quickly, artists were beginning to feel that they weren't getting enough attention from the label. This was in fact a rather premonitory observation. In a conversation with Marcus in August 2005, he admitted that there were virtually no artists on the roster who were present in 2003. In November 2003 I attended a label meeting where

plans for the upcoming sampler – planned release date February 2004 – were to be discussed. The meeting was also meant to give artists an opportunity to air any grievances they may have had with the label in general and Marcus in particular. In a conversation with me before the meeting, Marcus acknowledged that a few of the artists on the label were unhappy with him, because they felt that they were not being promoted properly and were not making enough money. I questioned whether or not a public meeting was the forum to address such issues, but his response was that he had already tried to deal with the issues on an individual basis, but to no avail. The meeting was intended to be the final word on the issue. As expected, however, the discussion about the sampler went fine, but when Marcus opened the discussion to give everyone a chance to air complaints, no one said a word.

One important factor that made it difficult for Marcus to manage the relationship with the artists who have since left the label, was friendship. As discussed, the label was born out of the freestyle sessions in Royal Bunker. Marcus created an opportunity for rappers in Berlin and the effect was immediate. It is still the case, however, that Marcus moved to Berlin from Stuttgart, was not a rapper himself, and had to work hard to be accepted in the scene. He didn't nurture or discover talent; rather he worked to build relationships with rappers who were in the scene in which he also wanted to have a name. Starting the label with artists who had become friends was fine while everything went well, but when the label's financial situation became more precarious, these friendships were challenged. It was hard for artists to take Marcus seriously as a manager, and his management style did not make the situation any easier. In the label meeting mentioned above, Marcus was at one point trying to explain why the sampler was critical in terms of income for the label, and was being ignored by some of the artists who were having

their own conversation. After repeatedly (and politely) asking them to pay attention to what he had to say, he lost his temper screaming at them to shut up and throwing a cup in their direction. His expectations of the old friendships collided with the realities of the new business structure he was trying to create. Part of this new structure involved being taken seriously as the president of the label, which became increasingly problematic for artists who felt they knew as much or more about hip hop than Marcus.⁷² It also involved moving away from the term “underground” to “independent.”

6.1.3 *Life in the Bunker*

My contact to Royal Bunker came through André Langenfeld, a legendary hip hop DJ in Berlin. During the course of our initial interview, André invited me to come to the studio for his weekly Hip Hop Soundgarten radio show. He mentioned that on the upcoming show he would have a guest in the studio I might be interested in meeting. At the end of our interview, André suggested that I take a walk with him to a small record label around the corner from the café where we had been talking. He added that this was the label home of the studio guest he had mentioned earlier. We were already in my neighbourhood, as I had selected one of my favourite cafés as a location for the interview, nevertheless I was quite surprised when we arrived at the Royal Bunker office, which was literally around the corner from my flat. I had passed the office several times a day since I moved to the neighbourhood, and had often wondered what went on in there. Set below street level, the windows allow passers-by to look down into a storage room piled high with basketball jerseys, CDs, tapes and other merchandise, as well as a small office

⁷² A physical manifestation of this was moving his office from the front to the back so that he was less accessible and could have more privacy.

and a lounge. It had never occurred to me to simply knock on the door to find out what type of music they made.

The front door to Royal Bunker is heavy and made of metal. There is no doorbell, so to gain admittance visitors have to bang loudly on the door. Steps lead down from the sidewalk into the lounge area, which is equipped with large sofas, a stereo, and shelves stocked with hip hop magazines. On the other side of the room there is a small refrigerator and a counter with an electric water pot. Above the counter there is a glass cabinet with dishes, tea, and food. At the bottom of the stairs to the left, is a small office and through the office, the stockroom. For my first few visits, this was the extent of my exposure to the Royal Bunker space. I knew that there were other rooms in the back – including a studio – but I did not venture there. During this first visit André introduced me to Marcus. André told Marcus that I was a hip hop researcher from Brooklyn, which Marcus seemed to find intriguing. We talked for a bit and as I left he gave me three CDs, a mix-tape, and four issues of a magazine that the label used to publish. He also agreed to an interview at a later date.

As discussed in Chapter 2, after my initial interview with Marcus I visited the label regularly and as a result became acquainted with artists on the label, office staff and interns working for the label, as well as other members of the Berlin scene who dropped by regularly to talk to Marcus. In the two years since I first met Marcus, the label has suffered some serious financial setbacks, nevertheless everyday life in the Bunker continues to reflect a “business as usual” attitude. Though there have been changes in office staff, Marcus employs a full-time manager (Niko), a personal assistant (Wassif) who works about 12 to 15 hours a week, and an unpaid intern (Felix). Niko, who is also known as Jack Orsen, was an original member of the MOR crew and participated in the open mic sessions in Royal

Bunker. Despite the departure of most of the artists whose music built the label, Marcus has continued with new artists from Berlin and beyond. In the spring of 2005 I met a musician/filmmaker (Kimo) from Los Angeles in Royal Bunker's small in-house studio. He was there to work on a new project with some Royal Bunker artists, and he told me that he was only there for a few days, but that he had been having a great time and enjoyed working with Royal Bunker.

The small in-house studio accommodates the spontaneous nature of music making at Royal Bunker. I was sometimes invited into the studio to listen to recently recorded tracks and give my opinion, but while sitting in the lounge it is still possible to hear the recording sessions because the studio is not properly insulated. The lounge also serves as a space where music is played for and discussed by listeners who sit on the sofas around the table, which is usually covered with food and drink. Visitors to Royal Bunker typically greet each person present, and depending on the level of acquaintance, offer a handshake or a "street hug." Not doing so is deemed disrespectful.

Everyday life does not just take place in the physical spaces that house the Royal Bunker label, but in cyberspace as well. The Royal Bunker website is a very important part of the label. Not only do fans visit the site to buy merchandise, but to watch music videos, find track lyrics, see images from various Royal Bunker shows and events, and to catch up on the label's latest news. In fact, Marcus writes a newsletter, which is emailed to individuals who have signed up for his mailing list, which according to Marcus contains over 7,500 email addresses. The newsletter serves many functions. It informs readers about new releases, shows, and other events. It not only gives readers a sense of the label's philosophy, but ensures that the label is tied irrevocably to its founder. The newsletter is foremost about Marcus. In some issues he describes what an incredibly difficult or wonderful day he has just

had, in others he rants about the competition, or politics. The label is Marcus and Marcus is the label. Once I was surprised to find myself featured in the newsletter. In addition to sending the newsletter to a mailing list, Marcus also publishes them on the website. Visiting the website one day I was a bit disturbed to read comments Marcus had made about Hannes Loh, a hip hop activist and writer with whom Marcus has had a longstanding feud. In the most recent flare-up, Marcus referred to Hannes in the newsletter as a “son-of-a-bitch.” The next time I saw him I asked what Hannes’ mother had to do with their feud. In the next newsletter Marcus referred to our discussion and apologised to Hannes’ mother and then wrote a few lines questioning why insults are usually feminised. He ended by changing his insult, this time referring to Hannes as an “untalented piece of shit.”

Feuds such as the one described above, also represent a part of everyday life at Royal Bunker. During one of our breakfast mornings, Marcus told me that the feud (or “beef” as it is known in the hip hop community) between him and Fler, an artist on the Aggro Berlin label, was back on. During the 2005 Splash Festival,⁷³ Marcus had insulted Fler onstage and subsequently received a threatening telephone call from him. This became a topic of conversation with other visitors to the label that day, with the general consensus being that Fler needed to be dealt with once and for all. The suggestion was that Marcus and Fler settle their differences in a boxing match. The competition between Aggro Berlin and Royal Bunker has less to do with sales, though Aggro Berlin has achieved phenomenal success in the last few years, and more to do with street credibility. As Chryille⁷⁴ pointed out, “Those guys just talk about the streets, but we really come from the streets.” Whether or not anything actually transpires between Marcus and Fler is not really the issue. What is more important is that these beefs provide an

⁷³ Annual hip hop festival held in Chemnitz.

⁷⁴ Chryille is a graffiti writer and frequent visitor to the Royal Bunker office.

opportunity – outside of music making – to define who and what the label represents. That said, there are sometimes music making opportunities with respect to beefs, and they are especially suited to the battle rap style favoured by the Royal Bunker artists. The “diss track,” for instance, is a track in which a rapper from another crew is insulted (i.e., disrespected). Long before the current incident with Fler, there was a diss track about him on the Royal Bunker website which was free to download.

In comparison to Aggro Berlin, currently the most successful independent hip hop label in Berlin, the most controversial aspect of Royal Bunker is the founder rather than the artists. Marcus is extremely outspoken and seems to court controversy. This is made easier by the fact that he is engaged throughout Berlin as a moderator for various events and as a journalist for national hip hop magazines. He was recently asked to moderate a panel on the topic, women in hip hop. Given the rather sexist music by some of the artists on his label, this struck me as a bad idea. Unfortunately, I was out of town when the event took place, but Marcus as well as friends who were present said that his presence on the podium was provocative and that a less controversial figure might have been able to handle the gathering of feminists more effectively. Marcus’ complaint to me that his artists are boring, led me to ask whether or not he finds it easier to surround himself with weaker personalities to ensure that he remains the “star” of the label. He acknowledged that he had also dreamed of fame as a rapper, but clearly didn’t have the talent. Starting the label was the next best thing. And as he told me,

I’m young, good-looking, and smart. Who knows what life after Royal Bunker will bring? I could write a couple pop books. I could definitely write one about Royal Bunker. The stories I could tell...

6.1.4 *The Future*

In many respects Royal Bunker rests on its past laurels in terms of its impact on the Berlin hip hop scene. Its most significant musical contributions to hip hop were made in the label's infancy. Since that time Marcus has struggled to find a new direction for his label. In the process, friendships have dissolved, the financial burden has increased, and his family life has been challenged.⁷⁵ Nevertheless Marcus Staiger and his label remain at the heart of the hip hop scene in Berlin. Whether this represents an incredible strength of will in terms of a single-minded determination not to let Royal Bunker go under, or a hip hop fanaticism that fails to accept current business realities is difficult to determine. But as Marcus is the first to admit, he is not a businessman:

I know that I'm not really a businessman and that I've made a lot of mistakes. I have never thought about profits, and I was never interested in creating and packaging images for my artists. You know, in the beginning we didn't have anybody to explain it us. We just stepped into the game and I've done the best that I know how.

The future for Royal Bunker remains unclear. While technological developments have significantly changed the ways in which music is made, marketed and sold, Marcus has little interest in these developments. He says that MP3s, and ring tones don't interest him. He admits to being tired of the label and is planning a strategy that will allow him to close it. What's important to him, however, is that the decision to close the label not be forced on him because of finances. He wants to end the Royal Bunker project free from debt and showing a profit. He says that he's proud of what's he's accomplished and adds, "The Royal Bunker label stands for something."

⁷⁵ He and his wife are currently separated.

6.2 HIP HOP MOBIL

Founded in 1993, the Hip Hop Mobil is a project sponsored by Arbeitskreis Medienpädagogik (AMP), and receives its funding from the Berlin city government. The AMP's mission is to develop media competence in young people by providing hands-on instruction in information and communication technology. According to AMP's profile, the Hip Hop Mobil was conceived with the notion that hip hop culture offers an excellent opportunity for the development of cognitive, social and motor skills:

- Cognitive goals: Knowledge of the history and meaning of hip hop; insight into the recording process; technical know-how; differentiation of different dance styles; composition of texts
- Social goals: Exchange of ideas and arguments; forming and justifying opinions; managing conflicts and finding compromises in the discussion of texts and musical arrangements; group dance lessons; mutual acceptance
- Motor: learning abilities; perseverance; development of precision and patience; sharpening body awareness; developing competence in scratching, dancing, rapping or reproducing and improvising with samples.⁷⁶ (Bick, 9)

Teachers in Berlin and Brandenburg can book the Hip Hop Mobil for three-hour sessions, which include instruction in rapping, DJing, and break dancing.

Instruction is given by active members of the Berlin hip hop scene, a strategy important to AMP in terms of guaranteeing the "authenticity" of the programme.

During the summer of 2003 while I was in Berlin conducting my field work investigation I interviewed Gauner, a rapper and current manager of the Hip Hop Mobil. At the time there were no bookings and I was unable to observe Gauner and his colleagues at work. After returning to Berlin in December 2004, I contacted Gauner and was able to schedule an appointment to accompany the Hip Hop Mobil to a *Realschule* near Berlin on Friday, April 29, 2005.

⁷⁶ My translation.



Fig. 9: Teller and the Hip Hop Mobil

I met Gauner, Teller (the breakdancer), and Irmel (the DJ) at Senefelder Platz in Prenzlauerberg at 9:00. Most of the equipment was already at the school as the Hip Hop Mobil had been booked there three days that week. The school was located in Potsdam and the drive there took about 45 minutes. Once we arrived, we spoke briefly with the teacher, before meeting the students who were 10th graders.⁷⁷ The class consisted of twenty-two students, roughly split between boys and girls. Gauner introduced his colleagues in the Hip Hop Mobil, and presented me as a guest. He then began by discussing the history of hip hop, before moving on to some of the preliminaries of DJing. The turntables were set up at the front of the classroom, and with Irmel assisting, Gauner discussed the evolution of the turntable and the basics in terms of its structure, and demonstrated how the DJ uses two turntables to manipulate music and to create new sounds.

⁷⁷ In the German school system, 10th graders are 15 -16 years old.



Fig. 10: Gauner explains turntable basics.

After about twenty-five minutes the class was split into three groups. Irmel remained in the main classroom with the turntables, Teller took his group to a large room across the hall, and Gauner took his students to a small classroom. For the next thirty minutes students received hands-on DJ instruction, learned breakdance moves, or wrote texts and practiced rapping. At the end of the thirty-minute sessions, the students switched groups, until each of them had been exposed to all three areas of instruction. At the end, students gathered in the main classroom and volunteers performed the raps they had written. I observed each group of students with each activity, and was surprised by the ways in which reticence quickly gave way to eagerness. One girl, in particular, was not at all happy about having to write and perform her own rap. To express her displeasure, she wrote a rap about how much she disliked hip hop. Despite her initial reluctance, she worked diligently on her rap and sought guidance and instruction on improving the text and her delivery.



Fig. 11: Irmel provides the beats for a student performer.

The idea of the Hip Hop Mobil was one I initially found perplexing. The idea of going into schools to “teach” hip hop seemed to support my impression of the overwhelming prominence of pedagogy in German society. My experience with the Hip Hop Mobil, however, revealed another important aspect of the issue. Clearly, Gauner and his colleagues are not concerned with developing new hip hop talent. Rather, they are offering young people the opportunity to learn more about hip hop culture, and to take the first steps in terms of production. This isn’t to suggest, however, that new artists do not come out of the programme. In fact, some of the most successful artists in Berlin, received early training through the Hip Hop Mobil, including Kool Savas (rapper), MelBeatz (producer), and Fumanschu (rapper), all three of whom travelled to Los Angeles on a cultural exchange programme sponsored by the AMP.

6.3 BERLIN HIP HOP FRAKTION

Deniz Bax founded Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion (BHHF) in response to what he felt were negative trends in hip hop culture. His mission is to educate young rappers in the “true” meaning of hip hop. In practical terms this means teaching young people the history of hip hop and then helping them develop as artists who understand hip hop as a socially conscious and political cultural form. Specifically, this means avoiding subjects and lyrics that are racist, sexist and violent in nature. According to Deniz, this is reflected not only in the lyrics, but in the ways the rappers conduct themselves in the community. As a young man of Turkish origin, Deniz says that it is a difficult struggle to live in a manner that reflects his commitment to Islam on the streets of Kreuzberg, and to maintain this commitment in his hip hop practices. I was not surprised, therefore, to encounter other members of the Berlin scene who felt that Deniz was crazy. Frequent comments were: “That guy has no humor at all,” or “He takes hip hop way too seriously.” In fact, over the course of my fieldwork, I witnessed profound changes in Deniz, which he attributed to an effort to “get his life together,” and which seemed to be evidence of the struggle referred to above. When I saw Deniz in February 2005 – over a year since our previous meeting – I instinctively reached out to embrace him, as this had become our standard greeting. He drew back from me and extended his hand, explaining that he was engaged and therefore not able to touch me like that according to the laws of his religion. While I was struck by this development (and the attending religious justification), I would challenge the popular notion that he lacks humour; quite the contrary, at least in his dealings with the young members of his group.



