GERMAN-TURKISH RAP IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSCULTURALITY

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Abstract

Rap music is gaining more and more popularity all over the globe; from USA to Germany to Turkey. However, the genre was far from popular when it first started as an artistic expression for the underprivileged minority groups in United States. This sentiment also became the voice of German-Turkish rappers whose lives were systematically confined to the realities of “minority ghettos”, when they started their careers in 1990s through the influence of American media. The first German-Turkish rappers were considered to be ‘Oriental musicians’, later on, the cultural term of ‘hybridity’ thought to be a well-fit for the genre and the rappers. However, hybridity is again reinforcing essentialist ideas of culture, which not only limits German-Turkish rappers in one fixed identity, but also eliminates the possibility of being part of the global mainstream music scene. That is why, Pütz’s “strategic transculturalism” is a useful theoretical tool to analyze the artistic expressions of German-Turkish rappers, and to comprehend the new cultural formations with a transcultural lens. This article attempts to demonstrate the practice of strategic transculturalism with a particular focus on Lady Bitch Ray, her songs and Die Urbane.

Keywords: German-Turkish Rap, diaspora culture, transculturality, cultural studies, strategic transculturalism

TRANSKÜLTÜRELLİK BAĞLAMINDA ALMAN-TÜRK RAP MÜZİĞİ

Özet

Rap müzik, Amerika’dan Almanya’ya ve Türkiye’ye kadar dünyanın dört bir yanında, her geçen gün daha da fazla popülerlik kazanmaktadır. Fakat, bu janr, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’ndeki yoksul azınlık grupları için sanatsal bir ifade olarak ilk ortaya çıktığında popülerlikten epey uzaktı. Bu sanatsal ifade biçimi, aynı zamanda, kariyerlerini 1990’larda Amerikan medyasının etkisiyle başlatan ve yaşamları “azınlık gettolarının” gerçeklikleriyle sınırlı olan Alman-Türk rapçilerinin de sesi haline geldi. İlk Alman-Türk rapçiler “Oryantal müzisyenler” olarak kabul ediliyordu. Fakat, daha sonra “hibrit” kültürel teriminin, bu türe ve sanatçılarına daha uygun olduğu düşünüldü. Ancak, hibrit kültürel terimi, Alman-Türk rapçilerini hem tek bir sabit kimliğe sınırlamakta hem de küresel ana akım müzik sahnesinin bir parçası olma olasılığını da ortadan kaldıran özcü kültür fikirlerini pekiştirmektedir. Bu nedenle, Pütz’in “stratejik transkültürellik” kavramı, Alman-Türk rapçilerinin sanatsal ifadelerini analiz etmek ve yeni kültürel oluşumları kültürlerarası bir mercekle kavramak için kullanışlı bir teorik araçtır. Bu makale, stratejik transkültürellik uygulamasını özellikle Lady Bitch Ray şarkılarına ve Die Urbane’ye odaklanarak göstermeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alman-Türk rap, diaspora kültürler, transkültürellik, kültürel çalışmalar, stratejik transkültürellik

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, rap music was announced to be the most popular music genre, overtaking rock, with a total consumption of %24.5 in USA.² Its popularity is of course not just confined to United States, the genre has been gaining popularity in different countries as well. However, rap music was not always recognized to be a part of the popular and mainstream culture. It was associated with being the voice of the poor, marginalized, ethnically discriminated communities when hip-hop movement first started in United States. Hence, it is no surprise that German-Turkish youths, especially in spaces marked as “minority ghettos” such as Kreuzberg, have also expressed their creativity and their diasporic situation through the repetitive beats and fast rhymes of rap songs, in order to address the discrimination and injustice in Germany, as well as to connect with the global culture. From the beginning of its development, German-Turkish rap has received numerous categorizations from German press that varies from ‘Oriental Rap’ to ‘Immigrant Rap’ and even ‘ghetto rap’. Thanks to its arabesque motifs, Eastern beats and English/ German/Turkish mixed lyrics inserted in an African-American genre, many scholars and academics have considered German-Turkish rap to be a “hybrid” genre which celebrates the plurality of cultures, languages and ethnicities, instead of reinforcing binary distinctions between majority-minority and the idea of a pure culture that is coherent (Caglar 1995; Kaya 2002). Additionally, German-Turkish rap is creating a medium of “third space” in Homi Bhabha’s terms (58), which is not only Turkish or German but a juxtaposition of different cultural practices and elements. However, hybridity is a term that can also evoke essentialist perception of culture that advocates for monolithic cultural identities that are fixed on territories (Caglar 1998, 248). Thus, hybridity, starting out as a significant cultural term that cherishes differences and fluidity of identities, runs the risk of reinforcing the binary distinctions that keeps the hierarchical boundaries between the center and periphery, majority and minority.

That is why, I propose Pütz’s ‘strategic transculturalism’ as an important analytical tool in examining German-Turkish rap and hip-hop scene, because transculturality plays the role of an additional lens that helps to understand the commonalities rather than differences between communities, allowing new forms of identity constructions and plural and fluid cultural embodiments (Pütz 2008). In this paper, I will elaborate on hybridity by giving examples from various rappers such as Eko Fresh and Cartel, then I will explain transculturality as a practice in gender and cultural identity formation in German-Turkish rap by giving the example of Reyhan Sahin, also known as Dr. Bitch Ray and several recent developments such as #MeTwo movement and Die Urbane.

