

# ‘Fick Dich Südtirol<sup>1</sup>’

## Dissatisfaction and Dissent in South Tyrolean Rap Music

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### Abstract

This paper aims at showing how German language rap in South Tyrol, a bilingual region in Northern Italy, expresses dissatisfaction and dissent. Since the region seems to be so utterly different from American inner cities, and research on it is practically inexistent, the author, herself a native to the area, wished to examine if and how South Tyrolean rap music expresses social criticism and frustration. In a qualitative sociolinguistic investigation, selected lyrics from one particular rap crew, Homies 4 Life, are interpreted and analyzed against a theoretical background, South Tyrol’s history and bilingual and bicultural reality, focusing on the contents as well as language use. Furthermore, the investigation draws on interviews carried out with several hip-hop artists from the area by the author. The results demonstrate how these artists vocalize social criticism and frustration concerning politics, linguistic and cultural segregation between the language groups as well as racism, in both standard German as well as the local Tyrolean dialect, using humor, vernacular language, offensive language, and dissing and boasting.

*Key words:* appropriations of rap music, bilingualism, (South Tyrolean) dialect, dissatisfaction and dissent in rap music, German language rap, hip-hop, language and identity, language and resistance, rap, rap music, rap and resistance, (linguistic/cultural) segregation, social criticism, sociolinguistics, South Tyrol, vernacular, resistance

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<sup>1</sup> Fuck You, South Tyrol

Rap music developed from party music to a discourse of resistance expressed through taboo topics, social criticism, and the use of a resistance vernacular, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Smitherman 1997). Although the genre in its origin voices issues of the black inner city experience (Rose 1994), it is no longer merely an African American expression (Hüser 2004), but has become the voice of a global youth subculture (Mitchell 2001). Around the globe, artists are re-interpreting rap to their own needs and appropriate it to their local experiences (Benett 2000; Hüser 2004).

Even in South Tyrol, a bilingual region in the Italian Alps, an area far away from the American inner cities, rap is appropriated and re-defined by local artists to express dissent and social criticism. The following pages form a sociolinguistic investigation that draws on interviews with South Tyrolean rappers combined with a qualitative analysis of local German-language rap lyrics to show how social criticism in the form of dissatisfaction and dissent are expressed through rap in this socio-cultural context via topics and language use.

In a first step, the author discusses South Tyrol against its historical and cultural background. After an overview of hip-hop's history and its development in the USA and Europe, a closer look will be taken at the arrival of hip-hop culture in South Tyrol and its development there. In the Methodolgy section, the author explains the approach used for the analysis and interpretation. At the heart of the paper, songs of local rap crew Homies 4 Life are interpreted and qualitatively analyzed in terms of their content and language to determine how these artists use their art form to express frustration and dissent.

## 1 Willkommen in Südtirol – Welcome to South Tyrol

In the very north of Italy, bordering with Austria, one finds the bilingual Italian province of South Tyrol, (*Südtirol* in German, *Alto Adige* in Italian), rural and mostly German-speaking. In this area, the Southern Alps, two cultures, languages, and mentalities collide: the Tyrolese and the Italian, forging a bicultural and bilingual reality. This reality has caused considerable dissatisfaction, resistance and protest amongst both 'South Tyroleans' as well as Italians, and the language communities remain mostly segregated (Bachmann 2015; Marchetti 2014; Pruscha 2016; Wolf 2011). In order to comprehend where these conflicts come from, a brief look at the history proves to be helpful.

In 1919, South Tyrol was annexed to Italy after having been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, turning the German- and Ladin-speaking population into a minority (*Südtiroler Landtag* n.d.). During Fascism, these language communities would encounter hostility and violence. South Tyrol was to become "Italianized", German and Ladin were forbidden in all public spheres of life, people had to change their names to Italian, so Luis became Luigi, place names were Italianized. German was banned from schools and church, traditions were forbidden, and Mussolini urged Southern Italians

to resettle in the region. (Bell 2012; Giuffrida 2015; Marchetti 2012; Zlatevska 2014a, 2014b)

After World War II, linguistic and cultural rights were redeemed in South Tyrol with a Statute of Autonomy regulating that German and Italian be equivalent official languages in all public matters. Today, there are two separate school systems, two news outlets, segregated sports clubs, and many people generally remain within their language communities in most aspects of life (Bell 2012; Marchetti 2012; Zlatevska 2014a, 2014b). And so, the history of South Tyrol is characterized by struggle, violence, and oppression, leaving its mark on the mentality of the people: It all contributed to what one local author described to me as the “longstanding hostility” between the two language groups (Bell 2012).

