

Music of the Multiethnic Minority: A Postnational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article examines implications of a postnational perspective on the music of minorities. As an example, the musical practices of a multiethnic hip-hop group in Norway are discussed with reference to musicological, linguistic and social studies. Lyrics and field observations present the complex image of a group of young people positioning themselves through music style, performance practices and language use. The article argues that a postnational perspective can provide a helpful approach to understanding the hybridized practices of minority youths engaged in globalized hip-hop culture, while it is also necessary to pay careful attention to the locally embedded discourses they take part in and contribute to shaping.

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INTRODUCTION

Music scholarship is increasingly faced with the limitations of attempting to understand musical practices and processes in relation to ideas of national or ethnic belonging. There is a growing interest in the essential role music plays in the shaping of social networks and pathways that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state as well as the confines of the ethnic community (Corona and Madrid, 2008). The *nation* or the *ethnic group* as primary frames of reference for cultural studies are being challenged by approaches that recognize the presence of cultural formations in which a variety of global and local motivations coexist and are developed in relation to notions of class, style, gender and race. This tendency can be partially attributed to demographic developments. In many countries, the growing presence of immigrants and refugees who form independent social communities, challenges the ideal of a unified national identity, while at the same time cultural groups founded on transnational alliances are emerging, transgressing both ethnicity and nationality as defining categories. From a scholarly point of view, it might be noted in current research that there is a tendency to avoid placing too much of an emphasis on “background” and “roots” as explanatory factors, instead searching for more varied and pluralistic approaches to describe and analyse the particular social, political, or cultural configurations emerging in contemporary societies. There is a strong interest in cultural complexity and hybridity understood as categories of study in their own right (*e.g.*, Eriksen, 2002, 2003).

Postnational thought can be roughly characterized as ideas that concern how nation-states and national identities lose their significance relative to transnational and global configurations. It emphasizes cross-cultural contact zones and social communities that transcend national boundaries, such as Internet-based global communities. The postnational may also have an ideological dimension based on recognizing national boundaries and distinctions as arbitrary and unreasonable, thus promoting a mode of thought in which all people are seen as global citizens rather than citizens of a given nation. An imagined postnational world could be conceptualized as a political structure based on equality, with no national or ethnic boundaries governing social inclusion or exclusion.

In music scholarship, perspectives that may be characterized as postnational have opened up for multiple and varied approaches focusing on process, agency and cross-cultural connections. Not surprisingly, ideas which critically explore national musical identities have a general anti-essentialist character that also challenges ethnic identity as a framework for understanding musical practices. Various examples could be mentioned. In his influential work on “micromusics of the West”, Mark Slobin (1993) regards musical practices in relation to an intermeshed network of *subcultures*, *intercultures* and *supercultures*, suggesting that various “planes of analysis” should be brought to bear on the same musical practices. Dan Lundberg (Lundberg, *et al.*, 2003) promotes a model in which musical practices are situated within a “cultural energy sphere” defined by opposing categories such as global/local, pure/mixed, collective/individual and mediated/live. In ethnomusicology, the roots/routes dualism

has inspired work that explores musical pathways and trajectories rather than cultural heritage (Clifford, 1997; Rice, 2003).

In publications on music and minorities, in addition to conferences and seminars devoted to this theme, “minorities” are often understood as ethnically or nationally identifiable groups of people with a shared cultural background as well as some common practices, activities, celebrations or rituals binding them together. Besides a number of studies on “native” ethnic minorities, research projects and publications either deal with refugees who are forced to leave their homes under difficult circumstances, or voluntary migrants in search of a better life for themselves and their families. A common frame of reference in minority music research is how national or ethnic backgrounds are negotiated and reconfigured in new surroundings. Attention is directed towards social dynamics and cultural negotiations, and how these are expressed in music and musical practices. Discourses of the marginalized and disempowered play a major role. “Minority culture” is often conceptualized as the culture of the subaltern *Other*, in contrast to a “majority culture”, which is understood as a dominant, unified category linked to institutions of the state, the media or education.

