

**Benjamin Hebblethwaite, Arabic Lexical Borrowings  
in German Rap Lyrics:  
Religious, Standard and Slang Lexical Semantic Fields**

**Introduction**

This essay introduces the Arabic lexical field in German rap lyrics. The topic is understudied in the German scholarly literature and there are only a handful of articles that explore Arabic influences in urban German. The matter is scarcely known among English readers. Partly rooted in Jamaican toasting, the rap and hip-hop musical genre emerged in the 1970s in New York City (Chang 2005). Hip-hop music is comprised of an instrumental track called a “beat” and a lyrical track called “rapping.” Rapping is a lyrical form that uses poetic techniques to create an exciting rhythmic verbal flow for the delivery of “raps” which are poetic narratives. The poetic techniques include assonance, alliteration, rhyming, chopping, and acceleration, among others.

Hip-hop music spread from the United States to France and Germany in the mid-1980s and has become a behemoth of their respective music industries since the mid-1990s. In Germany, the descendants of Arabic-speaking or Muslim immigrants (i.e. Turkish, Bosnian, Iranian, etc.), have become a significant presence in the genre over the last two decades. Arabic lexical influences are increasing. The Arabic lexicon in German rap lyrics can be divided into the religious, the everyday standard, and Arabic slang based on the semantic fields displayed in rap texts themselves. Of course many Arabic words in German are related to regional varieties of Arabic, but that is a topic beyond the scope of this essay. Some commentators, including rappers, use terms like “Kiezdeutsch,” “Kanak sprach” or “Kanakisch” in reference to the urban multi-ethnic German varieties (Freywald *et al* 2011:45). I will refer to the language of the German rap lyrics, however, as “urban German vernacular” as it is the most straightforward expression in English.

Among the 27 nations of the European Union, Arabic speakers make up 0.9% of the total population and Arabic is the 20<sup>th</sup> most common language based on European Commission data from 2012.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of adults who speak Arabic as a native or learned language is 0.45% of Germany’s population and Arabic is the 13<sup>th</sup> ranked language.<sup>2</sup> With regard to speakers of Turkish, at 2.67% of the population (5<sup>th</sup> ranked), insofar as they are Muslim, they are important for Arabic language contact in terms of the Islamic Arabic lexical field

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<sup>1</sup> Based on data collected by the European Commission:  
<http://languageknowledge.eu/countries/eu27>

<sup>2</sup> Based on data collected by the European Commission:  
<http://languageknowledge.eu/countries/germany>

in urban vernacular German.<sup>3</sup> In Austria, Arabic speakers only make up 0.28% of the population (ranked 21<sup>st</sup>) while Turkish speakers are 1.74% (ranked 7<sup>th</sup>). As Germany accepts an unprecedented 800,000 refugees from war-torn parts of the Arab world in 2015 alone (Lyman *et al.* 2015), Arabic language and cultural contact will have magnified importance in the coming years.

Arabic speakers represent half of a percent in Germany; however, Arabic-borrowings are common in rap lyrics composed by Muslims, whether Arabic speakers or not. The 4,119,000 Muslims in Germany form 5% of the population. There are 475,000 Muslims in Austria, representing 5.7% of the population (Rogers 2011)<sup>4</sup>. In Germany and Austria, the parents and families of rappers or the rappers themselves have roots in Muslim-majority countries including Turkey (Alpa Gun, Eko Fresh), Iran (PA Sports, Fard, Nazar), Afghanistan (SadiQ), Ethiopia (Ammar114), Morocco (Dú Maroc, Abdi, Farid Bang), Algeria (Al-Gear), Iraq and Kurdish regions (Azad, Kurdo, Haftbefehl, KC Rebell), Bosnia (Celo), Lebanon (Motrip), Palestine (Massiv), Syria (Abu Abiat), and other countries. To give the reader some perspective, it is fair to say that a significant minority of rappers in Germany have Muslim heritage. Most Muslim or Muslim-heritage rappers in Germany draw upon the Arabic lexical field, to greater or lesser degrees, to attain different effects in their texts.