Many German native speakers have not yet accepted that their region has been part of Italy for decades, they encounter Italians with mistrust. Hence some German voices are calling for independence or a return to Austria, whereas Italians, a minority in the region, often feel at a disadvantage. (Bachmann 2015; Bell 2012; Marchetti 2014; Pruscha 2016; Wolf 2011)

As Brunazzo tells Marchetti (2012): “There’s always been a serious identity issue”. Many South Tyroleans do not feel Italian at all, neither are they actually Austrian nor German, they are South Tyrolean. (Marchetti 2012; Wolf 2011; Zlatevska 2014 a).

This kind of environment and climate provides an interesting forum for studies in sociolinguistics and music:

South Tyrol is a peculiar territory and its history has strengthened this peculiarity: there is a great variety of cultural traditions connected with three different official linguistic groups (German -South Tyrol, Italian, Ladin). Such diversities and divisions are likely to be represented also by local music cultures [...]. (Riccioni 2015, 18)

## 2 How hip-hop came to Europe

With the release of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message” in 1982, the first rap song with a meaningful social message, or conscious rap, was born. In the early 1980s, documentaries were made about this new subculture (*Wild Style*, *Beat Street*), and hip-hop along with its battle culture were exported nationally and almost simultaneously internationally (Chang 2007; George 1998; Rose 1994). Rap would finally become the voice of the black man, describing reality without remorse (Verlan 2003; Chang 2007). When embraced and appropriated by other cultures and languages, this function was transported along with hip-hop, to become the voice of the voiceless, rappers functioning as social critics, chroniclers and observers (Bazin 1995; Chang 2007; Verlan 2003).

Hip-hop arrived in Europe as early as the beginning of the 1980s. The main carriers of this cultural exportation and spread were documentaries (*Wild Style*, *Beat Street*), radio stations, MTV and, in France, performances with Afrika Bambaataa and the Rock Steady Crew (Bazin 1995; Cheeseman 1998; Mitchell 2001; Verlan 2003). In France, Bazin (1995) reports the importance of independent radio stations favoring African American music in contributing to the spread of rap music as early as 1981. The first rap song performed in French supposedly appeared in 1982 (Prévos 1996). Then in 1984, “block parties” in the unused construction space along the subway line in Paris were popular (Bazin 1995; Verlan 2003). The first European hip-hop LP was released in France in 1984 (Verlan 2003). Sydney (as cited in Bazin 1995, 21), a crucial figure in the birth of French hip-hop, reports:

We didn't have landmarks or a basis, what's beautiful about this culture is that it's born from within itself [...] we didn't think about the future, all we knew was there was this new thing, it was like a breeze, it picked you up, sucked you in, and then you were in it. There were no brawls, it all started out from a totally natural and above all positive energy.

The first French rap groups were established around 1987 and 1988 (Bazin 1995). By this time, according to Bazin (1995), no country in Europe was left unaffected by rap. In France, rap was produced in French from the beginning (Bazin 1995; Verlan 2003). Furthermore, Bazin (1995) reports that rap in France would serve as a voice for the youth of the “banlieues” (suburbs) to express their dissatisfaction of being ostracized and excluded from society.

In Germany, hip-hop has always been more influenced by the US due to its linguistic as well as socio-political proximity, and the presence of American GIs in cities. The first hip-hop graffiti appeared around 1979/1980 (Verlan 2003). Unlike in France, the first rap songs in the early 1980s were performed and produced in English and in the 1990s, German rappers started rapping increasingly in German (Verlan 2003). Cheeseman (1998) observes that hip-hop offers the one space where minorities in Germany have successfully achieved integration and access into German culture.

Mitchell (1995) discusses the Italian roots of rap as being the “centri sociali”, the mafia, the “cantautori” (bards) of the 1970s, and the linguistic origins of “signifying” and “verbal duelling” in the carnivalesque tradition. He compares the rural Italian South to the US ghettos in terms of their levels of deprivation, crime and Mafia dominance (Mitchell 2001). In Italy, hip-hop was reportedly born and carried mainly by the *centri sociali* – centres or social spaces leftover from the socialist movement in the 70s, where youth would gather and cultural production took place. Thus, rap was embedded in a socio-political context and productive environment from the beginning. First attempts at rap in Italy were also produced in English, however by the 1990s Europe's rap scenes had begun to establish their own rap identities (Mitchell 1995; 2001; Pacoda 1996; 2000; Scholz 2004).

In Italy, there was a heavy emphasis on regionalism and dialect, where rap makes use of the “substandard” (Scholz 2004, 59). Furthermore, according to Scholz (2004), rap in Italy is mainly produced by young locals, whereas in France and Germany, much of the genre is carried by immigrant youth (Bazin 1995; Verlan 2003). Articles and movie reviews from the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* describing rap and hip-hop as early as 1984 also speak for a certain amount of attention and attraction to the culture (Castaldo 1984, 1985; Storie di Strada 1984)

### 3 Tracing the Roots of rap in South Tyrol

How, when, and where rap and hip-hop arrived in South Tyrol has not been recorded yet. Therefore, the history of other European countries outlined above will serve as a framework and background, set against the information provided by local rappers in personal communications with the author. Thus, due to the absence of journalistic as well as academic writings regarding hip-hop in South Tyrol, these sources provide the basis for an understanding of hip-hop’s arrival in South Tyrol.