The idea of a postnational perspective on minority musics involves issues affecting both the research focus and method – what we choose to look for and how we look, interpret and analyse. Evidently, the postnational cannot be regarded as a unified direction in minority music scholarship, but rather, a tendency or shift of focus that moves away from looking at a common history and background as necessarily being the major unifying factors for people who find themselves in a minority position. It implies recognizing that the web of meaning surrounding any musical practice or event can be varied, complex and ambiguous. It may imply directing attention towards the emerging multiethnic environments in many Western countries, in which young people express the minority experience by engaging with transnational, globalized popular culture, rather than music of their own national or ethnic background. Moreover, a postnational perspective on minority musics challenges scholars to engage in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary conversations, thereby acknowledging the value of contributions from fields such as linguistics, sociology and cultural studies.

A postnational perspective not only challenges the significance of national identity, but also questions the emphasis placed on identity in general. Beverly Diamond (2008, p. 172) suggests that in studies on indigenous minorities, *identity* has become a concept regulated by a “patron discourse”, which is characterized by certain established expectations and ways of listening within which minority voices must struggle to be heard. Diamond proposes a shift of focus from *identity studies* to *alliance studies*. This approach is exemplified by exploring how musicians of Inuit, Sámi and Canadian aboriginal minorities negotiate cultural expressions and positions between “distinctiveness” and “mainstreamness” in relation to discourses of genre, technology, language and dialect choice, citational practices and ownership. By studying how performers and promoters enact relationships, seek collaborations, find

audiences, negotiate access to distribution channels and establish strategies for gaining cultural visibility, this framework of understanding downplays the role of background and heritage and possibly inspires research that provides a more relevant view of minority musics in a globalized world.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to underestimate the significance conceptions of national or ethnic identity can have when it comes to the constitution of minority communities and their self-definition and promotion as cultural entities. Through wise and strategic use, references to ethnic roots and national background have been part of many a struggle aimed at giving a name, voice, and power to disempowered and marginalized groups in various countries. For the Sámi of Scandinavia, or the aboriginal peoples of Canada, references to ethnic background play a key role in the on-going struggle for land rights, social rights and cultural visibility. The cultural position and recognition these peoples have today would be unthinkable without successful negotiations based on notions of ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Similarly, there are communities of South Asians in the UK or Chileans in Norway that clearly benefit from categorizations following nationally defined lines, categorizations that constitute the very foundations of various cultural and social organizations, and provide legitimacy in their contact with official institutions. Strategies of survival and recognition are for many minority groups linked to constructions – or reconstructions – of national identity. However, a postnational perspective challenges us to explore the classifying, and potentially boundary-building properties of these categories, which may prevent us from noticing variation, multiplicity and cross-cultural developments. Thomas Solomon argues that although it has become commonplace to question myths of national coherence in view of the cultural hybridity found in diasporic communities, there is also a tendency to paradoxically assume that these communities are socially homogenous and culturally coherent (Solomon, 2011). Recognising the important role of nationally defined communities must not lead to categorizations which indiscriminately lump together minorities with a shared national background. It is important to recognize the many and varied ways in which people relate to their backgrounds and how they choose to put them into play in their cultural practices.

In recent linguistic studies the notion of the *multiethnolect* has become the point of departure for an entirely new field of study (Quist and Svendsen, 2010; Svendsen and Røyneland, 2008). This scholarly direction shifts the attention from tracing lines of language development towards understanding linguistic contact zones, aiming to capture the multilingual realities of young people in urban contexts. Studies on multiethnolects include structural and phonological analyses of new linguistic practices, but also examine how these practices and their practitioners are perceived, investigating the sociolinguistic potentials of speakers constructing, challenging and negotiating identities. A parallel direction in music studies that seeks to explore hybridized music cultures emerging in multiethnic environments could become an exciting field of study.