Fig. 12: Deniz Bax, founder of Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion

As discussed in Chapter 2, I initially contacted Deniz after reading an article in which he was quoted. The article – published in Berlin’s *Zitty* magazine – examined claims in a recent book that maintained that there was a new and disturbing development in Germany’s hip hop scene: Nazi Rap. In the article Deniz referred to problems in hip hop culture and mentioned the mission of BHHF. I found his website, which listed his mobile telephone number, and gave him a call. He was very friendly and seemed to enjoy the attention the article had generated.⁷⁸

In the course of my fieldwork I had several opportunities to attend his hip hop workshops and a few of the group’s public performances. For one of these performances I met Deniz, Dr. Rob (Robert, a 13 year-old who identified himself as Yugoslavian), and Dr. Isolight (Ishmail, a 16 year-old from Istanbul) at the Naunyritze youth centre and we travelled together to a huge shopping centre in the Tegel district in North Berlin. A streetdance competition was being held in the shopping centre atrium, and Robert and Ishmail were scheduled to perform at the

⁷⁸ The account of our initial meeting is discussed in Chapter 2.

end of the competition, while the jury conferred to decide on a winner. In fact, I was actually supposed to attend the Berlin Open 2003 Breakdance Competition that evening, but the guys wanted me to go with them for moral support. Beyond that, I was anxious to see them in a performance setting. I was particularly interested in seeing how the venue would affect the performance. There were a lot of people in the mall who were just there to shop, and were only mildly curious about the competition and the rap performances. Moreover, the physical setting created both an intimate audience (crowded around the stage) as well as a distant one (situated on the four levels overlooking the atrium). Robert did not feel comfortable in this setting. The first thing he said was that he didn't want to perform any anti-Nazi raps there. His reaction did not surprise me, for in our conversations he had often expressed a reluctance to venture outside of the "safety" of Kreuzberg. Ishmail was completely relaxed. He said that he had come to perform and that it didn't matter to him at all what people thought. Everyone tried to cheer Robert up, as he was obviously quite distressed. After the streetdance competition began, however, his mood improved. We all went upstairs to watch the performances, and had a lot of fun critiquing the dancers and their moves. By the time Robert and Ishmail were scheduled to perform, Robert was in good spirits. Nevertheless, the performance itself was a bit dry. They performed three songs: "Hip Hop ist nicht rassistisch"; "Hip Hop Soldat"; and "Ghetto Kids."⁷⁹ Though they weren't terribly pleased with their performance, they had had fun and everyone left in a good mood.

The following day I had another opportunity to see them perform. Once again we met at Naunyritze, and as Deniz was late, I was able to talk with Robert and Ishmail before he arrived. The conversation centred on Tupac Shakur, a famous rapper from California who was murdered in 1996. The conversation began with a

⁷⁹ The translations for the first two songs are "Hip Hop is not racist," and "Hip Hop Soldier."

discussion of how so many rappers try to imitate his style, and ended with a debate about whether or not he was actually dead.⁸⁰ Ishmail told me that he would be leaving the following day for his summer vacation in Istanbul, where he already had some performances lined up. Once Deniz arrived we travelled to a youth centre in the district of Wedding, which was hosting a breakdance competition. This time Robert and Ishmail were scheduled at the beginning of the programme, and the small outdoor setting created a more intimate environment. Robert was certainly more relaxed than at the previous day's performance. It must be added that the audience was comprised of young people who were all in the hip hop scene, and this also created a safe space for Robert and Ishmail. This performance was much better than the one I had seen the day before. Robert in particular, seemed more at ease and engaged in banter with the audience. In addition to the songs they performed at the shopping centre, Ishmail performed two Turkish songs. Although I could not understand the lyrics, his flow was excellent and his delivery clearly indicated his self-confidence as a rapper. Robert informed me that this was his 17th performance, and that they had yet another one scheduled later in the day.

Though Deniz and the BHHF may not have had the best reputation with the more hardcore members of the Berlin scene, cultural organisations and foundations support BHHF's "mission," and the group is often called on for projects dealing with multiculturalism and youth culture. While I was visiting one of the workshops, a producer from West Deutscher Rundfunk (WDR) came to ask members of the group about auditioning for a radio play. The storyline had to do with an adolescent who was being pressured by his girlfriend to have sex, but who felt that he was too young. After speaking with Robert, whose voice had not yet deepened at that time, the man from WDR encouraged him to participate in the project. The kids were

⁸⁰ This is a popular theme among young hip hop fans. See: Dimitriadis, 2000.

more interested once they discovered that they would each be paid 150 – 250 Euros per day for their efforts.

The opportunity to earn money through their association with BHHF was a strong motivating factor for its members. In fact, the young people appeared at times to be extremely savvy about their connection to BHHF. This is a mutually beneficial relationship for Deniz and his young associates. Deniz provides a structured organisation in which young people who are interested in hip hop culture are able to develop their skills, and those with more experience are paid to perform. Clearly, some of the young rappers are actually more talented than Deniz, a fact that is often evident in the workshops. Nevertheless, without Deniz their opportunities would be severely limited. During the May 1st street celebrations in Kreuzberg in 2005, I encountered *Ciro*, a 13 year-old Italian-German boy who used to be a member of BHHF, and whom I recalled meeting at the workshops in 2003. He said that he had left BHHF and together with some of his Italian friends had formed a new crew. He said that his reason for leaving BHHF was that Deniz devoted all of his attention to Robert and Ishmail. When I asked if it would be possible to see them perform anywhere during the summer, he said that they didn't have anything lined up because there was no adult available to help them get organised, and the oldest member of his crew was only seventeen. He did say that I was welcome to come by his apartment and that they would rap for me there.

BHHF is currently working on an EP, while Deniz is also trying to find a producer for his solo project. In fact, Deniz asked me several times if I could help with this, as he knew that I had developed extensive contacts in the Berlin hip hop scene. This was an issue that surfaced many times and which I tried to resolve by explaining what my role as a researcher entailed.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The case studies featured in this chapter offer three different negotiations with hip hop in Berlin: hip hop as a business; hip hop as a pedagogical tool; and hip hop as a cultural mission. Returning to Bourdieu's concept, each of these negotiations represents a distinct position in the field of cultural production, and each has its own relationship to broader issues of power in German society. For Bourdieu, these power dynamics such as class and capital determine the various positions of a field's social agents. What is of interest in the three case studies featured in this chapter, is their relationship to what can be described as the politics of youth in German society. Indeed, in considering hip hop as a field of cultural production in Berlin, power can be theorised as an enabler. Unlike the demonisation that characterised early receptions of hip hop in American society, hip hop in Germany was quickly adopted as a pedagogical tool as evidenced by the ease with which it initially appeared in state-funded youth centres across the country; a role it continues to serve.

The Hip Hop Mobil and the BHHF both benefit from state support. While this is fairly obvious with the Hip Hop Mobil, in the case of BHHF this support is not only tied to the space in the youth centre where they are allowed to hold their workshops, but to the funding for some of their appearances around the city. Royal Bunker, on the other hand, does not receive state support *per se*, but Marcus and most of the MOR crew have at some point participated in hip hop programmes that were financed by the government. Marcus made his initial entry into the Berlin scene by visiting Hip Hop Haus, where he met the rappers with whom he would go on to launch the open mic sessions. Moreover, several of these rappers received instruction from the Hip Hop Mobil. Though the Hip Hop Mobil, BHHF, and Royal Bunker would be hard pressed to see their relationships to one another, they

nevertheless operate within a field that has effectively been shaped by notions of how youth culture should be theorised in Germany. The direct relationship between the pedagogical theorisation of youth in Germany and hip hop practices is an important area for further research.

7. GERMAN CITIZENSHIP AND BERLIN IDENTITIES

In “Rap in Germany,” Mark Pennay suggests that German language rap signifies German youth:

Regrettably, the flow of new ideas and stylistic innovations in popular music is nearly always from the English-speaking market and not to it. But this must be balanced against a growing independence and confidence among *young Germans that they can create music in German for Germans*⁸¹ – the most positive development within post-unification Germany of a renaissance within the local music scene, and one within which the transmuted and initially contested genre of rap has played a key role. (Pennay, 2001, 128)

What is striking about Pennay’s quote, and indeed the article itself, is the way in which he ignores the notion of belonging and its relationship to identity in Germany. Pennay constructs a German local – in opposition to an English-speaking global – without taking into account the complexities of ethnic and cultural identity in Germany and how they factor into the hip hop scene there. His assertion that “young Germans...can create music in German for Germans” conflates language and national/cultural identity, ignores the diversity of contemporary German society, and fails to consider how this diversity impacts on hip hop practices. Robert Walser addresses this type of flaw in his contribution to Allan F. Moore’s *Analysing Popular Music*. Walser urges scholars to consider factors which may seem to be outside of the music, but without which the music cannot be fully understood. He takes as an example the issue of violence in rapper Ice Cube’s “When Will They Shoot?” citing various statistics reflecting the American context for young black men like Ice Cube, and concluding with the following:

Instead of censorship, demonization or hand-wringing about whether it is a good thing for us to have violent music, we might better ask whether it is a good thing to have social conditions to which violent music is an obvious and reasonable response. Such ‘sociological’ information is often taken to be quite distant from the concerns of musical analysis. But

⁸¹ The italics are mine.

knowledge of these conditions of poverty and injustice is absolutely essential, because without it, the analyst cannot possibly understand why this music has taken the form it has. (Walser, 2003, 33)

It is not surprising then that Pennay's failure to look beyond the term 'German' to the social realities of young peoples' lives, leads to a superficial analysis of rap music in Germany.

In this chapter I examine the term 'German' and the extent to which the concept of Germanness is reflected in Berlin's hip hop communities, by considering the following questions: Who is German? How does one become a German citizen? What is the role of language in the concept of German identity? These questions are critical in that they expose the issues that directly influence the extent to which young people in Berlin can claim 'Germanness' in the construction of their identities. By this I mean that they help to unpack the complicated notions of citizenship and identity in Germany, for it is within this sphere that young people define themselves. In other words, the extent to which they express Germanness – or any other ethnicity – in their hip hop practices is related to political and cultural constructions of what it means to be German.

In Chapter 3, I offered a brief historical overview of the development of ethnic diversity in Germany, and the roots of the ongoing East/West divide. This discussion was important because it provided a historical explanation for contemporary life in Berlin. Among other things, I wanted to illustrate that the complex histories of diverse groups of immigrants and Germans continues to shape the lives and experiences of young people in Berlin today. What was alluded to, but not fully discussed in that chapter was the discursive space in which these groups were operating. While I charted the experiences of various groups of people attempting to locate themselves within German society, I did not discuss many of the broader issues which contour German society. For example, my discussion of

how the reception of guest workers differed based on their country of origin did not fully examine issues such as religion. This was certainly a factor in how immigrants were perceived and was used as a measure of sorts to establish an immigrant group's relative distance from the norms and values of the host nation.

These norms and values are intrinsically tied to the mythic construction of German identity and to the evolution of the German nation-state. I'll return to these issues later, but it is important to note here that it is this enduring myth of German homogeneity which profoundly shapes the context in which immigrants – as well as Afro-Germans and former East Germans – construct their identities and experience hip hop culture. Equally important, however, is the impact of German identity on German members of the hip hop community. While Germanness may be an elusive (or unwanted) concept for the groups mentioned above, it can be a problematic one for Germans who are engaged in hip hop. Given the ways in which issues such as race and performativity permeate hip hop discourse, it is not unusual to encounter German hip hoppers who feel that being German limits them in ways that non-German members of the hip hop community never experience. This chapter draws on empirical data to see how these issues manifest themselves in Berlin. In the first section of this chapter I review some of the major issues with respect to the formation of the German nation-state and the second section analyses the extent to which these issues impact on hip hop practices in Berlin.

7.1 GERMAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Prior to unification in 1871, the German empire consisted of imperial states ruled by princes and over which the emperor had little control. From 962 AD until 1806, this collection of principalities, numbering at one point over 400, was known as the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The Holy Roman Empire ended

with the Napoleonic Wars in which Napoleon was finally defeated in Leipzig in 1813. The resulting Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) created the German Confederation, a loose political alliance of 39 states (Fulbrook, 2004).

The confederation was not itself a federal state (*Bundesstaat*), but rather a loose federation of states (*Staatenbund*). It had no common head of state, no administrative or executive organs, no common legal system, no common citizenship, and was able to make only precious few common decisions. The Federal Diet, which met at Frankfurt, was essentially a congress of ambassadors representing the interests of their own separate states. (Fulbrook, 2004, 100-101)

These were the circumstances in which the movement for German political unity gradually began to take shape, and when compared with other contemporary nationalist movements, the German case is indeed distinct. It is significant, particularly in terms of the current discussion, that the movement itself was largely driven by the celebration of German language and culture.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments in the 18th Century was the evolution of German into a “literary language and vehicle of profound expression” (Fulbrook, 2004, 85). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is probably the most renowned literary figure in German history and his work during the early part of the century inspired a reconsideration of the possibilities of German language. The issue of language is critical for several reasons, but foremost among these is how it relates to German identity. Typically, French had been the language of the German court. Renewed interest in German, however, became one of the foundations of cultural nationalism. The terms *deutsch* (the language) and *Deutschland* (where the language is spoken) form the basis for German identity:

Incidentally, the peculiarity of language is the source of the term ‘*deutsch*,’ used for the first time in the eighth century and meaning those who did not use the Latin language. ‘*Deutsch*’ and ‘*Deutschland*’ are terms that originally designate a lingual community. Their political import emerged in the sixteenth century and acquired a polemic thrust against the ruling princes through the claim to embody one single collectivity, as opposed to the fragmentation and manifold divisions of the empire. Thus the term ‘*deutsches Volk*’ (German people) has always been more meaningful than just the neutral designation of a particular collectivity in a delineated territory....

It embodies the Germans' search for political unity and identity. (Preuss, 2003, 41)

Given the impact of the French Revolution and the rise in nationalism that gripped Europe in the late 18th Century, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars and intellectuals⁸² in the German Confederation also longed for political unity. But unlike France, whose territory and society were "in a bounded territory under a single monarch" (Preuss, 2003, 40), the German Confederation was fractured. Celia Applegate's work on the *Heimat* movement examines how writers used the fractured provincial nature of German society as a basis for developing a national consciousness; they were able to do so by focusing on the German language:

The first thing one notes is the actors in this linguistic drama were people of a particular sort. They were writers preoccupied with the idea of the German language as the expression of the German people and as the promise of a German nation. Their German language was not that in everyday use in the small towns and the countryside. Rather, it was a language conscious of its audience, a public language for the growing body of Germans who identified with change, who looked to the future, and who for the most part pictured that future in terms of a single nation and state. (Applegate, 1990, 7)

It is perhaps Johann Gottfried von Herder, who best symbolises the movement to equate the concept of a German nation with its *Volk* traditions. His *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1968), originally published between 1784 and 1791 laid the foundation for cultural nationalism in Germany.

When unification finally did come to pass, however, it had less to do with the concept of nationalism which had been championed by the Romantic movement, but rather by what Fulbrook refers to as "Prussian expansionism and colonialism of non-Prussian Germany in rivalry with an excluded Austria" (Fulbrook, 2004, 125). Austria's exclusion from the German Empire is but one indication that the notion of a *deutsches Volk* was useful only to the extent that it was politically strategic. In fact, the boundaries of the newly unified Germany

⁸² And what Preuss refers to as the "educated classes."

encompassed a widely diverse population. Thus, the 1913 Citizenship Law was passed to bring some official concept of Germanness to bear on the new nation. Rather than the principle of *jus soli*, which would have offered citizenship to immigrants who were born in Germany, officials chose the principle of *jus sanguinis*, which privileged those with German blood and their descendants, regardless of their place of residence or birth (Fulbrook, 1999):

Among the conservative nationalists who opposed any naturalization of immigrants and their descendants, there was an extraordinarily deep-rooted, widespread, and absolute opposition to the notion of *jus soli*...in order to prevent any further ethnic diversity. In these circles, whose views were ultimately successfully enshrined in law, blood was in principle deemed to be more powerful in determining political loyalties than any education or socialization could possibly be (in contrast to the situation in neighbouring France, where in principle it was possible to *become* French). (Fulbrook, 1999, 182)

While the 1913 Citizenship Law was based on a concept of ethno-nationalism that may have been racist in practice if not intent, the Third Reich's Nuremberg Laws of 1935 were designed to establish a purely racial notion of what it meant to be German. These laws stripped Jews (determined by the number of Jewish grandparents one possessed) of their citizenship, and were the first steps towards the attempt to completely eliminate Jews from German society. It is this legacy, Hitler's quest to establish a homogenous Aryan nation, and the unimaginable lengths to which this quest would extend, which contributes to the problem of contemporary German national identity.