After consulting with local artists Boma, 2DPicche and Chackall the Misfit, it appears hip-hop arrived in Bolzano around the early 1980s. Youths were fascinated with this new exotic thing arriving from overseas and began imitating the dance moves and style they saw in videos and movies (Boma 2012; Chackall 2012; Bazin 1995; Verlan 2003). Chackall (2012, personal interview) reports seeing the first graffiti in Bolzano’s Parco Migliore in 1982 and how he would walk through the park, wondering what it was about and where this thing had come from.

All three artists mention that they were amongst the first in their town to listen to rap and eventually participate in hip-hop culture (Boma, Chackall, 2DPicche 2012, personal interviews):

Well, I heard the first rap songs around 1988 on the radio, [...] Run DMC, the Beastie Boys [...] at the same time there were also the movies, the break-dance movies [...] So, it was like a thing amongst the kids of my neighborhood. I’m from Bolzano Sud, and well, we liked it a lot, and so everyone was trying to dance or they just liked this new American thing that was [...] something a bit different. (Boma 2012)

I was born in 1973 [...] I started listening to hip-hop with my class mates, I think I was like 14 [...] I liked it right away. [...] I started breaking first, and I remember going to this contest in Florence, and there I saw all these kids, they looked like the kids I had seen in those movies, I was blown away...the ghetto blasters, the clothes, the way they walked and talked. At the time, I couldn’t even imagine there were any other break dancers around, and then

I got there and I felt like in one of those movies, like being in the middle of New York. (Chackall 2012)

2DPicche was in fact also named one of Bolzano's hip-hop pioneers in local newspapers (Conti, 2015; Ducati, 2012). He remembers: "In Italy, the scene was only beginning to develop, the groups were rapping in English not Italian yet. In Bolzano there was no scene. Me and another guy were the first ones to bring rap to our city." (2DPicche 2012)

All three report that they themselves did not start rapping until the 1990s: "After five or six years of only hearing American rap, I heard the first groups rapping in Italian and I loved it and said 'it's doable'. So, in 1993 I decided to try it myself." (2DPicche 2012); "I started [...] like participating in my first jams in the 90s and back then Public Enemy still had a great impact, right. [...] So, well, I started relatively early." (Chackall 2012); "Around 90-91, I started writing my own songs. Because up until then there were no Italian rap songs and nobody knew how to make them." (Boma 2012)

According to Chackall (a.k.a Lo Sciacallo), a rapper from Bolzano who was one of the first in his city to participate in hip-hop (Eva 2011; personal interview with author 2012), political rap was influential when Italians started producing their own rap music. At the time, in the early 1990s, Public Enemy were popular and hence rappers were following their politically oriented music (2012):

Everyone was writing political stuff. And then there was this argument over well, hip-hop cannot only be political. So, there was this one strand of groups who came from that political background (the Centri Sociali, where it all began in Italy) and then these other groups who were not from the Centri Sociali but went there because it was basically the only place where you could organize stuff. (Chackall 2012)

Boma talks about how the first rap songs in English were, of course, difficult to understand for him, but that it was the sonic force of the music and words that were attractive and that he actually did understand that there was some form of protest in this music:

I understood very little [...] at the time, obviously I was still in elementary or secondary school and we didn't study English [...] there was no internet and there was nothing in English [...] So, it was very difficult and what I actually liked was really the music, and the sonic power of the rhymes of the words of these people and then, of course, there was this thing that also attracted all the whites around the world, this thing which at the time was just really "cool" and awesome from this black world which was so great [...] we did understand that there was some kind of protest but it was more the playful part, or maybe the sneakers and the clothes, all this was really tight so we saw all this, also the dancing, the singing, the djing and it was just all really cool. (Boma 2012)

He then also makes an observation of the impact that this African American music had, that even though he would not understand all the lyrics, at least he would pick up on not only the meaning but also the message and the force of certain words and lines:

You would understand at least the title or the refrain or some word or another. In the beginning though, to me, all of this “slang” that they were using was really obscure. And so, it was very difficult, but you did actually understand quite a lot. For example there was this one song that said, “television is the drug of the nation”. And there you clearly got the message and then you had the first videos and so also the videos would complement the words. (Boma 2012)

Boma explains that keeping it real, the principle of hip-hop, in itself, will automatically lead to artists being different from the norm, going against the stream and creating a counter current (personal interview, 2012). Hence, one could argue that rap music is inherently a protest music, an art form that expresses dissent and dissatisfaction:

That was the way I understood [Keepin’ it real], and also the first hip-hop lyrics came with more pride in them than the ones now, they tried to tell you that in a way. Just like the song that said that the TV was the drug of the nation, well, it was a pretty powerful message, right? And therefore, it tried to encourage you to see things in a more critical way. [At the time] what was on TV was considered to be true, right? But actually, [hip-hop] tried to make you see things in a different light. (Boma 2012)

So, in South Tyrol, early hip-hop heads were attracted to the newness, the differentness of a cultural movement. They also did not fail to understand, despite language barriers, that hip-hop also embodied protest and social criticism.