As Islam's sacred language, Arabic provides a shared linguistic culture among Muslims of any background. Since all *khoutba* (sermons) in languages other than Arabic necessarily include extensive Arabic language recitations from the Qur'an and the Hadith, in addition to many single word Arabic borrowings or expressions inserted into the sermon, Muslims of any language background who frequent a mosque will gradually acquire a range of Arabic religious terminology. Therefore, the observance of Islam, and the centrality of Arabic in the religion, form major influences that help explain the salience of this lexical field in German rap. As a religion associated with immigrants and their descendants, and one that suffers from a degree of suspicion and marginalization in Germany, the employment of Arabic terms in urban vernacular German represents an attempt to reverse Arabic's precariousness. Drawing on Islam and Arabic, rappers assert a form of covert prestige that defends and asserts the Muslim faith, language, and identity.

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<sup>3</sup> Turkish-speakers also contribute many lexical items from Turkish into urban vernacular German and rap lyrics, but that is not my focus here. See: <http://languageknowledge.eu/countries/germany>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/jan/28/muslim-population-country-projection-2030>

### **Domains of borrowing and illustrations from German**

Arabic lexical items lend themselves to categorization in three overarching lexical fields, the religious, the everyday standard, and slang. The religious lexical field is primarily composed of Arabic Islamic words and represents a large portion of the borrowings in German and French urban vernaculars. The lexical semantic field of religion is famously influential and resilient in language contact situations, including under severe conditions of duress (Holm 2000:114). For example, in spite of Haitian Vodou's illegality and suppression under French colonialism, the religion's lexical semantic field survives robustly. Obstacles to economic opportunities and social assimilation, combined with the perception that European secularist policies discriminate against Muslims, drives many young Muslims to reactively accentuate religious values in their speech, including in rap (Béthune 2004:122; Boniface and Médine 2012:64, 103). The nonreligious lexical semantic fields, for their part, are discernable in the form of everyday words from the standard in addition to nonstandard slang expressions. The nonreligious lexical fields include food items, professions, sexuality and romance, drugs and alcohol, vulgarity, criminality, and many others.

### **Rap Lyrics and Linguistics: How Arabic is used in German Rap**

Rap lyrics are not a spontaneous record of speech varieties but they provide a synchronic record of a representation of urban vernaculars. Members of the Arabic speaking second generation and Muslims familiar with the Arabic Islamic lexical field have established a significant position in the German rap market. Today rap music accounts for a startling share of European music sales. The large audience that rap albums reach must be impacted by the diffusion of novel lexical items from the urban vernaculars.

For researchers living outside of the German-speaking parts of Europe, a valuable tool for gaining preliminary insights into the evolution of urban vernaculars over the last two and a half decades has been via recordings from the rap music genre. From the margins of European society, the offspring of immigrants – or immigrants themselves – have championed rap music. Although rap still has an underground element, the genre has become increasingly popular to the extent that rap albums routinely dominate album sales across genres in Germany.

In order to illustrate Arabic borrowings in German rap, I propose two approaches. First, the rap text below illustrates some of the ways that rappers make use of the Arabic Islamic lexical semantic field. Second, a selection of Arabic borrowings in their sentential context as found on a sampling of German rap albums that date from 2008-2015 will provide a broad perspective.

The song below is entitled *Amin* by PA Sports, featuring Alpa Gun, a bonus track on the album, *H.A.Z.E.* (2014). PA Sports, from an

Iranian family, and Alpa Gun, from a Turkish family, deliver a song that expresses an array of Islamic concepts using Arabic borrowings or German translations of Muslim concepts. This song stands out for its religiosity among the recordings of both these artists who typically do not dwell so deeply on the theme of religion:

