‘Boom-ch-boom-chick’: Entangled (Hi)stories in the German Mainstream Rap of 2018 and 2019

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Summary

From April 2018 to December 2019, 25 German rap songs with remarkably similar sonic patterns reached the number-one position in the all-genre single charts in Austria. The article takes these songs as starting point for retracing the processes which led to the entering of this music into the glocal mainstream frame of cultural debate. It disentangles the historical back-drops, social and identity practices, as well as aesthetics that postmigrant rap artists in Austria and in Germany have successfully intermingled into their own narratives. The article argues that the two dominating beats, ‘trap’ and ‘dembow’, were able to carry and connect these idio-syncratic encounters against the background of their postcolonial charge and international popularity wave.

Introduction

This article aims to enhance our understanding of contemporary popular music’s glocal aesthetics and practices by sharply focusing on entangled recent-past developments and cross-connotations. The center of my analysis is German-language rap, or *Deutschrap*, from April 2018 to December 2019, specifically those 25 songs that reached the number one position on the all-genre singles chart in Austria. This period marks the local peak in popularity of the globally circulating “aesthetic praxis” (Seeliger/Dietrich 2017, 10) of hip-hop. It was the result of a multi-dimensional, socio-cultural negotiation process between marginalization, resistance, commercialization, and mainstreaming (cf. Seeliger/Dietrich 2017, 10), including encounters between postmigration and postcolonial resonances, alongside their entanglements with the notions of identity politics, ethnic and gender stereotypes, technology, and trend awareness, as well as with France and French rap.

My goal is to filter, disentangle, and interrelate the different ramifications that have contributed to this process, which eventually led to an idiosyncratic bundle of transnationally intertwined musical and music-related aesthetics and practices that was seemingly in step with the zeitgeist of a particular moment in time and place.

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The theoretical perspective of this article is informed by the concept of mainstream popular music theorized in Steinbrecher (2021b). It describes *mainstream* as a specific frame of broad cultural debate, where particular artist personae, images, and musical objects function – mostly for a rather short period – as a "general cultural evaluation surface on which society negotiates its dominant conceptions, narratives and ideologies" (Steinbrecher 2021b, 410). Hence, when analyzing Deutschrap as a *mainstream* phenomenon, the many top-chart positions are the considerable indicators that it temporarily became – and needs to be analyzed as – one of the most audible stages of German and Austrian society on which "to perform or contest normativity and to reproduce or rework hegemonic constructions of gender, sexuality, race, class, or identity" (Steinbrecher 2021b, 410). According to music journalist Martin Böttcher, "No other genre in Germany deals so much with current topics and reflects [...] developments in society" (in Schmich 2020).

As to terminology, I use the terms *entangled* or *entanglement(s)*, first, in a similar sense than the idea of musical *cross-connotation* suggested by Richard Middleton, who states that "particularly strong articulative relationships are established when what we can call 'cross-connotation' takes place: that is, when two or more different elements are made to connote, symbolize or evoke each other" (Middleton 1990, 9). Second, I relate these terms to the relational historical approach elaborated by Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (2002). Their historiographical notion of "entangled histories" considers modern European history as an ensemble of interrelations and interactions between Europe and the non-European world, while at same time acknowledging the influence of regional, national, or imperial boundaries and thereby, essentially, foregrounding the accompanying power asymmetries as regards to, e.g., hierarchy and repression (Conrad and Randeria 2002, 17-18). In consonance with this relational perspective, I am situating my observations in a glocal context, yet emphasizing the dialectical relation between cultural globalization and localization which is considered paradigmatic for hip-hop (Androutsopoulos 2003, 11). Third, I am interweaving into this entangled perspective the personal narratives of the examined rappers, thus bringing together – as (hi)stories – both the collective narratives of history and the individual life stories.

The culmination of my study, as well as its initial point of departure, is the emphasis on the significance of particular parts of the relevant rap songs' musical make-up, because the top-chart position in Austria was dominated by remarkably similar sound aesthetics in the observed 20 months. Specifically, two sorts of rhythmic 'hooks', which relate to the 'trap' and 'dembow' beat patterns, are used in 24 of the 25 examined German-language rap songs (44 different songs had reached number one in the examined period).[2] I analyze the songs by mixing methods of music analysis (Steinbrecher 2016 and 2021a) and lyrical content analysis (Mayring 2010) within the individual cultural contexts. This close-reading approach towards the audible aesthetics of the examined Deutschrap is, in my view, essential for understanding their role within the cross-connotations indicated above.

To make informed statements about the aesthetic and other entanglements of recent Deutschrap as considered within the mainstream frame, I first retrace this branch of rap's

placement within and its connection points to the German rap's history, as well as to international rap and pop music at the top of the international charts. In this context, I use the term *Deutschrap*, which is actually the German neologism of 'German rap' and was coming to be known in the late 1990s,[3] in its common sense as mainly referring to rap in German language, and not necessarily to Germany as a nation. That being said, it has come about that my article's main focus is, in effect, on rap made by artists living and working in Germany, although I took the Austrian charts as the selection criterion for my music-analytical sample. This is simply because the German rappers dominated both the Austrian and the German top-charts – the former usually strongly interlinked with (or influenced by) the latter – in the examined period, rendering it non-essential, in the scope of this article, to zooming in on the specificities of Austrian rap(pers).[4] Basically, the idea of concentrating the analysis on the number-one songs in Austria was initiated by my research about popular music's reception practices in Austria in the examined period of 2018 and 2019 (Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021), which I will revisit particularly in the concluding section.

I start my historical considerations in reverse chronological order, beginning with a quick outline of the situation in 2018 and 2019, from which I will extend back to earlier developments. This retrospective view builds the discursive basis upon which I will analyze current rap's peculiar entanglements.

Entangled (commercial) Deutschrap histories

The enormous success of German-language rap singles on the German and Austrian charts was not a stepwise process but came about quite abruptly around the end of 2017. Up until 2018, only 13 rap(-related) songs with German lyrics had reached the top positions on the German singles charts; since then, the rappers Capital Bra and Samra alone have achieved 32 number-one hits. In Austria, Deutschrap began to dominate the Spotify charts at the beginning of 2018 and, shortly afterwards, the Ö3 *Austria Top 40* charts (Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, 17). Looking more closely at the Austrian charts, the following rappers reached the number-one positions with one or more songs (artist features being counted for each artist): Capital Bra (six solos, eight features); Mero (three solos, one feature); RAF Camora (two solos, three features); Samra (one solo, four features); Bonez MC (two features); KC Rebell (two features); Summer Cem (two features); Gzuz (one feature); AriBeatz (one feature); Sofiane (one feature); UFO 361 (one feature); Bushido (one feature); and Juju (one feature).

At first sight, this list already shows some peculiarities. First, there is only one woman, Juju, who was included as a featured guest on Capital Bra's "Melodien" (2018). Second, all the main rappers of number-one songs are first- or second-generation migrants to Germany or, in the case of RAF Camora, to Austria.[5] That is, Capital Bra was born in Russia, Mero has Turkish parents, RAF Camora was born in French-speaking Switzerland to an Italian mother, and Samra has Lebanese parents. Moreover, KC Rebell, Summer Cem, and UFO 361 have Turkish roots, AriBeatz was born to Iranian refugees, Sofiane is French, Bushido's

father is from Tunisia, and Juju's father is from Morocco. Of the artists on this list, only Bonez MC and Gzuz (both members of the Hamburg gangsta-rap outfit 187 Strassenbande) are from and have parents solely from Germany or Austria. Third, all the rappers, except for Bushido, were born after 1980, and many of them were in their early twenties at the time being considered here. Fourth, many of these artists have established a strong personal brand that extends beyond their musical output (e.g., through a widespread presence on social media channels and the promotion of non-music-related goods, such as pizza, vodka, or shisha tobacco).

The predominance of particular race and gender issues, together with strong neoliberal notions, as well as the ways in which these aspects are interwoven in the sounds and lyrics, must not be considered an arbitrary coincidence. Instead, these features are best understood as related to earlier developments in German rap that span the last 30 years, and particularly the commercially successful parts of it.

Generally, the history of hip-hop music in the German-speaking area cannot be easily narrated in a linear manner, as having started in the early 1980s as a transgenerational, evolutionary transmission evolving out of a common core of particular artists, sounds, and images. Rather than that, its narrative(s) are full of (re-)inventions, caesuras, entanglements, disentanglements, and commercial and artistic rises and falls. This becomes obvious in the relevant scholarly and journalistic historiographies, which most often choose not to build their narratives around one common thread, but instead attempt to systematize the different developments and their interrelations in the form of rather short-term historical phases and periods.