## 4 Methodology

The current study finds its origins in the author’s own 2013 thesis, *Keepin’ It Real South Tyrolean Style – The African American Vernacular English and the Construction of Rap Identities in South Tyrol* (Stuckey 2013). For this chapter, the field of study was limited to German-language rap of the region for the following reasons:

1. German speakers in Italy are a minority but in their region mostly a majority
2. A recent rise in German dialect rap production in the region was observed
3. The absence of literature and academic work produced about it
4. It is the author’s personal linguistic and cultural background

One prominent contemporary rap group was chosen, Homies 4 Life. The crew has produced songs that demonstrate the expression of dissatisfaction and dissent regarding politics, ideology, racism, and economics, attracting considerable attention in local media (see “Homies 4 Life: Südtirol” 2014; “Homies 4 Life sechster Streich” 2014; Röggl 2015). These songs were interpreted and studied in terms of their socio-critical content and in relation to their expression of dissatisfaction and dissent, specifically examining language use, how the rappers appropriate the genre to their needs, and how dissatisfaction and dissent are expressed through language and content. Moreover, personal interviews conducted with the author were also included in the analysis and discussion.

The theoretical framework for this study is provided by previous studies on language and the expression of dissent, such as theories of African American Vernacular English and resistance, slang and street credibility as well as expressivity (Alim and Smitherman 2012; Bazin 1995; Potter 1995; Smitherman 1997; Cutler 2003; Filmer 2003; Stuckey 2013). Furthermore, these sources also provided a framework for dialect and slang use and the inherent relationship between language and identity. Studies on code-switching as an important marker of identity and how it is used in hip-hop were also useful for the analysis (Alim and Smitherman 2012; Garley 2010; Stuckey 2013). In terms of South Tyrol and its issues of segregation, newspaper articles, blogs, and official sources were compared to the lyrics discussed, as well as personal experiences of the author and the interviewees. Excerpts from interviews as well as German and Italian language sources were translated by the author. For the lyrics, the original German as well as the English translation is provided, again the translation was carried out by the author.

#### **4.1 Introducing the artists and their music: Homies 4 Life**

Homies 4 Life (H4L), rappers MP, Gesta and Destroya, and DJ Dave, a crew from Collalbo, have produced a number of conscious rap songs that are socially critical and express dissent (Elisabeth 2009; H4L 2007, 2011, 2014, 2016; MP 2010; Röggl 2015). One of their first songs to draw attention was “Fick Dich Südtirol” – “Fuck you, South Tyrol” – in 2007. Originally, the group rapped predominantly in Standard German. However, they eventually shifted to rapping in the local vernacular. They have become South Tyrol’s most prominent rappers, using the dialect and rap as a tool to express their views and frustrations towards the society they live in. Prominent themes are racism and segregation between the two language groups in South Tyrol and corrupted politics. They have reached many young people, perhaps even more effectively than local politicians (Elisabeth 2009; “Homies 4 Life: Südtirol” 2014; “Homies 4 Life sechster Streich” 2014; Röggl 2015).

The following analysis will focus on the lyrics of this group in terms of their expression of dissatisfaction and dissent in relation to: racism/segregation, politics/politicians and a general expression of frustration.

## 4.2 The interviews

Interviews were conducted by the author with local artists in 2013, and are analyzed here in terms of viewing the dissatisfaction and dissent expressed in the lyrics. These communications were conducted face-to-face or via Facebook in the native tongue of the artists based on a general set of interview questions. The interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed and translated into English by the author. In Facebook interviews, a set of questions was sent to interviewees who then answered and returned them. A general overview of the interviews can be seen below in Table 1:

| Artist interviewed      | Time/Place                            | Language               | Interview Type     |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Boma                    | June 2012, Bolzano, Base Shop         | Italian                | Personal interview |
| Yo!Zepp                 | June 2012, Innsbruck, Treibhaus       | Tyrolean dialect       | Personal interview |
| Destroya & Gesta of H4L | June 2012, Collalbo, H4L's studio     | South Tyrolean dialect | Personal interview |
| Chackall                | July 2012, Bolzano, Chackall's studio | South Tyrolean dialect | Personal interview |
| Fabio 2DPicche          | August 2012                           | Italian                | Facebook interview |
| MP of H4L               | February 2013                         | South Tyrolean dialect | Facebook interview |

