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**New Media, Hip Hop, and Young  
Migrants: Social Capital,  
Entertainment and Political  
Articulation of Minority Groups**

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## **New Media, Hip Hop, and Young Migrants: Social Capital, Entertainment and Political Articulation of Minority Groups**

Not only information environments but also information flows and structures have radically changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Part of a larger project funded by the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (<http://twoday.tuwien.ac.at/seriousbeats/topics/ABOUT/>), this paper seeks to analyze the complex ways in which young migrants and children of migrants in Vienna, Austria, increasingly use Hip Hop in conjunction with new media—particularly YouTube, Facebook and cell phones—to not only articulate their discontent with the majority society but also construct their hybrid identities in between ghettoization and Hollywood glitz. The study is based on 48 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with migrant youngsters of various ethnic backgrounds between the ages of 14 and 17 in Vienna, Austria, during the spring of 2011. While gender, class, ethnic origin, and education are crucial variables in analyzing the attitude of these youngsters and their contribution to mainstream society, it appears that music overall, and Rap in particular, has been providing a channel to articulate and address their alienation with the mainstream Viennese society. In addition, Hip Hop and Rap also have the potential to become a common stage where migrant youth and “natives” meet and mingle, providing a possible platform for further socialization and integration. This paper will analyze if and how new media, the Internet and its music applications affect civil society. It will seek to answer the question of whether new media aids in the participation of minorities in the city politics of Vienna.

**Key words:** Hip Hop, Migrant Youth, Class, Entertainment

In this interdisciplinary project we are interested in the effects of the new virtual environments on the integrative capacities of the users, such as the establishment of social relations across ethnic borders and the accessing of information that could lead to improved inter-ethnic understanding. The internet is not only a safe place for ethnically and racially discriminated groups, dissidents and political activists, but also for people with migration background because the cyberspace-identity does not automatically reveal differences in speech and look. The “anonymous” player of social games on the Internet might find it easier to disengage from cultural restrictions (e.g., religion, traditional gendered behavior expectations etc.) and to thereby focus on other personal attributes to improve his or her socioeconomic conditions of life. Due to rapidly increasing computer capacities game designers are able to establish new participatory

social environments that attract up to hundreds of thousands of gamers as in, for example, “World of Warcraft” (Kuhn 2009). With the creation of a social impact online game (McGonigal 2011; Klimmt 2009), our project attempts to provide a space within these participatory social environments where teenagers with and without migration background can safely interact and develop familiarity and camaraderie with each other in order to overcome stereotypes and misperceptions (Götzenbrucker/Franz 2010). We hope to contribute to the narrowing of the social and cultural gaps between cohorts of working class teenagers who are members of various ethnic groups residing in Vienna, Austria.

Categories of integration and adaptation (Weiss 2007, Berry 2001 & 2003) are often misdirected and focus on the wrong subjects. In complex milieu studies, some authors have categorized migrants and their children in distinctive cultural types, such as intellectual-cosmopolitan, adaptive bourgeois, status oriented, religiously-rooted, traditional working class, uprooted, and what German scholars have called “hedonistic” sub-cultural milieus (Klingler-Kutteroff 2009). It is erroneous to assume that migrants and members of the so-called second generation fit neatly into these categories and, that as the last two categories assume, some refuse to acclimatize to the mainstream society.<sup>1</sup> We predict integration will not occur based on inflexible requirements by the majority society. Instead we argue that integration is not possible if the majority society is not willing to fully accept migrants and their children as functioning and completely equal members of society. The view that this is possible in any central European society, but particularly Austria, today, is naïve (Franz, 2012 *forthcoming*).

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<sup>1</sup> All young people born to one or two parents with immigration background who identify themselves with the heritage, culture, and traditions of their country of origin, independent of the language spoken in the young person’s household and his/her citizenship are included by the author as “second-generation.” Such children and young people were frequently born in Austria, raised as Austrian citizens, and speak German as their mother tongue. Many of these individuals have not been fully integrated into the Austrian majority society.

What young members of the second generation desire are attachment and the feeling of belonging. They wish to belong to a group, a community, a neighborhood. However, in their daily lives, in class rooms, neighborhoods, public transport facilities, on the streets and in the media, they experience, repetitive almost constant rejection by the mainstream society. Subsequently, some withdraw into remote youth groups, often isolated from the mainstream, roaming around parks, internet cafes and shopping centers. Thus the conclusion is misleading that immigrants *exclude themselves* from the majority society through strange cultural traditions and geographical separation into segregated districts with high-foreigner-population density. The ghettoization of migrants—both physically and mentally—conveys nothing about their integration capability and aptitude. Instead we argue that it is the recurring exposure to racism and Austrian ethnocentrism that causes in young migrants' exclusion and segregation.