A further approach to postnational thinking can be provided by referring to the theoretical concept of the *rhizome* as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari (1988). The rhizome – originally a complex root system – is understood as a metaphor for a dynamic cultural system consisting of decentralized, interconnected nodes with no connections or references to any single source or origin. The rhizome can be seen as a map with multiple entry points, anti-hierarchical in structure. Any point in a rhizomatic system can be connected to any other point, and no single point or connection is indispensable. The rhizome has been used to illustrate the dynamics of the Internet (Hamman, 1996), and of even more relevance to the study presented in this article, to describe the global flow and relocation of rap music (Mitchell, 2004). By necessity, if we take the metaphor literally, it implies a reduced focus on national background and ethnic origin. Faced with an – arguably utopian – totally rhizomatic cultural system, any discussion concerning the relationship between a cultural centre and its periphery would be irrelevant, simply because there is no clearly defined centre, but only countless crossroads, connections and interfaces of varying significance. Consequently, from this perspective, the focal point for understanding cultural dynamics is not the relationship to any situated “authentic sources”, but rather the innumerable ways in which groups and individuals choose to build their own cultural worlds based on the sum of links to the network available to them at any given time.

Minoritet1¹

As suggested above, the cultural strategies of today’s minorities do not always involve the cultivation of music relating to places far away and times gone by. The minority experience may incite strategies of various different types based on multiple cultural connections and associations. Minorities may engage in transnational cultural expressions, or develop innovative practices that challenge and cross national and ethnic boundaries, in some cases forming completely new cultural constellations and social alliances.

To illustrate such ways of coping with, and articulating the minority experience, I will turn to a young, ethnically diverse hip-hop crew in the centre of Oslo, Norway, which lends itself effectively to discussions related to the “postnational turn” in music scholarship (Corona and Madrid, 2008). Minoritet1 is a multiethnic music collective consisting of around 15 young people with family backgrounds from Iraq, Morocco, Somalia, Bosnia, Pakistan, Lithuania, Uganda, and Kurdistan. Their time in Norway varies from three years to their entire lives. Their common minority experience is the basis of their community and their musical practices. They started out as an amateur group in 2001, but gradually received increasing media attention and paid assignments. In late 2007, the group was featured in a six-episode television documentary on Norway’s national television network NRK, receiving considerable media attention. In early 2008, two key members left Minoritet1 to form their own

¹ The remainder of this article is largely based on results from a study conducted in 2005-2007 as part of the interdisciplinary CULCOM (Cultural Complexity) research programme at Oslo University. The study was based on field observations at performances and in studios, interviews, and music recordings by Minoritet1. Parts of this section have been previously published in Norwegian (Knudsen, 2008). For a close reading of multilingual rap lyrics see (Knudsen, 2010).

group, *Forente Minoriteter* (United Minorities), releasing their first CD album, “99% ærlig” (99% honest) in September 2008.

Minoritet1 is not exactly what we may conventionally think of as a minority group, although they explicitly declare that they are. We can tell this through their name, which simply means “the minority”, and through a strong focus on a kind of generic minority identity expressed through their lyrics and stage appearances. They describe themselves as a collective, a gang, a platform, or “a kind of umbrella” for young people in inner Oslo who share the same interests and are attracted to a common message. They comprise a loose and complex social group with no formal membership terms, performing regularly at various youth events in the Oslo area. On stage, they can act in different, changing constellations, sometimes as the subgroups *Nulltoleranse* (Zero Tolerance) or *Tasja Unger* (Beaten Kids).

The group’s way of making hip-hop music is fundamentally hybrid. Semi-fabricated music material in the form of “beats” is downloaded from the Internet, sometimes mixed with music samples from their “home” countries, and further elaborated on by adding vocals and sound effects. The music production mostly takes place at a local youth centre in Oslo, in a tiny studio supplied with a PC, microphones and other relatively simple equipment for multi-track recording. The studio is an arena that requires technical expertise, which the members possess to varying degrees. It is also a meeting place and a social arena that includes more than making music. Music production only involves two or three members at a time, but there are always others stopping by, chatting or just observing what is going on. It could basically be described as a youth gang that spends Sunday evenings together, with music production as a natural focal point.