1. *Hand aufs Herz, Du musst die Augen öffnen,*  
Honestly, you need to open your eyes,
2. *doch Menschen glauben nur das an was Sie glauben*  
*möchten.*  
yet people only believe in what they would like to believe.
3. *Halt Dich an **Allah** und an Seinem Seil fest,*  
Hold tight onto Allah and his rope,
4. *was für eine **Dünya** dieses Leben ist nur ein Test.*  
as for this dunya, this life is but a test.
5. *Ich sage **audhu billah** und nehm mein Abdest.*  
I say audhubillah and do my ritual washing.
6. ***Ja Allah** halt mich gegenüber Sünden standfest.*  
Ya Allah, keep me strong against sin.
7. *Ich bin kein Heuchler und will mich nicht begründen*  
I am no hypocrite and I don't want to explain
8. *weil ich auch nur ein Mensch bin wie du, ich bin nicht*  
*sündenfrei.*  
because I'm just human like you, I am not without sin.
9. *Halt dir vor Augen, eines Tages wirst du begraben;*  
Keep it in mind, one day you will be buried;
10. *was am Ende bleibt sind die schlechten und die guten Taten.*  
what remains in the end are good and bad deeds.
11. *Ob **Sunnite** oder **Shia** wir sind eine **Ummah**,*  
Whether Sunni or Shia, we are all one Ummah,
12. *und wer was Anderes sagt, Bruder, der hat keinen Schimmer.*  
and who says something else, brother, hasn't the faintest idea.
13. *Lass dich nicht vom Teufel und der **Fitna** leiten,*  
Don't let yourself be led by the devil and fitna,
14. *wir sind eins und das müssen wir unseren Kindern zeigen.*  
we are one and we should show that to our children.
15. *Tagtäglich sterben Brüder **in Palestine**,*  
Everyday brothers die in Palestine,
16. *doch ich sag jeden Tag **ja Allah ja kerim**.*  
still I say everyday oh Allah, oh generous one.
17. *Es ist die Habgier und die Missgunst die Menschen zu Tieren*  
*macht,*  
It is greed and distrust that turn people into animals,

18. *mein Bruder, aber nicht uns, was auch passiert, lass nie die Hoffnung los,*  
 my brother, but not us, whatever happens, don't let go of hope,  
 19. *behalte eins in deinem Kopf Bruder, Gott ist groß!*  
 keep this in your mind, brother, God is great!

Refrain

20. *Ich bete nicht für Hölle oder Paradies,*  
 I don't pray for Hell or Paradise,  
 21. *sondern weil Du würdig bist, darum fall' ich auf die Knie.*  
 but because you are worthy, I fall to my knees.  
 22. *Wenn Du willst sind wir morgen schon tot.*  
 If you wish it, then by morning we are dead.  
 23. *Nur durch den Mensch kam der Zorn in dir hoch.*  
 It is because of man that your anger is so great.
24. *Ich bete nicht für Hölle oder Paradies,*  
 I don't pray for Hell or Paradise,  
 25. *sondern weil du würdig bist, darum fall ich auf die Knie.*  
 but because you are holy, I fall to my knees.  
 26. *Ich glaub an Dich und warte auf den Tag der Abrechnung,*  
 I believe in You and I wait for the Day of Judgment,  
 27. *der Rest ist alles Ablenkung, amin!*  
 everything else is diversion, amen!
28. *Ja stimmt, die Drogen machen süchtig, es tut mir leid.*  
 I agree, the drugs produce addiction, I'm sorry to say.  
 29. *Bitte verzeih mir Herr, ich habe gesündigt.*  
 Please forgive me Lord, I have sinned.  
 30. *Ich habs bereut und darum geh ich jetzt den geraden Weg.*  
 I regret it and that's why I'm now taking the straight path.  
 31. *5 mal am Tag knie ich vor dir und mache meine Gebet.*  
 5 times per day I kneel before you and say my prayer.  
 32. *Ich bring die **Schahada** auch wenn die meisten es nicht so sehen:*  
 I also proclaim the Shahada when most wouldn't say it:  
 33. *Es gibt keiner gott ausser Gott und Muhammed ist Sein Prophet.*  
 There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Prophet.  
 34. *Ich glaub daran und gehe jeden Freitag in die **Moschee***  
 I believe in that and go to the mosque each Friday