As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, it is critical to keep in mind that the negotiation with the Nazi past initially took place in an occupied and divided land. This is the second problem with national identity in contemporary Germany. Each Germany was forced to position itself not only in relation to the horrors of the recent past, but in relation to the other Germany. Hence, nation-building after National

Socialism was fraught with a uniquely German set of ills. Or as Mary Fulbrook asks in *German National Identity after the Holocaust*,

...the myth of the common past was peculiarly problematic in Germany after 1945. The general issues are clear. When the past seems utterly discredited, when all roads seem to lead to Hitler, or fail adequately to oppose him, in what can a nation take pride? And when the nation splits in two, and each opposes and abhors the other, how can they distinctively reclaim and reinterpret a common heritage? (1999, 233)

The struggle to come to terms with the Nazi era remains an extremely problematic undertaking.⁸³ That said, the extent to which young people in Berlin acknowledge this struggle is related to the ways they position themselves in German society. While the notion of being proud of being German is certainly not an issue for a Turkish-born youth, German history may indeed be a factor in the extent to which Afro-German or migrant youth born in Germany consider the role integration should play a role in their lives. As the following section indicates, some migrant youth do not consider Germanness a goal worthy of their aspirations. For German youth, other issues impacting their concept of Germanness – such as the continuing East/West divide – become more significant. As discussed in the Introduction, this was certainly one of the more surprising revelations of the ethnography. The expectation that race would play a more significant role with young people in Berlin – particularly young Germans – was related to two factors: 1) the ways in which hip hop is typically discussed in academic discourse as being inherently anti-racist; and 2) the ongoing struggle to address the impact of neo-Nazis on German youth culture. What the ethnography revealed, however, is that identity doesn't always work the way scholars think that it does, and that this is particularly true in trying to understand how young people relate to popular music.

⁸³ For an excellent review of how this struggle has been reflected in the work of German historians, see: Berger, 1995.

That said, Germans were typically reluctant to support other German hip hop artists, which can be read as the reluctance to be proud of anything German. Granted, this may also be seen as the lack of confidence among young Germans with regard to their own hip hop authenticity, but I argue that this privileging of hip hop from the US is not only a question of aesthetic considerations, but is tied to the complex relationship young people in Germany have with their own culture. This isn't to suggest that young people in Berlin consciously problematize their identities in terms of the Nazi past, but they operate in discursive spaces where this is so often the norm; where the most innocuous art exhibit or television commercial has the potential to unleash furious and protracted debates about whether or not it is okay to be proud of being German.⁸⁴

7.2 BERLIN IDENTITIES

Despite recent changes to German citizenship and immigration laws traditional attitudes that German national identity is related to German blood, as discussed in the previous section, still persist. Furthermore, since Germany has long maintained that it is not a country of immigration, no allowances were made for naturalized citizenship. The recent reforms are meant to bring Germany in line with the rest of Europe:

The new law substantially changes the principle of descent (*jus sanguinis*) which has long been the country's traditional basis for granting citizenship. Now, it will also be possible to acquire German citizenship as the result of being born in Germany (*jus soli*) as is the case in most other European countries. Further, the reform also takes into account the fact that more than seven million foreigners live in Germany on a long-term basis. One third of

⁸⁴ A recent print and television ad campaign called *Du bist Deutschland* (You are Germany) unleashed a storm of controversy over its message: " Things aren't that bad. Take pride in your country because you are your country." Related to the controversy was the fact that the Nazis apparently used the same slogan. For the American perspective on the campaign and the controversy, see: Bernstein, 2005.

them have lived here for more than 30 years; half of them have lived in Germany for at least 20 years.⁸⁵

Interestingly, my interviews revealed that immigrant and Afro-Germans held rather traditional views about German identity. In fact, the legal construction of German identity was in many ways less of an issue than the notion of belonging.

Recognising that this research project is limited in scope, I am reluctant to suggest that the attitudes I encountered in the field reflect any kind of broad consensus.

Clearly, though, the data I collected indicates that any discussion of German identity cannot focus strictly on the legal (which is to say German societal) definitions of Germanness, but must also take into account the complexities of “non-German” notions of what Germanness represents. Consequently, trying to determine how German identity is actually manifested in Berlin’s hip hop community is no simple matter. The significant factor here is that everyday life in Berlin is one in which notions of identity, place and belonging are inextricably tied to a complex – and in some ways relentless – history that continues to shape contemporary discourse. In what follows I use three broad designations to consider the manifestation of Germanness in Berlin’s hip hop scene: non-Germans; Afro-Germans; Germans. These groupings reflect different negotiations with what it means to be German, both in legal and social terms; as well as different ideas of identity, place and belonging.

7.2.1 *Non-Germans: It’s a Miracle I’m Speaking German*

I met Kheops at a hip hop show in Tacheles, a popular club in Berlin Mitte. He was acting as MC for the Level-Eight Crew, which consists of about 6 hip hop groups. Kheops moved to Berlin from Cameroon when he was 15 years old. It

⁸⁵ Source: http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/reform_of_germany_s_citizenshi.html Accessed September 28, 2005.

wasn't his choice to move to Berlin, but he has had to cope with it, he says. On the other hand, he claimed that he was quite lucky that his brothers and sisters were all in Berlin with him – only his mother remains in Cameroon – because it is difficult for foreigners to build relationships with people in Berlin. His native languages are French and English, and he attended a French high school in Berlin, where he received his *Abitur*.⁸⁶ He now studies Communication Sciences at the Technische Universität. He discovered hip hop in high school, having previously been a pop music and R 'n' B fan. Because he only began to learn German when he moved to Berlin, his original attempts to rap were in English, but he soon realised that living in Berlin and rapping in English was hard. According to Kheops, the issue of credibility was tied to language; people couldn't understand him if he rapped in English. But aside from the language he uses, credibility is also linked closely with what he raps about. He feels strongly that ultimately rap is a tool for self-expression:

The Turkish kid isn't accepted because he's rapping about where he comes from: Kreuzberg, drugs, hard life. But you've got to be true to yourself. I can't rap about being a gangster. I don't know anything about that. I don't know how to shoot a gun. Some people are not being given the chance to express themselves. The only way to change things and make things better is to allow people to express themselves. But people aren't interested in hip hop that way in Germany. But you can change it, it's just a matter of time. (Interview, 8/08/03)

Kheops says that German rap artists don't touch on the points German people can relate to and that they try to be something that they're not. "There are so many things to talk about: life in Germany, circumstances...." Despite what others may view as the significant achievements of receiving his *Abitur* and attending university, Kheops does not feel fully integrated into German society:

It's hard for someone not born here to be integrated into society. If you don't really want it from the bottom of your heart, it won't happen. It's a miracle that I'm speaking German, that I'm writing lyrics in German. I'm proud of myself. (Interview, 8/08/03)

⁸⁶ The diploma which allows him to attend university.

Ultimately, Kheops wants to return to Cameroon after he completes his studies and makes some money. "That's where I come from," he says, "and you have to know where you come from."

This is a sentiment shared by Dr. Isolight, a 16 year-old Turkish rapper from Istanbul. Dr. Isolight, whose real name is Ishmael, moved to Berlin when he was ten years old. Ishmael is a member of Deniz Bax's Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion, a crew of made up of young people committed to the idea of hip hop as a political music culture. When Ishmael arrived in Berlin he couldn't speak German, but says he didn't have problems in the school because there were so many Turks in his class he could just speak Turkish. Ishmael only raps in Turkish and aside from American hip hop music, he only listens to Turkish language hip hop, focussing primarily on Berlin rappers Azra and Killa Hakan. He wants to return to Turkey after he saves enough money, primarily because he thinks there are more opportunities for him there than in Berlin. He doesn't think that his German is good enough to succeed in Germany and he finds the school system difficult. In the meantime, however, he enjoys life in Kreuzberg:

In Kreuzberg I feel like I'm in Turkey. People are nice and there are Turks everywhere. But I couldn't live here forever. I miss my country. (Interview, 26/11/03)

While Kheops and Ishmael both feel that they will leave Berlin at some point to return "home," their experiences in Berlin – with respect to integration, at least – have been markedly different. Though Kheops may not feel that he has fully integrated into German society, his *Abitur* and pursuit of a university degree, offer him possibilities Ishmael will never enjoy. Significant to this is the issue of language. Because Kheops spoke French and English, he was under greater pressure to develop his German skills in the hip hop community. Furthermore, he was able to attend a high school that allowed him to study in his native language and at the

same time, qualify for entrance to a German university. Ishmael's experience, on the other hand, reflects what scholars and educators in Germany argue lies at the root of difficulties for Turkish youth to succeed in school: the prevalence of the Turkish language in districts such as Kreuzberg. When Ishmael moved to Berlin, he moved into the largest Turkish community in Germany and could rely on his native language, never feeling any significant pressure to develop his German language skills. Kheops' assertion that his credibility was at stake because he couldn't rap in German stands in stark contrast to Ishmael, who is accepted in his community as a Turkish language rapper.

For Robert, however, the situation is quite different. Robert is Ishmael's rap partner in the Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion. He was born in Berlin in 1990, but identifies himself as Yugoslavian. Granted, Robert's self-identification is limited by German laws on citizenship, but there's more at stake than that:

I don't identify myself as German, although I was born here. To be an American is cool. My friend says that if I'm born here, I'm German. Okay, maybe there's a part of me that's German but I have to hang onto my culture. I'm a Yugoslavian born in Germany. But in America...that's a good country. I think it's honourable to say, "I'm an American." But to say "I am German," then the others would say, "Shitty German." I don't have anything against Germans, but still... (Interview, 26/11/03)

Like Ishmael, Robert also has difficulties in school; this, despite doing his homework, as he was quick to point out. Unlike Ishmael, however, it is an issue that matters to him. He says that he has been working hard and that his grades are improving, though much of this effort has been to appease his grandmother, who is raising him. Nevertheless, doing well in school matters to Robert. He pointed out that most rappers only had *Hauptschule*⁸⁷ diplomas and he really wanted to get a

⁸⁷ In Germany all children attend *Grundschule* (elementary school) from the first through the fourth grades (ages 5 through 9). From the fifth grade onwards, children attend either *Hauptschule*, which typically leads to vocational apprenticeship; *Realschule*, which usually leads to white-collar apprenticeship; or *Gymnasium*, which grants the Abitur and leads to university education. The school system decides which path students take. Supporters of the current system argue that the three alternatives either prepare students for the university or

Gymnasium diploma, or at the very least, one from a *Realschule*. Aside from the pressure Robert feels from his grandmother, he recognises that he will have to sort out his future in Berlin, his birthplace and where both of his divorced parents live. While Ishmael and Robert both feel at home in Kreuzberg, the difference is that Ishmael dreams of returning to Istanbul, while Robert can't imagine living anywhere else.

7.2.2 Afro-Germans: Where Do I Belong?

I first encountered Charnell in a *Wicked* magazine article about his former rap group, Da Fource. In the article, Charnell and his former partner Timo, were critical of German rappers who used the word "nigger" in what they considered an offensive and misguided attempt to gain street credibility. The son of a black American GI father and a Puerto Rican/German mother, Charnell has struggled to make sense of who he is and to figure out where he belongs:

Being a nigger in Germany is really hard. The Turks, they hate you. The Arabs hate you. You make music for those people because you grew up with them, but they don't support you. Of course the Germans don't like you. We never found our crowd, our community. (Interview, 1/12/03)

Charnell's search for community began when his father moved back to the US. After the Wall fell, many American servicemen returned to the US, and although Charnell and his mother had spent time with Charnell's father in the US, she decided that they would not move back there with him when he left Berlin. Charnell was unhappy with her decision and a few years later moved to Florida to live with his father, attending middle school there. According to Charnell, his father's drinking problem and aggressive attitude made staying with him impossible, so he moved

give them the practical training to find employment. Critics, including the United Nations, counter that the system is in fact class-based and unfairly penalizes children from migrant communities and lower-income families. For a discussion of the UN's position, see: Nicola.

back to Berlin with his mother after a year. When he returned to Berlin he began smoking marijuana and hanging out on the street. He was attracted to the Turkish and Arab street gangs because he felt that they were tight communities which always seemed to find ways to survive in a hostile environment. Although there were some African-American kids still in attendance at the high school, Charnell did not feel connected with them:

Turkish guys from Kreuzberg used to come and hang around outside the school and make trouble. The black guys from the States were fakes because they talked noise, but when shit went down, they ran. So I started hanging with Turkish and Arab guys. (Interview, 1/12/03)

In order to gain respect, he said that he had to act like them, dress like them, and even adopt their accents; a strategy he now admits must have looked rather strange.

While serving time in a juvenile correctional facility, Charnell discovered Snoop Dogg⁸⁸ and eventually started writing his own lyrics. After he attracted the attention of a label, he encountered difficulties because his subject matter was described as too American:

The Germans have found a way of expressing themselves and making hip hop competitive. They'll say, "Hip hop isn't talking about this or that, it's about word play. Yo, I can rhyme and my rhymes are tight." And when you try to talk about real shit, street shit, they don't believe you. They say they can't feel you. I was writing about drugs, stabbing people, robbing people, and I'd hear the same shit over and over: "This is not America, you can't be rapping about that stuff over here." (Interview, 1/12/03)

According to Charnell, middle-class German kids did not believe that those kinds of things actually happened in Berlin. But for Charnell hip hop is a way of letting people know that he's got something to say, and it's not all about life on the streets.

My mom was a heroin addict. Her boyfriend was an addict. I saw so much growing up around those people I thought, I need to start writing rhymes and I've kept on writing. I'm 25 now and I'm still not on top. I'm not gangbanging anymore and I could be asking important questions about life in the world today. But then everyone would say, "How can you do that, when you used to do that other shit?" (Interview, 1/12/03)

⁸⁸ Popular "gangsta" rapper from Los Angeles.

Charnell is frustrated with the evolution of hip hop in Germany, which he feels has been dominated by business people who don't know anything about hip hop, and who focus primarily on the acts which make the most money. Because of this, he recently formed his own label and feels that this is a trend which will eventually transform the hip hop scene in Germany.

As for his German heritage, he admits having denied it when he was younger. Tied to this denial was the belief that being German was nothing to be proud of, echoing a sentiment shared by Robert. He feels that Germany used to be a strong country, but lost everything with the war and subsequent occupation. He also describes the role of the German woman in Germany's loss of respect:

The Turkish guys, American guys. . . started taking German women and beating up German boys. We would never admit that we had German blood in us. Nope. We're this, we're that, we're black. They would say, "I thought your mom was German." Nope. "Well, what is she then?" I don't know but she ain't German. (Interview, 1/12/03)

He description of growing up with a German mother highlights his sense of confusion with respect to his identity. He says that never really knew where he fit in German society, and recalls being made fun of in school because his hair was different and his skin dark. Interestingly, he sometimes reverts to the third person as he recalls these memories:

They don't know anything about their own culture. They grow up with German mothers. They go to school with kids asking them, "Why is your hair like that?" They don't know what to say. People make fun of them. Then they start to get mad at themselves. Who am I? Am I German? Am I American? Where do I belong? Nobody really likes me. Nobody really accepts me. (Interview, 1/12/03)

Given the problems Charnell has experienced growing up as a person of colour in Berlin, it is perhaps not surprising that he never refers to himself as German. In fact, he makes it clear that he does not identify himself as a German rapper, but rather as someone who raps in German. Unlike Kheops, Ishmael, or Robert, Charnell has every (legal) right to claim German identity. Instead, he pictures a future for himself

in the US where he imagines his life will be less complicated. In the meantime he plans to work hard and save money so that he can buy a nice house in Miami not too far from his father.

