Globalization and the Future of German

With a Select Bibliography

Critically "Kanak": A Reimagination of German Culture

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Zusammenfassung


Die Welt franst aus: Sprache(n) entstehen. ...
Und in Deutschland? Deutschland franst im Innern aus.
Es entsteht genau dort Neues, wo Mißstöne werden: zu Sprachen.
Sprache zu Literatur.

The world frays: Language(s) emerge. ...
And in Germany? Germany frays on the inside.
Something new emerges precisely where discordant notes turn into: language.
Language into literature.

Jose F. A. Oliver (Oliver 1995: 1163)
This cultural collision is implicitly funded by the infrastructure of the German language and its inherent capacity to express cultural differences. The German language is rich in nuances and granularities that enable a deep, multi-layered understanding of the cultural context of any given situation. This framework is integral to the discussion on the unique way we possess and interpret the "spirit of Germany". Starting from this premise, we can approach a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and how it should be viewed within the context of globalization.

### 2. Bringing the Globalization Discourse Against the Primacy of the Nation

In particular, the role of the German language as a crucial tool in the representation of the nation is highlighted. The nation is a dynamic construct that evolves over time and is influenced by various factors, including language. This construct is not static but rather a living, breathing entity that adapts and changes in response to the changing social, political, and cultural landscapes. The nation is not an isolated concept but is deeply intertwined with the dynamic of globalization.

### 3. The Impact of Globalization on the Nation

The rise of globalization has had a profound impact on the nation, reshaping its identity and boundaries. This impact is evident in various aspects of society, from economics to politics, and from culture to language. The nation is no longer a static entity but is constantly being remade and redefined in response to the forces of globalization.

### 4. The Future of the Nation

The future of the nation is uncertain, and it is likely to be shaped by the ongoing process of globalization. The nation is a complex and multifaceted concept that is constantly evolving. It is not a static entity but one that is constantly being remade and redefined in response to the forces of globalization. The future of the nation is uncertain, and it is likely to be shaped by the ongoing process of globalization.

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1. **Introduction:** The Knaack Spark Phenomenon

   Since the mid-1990s, numerous articles (propagation of the Knaack Spark phenomenon) have been published in English and more generally in the literature of cultural anthropology. The issue of globalization has become a central concern of cultural studies, reflecting the growing importance of the concept in contemporary society. The Knaack Spark phenomenon has been the subject of much debate and analysis, with many scholars arguing that it is a manifestation of the globalization of culture. Others have suggested that it is a reaction against globalization, representing a desire to preserve traditional values and ways of life. The Knaack Spark phenomenon is seen as a way of bridging the gap between the local and the global, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity.

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2. **The Knaack Spark Phenomenon:**

   The Knaack Spark phenomenon refers to a series of cultural developments that have emerged in recent years, characterized by a renewed interest in traditional values and a desire to connect with the past. This phenomenon is often seen as a response to globalization, with many people seeking to reconnect with their cultural roots and to preserve their traditional way of life.

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3. **The Role of the State:**

   The state has also played a significant role in the Knaack Spark phenomenon. In many countries, governments have implemented policies aimed at preserving cultural heritage and promoting traditional values. These policies include the establishment of cultural centers, the promotion of traditional arts and crafts, and the protection of cultural heritage sites.

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4. **The Impact on Society:**

   The Knaack Spark phenomenon has had a significant impact on society, leading to a renewed interest in traditional values and a desire to reconnect with the past. This phenomenon has also created new opportunities for cultural expression and creativity, as people seek to explore and celebrate their cultural heritage in new and innovative ways.
national languages or at least one national language (German) with another, globally functioning, national language (American English). Yet, globalization can precisely not be understood in exclusively national terms. As theorists such as ethnologist Arjun Appadurai have pointed out, technological developments and the effects of large-scale migrations are among the factors that have changed the parameters of cultural interaction. National boundaries no longer exclusively determine the participants of that interaction or the participating cultural channels and products (Appadurai 1996; see also Hardt and Negri 2000). The various spoken and written forms of present-day German thus interact with multiple influences, influences which register in multifarious ways. This means that besides English we need to take into account the evolving multilingualism within Germany as part of the German language's contextual fabric. Furthermore, exclusively focusing on the threat of Americanization has the effect of mistakenly imagining German as otherwise unchanged and unchangeable. It may lead to the ideological fantasy of an organic and pure German which has remained untouched, as if it were outside of time and history. Instead we need to recognize that it is a living language which continues evolving and which registers change. The most serious ideological problem with the sole focus on Americanization is therefore that it obscures the contemporary realities of German, its potential for exciting impurities and its creative uncontrollability.