Table 1: Overview of interviews

## 5 Data analysis and discussion

The lyrics were analyzed and categorized by thematic content and focus, resulting in the categories of segregation between language communities, society's mentality and local politics. These are common topics in the songs, commented on by the artists in interviews (Chackall 2012; H4L 2013, "Homies 4 Life: Südtirol" 2014), and, given that rap reflects its current environment and is the voice of the 'streets' (JT the Bigga Figga cited in Alim 2014), one may conclude that these are topics concerning youth in South Tyrol. H4L use humor, vernacular language, offensive language, and the oral practices of rap music, dissing and boasting, in order to express their criticism and resistance. Most of the lyrics are delivered in the relevant local dialect, adding to the effect of resistance as well as the possibility of reaching the target audience and being comprehended by them.

### 5.1 The linguistics of social criticism and dissent

As a resistance culture whose language, imagery and rhetoric are embedded in African American culture, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and its oral traditions (Alim 2004; Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2002; Smitherman 1997), hip-hoppers in the global context will resort to linguistic material able to express dissatisfaction and dissent in their particular environment.

In their work *Articulate While Black* (2012), Alim and Smitherman argue that African Americans in the USA “styleshift”, i.e. speak several varieties of one language and codeswitch between these varieties. Styleshifting means to “move in and out of linguistic styles- between varieties of the same language” as learnt and practiced by many African Americans and bilingual and bicultural Americans. Since “racial divisions” still determine social and friendship groups it is necessary to learn how to communicate in different forms of one and the same language (5).

This interpretation and theory can also be applied to South Tyrolean society. Although here the dividend is not race but culture, language, nationality or ethnicity, the experience is the same: social groups are often determined by language, so there is a segregation between Italian and German. Furthermore, German native speakers in South Tyrol speak a local dialect which will differ from area to area. Additionally, the language of public German discourse, education, politics, and the media is Standard German. Hence, as a South Tyrolean German native speaker one most likely will shift between styles and codes depending on the situation and context.

Now, in South Tyrol, German-language rappers are increasingly deferring to their local dialect rather than Standard German. Similarly, they too can usually speak several varieties of German as well as Italian. The use of a vernacular is the most common way of communicating in day to day conversations. Hence, using the vernacular is a matter of identification and may also emphasize resistance and dissent because it is often considered ‘inferior’ to the standard language. It often evokes images and connotations of the less educated and underprivileged (Alim and Smitherman 2012; Cutler 2003; Filmer 2003; Gooden 2009; Smitherman 1997).

A dialect is basically a slang [...] To me every dialect is essentially a language with a history, with its own roots and its own character. Nonetheless, dialects are often only used in comical or superficial contexts, to make people laugh, and they are always felt to be the language of those who are not as clever. The lower social classes, so to speak. [...] I wanted to show that our dialect has way more to offer than only weird and ambiguous jokes. (Chackall as in Eva 2011)

Dyson emphasizes that unlike popular belief and prejudice, Black speech and language is articulate and that society must understand the racial and cultural practices behind them (Dyson 2012, xiv). Chackall in the quote above is fundamentally arguing in the same manner, emphasizing the value and legitimacy of dialects, the importance of language as

a constituent of identity – especially for minority communities where a vernacular may inherently carry a message of subtle protest against the standard, and perhaps dominant, society.

Using vernacular in rap also enhances hip-hop's subversive and resistance character (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003; Bazin 1995). While in South Tyrol the use of dialect can be seen as identity marker, it can also represent resistance to Standard German as being considered the superior language. Furthermore, offensive language of the local vernacular and AAVE are also used in local rap songs that function as social commentary and diss tracks, further emphasizing resistance while serving as identity markers and genre indexes.

Various scholars have stated that dialects along with informal, colloquial, and offensive language may generate greater expressivity, credibility, and realness (Androutsopoulos and Scholz, 2002; Potter 1995; Scholz 2004). This was also observed in the data of the current study. Two artists, Gesta and Destroya, comment on how people would criticize their socio-critical lyrics of being too harsh and pessimistic, feeling the crew would hate their own land:

Gesta: I mean, if we make a negative song we can't just all of a sudden in the middle of it go and say how good everything is here. A negative song is a negative song.