What follows falls into three sections. The first describes briefly the research methodologies applied in this project. Focusing on Hip Hop and Rap, the second describes popular ways in which young people with migration background articulate their discontent with the majority society and construct their identities. This part illustrates how for young migrants Rap music has become a way to articulate their alienation and frustrations with mainstream Viennese society and also how it allows young people to articulate their need to fit in and belong. In the third section I call attention to the project Serious Beats which invites teenagers with and without migration background to play the online game Your Turn! The Video-Game. The underlying intention behind this interdisciplinary project is to provide a safe but exciting space for second-generation and native-born Austrian youth where they can meet each other within *one* digital

environment: the virtual world of the game. With this action research project we hope to encourage heterogeneous friendships among young people of different ethnic backgrounds who usually establish friendships along gender lines and in relative homogeneous cultural structures. Based on associations, the game is designed to allow the young gamers to find empowerment in the game and help develop media literacy. We hope to point toward the establishment of an alternative notion of integration that insists on empowering individuals rather than focusing on the charade of integration into the Austrian middle-class, white, and exclusivist society.

### Methods and Research Design

This paper is based on 48 so-called media interviews conducted between March and June 2011 with 24 male and 24 female teenagers living in Vienna. Representing the largest ethnic groups in the state, 16 youths (between the ages of 14 and 17) of each Austrian, Turkish, and South-east European (mostly of Serbo-Croatian) background were interviewed in nine youth centers, schools and other similar institutions. Media interviews—interviews in front of the computer—, ego network analysis and action research—the participation of 24 youths in *Your Turn! The Video-Game*—allowed us to triangulate our methodology. After a game period of 3 months, all 48 interviews will be repeated in the spring and early summer of 2012.

### Youth Identity and Hip Hop

New technology influences power structures and sometimes promotes social shake-ups and revolutions. It also gives new opportunities to the “voice from below,” as Christopher Hill has called the figures and structures on the margins of *International Relations* (1999). Little political or other change happens without the dissemination and adoption of new ideas. Clay Shirky

points out that access to information is less important than what he calls “access to conversation”—being part of the society or movement (2011: 35). Rap music is part of Hip-Hop that has become one of the most sweeping arts movements of the past three decades, attempting, at least in part, to change global realities to perhaps more localized authenticities. Jeff Chang has argued that the best of these artists “share a desire to break down boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art—to make urgent, truth-telling work that reflects their lives, loves, histories, hopes, and fears of their generation. Hip-hop is about rebellion, yes, but it’s also about transformation” (2007: 59). The technology of the Internet, YouTube, and Facebook and similar broadcast and social network Internet sites allow local artists to reach large, sometimes worldwide, audiences, creating “spaces for a globalization from the bottom, bringing people together across the barriers of geography, language, and race” (Ibid: 65).

*Identity expression.* In this environment, young people often see music in general and Rap in particular as a method of expression and change. The vast majority of young people, 92% of girls and 88% of boys, listens to music (JIM 2011). Individuals in our sample most often listened to Pop and R’n’B (83 %), followed by Rap (73 %) and House/Electro (48 %). In addition, 14 teens with migration background (44 % of those with migration background) explicitly named music from their parents’ countries of origin (traditional folk music as well as more modern musical styles like Pop) and 18 youths explicitly emphasized German (or Austrian) Rap and R’n’B. Thirty-five interviewees—additionally or solely—listened to English music (mostly by US artists). Music is essential for mood management; 14 youth said explicitly what music they listen to depends on their mood and 14 others commented that they listened to music when they were happy, 13 explained that they always listen to music, 12 talk about music when they were sad and 4 said music improves their mood when they were angry. Seventeen used music for

relaxation and to diminish the stress in their lives, 5 listened to music to help them focus and think and 5 to fall asleep. However, the vast majority (43 teenagers) liked to listen to music in social situations with friends; only 6 explicitly did so with other family members. Thus music, particularly Hip Hop and R'n'B is essential in these young people's lives because it frequently expresses what they feel.

The method of music consumption among 14 to 17 year olds is interesting. Forty-seven young people of our sample use Youtube to listen to music. Even when young people own a MP3 player, the vast majority use the computer and the cell phone (when on the road) to listen to music. Only 10 download music and only 6 use CDs. But 21 youths post song texts and YouTube videos on their Facebook walls. This also corresponds with the JIM 2011 which attests that cell phone and internet use is higher than radio and MP3 among the young German population. Almost all (43) explain that listening to music is a social undertaking that they like to do with friends. Many talk about the music and the YouTube videos to their friends. Almost one quarter (13) explain that they usually listen to music and that music is extremely important in their life.