Even the interaction with what we facilitate call “English” occurs in a more complex manner than a binary opposition implies. As is well known, in its global reach there is not simply one English but rather a language which undergoes transformations and is appropriated in the most diverse ways. Besides multiple “new Englishes” (Crystal 1997: 130–134), there are elements seemingly from English which have a life of their own. What can we make of a ubiquitous word in German such as Handy for instance? This word seems to derive from English, but no English speaker, who didn’t also know contemporary German, would recognize that this is the word for cell phone. Is it then “English” which puts pressure on “German” or “German” which borrows from other languages for its own purposes? I suggest that the most important question we need to ask in this respect is: what desires does the use or evocation of English satisfy for German speakers? What does “Americanization” look like from this vantage point? What functions does it fulfill? The interaction between languages does not take place unilaterally. Therefore, we need to alter our framework to register fully the processes in which the German language is involved. Even if we assume the dominance of English in general and Americanization in particular, we still need to consider local appropriations of English, as well as other languages, and what they tell us about local forms of agency and desire. The insight into the interdependence of the global and the local – what some refer to as “glocalisation” (Roland Robertson) – can be observed in other realms, and it is necessary to consider that dynamic for the case of language as well.2

How can this more transnational understanding of globalization inform the present discussion? In evaluating the “future of German” in a globalizing world, the effects of migration on German culture in general3 and on the German language in particular necessarily occupy a central place, since ethnic minorities appropriate and alter the German language in new ways. Moreover, languages of minorities also change their form and function as they interact with German. Peter Auer and Inci Dirim (2003), for instance, have done research on the appropriation of Turkish by non-Turkish adolescents in Hamburg which shows the diverse social uses to which that language is put in the everyday life of young people from German majority and non-Turkish minority backgrounds. The example of young ethnic German Aussiedler from Kazakhstan interspersing Turkish phrases into their German speech gives us a different dimension of globalization that remains occluded by the sole focus on English. Such a focus on multilingualism within German unearths a dynamic that is much more complex than a mere binary between an invading, Americanized English and a supposedly homogenous, stable German language.

As part of the recognition of multilingualism within Germany, it will also be necessary to recognize the diversity of speakers of German. Ultimately this recognition will challenge the still prevalent view that the German language is the sole property of ethnic German speakers, which others might borrow but not possess. In this respect, we encounter a paradox: While there is a lament over the supposed decline in the use of German, there is an unwillingness to admit that German is not the sole property of ethnic German speakers and that there are in fact many other speakers of German. One of the questions for the future of the German language is: can the allegedly organic link between ethnic Germans and the German language be rethought? What is really at stake: is it the future of the German language or is it the future of the notion of an ethnically and culturally homogenous Germany which is the only legitimate owner of the language? If one cares for the future of the German language, will it be possible to care for it without necessarily linking it to ethnic Germans as its sole proprietors?

Sociolinguistic research is indispensable for showing us the present state of the language evolution in everyday life. The actual use of the language, however, occurs along with the equally changing cultural imagination of the language. That is, a language does not solely exist in its actual linguistic
parameters, but also in the continued cultural constructions of it. How a language is conceived of culturally, which notions circulate about it in cultural discourses, does not necessarily correspond to linguistic characteristics of that language, but constitutes a distinct realm in itself. It is here that a text such as Kanak Sprak comes into play. Literature can help us understand what cultural meanings are produced at the site of the transformation and multiplication of German. While there is a dynamic relationship between the linguistic situation in everyday life and the reimagination of that situation in literary texts, the two should not be conflated, but rather investigated complementarily. A focus on the cultural imagination of the language is also relevant given the crucial role ascribed to imagination in processes of cultural globalization (Appadurai 1996: 31).

In this context, it is significant that minority writers in contemporary Germany have increasingly turned to the German language itself as a site for articulating a cultural critique of the exclusive nature of the nation as an "imagined community". Among the contemporary minority writers who reinvent and reimagine the German language is for instance Emine Sevgi Özdamar, author of Mutterzunge, 'Mother Tongue' (1990), who in (1991) was the first minority winner of the prestigious Ingeborg-Bachmann-prize. Özdamar's writing, in part, draws on literal translations from Turkish while remaining in German, a strategy which results in a highly poetic alienation effect. Also gaining in prominence is poet José F. A. Oliver, who primarily writes in high German, but intersperses his local Allemanic dialect as well as Spanish passages into some of his poems, thus changing not only the form but also the cultural resonance of German dialect and Heimat 'homeland' poetry. The significance of these poetic and provocative reshaping of the German language by minority writers does not lie in depicting changes occurring on society's margin. Rather, they produce "new imaginaries" (Gaonkar 2002) and with that signify the reimagining of the cultural landscape at large.