From *Gastarbeiter* to *Ausländer*

The immigration from Turkey to Germany is firstly initiated with the ‘recruiting agreement’ (*Anwerberabkommen*) in 1961, which is to recruit workers from foreign countries. The recruited workers were thought to stay for a short-term and then return to their

22 O’Connor, Roisin. 2018. “Rap overtakes rock as most popular genre in the US.” Independent, 4 January 2018.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/artsentertainment/music/news/rap-music-rock-most-popular-genre-us-nielsen-musicreport-2017-kendrick-lamar-ed-sheeran-drake-top-a8141086.html>

homelands; hence the term of ‘*gastarbeiter*’ (guest worker) was coined, unfortunately, the jobs that were offered were quite unpleasant and underpaid jobs in which Germans were not interested (Pütz 2008, 512). Thus, the first wave of migration from Turkey to German was mostly male workers. After the military coup in Turkey in 1980, not just the number of Turkish immigrants in Germany increased, but also the motives were diversified (i.e men& women, Turkish& Kurdish). Hence, the perception of Turkish people in Germany transformed from ‘*gastarbeiter*’ to ‘*ausländer*’ (foreign), in other words, it has become clear that they are immigrants, rather than short-term workers.³ According to the statistics, the number of people with Turkish background was around 3million in 2017, which are mostly concentrated in big cities such as Frankfurt am Main and Berlin.⁴

Furthermore, the Turkish migrants are seen as a major part of the foreigner problems in Germany, and thus are faced with problems of representation, discrimination and racism. They are often accused of being violent, isolated and unable to assimilate; Kaya gives the example of Der Spiegel’ 14 April 1997 article, which denounced Turkish youths in Germany as ‘criminals’, ‘fundamentalists’, ‘nationalist’ and ‘traumatic’ (2002, 44). The social exclusion that are directed Turks every day had severe consequences as well, such as the arson attacks by neo-Nazis, skinheads and other far-right movements (Solomon 2006, 60). Ayse Caglar states that animosity against foreigners was channeled to German-Turks, who are referred as “Kanaks”, after the fall of Berlin Wall (2010, 317). Thus, Turkish people are excluded in mainstream networks and connections, even though they gain strength economically and intellectually. Turkish artists and writers in Germany usually state that they are not included in the German artistic scene and its criteria of evaluation; they are secluded in the enclave of ethnic artist.

On the other hand, German-Turks’ social position in Turkey is referred as “*alamancı*”(German-like) or “*gurbetçi*” (someone who is not living in their hometown), meaning they are not Turkish or German; they are something in between. Most of the time, they are seen as new-money and backwards (Caglar 1995, 316), made fun of because of their broken Turkish. Ultimately, they are alienated from Germany based on their ‘Turkishness’, and from Turkey because they are not ‘properly’ Turkish anymore. Thus, this “lost generation” in Caglar’s terms, engaged in hip-hop culture which started with Black Americans as a way to emancipate themselves from institutionalized racism through artistic endeavors.

Embracing the Hip-Hop Culture

In order to fully grasp the expressive nature of German-Turkish rap, it is important to shortly explain the origins of hip-hop culture and rap music. Starting in South Bronx in late 1970s, rap has been the creative voice of Black Americans and Hispanics from the ghettos who are subject to police brutality, institutionalized racism and constant violence with a very little political power. Rap music has its roots in pre-modern oral traditions, as well as the genres that

³ ibid.

⁴ Statistisches Bundesamt. “Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten nach Migrationshintergrund im engeren Sinne nach Herkunftsland in Staatengruppen.” n.d. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-staatsangehoerigkeit-staatengruppen.html>

are regarded as black music styles like jazz, soul and blues (Rose 1994). Thus, the genre itself as an expression of the periphery is a hybrid form of various musical styles.

The hip-hop culture in Germany is thought to be transmitted through the American media when American armed forces were located in Germany until the fall of Berlin Wall (Diessel 2001, 167). There is no doubt that German-Turks were aware of the founders of rap music. In a Turkish documentary about rap music⁵, famous rappers like Fuat Ergin and Hakan Durmus, also known as Killa Hakan, state that they saw the similarities between Black Americans and German-Turks. Because, similar to the situation of African-Americans, Turkish people in Germany saying would only be accepted in blue collar jobs, and they were expected to assimilate into German culture by dismissing their hybridity.⁶ They were faced with racist writings on the walls, such as ‘*ausländer raus*’ (foreigners out) and they were referred as ‘*Kanake*’, because of their ‘*Gastarbeiterdeutsch*’ (guest worker German), non-German appearance and behavior. Coming from this background, Kabus Kerim explains that the Turkish youth were looking for a platform where there are no limitations or boundaries based on race, culture, religion.⁷ Hence, the hip-hop culture became a creative premise for German-Turks.