35. *und, Bruder, falls du es nicht tust dann ist das dein Problem.*  
and, brother, if you do not do it, then that's your problem.
36. *Die Säulen des Islams faszinieren mich.*  
The pillars of Islam fascinate me.
37. *Viele sagen sie sind **Muslime**, doch praktizieren nicht;*  
Many say they are Muslims, but don't practice;
38. *sie kiffen, trinken Alkohol und machen draussen **Fitna**,*  
they smoke hash, drink alcohol and create fitna,
39. *sie heucheln rum und benehmen sich wie ein haufen wixxer.*  
they spread gossip and carry themselves like scum.
40. *Ich mach mein **Ramadan** und wenn ich kann geb ich mein **Zekat**,*  
I do my Ramadan and when I can, I give my Zakat,
41. *falls ich es schaffe will ich irgendwann mal auch nach **Mekka**.*  
if I can make it, I want to go to Mecca sometime.
42. *Glaub mir, der Mensch will nach einem gewissen Alter chill'n,*  
Believe me, people want to chill out until a certain age,
43. *doch es gilt nicht das was wir wollen, sondern was **Allah** will.*  
but it doesn't matter what we want, but what Allah wants.
44. *Manchmal läuft in diesem Leben alles nicht rund,*  
Many times in this life things don't go well,
45. *doch fühl dich nicht alleine Djane.*  
but don't feel alone, Johnny.
46. *Gott ist mit uns, glaub mir, hab' Vertrauen und lass nicht die Hoffnung los.*  
God is with us, believe me, have confidence and don't let go of hope.
47. *Vergiss eine Sache nie Bruder, Gott ist groß!*  
Don't forget one thing, brother, God is great!<sup>5</sup>

There are 17 different Arabic words in this German rap text and they are all from the Islamic lexical field: *Allah, Dūnya, audhu billah, ya Allah, Sunnite, Shia, Ummah, Fitna, ya Allah ya kerim, amin, Schahada, Moschee, Muslime, Fitna, Ramadan, Zekat* and *Mekka*. In general, even though many Arabic borrowings in rap texts come from the Islamic semantic field, there are also many non-religious borrowings. PA Sports' song has a strong religious theme, thus the Islamic emphasis. Several of the items in the text above belong to a layer of Arabic borrowings that already has a longstanding presence in German such as *Allah, Sunite, Shia, amin, Moschee, Muslime, Ramadan*, and the toponym, *Mekka*. The other expressions, *Dūnya, audhu billah, Ummah, Fitna, ya Allah ya kerim, Schahada* and *Zekat*, are not recognized by most Germans. These terms are well known,

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<sup>5</sup> German text transcribed by Ahmet Aktas and translated by Benjamin Hebblethwaite.

however, among German Muslims and Muslims worldwide. *Dünya* refers to this mundane world; *audhu billah* means 'I seek refuge in Allah'; the expression *ya Allah ya kerim* with two instances of the vocative *ya*, 'oh Allah, oh noble (one)'; *Ummah* 'the global community of Muslims'; *Fitna* 'strife'; *Schahada* 'the testimony of faith'; and *Zakat* 'charitable giving.'

In addition to the layers of Arabic lexical borrowings, the song also expresses aspects of Islamic tradition in German translation. There are several examples that are worth noting. Line four includes the phrase, *dieses Leben ist nur ein Test*. The notion that life is God's test of humankind's righteousness or lack thereof is a fundamental outlook in Islam (Ünal 2013:464). In Islam, our lives are tests that culminate in ultimate accountability. This takes form in the concept of the "Day of Judgement" which appears in two parts of the song in German translation, in line 10 as, *was am Ende bleibt sind die schlechten und die guten Taten*, illustrating the belief that each human will be judged for his or her good and bad deeds, and in line 26 where the Day of Judgment is made explicit: *ich glaub an Dich und warte auf den Tag der Abrechnung*.