3. Relocating difference: From Turkish to German

Given the widespread interest it provoked, Kanak Sprak appears as a significant site of such a new imaginary. As I have already noted, the book does not document a sociolect, but rather produces an artificial language which in this form exists only as a literary invention. Not the least through this language, Kanak Sprak constitutes an imagined space in which unforeseen connections between some languages and histories are made, at the same time that expected relations between other languages, cultures, and histories are downplayed or transformed. What do these choices tell us about the language poetics of Kanak Sprak specifically, and about language and globalization more generally?

Turkish-German youth and in some places also young people of other ethnicities practice code-switching between Turkish and German. Yet, Kanak Sprak does not feature words from Turkish or other migrant languages. Instead, Turkish is present only in the most indirect ways: as in the frequent reference to Germans as "der Alemanne", which plays with the French-derived Turkish word for German (Alman) and the name of the Germantie tribe. An expression such as "Jungblutbengel" [young blood rascal] (Zaimoglu 1995: 28) is also not immediately recognizable as an evocation of the Turkish word for young man, delikanlı, though it may draw on the word's literal meaning 'crazy blooded' in addition to the German phrase "junges Blut" 'young blood'.

The only place in Kanak Sprak where we encounter actual Turkish words is in the foreword, and there they are only cited to indicate what has been left out. As it turns out, the expressions which Zaimoglu mentions as ones which he intentionally did not incorporate are terms of endearment: "gözüm (mein Auge), gözümün nuru (mein Augenlicht)" [my eye [...] light of my eye] (Zaimoglu 1995: 14). The author explains this choice by his desire to avoid the "Folklore-Falle" [folklore trap] and not let his language be misunderstood as "blumige Orientalensprache" [flowery language of Orientals] (Zaimoglu 1995: 14). That means that neither actual Turkish words, nor Turkish-derived expressions are a suitable means of representing the Kanak as Zaimoglu wants to construct him. In order to avoid "orientalizing" his subjects Zaimoglu does away with Turkish or minimizes its influence. For example, the term of endearment 'light of my eye' is replaced with the less flowery "Bruder" [brother] (Zaimoglu 1995: 14). The tenderness which might be expressed through the Turkish phrase is replaced by a fraternal relationship and a renewed emphasis on masculinity. With this strategy, Zaimoglu inadvertently reproduces the image of Turkish as inherently "Oriental" – that is apolitical, sentimental, feminized.

In this manner, Turkish is excluded and avoided. Since the words and the grammar of the text are clearly in German, that language would thus seem to be the proper home of the figures in Kanak Sprak. Indeed, German is the necessary matrix for understanding Kanak Sprak, but it is not sufficient in itself. Zaimoglu gestures at that fact, when, in his introduction, he translates passages into standard German: "Der Kanake sagt, [...] 'Hasshand teilt gerne aus, bricht sich aber viele Knochen' und meint 'wer von Hass erfüllt
ist, greift ohne Rücksicht auf Verluste zur Gewalt". [The Kanak says ‘hated hand likes to give it out, but breaks many bones’. And means ‘whoever is filled with hatred turns to violence without consideration of losses’]. Or: "Der Kanake sagt ‘Gott ficke jede Lahmgøre’ und meint ‘wenn man weiterkornen will, muss man sein Schicksal selbst in die Hand nehmen’". [The Kanak says ‘god fucks every lame brat’ and means ‘if you want to advance, you have to take your fate into your own hands’] (Zaimoglu 1995: 14). Although in both cases every word of the initial sentence is in German, the sentences themselves require further translations in order to enable understanding. Through this intralingual translation, German is multiplied and its multiplicity is gleefully displayed. What Zaimoglu is telling his readers is that they might know one German language, but that this does not ensure access to understanding and a common ground for communication.

The language does not, however, only signal difference and eschew showing affiliation. The traces of spoken language in particular are often indicative of north German vernacular through such characteristics as contractions of the article “eine” into “‘ne”, or the use of “olle” for “alte” ‘old’. This use of the vernacular locates the text in a specific German region, rather than in the nation at large. Within the monologues, the local region is frequently evoked as a point of reference (“Wir sind wüchsig aus gaarden, hier, wo man das olle gras halm für halm wachsen hört” [We are growing-ups from gaarden, here, where you can hear the ole grass grow blade by blade] Zaimoglu 1995: 39). Such a local affiliation is not unusual for ethnic minorities globally and seems to offer a site of belonging alternative to the nation. The language does not stay restricted to the local, though, but mixes the most diverse registers. For example, pathos, which is evoked through archaizing word order, clashes with vernacular expressions: “Wenn ihr wie olle zoopaviane nach des deutschen wärters zuckerwürfel schnappt, vergesst nicht, dass ihr euch habt eure blanke seele verwursten lassen.” (Zaimoglu 1995: 86). [When like some ole zoo baboons you grab at the german guards’ sugar cubes, do not forget, that thou had allowed your bare soul to be made into cheap fodder]. By making the mixing of registers one of the primary stylistic features of the text, Zaimoglu challenges the demarcation line around what is proper and what belongs together. This strategy does not obey the expected clichés of “Gastarbeiterdeutsch” ‘guestworker German’ or “Türkenslangs’ ‘slang of Turks’ both of which are associated with simplified and incorrect grammar and with the importation of foreign words. Though situated on the margins of society, these figures’ language lays claim to all levels of articulation and to their anarchistic hybridization.

