

# Kanaks in the Leitkultur- Hip-hop Education in North Rhine Westphalian Communities

## Project Overview:

This project is a study of hip-hop musical practices among migrants and post-migrants in the German Ruhr Valley. Located in the state of North Rhine Westphalia, the “Ruhrpott” is the industrial heart of the country and home to the nation’s largest migrant and post-migrant populations, particularly large groups of Turks recruited to rebuild the country in the aftermath of World War II. Among migrant youths, hip-hop culture has been the dominant mode of personal expression and in-group belonging for nearly three decades; indeed, it has played a significant role in shaping migrant behaviors, environmental perceptions, and ways of being in the world that are unique to Germany’s urban communities yet maintain close aesthetic connections to hip-hop’s African-American roots. The entry point for many of these young people to hip-hop practice are state- and city-funded programs at community centers spread throughout the region. Hip-hop performativity, however, with its open displays of verbal aggression and hyper-masculinity, is often at odds with notions of a primary German culture and with state-sanctioned non-violence agendas that form the core of community house programming.

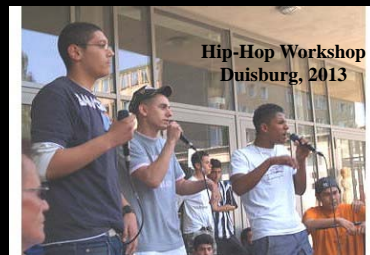
## Results:

Over an eight week period (June 1 – August 1, 2013), I conducted a multi-site ethnography to assess the impact of community center programming on migrant musical creativity and to discern how educational programs aimed at specific migrant populations expose broader questions of belonging in the German polity. Interviews with music practitioners and informants suggest the following:

- a) Violence is a constituent feature of migrant life in German inner cities, heightened by fear of violence acts *targeting* migrants
- b) Hip-hop culture is the dominant mode of musical expression in these communities and has significantly shaped perceptions of migrants in the broader polity
- c) Hip-hop culture in the Ruhr Valley articulates as world view in which violence is normative, supported by ancillary media (film, television).

## Future Study:

Interwoven within this study are the competing notions of migrant agency and the cultural values that become normalized through Germany’s community center programming. The community center is a fixture in the majority of German cities, a place of support and public aid whose programs foster self-expression in the graphic, musical, and theatrical arts, encourage collaboration in team sports, and train young adults to use contemporary media technologies. Counseling services designed to help young people address common problems such as the transition from school to work, conflicts with family members, drug use, romantic relationships, sexual activity, and legal matters are also a core component of its offerings. Future work will continue to assess the impact of these centers in “parallel societies,” or migrant neighborhoods that are marked by high levels of poverty and lack of integration into German cultural and social institutions.



I will incorporate this ethnographic data into a book manuscript for the African-American Music in a Global Perspective series published by the University of Illinois Press. The volume will contribute to the scholarly literature devoted to hip-hop practices outside the United States and will engage the “othering” process enacted when governments script migrant lyrical content or otherwise problematize hip-hop’s oppositional strategies through anti-violence campaigns and public collaborations with police and other authorities.

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