Cartel: An Oriental Music Project

In 1995, a music project, Cartel released their first album and it gained incredible popularity within a month by selling 30,000 copies in Germany and 180,000 in Turkey (Cinar 2000). The group was a formation of three different rap groups from various regions of Germany: Karakan (Nuremberg), Da Crime Posse (Kiel), and Erci-E (Berlin) (Kaya 2002, 47). The group’s members have fairly diverse ethnic background: Turkish, Kurdish, German and Cuban. Their first video clip, Cartel, was constantly on MTV and VIVA TV that summer (Kaya 2002, 48). The clip starts with a fire scene with a Turkish melody on the background, referring to the hate crimes and arson attacks in Mölln. There are footages of minorities protesting on the street of Germany, as well as, underground hip-hop scene with break dance. The song invites everyone to join the Cartel, because they are all brothers in the group (Lyrics 1995): Cartel – “Cartel” (Excerpt from the *Cartel* album):

Kaç kere söyledik biz çocuk sana	How many times did we tell you, kid
Bir türlü kulak asmadın lafımıza	You never listened to our words
Hadi bırak onları gel yanımıza	Come on, let them go, and come to us
Gel gel gel Cartel'e gel	Come come come Come to Cartel
Bilmiyorsan sana öğretirler	If you don't know, they will teach you
Gel gel gel Cartel'e gel	Come come come Come to Cartel

⁵ “Söyleyeceklerim Var (TRT Türkçe Rap Belgeseli - Almanya Yayını – Mutlaka İzlenmeli),” Youtube Video, 52:45, “Freeside Pro”, 3 January 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20y_Z1Y1VSQ&t=1640s

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Kabus Kerim (Cartel) Röportaj,” Youtube Video, 20:16, “Freeside Pro”, 5 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAJHhkzi58>

Cartel'dekiler kan kardeşler

The ones in Cartel are blood brothers⁸

This invitation to join their Cartel movement is not only a call for the audience to buy their albums, listen to their songs; but also, a summoning for anti-racism and brotherhood. The message in between lines is both an acknowledgement of the hierarchical difference between the center and periphery, because the people in Cartel movements are “never listened”; and a way out of this binary structure, which is achieved by joining the Cartel movement. Thus, the song is actually an all-inclusive call to unite in the face of discrimination and become one through solidarity.

However, this group was introduced as an “Oriental Hip-Hop Project”, also interchangeable with several labels, such as Immigrant Rap or Turkish Hip-Hop. Kabus Kerim, from Cartel, explains in an interview: “The group wanted to exaggerate the Turkishness with their album cover and symbols, because exaggeration is a part of hip-hop culture, like a slap in the face”.⁹ The sign in the cover of the album that Kabus Kerim refers to is a big ‘C’, shaped in the flag of Turkey with red background. Since this project is not only an aesthetic endeavor but also a capitalist venture; categorizing the group under one umbrella term and thus homogenizing them makes it easier to sell it in the global market dominated by the center and popular media. Thus, the group was mostly accepted as a Turkish immigrant production even though the lyrics are a mixture of Turkish, English, Spanish and German, and the members come from various different backgrounds.

Additionally, one of the most important characteristics of rap music is the sampling. While the rap music in United States makes samples out of the most famous pop, jazz, soul songs, German-Turkish rappers uses the most famous Turkish songs from the prominent singers, such as Bülent Ersoy and Sezen Aksu (Solomon 2006, 64). Diessel explains the rhythms in these samples saying that they rely “on the musical modes and rhythms that were cultivated during the Ottoman Empire and it shares a reciprocal influence with present-day Arab and Persian neighbors to the south and east of the Black Sea” (Diessel 2001, 171). Thus, since the region, Middle East, is commonly referred as ‘Orient’, the group’s musical style is immediately labeled under the name of ‘Oriental’.

The categorization of this musical style as Oriental, no matter how it may be easy to sell in mainstream media outlets, is problematic. This comes from a coherent and essentialist understanding of culture and identity, which promotes “stable practices and beliefs belonging to a specific bounded collectivity” (Benessaieh 2010, 13). It prevents the culture and cultural practices from being fluid entities by homogenizing cultures with labels and categorizations. Hence, German-Turkish rap is forced to represent the ‘authentic’ forms of certain fixated labels, based on the claims that these labels refer to certain cultural characteristics that are coherent. They are forced to be the “Orient” to the “Occident”. Thus, the binary distinction between the center and periphery is reinforced once again, even though Cartel’s initial aim is to overcome

⁸ The translation from Turkish to English is mine.

⁹ “Kabus Kerim (Cartel) Röportaj,” Youtube Video, 20:16, “Freeside Pro,” 5 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAJHhkzi58>

this hierarchical distinction with their own creative and unified voice. An example of their resistance and unique voice can be found in their song, “Kankardesler” (blood brothers) (Lyrics 1995): Excerpt from the Cartel album

birimiz hepimiz hepimiz birimiz	All for one, One for all
Türk, Kürt Laz ve Çerkez	Turkish, Kurdish, Lazi, and
ayrimcilik yaparsak kaybedecegiz	Circassian
Uyan artık katil sende Cartel'e	We will lose if we discriminate
toz pembe bakmazsin gelecege	Wake up and join Cartel
Nürnberg, Frankfurt, Berlin ve Kiel	You cannot see future through
Zannettigin arkadaslik bu degil	rose-colored glasses Nürnberg,
Daha da öte daha da ilerihep beraber olup	Frankfurt, Berlin and Kiel
kiracagiz zincirleri	This is not the friendship you
Kan kardeslere yakisir bir sekilde	think
Eger hazirsaniz simdi sira sizde	It is beyond and further
Kan kan kan kardesler	We will break the chains by
hep beraber bizi yenemezler	coming together
	This is what suits to blood
	brothers
	If you are ready, it is your time
	Blood blood blood brother
	They cannot beat us if we are
	together. ¹⁰

The themes such as brotherhood and being “all for one, one for all” are quite prominent in their songs such as this one, to promote an understanding of cultural interconnectedness and unity between nations; instead of discrimination based on the differences of the majority and minority. The importance of being unified regardless of who you are is emphasized even more with rigid beats and alarming background sound.