Rather than referring back to either of the two national languages that would seem to be available to Turkish-German youth – standard German or Turkish – Kanak Sprak marks the emergence of a different mode of articulation. Zaimoglu stresses this when he asserts that the language of the Kanak figure “setzt sich aus ‘verkauderwelschten’ Vokabeln und Redewendungen zusammen, die so in keiner der beiden Sprachen vorkommen” [is assembled out of ‘hotchpotched’ vocabulary and turns of speech which in this form do not occur in either of the two languages] (Zaimoglu 1995: 13, emphasis added). It testifies to the existence of something that is not derived from national languages. Instead, this language evokes a realm of creativity simultaneously within and beyond the scale of national languages.

4. English and rap in Kanak Sprak: The imposition of the global?

While a migrant language such as Turkish remains quite subterranean, Kanak Sprak mobilizes not only spoken language and regional dialects of German but also the “global” language English. Is this then merely another case of Americanization? As I argued earlier, we need to consider the specific uses to which the English language is put. In Kanak Sprak, English words appear not exclusively but most frequently in contexts in which rap is evoked. Although this is the case only in three monologues out of 24, the placement of these three among the first five (monologues 1, 3, and 5) gives the impression that they are representative for the text as a whole. Via rap, English language fragments thus enjoy a privileged position and serve as an entryway into Kanak Sprak. In the monologue attributed to “Bayram, 18, breaker”, the connection between English phrases, German minority discourse, and rap takes this shape:

Ich bin’n breaker und hab meine gute posse, die alle peace wollen und peace stiften, weil peace is schon das, was man aus sich machen sollte, häuter über deinen bruder und die posse und über die kleinen, die schon ne wehr brauchen vor den verdammten verderbem im dunkeln. Rap is’n harter kodex, auf schlaffem posten bist du im nu’ner toter posten. […] Der rap sagt: sieh dich vor vorn untersten wie obersten chargen, vor dem der garantiert im falschen pelz rumläuf, um dich auf lamm zu polen. Bist du’n lamm fressen sie dich. […] hier bei uns, bei den breakern und rappern, bei den brüdern und schwester, ist schluss mit dem stuss, wir schwimmen nicht mit dem strom, wir machen nen eigenen strikten strom, wo jeder’n fluss is und aufhört ‘n gottverschissenes rinnal zu sein.
I'm a breakdancer and I have my good posse who all want peace and do peace cause peace is what you should make of yourself, guardian of your brother and the posse and of the little ones who already need some defense against the damned ruiners in the dark. Rap's a tough code, on a slack post you're fast a dead post. [...] rap says: beware of the lowest and the highest ranks, of the one who runs around in a false fur, to rewire you into a lamb. If you're a lamb, they'll eat you. [...] here among us breakdancers and rappers, among the brothers and sisters, we're done with that bullshit, we don't swim with the tide, we make our own strict tide, where everyone's a river and stops being a goddamshitty rivulet.

(Zaimoglu 1995: 41–42)

The English words, “breaker” “posse” and “peace,” stem from the vocabulary of African American rap culture and in the speech of this figure provide an identity, a community, and a vision, respectively. Beyond the referential meaning of the words, they offer a mode of orientation and of making sense of the world, of one's own position within it as well as a “code” of conduct. This orientation and sense-making activity draws on a social analysis implicit in the terms themselves. Because of these implicit meanings, German words could not take their place. Instead, the English words and the specific minority culture to which they refer in this context, make the young Turkish-German breakdancer part of a much larger “posse”, namely one which is transnational.

The transfer of this African-American cultural practice to a German context, however, has its own specific parameters and implications. As anthropologist Ayse Çaglar (2001) points out, hip hop and rap culture and aesthetics have been actively promoted by state institutions as an appropriate “language” and cultural practice for Turkish-German youth in particular. German social workers in youth clubs have organized courses in rap and staged local graffiti and breakdance competitions (Çaglar 2001: 226–227). Paradoxically, they saw these forms of U.S. minority culture as a means of integrating young Turkish-German men into German society (Çaglar 2001: 229–230). This observation is partially confirmed in another Kanak Sprak monologue entitled “Der direkte Draht zum schwarzen Mann” [the direct line to the black man] attributed to “Ali, 23, Rapper (von 'da crime posse')”. Considering rap as a means of “Aufklärung” [enlightenment] (Zaimoglu 1995: 28) for the oppressed, “Ali” sees his role as spreading an anti-drug and anti-crime message: “no drugs, no crime [...] wenn du echt bronx sein wists” [no drugs, no crime [...] if you want to be real bronx] (Zaimoglu 1995: 28). If he does not succeed in his musical career, “Ali” continues, he will join the police force, since he pleads for “unbedingte teilnahme” [unconditional participation in society] (Zaimoglu 1995: 32). This example demonstrates that far from being simply an outlaw identity, rap can also function as part of a state apparatus of law and order.