The cultural symbols and expressions of Minoritet1 are markers of social belonging as well as social distancing – establishing both bonds and boundaries. Minoritet1 is ethnically inclusive. Their particular ethnic and national backgrounds are of minor importance, what brings them together is rather a common generalized minority experience. Their lyrics imply that all minority citizens have much in common through their mutual experiences of racism and oppression from the majority society. Still, there is clearly a lot of boundary-building taking place. The bottom line in many of the messages they promote is a distancing towards “majority culture”, commercial music, rival rap groups, the police and the authorities. Their musical authenticity is linked to faithfulness to a musical style and performance mode, in addition to personal creativity and inventiveness. Expressive quality is about creating your own lyrics that deal with everyday life “on the streets”, and performing them in a spontaneous way with rhythmic precision and dexterity.

In many European countries there is a remarkably strong representation of performers with immigrant backgrounds participating in hip-hop groups. According to Androutsopoulos (2002), 92% of French and 60% of German groups had members of a migrant origin. In Germany, the anti-racist hip-hop network *Kanak Attak* joins together youths from Turkish and other minority backgrounds (Klebe, 2004). In France, hip hop has been the major cultural expression of resistance by

young people of minority ethnic origin since the 1980s (Mitchell, 2004). Similar tendencies can be observed in Norway, where hip-hop artists with immigrant backgrounds such as Carpe Diem and Madcon have topped the music charts. Obviously, a globalized hip-hop style has become an especially relevant mode of expression in these young people's life histories and experience. This can be understood both in relation to the genre's history as a culture of resistance, and the dynamics of its global distribution. For Minoritet1, the beat downloaded from the Internet is a cultural object that all the members can engage with on equal terms. There is no doubt that we are dealing with an imported cultural form, but this does not prevent young people from Bosnia, Pakistan, Morocco or Kurdistan from appropriating the music style as their own. As argued by Androutsopoulos (2002, p. 30) rap is an "open" form of discourse, "... a genre that invites people to talk about themselves and their own social context, using their own social voice". Hip-hop culture has the "advantage" of being new enough to not be burdened with links to the parent generation or the cultures of their various home countries. Cultural background or nationality provides no special advantage; no rapper can claim with reference to his own country's heritage that he is more qualified than others to perform this music. The primary criterion for inclusion and status within the group is a creative and expressive expertise in accordance with the conventions of the genre. There are no national or ethnic constraints in relation to the music, no "frozen tracks".

Underlying the development of group identification are notions of being socially excluded, the feeling of standing on the margins of society and having experienced harassment and discrimination. When these young performers are attracted to idols of "black" American hip hop – such as Tupac Shakur or The Notorious BIG – it is apparently more about identifying with the "victim narratives" of marginalization and resistance than an ethnically-based identification with "black" American culture (Sernhede, 2005, p. 285). As with similar groups in various countries, which in one way or another understand themselves as being on the fringes of society, they see an analogy between their own social situation and the marginalized situation that many black Americans live in. They reconstruct the genre's forceful symbolic language of provocation as a platform for conveying their own experiences of alienation and discrimination.

