Minority and immigrant Germans’ embrace of the derogatory term Kanake as a self-ascription and of the low-status ethnolect Kanak Sprak has been compared to US rappers’ combative use of “niggah” and Black English. This essay, however, compares the revaluation of the term Kanake, a non-assimilatory Kanak identity, and the ethnolect Kanak Sprak to some early 20th century German Jews’ revaluation and embrace of Eastern European Jewish culture and Yiddish. It demonstrates also how non-minority and non-Jewish Germans have used Yiddish and Kanak Sprak in literature, theater, film, and popular culture to re-inscribe ethnic difference, especially at times when minorities and Jews were becoming indistinguishable from non-minority Germans (emancipation edicts or nationality law reform). Because Kanak Sprak is inseparable from HipHop culture, the second half of the essay examines the many parallels between the importation and naturalization of German HipHop and German Klezmer. Both were imported from the United States in the early 1980s; and following the fall of the Berlin Wall and German re-unification, both have played a role in German Vergangenheitsbewältigung [mastering the past]. While HipHop and Klezmer have become the soundtrack of German anti-racism, anti-Nazism, and multiculturalism; some observers are critical of non-minority and non-Jewish Germans’ appropriation or instrumentalization of ethnic music, and have cited instances of antisemitism and racism in German Klezmer and HipHop.

The word Kanake is a highly derogatory term that has been used since roughly the 1970s to refer to visibly non-German foreigners or presumed foreigners, especially Turks.¹ Although still considered a slur, Kanake has been appro-

¹The etymology of Kanake is obscure. Tom Cheesman writes, “According to Knaurs Konversationslexikon (1936), ‘kanake’ means ‘human being’ in Hawaiian, or a native of Hawaii.” Duden deutsches Universalwörterbuch (1983) mentions two slang, pejorative usages: an older one, uneducated, simple person,’ and ‘foreign worker, esp. Turk” (Tom Cheesman,
priated as a self-ascription by some minority Germans. According to Tom Cheesman, this “combative usage” of the term originated in the late 1980s in urban hip hop circles, where it was likened to US rappers’ use of “niggah.” In 1995, Turkish-German author Feridun Zaimoğlu introduced Kanak Sprak, the ethnolect spoken by self-described Kanaken, to a wider German audience in his book Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft [Kanak Speak: 24 Notes of discord from the margins of society]. By the late 1990s the ethnolect became part of mainstream German pop culture, in the genre Kanakcomedy, which features caricatured portrayals of foreigners and minorities, speaking Kanakisch, a stereotyped form of the actual ethnolect spoken by some Turkish-Germans of the second and third immigrant generations. Via these popular media portrayals, Kanakisch has entered the speech of Germans without immigrant background.

Linguists and cultural critics who have examined the revaluation of the term Kanake and the use of the ethnolect in popular culture and youth speech have noted similarities to roughly contemporaneous trends across national and linguistic borders (especially in the U.S. but also in the U.K.).

"Talking Kanak: Zaimoğlu contra Leitkultur," New German Critique, Vol. 92 (Spring/Summer 2004): 85. According to Peter Schlobinski, the word Kanake has long been part of Berlin dialect, where it is equivalent to “Hanake,” which refers to a Slavic ethnic group in Moravia (Peter Schlobinski, “Berliner Wörter von A bis Z,” http://www.fbls.uni-hannover.de/sdls/schlo/berlinisch/lexikon/a_to_z/h.htm [accessed December 13, 2005]). According to Gabriele Trost, “Hanake,” which had a negative connotation due to German-speaking Bohemians’ antagonistic relationship with Czech minorities, was generalized to mean a “crude, ill-mannered, or even malicious person” (Gabriele Trost, “Wissensfrage,” Planet-Wissen, http://www.planet-wissen.de/pw/Artikel,,,,,,,,AE2798769DC0566DE03408009B14B8E,,,,,,,,,.html [accessed December 13, 2005]).


have not, however, been examined diachronically, to consider whether they have historical antecedents in Germany’s own past.

Turkish-German author Zafer Şenocak has suggested that Turkish-Germans, contemporary Germany’s largest minority group, should examine the history of Jews in Germany to better understand their own situation as a non-Christian minority in an increasingly multicultural Germany and Europe. In a 1995 interview, “May one Compare Turks and Jews, Mr. Şenocak?,” he compares the experience of Turkish-Germans at the close of the 20th century to that of German Jews at its beginning:

[In Germany] minorities remain foreign, in spite of their adaptation. This will cause tension, which will in turn look familiar to us from history. The history of Jews in Germany and their assimilation is accompanied by a tense debate, which


In her essay “Touching Tales of Turks, Germans, and Jews,” Leslie Adelson observes: “During the 1970s a common political metaphor had it that ‘the Turks are the Jews of today.’ This slogan from the Left was meant to criticize a perceived continuity of fascist attitudes in West German society, with a simple rhetorical substitution that had Turkish guest worker stand in for Jewish victims of the Nazi past” (pp. 100–101). Noting that Jeffrey Peck and Micha Brumlik, among others, have argued that such glib, largely rhetorical comparisons are of limited usefulness, Adelson (who has translated Şenocak’s major essayistic work) does not rule out the possibility of comparison (Leslie Adelson, “Touching Tales of Turks, Germans, and Jews: Cultural Alterity, Historical Narrative, and Literary Riddles for the 1990s,” New German Critique, Vol. 80 [2000]: 93–124; Micha Brumlik, “Antisemitismus, Rassismus und Ausländerfeindlichkeit,” in Doron Kiesel and Rosi Wolf-Almanasreh, eds., Die multikulturelle Versuchung: Ethnische Minderheiten in der deutschen Gesellschaft [Frankfurt a.M.: Haag & Herchen, 1991], pp. 29–38; Jeffrey Peck, “Turks and Jews: Comparing Minorities in Germany after the Holocaust,” in. Jeffrey Peck, ed., German Cultures/Foreign Cultures: The Politics of Belonging, Harry & Helen Gray Humanities Program Series, Vol. 3 [Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1997], pp. 1–16).
was especially speared by Zionism and its thesis that there is no German-Jewish cultural symbiosis. This thesis posits that the mediation failed, that the Jew remains Jew and the German—who defines himself as non-Jew—remains German. Today’s picture reveals that many Turks in Germany perceive themselves as a lobby for Turkey because they on the one hand cover their backs in order to have a place to flee in case they are threatened. But at the same time they want to have an active life in Germany. Yet even if they have assimilated, they are very far from being regarded as inconspicuous citizens.  

Comparisons of Kanake and “niggah” and of Kanak Sprak and Black English are perhaps closer at hand, because the reinscription of the word Kanake and the popularization of the ethnolect are a product of the importation and naturalization of American HipHop culture to Germany. I will demonstrate in this essay, however, that Zaimoğlu’s reclamation of the term Kanake and his transformation of a low-status ethnolect into a literary medium can also be compared to early 20th-century German Jews’ embrace of Eastern European Jewish culture and Yiddish; and that the use of stereotyped ethnic speech (Kanakischt) in Kanakcomedy resembles the use of stereotyped Jewish speech in German-language literature (and other media) from the 19th century to the present. Because the linguistic phenomenon of Kanak Sprak/Kanakischt is inseparable from the history of HipHop in Germany, I will also examine the parallels in the “naturalization” of HipHop music (the “sound track” both of Zaimoğlu’s activist art and Kanakcomedy) and klezmer (the music of Yiddish culture) in Germany. Both of these musical traditions were imported to Germany from the United States in the mid-1980s and gained wide-spread popularity among non-minority and non-Jewish Germans in the years immediately following the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the German re-unification.

