Rap, rights and respect!

A musical anthropology of hip hop, rap music, violence and freedom of expression in primarily Middle Eastern migrant communities in Denmark

In Denmark generalising public narratives of people with migrant background have been increasing during the past few years. These predominantly negative stories stigmatise migrants as ‘strangers’ unwilling to let themselves integrate in the Danish society, sometimes even associating especially Middle Eastern migrants with radical terrorism or Islamic extremism. Such discriminating stories of migrants in general can be understood as an outcome of a Danish nationalist discourse, which at the moment has obtained more political influence than ever.

Based on ethnographic field research among primarily Middle Eastern migrant rappers in Denmark the project addresses, how young migrants use rap music in striking up against this Danish nationalist discourse, demanding rights, respect and recognition in the Danish society. Among other things it discusses, how some migrant rappers re-appropriate the migrant stigma of being perker in mobilising an identity contrasting the national Danish identity.

Working with i.a. Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘unhomeliness’ as well as notions of de- and re-territorialisation and ‘glocalisation’ the project wishes to conceptualise the ongoing processes of identity construction involving participation in the local migrant rap communities. By raising theoretical questions of, how we can understand musical agencies of rap expressing alternative cultural and political identities compared to the common Danish ones, it discusses music as a means in individual and collective identity processes and as an embodying and semantically structuring tool in communicating messages. Moreover it seeks to elucidate whether – and if so how – the stigmatising public narratives of migrants as well as the general association between rap and violence affect the rappers’ opportunities to express themselves freely.