Abstract

In the age of accelerating globalization, hip hop has emerged as one of the most symbolically contested and productive sites for the constitution and interpretation of a supposed ‘global youth culture’. Hip hop culture demonstrates the transnational value of the genre for youth expression as well as its pedagogical value for the state; the German case, in particular, shows how intimately these two purposes may be intertwined. This paper examines hip hop produced by non-ethnic Germans and immigrants in Germany for its expressive qualities, oppositional character, and cooperative role within the cultural policies of the German state. Even as hip hop offers emancipatory possibilities, it simultaneously risks essentializing experiences of alterity, forcing them into narratives built on violence and deprivation. Our textual and discourse analysis of lyrics, interviews, films, music videos, and news media explores the contentious, cooperative, and co-opting relationship between hip hop and the state.