For example, Jan Wehn's and Davide Bortot's oral history book (2019) subdivides German rap into five different phases alongside particular narratives constructed through some iconized figures: "beginnings" (1983-1994), "new times" (1994-2003), "Berlin republic" (1998-2007), "postmodern" (2006-2015), and "current times" (2015-2019).[6] Regarding the subgenre of gangsta- or street-rap, which is especially important today in commercial respects, Güngür and Loh have identified three particular phases extending to the year 2017 (i.e., until the point where my own examination starts): the incubation phase (1990-2000); the phase of creation and commercialization (2001-2008); and the phase of change, regionalization, and artistic renewal (2009-2017) (Güngür/Loh 2017, 214).

One reason for Deutschrap's historical fragmentation might be found in the genre's intrinsic element of renewal in connection with the rap-realness discourse. According to Ayla Güler Said, every time a new artist from the underground crowds out the renowned artists, a symbolic space is created that has a transformational influence on the rap scene and ensures its recurrent renewal (Güler Saied 2017, 232). Rappers Casper and Max Herre put it more literally and describe Deutschrap as a recurrent pubertal cycle and a hunt for the crown, functioning according to the principle of competition and extrusion (in Wehn/Bortot 2019, 438-439).

During all five phases classified by Wehn and Bortot, German-speaking rappers managed to achieve, with quite differing aesthetics and images, remarkable commercial success,

climbing to the top positions in the generic all-genre album and/or singles charts. It is noticeable, though, that the least connection points of currently dominating Deutschrap are to be found in the initially most successful form of German rap – that is, the pop-oriented "party rap" (Burkhart 2018) introduced by the Neue Deutsche Welle-influenced Stuttgart band Die Fantastischen Vier[7] and, later on in the mid-/late-1990s, the Hamburg outfit Fettes Brot and the so-called "student rap" of bands like Absolute Beginner, Eins Zwo, Massive Töne, or Freundeskreis. These groups utilized a rather dense, multilayered musical texture with different, often acoustic, sound sources and were strongly influenced by boom bap-oriented American bands like A Tribe Called Quest and the 'G-Funk' of Dr. Dre. At its then-peak, in May 1999, four Deutschrap albums were in the top 11 of the German album charts;[8] number-one singles, however, were rather sparse.

While these mostly male-white German middle-class rap artists, as well as the industry and production networks that have arisen around them, had an important impact on the (also mostly male-white German middle-class) rap artists who began to succeed on the charts in the late 2000s and early 2010s, such as Peter Fox, Marteria, Casper, and Cro,[9] the preliminary versions of the current Deutschrap stars, such as Capital Bra, Samra, Mero, or RAF Camora, are rather to be found elsewhere.

First similar contours can be identified in the rap crew Rödelheim Hartreim Projekt (RHP), which came into being in the early 1990s in Frankfurt/Main. The crew's main producer and local hip-hop scene's key actor, Moses Pelham, juxtaposed the then-relatively aggressive lyrics and local diasporic slang with rather minimalistic and pad, synthesized sound textures without disregard for the music's pop appeal by using, for example, sung chorus sections.[10] Moreover, the RHP and Pelham's own label, 3p, placed a strong spotlight on the artists' immediate, precarious surroundings of Frankfurt and, in connection to this, their migrant background. Specifically, they attached much importance to creating a coherent, memorable image, for example, through fashion and costly music videos. In 1997, the song "Du liebst mich nicht" by 3p artist Sabrina Setlur reached number one on the German singles charts. Setlur, who did not start out as a rapper, would be for a long time the only female solo rapper to reach this very position, until Shirin David's success with "Gib Ihm" in 2019.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the Berlin label Aggro Berlin took the 3p's approach further, both stylistically and commercialy, and constructed the strong notion of hard (local) street credibility around artists like Sido, Fler, and Bushido, who managed to reach the top of the charts with even rougher, more explicit rap about the deplorable state of affairs in their immediate neighborhood. Musically, the Aggro Berlin rappers further detached themselves from the successful Stuttgart and Hamburg bands of the 1990s. While the latter took their primary influences from funk- and soul-loop oriented American artists, the former based their rather short, reduced, and hardly alternated beat loops on synthesizer motives, heavy basslines, and drum machine patterns, combining crunk and east coast gangsta-rap influences with pop music's verse-chorus structure and set pieces of genres not immediately related to hip-hop, such as 1990s Eurodance and Black Metal (cf., e.g., Elflein 2010; Rösing 2012;

Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021). Sido's first top-20 single, "Mein Block" (2004), was, according to the rapper Ahzumjot, the moment when 'Aggro' became mainstream (in Wehn/Bortot 2019, 298).

While the hype around Deutschrap, in general and Berlin street-rap in particular, decreased rather quickly until the end of the 2000s (cf. Wehn/Bortot 2019, 312-316)[11], the Aggro Berlin approach to constructing strong hip-hop artist persona brands, such as the stereotypical Arab-German bad-boy "gangsta-pop image" (Bower 2011, 394) of platinum-rapper Bushido, has remained a strong influence until today. Specifically, the early do-it-yourself marketing on social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, helped the next generation of German street-rappers, such as Summer Cem and 187 Strassenbande, to widen their audience and create a cult of personality that extended far beyond their musical output:[12]

> We used the internet because we couldn't get into the other [media platforms]. Radio? A no-no. Television? Also a no-no. We only had the internet, and we used it. Among the first who succeeded on YouTube? Rappers. The first to drop on Instagram? Rappers. (Summer Cem in Wehn/Bortot 2019, 407; my transl.)

In a study by Ayla Güler Saied (2017), a 16-year-old hip-hop fan explicates his own notion of such (internet-)persona constructions quite aptly with the term "image rapper":

> And then there is also this image-gangsta-rap thing, where money, women, cars and so on are the lyrics' focus. In Germany, rappers like Shindy would fall into this category, while 187, they are real street-rappers. Shindy, KC Rebell, Bushido, and Farid Bang, they are more like image-rappers. One can see this on the internet as well as by their style. (Interviewee P. in Güler Saied 2017, 229; my transl.)

As a result of these developments, German hip-hop can be considered to have reached, according to some critical commentators, a "post-historic" phase, where intertextual historic references are no longer important (Behrens 2017, 301; Süß 2021, 8)[13] and no appreciation for earlier generations is shown (Casper in Wehn/Bortot 2019, 438). Its genre-specificities may even have become entirely non-musical (Behrens 2017, 289); this is because the musical make-up has become, as some interviewees reported in Wehn/Bortot (2019), arbitrary, unsubstantial, pre-processed, more-of-the-same, fully pop-oriented, and produced solely for commercial usability and with a main focus on melody, clap trapping, and the suitability for streaming algorithms (Wehn/Bortot 2019, 432-434). Moreover, sovereignty in matters of interpretation is no longer in the hands of scene-specific discourses; instead, opinions about Deutschrap are now also proclaimed by the feuilleton and the boulevard press.

In other words, German rap has evolved into a musical phenomenon that is negotiated by evaluative practices typical of the mainstream popular music frame of cultural debate (Steinbrecher 2021b, 3-5).[14] Due to its particular acts and actors, however, chart-topping

Deutschrap can be understood contradictorily, according to J. Griffith Rollefson in his study about postcolonial politics in European hip-hop, "as both a minority resistance vernacular and a mainstream cultural commodity" (Rollefson 2017, 8), which represents "an alternative form of assimilation into national discourses, languages, and economies" (Rollefson 2017, 7). Hence, when analyzing this particular kind of rap through the lens of mainstream popular music research – i.e., with regards to the "rhetorics of success" (Jost 2016, 164) and their relation to the shared realities of meaningful experience that it brought about in 2018 and 2019, specifically to a teenage audience (cf. also Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021) – it is necessary to consider the (postcolonial) ways in which the rap is "shaped by the entry of the marginalized into representation" (Ismaiel-Wendt 2013, 96).

Entanglements of race, diaspora, class, and gender

> You do not understand Deutschrap because it is from Tschuschen for Tschuschen. (18-year-old student in Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, 19)[15]

> Why did you come from the Ukraine to Germany? Because it was shit there. (Capital Bra in Sternburg 2020, 245; my transl.)