The contemporary German ethnolect goes by many names, Türkendeutsch [Turkish-German], Türkenslang [Turkish slang], Kanaksprak [Kanak


7 It is important to note that Germany and the United States have operated according to different racial/ethnic paradigms. In the United States, the prevailing paradigm has been a White vs. Black binary (with a recent trend toward a White-Black-Latino triad). In Germany, however, Jews were the paradigmatic “racial” Other. Beginning with the large-scale immigration of guest workers in the 1950s and 1960s, Mediterranean or Southern European immigrants, especially Muslim Turks, have replaced Jews as the other half of an imagined binary.
speak], Ausländisch [foreigner], Ausländer slang], Streetslang, HipHopslang, Ghettoslang, Stadtteilsprache [“hood” language], Mischsprache [hodgepodge or mixed language], Mischkamas [mishmash or hodgepodge], Balkandeutsch [Balkan German], Kanakisch, Kanakischdeutsch, Türkensprache [Turk(ish) pidgin], Ghetto deutscher [ghetto German].

Linguists who study the ethnolect distinguish between primary, medial (or secondary), and tertiary varieties. According to Peter Auer, the primary ethnolect is spoken chiefly by migrant youth (especially males with Turkish background) of the second and third immigrant generations. It should not be confused with the Guestworker German of the first migrant generation, because not all non-standard elements of the ethnolect can be explained by language interference or non-systematic language acquisition. Furthermore, unlike the first generation, speakers of the ethnolect frequently have a full command of standard German (as well as other varieties, such as dialect or regional speech) and practice code-switching, using the ethnolect as just one part of a larger linguistic repertoire of styles and registers. Ethnolect speakers employ it to express belonging to a particular ethnic group or subculture, or as an ironic allusion to the language of parents or grandparents.

Speakers of the ethnolect can be compared to post-Yiddish Jewish native speakers of German—both German Jews whose families had shifted from Western Yiddish and Eastern European Jewish immigrants of the second and subsequent generations whose families had shifted from Eastern Yiddish.

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8There is no consensus in terminology. Auer refrains from referring to the primary ethnolect with any of the above names but notes that some of them (Türkenslang, Kanak Sprak, Türkendeutsch, Balkandeutsch, Türkensprache, etc.) have been applied to the secondary and tertiary forms. Keim prefers the term Ghetto deutscher for the primary ethnolect, reserving the term Kanak Sprak for the secondary and tertiary varieties. Androuotsopolous notes that the proliferation of names suggests a “family of varieties” rather than one homogeneous ethnolect (Auer, “Türkenslang,” p. 260; Androuotsopolous, “Ultra korregd Alder,” p. 2; Keim, “Die Verwendung,” p. 97).

9Although spoken primarily by Turkish-German males, the primary ethnolect has undergone de-ethnicization (and also lost its character as a genderlect) in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic neighborhoods of some large German cities, where it is spoken by non-Turkish minority youth and German youth of non-migrant backgrounds (Auer, “Türkenslang,” pp. 262–265, Androuotsopolous, “Ultra korregd Alder,” p. 4, Keim, “Die Verwendung,” p. 97).


12Their German can be classified as “Jewish speech” as defined by Neil G. Jacobs: “[Jewish Speech is a] variety of a language X . . . spoken natively by a significant num-
Like speakers of the contemporary ethnolect, speakers of Ashkenazic German\(^\text{13}\) possessed an entire repertoire of styles and registers; they were (to a greater or lesser extent) cognizant of which elements of their speech were recognizably "foreign"; and they could code-switch or style-shift to general German or other varieties.\(^\text{14}\) Like speakers of the contemporary ethnolect, speakers of Ashkenazic German likewise typically restricted their use of their Jewish ethnolect to in-group communications, where it served to express solidarity or belonging or as an ironic or nostalgic reference to the speech of the parent generation.

Ashkenazic German should not be confused with Mauscheln (or Jüdeln), the stereotyped Jewish speech of antisemitic caricature. The stereotyped Jewish speech that occurs in literature, film, caricature, and propaganda is analogous not to the primary ethnolect but to the secondary or medial ethnolect (the portrayal of the ethnolect in pop culture). The secondary ethnolect is a reduced or stereotypical form of the primarily ethnolect, stylized to be easily recognizable by the German audience. The secondary ethnolect exhibits select easily recognizable aspects (often in exaggerated form) of the primary ethnolect. It also has elements that are not part of the primary ethnolect (some are gleaned from Guestworker German or the general youth language and others are invented). The medial ethnolect typically includes some of the following:

1) Use of voiceless palato-alveolar fricative instead of voiceless palatal fricative (ich > isch, sich > sisch);

\(^{13}\) The term Ashkenazic German is preferred by David L. Gold. For a discussion of terminology for varieties of Yiddish and German written and spoken by German Jews see David L. Gold, "Gentlemen, We Know More Yiddish Than We Admit" (On Werner Weinberg’s Die Reste des Jüdischdeutschen), Jewish Language Review, Vol. 4 (1984): 77–123.

2) Reduction of alveolar affricate /ts/ to voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ (swei, ersählen);
3) Rolled r;
4) Shortening of long vowels;
5) Omission of articles (Hast du Problem?);
6) Omission of prepositions and articles in prepositional phrases of direction and place (ich gehe Bibliothek);
7) Errors in gender, case, and word order;
8) The use of characteristic lexical items (korrekt, konkret and krass) and other discourse markers (weißt du, verstehst du, hey mann, hey alter, ich schwör).15

One important difference between the primary and the medial dialect is that the medial dialect typically does not exhibit code-switching, a prominent feature of the primary ethnolect. According to Jannis Androutsopoulos the secondary ethnolect appears almost exclusively in fictional genres, where it is attributed to “ghetto-oriented speakers for whom crime and drug-use play a central role.” For these figures, the ethnolect contributes to an “aggressive, provocative/trouble-making [anmacherische]” self-representation.16

Although Androutsopoulos characterizes Feridun Zaimoğlu’s Kanak Sprak as an example of the medial ethnolect, it should be distinguished from the medial ethnolect of Kanakcomedy. Whereas Kanakcomedy (performed and written primarily by non-minority Germans) employs stereotyped speech in order to parody or ridicule the ethnolect and its speakers, Zaimoğlu and other Turkish-German artists (such as filmmaker Fatih Akin) strive for a more realistic portrayal of the ethnolect and its speakers. In this regard, they resemble German-Jewish writers of “ghetto literature,” who likewise used marked Jewish speech in order to achieve a greater degree of realism.17 Not unlike some authors of ghetto literature (such as Karl Emil Franzos), Zaimoğlu positions himself in the introduction to Kanak Sprak as participant-observer ethnographer, an insider-outsider among the Kanaken (he is Turkish-German but university-educated). He stresses the authenticity of the texts in his anthology and the language in which they are rendered, referring to the texts in his anthology as “protocols” that are “the product of ‘detective’ investigations.” A few

pages later, however, he qualifies that he did not merely record the texts—they are “translations” or “free renderings [Nachdichtungen]” designed to create a “self-contained, visible, and therefore ‘authentic’ portrait of the language.”

Notably, the German into which Zaimoğlu “translates” the ethnolect remains far from the standard. It is a new literary language situated between the actual ethnolect and standard German. This sort of translation is reminiscent of early 20th century German-Jewish translators’ translations of Yiddish literary texts into non-standard German. Sander Gilman notes, for example, that Martin Buber, who was “struck by the extraordinary difficulty that he was having in capturing the essence of Pinski’s language in German,” began to devise in his translation of Pinski’s Eisik Scheftel a positively figured “literary Mauscheln.” Bertha Pappenheim likewise avoided standard German in her translation of the Zeenah u-Reënah, arguing that the language of the original was indispensable to the work’s charm, “an attempt to Germanize [it] would be a sin against the spirit of the Zeenah u-Reënah.” Her translations were not, however, merely transliterations from Hebrew to Latin script as one reviewer suggested but an “old-new language” that was, like Zaimoğlu’s “free renderings,” accessible to German readers without sacrificing the distinct character of the ethnolect.