Minoritet1 cultivates an "underground" imagery. Their postings on NRK's Internet page "Urørt" (Untouched) – where young bands can promote their music – locate the underground to the Grünerløkka area of central Oslo: "*Undergrunn rap fra kjernen i byen Grunerløkka*" [sic] (Underground rap from the core of the city Grünerløkka). The key metaphor "underground"² sums up various dimensions of the members' self-image, norms, aesthetics, attitudes and cultural knowledge – their "subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1995). One important aspect of this is that their music is created and distributed within an "underground" network which is independent of the commercial music market. As a result, this implies a distancing towards commercialization, particularly towards what they call "wacke-rap" – rap

² See (Solomon, 2005) for a discussion of the 'underground' metaphor in rap music.

performed in English by Norwegians – which they describe as a sell-out: unoriginal and unconvincing. This anti-commercial aspect is linked to images of authenticity and honesty; an underground rapper “keeps it real” by basing his lyrics on his own life experience with no thought of commercial success. Moreover, “underground” has to do with a musical and poetic style based on models in American gangster rap, and the underground codes of a “gangster discourse” linked to violence, drugs and sexuality (Sandberg, 2009; Sandberg and Pedersen, 2006, p. 238). At the same time, their music is also deeply rooted in their own Norwegian street environment in “the core of the city”. Both the key metaphor “underground” and the group’s name – Minoritet1 – connote a marginalization that suggests a contradicting “other”: a “mainstream” and a “majority”, respectively. A striking parallel in choice of a name is the Danish hip-hop group Outlandish, which also consists of young rappers from immigrant backgrounds.

LYRICS AND LANGUAGE

Minoritet1’s lyrics reflect some of the almost genre-defining characteristics of hip-hop language: irony, sarcasm and ambiguity; enhancing the impression of a subculture: secretive and “underground”. It is not supposed to be easy for outsiders to grasp all the various layers of meaning. Some lyrics contain explicit warnings against drugs and crime, as in these lines from “*Glatte gater*” (Slippery streets):

| | |
|---|---|
| du ender opp i fella | you end up in the trap |
| du ender i cella | you end up in the cell |
| på grunn av et par gram av henna ³ | because of a couple of grams of hashish |
| det er ikke verdt det | it’s not worth it |
| [...] | [...] |
| og jeg veit vi poffa før | and I know we puffed before |
| og alt var bare lættis | and everything was just fun |
| men sjof din knekte kompis | but look at your broken buddy |
| han bel til en nærkis | he became an addict ⁴ |

Other songs express resistance towards the police and public authorities, or seemingly encourage drug use. “*Hva skjer’å?*” (What’s up?) is written about the fantasy of smoking pot in a flashy BMW:

| | |
|--|---|
| men jeg har sota alle rutene | but I have tinted all the windows |
| så ingen kan se oss trekke sortah ⁵ ned | so no one can see us draw down the marihuana |
| ikke nok med det | and there is more |
| bare et lite anlegg med GPS og DVD | just a little system with GPS and DVD |
| og alle setene har MTV | and all the seats have MTV |
| så det er bare å lene seg tilbake | so all we’ve got to do is lean back |
| og bare slapp’ av, eh | and relax, eh |
| puff, puff, og pass den videre | puff, puff and pass it on |

³ Henna powder, bad hashish

⁴ All translations of Norwegian lyrics are the author’s own.

⁵ Marihuana, from Urdu

When references to ethnic or national background occasionally appear in the lyrics it is done in ways that evoke images of having personally experienced discrimination or violence. There are re-appropriations of originally insulting terms like “pakkis” (pejorative for Pakistani) or “svartskalle” (blackskull), and one song, “Sønn” (Son), tells the story of a dramatic flight from Bosnia, including being shot at by snipers. Lyrics may contain both Muslim and Christian references, even within the same song. In a stage performance of the collectively composed song “*Glatte gater*” (Slippery streets), one performer requests his “brothers” to “lift their hands and pray” for their deceased, “fallen”, friends (physically indicating prayer in the Muslim way with open palms), while another dreams about angels taking him to the gates of St. Peter where he will meet his friends again. Such ambiguity can be understood in view of the different social discourses the group is involved in and the images of themselves they want to present to their audiences. On the one hand, they position themselves within the framework of a “gangster discourse”: tough, fearless and smart, powerfully opposing law and order. On the other hand, they operate within a conventional “positive youth discourse”: they produce their music in a studio at a public youth centre where they depend on behaving reliably and responsibly, and may even play the role of ambassadors of the local community when performing at public events arranged by youth organisations. In this context, they will generally be understood as examples of successful integration and positive youth work. Still, performing at such events does not stop them from encouraging their audiences to join them in the aggressive chanting of: “fuck *baosj*, fuck *baosj*” (*baosj*: police, from Berber). It must also be added that as the group has developed professionally and been given more exposure by the mainstream media, they have somewhat moderated their “gangster image” by downplaying the more explicit references to illegal activities.