*Identity construction.* Teenagers express their identities and alter their lifestyles increasingly by using information and communication technologies and social media or computer games on the Internet. Classical media like television are still important as well. All these new technologies support teen socialization in a more independent, self-determined way: independent from institutions of socialization like family, school, church or political parties. Teenagers differ in specific styles and are often part of various sub-genres like goths, indies, skaters, punks, or hip hoppers (Hitzler 2010; [www.jugendszenen.com](http://www.jugendszenen.com)). Thereby music and style play a crucial role. Today coherent, unique identities are inadequate due to multiple expectations and challenges in

managing daily lives. The construction of more flexible, multiple identities (Turkle 1998) is therefore more appropriate. These “fluid” identities which hold a broader capacity for development match different contexts of activities and locations, for example school identity, family identity, spare-time identity in a Hip Hop scene, and work identity. Music is—as stated by youth researchers (Großegger/Heinzlmaier 2002)—one of the most important identity markers. Music has also been seen as suitable for both cultural self-expressions as well as forms of social bonding (Solomon 2009). Hip Hop, due to its “do it yourself”- quality can be seen as a tool for self-expression—independent of social class or ethnicity. Drop outs, high school students and workers are listening to Hip Hop or practice Hip Hop music, graffiti writing and breakdancing. Hip Hop as a “concept” works (nearly) globally and creates both global as well as national and local Hip Hop identities. Moreover, it also helps to create ethnic and gendered identities while at the same time blurring social and ethnic stereotypes. Sharing music, styles, tracks and videos creates a culture of exchange that marks individuals’ self-image (Misoch 2004) and peer-group identities, but allowing cross-cultural associations.

*Examples for Discontent and Hybrid Identity.* Among the sample, four teenagers, two women and two men, are writing their own Rap lyrics. Often performed in Turkish, Serbo-Croatian, or German, and some in English, these songs frequently begin with folk melodies that change into more traditional Rap beats. Almost all of the songs are available on YouTube. Many of the songs produced in the small, self-made music studios are love songs, but others focus on sociopolitical problems, such as xenophobia, violence against women and minorities, chauvinism, and integration. Performing at such posh outlets as the Wiener Festwochen, the 21-year-old Rapper EsRaPp, for example, often focuses her lyrics on sociopolitical issues that she

faces as a child of Turkish immigrants. In her song *Ausländer mit Vergnügen* (Foreigner with Pleasure) she asks for tolerance (Franz 2012 *forthcoming*):<sup>2</sup>

I was a child and was thrown into the sea  
 And down there I was the only one with black curls  
 Yes, I was different—is it my fault?  
 The roots we always carry with us  
 Now I ask the question:  
 How is it explained? Skin colors are the value  
 And does it nourish me? Is not everyone valuable?  
 We are all equal, whether Christian, Muslim, rich or poor  
 What does not kill you makes you stronger  
 And the struggle goes on every day  
 There is no truth in the world full of lies  
 I am a foreigner with pleasure

In this verse EsRaP defines herself as visually different and with a strong connection to her culture. She also asks why these signifiers make her different from others, insisting that everybody is valuable. Although the fight for equality continues, the stanza ends on an upbeat note with EsRaP's insistence that she enjoys her life as a foreigner in Austria (Franz 2012 *forthcoming*).

EsRaP like other rappers feels she has a message that needs to be heard. A number of young talents rapping in Vienna began to experiment with Turkish folk music, Serbian Turbo-Pop, and R&B in the youth centers where we conducted our interviews. Rap and other music productions

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<sup>2</sup> My translation (source: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki3SVC-\\_hju](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki3SVC-_hju)):

Ich war ein Kind und wurde ins Meer geworfen  
 Und dort unten war ich die Einzige mit schwarzen Locken  
 Ja, ich war anders—ist das mein Fehler?  
 Die Wurzeln traegt man bei sich und zwar immer  
 Jetzt stell ich die Frage:  
 Wie erklart es sich? Hautfarben bilden den Wert  
 Und wie naehrt es mich? Ist nicht jeder wertvoll?  
 Wir sind alle gleich, egal ob Christ, Moslem, arm oder reich  
 Was dich nicht umbringt macht dich stärker  
 Und der Kampf geht jeden Tag immer weiter  
 Es gibt keine Wahrheit in der Welt voller Lügen  
 Ich bin ein Ausländer mit Vergnügen

as well as other creative activities, such as dance and acting, can increase the self-worth of the migrant youth who frequently have been alienated from their parents and also feel estranged from their teachers at school and other adults in their lives (Franz 2012, *forthcoming*).