The ideology of the family, reflected in a brotherhood and sisterhood relation among Muslims, is expressed in German with *mein Bruder* in line 18. Several Islamic notions appear in German translation including *Gott* (line 19), *Hölle* (line 20) and *Paradies* (line 20). The characteristic attention to death as a reminder for how to live morally is reflected in lines 22, *wenn Du willst sind wir morgen schon tot*. The notion of sin and repentance (*tawba*) are reflected in line 29, *bitte verzeih mir Herr, ich habe gesündigt*. Similarly, the Qur'anic notion of the *siraat al-moustaqim* (the straight path) is expressed in German in line 30: *darum geh' ich jetzt den geraden Weg*. The Islamic tradition that requires Muslims pray five times a day is found in line 31: *5 mal am Tag knie ich vor Dir*. In line 32 the *Shahada* 'Testimony of faith' is followed by the German translation of Islam's fundamental statement of faith: *es gibt kein Gott ausser Gott und Muhammed ist Sein Prophet (La ilaha illallah wa Muhammadur rasulullah)*.

Finally, the Sunnah obligation of attending the Friday sermon and prayer at a mosque are drawn upon, *ich glaub daran und gehe jeden Freitag in die Moschee* (34). An enthusiastic reference to the (five) pillars of Islam is made, *die Säulen des Islams faszinieren mich* (36), and two Qur'anic expressions in German translation serve as the song's peroration, *Gott ist mit uns* (46) (from *Allahu ma'na*, see *Qur'an* 9:36) and the song's closing words, *Gott ist groß!* (47) (from the praise expression and exclamative, *Allahu akbar*).

The text provided above illustrates the fusion of the Islamic tradition with the German rap music genre. Songs that delve so deeply into the Islamic lexical-semantic field are relatively uncommon. However, there are nevertheless handfuls of interesting Arabic borrowings on many German rap albums, especially ones released by

Arabic-heritage or Muslim rappers. There is also some borrowing of Arabic words among non-Arabic speaking and non-Muslim heritage rappers, but it occurs on a smaller scale.

Below is a short selection of Arabic borrowings in their sentential context as found on a sampling of German rap albums. The religious lexical field, coded as (R), is common in German hip-hop lyrics. In addition, the presence of non-religious Arabic slang expressions (S) and everyday standard Arabic (E) is also significant:

**Abyat (m.) or baida (f.)** ‘white, i.e. cocaine’ *Sorry, Herr Kommissar, ich weiß es ist strafbar. Doch letzte Nacht war ich mit Marocs auf Baida. Schweißtest durchgefallen, Kokain im Blut.* Sorry, officer, I know it is punishable. However, last night I was with my Moroccan friends on cocaine. I failed the drug swipec test, cocaine in my blood.<sup>6</sup> (S)

**Ahlan wa sahlān** ‘hello and welcome’ *Aber du mein Freund wirst leider nie so wie ich, zu sensibel wie eine Klitoris. Ahlan wa-sahlān, heiß dich willkommen!* But you my friend will unfortunately not become like me, as sensitive as a clitoris. Hello and welcome, bid you welcome.<sup>7</sup> (E)

**Ajnabe** (ajnabi) ‘foreigner’ *Ich bin ein ajnabe. I am a foreigner.*<sup>8</sup> (E)

**Akhi** ‘my brother’ *Jeder schüttelt Hände für’s Business, Akhi, Achtung, Schlangen sind giftig.* Everyone shakes hands for his business, my brother, watch out, snakes are poisonous.<sup>9</sup> (S)

**Al-Fatiha** ‘the opening (Sura 1 of the Qur’an)’ *Mama weint und ich bete das Al-Fātiha.* Mama weeps and I pray Al-Fatiha.<sup>10</sup> (R)

**Al-Ain** ‘the evil eye’ *Jeder dritte macht aib<sup>11</sup>, jeder zweite al-ain.* One in three makes mistakes, one in two makes the evil eye.<sup>12</sup> (E)

**Astaghfirullah (Estagfurullah)** ‘I pray to God for forgiveness’ *Gewalt und Konsum – Astaghfirullah! Vorbestraft und illegal – Astaghfirullah! Die Sünde schmeckt süß – Astaghfirullah! Ein Weltbild voll Hass – Ratatata! Violence and consumerism – I pray to God for forgiveness! Previous conviction and illegal - I pray to God for forgiveness! The sin tastes sweet - I pray to God for forgiveness! A world image filled with hate – Ratatata!*<sup>13</sup> (R)

**Dajjāl** ‘Dajjaal, i.e. a satanic figure of Islamic eschatology’ *Brüder ficken mit dem Dajjāl. Estagfurullah.* Brother, fuck with the Deceiver. Forgive me God.<sup>14</sup> (R)

<sup>6</sup> Olexesh, *Arschkontrolle* (2015)

<sup>7</sup> Fard, *Huckleberry Finnphase* (2015).