As noted in the previous section, contemporary Deutschrap has been strongly shaped by artists who either immigrated themselves to Germany or Austria in their childhood or whose parents were immigrants. In this context, the term and discourses of *postmigration* in the sense of Florian Ohnmacht and Erol Yildiz (2021) are a suitable starting point for further analysis. For them, postmigration focuses "on the processes of dislocation and new location, ambiguity and boundary thinking. The concept of 'in-between' [...] appears characteristic for postmigrant practices, designs and plans for living and forms of articulation" (Ohnmacht/Yildiz 2021, 150).

Particularly, artists with a Turkish, Kurdish, Slavic, or Arabic cultural background have managed to succeed in the German hip-hop scene, as well as more broadly, addressing both members of diasporic communities and those who identify themselves with, or are attracted by, these communities, without necessarily having a migration background themselves. Many of these artists – from the RHP to the Aggro Berlin rappers, to Haftbefehl and Capital Bra – are more or less strongly attached to the subfield of gangsta- or street-rap and thus enable interpretations informed by existing theories of image and identity constructions in connection with corresponding staging practices and aesthetics.

As to the historical connection between migrant culture and hip-hop in Germany, Hannes Loh and Murat Güngör, authors of the book *Fear of a Kanak Planet* (2002), have drawn attention to the fact that rap was already used in the early 1990s as an agent of migrant self-assertion (Loh/Güngör 2017, 196). Worth mentioning are songs such as "Ali-Rap" (Yarınistan, 1990), an ironic reflection on German life from the viewpoint of a so-

called 'Gastarbeiter' (literally 'guest worker'), "Ahmet Gündüz" (Fresh Familee 1990), about everyday racism, "Fremd im eigenen Land" (Advanced Chemistry, 1992), which deals with the xenophobic experiences of Afro-Germans and migrant children, and crews like "Islamic Force," which was founded in 1992 and is deemed to be the key enabler of what has been labeled "oriental hip-hop" (Elflein 1998, 263).

Looking at the more recent past, Loh and Güngör (2017) reckon that the contemporary generation of postmigrant gangsta- and street-rappers, born in and after the 1980s, hardly has any relation to the struggles of the first and second generations of immigrants due to different life situations and experiences; at the same time, though, they have still had to cope with their status as (Eastern) foreigners.[16] As a result, they gave gangsta-rap a "new artistic quality" (Güngör/Loh 2017, 196). These new aesthetics need to be analyzed as such, but without blurring out the historical "recontextualization process" (Androutsopoulos/Scholz 2002) against which the current generation has constructed its own version of rap.

In particular, I am interested in why postmigrant rappers are so enormously appealing with their aesthetics to audiences without similar trajectories and experiences related to migration, race, and ethnicity. With regard to Bushido's uprising in the 2000s, former label owner Marcus Staiger has remarked that "the fans who made Bushido successful do not hang around in broken suburbs. The money comes from German secondary-school students who grab their deluxe-set from Saturn [German consumer-electronics chain] and are going to shock their parents with this sound" (Staiger in Verlan/Loh 2015, 73; my transl.). Considering some live video footage of concerts from, for instance, Capital Bra and Samra, Staiger's observations of the audience's age and class are most likely still valid today.[17]

One aspect of this particular appeal to a young white audience might relate to what Justin D. Ross describes, in connection with Black American gangsta-rap, as white kids looking through a keyhole

> into a violent, sexy world of 'money, ho's and clothes.' We're excited to be transported to a place where people brag about gunplay, use racial epithets continually and talk freely about dealing drugs. And then we turn off whatever we're listening to and return to our comfy world in time for dinner. (Ross 2007)

For Tricia Rose, the notion of a keyhole perspective (cf. also Güngör/Loh 2017, 218) is strongly connected with racist ideas about "white desires and projections onto black people" (Rose 2008, 233). Regarding German gangsta-rap, it is remarkable that many of the currently most popular and most aggressive protagonists are actually white people being read as Germans, such as Bonez MC, Gzuz, Kollegah, or Fler, while Black German gangsta-rappers are relatively rare, at least in the broader public sphere. Therefore, and without considering notions of authenticity at this point (cf. e.g., Hess 2005; Grealy 2008; Armstrong 2010), one may speak of a twofold keyhole through which white kids look at white rappers who look at, often indirectly through French diasporic culture (cf. below), Black American culture. With regard to the examined rappers at the top of the singles charts, who are mostly not being

read as Germans or Austrians, the role of – or deliberate action with – xenophobic and other stereotypes or prejudices remains relevant, too, especially against the background of what might be expected by their local (non-migrant) white audiences.

My qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2010) of the number-one rap songs' lyrics of 2018 and 2019 reveals that the topics mentioned by Ross, specifically in relation to money, violence, drugs, and misogyny, have actually found their way to the singles charts' upper echelon. An illustrative example is the chorus of Capital Bra's song "Neymar", which hit the number-one position on the German and Austrian singles charts in May 2018:

> Come on, let's change the subject
> I want 22-inch wheels,
> And the seats made of leather
> And the judge yells, I was the offender
> But today I'm a star, just like Neymar
> She licks on my Yarak and I on my paper
> No sign of enemies
> ("Neymar," Capital Bra, 2018; my transl. – for the original German lyrics see endnote)[18]

In these seven lines, Capital Bra encapsulates a multifold reference system of different layers of meaning, which can be found recurrently in the analyzed songs. All of these layers refer to issues that have already been prevalent in gangsta- or street-rap's earlier forms, and which are now re-contextualized within the frame of postmigrants' life (hi)stories.

First, Capital Bra strongly adheres to the subgenres' convention of self-presentation. According to Fröhlich and Röder, the speakers in gangsta-rap can be viewed as virtuosos of self-thematization (Fröhlich/Röder 2017, 138; cf. also Burkart 2006, 313), who deliberately make their own lives and experiences a public subject and are specifically skilled in thinking about and observing themselves. By doing this in a particular way, they are able to create a strong, and strongly subjectified identity clearly marked off from the Other. This is to present life in its entirety as a process of development from the perspective of a marginalized group's member, who uses dialects and sociolects, with which he describes, among other things, mundanities, and deviations from them (Fröhlich/Röder 2017, 149). The fact that 'talking about oneself' is a common form of expression in the rap genre in general, often in connection with boasting and dissing, is shown, for example, in an analysis of European rap-song lyrics by Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2002). The topic of self-presentation was evident in 20% of the study's sample of 150 (French, Italian, and German) songs (Androutsopoulos/Scholz 2002, 12).[19] In fact, in my own 2018 and 2019 sample of 25 songs, 18 songs relate to the artist's personal narrative of life development, specifically in connection with social ascent. In "Vendetta", for instance, RAF Camora states that:

> Little bastard ('Piç'), do you still know who I am (Heh?)
> The one without nothing from West-Vienna

> You were eight, I was alone with Jasmin
> Okay, we have cashed in, but everything makes sense
> 'Cause I don't forget nothing, many have fucked me on my way
> ("Vendetta", RAF Camora, 2019; my transl.)[20]

In Capital Bra's "Neymar", the notion of life achievement is negotiated with the eponymous football player Neymar Jr., who succeeded from rising out of the Brazilian slums to become one of the most highly-paid footballers, playing with the Sheik-led club Paris St. Germain. Actually, the main criteria by which the rappers measure their hard-earned new status are social and financial potency, the latter in the form of money, expensive cars or brands, and – against, at first sight, any subcultural or anti-mainstream ethos – the ability to reach the number-one position on the charts. The songs entitled "Maserati", "Ferrari", and "Rolex" are self-explanatory in this regard, but also in those songs primarily dealing with the topic of love, it is brand names and financial wealth which are often used as a means of self-affirmation with respect to one's own (male) value.[21]

What becomes apparent in the context of the examined songs is a particular intersection of class-related empowerment, specifically of the neoliberal narrative of efficiency in connection with having come to the top from down below through hard work and punch (Seeliger 2017, 46), with notions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005) and (the transcendence of) hindrances to cultural participation due to racist exclusion. On the nature of this context, Martin Seeliger has remarked that those rappers with a migration background within Arabic-Islamic culture are often put in the situation of dealing with stereotypes. These go along with experiences of exclusion, but, at the same time, enable the young men to build upon related discourses of crisis, which often stigmatize them as violators and criminals (Seeliger 2017, 41). Regarding the empowerment mechanisms that go along with the postmigrant rappers' successful commercialization of their art form, the displaying of materialist consumption and wealth might also be interpreted as a political act of forcing participation through confrontation, in terms of the rappers appropriating symbolic goods from those who marginalize them and then re-confronting them with the appropriated. The German feminist and "alternative hip-hop" (Last.fm 2022) rapper Ebow, grand daughter of a Kurdish immigrant, refers quite pointedly to this interrelation in the interlude to her song "Prada Bag" (2022):