Destroya: [...] you just want to tell people, look, this is the blatant truth, because if not, then people just go, okay, that's the way it is, but then they forget about it again, right? But if you make a blatantly harsh point once, then maybe people will actually start thinking about it. (personal interview 2012)

Rap music functioning as a tool for resistance and raising awareness wants to be understood by its audience located within the artists' own community (Templeton 2007). A vernacular or dialect is the most natural and authentic language choice for rappers, reflecting their own linguistic identity, assuring comprehension and closer identification with their target audience (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003; Mitchell 1995). Consequently, delivering conscious and political rap is most effective in such a vernacular and credibility is most likely achieved through it (Smitherman 1997; Templeton 2007). In the words of late rapper 2DPicche from Bolzano:

In Italy, when it becomes fundamental to be understood by a certain community and the national language might pose limits, one turns to dialect. The use of dialects reminds very much of the choice of African Americans to rap in their slang rather than English. The motive, of course, remains to make yourself understood as fully as possible by your own community. (personal interview 2012)

Similarly, rappers Gesta and Destroya comment on their own switch from standard German to the use of the local Austrian-German dialect on their album *MundArt*:

It's easier for people [in South Tyrol] to understand us. So, people who normally don't listen to hip-hop I'd say, well, will identify more with MundArt, right? (personal interview 2012)

Yo!Zepp, a rapper from Innsbruck in Tyrol, Austria, says vernacular or dialect to him is the natural choice, Standard German not being his mother tongue and hence always sounding unnatural and “imposed” (personal interview, 2012). In South Tyrol, German native speakers usually speak more dialect than standard language, hence the use of such a vernacular in rap songs seems natural.

The use of the local German vernacular and its various dialects in South Tyrol may be regarded as having the quality of a resistance vernacular. Forbidden and banned during Fascism, it remains the language of daily communication and operations amongst its speakers, however, not in the media and education. Furthermore, the Tyrolean dialect is met with hostility by some Italians. It is harder to understand than Standard German and, being a minority in the region, the use of the dialect establishes a sense of detachment, distinction, and exclusion, perhaps (Marchetti, 2014; Zlatevska 2014a, 2014b; Wolf 2011).

In fact, the local vernacular distinguishes South Tyroleans from Germans, Austrians, and Italians, giving them a sense of identity and solidarity. Language thus becomes an empowering tool of distinction and gains “symbolic power” (Alim and Smitherman 2012,3). In this particular context it is twofold: one is the distinction between German

Alim and Smitherman maintain that language is an essential factor for establishing racial and ethnic identities as well as their cultural comprehension. They speak of “linguaging race” – looking at race through “the lens of language” (2012, 2–4). In the context studied here, this applies of course to ethnicity and culture, “linguaging ethnicity and culture” so to speak. Through the local vernacular, identity is established and culture and issues comprehended.

## 5.2 Adapting Rap to one's environment

As an originally African American phenomenon, rap has been adapted globally into local contexts, producing something “glocal” (Benett 2000; Hüser 2004; Mitchell 2001). This happens via language and style, but also in terms of topics and themes. Rappers engage in telling true stories tied to their local environment. So, to rap about ghettos, AKs, police brutality, and numbing poverty in South Tyrol would breach rap's laws of authenticity. As rapper Chackall puts it:

We have other kinds of problems [...] a high suicide rate [...] the youth, all boozed up, binge-drinking themselves into comas every year, that's tough.

[...] This is sad and these are also themes and topics. (personal interview 2012)

Similarly, 2DPicche said:

Italy and Bolzano fortunately do not approve of it [gangsta rap]. It would be absurd to rap about ghettos, gangs, arms in a city as peaceful as ours [...] Rap is like a newspaper, it has to truthfully tell about what it sees and not invent stories that are highly unlikely. (personal interview 2012)

While a majority of mainstream American hip-hop showcases themes such as money, wealth, and women, the local group studied for this paper relies on the more traditional purposes of rap as a resistance music and as social commentary (Elisabeth 2009; Röggl 2015). H4L have reached many people in South Tyrol, stretching beyond their predominantly teenage and adolescent audiences, also attracting the media. In an article published in the local magazine *FF* after H4L's release of the song "Graue Sonne" ("Grey Sun"), the crew was praised for continuing the kind of American rap before the mainstream era of the 2000s, back when "rap was still considered the 'black man's CNN' and the buzzword 'style' did not automatically evoke images of [fat] watches" (Elisabeth 2009, 54). The author also relates to a blog that pronounced rapper MP of the crew as being *the* political rapper of the region. While the album *Der Rapper* (*The Rapper*), released in 2010, featured songs about issues faced by young people in general, such as school and peer pressure, love and drugs – "Krank" ("Sick") "Kein Bock" ("Can't be fucked"), "Alles Gut" ("It's all good") – about hip hop and rap – "Nicht wie wir" ("Not like us"), "Aus Liebe zu Hip Hop" ("Out of love for hip-hop") – it also carries social criticism, voicing concern, opinion and dissent regarding Neo-Nazis, local politics, racism, and society in general – "Graue Sonne" ("Grey Sun"), "Nicht mit Uns" ("Not on our watch"), "Halts Maul" ("Shut the fuck up") (Elisabeth 2009; MP 2010).