Rappers such as EsRaP epitomize the elements within the second generation who possess a high degree of cultural adaptation and yearning to integrate into Austrian society. This group in many ways expresses a bi-or multi-cultural understanding of their own identity. Its members have been labeled elsewhere “ethnic urbanites” (Franz 2011). They hold on to their mostly regional, ethnic roots but can no longer escape the pull of the host community, and have developed language and other cultural capital that led to their relative integration in the host society.

*If they graduate high school the cultural and social capital of members of this group is enormous; they have learned to maneuver in their parents’ culture and mainstream society and, perhaps more importantly, traverse both. While they can enroll in university, we want to suggest that even without university training Central Europe will need young well-versed workers who are familiar with the majority society and respective minority groups and can communicate effectively across cultures. Our research demonstrates that young people with migration background independent of their educational achievement are ready and frequently manage to transcend the gap created between their parents’ culture and the mainstream if given the opportunity.*

However, among certain migrant cohorts, specifically of Turkish background, only a very low percentage of students actually graduates from high school: Only 18 % of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Turks and 21 % of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Yugoslavs graduate—compared to 33 % of teens with Austrian

background. Also, 39 % of Turks and 24 % of Yugoslavs leave school after the minimum of nine years—compared to only 15 % of native Austrians (Weiss 2007). Those leaving school after only nine years, frequently drop outs, uncertain what their future will hold, are often found in a limbo between the imagined idealized ancestral home and their modern urban life. They have been characterized elsewhere as “translocal traditionalist” (Franz 2011).

The translocal traditionalist moves between local sites of the [Turkish] community of origin and the respective Austrian district of residence. The transnationalism of the translocal traditionalist is focused on the ordinary, everyday activities of people often reflecting obligations toward one’s family, loyalty to kin, rituals, and traditions, across two nation-states (Werbner 1997). Members of this cohort often remember life in Turkey with a romanticized nostalgia, emphasizing rural life, honor, family, frequently Muslim traditions, associated with Arabesque music and masculinity. They still adhere to the traditional social structure and moral codex of the Turkish village. Translocal traditionalists are late-comers when it comes to integration. This is the result of a number of factors, not the least of which is the fact that integration policy did not exist in Austria until fairly recently (Franz 2011).

Living “local to local” in Austria and their particular region of origin, translocal traditionalists use technology to connect these two locations (Franz 2011). Through new media and cable TV these teenagers are more embedded in Turkish homeland culture. For example, typically young male teenagers are agitated fans of the TV series *Valley of the Wolves (Kurtlar Vadisi)*. This 2003–2005 Turkish series, later also turned into a movie, depicts a fictional Turkish intelligence officer who bravely seeks to infiltrate and destroy the dangerous Turkish Mafiosi (Franz 2011). These teenagers, however, are often torn apart between the expectations of their parents and those of the society they grew up in.

For the outside observer, these cohorts’ inbetween-ness often appears to be complete without any congruent structural patterns (Franz 2011). If asked who they are and how they see themselves,

almost all of the members of the second generation reply that they are Turkish. However, if asked for their citizenship or where they want to live in the future they respond, “Austria”, and more specifically, very close to or in the region or district they grew up. Their identity formation has often been relatively localized, e.g., in a particular Viennese district. As one of our young informants of Turkish background points out: “Mich kennt ein jeder Zweite hier im 20. Bezirk.” (Roughly: “Almost everybody knows me here in the 20<sup>th</sup> district”). Members of this group are in a limbo, stuck between worlds, rooted in two localities (Franz 2011). Which identity becomes salient depends entirely upon the circumstances and the environment. While both family and society pull these young peoples’ identities into seemingly opposite directions, it appears that many members of this cohort see their own localized but multi-cultural identities as unproblematic and context-dependent.

What remains problematic is the lack of the group’s acceptance by the majority society. This is particularly true for the undereducated school drop outs who, spending their days in Internet cafes, parks, malls and other public places, are often seen as public menace and nuisance. Of our sample 16 young people explicitly refer to racism and xenophobia. For example a 15 year-old student with Serbo-Croatian background explains that it would be good if teenagers stopped to insult each other:

‘Shit-Austrian’ or ‘Shit-Turk’ or so then these fights and this hatred against Austrians wouldn’t be there, I feel. ... They call us always ‘gypsies.’ But I think each human being has a right to be respected.