<sup>8</sup> Hamad 45, *Ajnabe* (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Fard, *Traumfängerphase (Mezzanin)* (2015).

<sup>10</sup> Fard, *Al-Fatiha* (2015).

<sup>11</sup> The word *aib* is Turkish for “mistakes” (see the notes for Massiv, feat. Celo & Abdi, *Intifada Ghetto* (2013) on [www.genius.com](http://www.genius.com)).

<sup>12</sup> Massiv, feat. Celo & Abdi, *Intifada Ghetto* (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Snaga & Fard, *Astaghfirullah* (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Haftbefehl, *Engel im Herz, Teufel im Kopf* (2014).



**Dschinn** 'spirit [jinn]' *Meine Welt ist dunkel, sprech' mit Fäusten wie ein Pantomim. Mit dem Dschinn in der Hand (ah, ah), so wie Aladdin.* My world is dark, speak with ghosts like a pantomime. With the jinn in my hand (ah, ah) just like Aladdin.<sup>15</sup> (R)

**Flous** 'money' *Aber egal, mir geht es gut. Immer noch Probleme aber Hauptsache Flous.* In any case, things are going well. Still there are problems as always, but there is money.<sup>16</sup> (S)

**Habibi** 'beloved' *Habibi komm ich zeig' dir was auf der Straße geht.* Beloved, come I'll show you what's going on in the street.<sup>17</sup> (E)

**Hadjibart** 'long beard worn by someone who completed the Hajj to Mecca' *Tragen ein Hadjibart.* Wear a Hadj beard<sup>18</sup> (R)

**Halal** 'halal, i.e. permissible in Sharia law' *Damals Schwarzgeld, illegal, Heute halal money legal.* Previously ill-gotten money, illegality, today, halal money, legality.<sup>19</sup> (R)

**Hamdulillah** 'thanks be to God' *Hamdulillah, mir geht es gut.* Thanks be to God, all is well with me.<sup>20</sup> (R)

**Harami** 'transgressor' *Slumdog Harami, Passport: Almani.* Slumdog transgressor, passport: German<sup>21</sup> (R)

**Iblis** 'Ibliss' (one of the jinn in the Qur'an) *Sorry, das war nicht ich, sondern Iblis.* Sorry, that wasn't me but Ibliss.<sup>22</sup> (R)

**Iftar** 'iftar, i.e. meal after sundown during Ramadan.' *Pismams sind hungrig wie auf Iftar, click bam.* Cousins are hungry like at Iftar, click bam.<sup>23</sup> (R)

**Inch'Allah** 'God willing' *Bald kommt dein Album, inshallah Altun.*<sup>24</sup> Soon your album will drop, God willing gold.<sup>25</sup> (R)

**Jumu'a** 'Friday' *Auf'm Weg zum Jumu'a Gebet.* On the way to Friday prayers.<sup>26</sup>

**Kahba** 'whore, slut, ho' *Kahbas schrei'n, wenn wir vorbeifahr'n, sahbi.* Whores scream when we drive by, brother. (S)

**Khoya** 'brother, dude, man' *Khoya, das hier ist mein Leben und vielleicht werd' ich erwischt.* Man, this is my life and maybe I'll be caught.<sup>27</sup> (S)

**Lak** 'dude, dawg' *Lak, der Marokkaner tickt Stoff.* Dawg, the Moroccan deals in powder.<sup>28</sup> (S)

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<sup>15</sup> Fard, *Keine Harmonie* (2015).

<sup>16</sup> Al-Gear, *Aber egal* (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Fard, *Habibi Music* (2008).

<sup>18</sup> Automatik, feat. Kurdo, *Ghettopräsident* (2014).

<sup>19</sup> Kurdo, *7Halal* (2015).