7.2.3 Germans: He Doesn't Feel Anything

In the spring of 2001 I saw Joe Rilla and his group, *Analphabeten*, perform at the Hip Hop Lyricist Lounge in the Berlin Volksbühne. Originally from East Berlin, Joe Rilla has evolved into a successful producer since I initially encountered him. His participation in hip hop culture began shortly after the *Wende*. He began as a graffiti writer (sprayer) and became well-known in Berlin. He began to reassess his future as a sprayer as he grew older and his confrontations with the police became more serious:

Yeah, spraying was my life, but only up to a certain age. I eventually realised that I had my fame with my name and my crew, and the police were stressing me. It's one thing to get ticketed for spraying, but it's another thing to go to jail, which is a possibility when you're older. I didn't want to leave hip hop, but I was too big to break, and my fingers were too slow to DJ, so the only thing left was to try rapping. (Interview, 31/07/03)

Inspired by André Langenfeld's hip hop radio show, Joe Rilla began to rap. His initial efforts were in English but he soon gave that up, because most people couldn't understand him and the ones who could laughed at his grammatical mistakes. At the same time he began rapping in German, he started to learn about production. Recently he and his partner formed *Ostblokk*, production home to about six different rappers. He has his own studio and creates beats for the *Ostblokk* artists as well as artists on other labels. The name *Ostblokk* suggests an East Berlin/German focus and according to Joe Rilla, it's easier that way:

Well, I come from the East and I could never imagine working with or connecting with somebody who acts like the West is the shit. That's how it starts. The *Wende* was thirteen years ago, but you still have people walking around talking about "West Berlin Masculine" or "West Berlin is the shit." No. We need cool people in the studio. (Interview, 31/07/03)

Joe Rilla doesn't think that rappers from the East are taken as seriously as rappers from the West, but when it comes to discrimination he thinks that white rappers have a much harder time than blacks. As a result, he says that white rappers have to be twice as good as their black counterparts. Joe Rilla believes that much of this is because of the record industry, which is eager to promote black artists because they consider them more authentic.

At the same time, however, he criticises the German relationship with hip hop culture. He thinks that one of the problems is that hip hop in Germany is actually directed at a very young target group:

There are all these kids who think: "I'm hip. I want to belong. My friends listen to hip hop. I'll listen to hip hop, too. My friends wear hoodies. I'll wear hoodies, too. My friends are going to the Analphabeten concert. I'll go with them." Maybe this kid doesn't even like it, but he stands there at the concert thinking: "This is cool. I'm cool." But he doesn't feel anything. (Interview, 31/07/03)

This is why hip hop will always be a fad in Germany, according to Joe Rilla. He says that German people have forgotten that hip hop is supposed to be fun; they just want to be cool. Joe Rilla describes Germans as people who need illusion. To illustrate what he means, he describes a concert he attended in Berlin by the US rapper Common:

You go to your typical hip hop show and it's mostly really young people and hardly anyone dances. But a while ago I went to see Common. There were people of all ages there, and they were having a good time, dancing like crazy. But if there had been a German opening act on that show, people would have just stood around. Understand what I mean about illusion? When Common comes on, they think, "Oh here comes somebody from the States...someone real." (Interview, 31/07/03)

The idea that hip hop is a fad in Germany is related to the age of the active participants in the hip hop community. Joe Rilla's observation that Common attracted a broader age range suggests that older fans feel a connection with acts from the US, which they don't feel for acts from Germany.

Karin books and manages tours for a firm called Subotage Entertainment. These tours focus primarily on bringing independent hip hop artists from the US to Germany. Karin is from Heidelberg and holds a degree in English and German literature. Her participation in hip hop culture began with the jam culture described in chapter five, and her interest led her to create a hip hop fanzine. In 1996 she went to the UK to study and wrote about the UK hip hop scene for an online fanzine, which eventually attracted the attention of artists in the US who wanted to travel to Europe to perform. She now handles about two tours a month.

According to Karin, hip hop is more of a social activity in the US than it is in Germany. As a participant in the hip hop jam culture, Karin still considers the experience of hip hop more important than the music:

What I like about hip hop is that it creates a space where people can do what they want to do and where they can be different. It's not just one style but many styles and many ages. But in Germany, the culture has disappeared. The focus is on the music and original ideas are not so present anymore. Today it is hard to know what you're doing and why you're doing it. I don't know if the young kids have any idea. (Interview, 11/08/03)

Karin shares Joe Rilla's concern that many young people don't know why they're involved with hip hop. For Karin, this helps explain the youthfulness of the hip hop scene in Berlin:

They don't really think about it. That's why so many lose it when they get older. If they didn't know why they were doing it in the first place, then of course they're going to lose it later. It's not so bad, not to totally "get it" when you're 16, but people who are older have the responsibility to transfer the concepts. But the money thing did kill it. Now the older people don't want to hang out at the show with the kids. The whole thing died. (Interview, 11/08/03)

Nevertheless, her understanding of social and economic inequality lets her make allowances for the focus on the business aspect of hip hop in the US. Despite her long and active engagement with hip hop culture, it is this same sensitivity which leaves her at times questioning her right to belong:

I want to contribute to the whole thing. Hip hop gave me a lot and I want to give something back. But maybe I'm oversensitive, but when I'm in New

York, I'm thinking about the history of blacks and Latinos...so what do I really have to do with it? (Interview, 11/08/03)

Karin's self-conscious assessment of her role in the hip hop community and her willingness to forgive the business-focussed nature of hip hop in the US is perhaps indicative of the time she has spent in the US as well as the times she spends with US rappers in Germany. Joe Rilla on the other hand, who argues that white MCs in the US are being held back,⁸⁹ has never been to the US, nor does he have the type of regular contact with US rappers as Karin does. They both agree, however, that there are a lot of young people involved in the hip hop community, who don't understand why. For Karin, however, it isn't so bad that people play roles in hip hop: "There have always been people playing roles in hip hop – they just shouldn't get confused."

Sascha, a journalist for a hip hop print magazine, agrees that the scene has become quite young, but he attributes that to the fact that the older hip hop fans are bored with the scene and the music:

Well, it's a very young scene. The older people just don't have the desire for this anymore. In the beginning there were parties once a month or every two months and everybody came. Now there's too much. There are three or four parties on the weekend. Besides that, it's the same stuff. The DJs rely on the standards because they're afraid the crowds won't be into the new stuff, and for people who've been to hundreds of parties, that's completely boring. So then these folks are looking for something new – electronic hip hop for example. (Interview, 10/07/03)

Sascha concentrates primarily on the international hip hop scene, and admits that he's not particularly interested in the hip hop scene in Germany. He thinks that good hip hop shows that the artist is thoughtful and that the music offers something different; that it builds on what's gone before, but is innovative. He does think, however, that artists in Germany who've been around for a long time are showing signs of development in style and technique and says that he can actually listen to

⁸⁹ At one point he told me, "Just look in *Source* magazine, everybody is black."

German-language hip hop again. But he feels that the hip hop boom of the mid-Nineties has had a negative effect on hip hop:

Now there are all of these kids who are rapping at home in their bedrooms and who think the next step is a record contract. Before, they had to prove themselves on the stage first. So now with the standard hip hop parties in Berlin, I could just as well stay at home and play records. At least then I don't have to pay for my drinks. (Interview, 10/07/03)

He believes that the situation in Berlin is extreme, and says that every other kid on the street wants to be a rapper. This in turn leads to the difficulty of establishing a local fan base. He describes the attitude as, "Why should I go to see them? I'm making my own music."

Born in East Berlin, Sascha agrees with Joe Rilla that there are some lingering effects of Berlin's division on the hip hop scene.

I still hear, "West Berlin, Masculine." When I ask if they have a problem with a unified Berlin, the answer is "No, no, we just want to show where we come from." Yeah, right. But the fact is young people have no contact with each other. Someone who lives in Marzahn won't travel twice a week to Spandau. The Turkish kids don't want to travel to the East because they think there are only Nazis there, and the kids in the East think they'll have problems if they travel to Kreuzberg. (Interview, 10/07/03)

Despite this, however, Sascha believes that hip hop will never disappear.

Of course, there are highs and lows in hip hop. But there is no other youth culture in the world that's so widespread. Even if it becomes really small again, no matter - it's still there. (Interview, 10/07/03)

Basti, editor of an online hip hop magazine, shares Sascha's lack of interest in hip hop in Germany. For Basti the problem is a lack of creativity on the part of artists in Germany, which he attributes to the fact that so many artists get their influences from the US:

That's why they all sound alike. No one is creating their own sound. There has been some lyrical development, but the beats are weak. There aren't any producers in Germany really doing their own thing. It's more like, "Hey, what's that thing that Premier is doing, let me try that." (Interview, 23/06/03)

Basti has an interesting notion of “selling out” and how it impacts German artists.

First, he says one must factor in the socio-economic differences between US and

German hip hop communities. But another important factor seems to recall Adorno:

Germans are suspicious of mass culture. They want to be so hardcore that they don't want commercial success. German artists want to keep street credibility, and take it to the level of not wanting certain “those” people to buy “our” records. (Interview, 23/06/03)

Basti thinks, however, that in terms of the commercial/underground dichotomy, one can't exist without the other, and points to the scene in France which seems to be able to be both – being hardcore and commercially successful. The concept of “selling out” is one that seems to be more of an issue for German members of the hip hop community than Afro-Germans and non-Germans. Charnell, for instance, also criticised the impact of the industry but more because he feels that it is hindering his success. When asked about selling out, Kheops answered:

Those people who have a problem with making money in hip hop are the backpack hip hoppers. If they don't want to make money, then they just should keep hip hop as a hobby – do it at home or with their friends. Those are middle class kids who don't have to hustle. (Interview, 8/08/03)

This divide points to different negotiations with hip hop culture: hip hop as street culture; hip hop as party culture; hip hop as a way out. For German kids who do not see hip hop as a means of establishing financial security, the appeal is often its hardcore street nature, which has a special resonance for Berlin artists.

Pyranja, a rapper with the Ostblokk crew, thinks that this emphasis on being hardcore destroys credibility.

There are so many posers. When they rap it's all, “I'm the Mack Daddy, the biggest Pimp, etc.” and when you meet them, they're so soft. But rap isn't just text, it's the person behind the text. That's more the case for rap than any other kind of music. (Interview, 25/08/03)

In Pyranja's case, the person behind the text is an attractive young woman trying to make her way in the male-dominated scene. Growing up in East Germany, she had

the opportunity to go to Boston as an exchange student shortly after the Wall came down. For her it was a life changing experience:

Before the *Wende*, I had travelled with my parents to Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and the Soviet Union. The rest of the map was black. Then suddenly I was at Sommerville High School in Boston, where you had to go through metal detectors to get into the school. (Interview, 25/08/03)

The experience also exposed Pyranja to something she found disturbing given her love for hip hop. Visiting a hip hop record shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the all-black staff asked her what she wanted there, presumably because she was a white girl. "That's the first time I realised that prejudice could come from the other side," she said. "And that was strange for me because I always just wanted to be from Brooklyn."

Pyranja feels that artists from the US have a different motivation from artists in Germany, and as a result the music is different:

There are some artists who would rap no matter what, and there are others who think it's cool and want to be cool, too. People in Germany make a completely different form of hip hop than in America and France. There are no ghettos here. It's a paradise. No, it's not perfect, but certainly not as bad as other places. No one has to struggle like the average person in Brooklyn. Does anyone here have to be afraid just to walk down the street? No. (Interview, 25/08/03)

She also faults the record industry for staying with whatever formula is successful. Once they identify success, they copy it. They don't really care about the style, just whether or not they can make money with it. She describes her experience with Def Jam Germany:

I signed with Def Jam Germany when they opened their office in Berlin. They wanted me to do a single with LL Cool J. I didn't really want to because I really only wanted people on my CD that I was "down" with. But I did it because that's what they wanted. When you're new and you say here's my concept, they say, "No, no, wait." Now they're all losing money because no one is buying records. Earlier, first albums were to build and develop artists. You didn't have pressure to make it in the charts. Now it's so different. (Interview, 25/08/03)

She says the experience with LL Cool J was okay, but perhaps it would have been better if he had actually taken her back to Los Angeles. “There wasn’t really an exchange, it was just about presenting stuff from America in Germany.”

Perhaps one of the most consistent themes revealed during the course of the interviews was the lack of interest in German-language hip hop. For Pyranja this may be related to German insecurities and lack of confidence:

There are so many rappers who say, I do German rap, but I don’t listen to German rap. That’s crazy. Who do they think is going to buy their stuff then? Maybe it’s just a German thing. Maybe it’s envy. Or maybe Germans just find themselves shitty. But they never give credit or compliments. They’re extremely competitive. (Interview, 25/08/03)

Pyranja is quite happy with her Ostblokk family, where she sees the influence of the former political structure in the East, saying that under socialism the group was important. She doesn’t know how long she will continue rapping, she feels that she has learned a lot and has developed confidence in her creative abilities, which will help her no matter what she decides to do in the future.

7.3 CONCLUSION

Given the complexities of German national identity and citizenship, it is not surprising that young people in Berlin’s extremely multi-cultural environment have different negotiations with the notion of Germanness; negotiations which may have very little to do with the legal construction of what it means to be German. The different cultural and social backgrounds of young people in Berlin – which impact on their feelings of identity, place, and belonging in German society – also inform their understandings of hip hop culture and shape their various hip hop practices. While it is certainly the case that many of these understanding and practices are quite similar, the fact that they are believed to be different by participants in the scene, reflects the ways that popular music produces social groups. What remains to

be seen is the extent to which these differences are reflected in the aesthetics. Are the ethnic and cultural differences in the Berlin hip hop evident in the music? Or does the city of Berlin have its own impact on the hip hop music produced there? In other words, is there a Berlin hip hop aesthetic?

8. HIP HOP IN BERLIN

In an article for *African American Review* published in 1995, Mtume ya Salaam addresses what he regards as a failure in the literature on rap music:

After reading many articles supposedly covering rap music – about the social aspects of rap music, the criminal elements of rap music, the lawsuits caused by rap music, sampling in rap music, gossip concerning rap musicians, how other musicians feel about rap music, etc. – I realized that I had yet to read about the music itself. In other words, I had not read about the “aesthetics” of rap, about the qualities which made particular examples of rap music good music – not necessarily good rap music, but simply good music. (ya Salaam, 1995, 303)

Salaam’s article, “The Aesthetics of Rap Music,” represents an attempt to actually engage with rap music as music. Unlike Salaam, my concern with the aesthetics of hip hop music in Berlin isn’t to determine whether or not hip hop music in Berlin is good or bad, but to examine the extent to which there is a common aesthetic shared by artists in Berlin; by that I mean a sonic and visual connection to the music produced there. When broaching the issue with my interview subjects, I did, however, frame the discussion in terms of “good” versus “bad” hip hop. Overwhelmingly, my interviewees responded to the question of what constitutes “good” hip hop, by making comments about content and credibility; though there was occasionally some consideration of aesthetics when they expanded on their responses. For Sascha, it is important that the artist is thoughtful and that the music offers something different. Stefan believes that good hip hop is fun and that people should be able to identify with what the artist has to say. Karin thinks that the attitude of the artist is critical; that they have to know why they’re doing it and deliver a positive message. That said, she also thinks skills and style are important. Pyranja feels that the artists must be believable. And while Kheops also addressed issues such as credibility, he seemed to be more concerned about aesthetics than

most of the others. According to Kheops multi-cultural audiences tend to go to shows where the music is “hot.” He went on to say, “If I can bounce to it, then it’s tight,” and then declared that German rappers concentrate too much on their rhymes rather than their delivery:

Most German rappers are focused on rhyme schemes. But the flow is more important than the rhyme. My strength is in my flow, and I’m showing German people an aspect of their language that they’ve never seen before. . . and coming from somebody who wasn’t born in their country.
(Interview, 8/08/03)

These discussions were critical because I believe that they influence hip hop production. In other words, though I wasn’t interested in passing judgment, I was definitely interested in how judgement was being passed. By exploring the notion of hip hop aesthetics with my interview subjects, I was also trying to uncover the extent to which they felt that there was a distinct Berlin sound. Here, there was fairly unanimous consensus: hip hop in Berlin is “harder” than in the rest of Germany. The development of battle rap, discussed in the Royal Bunker case study, contributed to this notion of a hard-edged Berlin sound. This wasn’t a purely aesthetic judgement of the music, however, but rather an acknowledgement of the ways in which everyday life in Germany’s largest city determines much of the lyrical content of the hip hop music produced and performed in Berlin.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the aesthetics of hip hop in Berlin. This is undertaken from my position as an ethnographer and media analyst, and not as a musicologist; a distinction which is evident in the analysis. I draw attention to the distinction at this point because it frames what is to follow. There is an acknowledged reticence on the part of non-musicologists to engage in musical analysis when investigating popular music. In his otherwise brilliant examination of Asian identity in the UK music scene, *Brimful of Asia: Negotiating Ethnicity in the UK*

Music Scene, Rehan Hyder attempts to justify the exclusion of musical analysis of the four bands comprising his study:

The second question that needs attention is that of the music itself; how to write meaningfully about a medium that quite simply cannot be represented in words. Descriptions of the sound of music are invariably subjective and tied into the ability of the author to convey what can be the most ephemeral or profound sonic and emotional nuances. Furthermore, I have always felt that analysis of musical notation and lyrics is something of a cold and abstract tool; particularly when considering such complex issues as that of ethnicity and cultural identity. The close study of musical texts is undoubtedly a useful method and can uncover some important insights about both the author and the society that produced them, but ultimately they are limited inasmuch as they are bound by the interpretative powers of the critic. The examination of lyrics is a particularly favoured source of analysis within popular music, but one which has limited value since it not only isolates particular passages and words but also excises them from the overall context where sound and language are fused. In the end whatever is uncovered by such scrutiny must always be considered with caution; too often are meanings ascribed to lyrical texts that are alien or even anathema to authors themselves. (Hyder, 2004, 4)

I have quoted Hyder at length because his arguments are valid and address the multiple issues that make the analysis of popular music a complex undertaking. It is nevertheless striking to note, that by virtually ignoring the musical output of the bands in his study, he inevitably falls into the same pattern criticised throughout his text: not taking the musicians seriously as musicians, but focusing primarily on their ethnicity. He argues that, “the actual music itself is not of primary importance; how it is used, interpreted and reported is the real source of interest” (Hyder, 2004, 5). Perhaps, but since his work focuses on the emergence of syncretic identities, it would have been interesting indeed to see how this affected musicmaking. I take Hyder’s point about the subjective nature of musical analysis, at the same time however, if I am investigating how hip hop is understood and practiced by different groups in Berlin, I can hardly ignore what hip hop in Berlin sounds and looks like.