One of the most successful products of this effort was the predominantly Turkish-German hip hop group Cartel whose formation was enabled precisely by state-sponsored social work in Berlin. Their surprise success in 1995 coincided with the publication of Kanak Sprak. Both are part of a general trend where minorities in Germany can be heard primarily through the vehicle of hip hop, which appears as the designated and most legitimized means of minority articulation. Rap is thus actually a site where minority and majority imagination – if we can make such a distinction – intersect and interact. While this does not mean that the young people who embrace this style are merely manipulated, it does point to the fact that in the “German” imagination there is a link between minorities in Germany and U.S. American minorities. This imagined link between Turkish-Germans and African Americans is by no means new. Already in a (1973) feature on Turkish migration to Germany, the Spiegel magazine raised the specter of German cities turning into “Harlem”. US-American culture has for some time served as a site of projection for dealing with changes in German society. Experiences with cultural differences were and are articulated through reference to a U.S. American context, and seem to suggest that no useful German precedents are available.

So what role does English play in this context? Actual English words and phrases constitute only a minimal portion of Kanak Sprak. Yet at the same time, English is of strategic importance for the book. In citing the English vocabulary of rap, the figures in Kanak Sprak participate in one of the prime examples of a transnationally circulating cultural form, one which they claim for themselves. Though globally dominant, rap carries with it the association of oppositionality and minority resistance on which these figures draw. With this appropriation of the globalized language of rap, they go beyond the tired cliché of being stuck between two cultures, the still dominant trope in discourses on Turkish-Germans. As a third term and language, English breaks down the binary between sole affiliation with either Turkish or German.

As we have seen, however, drawing on an English-language mediated cultural form does not necessarily denote a place outside German culture. On the contrary, English mediation is at times used as a gateway to a place in German culture. In that case, English does not stand for Americanization but is used in Germany as a means to negotiate other forms of cultural difference, both by the state and by minority subjects. Ultimately, the presence
of English and rap in *Kanak Sprak* illustrates how a multiplicity of local desires shapes the circulation of global forms, at the same time that global cultures provide a transformative language for expressing the conditions of the local.

5. *Rotwelsch* and Jewish languages in *Kanak Sprak*

While Zaimoglu uses the enabling language of hip hop, the monologues also draw on other languages, forms, and even histories. Besides hip hop aesthetics, Zaimoglu also likens *Kanak Sprak* to other “jargons”: “Längst haben sie [die Kanaken] einen Untergrund-Kodex entwickelt und sprechen einen eigenen Jargon: die “Kanak-Sprak”, eine Art Creol oder Rotwelsch mit geheimen Codes und Zeichen. Ihr Reden ist dem Free-Style-Sermon im Rap verwandt, dort wie hier spricht man aus einer Pose heraus” [They [the Kanaks] have long since developed an underground code and speak their own jargon: “Kanak Speak”, a kind of Creole or thieves’ cant with secret codes and signs. Their speech is related to the freestyle sermon in rap, in both cases one speaks from a certain pose] (Zaimoglu 1995: 13). While rap is highlighted, the other analogies and related linguistic codes are significant in their own regard. *Rotwelsch*, for instance, is known as the secret language of marginal groups, such as wandering beggars, small-time criminals, or prostitutes and dates back to the Middle Ages, though forms of it are still alive in some areas. It is an itinerant code based on a vocabulary of elaborate neologism and circumlocution that remains incomprehensible to those not instructed in it. This effect is furthered by numerous borrowings from other languages, Yiddish in particular, as well as Slavic and Romance languages. Clearly, the *Kanak Sprak* of Zaimoglu’s making has a few things in common with *Rotwelsch*, both in its make-up – the tendency to create new German words, the borrowing from other languages – and in its social positioning on the margins. Whereas rap style summons a form of effective public speech, *Rotwelsch* signifies a means of communication that excludes the mainstream and the majority. If a community is imagined through this code, then it is one of shared secrets, marginality, and illegality. *Kanak Sprak* combines both elements: through its twisting of the standard language it creates opacity and signals the exclusion of the majority from its network; at the same time it is a form of stylized public speech.