> Listen, people always ask: "Why is rap always about how much money one makes, which brands you wear, which car you drive?" And so on, right? But when you're growing up in a society that always looks down on you as second-class person, then the only chance you have to stand on an equal footing is to impress them. Of course, you may also have a good job, having studied, right? Then they're perhaps taking you seriously as well. But if can't take this path, then there is not much left.
> You're appropriating the things they would like to have. You're wearing the brands that they would like to have. You're driving the cars that they would like to have. This is the

> only moment when you're getting their attention. When you're taking something that they don't think you deserve. ("Prada Bag", Ebow, 2022; my transl.)[22]

Interview-based insights into how the life and career pathways of today's postmigrant Deutschrap stars, such as Nimo and Capital Bra, were (also) often influenced by experiences of alienation and xenophobic and class-related degradation can be found in the journalist Juri Sternburg's YouTube-series-based book *Das ist Germania. Die Größen des Deutschrap über Heimat und Fremde* (2020).[23] However, the ways in which these rappers aesthetically process and incorporate their 'foreign' background into their music and identity constructions have become different compared to earlier German rap phases, when 'migrant rap' wasn't that strongly the focus of the broad (white) public's eyes and ears (and they are, of course, also different compared to politically engaged contemporary artists such as Ebow).

First of all, neither is criticism of racism directly articulated in the analyzed songs, nor is criticism of social inequality directed toward concrete (circle of) persons, such as politicians.[24] In fact, the rappers avoid openly criticizing or offending their white German or Austrian contemporaries (and, of course, potential buyers). Generally, the mentioning and threatening of alleged enemies remains in these songs on a rather abstract level, sidestepping the question of who exactly they want "to fuck" or who wants to "fuck them", and, even more remarkably, the rap-typical technique of dissing fellow rap colleagues is hardly or rather covertly used.[25]

Seen from this perspective, the ubiquitous use of swear words, including misogynist – but rarely homophobic – terms and descriptions, can be considered as a particular stylistic device referencing the sociolectical frame of (gangsta-)rap culture, but without exhausting its symbolic potential for expressing insurgency against particular hegemonic practices. Rather, the 'rough' language is more likely to be used as a tool to meet their young audiences' desire for resisting their parents' moral concepts and tastes (cf. also Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, 23).[26] More importantly, as regards the migrant "hip-hop linguistics" (Alim 2006, 10) of the analyzed sample, is probably the fact that many of the rappers include single terms or even whole sections of minority languages, but which do not necessarily relate to their own descent, into their songs. Capital Bra, for instance, uses the Turkish term *yarak* ('penis') in the above-shown "Neymar" excerpt and raps the whole first verse of "Prinzessa" in Russian; RAF Camora's "Perfect" (2019) has a section in French; one of the main hooks in Eno feat. Mero's "Ferrari" (2019) is in Turkish; and Samra's "Harami" (2019) already carries an Arabic or Aramaic title.

Again, this process of (trans-)local adaption and reconfiguration has also been an integral part of many hip-hop musics, including those in German-speaking countries (e.g., Bohmann 2010; Wiemeyer/Schaub 2018). For example, Rosa Reitsamer and Rainer Prokop identify, in their study of second-generation Turkish and (Ex-)Yugoslavian rappers in Vienna (2017), notions of a glocal resistance vernacular (Mitchell 2000), which have helped the rappers to interrogate dominant (racist) discourses and to create, together with stressing the close relation to their home district, a strongly locally bound, self-empowered identity.

In the case of the examined chart-topping songs, the rapper's local rootedness is mentioned in some songs with regards to home towns, but such references are sometimes more weakly presented in the form of quick listings of city (e.g., Stuttgart or Gladbach) or area names (Berlin's Neukölln and Ku'damm or Rüsselsheim's Wellritzstraße), and sometimes more strongly, as in the case of Capital Bra's "Berlin lebt" (2018), Mero's "Baller Los" (2018)[27] and, particularly, in RAF Camora's "Vendetta" (2019). In the latter, the Vienna-raised rapper strongly stresses, as he also does in many other songs, the (criminal) street life in his home district of Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus, which is the area with the highest percentage of foreign nationals in all of Vienna (ÖIF 2018). Altogether, though, the importance of identity through locality is less pronounced in these hit songs than it was, for example, in the lyrics of the early Frankfurt or Aggro Berlin scenes.[28]

Frankfurt and Berlin can also be considered the breeding grounds of today's common use of multi-ethnolect or "Straßenstyle International" ("street-style international", Haftbefehl 2013) in rap lyrics. The examined songs continue a tradition in German rap that had already become common in the 1990s, specifically in Frankfurt and most prominently with the so-called *Chabo*-vernacular, which was used, for example, by the RHP and, later, the rapper Haftbefehl (for a historic overview, cf. Killmann 2019).[29] Regarding the Berlin scene, rapper Massiv, who is of Palestinian descent, claims to be one of the first to have used, at around the year 2005, Arabian(-influenced) terms of everyday-street jargon, such as "*Hamdullah, Inshalla, Habibi …"* in his lyrics (Massiv in Sternburg 2020, 127). As of today, he considers this a common practice in rap, with a big influence "on the German community", who, after listening, "googles it [the slang], tries to find out what it means, and thinks it is fly" (Sternburg 2020, 128; my transl.).

Massiv's remark is specifically relevant in connection with the identity affordances and (re-)presentation of the current postmigrant Deutschrap to a white (non-migrant) audience. As Hannes Loh puts it, "Today, the majority society lags behind the wordplays of the MCs, striving desperately to understand them" (in Gültekin 2017; my transl.). Jannis Androutsopoulos points to the necessity of analyzing such lyrics not merely with a focus on national-linguistic etymology, but as multilingual practices – that is, with regards to their socio-etymology, their audience orientation, and their mediation-through-genre to other communities of practices (Androutsopoulos 2020, 30-33).

Regarding chart-topping songs like the ones examined in this article, a tendency toward less codified or cryptic ethnolect than, for example, in Haftbefehl's or other Frankfurt, Berlin, or Vienna artists' oeuvres, becomes visible through my analysis. In the number-one rap hits of 2018 and 2019, the rappers hardly use any specific local ethnolect. Instead, they draw from a rather general vocabulary referencing a relatively low number of topics, which is relatively easy to understand for outsiders. Non-German and non-English terms are used loosely in connection with money,[30] criminal activity/violence,[31] and drugs,[32] or they are used for addressing someone or as a general call for action.[33] Explicit references to sex, such as those found in "Neymar", are, somewhat surprisingly, rarely found in general.[34]

Aside from the examined rappers' self-placement within local (diasporic) communities in Germany and Austria, there is another foreign but European cultural area that holds together and entangles their doings and sayings. This area is France.

French (diasporic) entanglements

> There are two camps in Germany. One of them was inspired by American rap. Kool Savas and Samy Deluxe belong to this camp, for instance. And then you have other rappers who rather listen to French hip-hop, because they cannot identify that much with American hip-hop. I count myself as one of them, but also many Frankfurt rappers such as Nimo or Celo & Abdi. (RAF Camora in Ohanwe 2017; my transl.)

> Most commonly, Germany [German rappers] used to look up to France. But now, France looks up to Germany. (Capital Bra 2019, 32:10-33:30; my transl.)[35]

In the examined hit songs, France appears in different forms: as a place of longing, as the domain of certain football players, through the use of the French language, and through French musical influences. In particular, Paris is mentioned repeatedly as a place to go with a loved one or for partying ("Prinzessa", "DODI", and "Harami") or in connection with the football club Paris St. Germain ("DNA"), its star player Neymar ("Neymar"), and the former coach Carlo Ancelotti ("Rolex"). Other French football players are also mentioned, such as Zinedine Zidane ("Maserati"), Frank Ribéry ("Perfekt"), and Karim Benzema ("Benzema"[36]). These players either fulfill the from-ghetto-to-glory narrative, like Neymar and Ribéry, or, in the case of Zidane and Benzema, who are of Algerian descent and have experienced hostilities because of this during their careers, they (also) have a migration background. Thus, these football players function as individualized proxies for the Deutschrappers' own struggles as first- or second-generation immigrants.