The elusive and ambiguous character of their lyrics will often leave both outsiders and more initiated fans with questions concerning how seriously or literally they should be taken. It would be a mistake to take Minoritet1’s lyrics – or most rap lyrics for that matter – entirely at face value. Nevertheless, if we were to dismiss them as only figural speech based on an indiscriminate appropriation of expressions from role models in American gangster rap, we would potentially miss important underlying connotations. For several Minoritet1 members, their engagement in a culture of resistance is rooted in personal experiences of exclusion and harassment in school and employment situations, often with racist undertones. Ultimately, their version of hip-hop should be understood as a serious political expression of resistance promoted through a playful mode of performance with multiple layers of meaning, an “unserious seriousness” (Potter, 1995, p. 84).

It should be noted that although a close identification with the gangster discourse of hip-hop exerts a major influence on their personal and cultural identification, the members of Minoritet1 also cultivate alliances to arenas in which other social and cultural codes are valid. While dress codes mostly carry signals of an affinity to internationalized hip-hop culture, social codes include the adaptation of greeting procedures common in many Arabic countries, such as lifting the right hand to the

chest following a handshake. During Ramadan two of the rappers regularly turned up late for scheduled recording sessions, explaining that this was because they had attended “iftar”, the ritual evening meal ending the daily fast, with their family. A key part of each performer’s cultural competence consists of relating in relevant ways to the diverse – sometimes seemingly contradictory – social discourses they are connected to, whether in their musical recordings and stage performances, their lyrics and language, or the social interaction of their daily life.

Rappers in various European countries explore and exploit the entire linguistic repertoire of their respective speech community, including regional dialects, social dialects, English elements and terms from minority languages, often resulting in the formation of particular hip-hop vernaculars (Androutsopoulos, 2002; Mitchell, 2004). Minoritet1 has been closely linked to the development of a novel “multiethnolectal” speech style, which can be regarded as a manifestation of a hybridized identity in the tension between immigrant cultures, popular youth culture and “Norwegian-ness”. Their lyrics are excellent examples of the urban language variety sometimes referred to as “kebabnorsk” (Kebab-Norwegian) which is spoken to varying degrees by adolescents in central Oslo and the eastern suburbs (Aasheim, 1995; Østby, 2005; Svendsen and Røyneland, 2008). Music is arguably the primary arena for the development of this novel patois, which mixes Norwegian with expressions from a number of foreign languages, including Punjabi, Urdu, Kurdish, Berber, Arabic, Spanish and English. Several Minoritet1 members were key informants for the noteworthy “Kebab-Norwegian dictionary” (Østby, 2005), which includes excerpts from their lyrics used as language examples. This collaboration with a Norwegian author has apparently strengthened their image of being language innovators, in addition to their position as role models of localized hip-hop culture.