This chapter, then, is an analysis of the hip hop music produced by some key artists in Berlin. I am not suggesting that this limited sample represents the breadth of hip hop in Berlin, but it does offer a variety of musical styles and themes. It is also

important to acknowledge that, despite my connection to the local scene, I am still an outsider. When considering which artists to include in my sample, I felt it was important, therefore, to take into consideration suggestions made by two contacts who have been critical informants throughout my research: André Langenfeld, an influential hip hop radio DJ; and Stefan Hülsmann, a journalist for a national hip hop magazine. Before engaging in the musical analysis, however, it is important to explain my approach to hip hop aesthetics.

8.1 BEATS, RHYMES, RHYTHMS...AND VIDEOS

As mentioned earlier, I am considering hip hop music as an ethnographer rather than as a musicologist. The musicological analysis of hip hop music undertaken by Adam Krims in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000), is impressive in its thorough attempt to establish genres of hip hop music based on an analysis of lyrical and musical content. For non-musicologists, however, it remains, a somewhat bewildering and fairly inaccessible effort due to its extremely detailed music analysis. Tricia Rose's classic, *Black Noise* (1994), is one of the most comprehensive attempts at hip hop aesthetics, but her concern is much more with the sociological and cultural aspects of what the elements in the music represent than with the music itself. More recently, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (2002) by ethnomusicologist Cheryl Keyes, also offers an examination of the relationship between culture and aesthetics in hip hop music, but is more concerned with aesthetics than *Black Noise*. As an ethnographer, my approach to this analysis was to take certain things for granted when considering hip hop music, both as a researcher and as someone who is familiar with hip hop music.

Beyond my academic connection, I have been a casual listener to hip hop music since 1979, and I went into the field with the assumption that hip hop would

be comprised of the same essential elements, despite whatever cultural differences exist between Berlin and New York. Stripped to the essentials, a hip hop track consists of a rhyming vocal rapped over beats, and aside from the importance of the MC's rhymes, the critical element which determines his or her skill as a rapper is the flow. The flow is how the MC raps in relation to the beats; it is another layer of rhythm in a hip hop track. There is a more elusive quality, however, which is difficult to define but is nevertheless critical in determining how skilfully someone raps. This has to do with the voice and how a rapper uses his or her voice as a musical instrument. Here I am not referring to the rhythmic nature of the rapper's flow that I mentioned above, but the musical quality of the voice. I'm not suggesting that a rapper is a singer – though some rappers do sing – but what I am suggesting is that the use of techniques such as changes in pitch, crescendos, and diminuendos, are also employed by good rappers. A hip hop track can be a multi-textured mosaic of sounds, or a rap laid over a simple beat. Furthermore, a hip hop track can be acappella, but not instrumental.

Returning to Salaam's critique regarding the lack of attention to hip hop aesthetics, it may well be that the point has been reached where so much about hip hop is simply taken for granted as to render such considerations moot. It is virtually impossible to find reviews of hip hop music that offer more than the most cursory consideration of musical aesthetics. Overwhelmingly, reviewers discuss the production team or the artist's background, as if these alone should suffice as a discussion of the music. And perhaps for serious hip hop fans this is the case. The difference between tracks produced by Timbaland or N.E.R.D. do not need to be described; it is self-evident. But even those who are not particularly interested in hip hop, have an idea of what it sounds and looks like. For in the years since *Black Noise* was initially published, hip hop has become a multi-billion dollar industry

spanning the globe. Consequently, while its aesthetics may not be given adequate critical attention in an academic sense, hip hop aesthetics have certainly garnered enormous popular attention.

That said, the hip hop that conquers global airwaves today, is in many respects quite removed from the DIY nature of the culture Rose describes in her book. The two “turntables and a microphone” aesthetic of the Old School, has given way to sophisticated production techniques, which render turntables obsolete. The MC’s DJ (assuming he or she has one) rarely provides the beats for the track; they are procured from producers situated around the world. This is a clear indication of the rise of the MC’s prominence – at least in hip hop music terms – over the DJ.

While hip hop may have originated with the DJ and the MC’s role was subordinate, today the rapper is the star. Interestingly, however, during live performances a DJ is usually still featured on stage with the rapper, as a prop which effectively serves to link the performance – and the performer, of course – to a bygone era and provides an air of authenticity to the performance. So although the relative importance of the DJ may have waned, the DJ is nevertheless still seen as an important element of live hip hop performance.

For me, this suggests that performance is an integral part of hip hop music and culture, and that issues of authenticity and credibility are as much related to performance, as they are to musical and lyrical content. What has changed, however, is the nature of performance. In the early days of hip hop, performance had less to do with the conscious consideration and overt manifestation of hip hop identity, and more to do with exhibiting the various skills of rappers, DJs, B-Boys, and Sprayers. In the case of rappers, DJs and B-Boys, this meant performing at parties, battles, and shows. And while hip hop artists still do perform to live audiences, I am convinced that music videos play a much greater role now in

presenting artists to hip hop fans and shift the consideration of a rapper's skills as a live performer to a more subordinate position. This isn't to suggest that music videos are an entirely new phenomenon; there were certainly music videos of Old School hip hop artists. What is new, however, is the extent to which music videos have become the music industry marketing tool for artist promotion.

In its infancy, Music Television (MTV) resisted airing music videos by black artists, and when concessions were finally made, hip hop videos were largely confined to "Yo! MTV Raps," a two-hour programme that aired weekly, then eventually moved to a daily spot. Black Entertainment Television (BET) was another outlet for hip hop videos, but like MTV, BET initially limited its hip hop programming to features like "Rap City." Despite the reluctance with which these music video outlets offered hip hop at the outset, it was soon apparent that the demand for these programmes was enormous. In fact, MTV has been widely credited with broadening hip hop's appeal. "Yo! MTV Raps" brought hip hop to the suburbs, and young white males there remained the show's primary demographic (Samuels, 2004, 147).⁹⁰

In the current climate, hip hop videos are a staple on music video channels and chart shows around the world and as a result, artists reach far greater audiences than any world tour would enable. These videos not only inundate fans with images of the world's most successful artists, but also establish and reinforce hip hop's visual aesthetics. It must also be noted, however, that the impact of hip hop aesthetics extends beyond the domain of music videos. Hip hop's influence can be seen in fashion and advertising, where it is used to sell products as diverse as automobiles and sugar substitutes.

⁹⁰ The effect of hip hop's appeal among white suburban youth on hip hop aesthetics, is a highly controversial subject. Samuels argues that there is a direct relationship between hip hop's popularity in the suburbs and the ways in which hip hop artists are marketed, and that this has created a notion of hip hop authenticity built on negative stereotypes of black urban life.

What I am trying to suggest in this analysis, is that considering hip hop aesthetics is not merely a question of listening, but of looking. That being the case, when planning my analysis of key artists in Berlin's hip hop scene, I chose artists who also have corresponding videos of the tracks I wanted to consider. Any attempt to uncover how hip hop has been taken up in Berlin, must also consider how artists in Berlin present themselves in their music videos. In other words, it's not just an issue of what the music sounds like but what the rapper chooses to look like when re-creating the sounds for fans and viewers. Recognising that a major label can pressure an artist to adopt a particular style in a video – a style with which the artist may be uncomfortable – I have tried to select artists working on independent labels where it is likely that the video is the product of a more collaborative effort between the artist and the label. Do the visual aesthetics favoured by hip hop artists in the US influence the manner in which artists in Berlin develop their own sense of hip hop performance?

8.2 HIP HOP AESTHETICS IN BERLIN

In the following sections I consider four tracks and their corresponding videos. In order to provide a context for situating the artists and their labels with the Berlin hip hop scene, I offer a brief introduction to the artists and the labels at the beginning of each section.

8.2.1 Mein Block, by SIDO⁹¹

As Germany's first successful Gangsta-rap label, Aggro Berlin has had a polarising effect on the Berlin hip hop scene. Whether reviled for their drug-fuelled

⁹¹ SIDO is an acronym for Super Intelligente Drogen Opfer (Super Intelligent Drug Victim).

sexist and violent lyrics, or praised for their hard-hitting approach to German-language rap, the controversy has clearly had a powerful effect on the label's success. Aggro Berlin was founded in 2001 by Halil, owner of one of the first hip hop stores in Berlin; Spaiche, a former breakdancer from East Germany; and Specter a graphic artist and former breaker who grew up in France. The label currently has three artists under contract: SIDO, Fler, and B-Tight. One of the most consistent criticisms of Aggro Berlin is that they present an image which has little to do with reality, and that their fan base is not in Berlin, but in small towns in Germany where young people are completely unfamiliar with life in Berlin. What Aggro Berlin offers these fans is a titillating Gangsta aesthetic, familiar from hip hop videos from the US: flashy cars; scantily-clad women; and bass-driven tracks to accompany lyrics about weapons, drugs, and anal sex.



Fig. 13: SIDO in a still from the video "Mein Block." (Courtesy Aggro Berlin)

"Mein Block" is a track from SIDO's debut album, *Maske*. The album's title refers to SIDO's trademark: a silver skull with a built-in microphone that he wears for every performance and public appearance. *Maske* debuted in the German album charts at number 3 in April 2004 and remained in the top 100 for 26 weeks, making it the "highest debut by an independent label since Germany established record

charts." Released a month before the album, the single, "Mein Block," reached number 13 and stayed in the top 100 singles chart for 19 weeks. "Mein Block" is SIDO's hymn to his neighbourhood – Märkisches Viertel – a district of low-rent high-rise apartments in northern Berlin where he was born, raised, and continues to live. The song describes the self-contained atmosphere of the 16-story apartment building in which he lives and where he has everything he needs: drugs, friends, and sex. The lyrics take the listener throughout the building, describing neighbours on the various floors, and offering a humorous and obscene version of life in one of Berlin's "ghettoes."

SIDO is a technically proficient rapper, but reminiscent of Kheops' criticism of German rappers, his style suggests that he is far more concerned with the lyrics than with using his voice to inject other levels of meaning into his performance. This speaks to the elusive quality of the voice to which I referred earlier. Missing from SIDO's voice – and by extension his rap – is what I can only describe as a sense of authority. The monotone quality of his voice and the lack of rhythmic variation in his flow suggest a level of insecurity evidenced by his apparent unwillingness to play around with his delivery. The track is not boring, however, and that has to do with the beats and pulsating electronic music in the backing track. In terms of layers of sound, the track is simple. It opens with a guitar riff that is repeated throughout the entire song. There is a simple beat that repeats through the verses as well as the hook. On top of the beat, there is a synthesizer riff that punctuates the verses intermittently and then plays throughout the hook giving it a richer sound. To that, a simple bass line, as well as hand claps, sound effects, and comments on the rap from other rappers create a deceptively rich sounding track. What makes this a pop song, however, is the hook. And though I do not want to engage in a full textual

analysis of SIDO's lyrics, it is worth examining the two lines that played a large role in the chart success of "Mein Block."

*Meine Stadt mein Bezirk mein Viertel meine Gegend meine Straße mein Zuhause mein Block. Meine Gedanken mein Herz mein Leben meine Welt reicht vom ersten bis zum 16. Stock.*⁹²

The first line establishes the physical space of his world: his city, his district, his neighbourhood, his street, etc. The second line defines this space in non-physical terms: his thoughts, his heart, his life, his world extends from the first to the 16th floor. The text is quite simple and it is delivered with an almost staccato rhythm that makes it easy for listeners to rap along with the track.

The lyrical content of the track lends itself to a direct visual translation. The video was shot in Märkisches Viertel and attempts to confirm visually what the lyrics suggest: life in SIDO's ghetto is more interesting than life in a posh one-family house in one of Berlin's more affluent districts. From the opening scene, in which SIDO and his companion steal a BMW to cruise through the neighbourhood (then leave it abandoned for someone else to steal the stereo), the video for "Mein Block" establishes SIDO's identity as a "real" ghetto kid. According to the lyrics, his world extends from the 1st to the 16th floor of his building, which for him is not a bad thing. The video then serves as an introduction to SIDO's world: the apartments, halls, and stairways of his building. Among the cast of characters populating his world, are junkies, drug dealers, fetishists, hookers, gays, lesbians, and pit bulls. The camera tracks in and out of apartments and down narrow, dimly lit hallways, where getting high and/or engaging in sexual perversion is the order of the day. Whether surrounded by his friends while sitting in the stairwells⁹³ or strolling the hallways alone, the video presents an image of the ghetto as a place of security and familiarity

⁹² Text by SIDO. Printed courtesy of Aggro Berlin.

⁹³ The video features a break not found on the track. Sitting in a stairwell with friends, Sido raps the hook from another track from *Maske*, "Sido aus dem Block," a reference to Jennifer Lopez's hit "Jenny from the Block."

for those who live there. It is a place where people look out for each other and where outsiders aren't welcome.

8.2.2 *Macker, by Moabeat*

Moabeat is a four-man crew based in Moabit, a working-class district of Berlin. Made up of Malo, DJ Illvibe, and brothers Yasha and Monk, Moabeat is one of two acts signed to NewNoise Recordings. If Aggro Berlin represents the gangsta fraction of the Berlin hip hop scene, NewNoise is the polar opposite. This is perhaps most evident in the fact that the other act signed to the label is a group of rapping hand puppets. This does not mean to suggest, however, that the label output is childish. In fact, NewNoise has gained an international reputation in the drum and bass scene, and Moabeat have done remixes for N.E.R.D. and Sean Paul. Moreover, Moabeat's latest album, though no chart success like SIDO's *Maske*, has garnered critical acclaim. But if SIDO is a ghetto kid, then Moabeat are what is referred to in Germany as backpack hip hoppers: middle class kids just trying to have fun with hip hop music.



Fig. 14: Moabeat – Yasha, Malo, Monk and DJ Illvibe (Courtesy of Moabeat)

“Macker” is the second single from Moabeat’s latest album, *Dringlichkeit Besteht Immer*,⁹⁴ which was released in June 2004. The track is an ironic description of what it is to be a *Macker*, which roughly translated, means macho playboy. “Top Model,” the first single from the album, was another humorous look at relationships and the difficulty involved in trying to succeed with beautiful women. This isn’t to suggest that Moabeat’s approach to hip hop can be summed up by light-hearted playful songs. The album deals with a variety of themes and issues. While they may not take themselves too seriously, and believe that they can have fun with hip hop, Moabeat are talented musicians and rappers who take the music seriously. One of the factors which distinguishes them among other hip hop groups in Berlin, is that they work together to produce their own music, rather than procuring beats from elsewhere. And perhaps because they’re also musicians, their approach to hip hop is often melodic and richly textured.