Cartel became one of the most famous German-Turkish rap groups both in Germany and Turkey. Mosquera explains hows and whys this phenomenon saying that the centers let the periphery “of their choosing” pass through their borders within limits, and “keeping disconnected the zones of silence” (1994, 135); thus, cultural diversity and the hierarchical power of the center are kept intact. Since the periphery is accepted in the mainstream/central circulation of art as long as they represent the ‘authentic’ identity of their background, they become the cultural symbols/tokens. This problematic situation is a consciously constructed obstacle for cultural practices of periphery, so that they are restricted to certain given categories

¹⁰ The translation from Turkish to English is mine.

such as immigrant, Turkish, Oriental within the Western art forms and musical genres. I would like to conclude the problematic homogenization of German-Turkish hip-hop culture by quoting an important statement from Pütz: “Even if homogeneous cultures ever existed, they would, at the very latest, not be identifiable in the era of globalization and movements of migration” (2008, 523). Thus, Cartel’s political purpose of being the voice of minorities was covered by the unrealistic and homogenizing ‘Oriental’ label.

German? Turkish? or German-Turkish?

With Cartel, German-Turkish rap gained a great momentum in popular media, which opened up an immersive arena to debate and explore further the diasporic aesthetics and hybrid identities both for academics and researchers, as well as up and coming hip-hop youths. German-Turkish youths, especially the second generation that has been referred as “lost” or “in-between” (Ickstadt 1999), gave the answer to the question of “Are you German or Turkish?” through the rap songs and their mannerisms in the hip-hop scene. They resist the essentialist cultural labels that give room to only one fixed identity and force individuals to choose between any multiplicity: German or Turkish, Muslim or Christian, Black or White etc. For example, Eko Fresh raps about the consequences of a pure culture concept that is forced upon German-Turks in his song *QuotenTürken* (Lyrics 2013): Excerpt from *Eksodus* album

Zum Beispiel mach' ich schon seit ich	For example I have been rapping since I
vierzehn bin Rap-Lieder,	was 14,
Doch die Leute denken: Was will	But people still think, “What does this
dieser	Turk want again?
Türke jetzt schon wieder?	No matter how much talent I have in
Denn egal, wie viel Talent auch in mir	me. ¹¹
ruht.	

In the song, Eko Fresh compares himself to other ‘exemplar’ Turkish mediatic personalities and raps about the struggles of being an outcast who tries to fit into the German artistic scene. Coming from a ghetto background, he is not accepted in popular media; and no matter how talented he is, he is still referred as an “*Ausländer*” (foreigner), not as a successful rapper.

Thus, German-Turkish rap is not merely a hybrid art form where American style of rapping and Turkish melodies are combined like a mish-mash. More importantly, it has the potential to be the voice of hybrid identities. For example, one of the German-Turkish rap’s few female rappers, Azize-A (A stands for the word *Abla* which is sister) makes use of a lot of Turkish samples in her music in an attempt to turn her roots (Kaya 2002, 57). Azize-A states in an interview:

¹¹ The translation from Turkish to English is mine.

“Rap sends subliminal messages to the people. I want to explain to the people (German and Turkish) that the Turkish woman has many other values and talents. I want to demonstrate that we are not sitting at home and doing housework all day. I also attempt to erase the question of ‘whether we are Turkish or German’ and announce that we are multi-kulti and cosmopolitan. I want to show that we are no more sitting between two chairs; we have got a ‘third chair’ between those two.” (qtd. in Kaya 2002, 57)

Azize-A expresses the urgency to understand German-Turkish people in a different perspective that is not imposed but empowering and freeing from the bounded cultural labels. She assembles an identity that is not one way or the other but both in great harmony, creating a “third chair”. Kaya discloses the similarities between Azize-A’s positioning German-Turks in the “third chair” above and Homi Bhabha’s third space which is a creation by and for hybrid identities (Kaya 2002, 58).

Then, what is hybridity? According to Homi Bhabha, hybridity constantly reshapes the cultural patterns that are present in the society, by challenging the essentialist ideas; and, it does not “come as a force from ‘outside’ to impose an alternative a priori ground-plan on the pattern of the present” (Bhabha 2015, ix). Thus, cultural hybridity’s aim is not to create another alternative to fixed identities; but rather, to open endless possibility of doors in cultural identity formations and create as many combinations of flexibility as possible for the self. The framework of hybridity is closely linked with our global times in which mass-produced images, cultural products move in rapid flows to modern subjectivities (Appadurai 1996, 4), “accentuating cross-cultural contact” (Canclini 2005, xxxv). Thus, hybrid identities envisage the intersections between cultures and communities that exist within the fluid flows and movements of globalized times. This phenomenon, of course, capsizes the power structures that are constructed on hierarchical binary divisions such as centers/peripheries and ghetto/elite. Homi Bhabha insembrates this subversion of power to the problem of authority and agency in margins: “For hybridity, empowerment is about the achievement of agency and authority, rather than the fulfillment of the ‘authenticity’ of identity – however mixed, however ‘multi’, however interjective or intercultural” (Bhabha 2015, xii). In cultural and political structures where the center claims the authority for agency and authority in identity politics; hybridity is quite important for peripheries in the path of reclaiming their agencies and reshape the cultural patterns that are built on homogenization. Thus, hybridity is about empowering the marginalized subjectivities such as Azize-A who strives to take the authority of her own voice and show a ‘cosmopolitan Turkish woman’ who is engaged with her music.