Zaimoğlu’s transformation of “the language of the marginalized into a plausible literary vehicle” bears a resemblance to the work of German Jewish Yiddishists who sought to counteract the common opinion (held by Jews

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18Zaimoğlu writes that a challenge of translating Kanak Sprak is that “language alone” must also capture “gesticulation” (Zaimoğlu, Kanak Sprak, p. 18). The notion that a specific code of gesture is an essential part of a language or ethnolect applies also to Mauscheln, which Sander Gilman defines as “the use of altered syntax and bits of Hebrew vocabulary and a specific pattern of gestures to represent the spoken language of the Jews. What is stressed is the specifically Jewish intonation, the mode of articulation as well as the semantic context” (Sander L. Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], p. 139).

19Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred, p. 276.


and non-Jews alike) that Yiddish was an inferior jargon not worthy of the moniker Kultursprache [language of culture]. Their arguments in defense of Yiddish varied as widely as their respective ideologies. In 1916, the German Neo-Orthodox theologian Joseph Wohlgemuth argued that dialects, not the artificial construct standard German, were the “real” German and that Yiddish should be viewed as a “full-blooded” German dialect, whose literature deserved the same respect as the Mecklenburger Low German dialect literature of the popular author Fritz Reuter. Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews, whom Germans were encountering in increasing numbers both at home and on the Eastern front of World War I, were thereby transformed into German patriots, who had lovingly preserved their “German” native tongue after being driven out of German lands.24 That same year, Moses Calvary, in an essay in the Cultural Zionist journal Der Jude rejected the notion that Yiddish was not a gebildete (educated, learned, and cultivated) national language but merely a German dialect like Reuter’s Mecklenburger Low German. He demonstrates (with examples from Yiddish literature) both how “un-German” and how stylistically sophisticated Yiddish was, concluding that it was a capable vehicle for literary and scientific discourse and up to the task of being a national Jewish language.25

Zaimoğlu’s characterization of Kanak Sprak, however, would hardly seem appropriate for legitimizing the ethnolect as a cultivated literary language:

[The Kanaken] have long since developed an underground-code and speak their own jargon: Kanak Sprak, a sort of creole or argot/thieves’ cant [Rotwelsch] with secret codes and signs. . . . The Kanake’s verbal power expresses itself in an expulsive, short-winded, hybrid stammering without period or comma, with arbitrarily placed pauses and improvised expressions. The Kanake speaks his mother tongue only imperfectly, and his command of “Almanisch” is limited. His vocabulary is comprised of gibberized words and expressions that exist in neither language. . . . He embellishes his free-style sermon with gestures and facial expressions.26

Indeed, Zaimoğlu’s description of Kanak Sprak bears a strong resemblance to Germans’ negative perceptions of Yiddish and of Jewish speech in general, for example: that Jews spoke a hidden or secret language; that the degeneracy or criminality of Jews was linked to their mixed (i.e., “corrupt”) lan-

26Zaimoğlu, Kanak Sprak, p. 13.
guage, an assumption that was undergirded by the popular association or even conflation of Yiddish with thieves’ cant; that Jews were incapable of speaking German as natives; and (since Yiddish was a Jargon and not a language) devoid of a real mother tongue;²⁷ that non-verbal communication, gesturing, is an integral and distinctive part of Jewish speech; and that Jewish speech is defective (i.e., Jews stammer, lisp, etc.).²⁸ One might counter that contemporary German audiences would no longer recognize the markers of stereotypical Jewish speech. There is, however, evidence to the contrary: Martin Walser’s novel Tod eines Kritikers [Death of a Critic] employs stereotyped Jewish speech in the portrayal of the literary critic Ehrl-König,²⁹ who is a thinly-veiled portrait of Walser’s nemesis, German Jewish critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki.³⁰ Another example of the use of marked Jewish speech in contemporary German culture is

²⁷The notion that young ethnolect speakers are without language is apparently widespread among German educators, especially in the Hauptschule, the lowest school in Germany’s three-tier secondary school system. Uta Keseling writes: “For many of the young people, all languages are actually foreign ones. They really don’t have any language at all. In an average Hauptschule, a large percentage of the students not only hardly speak German, but they know just as little about their respective native languages. . . . What should one call the language that Ms. S.’s students speak? Mishmash? Pidgin-German? Kanakisch—like they call it themselves? Maybe they have hardly ever spoken very much at all at their whole lives” (Uta Keseling, “Wie lange dauert das noch—so halbe Stunde? Deutschunterricht in einer Hauptschulklasse—Doch die 30 Schüler beherrschen weder Deutsch noch ihre Muttersprachen—Und die Lehrerin verzweifelt [How much longer—about half hour? German class in a Hauptschule—But the 30 students here have mastered neither German nor their native languages—And the teacher is at her wits’ end],” Berliner Morgenpost, August 27, 2003. http://www.morgenpost.de/content/2003/08/27/berlin/625375.html.

²⁸See Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred. See also Sophie Baum, ”Richtig sprechen, eine Förderung unserer Zeit [Speaking correctly, our times demand it],” Frankfurter Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt, Vol. 14, No. 11 (August 1936): 433; Hannah Zweig, letter to the editor, C.V.-Zeitung 10.22 (May 29, 1931). Baum and Zweig (who was an assistant for speech training and elocution at a German university) urge German Jews to fight antisemitism by avoiding overly animated facial expressions and ridding their speech of supposedly Jewish speech defects.

²⁹This is an allusion to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem “Der Erlkönig.” In German and Danish folklore the “Erlkönig” is an omen of death. The use of the name suggests that bad reviews from this critic can mean “death” for an author’s career. However, in the poem the Erlkönig is not just an omen; rather, he takes a dying child “by force.” Given the marking of the critic as Jewish via other antisemitic stereotypes, this could easily be an allusion to the blood libel myth.

³⁰Martin Walser, Tod eines Kritikers (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002). I am grateful to Dagmar C. G. Lorenz for alerting me to this.
the portrayal of the character Thomas in the film *Go for Zucker!*, which won last year’s German Film Prize and has been touted as the first post-Holocaust German-Jewish film comedy.\(^{31}\) When Thomas (a virgin) tells his mother that he is “different,” she mistakenly assumes that he is gay. Perhaps his uncircumcised penis is the “difference” to which he refers and the root of his sexual inhibitions; but we are never told whether he has been circumcised (his mother is not Jewish and his father, who identifies more with the defunct German Democratic Republic than with his Jewish heritage, is not religious)—his only discernible difference is his stuttering.

Androutsopoulos attributes the introduction of the ethnolect into mainstream German pop culture to Moritz Bleibtreu’s portrayal of the Turkish gangster Abdul in the 1997 film *Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door* and the radio show *Taxi Sharia*, whose catch-phrase “wo du wolle [where wanna you go?]” spoken by the main-character, the Turkish taxi-driver Ützwurst (portrayed by Sascha Zeus), has become a popular bumper sticker.\(^{32}\) These comedies paved the way for an entire genre, *Kanakcomedy*, whose representatives include: 1) The Frankfurter Comedy-Duo Mundstuhl’s (Lars Niedereichholz and Ande Werner) characters Dragan und Alder,\(^ {33}\) 2) The Munich Comedy duo Erkan und Stefan (Erkan Maria Moosleitner and Stefan Lust), who appear on radio and television, and popular action comedy feature films;\(^ {34}\) 3) Comedian Matze Knop’s character Richie;\(^ {35}\) 4) Turkish-German comedian Kaya Yanar’s SAT-1-Sendung *Was guckst du?!* (Whatcha lookin’ at?), which features characters from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including the Turkish bouncer Hakan and the Indian Ranjid,\(^ {36}\) and 5) Michael Freidank’s *Bild-Zeitung* series

\(^{31}\) Dani Levy, dir., *Alles auf Zucker!* © 2004 X-Filme and WDR. Jackie Zucker’s sister-in-law Golda is the only figure who speaks with a Yiddish accent. She is played by Golda Tencer, an actor from Warsaw’s Jewish theater and a well-known performer of Yiddish song.