Moreover, by setting themselves in close relation to France and French hip-hop, contemporary Deutschrappers are able to benefit from the notions of originality and authenticity that postmigrant African-French rappers, according to Rupa Huq (2003 in Reitsamer/Prokop 2017, 261), have constructed through negotiating ethnic and social segregation and the poor and dangerous life in the banlieues. French influences on German gangsta-rap were already exposed detectable in the early 2000s (Güngör/Loh 2017, 213-214), particularly regarding the imaginary used in German artists' videos.[37]

However, from the "strong political discourse [...] which African-French rappers have pointedly expressed for decades" (Verlan/Loh 2015, 249; my transl.) and the broad societal horizon to which French street-rap relates (Verlan/Loh 2015, 36), there is not left much in the examined hit songs' German or other-language lyrics. The French interjections, which can be found in some of the analyzed songs, remain within the confines of tourist phrases, such as "bon appétit" ("Baller Los") and "Capital Bra je m'appelle", or they are used as an

additional sound-painting layer without necessarily adding substantial content (like in the French verse of RAF Camora's "Perfekt").

French influences on contemporary Deutschrap, especially on the examined hit songs of 2018 and 2019, can also be found with regards to the musical make-up. Shortly before, in 2016, RAF Camora and Bonez MC reached number one on the German charts and number two in Austria with *Palmen aus Plastik*, which was heavily influenced by a sound established by the young French rapper MHD.[38]

Musical entanglements – Trap, dembow, and Afro-trap

Broadly speaking, the 25 Deutschrap songs that reached number one in Austria between 2018 and 2019 are composed on the basis of two kinds of beat loops. Twelve songs use a pattern in the style of US-American 'trap' music, utilizing heavy TR-808 bass- and kick-drum sounds, a rather slow tempo with little harmonic movement and a "low/high frequency spread" (Burton 2016), high-pitched hi-hats including fast clusters and triplets, manipulated (auto-tuned) vocals, a sharp snare-drum(-like) backbeat on 2 and 4, a downbeat-emphasizing kick drum that is otherwise often syncopated. Another 12 songs utilize a drum pattern that incorporates three-unit spans stretched across a pure-duple frame (Cohn 2016, para. 0.1), with a distinctive low-high-pitch structure ('boom-ch-boom-chik') that is often combined with a four-to-the-floor kick drum – a beat commonly referred to as 'dembow'.[39]

It is certainly not uncommon for songs in the mainstream popular music frame of a particular period and place to relate to each other through their sonic similarities that adhere to the musical trends of the day. Nonetheless, it remains remarkable how strongly the examined songs are constructed around specific, digitally produced durational entities with a high amount of inner motion and temporal tensity (cf. Steinbrecher 2021a, 122),[40] which function not just as rhythmic accompaniment layers to melodic or harmonic gestures, but also as these songs' hooks (Steinbrecher 2021a, 121-122) and important conveyors of their identity, feel, and groove (Cohn 2016, para. 0.1). Following Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt's postcolonial understanding of presets, the beats can also be considered matrices that co-determine the music's perception and help to differentiate cultures (Ismaiel-Wendt 2013, 7). In general, Güler Saied identifies the beat as one major aspect of rap consumption together with the voice and the whole package (Güler Saied 2017, 238).

My following considerations in the last section of this article are guided by the assumption that, in 2018 and 2019, the postmigrant Deutschrappers mixed in and maxed out both the trap and dembow beats' commercial momentum and iconic charge to make direct hits. The fact that these particular artists started to heavily use these default beats around this period was certainly an informed commercial move to join the latest sound trends. However, in doing so, they did not incidentally adopt some arbitrary sonic constellations, but managed to successfully reconstruct, within their own meaning set, the social practices, cultural

stereotypes, and identity politics that both beats encode and facilitate (cf. also Rollefson 2017, 9-10). This is not to say that Capital Bra, Mero, Samra, RAF Camora, or others, according to Ismaiel-Wendt, simply perpetuate the dembow or trap beats' essentialized narratives of Afro-Caribbean or Afro-American roots, but that they renegotiate these sounds' meanings in representation (Ismaiel-Wendt 2013, 96-97). Actually, before the mid-2010s, neither of these beats was widely used in German rap, but both had already entered Western mainstream popular music through different junctions.

Trap music, in general, originated in the 1990s in the US-American South, specifically in the suburbs of Atlanta, and was popularized and "sonically branded" (Vaught and Bradley 2017, 19) by rapper T.I. and his album *Trap Muzik* (2003). However, it was only at the beginning of 2010s when young producers such as Lex Luger consolidated the characteristic 808-kick-drum driven sonics with "pair rattling, lawn-sprinkler-ish percussion," and "ominous synthesized orchestration" using digital audio workstations such as FL Studio (Pappademas 2011). The resulting electronic beat became the trap's "grimmer," "harsher techno-y" (Pappademas 2011), "overall dark" (Kaluža 2018, 24), and rather aggressive (Dörfler-Trummer 2021, 172) signature sound. Soon after, this new kind of trap music entered the U.S. Billboard Hot 100, with artists such as Rick Ross and Future, and broke through to the top of international pop music in 2016, the latest, with Migos feat. Lil Uzi Vert's "Bad and Boujee" (2016; having today over a billion YouTube views).

For Emilia Greco, trap is visually and lyrically strongly determined by references to the rejected practices of marginalized and discriminated youth groups, "such as drug consumption and dealing, misogyny, and sexism, and the display of wealth and theft" (Greco 2018).[41] The strong notions of the "outlaw or the 'street' experiences" that this imaginary entails are, according to Greco, also musically embodied. Specifically, the musical aesthetics here might be considered the direct result of the production circumstances in relation to the physical condition, place, and technology. A Spanish trap artist interviewed by Greco remarked that "trap's what happened to hip-hop artists once they tried certain drugs and got into their home with a computer to make music. Codeine's used, a lot. Everything becomes slower and voices are distorted" (JXY3RX in Greco 2018).[42]

Looking more closely at the 12 number-one songs built upon a trap beat,[43] it becomes clear that the rappers utilize its particular referentiality and vibe very specifically as a tool for contouring their own postmigrant experiences and narratives. All of these 12 songs' lyrics center around criminal activity (or intentions), drug consumption, and (newly-earned) financial wealth. Moreover, the Deutschrappers also attach to themselves the trap frame's "often contradictory affects", and as Kaluža puts it, "trap is bitter-sweet[;] it includes nihilism and joy, states of ecstasy and states of depression, life['s] up's and down's, entrapment and escape" (Greco 2018, 27). Indeed, two of the most successful artists, Capital Bra and Samra, do not shy away from self-reflecting and addressing their own vulnerability and identity turmoil in their lyrics, as is evident in "Wir Ticken"[44] or "Harami":

> Perhaps I'm going to die tomorrow, but for this I'm going to accept it
> All the ways that I'm running, falling, and standing up again
> I've trusted much too quickly, but sadly, mon ami
> Real life taste as bitter as cocaine ("Harami", Samra, 2019; my transl.)[45]

Another essential aspect of trap music that the Deutschrappers have taken with their trap-based songs into the Austrian and German charts concerns the echoing of its self-contained do-it-yourself attitude, specifically regarding the music's digital production and promotion. In "Der Bratan bleibt der gleiche" ("The Bratan stays the same"), Capital Bra declares that he does not need "no managers" and that "every promo-move is planned by Capital himself", while Mero states in "Baller Los" that he has "already fucked everything only through smartphones videos". One more example in this regard is "Für Euch alle":

> Unlike you guys, I can still look at myself in the mirror
> Everyday day plodding, Bra, full of Jacky-Coke, Haze
> Night after night in the studio, just ask The Cratez (bra)[46]
> ("Für Euch alle", Bushido feat. Samra & Capital Bra, 2018; my transl.)[47]

Resembling trap's beginnings (cf. Greco 2018), the current postmigrant stars of German rap also had to take advantage of the possibilities of digital and internet technology for independent production and self-promotion, aside from commercial circuits, due to the lack of industry recognition and support. Although their music has now very strongly entered the (youth-cultural) mainstream frame, the rappers – while in parallel having established their own professional circuits of production and commercialization – are still able to maintain a kind of offbeat, anti-establishment semblance.[48] The referential affordances offered by the trap beat can be considered an important aesthetic device in this social positioning.