### 5.3 Italian vs. South Tyrolean – Addressing segregation

Südtirol brauch mehr LOVE  
Und viel wianiger HATE  
(Homies 4 Life 2014, "Love/Hate")

South Tyrol needs more love  
and a lot less hate

H4L's song "Love/Hate" broaches South Tyrol's age-old issue concerning the (absent) conviviality of Italians and Tyroleans (cf. Bachmann 2015; Bell 2012; Marchetti 2014; Pruscha 2016; Wolf 2011). Delivered in the local vernacular it sounds more authentic and has great potential of reaching all age groups in the local community. Code-switching and the use of English items "love" and "hate" perhaps also allude to the idea that it is time for a change, time to move towards more openness and progressive thinking, while keeping some traditions and culture alive. English represents internationalism and the

modern, but South Tyrol is still clinging to the age-old segregation of its language communities (see Garley 2010; Pennycook 2007). Hence, language here becomes a symbolic tool. The general juxtaposition of Italian and German dialect elements reflects the linguistic reality and identity of many South Tyroleans of combining two languages in their everyday speech (see Auer 2005; Gumperz 1982).

The group raps about the characteristics of life in South Tyrol, the differences between Italian and German speakers, and how the two cultures collide. They draw on the identity issue people face here, while emphasizing that all inhabitants are the same, the only difference being that they speak different languages. The three rappers express their frustration and criticism of the fact that these two language communities share a common land, live next to each other, and yet meet with so much antagonism (Bell 2012; Marchetti 2014; Pruscha 2016; Wolf 2011).

While the song generally reflects a humorous attitude, in some instances the MCs sound more aggressive and straightforward, alluding to the pretentious nature of local nationalism (using Italian language but calling for a South Tyrol without Italy):

I bin a Südtiroler, onderscht gskog a Pizza mit Knedl  
und i verstea net, wo's Problem isch, i kriags net in  
mein Schädl. Ob iatz *crucchi*<sup>2</sup> oder *Walsche*, *Italiener*  
oder *Deutsche* – Irgendwia sein mir jo olle lei es gleiche  
Mir sein olle *Südtiroler* oder *Altoatesini*,  
Mir sogn *Riff* und sie sogn holt *bambini*,  
Ober wegn a so an Scheiß gea i in niamend af die Eier.  
Mir sein olle Südtiroler, des checken net olle leider.

Also schreib i des für olle do draußen,  
De lei Hoss wölln, ober ihr Forst net dorsaufen.  
In insrer Zukunf solln mor olle leben kennen  
Und es wissen beade Seiten mehr geben kennen.

(Homies 4 Life 2014, “Love/Hate”)

I'm South Tyrolean, in other words, I'm a pizza with  
dumpling.

I don't understand what the problem is, I just can't  
grasp it. No matter if “Crucchi” or “Walsche”, Italians  
or Germans – Somehow we are all the same.

We are all “Südtiroler” or “Altoatesini”,  
We say “Riff”, they say “bambini”,  
what's the big deal? That's nothing to make a fuss about.  
We're all South Tyroleans, but unfortunately not every-  
body gets it!

So I'm writing this for all those out there  
who only want hate, but choke on their “Forst”<sup>3</sup>  
In our future, we should all be able to live,  
And both sides know that both sides could make a greater  
effort.

In this stanza, rapper MP introduces the image of bicultural and bilingual identity of South Tyroleans sharing characteristics of both the Tyrolean as well as the Italian identity (line 1). Being South Tyrolean means combining aspects of both identities. In line one he presents this bicultural identity via the image of two typical foods which have become very representative for both cultures: the Italian pizza and the Tyrolean

<sup>2</sup> Italian words in italics – not all italicized words are Italian.

<sup>3</sup> Locally brewed beer.

dumpling (“Knedl”), claiming that being South Tyrolean means being both of these things combined. And in fact, the region itself reflects the combination of both cultures and ethnicities as seen in the architecture of Bolzano, the various Italian and Tyrolese restaurants, both flags and both languages (Bell 2012; Giuffrida 2015; Marchetti 2014; Zlatevska 2014a, 2014b). He goes on to play with the linguistic characteristics of South Tyrol, Italian and German, reflecting local language use, emphasizing how absurd the situation seems to him (cf. studies on code-switching and identity: Auer 2005; Gumperz 1982). People using different languages to refer to the same things should not be a reason to hate each other (5–6) since everyone shares a South Tyrolean identity, whether of Italian or Tyrolese origin. In lines three and four he pairs Italian insults used to refer to German speakers of the area (“crucchi”) and the German one for Italians (“Walsche”) with neutral references, alluding to the fact that however people refer to each other, they are all the same – they are all South Tyroleans. This also sheds light on the fact that there is hate coming from both sides. In the final lines of this excerpt he claims that both communities need to make a greater effort to make conviviality a reality.

To emphasize the hollowness of this hate between the language communities, MP claims that he can by no means conceive where the problem lies, making it seem preposterous (line 2–3). Using dialect and vernacular becomes an important tool here to add more effect and aggressiveness (“Schädl” is the dialect word for “brain”; however, the word in its German origin refers to the skull, hence the word sounds harsh and is often used to communicate hostility and anger rather than understanding and love).