\(^{33}\) Mundstuhl’s CD recordings and touring schedule are listed on their Web site: http://www.mundstuhl.de/ (accessed February 9, 2006).


“Voll krasse Kanakisch [literally: totally extreme kanakisch],” and his series of Kanakisch publications in Eichbornverlag. These range from “language courses” and phrase-books to Kanakisch renderings of German fairy-tales. The majority of cultural products within the Kanakcomedy rubric reinforce negative stereotypes of migrants in Germany (especially Turkish and Balkan males) as misogynistic; macho; over-sexed; prone to criminal activity, violence, and drug use; and primitive and un- or undereducated. Freidank’s “textbook” Kanakisch-Deutsch states, for example: “The vocabulary of Kanakisch consists of about 300 words. About 1/3 are obscenities of the fecal or sexual varieties, another 1/3 are devoted to makes, models, and varieties of automobiles.”

Richie’s on-line resume reads:

Mother: Fatima
Father: Lorenzo, Francesco or Enzo ...
Pre-School: Green Group. Expelled for robbery of the mini-mart
School: Remedial
Career Training: Mechanic (not completed), Pizza-baker (flunked out), Successfully completed apprenticeship in shopping cart retrieval and parking.

Because minority Germans’ use of the term Kanake as self-ascription destigmatized the slur and lifted the taboo against it use, and minority artists’ use of the ethnolect and ethnic stereotypes in their own work was likewise interpreted as tacit permission for non-minorities to do the same, non-minority Kanak-comedians have come to see their work as hip anti- or post-political-correctness. Mundstuhl’s website asserts, for example, that their skits are “anything but contemptuous of minorities.” Confronted in a radio interview about the discriminatory character of the word Kanake, Michael Freidank, the Kanakisch expert who claims to have acquired his knowledge of the ethnolect by eavesdropping on the subway replied, “That was once upon a time. I never would have used [the word] were that still the case.” According to Mu-

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37 These include, among others: Michael Freidank, Kanakisch-Deutsch: Dem krasses ten Sprakbuch übernhaupt (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 2001); Michael Freidank, Wem ist dem geilste Tuss im Land? Märchen auf Kanakisch (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 2001); Michael Freidank, Dem Tuss fick isch! Flirten und Baggern auf Kanakisch (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 2002).
40 Quoted in Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, p. 168.
rat Güngor and Hannes Loh, the reception of *Kanakcomedy* among minority Germans in the German HipHop scene is mixed. While their informants are largely critical of *Kanakcomedy* by non-minority performers (Richie, Stefan und Erkan, and Mundstuhl, in particular), Kaya Yanar enjoys a large degree of popularity.\(^{41}\) Inken Keim documents that the young ethnolect speakers whom she observed consciously and purposefully integrate elements of *Kanakisch* (the medial dialect) into their speech repertoire.\(^{42}\) This would indicate that they are active, and approving, consumers of the *Kanakcomedy* genre.\(^{43}\)

Native speakers of German with no minority or immigrant background have likewise borrowed elements of the medial ethnolect, creating a tertiary ethnolect. Androutsopolous conjectures that their use of the tertiary ethnolect is less an act of blatant racism than a demonstration of pop-cultural literacy or a means to build community based on common pop-cultural knowledge. While most of Androutsopolous’s informants report that they use *Kanakisch* “just for fun,” and many examples are benign (use of discursive markers such as *krass*, *korrekt*, etc. instead of other previously favored slang words; the use of *Lan* or *Alter* to address friends in informal contexts), Androutsopolous concedes that there is sometimes latent racism at work. Like jokes in Mock Spanish made by English-speaking, monolingual, non-Hispanic Americans, jokes in *Kanakisch* frequently reinforce negative stereotypes of the minority group.

Androutsopolous cites the example of a young man who says to a female friend: “correct character”—in the Stefan und Erkan variety of *Kanakisch*, this would translate as “nice tits.” The recipient of the “compliment” interprets it as a joke, because she knows that the speaker would normally not address a woman with such vulgarities. This implies, however, that an ethnolect speaker might.\(^{44}\)

It is not a coincidence that the inception and immense popularity of *Kanakcomedy* coincided with the reform of Germany’s Nationality Law and


\(^{43}\) Kaya Yanar’s comedy could be compared to Jargon parodies and humorous Jargon phrase-books written for German-Jewish readers. See Gold, “Gentleman”; Weinberg, *Reste*; and Amy Blau, “Das Lied vun die Kuggel: German and Yiddish Schiller parodies” (paper, German Studies Association Conference, Milwaukee, 2005).

\(^{44}\) Androutsopolous, “Ultra korregd Alder,” p. 14. A pendant to *Kanak* comedy is *Kanak* Chic (a term used by Hito Steyerl, Mark Terkessidis and others). Suffering what Tom Cheesman aptly calls “diversity envy,” young German intellectuals weaned on Anglo-American Cultural and Post-colonial Studies and interested in Black and Asian novelists,
the discussion and adoption of Germany’s first ever Immigration Law, which is slowly bringing an end to the long-lived political fairy-tale that Germany was not a “land of immigration.” Because Germany’s long-standing use of *ius sanguinis* (blood principle) in determining citizenship was being augmented with *ius soli* (place of birth principle), the difference between “BioGermans” and the progeny of immigrants would no longer be officially signified by possession of the German passport. One reaction to these reforms, which effectively changed the definition of “German,” was Friedrich Merz’s (the leader of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union parliamentary group in the Bundestag) October 2000 proposal that immigrants be required to conform to a German *Leitkultur*. Certainly due in no small part to the *Leitkultur* debates, provisions for required integration courses for some new immigrants (and foreign residents already residing in German, who were deemed to need them) were part of the 2004/5 Immigration Act. *Kanakcomedy*, on the other hand, offers not a means to integrate new Germans but a means to re-draw musicians, and film-makers from other countries were intent on “discovering” their very own “bright, young, non-white, hybrid Germans.” Zaimoğlu, Tyrone Ricketts, and numerous other talented immigrant and minority artists, entertainers, and models have benefited from this trend (Cheesman, “Akçam—Zaimoğlu,” pp. 181–182).


47In 2002 Bavarian Minister of the Interior Günther Beckstein (Christian Social Union) defined *Leitkultur* in more concrete terms, demanding, “[Every immigrant] must recognize our Western civilization, which is shaped by Christianity, Enlightenment, and Humanism—otherwise he has no business being here (quoted in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 1, 2002). The *Leitkultur* debate raged on for about three years and lay dormant until Fall 2004, when it resurfaced in the context of discussions of Turkey’s entrance into the EU. The second round of *Leitkultur* debate also coincided with the final approval and impending implementation of the Immigration Law.
the borders by focusing on linguistic difference. On the one hand the political incorrectness of Kanakcomedy purports to reflect a normalization of relations between Germany and its minorities: There is no need to step on egg-shells, it’s all in fun, and we’re laughing together. Tom Cheesman, while certainly not uncritical of Kanakcomedy, recognizes its merits:

The fact that such a proletarian and multi-ethnically coded language has taken root in the German entertainment industry does at least imply a domestication of ethnic difference as material for a humor that is neither embarrassed nor aggressive. Certainly this popular culture, based on a commercial fusion of transnational music and film genres with local colours, is the antithesis of the “German Leitkultur” imagined by conservative politicians.48

Despite this subversive potential, Kanakcomedy calls attention (especially via language) to the distinctions that threatened to become blurred or erased by political reform. Consumers of Kanakcomedy are reassured that even though Kanaken have German passports, they are still recognizably different from the genuine article.