<sup>20</sup> Massiv, *Ein Mann ein Wort 2* (2015).

<sup>21</sup> Hamad 45, *Mantika* (2014).

<sup>22</sup> Haftbefehl, *Engel im Herz, Teufel im Kopf* (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Kurdo, *Meine Welt* (2014).

<sup>24</sup> The word *Altun* comes from the Kurdish word for "gold."

<sup>25</sup> Kurdo, *Halbmond* (2015).

<sup>26</sup> Massiv, feat. Celo & Abdi, *Intifada Ghettolied* (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Al-Gear, *Multikriminell* (2014).

- Mantika** 'sphere' *In meiner Mantika*. In my sphere.<sup>29</sup> (E)
- Maskhara** 'filthy' *Deutscher Rap ist Maskhara*. German rap is filthy.<sup>30</sup> (E)
- Mekka** 'Mecca' *Bete Richtung Mekka und sterbe als Moslem*. Pray in the direction of Mecca and die as a Muslim.<sup>31</sup> (R)
- Nargila** 'water pipe' *Lieben schnelle Autos, den Rauch von Nargila*. Love fast cars, the smell of a water pipe.<sup>32</sup> (E)
- Ro** 'bro' *Es bleibt wie es ist, ro, weiter Haram-Para*. It stays what it is, bro, simply money gained from illicit means.<sup>33</sup> (S)
- Sahbi 'friend'** *Meine Welt ist parallel, fick das Parlament, Euros und Karamell, Lambos und Panamera, Europa Alarme, Ghetto, ghetto sahabi* "My world is parallel, fuck the parliament, Euros and caramell, Lambos and Panamera, Europe alarm, ghetto, ghetto, friend."<sup>34</sup> (E)
- Seytan (Sheytaan)** 'Satan' *Generation Estagfurulla was sehe ich nur? Brüder dreh'n durch, wählen Seytan statt Religion. Der Teufel holt auch dich, bietet Geld und Ruhm*. Generation forgive me is all I see? Brother get over it, they choose Satan over religion. The devil brings for you, offers money and fame.<sup>35</sup> (R)
- Tijara** 'business, (illicit) trade' *Ich bin Star in Europa, du machst Tijara minimal*. I'm a star in Europe, you make minimal business.<sup>36</sup> (S)
- Wallah** 'I swear' *Wallah diese Tabakjoints kann ich ma garnet leiden*. I swear I can't stand these tobacco joints.<sup>37</sup> (R)
- Ya latif** 'softy, a weak person' *Du willst Beef, ya Latif, komm hol mir deine Clique gleich mit*. You want beef, oh softy, come get me with your whole clique.<sup>38</sup> (E)
- Zamzam** 'Zamzam spring near Mecca, considered holy in Islam.' *Ich schlürf' Wasser vom Zamzam-Brunnen, Du den Fotzenschleim von Gangbang-Nutten*. I slurp water from the springs of Zamzam, you the pussy mucus from gangbanged whores.<sup>39</sup> (R)

This short list of Arabic lexical borrowings found on German rap albums signals the use of several lexical fields. The most important is the religious (R) lexical field with 15/32 lexical items. Terms from every day (E) standard Arabic comprise 9/32 lexical items. Slang expressions (S) are also important with 8/32 items. The total number of

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<sup>28</sup> Massiv, feat. Celo & Abdi, *Intifada Ghettolied* (2013).

<sup>29</sup> Hamad 45, *Mantika* (2014).

<sup>30</sup> Chaker, *Citycode* (2014).

<sup>31</sup> Hamad 45, *Ajnabe* (2014).

<sup>32</sup> Kurdo, *Gauads* (2015).

<sup>33</sup> Celo & Abdi, *Innenstadt Unzensiert* (2011).

<sup>34</sup> Kurdo, *Meine Welt* (2015).

<sup>35</sup> Celo & Abdi, feat. Capo, *Parallelen United Remix 2* (2012).

<sup>36</sup> Haftbefehl, *Ich rolle mit meim Besten* (2014).

<sup>37</sup> Celo, *Para miet Amnezia* (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Proph, *P zum dem Roph* (2015).