The bouncy dembow beat is also interlaced within an intertextual fabric, including ethnic and gender stereotypes, embodiment preconceptions, and postcolonial dissociation. According to common narratives, the pattern's fundamental 3-over-2 structure was spread to Europe and the Americas through Afro-Caribbean music and evolved into styles such as tresillo, habanera, bossa nova, and ragtime. It was then reshaped and recontextualized by popular-music artists such as Bo Diddley, Elvis, and George Michael, and eventually became an essential fundament of reggaeton. Eponymous for the dembow beat is the riddim in the dancehall-reggae song "Dem Bow" (1991) from Jamaican artist Shabba Ranks.[49] From there, according to Wayne Marshall, the pattern has meandered as an audible threat "demonstrating the mutations of translation and localization" (Marshall 2008, 131) and serving "as a postcolonial chant to describing a transnational rhythm" (Marshall 2008, 149):

> [...] a song ["Dem Bow"] which begins as an anti-gay, anti-colonial anthem, implicitly interpellating its audience along the lines of race and nation, proceeds to be re-recorded, translated, and adapted with a good deal of its original thematic integrity

> preserved, but ultimately finds itself defused and diffused, turned into a mere symbol of seduction, describing a distinctive, sexy, transnational and utterly marketable beat. (Marshall 2008, 132-133)

In the last 20 years, the dembow loop has successfully made its way to the top of the international pop charts (on-again-off-again), with remarkable peaks around 2005 and 2016. With the examples of the global hit songs "Oye Mi Canto" (N.O.R.E., 2004) and "Gasolina" (Daddy Yankee, 2005), Marshall identifies a commercializing process of "whitening" or "cleaning up" to be more appealing to a "'mainstream', pan-Latino listenership" (Marshall 2008, 132). As N.O.N.E. puts it in "Oye Mi Canto", "If you're proud to be Latino right now, stand the fuck up!"[50]

About 10 years later, in 2016 and 2017, the 1 a (2) + 3 a (4) + accentuation structure dominated the international charts and led the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 "for a cumulative 51 weeks" (Ugwu 2019), with songs such as "Sorry" (Justin Bieber, 2015), "Cheap Thrills" (Sia feat. Sean Paul, 2016), "Shape of You" (Ed Sheeran, 2016), "Despacito" (Louis Fonsi feat. Daddy Yankee), and "One Dance" (Drake feat. WizKid & Kyla, 2016). Somewhat unlike the 2005 dembow wave, these songs' adherence to '(Afro-) Latino' or '(Afro-)Caribbean' manifests differently – from rather strongly (Louis Fonsi, Sean Paul) to relatively subtly (Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran), and sometimes with allegations of cultural appropriation (Drake).[51] What remains intact, however, is that all the songs prolong, although in a more reserved manner, the male-gaze machismo often to be found in reggaeton lyrics (Dinzey-Flores 2008), as "body" and "bawdy" music "animated by lustful lyrics" (Marshall 2008, 150). In all these songs, a male narrator discusses the body (and bodily benefits) of the desired woman.

German postmigrant rappers were again able to quickly recognize the signs of the time and incorporated the 'boom-ch-boom-chik' pattern into their music, leading to another 12 chart-toppers in 2018 and 2019. However, the artists did not just impose the same lyrical contents as found in the trap-based songs onto this particular, asymmetrically accented 3+3+2 pattern as well; instead, they equilibrated the lyrics to its different signification framework. In seven of the 12 songs,[52] there is hardly any mention of crime, violence, or hard street life. Instead, an (always heterosexual and female) object of desire is gazed at and ensnared. A similar approach is also found in the three international songs with this same rhythm structure, which reached the top position of the Austrian charts in the examined period.[53] In another four of the 12 songs,[54] the dembow and trap aesthetics are fused together and labeled under a new genre brand: 'Afro-trap'.

Although it might seem that the meaning frameworks of these two beats are rather disparate, the early days of reggaeton in Puerto Rico at around 1990 actually bear resemblances to trap's origin in Atlanta at about the same time. An important parallel concerns notions of place in a literal (and not just geographical) sense. While early US-American trap music entails the narrative of having been produced in so-called 'trap houses' (functioning primarily as drug trading centers), early reggaeton was also strongly attached to

particular places entangled with a criminal and drug milieu and notions of 'Blackness' (e.g., Rivera 2010), specifically urban housing projects ('caseríos'). Similarities can also be found with regards to the high importance of digital technology. Just like trap music, reggaeton might also be classified as being "undeniably a product of the digital age" due to its usual creation with computers, drum machines, and keyboards (Marshall 2021).

However, the moment when the trap and dembow beats crossed each other loudly and sidelined into the European mainstream can be found, again, in the mid-2010s, when young French rapper MHD's album *MHD* (2016) reached number two on the French charts. The musical approach of MHD, who grew up in Paris to parents from Senegal and Guinea, of combing heavy 808-trap-beats with throaty vocals and 'Afro-Caribbean' sound elements, most notably the dembow beat, was quickly and heavily adopted by Austrian rapper/producer RAF Camora. When asked about the influence of MHD on his music, and particularly on the song "Ohne Mein Team" (2016), RAF Camora stated the following:

> The melody of the sample is taken from a trance-music library and, thus, it is pure coincidence that it sounds similar. Regarding the drums, there is simply not that much variety in Afro-trap. Everything sounds quite similar. [...] I don't care if "AfroTrap Part. 5" sounds similar. I'm extremely into MHD's album. (RAF Camora in Ohanwe 2017; my transl.).

Camora re-located the dembow beat back into a rather dark and violent setting together with reggaeton's "culture of bling" (Domino Rudolph, 980), as opposed to its 'love and lover' usage in international pop and (other) national rap. Also, the (diasporic) street life and gang symbolics of MHD and his faible for the football club Paris St. Germain did not remain without echo in the German rap scene (see above), and especially in the four number-one singles of RAF Camora in the examined period, which use these exact Afro-trap sounds and imaginary.[55] From a critical perspective, hip-hop journalist Mathis Raabe remarks that while the Afro-trap boom went along with the biggest commercial success of Deutschrap, it also comprised a "colonial mentality", by dissociating elements and terms from their cultural origins and decorating oneself with the "exotics of African influences of which not much is left", aside from a distinctive, danceable rhythm (Raabe 2019).

Internationally, the bringing together of "both reggaeton and southern trap sounds" (Sousa 2019) also found far-reaching success around 2016, specifically with the song "La Ocasión" (2016, De La Ghetto feat. Anuel AA, Ozuna, and Arcangel). Sometimes labeled under the term "Latin-trap", whose origins go back to the mid-2000s (Salud 2017), artists like Bad Bunny and J Balvin have since then achieved huge international success on the charts – without, however, rolling forward the heteronormative gender positioning of their reggaeton precursors or Deutschrap contemporaries.[56]

Conclusion – Entangled (hi)stories

> Definitely, things have mixed up. Capital Bra, for instance, combines street-rap with pop moments [...]. Ufo361 uses elements of trap and cloud rap in his pieces, Trettmann as well, plus a few sounds inspired by dancehall. Afrobeats, sounds from West-Africa are important. Old-school hip-hop, on the other hand, has rather bad prospects at the moment. (Böttcher in Schmich 2020; my transl.)

In this article, I took the top of the singles charts as a starting point for retracing the processes that led to the entry of particular musical objects, imaginaries, and artist personae into the glocal mainstream frame of cultural debate. My analysis attempted to disentangle the historical backdrops, social and identity practices, and aesthetics that the postmigrant rap artists in Austria and Germany successfully intermingled during 2018 and 2019 into their own narratives to precisely tailor their own full complement to the national and international zeitgeist.

A close reading of the lyrical and musical representation of the rappers' own pool of identity affordances (Seeliger/Dietrich 2012, 23) connects to observations made by Steinbrecher and Pichler (2021) about the "intermediate level[s] of social categorization" (Abrams 2009, 305) that Deutschrap offers to its (mostly non-migrant) teenage audience, which fits very well into their evaluation framework's "rather narrow borderline between conformity and deviance" (Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, 21-22). Rather than providing a tiny, shabby keyhole through which one can peep from the outside in at criminality, power struggles, and diasporic experiences, the examined Deutschrap opens up a rather broad door crack through which its audiences can enter and leave, down to their whim and without much effort or risk, and apply to themselves particular elements of the (re-)presented culture. The lyrics are explicit but rather vague regarding the addressees and without obvious social critique; notions of male self-aggrandizement are ubiquitous but sometimes foiled by self-doubt (and ironic exaggeration); and local ethnolects and foreign-language interjections are used, but in homeopathic doses. Moreover, by adhering more strongly to Europe (specifically France) than to the United States, the cultural references are potentially more comprehensible for German and Austrian listeners (e.g., with regards to football or Euro-Disco/Eurodance interpolations[57]). Another aspect contributing to this low barrier to entry might concern the heavy use of alienating voice effects, such as auto-tune, which could be interpreted as functioning as a deauthenticating protective layer between the narrators and their recipients (cf. also Brøvig-Hanssen/Danielsen 2016, 130).