Hence, hybridity framework is a celebrated concept in the face of globalization to subvert the hierarchical power structures between center and periphery. However, I would like to emphasize to the pitfall traps of this concept that might jeopardize what it proposes to achieve: fluidity. This is not to undervalue the importance of hybridity in destabilizing the present cultural patterns; but to point out what can be improved further. Firstly, Friedman states that hybridization ‘museumises’ cultures as a tangible object that can be captured as it is, which pertains to essentialist approaches to culture (qtd. in Caglar 1997, 173). Thus, hybridisation becomes just “another means of anthropological textualization of otherness” (173), Ayse Caglar also states that “...despite these celebrations of ‘difference’, hybridity discourses set limits to

these ‘differences’” (173). In other words, hybridity reproduces the essentialist ideas of culture and binary power structures, because it still reaffirms the linkage between territorial politics and cultural identities whether it is local or global.

Furthermore, as I mentioned above, hybridity is also closely linked with globalization, because of its power to create and multiply cross-cultural markets, subjectivities, and products. It is undeniable that globalization heightens the opportunities of representation and can reach beyond the physical borders; for example, Sufi songs are available on Spotify free of charge on any phone and for every audience. However, globalization can also be utilized as a tool for the formation of different inequalities by exploiting cultures to expand the markets. This problem homogenizes cultures under one umbrella, and that is, the market demand. Culture and cultural products become commodities and modified accordingly through the lens of globalization; commodities that are formed based on the idea of single fixed culture that are capturable in one word, such as Oriental rap. Canclini gives the example of Latin music which corresponds to the neo-Hispanoamericanisation of Latin America (2005, xxxvi). Under the layers of global markets and its effects, there is a problem of agency and authority of the peripheries and ghettos. Ayşe Caglar comments on the profitable side of cultures: “Thus in the context of thriving multiculturalism, identity politics and political correctness, being on the margins and representing the periphery might be very suitable both commercially and ethically” (1998, 248). Referring back to Mosquera in the “Oriental Rap” section, the center again lets the peripheries of their choosing to ‘move’ to the center on the basis of profitability for the multicultural propaganda. Although the publicity or profit can be useful for the diaspora, the hip-hop culture’s aim is to give voice to the marginalized identities and the problem that they address still remains: diversity is kept under control by the center.

In conclusion, hybridity serves as a useful theory in identifying and destabilizing the essentialist ideas, differences between centers and margins. However, it definitely has iniquitous consequences which might at the end re-affirms the present culture patterns. German-Turkish rap music embarks upon questioning the current cultural politics since its beginning. These pitfalls of hybridity might endanger German-Turkish music and what they try to achieve and overcome. As an individual who listens, and feels empowered by German-Turkish rap music, I believe hybridity on its own is a restricting framework. That is why, I consider German-Turkish rap as a transcultural practice that functions strategically between learned cultural patterns, which aims to capture not just Germans, Turks, or German-Turks, but every individual who is pushed to the margins, as well as the privileged individuals who can appreciate the political expression of music.

Transcultural Practice of German-Turkish Rappers:

In the midst of rapid flows, globalization of cultures and popularization of rap music, the singular identity constructions, traditionalist cultural patterns and hierarchical systems are being questioned. Restricting categories of identities, difference-driven segregations and territory-bounded nationalisms are becoming irrelevant, as new identities emerge. As the culture as a powerful tool of politics transforms, so does its products, such as rap music, German-Turkish community and hip-hop youth. That is why, musical genres that are defined by cultural markers (such as Oriental rap) become derogatory, as it limits the marginalized artists to reach out for

mainstream flows and genres. It is no doubt that art fosters from cultures, yet a territorially fixed and homogenous concept of a culture on its own is both highly inadequate to fully grasp any type of art and unsustainable in global times. It is important to regard culture and its present markers as tools or gadgets in artist's room; they are merely the elements that can be utilized, yet they do not make up the whole extend of art; they help in the agency of the artist. For example, German-Turkish rappers nourish their music with elements from various cultures through their strategic positioning towards cultures in order to, first, naturally have economic sustenance and then to reclaim their agency over their own narrative to which other marginalized identities can also relate. According to Pütz, this behavior can be regarded as strategic transculturality which can explain financial and everyday encounters (2008). In this chapter, I will try to explain what I mean by transculturality and its practice in the hip-hop scene of German-Turks and how it can provoke progress and change in present cultural patterns.

Firstly, it is highly important to state what transculturality is and is not in this context, since most of the cultural terms that I use in this paper have intersecting elements. Transculturality does not stand in opposition with other cultural terms that try to initiate discussion on cultural politics; it is rather an additional term that aims to dig deeper into the visible and invisible connecting links between cultures, communities and identities, and between other academic disciplines (Benessaieh 2010, 21). In fact, Nicholas Mirzoeff states that "transculture offers a way to analyze the hybrid, hyphenated, syncretic global diaspora in which we live", and he adds, "in the era of global diaspora and interconnection, all culture is transculture" (qtd. in Stein 2009, 256). Thus, transculturality introduces an interdisciplinary lens to every cultural stakeholder, which broadens the analysis and perception in what Mirzoeff calls 'global diaspora' and present cultural theories. However, Mirzoeff's understanding of transculture is unfortunately not specific enough and it is often merely speculative to presume a 'one-culture-for-all' perspective for complex cultural terms.