The use of *Rotwelsch* also raises the question of Yiddish. Much of *Rotwelsch* consists of borrowings from Yiddish, a fact that in the past has had grievous consequences for the latter, as it was mistakenly conflated with the so-called thieves’ cant (Grossman 2000: 134–135). In *Kanak Sprak* we repeatedly find expressions such as “schlamassel” (47), “mischpaoke” (121), “meschugga” (117), “schofele” (136), words which have origins in Yiddish. Although these words are used today in everyday speech and might have lost the connotation of *Fremdwörter* ‘Germanized foreign words’ the citation of these “Germanized” Yiddish words is nonetheless intriguing. Even if there is no conscious link made to Yiddish and all the associations it brings with it in Germany, does the use of such words not suggest the presence of unconscious histories embedded in languages? What, furthermore, does their use tell us about immigrants’ relationship to the history and cultural memories with which they come into contact and into which they necessarily enter, not the least through language? In fact, references to experiences of German-Jews and particularly the German historical memory of the Holocaust surface throughout Zaimoglu’s text. Given these explicit references, the traces of Jewish languages in *Kanak Sprak* do not seem random in this carefully composed volume. Some of the other “Jewish” references are quite ironic, as when Zaimoglu has the Islamic fundamentalist say “Ich, der ich mich [gottes] wort ergeben, esse koschere, geschächtetes fleisch” (Zaimoglu 1995: 141) [I who has submitted to god’s word, eat kosher, properly slaughtered meat]. By using the Hebrew term “koscher” rather than the Turkish-Arabic “helal”, Zaimoglu blurs Jewish and Muslim practices within a German text and linguistically crisscrosses minority subject positions within Germany. In this particular instance, he undermines the very discourse on purity and properness which the sentence confesses to.

With *Rotwelsch* Zaimoglu invokes a language form which is itself bastardized and meant to undermine authorities and which stretches across territories without being tied to a nation. That is, through *Rotwelsch* and, less explicitly, Yiddish, the text evokes non-national languages which were thought of as illegitimate and improper, a sphere in which *Kanak Sprak*, too, locates itself. These languages serve as the index of a cultural memory of previous marginal existence beside and within German.

6. Conclusion: Politics of resignification, or, German in an age of globalization

As I have demonstrated, *Kanak Sprak* joins multiple languages and codes in irreverent and complex ways in order to give voice to a cultural and political transformation under way. The starting point in this process is the reappropriation of the slur *Kanake*. Zaimoglu credits the Black consciousness
movement and hip hop with providing the model for this reappropriation (Zaimoglu 1995: 17). However, the altered way Kanak has come to function shares some significant features with another recently reclaimed term, namely “queer.”35 This term began being widely used in the 1990s first in the United States by sexual minorities such as gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and in the meantime has also entered the German vocabulary. Like Kanak, “queer” was a highly derogatory term before it became a defiant self-reference. Moving away from referring to specific ethnic or sexual identities, both Kanak and queer have taken on the function of umbrella terms in political movements. In the case of Kanak, this is particularly evident with the network “Kanak Attak” since it does not organize around one specific (ethnic) identity (Kanak Attak 1999; Cheesman 2002: 187). This enlarged notion of Kanak may also explain why others of various backgrounds have felt free and encouraged to adopt the term. Furthermore, both Kanak and “queer” represent an anti-normative and anti-normalizing stance. Under both names, discourses of assimilation are rejected and visibility is provoked.36

In this context, it is worth pointing to the historical moment that preceded Kanak Sprak. Following German reunification, the early 1990s witnessed an increasing number of racist attacks against the non-German population and Germans of color. Besides the open mob violence in Rostock primarily against Vietnamese families (1992) or the numerous firebombings of refugee shelters, it was especially the firebombing of the homes of long-resident Turkish-German families in Mölln (1992) and Solingen (1993), in which women and children died, that provoked the mass protests from minorities against racist violence.37 The attack on long-established families undermined the credibility of the dominant rhetoric of assimilation and integration. In the context of those protests, there was the first outspoken rejection of assimilation as an acceptable or promising demand on minorities. This rejection of assimilation and normalization preceded Kanak Sprak and finds a reformulated articulation in it.38

The resignification of Kanak is a synecdoche for the resignification that the text as a whole undertakes. In Kanak Sprak the German language itself is resignified. That does not simply mean that parts of it are twisted, turned, and changed, but rather suggests that what German is, is itself in question, and is altered by the uses to which Zaimoglu puts it. The significance of Zaimoglu’s project therefore does not lie in the invention or inscription of a language for actual use, but more in its performative thrust, which interpelates new collective subjects and which makes the German language a multilayered home. The German language that we encounter in Kanak Sprak is woven out of multiple linguistic levels and is not confined to a national framework. Rather, it imagines a German which is the site of the local along with the transnational, drawing on national memories, as well as remembering non-national languages. In its self-assured performance, Kanak Sprak emphasizes that the transformation of German culture is not something abstract but something that makes itself felt through the very fabric of the German language.