It could be argued that this labelling of a speech mode may have an essentializing effect, and may even be regarded as stigmatizing. By and large, the term “kebabnorsk” is not appreciated by the speakers themselves, and may even be regarded as a pejorative (Svendsen and Røyneland, 2008). The young performers of Minoritet1 refer to the obvious fact that the term was launched by a Norwegian “outsider” (Aasheim, 1995), and propose their own alternative “emic” designations such as “asfaltpråk” and “gatespråk” (asphalt language, street language); concepts that unmistakably evoke the “underground” imagery of the urban hip-hop culture they are part of. Even so, since “kebabnorsk” has established itself as the generally prevailing term – a fact which Minoritet1 has undoubtedly contributed to themselves through their contributions to Østby’s dictionary – they rarely oppose it when confronted by the media, who seem to have a particular liking for it. Despite their apparent distaste for the term, Minoritet1 has appropriated and taken advantage of it in their music, even using “kebabnorsk” as a title to a song with an exaggerated use of its most characteristic terms. Some examples from this song include the following words, all of which are based on minority languages and partly adapted to fit Norwegian orthography and grammar: *sjof* (look, from Arabic), *sjpa* (nice, from Berber), *kæbe* (girl, originally whore, from Berber) *morta* (fat guy, from Punjabi), *corlia* (girl, from Urdu), *isjpita* (steal, from Arabic), *kohta* (dog, from Punjabi), *flus*

(money, from Arabic), *kif* (hashish, from Berber), *baosj* (police, originally bug, from Berber) and *avor* (leave, from Kurdish). Lines from the song *Kebabnorsk* such as: *sjof den schpaa kaba* (look at that nice girl), *baosj cathca morta* (the police caught the fat guy) and *isjpita Nokian kifen og flusa* (stole the Nokia, the hashish and the money) clearly demonstrate the hybrid character of “kebabnorsk”.

Central features of rap music have close parallels in the practice and development of the hybrid language varieties that can be linked to this music: sampling and mixing, re-appropriation, transformation, and improvisation. Similar to the practice of “borrowing” music samples and beats from recordings by other artists, a hallmark of hip-hop lyrics is the rap artist’s ability to pick up the phrases and rhymes of other performers by re-appropriating them, twisting, turning or subverting phrases through inventive poetic and linguistic variation. In hip-hop and rap music, there has always been a deep commitment to pushing, bending and breaking the limits. Hip-hop is a culture of resistance, its language a “resistance vernacular” that “deploys variance and improvisation in order to deform and reposition the rules of “intelligibility” set up by the dominant language” (Potter, 1995, p. 68). In this vocal expression of defiance and protest, both language choice and language use are strategic. Rap lyrics connote defiance, and to emphasize this, performers apparently set out to bend and break standard language rules in much the same way as they challenge rules of society and conventional principles of making music.

Minoritet1 and similar hip-hop groups in the Oslo area make no attempt at downplaying or hiding their non-Norwegian accents and “alternative” grammar. While the first generation of Norwegian rappers from the early 1990s worked hard to sound like their American rap idols, Minoritet1 performers take pride in promoting their own “street language”, marking themselves as different and positioning themselves locally. They create a stylized performance language that underscores and puts into play their identity as young minority rappers, thus emphasizing and producing the position of the “other”. Through music performance, language style becomes a trademark for the hip-hop crew by affirming and celebrating their ethnic otherness as well as images of social marginality.

As argued in research on the music of various minority groups in Scandinavia (Hammarlund, 1990; Knudsen, 2006; Lundberg, *et al.*, 2003) one of the primary social functions of group-specific music culture is the production of difference. This tendency towards articulating, maintaining and celebrating cultural practices that mark difference in relation to the “majority culture” is often overlooked in official “multicultural” policies, which tend to promote images of music as a universal language with the capacity to break down cultural barriers and serve as a tool to promote inter-ethnic understanding and stimulate integration (Skylstad, 2004).⁶ Using a hybridized “street language” on stage is undoubtedly a public expression of difference and particularity. Outsiders who invariably have to struggle to understand even the basic vocabulary employed will often take “street language” as a

⁶ In the Norwegian political discourse, *integration* is understood as different processes of adjustment and adaptation aimed at stimulating the social inclusion of new immigrants in society. Integration is often defined as a contrast to *assimilation* that is largely understood as an outdated, negative term signifying a process in which immigrants give up their pre-existing cultural values in order to become as much of an integral part of the majority society as possible.

manifestation implying something such as “we have something in common that we don’t share with others”. Hence, the cultural practices of Minoritet1 are imbued with powerful notions of social distancing, while also loudly affirming and celebrating their own multi-ethnic community through the creative development of a cross-cultural mode of expression.