Going beyond Mirzoeff, transculturality is an active process of understanding heterogeneous diversity which ultimately unveils the intersections between cultures. Benessaieh summarizes transculturality comprehensively:

...the view of transculturality as a fluid transformative process in which people no longer perceive themselves under one single culture. Transculturality here refers to an embodied situation of cultural plurality lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience whose multifaceted situation is rendered more visible under globalization(2010, 25).¹²

This definition of transculturality provides various key terms, such as globalization, fluidity and plurality. However, the emphasis on the agency is paramount in this context, which proposes an analysis of culture and "roots" on a personal basis (Welsch 2001, 79), and a constant "relocation of demarcations on the individual tier" (Pütz 2008, 524). Wolfgang Welsch highlights this distinction between internal and external transculturality, as the lived experience of embodied situation of cultural plurality of individuals declares itself on a

¹² Italics in the original.

societal level as well (Welsch 2001,79). Pütz states that, through transculturality, it is possible to see the differences between internal cultural demarcations and external symbolisms of culture, hence “through the relocation of the ‘inside-outside-differences’ to an intra-personal tier, multiple belonging of individuals is conceptually accepted as well as empirically seizable” (Pütz 2008, 524). This active process of relocation embraces diversity both on individual and societal level that is highlighted with global movements; yet, these relocations can easily be mistaken for multiculturalism in which diversity is often confused with homogenous ‘mosaics of cultures’. In other words, through inside-outside differences, culture becomes a practical tool that can be utilized to (re-) shape transcultural identities that can orient themselves strategically in complex cultural systems (Pütz 2008, 525). Considering culture as a repertoire, ‘strategic transculturalism’ debunks the silver bullets of monolithic cultures through the interplay of cultural symbolisms. These strategic demarcations can also apply for gender roles. Pütz gives the example of a businesswoman, Kevsan, who has Turkish-Alevi origins who uses interpretive schemes of culture and gender during business deals with new customers for the sake of company’s economical prosperity (Pütz 2008, 530). Going back to Cartel, it is possible to see the resemblances in the financial strategy, that is, transculturality as a practice. Cartel strategically picks out the cultural symbolisms from its members to reach out the global market as much as possible and eventually unite the audience in the interconnectedness of all these cultures that nourishes their art. For example, Kabus Kerim explains that Cartel’s first album was not intended to be released in Turkey but it was rather for the audience in Germany, and the initial concept behind of the album’s cover was to use the most recognizable immigrant symbolisms to provoke and react against racism not just Turkish people, but immigrants as a whole.¹³

To sum up, transculturality provides an additional framework to cultural diversity in our global reality of multiculturalism and hybrid identities, which does not aim to control the diversity, but rather to analyze the complex infrastructures of cultural systems. It destabilizes the idea of pure and homogenous cultures through exposing the constructed symbols of cultures and thus, provokes the individual agency to overcome essentialist traps through threatening culture as a tool that can be utilized strategically on an empirical level. I consider German-Turkish rap as transcultural project, because the rappers, whether for financial purposes or political purposes, adapt transculturality as a practice in their art to tease with the constructed symbols of culture and create their own realities, in art and global world. In the next section of this chapter, I would like to offer more examples of German-Turkish rappers who adapt transculturality as a practice their art and provoke further strategic transculturalism in their communities.

Reyhan Sahin a.k.a. Lady Bitch Ray:

Reyhan Sahin, who is known by the name of Lady Bitch Ray in the hip-hop scene, was born into a Turkish guest worker family in Bremen. Her career in hip-hop, even though it is

¹³ “Kabus Kerim - Hiphoplife Röportajı (Bölüm 1) @ Hiphoplife.com.tr.” Youtube Video, 10:28, “Hiphoplif.com.tr,” 9 May 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3G-6JK82i5s>.

short-lived, is controversial because of her self-acclaimed genre of rap, porn rap. She is not just a rapper, but also a lecturer with a PhD in the university of Bremen. Now, she goes by the name of Dr. Bitch Ray and she produces her songs under her own record label, Vagina Style Records (Tuzcu 2013, 158). Her ‘vagina style’ rap music is characterized by its sexually explicit language and video clips, showing that Dr. Bitch Ray is not scared of stigmatization from the society based on her outspoken sexuality. The emancipation of female body and ‘returning the gaze’ is quite prominent in her music, which aims to analyze not only body politics revolving around the women in hip-hop, but also to be a ‘Kanackin’ (derogatory word used for German-Turks/ sign of racism) in Germany (Stehle 2013, 226). It is possible to see how Dr. Bitch Ray utilizes the cultural and gender codes, being very well aware of their superficiality, as a repertoire for her art. Her choices around her hybrid background and gender are very well thought in order to first mock these cultural markers and second to emancipate from those.