The way that Kanakisch functions in Kanakcomedy is reminiscent of the way that Yiddish or stereotyped Jewish speech functioned in antisemitic literature, comedy, caricature, film, and propaganda from as early as the beginning of the 19th century through the National Socialist period. As German Jews (and later Eastern European Jewish immigrants) assimilated into German culture by shedding (at least for public use) remnants of Yiddish from their speech, many Turkish Germans and other migrants have also viewed the acquisition of non-accented standard German as a ticket to acceptance and social and economic advancement. Indeed, contemporary immigrants would be justified in assuming that mastering the German language is the ticket to integration into and acceptance by German society—600 hours of the 630-hour federally legislated integration course are devoted to German language instruction.

When Jews, like today’s middle-class educated and naturalized immigrants, became increasingly indistinguishable from “genuine” Germans, antisemitic portrayals of Jews reinstated difference by portraying Jewish speech as different, either non-standard or missing the mark by being hyper-standard (i.e., lacking regional specificity).49 One such portrayal was Karl Borromäus Alexander Sessa’s wildly successful dramatic farce Unser Verkehr [Our Crowd]

49Jewish speakers of German tended toward supralectal German (a supraregional speech free of identifiable dialect features). Karl Kraus’s hyperlectalism is just one example
Sessa’s figures speak several varieties of German, ranging on a scale from a German imitation of Yiddish to a German that misses the mark by being too perfect, too formal. The farce reaches its climax when all of the Jewish characters, regardless of how they otherwise speak, respond to an unexpected shock (the loss of a fortune) in a chorus of “ai wah.” Like Kanakcomedy, Our Crowd appeared at a politically auspicious moment—close on the heels of the Prussian Emancipation Edict of 1812—just in time to reassure Germans that Jews remained different despite legal emancipation.

Although many German Jews in the first decades of the twentieth century reacted to antisemitic portrayals of Jewish speech with overcompensation, struggling to rid their speech of identifiably Jewish markers, others embraced Yiddish, the scorned language attributed to them, and the culture of its speakers, contributing to what Steven Aschheim has called a “Cult of Eastern European Jewry.” The embrace of Yiddish and Eastern European Jewry by German and Austrian Jews was part of a larger trend of dissimilation that began in the late 19th century with the Zionist movement and other Jewish nationalist and


German-Jewish writers have also employed stereotyped Jewish speech in parody. Max Jungmann (the editor of the Jewish humor magazine Der Schlemiel), for example, mocked German nationalist Jews’ hyper-Germanophilia and anti-Zionism in a parody protocol of a “Deutscher Judentag” [Day of German Jews], published in the Zionist journal Die Welt. In the protocol, the meeting chairman and other delegates attempt to silence the pro-Zionist remarks of delegate Geigenbaum-Eydtkühnen, who speaks a Pseudo-Yiddish that the chairperson characterizes as the “hodgepodge that is the idiom of uneducated foreigners” (Max Jungmann, “Der deutsche Judentag,” Die Welt, Vol. 5, No. 10 (March 8, 1901): 10–11. I thank Sander L. Gilman for this example.


Steven E. Aschheim, Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).
Yiddishist movements (Bundism, territorialism, diaspora nationalism, etc.). Similarly, Zaimoğlu and others (most notably the pan-ethnic anti-racist cultural and political activist organization Kanak Attak), recognizing the failure of assimilationist strategies for Turkish-Germans and other immigrants and minority groups, have embraced the language and anti-assimilatory stance of the Kanake. Zaimoğlu compares the positive revaluation of the term Kanake and the ethnolect to the “Black consciousness movement’s” reclamation and revaluation of the N-word and Black English. However, one need not look overseas for a model of how members of a discriminated minority group have embraced and revalued both the racial slur and the derided ethnic “Jargon” (the German-Jewish word for Yiddish) ascribed to them. One can look backward to the history of German-speaking Jews, for example the monumental 1908 Czernowitz Yiddish conference (proposed by Nathan Birnbaum, a German speaker, who learned Yiddish later in life) or Franz Kafka’s interest in Yiddish language and theater. Or to the establishment of two German-Jewish journals (Leo Winz and Davis Trietsch’s Ost und West, and Martin Buber’s Cultural Zionist journal Der Jude), which published Yiddish literature in German translation and sought to awaken in German Jews a sense of solidarity with Eastern European Jewry. Indeed, Buber’s choice of the title Der Jude, which


54It is important to note that Kanak Attak is a pan-ethnic movement that seeks to counteract “identitarian” politics, whereas the so-called Cult of Eastern European Jewry was just the opposite, part of an attempt to re-ethnicize German Jews. They nevertheless are similar in other ways: they both seek to transcend East-West borders and class divisions; their embrace of stigmatized identities is a defiant response to discrimination; and both are projects of an intellectual or cultural elite, and as such, a one-sided embrace not necessarily reciprocated whole-heartedly by the “genuine” Jews and Kanaken.

55Zaimoğlu, Kanak Sprak, p. 17.


57David Brenner, Marketing Identities The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in “Ost und West” (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).
was viewed by many “German citizens of the Mosaic faith” as a slur, is easily as provocative as Zaimoğlu’s and Kanak Attak’s use of the word Kanake.⁵⁸

As noted above, the reclamation of the slur Kanake as a positive self-ascription is inseparable from the importation of HipHop music and culture to Germany. Self-described Kanaken liken their use of the word to African-Americans’ use of the word “niggah”; Feridun Zaimoğlu compared the speech of the Kanaken whose monologues are recorded in Kanak Sprak to the “Free-Style Sermon in Rap”,⁵⁹ and HipHop provides the “soundtrack” for the work of Kanak Attak, the cross-ethnic anti-racist network with which Zaimoğlu has been closely allied, but also for Kanakcomedy.⁶⁰ Conversely, not only minority language (the ethnolect) but also minority culture (HipHop culture, in particular) are parodied in Kanakcomedy. Because the development of the ethnolect is inseparable from the story of HipHop in Germany, the remainder of my essay will focus on the German naturalization of the HipHop music, comparing it to Germans’ embrace of klezmer music, the music of Yiddish culture.

HipHop and klezmer were both imported to Germany from the United States in the early to mid-80s.⁶¹ Mainstream interest in klezmer dates to

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⁵⁹ Zaimoğlu, Kanak Sprak, p. 13.

⁶⁰ According to Tom Cheesman, HipHoppers of Germany’s “old school” are prominent in Kanak Attak. “Dieser Song gehört uns [This is our song],” which could be read as the Kanak Attak rap anthem, was the theme song of the organization’s first major conference (of the same name), which was held at the Berlin Volksbühne; and HipHop music by Kanak Attak members and sympathizers has been a prominent feature of that and subsequent events (Cheesman, “Talking Kanak,” p. 91). See also event programs on the Kanak Attak web site, http://www.kanak-attak.de/ (accessed March 7, 2006).

⁶¹ Although wide-spread interest in Klezmer dates to the mid-80s, the “rediscovery” of Yiddish music by much smaller segments of the postwar German population, both in East and West Germany, has a longer history, dating to the immediate post-war years. One segment of the pre-80s reception of Yiddish music deserves especial mention here, namely the reception of Yiddish music by German proponents of the international folk music movement in the 1960s and 70s, who were unable to embrace their own national folk music, because it was tainted through National Socialist misuse. With the motto “Wir dürfen den Gamsbart nicht den Rechten überlassen [We can’t leave the Gamsbart (lit., a tuft of hair from a chamois used as a hat decoration in traditional costumes. Fig. German folk tradition] to the Far Right],” Peter Rohland and the Kröher Brothers searched archives and pre-1933 song collections in search of German roots music pre-dating National Socialism. Because