I have argued that the two dominating beats of the examined number-one songs were very well able to carry, entangle, and frame these idiosyncratic encounters against the background of their postcolonial charge and international popularity wave. For example, one can hardly find a non-postmigrant German or Austrian pop artist who had similar success during the examined period with a similar sonic setting. However, the fact that the

mainstream momentum of these encounters had a certain date of expiration is indicated by a glance at the Austrian singles charts in 2020 and 2021. Already in 2020, the genre and sonic palette (as well as the rappers' gender) became considerably more manifold at the number-one position, while in 2021, only six German rap(-related) songs topped the singles charts, including four songs of RAF Camora (two of which have a dembow/Afro-trap beat).

Regarding future research, my focus on number-one singles, specifically of the *Austrian Top 40*, certainly provides a rather distinct view of the glocal mainstream popular music frame in general and Deutschrap in particular. A comparative picture might include, for example, the top of the album charts and the charts of streaming platforms, as well as the songs positioned below the top 10.[58] Most importantly, however, it would be necessary to more profoundly understand the mediation processes of Deutschrap and its broad impact on today's young society members. That is, it would be most valuable to sharpen the reception-oriented focus and to empirically examine – methodologically, like the approaches of Steinbrecher and Pichler (2021), Güler Saied (2017), and Böder and Karabulut (2017) – how the actual listeners of Deutschrap identify, absorb, and process the discursive meanings and aesthetics laid out in this article.

Endnotes

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2 The entire list of examined songs can be found in the discography. Charts information taken from "Nummer 1-Hits Österreich". In: *austriancharts.at*, https://austriancharts.at/no1_single10.asp (last access 13.12.2021).

3 The term was first introduced to the broader public through a May 1998 cover of the German hip-hop magazine Juice, showing Michi Beck, one of the members of the band Die Fantastischen Vier (Katmando in Wehn and Bortot 2019, 177). It was meant to be an analogy to Deutschrock (German rock; cf. also Redaktion 2017).

4 As for the different phases in Austrian hip-hop, for example, cf. Dörfler-Trummer (2021).

5 The fact that RAF Camora is Austrian and not German is hardly recognizable in his vocal delivery because he doesn't use any local dialect.

6 However, one might also add a pre-phase in the late 1970s/early 1980s, with (Austrian) pop-artists like Falco and EAV, who included quick spoken-word sections in their music, and parodies such as G.L.S.-United's (only) song, "Rapper's Deutsch" (1980), TV-entertainer Thomas Gottschalk,

"Hip Hop Bommi Bop" (1983) from the German punk-band Die Toten Hosen, or "Huusmeister Kaczmarek" (1984) from the Cologne-dialect band Bläck Fööss.

7 "This is hit-pop, but no hip-hop" (Toni der Koch quoted by Ralf Theil in Wehn/Bortot 2019, 65).

8 "Top 100 Album-Charts". In: *Offizielle Deutsche Charts*, https://www.offiziellecharts.de/charts/album/for-date-927237600000 (last access 13.12.2021).

9 They put out commercially successful albums with extraordinary efforts on the parts of production and arrangement. Actually, Peter Fox, with a French mother, and Casper, with an American father, were also born to non-German parents. Due to their Western-European and American descent, however, these artists are usually not framed in the public as migrants or foreigners.

10 Some might describe the instrumentals as also having a cheap or kitschy touch to them. König Boris of Fettes Brot referred to RHP's sound in their song "Hallo Hip Hop" in the following way: "Pack your children's keyboard and let your violin crated" (Dokter Renz in Wehn/Bortot 2019, 79). Technical proficiency in the vocal delivery was also not the main focus, as some artists, like Sabrina Setlur, did not have a background in rapping.

11 Through the lens of charts success, however, there was still at least one German rap song that had reached number one on the German singles charts between 2012 and 2015.

12 In this context, following André Sirois's notion of hip-hop culture being itself a new media culture (2016), the idiosyncratic, do-it-yourself use of technology – either regarding the uncommon use of existing technology, such as turntables, or the early use of new technology, such as auto-tune and the internet – must be ascribed an important role in Deutschrap's strategies of producing and distributing music and images.

13 In his comment, Roger Behrens speaks about gangsta-rap in particular. It can be assumed, however, that his view on artists like RAF Camora or Capital Bra are not entirely different.

14 When popular music gets interwoven into the mainstream debate, evaluations happen, according to Steinbrecher, "against the backdrop of an imaginary conception of particular intentions and production practices within capitalistic conditions, triggering specific beliefs as to why and how certain music is made" (Steinbrecher 2021b, 4). Thus, value judgements, such as the ones mentioned, "tend to refer more to the (commercial) process of development than to the aesthetics of the final (commercial) product" (Steinbrecher 2021b, 4).

15 The ethnic slur *Tschusch* is used particularly in Vienna, "both as a pejorative exonym for and an endonym by 'Slovenes, Croats, (former) Yugoslavs, South-East Europeans generally, and members of other ethnic groups' (Priestly 109)" (Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, note 29).

16 As Seeliger puts it: "So even the post-migrants can't get rid of their identity of migrants, even when they don't like to" (Seeliger in Verlan/Loh 2015, 42; my transl.).

17 For instance, "Capital Bra & Samra (Tilidin live in Köln Tanzbrunnen)". In: *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikKaewQjqrs (uploaded 08.07.2019).

18 "Ach, komm, wir wechseln das Thema / Ich will 22-Zoll-Räder / Und die Sitze aus Leder / Und der Richter schreit, ich war der Täter / Doch heut bin ich ein Star, so wie Neymar / Und die Kahba auf Beyda / Sie leckt an mei'm Yarak und ich an mei'm Paper / Weit und breit

keine Gegner." (the lyrics quoted in this article were initially taken from *google.com* and then re-checked by myself and through using the platform *genius.com*).

19 The other dominating topic was "social critique", which was found to be particularly important in French rap songs (Androutsopoulos/Scholz 2002, 12).

20 "Kleiner Piç, weißt du noch, wer ich bin? (Heh?) / Der von damals ohne nix in West-Wien / Ihr wart zu acht, ich allein mit Jasmin / Okay, wir haben kassiert, doch es hat alles einen Sinn /Denn ich vergesse nix, viele auf'm Weg haben mich gefickt."

21 For instance, consider "Prinzessa", "Cherry Lady", and "Wolke 10".

22 "Schau mal, die Leute fragen immer: 'Warum muss es im Rap darum gehen, wer wie viel Cash macht, welche Marken du trägst, welchen Wagen du fährst?' und so weiter, ne? Aber wenn du in einer Gesellschaft aufwächst, die dich immer als Mensch zweiter Klasse sieht, immer von oben herab, dann ist deine einzige Möglichkeit, auf gleicher Augenhöhe zu stehen, ihnen zu imponier'n. Und natürlich wär es eine Möglichkeit, ,n guten Job zu haben, studiert zu haben, ne? Dann nehm'n sie dich vielleicht ernst. Aber wenn du diesen Weg nicht gehen kannst, dann bleibt dir halt nicht viel. Und du eignest dir das an, was sie gerne hätten. Du trägst die Marken, die sie gerne hätten. Du fährst den Wagen, den sie gerne hätten. Das ist der einzige Moment, wo du ihre Aufmerksamkeit bekommst. Wenn du dir etwas nimmst, wovon sie denken, dass es dir nicht zusteht."

23 *This is Germania. The greats of Deutschrap about home and foreignness* (my transl.).

24 Somewhat special cases in this regard are the prosecutor and judge, who, seemingly, want to see Capital Bra prisoned according to his lyrics in "Wir ticken".

25 In the case of "Der Bratan bleibt der gleiche" (2019), for instance, Capital Bra first leaves open who they are who "wanted to see him fall" and "wanted to have his money", but then he indicates how he "has no fear of some Arabians" (probably in connection with his then-new label). In RAF Camora's "Vendetta", the "little bastard-kid" who RAF Camora and his crew are now going to chase also remains anonymous (at least to outsiders; even the lyrics platform *genius.com* is not helpful in this regard).

26 Since most of the public radio stations in Austria and Germany refuse to play much of the current Deutschrap due to reasons of explicit language, the music might offer "a musical refuge away from the sphere of influence of their [the listeners'] parents (generation)" (Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, 23).