Along the same lines, a 15 year old student with Turkish background argues: “I feel they should respect the foreigners a little. If I think about the FPÖ [right-wing Freedom Party] ... I don’t know what they have against foreigners.” And a 14 year-old Austrian student concurs arguing

that: “The religion of others shouldn’t be despised because most foreigners believe we are Nazis who believe that foreigners are only dirt and so forth.” Of the 48 interviews conducted in our sample, 36 interviewees expressed that they feel they are foremost or exclusively Austrian, another 8 stated that they are cosmopolitans or did not know how to identify, while only 4 interviewees saw themselves exclusively as foreigners. Thus we conclude that the ghettoization—in a physical and mental sense—occurs because the mainstream society excludes these young people. From these data we cannot conclude any useful data concerning the ability and desire to integrate. To help overcome xenophobia and racism by connecting young people of different ethnic background, our multidisciplinary group has designed an online game.

### Hip Hop—The Project

The project Serious Beats centers upon the potential advancement of interethnic and -generational friendships through online gaming.<sup>3</sup> We assume that gaming links endogenous and exogenous factors by encouraging the gamers of second-generation migrant background to develop their own identities within a synthetic world, develop networks, and apply online traits in their daily on- and offline lives. The particular online environment in which gaming identities are developed limits intergenerational, intercultural and gender conflicts. Thus the music-based online game YourTurn! The Video-Game developed by the Vienna-based game studio Platogo, encourages players to engage in “battles”. Taking turns, the players select snippets of YouTube music videos, which they attach to a mutual DJ mix. The design of YourTurn! allows for the gamers to play against each other, but actually leads to a shared creative result: a DJ mix made

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<sup>3</sup> In cooperation with the University of Vienna’s Institute for Media and Communication Studies and the Vienna University of Technology’s Institute of Design and Assessment of Technology, this interdisciplinary project has been funded by the WWTF in the Diversity – Identity Call 2010, the third call within the framework of the “Funding programme: Social Sciences and Humanities in Vienna.”

by two players who previously did not know each other. Thus the game brings together and allows for prolonged interactions of youth of different ethnicity, gender and place of residence who normally would not be in contact with each other. Music acts as cultural and identity-related tie. To maintain these relationships Serious Beats generates a number of events and workshops in “real life”. The game went live on February 20, 2012. Over a period of three months, half of our sample, 24 teenagers of Austrian, Turkish, Ex-Yugoslav descent, have started playing YourTurn! They are also involved in workshops with DJs, rappers, beatboxers, game designers, and social scientists. The gamers are encouraged to participate in various events in youth centers, and a mobile recording studio, the so-called Rec’n’Roll bus. A final party with awards for the best gamers is planned as well as a presentation of the best game contributions in the fall of 2012.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

The data resulting from the second set of interviews will be compared with the first set, focusing on changes in Ego-Network and friendship structures, and diversity in youth music choices as well as music identities. We hope to find that the friendship structures of the 24 teenagers who played YourTurn! for 3 months will be more heterogeneous and less limited to their immediate family and few close friends from the same gender, ethnic background and Viennese district. Thus the action research part clearly aims at altering the social structure of young people with the objective to encourage the participating teens to broaden their social networks and enhance their social capital. The game also encourages the participants without migration background to engage with teens with migrant background on an even playing field, excluding ethnocentric feelings, racism and xenophobia. Ideally, we thus hope that YourTurn! will provide the

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<sup>4</sup> The most successful players will receive an invitation to present their DJ mixes at GameCity, Austria’s biggest video game festival held in Vienna’s city hall.

incentives for native-born Austrian teenagers to “integrate” into the multi-ethnic city that Vienna has long been. We hope to provide one small path for members of the majority population to get to know and learn to accept migrant teens as functioning and completely equal members of society.

Additionally, we expect empowering effects thanks to an increase in media literacy. The game directs everyday web surfing habits, seen as conscious creative acts and allows for the potential of young people’s (media) reflection. Choosing a short clip from a longer video is such an act, even though it may go unnoticed by the players themselves.

This paper has argued that members of the second generation frequently feel that they are inbetween cultures which often contributes to their multifaceted identities. However, their need to belong is as real as their daily experienced exclusions through racism and xenophobia. While most teenagers listen to music because it helps them to manage their moods, for some music is much more. For some of our interviewees, for example, Rap and Hip Hop is a genre that allows young people to express both their alienation and estrangement and their self-understanding and connectedness with Vienna. With this project we hope to find a mechanism to promote integration and eliminate the negative effects of xenophobia.

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