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1984, when the American klezmer band Kapelye toured Germany, and Israeli clarinetist Giora Feidman performed in Peter Zadek's Berlin production of Joshua Sobel's *Ghetto*. Soon thereafter Feidman began touring Germany with a performance repertoire of klezmer and Yiddish songs, Hassidic melodies, Israeli songs and dance music, international folk music, tango, Gershwin, and classical music; and in the early 1990s he added klezmer workshops to his offerings. Kapelye was followed by other acts from the American klezmer revival, including the Klezmatics in 1988 and Brave Old World in 1991. The members of Brave Old World likewise offered workshops for klezmer-hungry German musicians. With the dual (and dueling) workshop offerings of Brave Old World and Feidman, two distinct camps developed within the burgeoning German klezmer movement. In the spirit of the klezmer revival in the United States, the Brave Old World workshops sought to transmit klezmer as Jewish roots music. They emphasized klezmer's embeddedness in Eastern European Jewish culture, specifically its role as dance music in the context of Jewish weddings and celebrations; and they stressed the importance of studying historic recordings to assimilate the characteristic klezmer style. For Feidman, on the other hand rejected the use of the term klezmer to indicate a specific musical style rooted in a specific cultural and historical context. For Feidman, the Yiddish language originated in Germany, Yiddish folk songs were embraced as "German in essence." The most notable products of German folk's interest in Yiddish folk songs are Peter Rohland's "Lieder der Ostjuden I, II" in 1968 and 1971 and Zupfgeigenhansl's 1979 LP "chob gehert sogn—Jiddische Lieder." Released the same year that the U.S. mini-series *Holocaust* was aired on German television, Zupfgeigenhansl's LP generated mainstream interest outside the bounds of the countercultural, political folk movement (Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* [Berkeley: University of California, 2002], pp. 203–205). See also Heiko Lehmann, "Klezmer in Germany/Germans and Klezmer: Reparation or Contribution," Sukke Web site, http://www.sukke.de/lecture.html (accessed February 13, 2006); Aaron Eckstaedt, "Klaus mit der Fidel, Heike mit dem Bass . . .": *Jiddische Musik in Deutschland* (Berlin: Philo-verlag, 2003); Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).


klezmer was a universal musical language that united all peoples—klezmer was “authentic” when it expressed the “inner voice” of the musician. Feidman explained his quasi-mystical approach, which is loosely rooted in Hassidic and Kabbalistic tradition to Ruth Ellen Gruber: “The role of klezmer is to be the holy glue to bring society to what we were born to be—one human family. . . . Through the music of what I call klezmer, I have been successful in infiltrating myself into the healing process between Germans and Jews.” With this approach, Feidman became the “guru” of one contingent of the German klezmer movement, but he has also garnered severe criticism. Gruber charges that his message is a “deliberate strategy” to ensure him a full touring schedule in Germany.64 Alan Bern of Brave Old World rejects Feidman’s universalization of klezmer: “I feel that people’s feelings of guilt and need for forgiveness are getting loaded on to a sort of contentless idea. For me what’s a problem, too, is that the entire culture is being made to disappear along with that. It’s as if the Jews didn’t have anything to do with klezmer music. To approach it that way, it’s like a second destruction of the culture.”65

Although German klezmer performers and audiences are a diverse group,66 most klezmer music in post-reunification Germany falls into three categories:

1) Jewish roots music. Klezmer has provided some younger Jews in Germany, especially descendants of Eastern European Jews and D.P.s, as well as recent Russian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants, a means to reconnect with their Jewish roots, just as it had for young American Jews of the klezmer revival.67 Some German Jews, however, have distanced themselves from the German klezmer craze, because they are critical of Feidmann’s dehistoricization and dejudaization of klezmer, or of the reduction of all Jewish culture to the cliché of a laughing-crying klezmer melody. Some German-Jewish musicians have even reported feeling unwelcome or marginalized in the

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64Gruber, Virtually Jewish, pp. 211–13.
65Quoted in Gruber, Virtually Jewish, p. 213.
66For interviews with a wide variety of Jewish and non-Jewish German klezmer performers see Eckstaedt, Klaus mit der Fiedel. See also “Virtual Klezmer,” http://www.klezmer.de/D_Klezmer/D_Links/d_links.html (accessed February 14, 2006). “Virtual Klezmer” currently offers links to the Web-sites of 64 German klezmer bands, as well as an essay on klezmer in Germany, concert and event listings, and a very active discussion board.
largely non-Jewish German klezmer scene, especially if they failed to fulfill their colleagues’ preconceptions of Jewishness.\textsuperscript{68}

2) Klezmer as individual or public \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung} (mastering the past, the term refers almost exclusively to the Holocaust). Some non-Jewish German klezmer musicians view their engagement with klezmer as a way to make reparations or heal wounds by salvaging and preserving, or even contributing, to the culture that was decimated by their parents’ or grandparents’ generation. Alongside these individual acts of \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung}, klezmer and Yiddish song have also become ritualized components of \textit{Kristallnacht} anniversary and other official Holocaust remembrance ceremonies.\textsuperscript{69}

3) Klezmer as \textit{W}orld \textit{M}usic. Klezmer has also been subsumed into the larger category of “world music,” which in Germany plays an integral role in public demonstrations of liberal multiculturalism and anti-racism. As the music of Germany’s quintessential persecuted other, klezmer music was featured in demonstrations against acts of violence against other minorities, especially Turks in the early 1990s. Some individuals view performing or even listening to klezmer as a personal statement of support for multiculturalism and tolerance.\textsuperscript{70}

Because the concept of “world music” de-emphasizes the cultural specificity of the musical traditions subsumed therein, the categorization of klezmer as world music has opened it up to experimentation and multiple fusions, such as those practiced by the German band NUNU!, which describes its music as follows:

Mambo in the Carpathians, Blues on the Black Sea, Cowboys at the Bazaar, swinging sylans, the rebbe’s rap—NUNU! Brings the most diverse musical worlds together to create a unique harmony transcending the “Ethnic Boom” and the whims of fashion. Inspired by the diversity and vitality of Jewish and Eastern European music traditions, the six musicians meld folklore and Jazz, East and West. . . . With virtuosity, playfulness, and fun . . . NUNU! creates a world of sound with a unique allure while preserving the soul of the traditional music.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68}Eckstaedt, \textit{Klaus mit der Fiedel}, p. 291.


\textsuperscript{70}Gruber, \textit{Virtually Jewish}, pp. 185–186, 218.

The irony of German klezmer—that the country that once sought to destroy Jewish culture would one day become one of the largest markets for Eastern European Jewish culture—is not lost on its performers. Some artists, whether self-reflexively or defiantly, have chosen band names or CD titles that draw attention to their lack of Jewish pedigree, such as the Klezgoys, the Klezmgershicksen, or the T'angoys, or the band Huljet's CD “The Goj Group.” One southern German band, Zwetschgendatschi (Bavarian for plum cake), took a different tack by choosing a name that reflected not what they are not, but what they are: Bavarians. According to one critic, the band melds Jewish dance music with “a Bavarian joy in playing music,” creating a sound that “breathes folk-dance, folk festival, sow-dance.” The language of this review implies a radical “naturalization” of Jewish music, but it is a Bavarianization rather than a Germanization. Interestingly, the members of Zwetschgendatschi also perform in a “working band” offshoot, Reiberdatschi (the Bavarian version of a latke).