Globalization understood as Americanization runs the risk of simplifying and obscuring the much more complex dynamics that will define the future of German. In particular, such an understanding does not account for other aspects of globalization such as multilingual migration. Even where we do detect forms of Americanization, we still need to pay attention to the local meanings given to them, by understanding them as the interplay between hegemonic influence, local histories, and local appropriations. Zaimoglu’s writing helps us understand the cultural imagination of the “German” language in the present, and its generative, albeit non-traditional possibilities. Writing such as Kanak Sprak may not be the “future” of German, but it does reveal a part of its present.

Notes

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2. In addition to numerous articles, Zaimoglu has published five more books since then. See Zaimoglu (1997), (1998), (2000), (2001), (2002). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of titles and passages are mine.

3. See Cheesman (2002) for the most extensive account of the reception of Zaimoglu’s text.

4. This is the title of a German-language book about hip hop (2002). The title is a reformulation of the rap album Fear of a Black Planet by the US-American group Public Enemy. As these examples suggest, hip hop is of central importance in this phenomenon. Though Zaimoglu does not say so explicitly, the appropriation of Kanak is modeled on the appropriation of the racist epithet “nigger” in some forms of hip hop. The word “nigger” itself appears prominently in two different functions in the text. In one case it is set off against Kanak in a sarcastic mimicry of German attitudes towards different people of color (1995: 22); in another it functions as an overarching identificatory term (1995: 25). For more on hip hop and Kanak aesthetics and politics see below.

5. For an example of a cross-ethnic identification and use of the form, see the texts of Italian-German writer Vito Avantario (2000).
6. Among the most successful versions in popular culture are the characters created by the comedy duos Erkan & Stefan and Mundstuhl. They do not, however, deal with the political and explosive issues which are at the core of Kanak Sprak, but rather use non-standard speech and minority youth as comic triggers.

7. See also Cheesman (2002: 180). It is also important to point out that despite the so-called “Kanak-Chic” (see Steyerl [2001] for a critical assessment), the term is still very much used as an insult. I was repeatedly reminded of that in an online search in which next to the many entries on Zaimoglu, there were police reports of brutal attacks on minorities accompanied by verbal abuse featuring that slur.

8. See for example Bär (2000:18–20). Much more polemical articulations of that view can be found in the contributions to Glück and Krämer (2000). Focusing on the media dimension of globalization likewise primarily leads to a discussion of the role of English, as in Hoffmann (2000).

9. Given this discourse on the global dominance of English elsewhere, it is ironic that in the U.S. itself, for instance, there have been voices worrying about the status of English vis-à-vis Spanish. These voices have led to the emergence of “English-only movements” in recent years. This underscores the deeply political nature of perceptions of encroachment and threat. The Harvard-based project Multilingual America, led by Werner Sollors (1998), began in part as a response to that political debate and offers an alternative vision of American literature by collecting American writings in languages other than English.

10. It might be useful to remember the manifold ways in which German already bears the traces of other languages. In his classic study, Eric Blackall (1959) has traced many of the strands that led to the development of German as a high literary language in the course of the 18th century. His study shows in great detail, among other things, the crucial role that the emulation of English style and grammar played in this development.

11. Schiewe discusses this phenomenon with further examples such as “showmaster” or “tewen” (Schiewe 2000: 40).

12. On the conceptual relationship between the global and the local see Hardt and Negri (2000: 44–45) who treat both as “different networks of flows and obstacles” (45) and rightly caution against the other extreme, the tendency to privilege the local alone.

13. For a useful brief overview of the history of labor migration to Germany since the late 19th century and a sketch of its social and cultural effects see Terkessidis (2000).

14. For see instance the work of Peter Auer or Volker Hinnenkamp. I would like to thank Philipp Angermeyer for drawing my attention to Auer.

15. Androutopoulos (2000) offers an insightful sociolinguistic consideration of the interaction between non-standard language varieties developed by speakers and the stylized adoption of that variety in media and various cultural forms. He lays out quite clearly the differences between these forms, but also stresses their dynamic relationship. Among the examples of stylized versions of what he calls ethnolect are in fact Zaimoglu’s first two books. His analysis, however, focuses on the role of mass media in the circulation of ethnolect and does not engage with Zaimoglu’s work at any length.

16. For the most extensive coverage of literature by minorities see the handbook edited by Chiellino (2000) in which, however, as Cheesman (2002: 190) points out, Zaimoglu and the Kanak phenomenon are treated only briefly and dismissively.

17. See Konuk (1997) and Seyhan (2001) for an analysis of the literary language and the relationship between Turkish and German.