In a heavily male-dominated hip-hop scene of German-Turks, Dr. Bitch Ray stands out for her deifications of what a Turkish woman should look like or a woman rapper should rap about. The explicit language and video clips where naked female body is displayed in rap is in fact a common practice by male rappers; yet Dr. Bitch Ray demonstrates how such a frequent hip-hop element is used by woman rapper, it is controversial, out-of-ordinary. Thus, Dr. Bitch Ray consciously goes through a selection process in traditionally accepted gender roles and cultural codes, in order to reverse them right back at the society to show the artificiality of such codes. For example, in her song “Ich bin ne Bitch”, she reclaims every criticism that she has faced, and asks the patriarchy, “so what?”:

Dr. Bitch Ray- Ich bin ne Bitch (Excerpt from *Vorhang Auf!* Album):

Ich bin ne Bitch!	I am a bitch!
Du meinst dass du mich disst, nennst du Ficker mich Bitch?	You think you are dissing me, you fucker call me bitch?
Junge die Wahrheit ist – Ich bin ne Bitch!	Boy, the truth is I am a bitch!
Bitch ist für mich en Trend, für mich ein Kompliment, Junge du bist verklemmt!	Bitch is a trend for me, a compliment for me, boy you are uptight!
Ich bin ne Bitch! Pisser ich mach mein Ding, Nutte steht auf meinem Ring, keiner kann mich bezwingen!	I am a bitch! Pisser I do my thing, whore is written on my ring, nobody can get me down! I am a bitch! You want to know what a bitch is, right? Come here, I show you what a bitch is! ¹⁴
Ich bin ne Bitch! Du willst wissen was ne Bitch ist, ha? Komm ich zeig dir was ne Bitch ist!	

Even though journalists have accused Dr. Bitch Ray of being an attention seeker, she has revealed that her Turkish audience actually sees her as an idol, a liberated woman (Stehle 2013,

¹⁴ Stehle, Maria. 2013. “Pop-Feminist Music in Twenty-First Century Germany: Innovations, Provocations, and Failure.” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25(2): 222-239.

230). In a culture in which women are oppressed to extreme levels, such as Turkish culture, sometimes even talking to other men can be considered to be a “bitchy” behavior. Thus, witnessing such a liberated female rapper who can create her art in the male dominated hip-hop scene without a fear is certainly a phenomenon that liberalizes oppressed Turkish women and women around the world.

Furthermore, her hybrid identity is significantly essential to her music. Pinar Tuzcu states that the character of Female Kanack of Dr. Bitch Ray is an intentional “mixture and re-formulation of German-ness and Turkish-ness” (2013, 166). This positions her ‘Kanackin’ character as an intentional hybrid in Mikhail Bakhtin’s hybridity division; intentional hybrid consciously opens a platform for in-between-ness (166). There is no doubt that Dr. Bitch Ray is a conscious hybrid agent in the politics of cultural identity who tries to go beyond the concept of pure nations and bounded cultures. However, what makes her music and Reyhan Sahin’s sexually affirmative persona of Dr. Bitch Ray unique is the ability to position herself reflexively in complex situations. This ability, called “strategic transculturalism” (Pütz 2008, 531), can be witnessed both in her music and her career. Reyhan Sahin changes her behavior situationally based on her assessment of power structures in certain environments, such as fluidly transforming from Reyhan Sahin as an intellectual scholar to Dr. Bitch Ray of the hip-hop scene. In her most recent music video, “Bitchanel” (2018)¹⁵, there are three different female figures: one is Dr. Bitch Ray, second one is a bride with a red ribbon on her waist which indicates that the bride is chaste in both Turkish and Kurdish culture, and the third one is the famous belly dancer figure from Turkey. The video is set in an urban setting with a wedding convoy circling around in the background, which is a common cultural practice in Turkey in an event of celebration; such as son returning from the military service successfully, and a couple getting married. Combining all these cultural symbolisms and different female figures, while Dr. Bitch Ray sings about her “çok güzel” (very beautiful) vagina, Reyhan Sahin practices transculturality strategically to demonstrate how marginalized identities can come together and celebrate in a harmonious way. The female characters are structured carefully for the audience to recognize the cultural symbolisms right away with the close-up shots. Her strategic transculturalism destabilizes the essentialist ideas of cultures and identities that advocate an isolated purity, hence the interplay of interpretive schemes of gender roles and cultural symbolisms create an art form which the audience can relate to, as well as feel emancipated by it.

5.2. #MeTwo Movement and Die Urbane:

Finally, there have been significantly important developments in identity politics in recent years, thanks to the democratizing effect of social media and rapid movements of knowledge and events around the globe. These developments are not necessarily exclusive for German-Turkish community, yet they can play an effective role in Germany’s hip-hop scene, in grasping transculturality as a practice and celebrate diversity rather than controlling it. They can spark active communication between individuals, inspire art forms that are inclusive rather than

¹⁵ “Lady Bitch Ray - Bitchanel (Official Video),” Youtube Video, 3:14, “Votzenssekretariat,” 25 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6Bcb3LHm5k>.

exclusive, and imaginably establish a blue-print action for transcultural representation. Considering transculturality as embodied situation of cultural plurality of individuals¹⁶, movements such as #MeTwo and concepts such as HipHopNation provide both exemplary transcultural practices and alternatives to traditional identity politics. In this part of the paper, I will explain #Metwo movement and Die Urbane's HipHopNation concept to elaborate on transculturality as a practice.