Despite the use of klezmer as an overt personal expression of anti-racism and in public (sometimes official) displays of Jewish-German reconciliation or Holocaust remembrance, German klezmer is not free of antisemitism. Rita Ottens notes, for example, that klezmer has served as an “auditory pictogram” in German television, where it used to signal the Jewishness of diverse historical and contemporary personalities. Because klezmer is applied without regard to the figures’ self-identification as Jews or their cultural origins (Eastern, Western, Ashkenazim, Sephardim), it serves essentially as a “racial” stamp, like the yellow star. Ottens notes that even some Holocaust or Kristallnacht commemoration events featuring klezmer performances have perpetuated antisemitic stereotypes. A Berlin event commemorating the 53rd anniversary of Kristallnacht, for example, was advertised with a leaflet entitled “The Eastern Jews Are Among Us,” which featured a drawing of an Eastern European man with stereotypical features. According to Ottens, the portrayal of the figure, who watches a group of musicians from a distance while rubbing his hands, invokes the stereotypical “lurking slyness” and sexual deviancy of the Eastern

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73 In Bavarian, a Volksfest refers to outdoor festivals like the Munich Oktoberfest that feature food and drink (often in beer tents), Bavarian and German dance and drinking music, and other entertainment.
74 The Sautanz is a traditional Bavarian folk dance. The word can also refer to a traditional pig roast featuring food, drink, music, and dancing.
European Jewish male. Ottens notes that even an academic expert in music pedagogy who advocated the use of klezmer in political (especially anti-racist) education was not entirely immune from stereotype. In a review of Ottens’s and her husband’s writings on klezmer in Germany, Wolfgang Martin Stroh cautions: “Rubin/Ottens’s assessment of the current development is prejudiced; because, as producer and musician, they are not only interested in their personal message but are also interested in the conquest of German market shares.” Ottens observes that this echoes stereotypes that Jews are self-interested, “power- and money-hungry,” and intent on invading and conquering Germany. Aaron Eckstaedt confirms that the “cliché of Eastern European life that is disseminated through klezmer sometimes comes dangerously close to anti-Semitic stereotypes.”

Whereas klezmer has undoubtedly offered many German musicians and listeners the opportunity for thoughtful engagement with their country’s or families’ past or for dialogue and collaboration with Jews, some German klezmer musicians have used their engagement with klezmer to assume the role of outsider within or victim of an imagined (Jewish) klezmer establishment—turning the tables on the victim-perpetrator relationship between Germans and Jews. The non-Jewish German klezmer musicians that Aaron Eckstaedt interviewed frequently expressed their frustration with having to justify their right to play klezmer or their motives for doing so. One female interviewee responded defensively: “Because it’s my music, and I love playing it. . . . Would you ask me the same question if I played jazz or Irish music? . . . The Jew Menuhin plays the Protestant Bach!” Rita Ottens reports that the German promoters of the Polish band Kroke distributed a flyer accusing Ottens and Rubin of acting as a “klezmer police . . . attempting to establish themselves . . . as the musical definers and only legitimate guardians of Jewish cultural traditions.”

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78 Eckstaedt, Klaus mit der Fiedel, p. 61.
79 Eckstaedt, Klaus mit der Fiedel, pp. 181–182.
80 Ottens is German and Rubin is Jewish and American.
81 Ottens, “Sounds of the Vanishing World,” p. 46. The dispute began after Ottens and Rubin had identified Kroke in one of their publications as a non-Jewish band. The band’s members, however, identify themselves as Jewish.
HipHop entered German youth culture in the early 1980s (at roughly the same time as Klezmer) with a relatively short-lived break-dance craze inspired by two American HipHop films, *Wild Style* and *Beat Street.* While the break-dance fad crossed racial and social class boundaries for a short time, middle-class white German youth soon lost interest. Break dance, along with other aspects of HipHop culture (especially rap and graffiti), became the cultural territory of the *Jugendhäuser* (youth centers), the bastion of young people from the urban social and educational under-classes, especially immigrant youth, who were attracted to HipHop as a means of positive self-expression and social critique.

In the early 1990s, HipHop re-entered the middle-class white consciousness with the advent of a new genre, *Deutschrap.* The moniker *Deutschrap* had less to do with the music’s country of origin or the language of the rap texts than with its young, mostly white “BioGerman” makers’ post-*Wende* search for a new positive and unapologetically German identity. This search is exemplified by the 1991 Hip Hop anthology, *Krauts with Attitude: German HipHop* Vol. 1 (Michael Reinboth). Inside its black, red, and gold cover, the liner notes amount to a *Deutschrap* manifesto:

As thrilling as such places are, we simply don’t have a South Compton or Brooklyn—and that might just be a good thing. And this is for you—all of you wannabe-Ice-Ts, super-cool fashion victims, and hardcore B-boys: playing the gangster here in Germany is more embarrassing than it is cool. . . . It’s time for us to counter the Brits and Americans’ self-confidence. . . . It was hard enough for us as non-Americans and pale-faces to be accepted in Hip Hop. I think the major labels, who say they can’t sell Hip Hop albums without a negro, are to blame for this. They say that Snap, Splash, etc. work only when you have a blackie as poster-boy.

Although the title “Krauts with Attitude” is a clear allusion to an American West Coast role-model, Niggaz with Attitude, the liner notes express German rappers’ desire to distance themselves from the implied tyranny of Afri-

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83 In contemporary Germany, *Wende* refers to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.
84 Black, red, and gold are the colors of the German flag. Overt signs of patriotism, such as exhibiting a German flag for other than official purposes, were not commonplace in Germany prior to 1989.
85 Quoted in Güngör and Loh, *Fear of a Kanak Planet,* p. 306. Snap and Splash are music festivals.
can-American musical forefathers (or a faceless music industry that demands racial authenticity). If Niggaz with Attitude was the revolt of a repressed minority against a white establishment, then Krauts with Attitude positions the “Krauts” (a derogatory term that typically refers to German soldiers, in particular) as the repressed but newly defiant victim. The notion that German HipHop is occupied and controlled by a Black HipHop establishment recalls the occupation of Germany by black American soldiers after the second world war. It is also analogous to German klezmer performers’ complaints of a Jewish klezmer establishment’s attempts to disallow or discredit non-Jewish German participation in klezmer music. By positioning white Deutschrap against black or ethnic American and British rap, Reinboth also obscures the existence in Germany of Rap by migrants or minorities, as well as the German ghettos (literal and figurative) from which it emerged. The desire to liberate white German HipHop from its roots in the American urban ghetto, coupled here with the erasure of German rap’s minority participants, likewise resembles German klezmer musicians’ “occupation” of the supposedly vacant Jewish space of klezmer music.

By 1992, with Die fantastischen Vier’s break-out platinum album Vier gewinnt [the German name for the Milton Bradley game Connect Four], Deutschrap had arrived. The album’s hit single “Die da [That girl, there],” a dialogue between two friends who discover that they are dating the same girl, was representative of Deutschrap, which according to Güngör and Loh was and is dominated by “Good mood lyrics about women, parties, and boozing,” and staunchly apolitical. German-language rap that addressed social injustice or thematized racism and xenophobia, such as Advanced Chemistry’s “underground” hit “Fremd im eigenen Land (A Stranger/Foreigner in My Own Land)” of the same year, would henceforth be pigeon-holed as Betroffenheitsrap (rap that is an expression of concern or consternation), or Multikultirap. In

86Die fantastischen Vier, Vier Gewinnt, © 1992 Col/Sony BMG.

87Güngör and Loh note that, although the Fantas were programmatically and vocally apolitical, they did not remain entirely silent about the neo-Nazi violence of 1992. The short track “Hört Euch den hier an (Listen to this guy),” exhorts listeners: “Stop shaving your heads and marching down the streets. We can’t risk isolating ourselves again. When cultures collide, you can’t discriminate. You have to inform yourself to find your way.” The Neo-Nazi violence of that year is termed a “collision of cultures,” an expression that implies that the innocent victims were somehow responsible, as participants in a two-way culture war, for the uninstitigated violence against them. Neo-Nazism is rejected not on account of moral outrage but by virtue of political/economic pragmatism (Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, p. 309).
the mainstream consciousness, it was relegated to anti-Nazi demonstrations and festivals celebrating Germany’s “ausländische Mitbürger [foreign fellow citizens].”88 where it joined klezmer music in pronouncing a new tolerant, multicultural Germany. Like klezmer, Hip Hop has been seized by German social workers and educators for use in anti-racist education.89

Güngör and Loh charge that the marginalization of non-white and immigrant rap, especially political rap, continued throughout the late 1990s, when journalists intent on reading young white German rappers from middle-class backgrounds as part of a “new culture of poets and rhymes,” traced the lineage of Deutschrapt from Die fantastischen Vier directly to American HipHop, again glossing over the place of migrants and minorities in the history of German HipHop. Because rap music’s African-American politicized ghetto origins clashed with the idea that a new generation of “poets” was taking root in the new and normalized Germany,90 critics declared that German rappers had finally liberated themselves from rap’s stifling socio-political mandate.91 Stecher: “In 1992 . . . no social studies project week was complete until students had rapped against racism and for world peace. The result: rhymed propaganda, artistic value was secondary. Today’s young rappers have emancipated themselves. They remembered their own concerns, the joys and fears of the life of a young person on the threshold of a bourgeois existence.”92 Christian

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88Güngör and Loh refer to the neo-Nazi violence of the early 1990s as “pogroms” (Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, p. 65).