18. See for example Oliver (1993). These bilingual or multilingual aesthetics are not limited to minority writing in German, but can be found across multiple languages and contexts. That is, they constitute a distinct transnational literary phenomenon. Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera (1987) and Abdelkebir Khatibi’s Amour bilingue (1983) are just two prominent examples of such an aesthetic engagement with language. See also Sommer (2003) who gathers essays about “bilingual games” in multiple languages and literary contexts.


20. The fact that he does include Turkish words on occasion in his subsequent works, makes this absence even more remarkable.

21. The rarity of direct allusions to the Turkish language is one of the features which distinguishes Zaimoglu’s writing from Özdamar’s style.

22. This gendered discourse ultimately finds its expression in rap-inspired rhythms and attitudes, as I will suggest below.

23. For a critique of the sexual politics in the larger Kanak phenomenon, see Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2001).

24. Çağlar (2001: 236) highlights the fact that belonging is no longer defined along nation, state or ethnicity but is rather oriented towards urban spaces. Kanak Sprak’s local affiliation, however, does not follow the trend of locating minorities in metropolitan spaces, but rather in the province. The aforementioned use of Allemanic by José Oliver’s is a further literary example for this.

25. The range of registers and the recourse to a high literary vocabulary also differentiates his style starkly from that of the popular comedy version of migrant youth speech.

26. The foregrounding of the “black man” in this monologue further indicates that the source for and point of access to this appropriation of American English is ultimately the expression of a resistant male minority existence. Although there is a monologue by a male-to-female transsexual (Zaimoglu 1995: 34–38) Kanak Sprak is explicitly gendered as male. In response to strong criticism, especially from Turkish-German women, Zaimoglu’s third book Koppsstoß: Kanaka Sprak vom Rande der Gesellschaft [Headstuff: She-Kanak Speak from the Margins of Society] (1998) gathered monologues by female counterparts to the figures in Kanak Sprak. Yet the language in that volume is noticeably different, with some entries written in standard German.

27. In fact, the group da crime posse of the above mentioned rapper Ali (Aksoy) was part of Cartel. As Cheesman notes, Aksoy is the only clearly identifiable
figure in the text (2002: 185). For a fascinating discussion of the very different meanings which Cartel’s reclaiming of Turkish identity through hip hop acquired in the German, Turkish-German, and Turkish contexts vis-a-vis nationalism, see Çaglar (2001: 231–233). It should be noted, though, that in contrast to Kanak Sprak, Cartel’s songs were predominantly in Turkish while also featuring Spanish, German and English lyrics.

28. This appears to be true outside of Germany as well, as indicated by a New York Times feature on Turkish-German youth via a portrait of filmmaker Neco Çetin and the focus on his hip hop, graffiti and gang member experience (Bernstein 2003). For a more accurate and critical discussion of this trend in filmic representations see Mennel (forthcoming). I would like to thank Barbara Mennel for sharing this essay with me prior to its publication.

29. In this context, it would also be important – though not possible here – to consider the role of Afro-Germans, both as active producers of hip hop (see Loh and Gungor 2002) and other forms of German minority culture and as figures in discourses on cultural difference in Germany.

30. For an incisive critique of this extremely widespread trope, see Adelson (2001).

31. See Girtler (1998) for an account and documentation of the contemporary Viennese variety.

32. In his essay “Germany-Home for Turks?” Turkish-German poet, novelist, and public intellectual Zafer Senocak asks: “Doesn’t immigrating to Germany also mean immigrating to, entering into, the arena of Germany’s recent past?” (Senocak 2000: 6).

33. Adelson discusses this in greater detail in her (2000) essay where she explores Jewish references in Turkish-German literature.

34. Yiddish, of course, gradually ceased to be the primary language of most German Jews in the course of the 19th century, so that the link imagined between Yiddish and German Jews is no longer based on fact. For more on tropes about Jews and language, see Gilman (1986).

35. My title suggests this parallel by alluding to Judith Butler’s important essay “Critically Queer” (1993).

36. Engel (1999/2000) lays out in much more detail the parallels and overlaps between the queer and Kanak movements in Germany.

37. Çaglar (2000: 233) makes a similar argument about the historical and cultural moment with respect to the success of Cartel.

38. In his foreword to Koppsstaff, Zaimoglu (1998: 9) retrospectively acknowledges the impact of those events on Kanak Sprak.

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Globalization: A Look at the Positive Side

John M. Grandin

Zusammenfassung


The intent of this volume is to assess the impact of globalization on the German language and culture, especially within the framework of American higher education at a time when the world appears obsessed with learning English. The fact that English has indeed become the lingua franca of the 21st century would seem, at least on the surface, to eliminate the need, once and for all, for Americans to concern themselves with languages other than English. Falling German enrollments, along with those of most other languages at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, indicate that most Americans believe they can, in fact, live, work, and travel most anywhere in the world without learning another language. As this volume testifies, Germanists fear that the place of the German language and culture in the American higher education curriculum is threatened by the hegemony of