A GLOBAL IDENTITY?

The global spread and recontextualization of rap music is a recurrent theme in the study of hip-hop. The production process, with its sampling and remixing from diverse, geographically dispersed sources, is itself a transnational practice that challenges notions of a music's relation to time and place. As argued by Tony Mitchell, this rhizomatic trend leads to the formation of multiple “... syncretic “glocal” subcultures, [...] involving local indigenizations of the global musical idiom of rap” (Mitchell, 2004, p. 108). The term “glocal”, introduced to social science by Roland Robertson (1995), has been applied in writings on popular music to describe the appropriation of globally available musical styles and products and their reterritorialization and redefinition in local communities around the globe (Mitchell, 2001). The term can fittingly describe some of the processes Minoritet1 is engaged in. The globally circulating beats that members download from rhizomatic networks are publicly available cultural objects practically stripped of cultural connotations. The rappers appropriate these “displaced” and depersonalized musical patterns, fill them with their own ingredients and use them as a platform for expressing their own life experiences in their local *kembo*⁷ (local districts of Oslo). There is little interest in the historical or geographical origin of a beat or the samples included in it. It makes little difference whether the person who created the beats and uploaded them onto the Internet is situated in Hong Kong or Hardanger. The most important thing is that the beat is understood as being stylistically consistent with the “underground” imagery the rappers identify with, and that something in it inspires lyrical and musical improvisation

A live performance by Minoritet1 gives an impression of how the group negotiates ideas of place and belonging in the field of tension between the local and the global. Led by Dadi jr., they enter the stage calling out to their audience: “We are Pakistan! We are Morocco! We are Kurdistan!” As more performers appear, they are presented individually, though not by nationality, but by their *kembos*, the local districts of Oslo where they live: “Titty Twista from Hauketo! Emir from Torshov!” Apparently, their sense of community – “We are” – is conceptualized by referring to global links to various distant countries, while the individual performers are identified by their belonging to specific local districts of Oslo.

The complex picture that emerges from this case study connects to key aspects of postnational thinking, but also raises certain tensions. A postnational perspective can provide a useful approach to understanding the workings of globalized hip-hop culture by highlighting the role of cross-cultural dynamics and social communities that transcend national and ethnic boundaries. Creative multiethnic hip-hop

⁷ From Kurdish for district of neighbourhood.

environments such as Minoritet¹ engage with transnational, global culture by employing an imported form of discourse, largely available through a rhizomatic network. Still, this perspective is not sufficient for yielding an adequate understanding of the complex lived reality of the young performers presented here. As in similar environments around the world, there is also a strong cultural consciousness pointing in a more embedded direction, producing and marking difference, building social boundaries, and relating to local discourses by the use of a particular resistance vernacular.

This double scenario raises questions about the possibility of thinking in terms of a *global identity*. There is no question that the globally accessible music culture creatively exploited by many young people today provides ideals, role models and identifications that are crucial in the shaping of their daily life. Even so, while references to national or ethnic background cannot provide a sufficient basis for understanding the construction of identity, globality cannot give more than a “flimsy” or “liminal” sense of belonging (Hedetoft and Hjort, 2002, p. xvi). A global identity may make sense on an aesthetic or cultural level, but since identifying with global music culture is basically a non-committal one-way relationship, this is not a satisfactory notion on a more personal, existential level. In accordance with postnational thinking, it may very well be possible to speak of a global consciousness – cultivating the feeling of being part of a larger transnational cultural movement, but still, globality is not something people belong to, the globe is not “home”. “Belonging”, understood as individual processes of identification, requires personal relationships, obligations, proximity, and generally, also certain conceptions of territorial fixity. It is these connections that are continuously being built and rebuilt through musical production and performance by young rappers in hybridized “glocal” youth cultures.

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