27 "Brother, Rüsselsheim, shots fired as usual."

28 Generally, though, the examined rappers are also stressing their strong ties to local origins, such as Capital Bra and Samra with regards to particular areas of Berlin (Nejati 2019, 15:30-17:00).

29 In 2012, Hafbefehl, who was born to a Turkish mother and a Kurdish father in a neighboring city of Frankfurt (Offenbach), released the song "Chabos wissen wer der Babo ist". The song not only stimulated the German feuilleton to start taking this kind of street jargon, which used to be pejoratively called 'German pidgin' or 'immigrant mix-language' (Androutsopoulos 2020, 24) seriously as an artistic device, but eventually led to the term *Babo* (Turkish for 'boss') becoming the German youth-slang word of 2013.

30 *Para*, used in six songs, or *massari*, both of which refer to 'money'. My translations of these and the below terms and phrases are mostly derived from *genius.com.* This is guided by the assumption that the website functions as an important source of information for Deutschrap listeners, too.

31 *Mermis* for 'bullets'; *daule* for 'state, police'; *afiyet* for 'appetite (of bullets)'; *ta qifsha nanën* for 'I'll fuck your mother'; *mashkal* for 'problems'; and *piç/pico* for 'bastard(s).'

32 *Kahba auf beyda* and *abiat* for 'cocaine'; *baba-weed; saruch* for 'rocket' (to get high); and *tijara* for 'drug dealing.'

33 *Hajde* and *yallah* for 'come on'; *salam* for 'welcome'; *bana bak* for 'look at me'; *mashalla* for 'what god likes'; *tamam* for 'okay'; or *lak* for 'bro'.

34 Other codified terms or abbreviations mostly relate to cars, clocks, or, again, drugs.

35 Capital Bra refers here to Samra's song "Cataleya" (2018), which was covered by the French rapper RK.

36 The song "Benzema" from Capital Bra was not part of the analyzed sample since it didn't reach number one in Austria (only in Germany in 2018). Another example is Thierry Henry, who is mentioned in Nimo's and Abdi's Song "Nie Wieder" (2016).

37 As RAF Camora puts it, "It's always the same: First something happens in the USA, then it comes to France, and as soon it is in France, it's getting Europeanized – and three to four years later, it ends up in Germany" (RAF Camora in Ohanwe 2017; my transl.).

38 With their subsequent album of 2018, *Palmen aus Plastik 2*, they were able to rank 13 songs in the Top 15 of the Ö3 *Austria Top 40* charts in 2018, including the number-one songs "Kokain" and "Nummer unterdrückt". As a consequence, Ö3 changed the calculation of the charts in so far as since then, only "a maximum of three (3) most-streamed premium single songs from an album are rated for the single charts" (Grassinger; cf. also Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021).

39 Only RAF Camora's "Kokain", with its heavy and slow kick-drum beat, marches to a different drummer. The hi-hats in the chorus, however, also indicate the characteristic 1 a (2) + emphases of the dembow rhythm.

40 One standout-aspect of the dembow beat regards the fact that it does not use an upper-range frequency accent on the 2-and-4 backbeat, instead emphasizing the fourth sixteenth note: 1 a (2) + 3 a (4) +. This accent interrupts the regularity of the metrical structure and creates tension by stretching the temporal space between the first and second accent while anacrustically targeting the releasing offbeat accent on 2 +. Regarding the trap beat, which is structured more evenly towards the backbeat, tension arises from the syncopated kick drum, often to be found on the accents 3 + and 4 +, and from the 32nd and 64th notes on the hi-hat, which tend to be interspersed somewhere in-between the heavy accents. In general, many of the examined songs use a similar vocal hook patterns that also entails strong notions of tension and release (Steinbrecher 2021a, 137-138).

41 In contrast, artists such as Justin Bieber are regarded with curiosity when utilizing trap beats and attempting to create some sort of "trap ballad" (Ben Saoud 2020).

42 Also, the heavy use of voice-manipulation effects, like auto-tune, facilitates polished vocal performances without much experience or training.

43 "Neymar", "Berlin lebt", "Für Euch alle", "Baller los", "DODI", "Hobby Hobby", "Ferrari", "DNA", "Wir ticken", "Harami", "Wieder Lila", "Der Bratan bleibt der gleiche".

44 "We're wearing Gucci, people starving in Nigeria (ah) / I'm no aider and no poet and no priest (no) / I am Capital, not more and not less / But the things that I have experienced, Bra, are not to be seen in Wikipedia" ("Wir Ticken", Capital Bra feat. Samra, 2019). "Wir tragen Gucci, Leute hungern in Nigeria (ah) / Ich bin kein Helfer und kein Dichter und kein Prediger (nein) / Ich bin Capital, nicht mehr und nicht weniger / Doch das, was ich erlebt hab', Bra, steht nicht in Wikipedia." About the melancholia and darkness in Capital Bra's work cf. also Sternburg (2020, 246-247).

45 "Vielleicht geh' ich morgen drauf, dafür nehm' ich es in Kauf / All die Wege, die ich lauf', fall' und steh' wieder auf / Ich hab' viel zu schnell vertraut, aber leider Gottes, mon ami / Schmeckt das echte Leben bitter so wie Kokain."

46 The Cratez are a German music production team responsible for the beats of many contemporary rap hit songs. According to the information provided by Wikipedia, RAF Camora's song "Guapa" (October 2021) was the twenty-second song by the Cratez reaching number one in the Austrian singles charts (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_Nummer-eins-Hits_in_%C3%96sterreich_(2021), last access 13.12.2021).

47 "Doch im Gegensatz zu euch kann ich noch in den Spiegel gucken / Jeden Tag am Ackern, Bra, auf Jacky-Cola, Haze / Nächtelang im Studio, frag doch mal The Cratez (bra)."

48 The refusal of big radio stations to play the majority of current Deutschrap surely supports this notion.

49 Marshall describes the rhythm as follows: "It also describes the basic rhythmic framework, derived from the DEM BOW and other dancehall reggae riddims, in which a kick drum accenting a steady 4/4 pulse (landing on each beat of the measure) is cross-cut by snares marking a 3+3+2 rhythm" (Marshall 2008, 149, fn).

50 Other songs of this era include, for example, "Like glue" (Sean Paul, 2003), "Reggaeton Latino" (Don Omar, 2005), and "Hips Don't Lie" (Shakira, 2006).

51 Drake has been recurringly subject of discussion in this regard, cf., e.g., Persadie (2019); Kelley (2019). Allegations of cultural appropriation in connection with the dembow beat can also be found, e.g., in connection with Shakira's 2010 song for the football world championship in South Africa, "Waka Waka" (e.g., Tande 2010).

52 "Cherry Lady", "Melodien", "Prinzessa", "Nummer 1", "One Night Stand", "Wolke 10", and "Capital Bra je m'appelle." Technically, not all of these songs are built from the 'original' dembow beat in the narrower sense, because not all of them are using a four-to-the-floor kick drum (this is also true regarding, e.g., "Shape of You").

53 "Échame la culpa" (Luis Fonsi & Demi Lovato), "I Don't Care" (Ed Sheeran & Justin Bieber), and "Bella Ciao" (El Profesor). Among the number-one German-language pop hits (without rap sections), the dembow beat is hardly used. In Mark Forster's top-20 song "194 Länder" (2018), in which he sings about his desire to see all of the world's countries, the use of the dembow beat can be considered as a stereotypical stylistic device to represent wanderlust and, rather exotistically, "the whole world".

54 "Maserati", "Perfekt", "Nummer unterdrückt", and "Vendetta", These four songs all use a fully-elaborated dembow beat with a steady kick drum.

55 A detailed musical analysis of RAF Camora's and Nazar's song "Artkore" (2010), in which both dembow and trap elements are already indicated, can be found in Dörfler-Trummer (2021, 236-251).

56 J Balvin describes himself as having been the "Queen of Reggaeton" in connection with his former gay sexual orientation (Redacción EC 2018). Bad Bunny was recently described by gay singer Ricky Martin as "an icon for the Latin queer community" (Wheeler 2020).

57 These indications can be found in Modern Talking's "Cheri Cheri Lady" (1985) and RAF Camora's oeuvre (cf. also Steinbrecher/Pichler 2021, 9).

58 A more comprehensive analysis might also include critical reflections on the processes that (potentially) influence how contemporary charts and streaming algorithms come into being, especially with regards to German rap songs. Cf., e.g., Y-Kollektiv 2019.

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