<sup>39</sup> Kurdo, *7Halal* (2015).

lexical items in this short glossary is a mere 32 different Arabic words. Such a small corpus is far from representative; nevertheless, based on my study of German rap and as an approximate indicator, the borrowings do roughly reflect the major Arabic lexical fields present in German-language rap lyrics.

### **Discussion on Arabic borrowings in German rap**

This essay briefly introduces the topic of Arabic lexical borrowing as found in German rap lyrics. Arabic speakers and Muslims familiar with the Islamic lexical-semantic field have been settling in Germany in significant numbers since the end of World War II. In 2014 and 2015, Germany absorbed close to one million Arabic speaking and Muslim refugees as a consequence of the massive wars that have engulfed Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya since the interventions and occupations of the United States and other western powers began in 2003. The settlement of Arabic speaking and Muslim refugees in Germany and Europe continues to have profound ripples throughout the region. There are serious tensions in Europe related to the violence those wars have generated globally and inside of Europe. Unfortunately, areas of creative contact between speakers of German and Arabic receive much less attention from the media and yet the language contact that is reflected on rap recordings suggests that a profound type of acculturation and cultural creativity is taking place: rap lyrics represent an intermediate space of linguistic and cultural exchange in Germany's complex multicultural landscape.

Given the major increase in the number of Arabic speaking refugees and immigrants in Germany that began in 2014-2015, it is likely that Arabic influences on urban German vernaculars—and on rap lyrics—will continue and increase in the coming decades. In the lyrics of Arabic speaking or Muslim heritage rappers, the insertion of Arabic lexical items and expressions has been on the rise in German and French rap albums since Al-Qaida's attacks on September 11, 2001, and the ensuing and all-consuming "global war on terror" initiated by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, and ongoing under President Barack Obama. With the rise of Islamist extremist terrorism and the expansion of western military violence in the Middle East, Muslims in Europe are under intense pressure, scrutiny and suspicion.

The arrival of the Arabic lexical field in urban European vernaculars and in the art forms they feed such as hip-hop reflects an assertiveness and defensiveness from members of the Muslim and Arabic-speaking communities. Rap music is rooted in African-American traditions of consciousness-raising and resistance. Therefore the repurposing of rap to respond to concerns and to reflect the culture of Arabic speakers and Muslims reflects a core discursive dimension of hip-hop culture. Arabic word borrowings in German hip-hop reflect the expression of ethnic and cultural identity. The rappers situate

themselves in the “social landscape through the stylistic practice” of word borrowing (Svendson 2015:7).

I use hip-hop as a means of breaking into a representation of the urban German vernaculars. Living outside of Germany, hip-hop music and the Internet provide access to aspects of urban culture and language practices. The extensive corpus of German rap lyrics at **www.genius.com**, in addition to the website’s crowd-sourced annotations that are provided by native speakers of German, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish and other languages, offer unprecedented insights into language contact in urban German varieties. Hip-hop lyrics and such websites represent important mechanisms for the diffusion of lexical borrowings.

The German rap corpus that I examine stretches from 2008-2015. In this period Arabic borrowings have become routine on the albums of Arabic heritage artists. This essay offers a short introduction to Arabic lexical and cultural influences in contemporary German urban culture. There are alarming tensions in Europe between Muslim fundamentalists and extremists, on the one hand, and far left secularists, far right political streams, and Christianists, on the other hand. Stresses are so polarizing that even Muslim and non-Muslim moderates become pitted against one another. In this setting, hip-hop stands out as a popular expressive cultural space where hybrid identities and ethnic differences are embraced and celebrated.<sup>40</sup> Hip-hop represents a successful multicultural, multi-faith, and multi-ethnic cultural movement that illustrates cooperative—rather than conflicting—creative human interaction in contemporary German society. For students of the urban German vernacular and culture, rap stands as an interesting resource.

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<sup>40</sup> Note that there are racists and right wing extremists who rap and release recordings in Germany, but this content tends to be quite rare and unpopular. For more information on Nazi rap in 2015 see: <http://juice.de/rechtsausser-patriotismus-und-deutscher-nazi-rap/>

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