Musically, “Macker” blurs the distinction between hip hop and R-n-B, and the fact that about half of the track is sung rather than rapped makes this issue that much more apparent. The track begins with the hook, in which two lines are sung by Yasha and are then re-worked from a woman’s perspective and sung by Platinum, a local R-n-B singer. The musical track is reminiscent of 1970s R-n-B, with guitar riffs similar to Johnny Guitar Watson’s. After the hook, Monk raps the first verse, followed by Malo, who raps the second. The hook, sung again by Yasha and Platinum, follows the second verse, then Yasha raps/sings the break, followed by the final hook. The slow and groovy tempo of the track is maintained throughout the song, and the flow of the raps by Monk and Malo are fairly consistent, though each of them includes variations such as syncopated rhythms and vocal variations. The major rhythm change is in Yasha’s break, where he speeds up the rap, then

⁹⁴ Translation: It’s always urgent.

slows it down, then finishes the break by singing.⁹⁵ In terms of sound layers, the track has repeating bass and guitar riffs, beats, synthesisers, and background vocals. Monk, Malo, and Yasha rap in a playful style that suggests that the lyrics aren't to be taken seriously. Whether drawing out certain words, playing with tempo, or exaggerating intonation, the rappers inject humour into their performances.

The irony suggested in the vocal performances is fully clear when one sees the video. Here, the macho playboys in the lyrics are not the suave and debonair types one might expect, but exaggerated versions of the guy-next-door who has been elevated to the status of the man every other man fears, and every woman wants to have. The video is shot with a fisheye lens, which distorts the images, and in this case creates a comic effect. From the opening scene, in which the rappers are playfully cavorting down the street in a style reminiscent of the Monkees in their 1960s TV programme, to the various shots of the two young women in their pink boudoir pinning for Yasha, "Macker" reveals Moabeat's playfulness. During the break, Yasha describes, among other things, how the Macker buys weed (marijuana) in the neighbourhood. In the video this is depicted as him meeting the drug dealer and exchanging money for a bag of weed, which later turns out to be a bag full of tea bags. The dealer then discovers that he's been paid with play money. The video is shot with bright lighting and features vibrant colours. In Moabeat's world, the violence is cartoonish. This is evident in the scene in which Monk, wearing huge shoulder pads under his jean jacket, single-handedly disarms a gang of wig-wearing thugs on bicycles, who threatened him. In the scene featuring Malo, he strolls through the gym on the way to his workout, and two beautiful (black) women leave the handsome, well-built man they're with (also black), to be with him. Violence isn't necessary, as the man who has lost his women just hangs his head in defeat.

⁹⁵ Here I have to echo Hyder's point about the difficulty in writing about sound, for it is difficult to adequately describe the unique quality of Yasha's voice.

This is an entirely different world from SIDO's. In Moabeat's world, hip hop is not restricted to the ghetto, and having fun – both with the music and with their image – is the order of the day.

8.2.3 *Samba, by Ostblokk*

Ostblokk is a hip hop crew made up of five artists: Sera Finale, Pyranja, Dra Q, Jamie Whyte and Joe Rilla. As discussed in Chapter 7, the name *Ostblokk* implies an East Berlin/East Germany perspective, and with the exception of Sera Finale, everyone in the crew is from the East. Each member of *Ostblokk* is a successful solo artist, and a few have branched into acting: Pyranja, Jamie Whyte and Sera Finale had major roles in *Status Yo!*, a feature film set in the Berlin hip hop scene.⁹⁶ Joe Rilla, whose real name is Hagen Stoll, is the founder of *Ostblokk Plattenbau*⁹⁷ (a record label). He also runs Alphabeatz (a music production firm) with his partner Andreas Petsch. Joe Rilla is the heart and soul of the *Ostblokk* project. His efforts, however, are not limited to the other *Ostblokk* artists, but include collaborations with Aggro Berlin and other Berlin artists such as the Harlekinz and the Pfliegerlounge project.

⁹⁶ A brief discussion of the film is found in the Conclusion.

⁹⁷ *Plattenbau* is the style of high-rise apartment buildings common during the GDR.



Fig. 15: Ostblokk Crew

Samba was released on the *Ostblokk Plattenbau* label as a maxi-single in June 2005. The track features each of the *Ostblokk* artists rapping a verse over samba-inspired beats and rhythms. *Samba* manages to sound simple and complex simultaneously. This is the result of two factors: one has to do with the layers of sound that make up the music, and the second is related to the varying rhythms of the music and the rappers' flows. Musically, *Samba* is comprised of a simple bass riff, percussion lines, handclaps, and occasional guitar. The track has three major components, and each has its own rhythm. The first is the staccato rhythm of the refrain, the next is the samba rhythm of the verses, and the third is the rhythm of the hook. The track opens with the two-line refrain, which is sung by a chorus of voices and punctuated by handclaps. Sera Finale raps the first verse, followed by Pyranja. The refrain follows Pyranja's verse, and then comes the hook, which is sung by a female voice in heavily accented German. The next verse is rapped by Dra Q, and Joe Rilla's verse follows. Next comes the refrain, then Jamie Whyte's verse. The track then ends with the refrain followed by the hook. Unlike the two tracks discussed

previously, Samba does not have a particular narrative that informs the content. Each of the artists raps about him- or herself and this includes a discussion of his or her prowess with the opposite sex, whether on the dance floor or in the bedroom. The theme that connects these self-portraits though, is samba. The hook invites the listener to dance the samba because it makes people happy.

The video is also deceptively simple. Presented in a wide-screen format, the screen image is then further divided by two thin red horizontal lines near the top and bottom. The video plays within these red borders, creating a frame within the frame (See Fig. 16). The video opens with an overhead shot of a DJ dropping the needle to a vinyl prominently featuring the *Ostblokk* logo. When the refrain begins, there are several fleeting shots of members of the *Ostblokk* crew. The first image is of Sera Finale, whose back is to the camera. It is a quick shot, but it allows enough time for him to make the “W” for West Berlin behind his back with fingers. In addition to the *Ostblokk* crew, the video also features two black women whose function seems to be giving some authenticity to the track’s samba theme. The video was shot on a stark white set with few props. At the beginning of each rapper’s verse, however, the set is black. As each rapper begins his or her verse, an opening in the red border at the top of the screen opens and the rapper’s name appears in the space. During each verse, the set alternates between the white one – where the rapper may be alone, with one of the black dancers⁹⁸, or with other members of the crew – and the black set, where the rapper is always alone.

⁹⁸ Pyranja is not paired up with one of the black dancers.



Fig. 16: Still from *Samba* video (Courtesy of *Ostblokk Plattenbau*)

The rappers also go through a few costume changes, though these are not significant, except perhaps in Pyranja's case. She carries off a few different looks, from casual street wear, to an elegant black halter dress, equipped with a black beaded wrap for her head.

The clip is visually quite stunning. This is a bit surprising because the colours have been muted so that it almost appears to have been shot in black and white. The red frame along with the black and white backgrounds give the clip a very clean look, and the camera movement⁹⁹ and editing give viewers a sense of gliding fluidly through the video images, enhancing the spirit of samba in the music. The black dancers contribute to this as well, particularly through some of the costumes they wear, which evoke images of carnival in Brazil. The video gives the sense that the *Ostblokk* crew not only enjoy what they do as individual hip hop performers, but that they enjoy working together on the *Ostblokk* project as well.

⁹⁹ There are some nice overhead and tracking shots used here.

8.2.4 *Eigentlich Schön*, by Eko & Azra

In 2004 Royal Bunker released Germany's first Turkish-German hip hop CD, *Dünya Dönüyor/Die Welt dreht sich*.¹⁰⁰ Written and recorded by Eko and Azra, the eighteen tracks on the CD describe life in Germany for Turkish-German people, and deal with issues such as families, city life, and love. Each track on the CD is performed in German and Turkish; Eko raps in German while Azra raps in Turkish, with the exception of "Intro" in which Eko raps in Turkish and Azra in German. The CD features guest artists, including: Valezka, an Afro-German R-n-B singer (and until recently Eko's girlfriend); G-Style; and other Royal Bunker artists Jack Orsen and Chablif. ¹⁰¹ In addition to combining Turkish and German lyrics, *Dünya Dönüyor/Die Welt dreht sich* also effectively blends Turkish music with R-n-B, and sets the combination to hip hop beats, creating a rich testament to musical syncretism.

Eko is a Turkish-German rapper who was born in Köln and grew up in Mönchengladbach, a city of about 266,000 inhabitants near Düsseldorf. He moved to Berlin to join Kool Savas' Optik Crew in 2001, shortly after his seventeenth birthday. Eko has achieved phenomenal chart success in his relatively short career, both as a performer of his own music and as a songwriter for pop artists. His first single, "*König von Deutschland*,"¹⁰² went to number fifteen in the German charts, and his second, "*Ich bin jung und brauche das Geld*"¹⁰³ from his debut CD of the same name, went to number five. Following these hits and the success of the debut album, he was invited by the head of BMG Music in Germany to write the lyrics to Yvonne Catterfeld's number one hit, "*Du hast mein Herz gebrochen*."¹⁰⁴ Eko's success,

¹⁰⁰ Translation: The world turns.

¹⁰¹ Chablif have since left the label.

¹⁰² Translation: King of Germany.

¹⁰³ Translation: I'm young and I need the money.

¹⁰⁴ Translation: You broke my heart.

particularly the song he wrote for Catterfeld, has had a damaging effect on his reputation in the Berlin hip hop scene.¹⁰⁵ This, coupled with the fact that he and his mentor Kool Savas, one of the most popular hip hop artists in Berlin, had a public and acrimonious split, led to his decision to move to Köln.¹⁰⁶ Azra, on the other hand is a popular figure in Kreuzberg, where he grew up. While he has not enjoyed the same kind of success as Eko, there is a strong following in the Turkish-German community for his exclusively Turkish language hip hop.¹⁰⁷ Azra's popularity in Berlin's Turkish hip hop scene is related to his perceived street credibility. When I met him he described the disillusionment he felt as a young boy growing up in Berlin, and was particularly disappointed by the lack of encouragement he received in school. He said that his attempt to attend a better school outside of his neighbourhood ended when teachers there suggested that he go back to Kreuzberg to study because his German was poor; an assessment of his language skills that he disputes. He dropped out altogether shortly afterwards. He admits to having engaged in criminal activity in the past, but eventually turned to music as a means of re-directing his life.

¹⁰⁵ Questions about his "street credibility" had already been raised because he attended *gymnasium*, rather than *haupt-* or *realschule*.

¹⁰⁶ The feud between Eko and Kool Savas resulted in two "diss tracks," each with an accompanying video. Eko's decline in popularity in Berlin's Kreuzberg district was all too evident at a concert I attended on May 1, 2005 when he was struck in the face by a bottle thrown from the crowd. He received a deep gash above his eye and required stitches.

¹⁰⁷ Given his popularity as a Turkish rapper, I was surprised when he told me during an interview that he only began learning Turkish a few years ago.



Fig. 17: CD Cover (Courtesy of Royal Bunker)

“*Eigentlich Schön*”¹⁰⁸ is the first single from *Dünya Dönüyor/Die Welt dreht sich*. The song is a reminder to young Turkish-Germans that despite whatever hardships they have to face, they should never forget that life is precious.¹⁰⁹ This doesn’t mean to suggest that “*Eigentlich Schön*” is a “feel-good” inspirational track, a point that may be clearer in the discussion of the track’s accompanying video, but its upbeat tempo and music combine to create a positive listening experience that supports the song’s message. The track opens with staccato string melody played over a repeating keyboard riff, punctuated by horns and paced by a percussive rhythm played on the rims of a drum. When Eko begins his rap, the bass line comes in and

¹⁰⁸ Translation: Actually beautiful.

¹⁰⁹ The track led to a controversial battle between Royal Bunker and KISS FM, a hip hop radio station in Berlin. When Marcus took the track in to the station to promote it, the program director stopped it once the Turkish lyrics started, saying that he would not support Turkish language hip hop. Marcus promptly reported the incident on the Royal Bunker website and was then charged by the program director with slander and forced to retract the statement. After a court appearance in which radio station employees confirmed the Royal Bunker version of the story, the case was dismissed and the full story returned to the website.

adds another layer of musical sound. The bass line repeats the melody of the strings that introduced the track. This short and repeating melody is taken from the refrain, and is worked throughout the song. Eko's rap style is self-confident and this is reflected in the ways in which he varies the rhythm of his flow, the musical quality of his voice, and the delivery of the lyrics. His proficiency as a lyricist is reflected in his frequent use of double rhymes, in which the last two words of a line rhyme with the last two words of the next line rather than just the final word.¹¹⁰ After the first verse the refrain is sung by Philippe, a former contestant on the German version of Pop Idol. Azra's Turkish verse follows the refrain. Though I do not understand Turkish, it is easy to hear that Azra's use of the language is both fluid and melodic.¹¹¹ He begins the verse with a tempo that follows the track's beat, then speeds up to double-time. Despite the speed of the delivery, the flow is excellent and the words remain clear and distinct. Key phrases in the text are punctuated by other voices rapping along with Azra. Despite the track's melodic nature, the overall tone of the verse is urgent and this is reflected by Azra's voice, which builds to a crescendo at the end where the words are practically shouted. This verse is followed by the refrain, and the final two verses are performed by Chablife, a duo made up of rappers Jay and Kay. Their verses are also delivered in a very quick tempo, which is not surprising given that they are billed as the fastest rappers in Germany. The track's upbeat tempo and sense of urgency reflected in the deliveries, underscore the message that life can be difficult, but the best way to confront these difficulties is to face problems realistically and to recognise the value of life.

Given the positive message offered in the track, the video seems like a deliberate attempt to emphasise the "life is hard" aspect of the lyrics, and to

¹¹⁰ For example, the first two lines of the rap are: *Kein Blut muss vergossen werden, kein Sarg muss im Zukunft geschlossen werden.*

¹¹¹ Royal Bunker provided German translations for the Turkish lyrics in the CD booklet.

downplay any notion that their “life is beautiful” sentiments mean that Eko and Azra are unaware of the realities of everyday life for migrants in contemporary German society. Interestingly, however, the threat in the video comes from other migrants. The video opens with a shot of Eko in the back seat of a convertible jeep. He is suffering from multiple gunshot wounds and Azra is driving down a country lane, while constantly looking in the backseat to check on his friend. The shots during the first verse alternate between the jeep and a field of bright yellow flowers. Other shots follow of the rappers seated around a large table in the middle of the field of flowers, a group of young musicians with horns and drums walking down the lane beside the field, and the group of armed Turkish gangsters also on the lane. Departing from the order of the CD, Chablife perform their two verses after the refrain. During these verses the gangsters discover the rappers in the field, Eko is shot, Jay and Kay are bound and rowed to the middle of a lake where they are pushed off of the boat, and Azra tries to escape with the wounded Eko. In the video, Azra has the last verse and here he is seen driving away with the wounded Eko. This is interspersed with shots of him rapping around the table before the gangsters have arrived. In the final refrain day has become night and Azra kneels in the dirt in front of the jeep, illuminated by its headlights. He beats the ground and grabs handfuls of sand that he lets slip through his fingers as he raises his fists to the sky and mourns his dead friend.

Because the video is shot outside on a beautiful day, the overall look is sunny and bright until the final scene. This effect is enhanced by vivid colours, which include the yellow and green field of flowers, the white tablecloth, the yellow jeep, the blue sky and Eko’s red T-shirt. The colours and location seem to celebrate life and the pleasures associated with experiencing the outdoors. In fact, the location adds a sense of irony to the events that unfold in the video; a tranquil field of

beautiful flowers hardly seems the place for a violent confrontation to take place.

But the message is clear, life is over quickly enough and until it is figure out how to appreciate and enjoy it.

8.3 CONCLUSION

My search for an aesthetic connection in Berlin's hip hop music was initially inspired by the city's reputation for producing hardcore battle rap. I was interested in the ways Berlin's role in German imagination – both before and after the *Wende* – was related to the ways artists there approached hip hop. Before the fall of the Wall West Berlin was an island in the middle of East Germany, sustained and subsidized by West Germany. After the *Wende*, the tensions between East and West – exacerbated by the city's worsening financial crisis – effectively maintained Berlin's island mentality. Several of my interviewees suggested that this mentality – along with the city's "ghettoes" – has contributed to the hardcore edge evident in the Berlin hip hop scene. While I do not dispute the assertion that there is an underground and hard-edged element in the Berlin hip hop scene, this does not tell the full story.

The tracks and corresponding videos discussed in this chapter differ both musically and visually, and none of them could be described as battle rap. From SIDO's electronic groove and deep-bass riffs, to *Ostblokk's* samba-inflected beats and rhythms, the tracks I reviewed reflect a variety of musical styles. From the ironic take on macho playboys channelled by Moabeat, to the earnest advice to Turkish-German youth offered by Eko and Azra, these tracks also reveal a broad range of subject matter. Visually, the hip hop performances offer different experiences of space. SIDO moves through the halls of his high-rise apartment building and drives through the streets of Berlin. Moabeat take viewers to a variety of locations

including the gym and a young lady's boudoir. *Ostblokk* occupy the stark space of studio set, while Eko and Azra escape the city streets to explore the countryside.