Last year, Mesut Özil resigned from the German national soccer team, after a photo of him with Turkish president. Mesut Özil publicly addressed the controversy, stating "I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose".¹⁷ The incident sparked discussions about racism in Germany and Germans' perception of minorities living in Germany. Ali Can launched the #MeTwo hashtag to change the perception on what it means to be German. Since the launch, more and more people have come forward from using the Twitter hashtag to address the racism and patriotism that they face in Germany and also to show their hybridity that they do not belong just one country but two and maybe even more. As the official hashtag of hybridity in Germany, #MeTwo movement has opened up an immense platform of discussions around territorial belongings, cultural stereotypes and prejudices only Turkish community but all minorities living in Germany face in their everyday lives. Various artists have joined the movement to speak up about their experiences on being a hybrid in Germany, such as one of the most famous German-Turkish rapper, Kool Savas tweeted about his experience about being a German-Turk in Kreuzberg: "Meinen Kreuzberger Kumpels war ich als deutsch türkischer Mischling oft nicht Türkisch genug #MeTwo" (As a German Turkish mixed race, I was often not Turkish enough for my Kreuzberg pals # MeTwo).¹⁸¹⁹ #MeTwo hashtag has the potential to empower every individual who decides to share their experience of marginalization based on their nationality, as well as, the readers who relate to these problems in some way. It is a great Twitter project that can highlight the interconnectedness of individuals, rather than the differences.

On the other hand, hip-hop culture that has acted as a medium of political expression all around the globe can be regarded as an imagined (sub-) community, unraveled from blood relations and physical connections to territory. This aspect of hip-hop culture in Germany deterritorializes the formation of a community and reflects what Pütz refers as "reflexive examination of powerful social affiliations(.)", in other words, strategic transculturalism (2008, 531). By putting transculturality in practice, the concept of hip-hop nation opens its arms to every individual who would like to participate regardless of nationality, gender, and religion. This concept of Hip-Hop Nation has, of course, been referred multiple times in rap music; yet, Germany has a unique example of how this concept can be put in the practice: Die Urbane (The

¹⁶ Italics in the original.

¹⁷ Noack, Rick and Luisa Beck. "Germany's #MeTwo hashtag has the country asking: How racist are we?" *Washington Post*, 1 August 2018. Accessed March 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/31/germanys-metwo-hashtag-has-the-country-asking-how-racist-are-we/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-metwo-migration%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.de9c50eff085.

¹⁸ The translation from German to English is mine.

¹⁹ Kool Savas (@koolsavas), "Meinen Kreuzberger Kumpels war ich als deutsch türkischer Mischling oft nicht Türkisch genug #MeTwo," Twitter, 26 July 2018, 10:14 a.m., <https://twitter.com/koolsavas/status/1022530626401067009?lang=en>.

Urban). Die Urbane is a hip-hop party that was founded on 1st of May 2017 and officially elected as a political party 2017. The founder Raphael Hillebrand explains that he does not necessarily consider himself as a German because national identities are separationist, and he adds that the basis of his party is “self-expression and it has things that speak to people like dancing, language and music”.²⁰ Die Urbane exhibits an example of how insisting on political slogans that promote only one culture and one nation can be avoided, and how transcultural and hybrid identities can be represented in the political arena. Using the conventional political system, Die Urbane initiative provides a blueprint action on how to embrace fluidity and diversity of cultures that is in accordance with the values and principles of hip-hop genre. This initiative shows how current constructed cultural patterns can pave the way for an alternative and diverse idea of culture and nation that is ruled with songs, fast rhythms and break dancing.

To sum up, these movements that spark further cultural debates in Germany’s hip-hop scene unveil the interconnectedness of cultures in a global era in which alternative ways of fluid identity formation and representation is possible, thanks to social media and instant knowledge access. These movements can empower marginalized communities without having an ulterior motive of homogenization and help to put transculturality in action in politics, in art and everyday life.

Conclusion and Further Discussions

Taking inspirations from African-American hip-hop scene, German-Turkish rap has been a prominent form of expression for German-Turkish minority. First regarded as an Oriental rap group, Cartel has been a pioneer in not only representing the Turkish minority in Germany, but also becoming the voice of voiceless. Hybridity framework has helped in destabilizing the present cultural patterns and opening an “in-between” space that unveils the possibility of German and Turkish, rather than German or Turkish. Eko-Fresh and Azize-A emphasize the importance of fluid identities with their songs, and demand a “third-chair” that stands for the in-between-ness of German-Turkish minorities.

Most importantly, German-Turkish rappers such as Cartel and Dr. Bitch Ray demonstrate how culture can be utilized as a repertoire which can be individually and strategically positioned depending on situations, such as Dr. Bitch Ray’s three female figures in the video clip “Bitchanel” (2018). Such artists not only empower the marginalized identities in current multicultural Germany, but also emancipate themselves from the cultural impositions that are homogenizing and oppressing. Furthermore, in the era of globalization and social media, individuals are always encouraged to implore and stand up for discrimination and inequality. Movements like #Metwo help to blur the harsh line that borders between center and the periphery, and citizens can support their political parties depending on their musical preferences. Die Urbane shows that cultural patterns that are in effect right now can be leveraged to construct an alternative nation or culture that is based on hip-hop scene. These movements and rappers that are practicing transculturality can be in limited numbers, and

²⁰Hillebrand, Raphael, interview by Shelley Pascual. “Challenging what it means to be German: Meet the hip hop party running for election,” *The Local*, 8 September 2018. <https://www.thelocal.de/20170908/giving-a-voice-to-the-voiceless-why-germanys-first-hip-hop-party-are-running-for-election>.

transculturality may not be the only solution to escape essentialist traps. However, these examples inspire further transculturalisms all around the globe, open the discussion on being hybrid and fluid. It is a hopeful possibility that one can vote for representation in politics based on their aesthetic ideas in music in ten years from now. There is no doubt that one can always ask further questions on the inequality between the center and the periphery or minority and majority, yet, these examples hopefully can provide a fruitful discussion in cultural identity politics.

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