90For many Germans, the re-unification of Germany marked the end of the punitive division and occupation of Germany after World War II, signaling a normalization of Germany, a post-post-Holocaust era.


Seidl observes: ’All of the grumblers who were still blustering about the people unscrupulously helping themselves to other people’s culture’ have stopped talking . . . . Young people don’t want to hear about ‘two-class society’ or ‘race discrimination.’’

The stylization of non-minority middle-class rappers (both by themselves and by media critics) to oppressed victims (albeit now liberated from their oppressors) resembles German klezmer performers’ or promoters’ complaints of a repressive “klezmer establishment” intent on enforcing authenticity (either stylistically or racially/ethnically). The emancipation of German HipHop from its socio-cultural origins and its political or socially critical function is also akin to Giore Feidman’s liberation of German “klezmer” musicians from perceived stylistic, cultural, and historical shackles.

Like German klezmer, the German HipHop scene is not free from racism. The surprising commercial success that Afro-German group Brother’s Keepers achieved with their aggressively anti-racist hit song “Adriano-letzte Warnung [Last Warning],” as well as the mainstream success of other Afro-German performers, have been greeted with a racist backlash against commercially successful black artists, especially within the “underground” sub-genre Battle-Rap. Ronald McDonald of M.O.R., for example, has rapped: “You primitive negro!” (addressed to Samy Deluxe), and “Apes like Afrob—off to the zoo.” MC Denana attacks women of color: “Too many bitches are raking in money with their niggerbonus.” Battle-Rappers and their fans defend these punchlines with the argument that “Nigger” and “Bitch” are not meant to be racist and misogynist but are merely commonplaces of the genre.

A Ronald McDonald defender reasons: “I can’t deny that these lines [Afrob, off to the zoo] could be interpreted as racist. . . . However, I think that this rhyme has more to do with the alliteration that the combination Affe—Afrob offers.”

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95 Quoted in Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, pp. 292–294.

96 Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, pp. 293–5.

Alongside racial slurs, German Battle-Rap has also recently integrated National Socialist and Holocaust imagery into its repertoire. Examples include: Ronald McDonald: “I’ll send your kids to the concentration camp,” Berlin Maskulin: “I’m a Nazi and Hitler is my father,” an unnamed Dresdner battlerapper: “skillz en masse, off into the gas,” Bass Sultan Hengzt: “I slaughter children like Hitler,” and MC Basstard: “T-A-K-T-L-O-S-S . . . He is the battle rap Führer . . . so give him a Sieg Heil!”

Defenders of Battle-Rap argue that the rhymes should not be taken literally, as Battlerappers are merely meeting the demand of the genre to shock and to break taboos. Since racial slurs, misogyny, and homosexual bashing were long since commonplace and slowly losing their sting and shock appeal due to overuse, battlerappers were simply taking provocation a step further. Loh and other critics who were already critical of hate-speech in rap argue that the use of Holocaust and Nazi vocabulary will result in a transfer of this vocabulary and these images from the context of Battlerap to the everyday vocabulary of its (mostly young) audience, and in some cases to an internalization of their literal contents. According to Loh, these rhymes have already been greeted enthusiastically by the far-right. Citing racist punchlines and Nazi-metaphors such as those above, Rocknord magazine posted an on-line article in Nov. 2001, “HipHop wird schneller weiß als man denkt [HipHop will be white sooner than you think].” The article spawned heated debate in neo-Nazi circles over the possibility of instrumentalizing HipHop, a Black music genre, for their cause. One forum participant argued in favor of HipHop potential as propaganda: “HipHop with nationalistic texts might get some HipHoppers to start thinking. We should try to infiltrate every segment of society with national texts. We don’t need to listen to this music ourselves, but we shouldn’t boycott it, we should support it ideologically!” Another dismissed the notion that “black” music was un-German: “Well, I think that HipHop isn’t any more un-German than Rock. All of that Rock-Pop—and whatever—music is based on black rhythm and blues. Even later developments such as heavy metal and

98 Güngör und Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, pp. 300–301.
99 Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, pp. 294, 300–1.
101 Quoted in Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, p. 288.
Oi-rock have black roots when you come down to it. They only became compatible with Right thinking, because we ‘occupied’ them.”

The success of Berlin rapper Fler’s hit “Die neue deutsche Welle” [The New German Wave] re-opened the discussion of Nazi-rap both in on-line music discussion boards (including Rocknord) and in the mainstream media. Fler’s use of National Socialist symbols and nationalist rhetoric have tested the limits of what is socially acceptable in 21st century Germany. Fler’s logo consists of a slightly altered Reichsadler (Reich’s Eagle, a National Socialist emblem) that blends into his name written in lower case Fraktur script. Because the letter “f” in Fraktur is easily mistaken for a “t,” the visual representation of the name, in conjunction with the eagle (in German, Adler), is designed to conjure the name Adolf Hitler. This is analogous to the strategy of wearing shirts with the Lonsdale brand, because the “nsda” that shows when the shirt is worn with an open jacket will evoke “NSDAP.” Fler’s song “Die Neue Deutsche Welle,” which samples Falco’s “Amadeus,” suggests that the new German “new wave” is a National Socialist-style German patriotism. The lyrics include the lines: “Black, red, and gold—proud and tough” and “the new German wave is coming, you see the flag in the sky.” For a short time the album was advertised with the Hitler quote, “starting May 1, we’ll shoot back,” as its ad slogan. The song video is likewise rife with far-right allusions: a Mercedes with the license plate B-AY 889 displays the Nazi code 88 (for Heil Hitler); flags fly; an “Aryan” vs. minority kick-box match, in which the “real” German emerges victorious; the video closes with an eagle landing on Fler’s arm.

The director of the video reportedly wanted to let Fler march across the screen with Skin-heads but feared being “falsely pigeon-holed.” While the mainstream and left-leaning press certainly took notice of Fler’s provocative use of far right rhetoric and symbolism, by and large they reached the consensus that Fler and his music are not Neo-Nazi but simply “stupid.” Pointing to other lines within the same song (“That’s normal—It’s multi-kulti here. My homies are from all over the place.”), or to Fler’s insistence that he is a supporter of the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) because “it’s cooler, more social and just and all that,” and his long-standing cooperation with minority and immigrant HipHoppers, critics insist that his Nazi allusions cannot be taken all too se-

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102 Quoted in Güngör and Loh, Fear of a Kanak Planet, p. 291.
riously. They are merely part of an attempt to create a tough image or street credibility, or even part of a clever marketing ploy.\textsuperscript{105} However, the fact that an artist can achieve mainstream success\textsuperscript{106} with a Nazified image, and that critics find it more or less understandable that a doubly marginalized German (an underclass white non-immigrant German living in a poor, primarily minority neighborhood) would counter his HipHop colleagues’ Turkish Pride with a display of German Pride that relies heavily on National Socialist imagery, suggest that Germany is failing to develop a viable alternative for a rising generation of young Germans who are trying to find their own place and assert a new German identity within their newly minted multicultural “country of immigration.”


\textsuperscript{106}Fler’s mainstream success is attested by his appearance in the teen magazine \textit{Bravo} (“Fler: Wie Aggro Berlin ist er wirklich,” \textit{Bravo} No. 10 [May 2005]).