What links these examples, however, is the performances. The videos reveal the ways in which a global performance aesthetic has been created. Aside from the scenes in *Samba*, in which Pyranja dons a dress, all of the artists are dressed in a similar fashion: baseball caps, baggy jeans, do-rags, T-shirts, hoodies and trainers. More striking perhaps, are the physical elements. The artists I reviewed shared similar hand gestures, posture, and head movements.¹¹² I would argue, though, that the evidence of a shared performance aesthetic in Berlin does not suggest a connection between rappers there. Rather, it demonstrates how powerful images from the US are in determining how young people in Berlin perform hip hop.

¹¹² When I showed the *Mein Block* video at a conference at New York University, one woman in the audience asked me how SIDO learned how to move like a black rapper from New York.

CONCLUSION: WHAT'S SO GERMAN ABOUT IT?

When I moved to Berlin in 2000, I told anyone who would listen that I was there to research the city's hip hop scene. The typical responses I received ranged from, "Does Berlin really have a hip hop scene?" to "Actually, you should check out the scenes in Hamburg or Stuttgart, they have bigger stars." I countered these comments with reassurances that, yes indeed Berlin did have a hip hop scene, and I was interested in Berlin precisely because the scene had a more underground feel, thus the absence of big names was not a problem, and beyond that I found Berlin a more interesting city than either Hamburg or Stuttgart. As I recall these conversations and my vain attempts to convince sceptics that I knew what I was doing, it is a bit difficult for me to reconcile the Berlin scene I thought I was investigating in 2000 with the one I know today.

To illustrate what I mean, in the past twelve months three films about hip hop in Berlin have been released, each in its own way trying to capture and document what makes hip hop in Berlin special. *Status Yol*, released nationwide in September 2004, is a somewhat dizzying collection of vignettes taking place in a twenty-four hour period. These vignettes are connected by various members of the hip hop scene, and by two primary narratives. In the first, a local crew is trying to organise a concert/party, while in the second a young Turkish woman is roaming the city trying to reconnect with her boyfriend (with whom she has had a fight) without encountering family members who disapprove of the relationship and want to send her to Turkey. The actors in the film are all members of the Berlin hip hop scene, thus the film has a quasi-documentary feel. Contributing to this documentary aesthetic is the way the city of Berlin is captured on film. In fact, I would argue that the city is the film's actual star.

I wasn't able to see the film until January 2005, and after doing so was anxious to see what some of my contacts thought of it. I asked Marcus at Royal Bunker his opinion of the film, and he answered rather dismissively, that he hadn't seen it, adding that the film didn't actually depict the Berlin hip hop scene. Moreover, if I wanted to get a real idea of hip hop in Berlin, I should wait until the Royal Bunker documentary, *Gegen die Kultur*, was released.¹¹³ The fact that *Status Yo* primarily featured artists from the Pfefferlounge Crew, and that no one from Royal Bunker had been invited to participate, had clearly annoyed him. My conversation with him gave me cause for reflection as I realised how much the hip hop scene in Berlin had evolved, given that the point had apparently been reached where the question of who was best able to represent hip hop in Berlin on film could be debated. I had to admit, though, that in many respects Marcus was right. The hip hop scene represented in *Status Yo!*, was a very specific construction dominated by one element of the Berlin scene. That said, would it have even been possible for one film to capture such a diverse scene? If so, the closest approximation would be the third film, *Rap City Berlin*. This film is also a documentary offering portraits of 40 labels and over 150 artists in Berlin and if the film offers a vision, it is of a city whose hip hop artists are obsessed with battle rap.

In 2005 VIVA, Germany's music video station, launched a show set in Neukölln, a low-income, high-crime district bordering Kreuzberg. Over eight episodes, *Unser Block* tells the stories of a group of young rappers, dancers, and their friends struggling to achieve success in the hip hop scene. *Unser Block* does not deviate thematically in its construction of hip hop in Berlin from the films discussed above, resembling in many ways the hip hop experience offered by *Status Yo!* This is particularly the case with regard to highlighting the DIY nature of music making

¹¹³ *Gegen die Kultur* was only released on DVD.

in Berlin. But perhaps more than *Staus Yo!*, *Gegen die Kultur*, or *Rap City Berlin*, *Unser Block* represents the extent to which hip hop in Berlin has become mainstream.

Today when I am asked what I am doing in Berlin no one responds with, "Is there any such thing as a Berlin hip hop scene?" In addition to feature films, documentaries, and television shows, the recent controversy concerning artists on the Aggro Berlin label – most notably Fler – have put the city and its hip hop scene on television news programmes, and in the pages of mainstream press from *Süddeutsche Zeitung* to *Spiegel*.¹¹⁴ Given the nature of the controversy and its future implications for artistic freedom in Germany, a brief discussion of the incident with Fler follows.

The March issue of *Juice*, a German hip hop glossy magazine, featured a two-page advertisement (on the opening inside cover) of Fler's upcoming release. Dressed in white and photographed against a white background, Fler was featured gripping a baseball bat. Typically the weapon of choice for skinheads in Germany, the bat seemed to be a rather provocative prop for a hip hop artist. About a month later, Fler's new website debuted. The image on the homepage was of Fler gripping a lit Molotov cocktail (see Fig. 18), and was accompanied by the quote: "*Ab 1. Mai wird zurückgeschossen.*" Roughly translated, this means, "On the first of May I'm shooting back."¹¹⁵ There were two reasons the homepage was regarded with alarm in some circles. First, the May 1 release date for Fler's CD coincided with the First of May demonstrations, which typically result in rioting in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin. Second, the quote is a play on the one with which Hitler began World War II. Later, the single and accompanying video were released, and the images of the German flag and the German eagle accompanied text that included: "black, red

¹¹⁴ See: Kim, 2005; Rüle, 2005.

¹¹⁵ I use the word "roughly" because the original quote is a passive construction devoid of a subject.

gold/ hard and proud.”¹¹⁶ It is perhaps not surprising then, that in the weeks after the album was released, a fierce debate raged in the German press in which Fler was accused of being a right-wing threat.



Fig. 18: Fler (Courtesy of Fler.de)

Most troubling, perhaps, in terms of its long-term implications, the debate about Fler, which is ultimately a debate about artistic freedom and censorship, has even found its way into the halls of the *Bundestag*,¹¹⁷ where politicians are demanding that media outlets such as MTV, VIVA and radio stations refrain from featuring offensive artists and material in their playlists. The prominence the city was seeking – evidenced by projects such as the Hip Hop Sommerschule – appears to have come at what may ultimately be a significant price.

¹¹⁶ Black, red and gold are the colours of the German flag.

¹¹⁷ German Parliament.

LOOKING FOR THE LOCAL IN A GLOBAL CITY

This project began as a challenge; a challenge only partly reflected in the question, what's so German about hip hop in Berlin? When I began this research project, I thought that I was undertaking the investigation in order to illustrate how inadequate the terms "global" and "local" are for describing the positions from which young people in Berlin experience culture and construct their identities, particularly given the complexities of German history and global media flows. Walking through the streets of the city I often wondered, how does one begin to define "the local" in a city like Berlin, which in itself often appears to offer a microcosm of global culture? As perplexing though, as trying to determine how Berlin did or did not relate to the mythic "global," was considering the extent to which Berlin relates to the rest of Germany. At the same time, it is also the case that a pre-occupation with the "local" is a critical component of hip hop culture, or at least it used to be. But the "local" in hip hop discourse is actually meant to convey a sense of neighbourhoods and communities, rather than represent the opposite of "global." In any case, when considering how artists in Berlin understand and reproduce hip hop culture in relation to Germanness, we need to recognise a broader hip hop aesthetic and mindset. In other words, what is more important for a hip hop artist in Kreuzberg, identifying with artists in Brooklyn or with artists in Hamburg? And if the desire to understand and identify with artists in Brooklyn represents an ideal, is that somehow a German reaction, a Berlin reaction, or a bit of both?

One of the most perplexing but consistent answers I received when conducting my interviews, was to the question: Which hip hop artists – based in Berlin or elsewhere in Germany – do you like? Unless my interviewees were able to name other artists in their crew or personal friends, the answer was always the

same: None. This wasn't only the case for artists, but for hip hop journalists as well. No one would admit supporting artists in Germany. Most claimed they didn't even listen to other artists in Germany. I always found this extraordinary, for it revealed if nothing else, an incredible lack of curiosity about what the crew around the corner was doing. When the question came back to me, as it inevitably did, there was always shock and surprise when I could name artists that I liked and whose music I listened to on a fairly regular basis.¹¹⁸ In some instances, my enthusiasm about a particular local artist was enough to cause interviewees to offer to listen to them at some point, but usually even my endorsement was not enough to grant even a cursory review of the artist's material.

This attitude can perhaps best be illustrated by the following: In the fall of 2003, having just returned to Scotland from the field, I was contacted by Marcus at Royal Bunker who wanted me to know that they were going to be on BBC Radio and wanted me to listen. BBC 1 Extra, a relatively new digital urban station based in London, had sent two of its afternoon DJs – Ace and Invisible (Vis) – to Germany in order to report on the hip hop scene there. Ace and Vis went to Stuttgart, Hamburg, and Berlin. In addition to live radio interviews and performances, photos and other information about hip hop in Germany was available on the BBC 1 Extra website. During the segment in Berlin, Fumanschu battled Illo, another Berlin rapper; and the most prominent Berlin rapper at that time – Kool Savas – was interviewed. In the course of the interview, Ace and Vis asked Kool Savas about the scene in Berlin. Specifically, they wanted to know if someone wanted to experience hip hop in Berlin, where should he or she go. Without hesitation Kool Savas answered that he didn't really know, explaining that he wasn't really into the Berlin scene, but more

¹¹⁸ This was also tied to the fact that as a black woman from Brooklyn I was given a bit of credit for having good taste in hip hop music.

into hip hop from the States.¹¹⁹ Astonishingly, he also complained that it was very difficult to get his music played in the clubs in Berlin and across Germany.

According to Savas, club DJs preferred playing hip hop from the US, and he made no connection with his own attitudes to those of the DJs he was criticizing.

The desire to belong to an imagined hip hop nation, in which Germanness plays an insignificant role, was shared by most of the artists with whom I spoke. This isn't to suggest that they wanted to move to the US or rap in English, but that there seemed to be a consistent reluctance to claim any type of local alliances beyond the boundaries of their own crews. Time and again I was told that other rappers in Berlin (and Germany) were untalented, stupid, and fake. When I challenged them to tell me which artists they liked in the US, and then discussed these artists in terms of their clichéd performances or poor rap skills (evidenced in their music videos or lyrics), I was told that it was "different." After a while I realised that, though most of my interviewees listened exclusively to hip hop from the US and had fairly good English skills, in fact they did not really understand a lot of what was being rapped about in the tracks they heard.¹²⁰ On the other hand, German-language hip hop was held up to a much higher level of scrutiny in terms of its subject matter and lyrical content, and perhaps more importantly, the perceived distance from what the artist rapped about to his own experience. This scrutiny reveals a particular kind of insecurity artists feel about the cultural practice they are engaged in.

¹¹⁹ I was so annoyed with his response, I wrote an essay about it for MK ZWO, a hip hop website based in Berlin. Without naming him, I suggested that the artist had missed an incredible opportunity to promote the scene in Berlin, which could only have been beneficial for all hip hop artists there.

¹²⁰ In one instance André Langenfeld played some new music from the US for me. At one point I asked him to go to another track because I couldn't listen to the song any longer. When asked what I had heard that I didn't like, I had to explain to him what the phrase "hymen grinder" meant.

I don't mean to suggest here that members of Berlin's hip hop scene reject the city while in the process of dismissing other artists. In fact, the city plays a large role in the imaginations of hip hop performers based in Berlin. As artists, journalists, and scholars are quick to point out, Berlin is the largest city in Germany, and to the extent that Germany has any "real" ghettos, they are to be found in Berlin. Thus, what Berlin offers to members of its hip hop scene is "big city" life, replete with the requisite opportunities and problems that come with living in an urban environment, giving what practitioners believe is an air of authenticity to the city's hip hop practices.

MAKING SENSE OF HIP HOP IN BERLIN

Trying to make sense of hip hop culture in Berlin was complicated by two factors. The first was that I was initially convinced that I had to understand the scene on its own terms and not in relation to hip hop as a global cultural youth form. The second is actually related to the first, in that my efforts to understand hip hop in Berlin as a unique manifestation of everyday life there, were ultimately complicated by the fact that hip hoppers in Berlin understand hip hop primarily as a black American cultural form, despite over twenty years of hip hop culture in Germany. The dominance of hip hop in its American form is relatively unchallenged and remains the touchstone by which young people in the Berlin scene construct their hip hop identities. Hip hop scholars whose research interests lie outside of the US, suggest that in its global form hip hop has created new possibilities for young people around the world; that they re-work it into something new. While I do not want to dismiss these conclusions entirely, my experiences in the field suggest that the question of identity and hip hop culture is more complex than is usually theorised.

Perhaps this is clearer if I return to Simon Frith's notion of popular music and identity with which I opened this work. In his essay, "Music and Identity," Frith begins by critiquing the homology models that inform much of the research on popular music. As Frith points out, "the assumption that the sounds must somehow 'reflect' or 'represent' the people" is evident in the ways in which identity politics impact on popular music scholarship (Frith, 1996, 108). So not only must music represent the people, only certain people are capable of being represented by certain music. Consider the following passage from Cheryl Keyes' work on hip hop culture:

...gangsta rap videos have inspired a bevy of imitators whose makers have no direct link to or experience of the context from which this music sprang. Non-black youth adorn themselves in hip-hop fashions, imitate speech patterns, and use gestures in a street style similar to artists in these videos. (Keyes, 2002, 220)

In Keyes' consideration of "imitators" she does not consider, for instance, black middle-class rappers whose experiences – like their "non-black" counterparts – have no discernible relationship to the "gangsta" culture that their music may suggest. This seems to imply that blackness suffices in hip hop as a marker of "authenticity" and that ghetto experience is implied in skin colour; evidence of the cultural essentialism Frith refers to in his essay. In fact, Frith argues that the musical experience transcends such essentialism:

Anti-essentialism is a necessary part of musical experience, a necessary consequence of music's failure to register the separations of body and mind on which such 'essential' differences (between black and white, female and male, gay and straight, nation and nation) depend. (Frith, 1996, 122)

This is not to dismiss the notion of cultural capital. There is, however, an important distinction between acknowledging the role that the social construction of identity may play in the production of music, and relying on 'cultural essentialism' to explain the relationship between music and identity. Frith questions this relationship by asking how music creates, rather than reflects identity:

...popular music is popular not because it reflects something or authentically articulates some sort of popular taste or experience, but because it creates our understanding of what 'popularity' is, because it places us in the social world in a particular way. (Frith, 1996, 121)

The social world Frith refers to is the key to understanding the ways in which popular music shapes identity, and this is particularly relevant to hip hop.

As discussed in chapter 5, hip hop was initially experienced in Germany as an American musical import. With films such as *Beat Street* and *Wild Style*, young people in Germany were able to see the street culture that provided the context for hip hop music, and these images captivated them in ways that the music alone had not. The films demonstrated how hip hop was performed and experienced in urban America. I would argue that it was precisely this visual impact – binding music, performance, and place – that created the template for hip hop in Germany. Though the music was exhilarating and new, young people were also responding to what hip hop's social context seemed to reveal about young people in America's urban environments. But the construction of hip hop identities in Germany was tied not only to the experiences and production of hip hop culture in the US, but to the realities of culture and society in Germany as well. Thus, to understand the role of hip hop in the construction of young people's identities in Berlin, means considering hip hop as myth (US) and as experience (Berlin).

To insist on reading hip hop outside of the US as providing opportunities for the creation of new identities in a global youth movement is perhaps to miss the point; or at least it misses the point in Berlin. The notion that young people outside of the US are creating something new with hip hop has to do with distancing hip hop from its urban American roots; an issue which seems to be more important for scholars than for any of the young people in the scene I researched. In fact, hip hop's roots in urban America are precisely what draw many young people in Berlin

to hip hop culture, despite whatever cultural differences may separate them.

According to Frith,

Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives. (Frith, 1996, 124)

In the case of hip hop, the “imaginative cultural narratives” are hip hop’s mythic origins. Thus, the experiences hip hop offers young people in Berlin are grounded in myths that thrive in the practices of young people active in the Berlin scene.

Furthermore, I would argue that young people in Berlin are particularly susceptible to hip hop mythology due to a unique set of historical and social issues, all of which contribute to how different groups of young people position themselves (and are positioned) in German society. As discussed in the chapters comprising Part II, World War II left Germany humiliated, divided, and in need of foreign guest workers to aid in the process of rebuilding. American popular culture in the post-war era arrived in a Germany still reeling from the effects of the war, and with young people particularly susceptible to the possibilities of escape from German culture, which jazz and rock seemed to offer. Meanwhile, immigrant populations continued to grow in a country that had not planned on their permanence. Everyday life in contemporary Berlin continues to reflect the legacy of the post-war years.

WHY IT MATTERS: ETHNOGRAPHY, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND POPULAR MUSIC

At the end of an ethnographic project, it is difficult to escape the “So what?” moment. In this case I initially experienced feelings of anti-climax and mild disappointment with the research data, and to a lesser degree with the project itself. I was not entirely convinced that the material I had gathered – drawn from my

ability to participate and observe – would allow me to adequately convey the Bourdieusian field of Berlin's hip hop scene. In retrospect these feelings appear quite normal given the particular set of expectations that ethnography seems to invite for researchers. My theoretical engagement with youth culture research had convinced me that the ethnographic method was the key to understanding hip hop in Berlin, and I revelled in the notion of allowing young people in the scene to speak for themselves; something that rarely happens in research on popular music and young people. But given that ethnography is about experiencing everyday life, it can't always be exciting or interesting; and this can result in questioning the value of the research. As William Foote Whyte wrote in the appendix to his classic ethnography, *Street Corner Society*: "Sometimes I wondered whether just hanging on the street corner was an active enough process to be dignified by the term 'research'" (1993, 303). Returning from the field, my initial reactions were that ethnography is difficult, Germany is complicated, and young people are a lot of work. Eventually, however, I allowed myself to be inspired by the fact that I had actually *been* in the field; that I had gone to experience Berlin's hip hop scene for myself; and that there was value in having done so.

John Borneman conducted his ethnography of East and West Berlin during the two and a half years leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the introduction to his book, he establishes the authority of his work by positioning his ethnographic approach in relation to that favoured by historians:

Unlike a "history" that fundamentally derives its authority from a chronologically enclosed past, my authority in this book stems primarily from the fact that I was there for the telling of the story. (1992, 5)

Like Borneman I was there, and my authority in telling how different groups of young people understand and practice hip hop rests on that fact. At this writing, this thesis represents the only full-length attempt in English to investigate the

diversity of a hip hop scene in a major German city, and one of the few by a non-ethnomusicologist to engage with the aesthetics of hip hop music. This matters for the following reasons:

1. As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, to the extent that hip hop has received academic attention outside of Germany, it has been to focus on hip hop practices among Turkish youth. While I can understand and appreciate the nature and importance of this research, it only tells part of the story. The intersection of hip hop music and youth identities in Germany is not just an issue for non-whites. Unpacking complicated notions of German identity and looking at different negotiations with both Germanness and hip hop culture, sheds much light on contemporary German society and culture, and moves beyond the notion that issues of identity are somehow restricted to the Other.
2. The reticence experienced by media and popular music studies scholars to write about what music sounds like is certainly understood, but the absence of such work is unfortunate given what these scholars have to offer in terms of their theoretical approaches to studying music and culture. The aesthetic consideration of popular music shouldn't be confined to the field of ethnomusicology.
3. Though it may have been possible to write about the young people in the Berlin hip hop scene without using ethnography, I question the value of such an approach. As long as music remains an abstract matter, historical and textual analyses are (perhaps) adequate to understand and to analyse. There are, however, different issues involved when the research questions stem from trying to understand how music functions in everyday life. In a

world where young people are inundated with sounds and images from literally around the world, it is no longer possible to theorise from a distance how they are using and interpreting music. Moving beyond the rhetoric of globalisation, and conducting site-specific research intended to make sense of young people's musical lives, is a worthy aim for popular music studies.

Beyond the specifics of this project, however, there is a more general case to be made about the importance of ethnographic research in popular music studies.

Writing in 1993 Sara Cohen addressed the benefits of ethnographic research to popular music studies:

...ethnography would increase our knowledge of the details of popular music processes and practices. Only with such knowledge can we be justified in making more general statements about popular music (e.g. regarding globalisation and its effects, the nature of popular music as mass culture, processes of consumption and production, etc.). More importantly, perhaps, such an approach would remind us that general statements tend to mask the complex interrelatedness of contexts, events, activities and relationships involved with popular music. Finnegan, for example, shows how hard it is to make generalisations about music in relation to social difference. (136)

In the quote above and elsewhere in the article Cohen discusses Ruth Finnegan's seminal ethnography, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*, and she uses her own ethnography of the Liverpool rock scene¹²¹ to make the case for ethnography's unique facility in grounding musical experience in everyday life. The article reads as if Cohen is on a mission. In the conclusion she says, "[t]here is some evidence that an ethnographic approach to the study of popular music might be slowly developing" (136), and that this "will hopefully ensure that the study of music as social practice becomes firmly embedded in the future of the discipline" (136). In the years since this article was published there has been an ethnographic turn, so to speak, in popular music studies. Recent well-received ethnographies

¹²¹ Discussed in the literature review.

include Rob Drew's research on karaoke (2001); Louise Meintjes' work on a recording studio in Johannesburg (2003); and Aaron Fox's exploration of country music making in Lockhart, Texas (2004). Each of these works contributes to our understanding of the social worlds created by music.

This isn't to suggest that textual and/or historical analyses aren't critical to understanding popular music. In fact, ethnography works best when combined with other approaches which provide a context for understanding popular music and its social worlds. The point here is that popular music studies should continue to encourage and promote ethnographic research, for it is only in the ethnographic method that scholars can truly understand how popular music works in people's lives. Ethnography forces scholars to move beyond theoretical models to understand why people do what they do, creating a unique body of scholarly knowledge. As seen in this work for instance, terms such as "resistance" – often used to describe the intersection of youth culture and popular music – become more problematic when scholars engage with young people in the attempt to understand how music actually functions in the construction of their identities. What is learned about popular music from ethnography, I would argue, can only be learned this way.

Writing in *Popular Music and Society*, Tom Caw laments the fact that popular music "has long been derided as frivolous and ephemeral," then he adds, "but it has proved to have a lasting cultural impact worthy of scholarly work" (2004, 49). What I hope my own work demonstrates is that popular music's cultural impact is not only to be found by digging through music archives, but by trying to understand what it means to the people who love it.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

1. Jan Kage	MC, Author, DJ, Actor	15/04/03
2. Deniz Bax	Founder, Berlin Hip Hop Fraktion	4/06/03
3. Mike Schmidt	Manager, Optik Records	11/06/03
4. Basti Zeiger	Editor, Rap.de	23/06/03
5. Drs. Rob & Isolight	MCs, Members of BHHF	28/06/03
6. Gauner	MC, Co-ordinator Hip Hop Mobil	2/07/03
7. André Langenfeld	DJ, Radio Fritz	3/07/03
8. Fumanschu	MC, MOR Crew	9/07/03
9. Sascha Wambutt	Hip Hop Journalist	10/07/03
10. Stefan Hülsmann	Hip Hop Journalist	16/07/03
11. Marcus Staiger	Founder, Royal Bunker	17/07/03
12. Christoph Liell	Doctoral Candidate	23/07/03
13. Christoph Happel	Director, Arbeitskrise Medienpädagogik	28/07/03
14. Joe Rilla	MC; Producer; Founder, Ostblokk Records	31/07/03
15. Kheops	MC, Level Eight Crew	8/08/03
16. Karin	Manager, Subotage Entertainment	11/08/03
17. Fat Jon	MC, DJ	12/08/03
18. Ronny Schulz	Independent Distributor	13/08/03
19. Chrille	Graffiti Writer	13/08/03
20. Pyranja	MC, Ostblokk Crew	25/08/03
21. Marcello	MC, Funkviertel Crew	20/11/03
22. Yasha and David	Moabeat Crew	24/11/03
23. Amani	Member, BHHF	21/11/03

24. Nicole	Royal Bunker Crew	25/11/03
25. Dr. Isolight	MC, Member BHHF	26/11/03
26. Ferhan X	Beatboxer, Member BHHF	26/11/03
27. Dr. Rob	MC, Member BHHF	26/11/03
28. Charnell	MC; Founder, Digga Music	1/12/03
29. Azra	MC	7/02/05
30. Jack Orsen/Niko	MC, MOR Crew	17/03/05
31. Irmel	DJ; Instructor Hip Hop Mobil	20/09/05

APPENDIX II: GERMAN CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY REFORMS

[Due to the relative complexity of German citizenship reforms, the following text is offered in its entirety.]

Harmonization with European standards as of 1 January 2000

The Federal Republic of Germany has had a new citizenship and nationality law since 1 January 2000. Passed by broad majorities in Germany's Bundestag (lower house) and Bundesrat (upper house) in May 1999, this reform of the regulations governing the naturalization of foreign nationals was one of the first domestic measures of major societal importance and European dimension to be launched by the new government under Chancellor Schröder. The new law substantially changes the principle of descent (*jus sanguinis*) which has long been the country's traditional basis for granting citizenship. Now, it will also be possible to acquire German citizenship as the result of being born in Germany (*jus soli*) as is the case in most other European countries. Further, the reform also takes into account the fact that more than seven million foreigners live in Germany on a long-term basis. One third of them have lived here for more than 30 years; half of them have lived in Germany for at least 20 years. The lives of most of the foreign nationals living in Germany center around Germany. The new citizenship and nationality law offers them a shorter mandatory waiting period for naturalization. It is an offer to facilitate their integration into the civic community, an offer that is based on reciprocity. A large portion of Germany's population now has the opportunity to participate in and help shape social and political issues with all inherent rights and obligations. This reform is aimed at closing the gap that has existed to date between social reality and citizenship status. This gap exists because, in practical terms, most of these people have become Germans. In legal terms however, they continue to be foreigners. This offer to facilitate the integration of foreign nationals living in Germany however also involves obligations. These obligations include in particular that the respective individual learns German and professes loyalty to the Basic Law, Germany's constitution.

Main features of the new legislation

Acquisition of German citizenship by the fact of being born in Germany

Children who are born in Germany to foreign nationals will receive German citizenship when one of the respective child's parents has resided lawfully in Germany for at least eight years and holds entitlement to residence or has had an unlimited residence permit for at least three years. Under the new law, such children acquire German citizenship at birth. In most cases, they will also acquire their parents' citizenship under the principle of descent (depending upon the other country's laws). For this reason, such children will have to decide within five years of turning 18 – in other words, before their 23rd birthday – whether they want to retain their German citizenship or their other citizenship. They must opt for one of their two nationalities (which is why this is called the requirement to opt):

- In the event that they declare that they want to retain their foreign citizenship, they lose their German citizenship. This is also the case

when such a child does not make any statement to the authorities before his 23rd birthday.

- Should the respective individual decide to keep his German citizenship, he has to provide proof before his 23rd birthday that he has lost his other citizenship. Exceptions are possible, particularly when renouncement of the other citizenship is not possible or would be unreasonable.

Transitional provisions for children

Children up to ten years of age enjoy special entitlement to naturalization under the new regulations governing the acquisition of German citizenship through birth in Germany. The requirements:

- An application for naturalization must be submitted by 31 December 2000.
- The child must be less than ten years of age on 1 January 2000.
- The child must have been born in Germany.
- At the time of the child's birth, one of his parents must have resided lawfully in Germany for at least eight years and have entitlement to residence or have had for at least three years an unlimited residence permit.
- The requirement of one parent having his lawful place of abode for an unlimited period in Germany must be met not only at the time of the child's birth but also at the time of his naturalization.

The requirement to opt also applies to children who receive German citizenship under these provisions.

Absolute legal entitlement to naturalization under the Foreigners' Act

Before the new legislation went into force, foreign nationals were granted entitlement to naturalization only after 15 years of residence in Germany. Now, a foreign national is entitled to naturalization after lawfully residing in Germany for eight years when he meets the following requirements:

- He professes loyalty to the free democratic basic order laid down by Germany's constitution and, in particular, has not been involved in any activities that are hostile to the constitution;
- The respective individual is in possession of a residence permit or the right of unlimited residence;
- He is able to support himself without the help of welfare benefits or unemployment assistance (as in the past, this requirement does not have to be checked in the case of foreigners who are under 23 years of age; the receipt of unemployment assistance or welfare benefits does not have a detrimental effect on the individual's application when the respective individual is not responsible for the situation);
- The applicant has renounced or lost his previous citizenship (exceptions are allowed, particularly in those cases when it is not possible to renounce one's previous citizenship or renouncement is possible only under difficult terms).

- The individual does not have a criminal record (exceptions are possible, particularly in the case of minor offenses);
- He has an adequate command of the German language.

Hardship provisions

The principle observed to date of avoiding plural nationality (holding of more than one nationality) upon naturalization continues to apply. Exceptions for special hardship cases have however been defined and moderately extended. These exceptions apply to:

- Older persons in those cases where efforts to be released from their foreign citizenship meet with a disproportionate amount of difficulty;
- Persons who are politically persecuted or recognized refugees. In the future, it will no longer be necessary to prove in each individual case that being released from the previous citizenship constitutes an unreasonable demand;
- Instances in which the conditions required for being released from one's foreign citizenship are unacceptable (such as unreasonably high fees for being released or cases in which the terms under which the foreign state releases its nationals from their citizenship are demeaning) and
- Cases where being released from one's foreign nationality would entail substantial disadvantages, especially when these disadvantages are economic or proprietary in nature.

The office and role of the Federal Commissioner for Foreigners' Affairs

The Federal Commissioner for Foreigners' Affairs looks after the interests of foreign nationals in Germany. She deals with basic issues and points of detail involved in policies governing aliens in Germany and acts as the point of contact for organizations that work with foreign nationals. One of her most important responsibilities is to inform both the foreign and German population in Germany about the objectives of integrating foreigners into German society and the measures being implemented to achieve their integration. Her agency also supported the reform of Germany's citizenship and nationality law with a broad-based information campaign. One of its brochures which it published in large numbers explains the reform to German and foreign nationals. Another brochure specifically targets foreigners. The agency's public relations work also included outdoor advertising in major cities, advertisements in newspapers and magazines, appearances by public figures all aimed at informing the public about the reform and promoting its acceptance. Germany should gain a total of one million new citizens in the year 2000 through naturalization by application and the new option of acquiring German citizenship through birth in Germany. This campaign addresses the German population not only to encourage its acceptance of the new legislation but also to promote a new, more modern understanding of who "Germans" are.

Initial experience

Although frequently very heated in the past, the discussion among the German population regarding entitlement to German citizenship through birth in Germany has become more objective and led to a broad acceptance within a short time. The following trends are discernible among foreign nationals who are affected by the new legislation:

- Young people are particularly pragmatic in their use of Germany's new citizenship and nationality law. The new regulations have greatly extended circle of persons who are entitled to naturalization and persons who are willing to take advantage of their entitlement.
- Older people tend to be reserved in their response. This reflects a certain disappointment over the fact that their hopes for plural citizenship were not fulfilled. Language problems are also a factor with this age group.
- People are also reserved about taking advantage of the newly created opportunity to naturalize children who are under ten years of age. This is probably due to the fact that the situation created by the reform is still new to parents. There is apparently a need for more information in this area.

The naturalization process generally takes one to two years (starting from the date on which the application is submitted until naturalization).

Germany's new citizenship and nationality law is meeting with a positive response in towns and cities. The number of applications for naturalization rose sharply during the first month after the new regulations went into effect. A random survey conducted by the Federal Commissioner for Foreigners' Affairs of naturalization offices in towns with a large proportion of foreigners reveals a marked trend: The number of new applications for naturalization has doubled in many towns. In some communities, the number has even tripled. A similar pattern could be observed in the number of application forms issued. The number of guidance talks has also increased noticeably at many offices.

Many communities have responded to the increased interest in naturalization by increasing their staff size and conducting aggressive information campaigns. Applicants' mastery of the German language is to be tested in a pragmatic, practice-oriented manner. In many cases, a short, simple conversation with the relevant authorities is sufficient to prove adequate language capability should other proof not be available.

(Source: http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/reform_of_germany_s_citizenshi.html)

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