Finally, he claims this song to be dedicated to all those who demand hate but cannot authentically represent it; that is, he plays with the image of toughness here alluded to through the locally-brewed beer “Forst”. MP seems to be referring to bullies and hooligans who ask for hate but then are unable to manage it, meaning two things: their hate is unfounded and they are too weak. “Forst” as the local beer is generally the only draft beer available in local, especially rural, bars. Hence, this line also alludes to the fact that a lot of the hostility towards Italians is found in the more rural areas and communities.

The song symbolically and representatively uses Italian items in the form of code-switching, a characteristic of the local German dialects (see Auer 2005; Gumperz 1982), to reflect reality, but also to emphasize the bitter irony of this linguistic reality: while the languages mix, the people do not mingle as much as they actually could:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Wia a holber Sotz af deitsch mit zun Schluss an “dio cane”.            | Like a half-German sentence with a “dio cane” at the end                                     |
| Um zu zoagn wer i bin, brauch i sicher koane Fahne,                    | To show who I am, I certainly don’t need a flag  |
| Also scheiß af dein Ausweis und zoag amol in Mensch der du bisch [...] | So, I don’t give a fuck what it says in your ID-card, just show the human being that you are |
| Es geat um mehr als a Sproch, also “chi se ne frega”. [...]            | There is more to it than just a language, so who gives a fuck? [...]                         |
| Und a Fakt isch, um sel zu kennen brauchts a Verstand [...]            | And the reality is, to do that, you need some sense [...]                                    |
| Hermor auf zu streiten und leben besser olle zom,                      | Let’s stop arguing – better we start living together   |
| Weil lei mir mitanond hobm a wunderschians Lond.                       | Because only then do we have a beautiful land.   |
| (Gesta in “Love/Hate”)   |  |

Rapper Gesta emphasizes that it does not matter what one’s ID says, in the end everyone is only one thing – human. Italian IDs are issued in red and in Italian only, while IDs issued in South Tyrol are green and bilingual (Marchetti, 2014). He alludes to the fact that German-speaking South Tyroleans use Italian words, that they code-switch. Often this is done in the form of swear words at the end of a sentence, such as “dio cane” (“God dog”), a strong Italian swear word widely used by German dialect speakers. In fact, it is often said that Italian native speakers themselves actually do not use this as profusely as local German speakers due to its highly offensive content. The phrase “chi se ne frega” is again an often-used Italian colloquial expression, meaning “who gives a shit?” Again, vernacular, informal, and offensive language are used to enhance the feeling of frustration and criticism while also reflecting natural local language use. Simultaneously, these phrases are so common and embedded in local German vernacular, hardly anybody questions their use.

“It’s about more than just language” seems an important statement here. Language is an important identity marker, and in South Tyrol many people experience linguistic discrimination or antagonism. For instance, one may encounter hostility towards the German language from the Italian side, since many believe that technically being in Italy everyone should be required to speak Italian only. Whereas on the other hand, native German speakers may refuse to speak Italian due to deep-seated historical pain and anger (Marchetti 2015; Wolf 2011).

Gesta also mentions that flags are not necessary to establish identity. In South Tyrol, there are two flags that play an important role for identity and national pride as well as for separationist feelings: the Italian Tricolore (green, white, red) and the Tyrolean flag (red and white). Most likely, this is also a reference to the *Südtiroler Schützenbund* – the *Federation of Historic South Tyrolean Riflemen* – a pro-separationist movement, who organize traditional marches in their national dress, carrying flags, and demanding a reunification with the rest of Tyrol (cf. Bell 2012).

Italians and South Tyroleans live apart – they are segregated. They attend different schools, have different clubs, and mostly stay in their communities. Italians feel like a minority, Germans do not feel like Italians. The song demands more love between the communities, proposing that it is time to leave the past behind. But it is the past that explains these feelings of antagonism: the break with Austria-Hungary, the Italianization by Mussolini, the option agreement between Hitler and Mussolini, the freedom fighters of the 1970s (Bell 2012; Bachmann 2015; Giuffrida 2015; Marchetti 2014; Pruscha 2016; Wolf 2011; Zlatevska 2014a, 2014b). Mentalities and feelings may take decades to finally change and convert. And the images the three rappers produce in this song relate exactly to this segregation, racism, and hate. Gesta here tries to send a message of unification. In the last line, he suggests that while the region is indeed a beautiful place, geographically, economically, and culturally (Zlatevska 2014a, 2014b; Giuffrida 2015), it can only be experienced in its true beauty if people stop the hating and begin to unite.

In a video interview with the online news portal *Stol* (“Homies 4 Life: Südtirol” 2014), MP claims the song “describes what we South Tyroleans are actually like, how we feel [...] We live in such a beautiful area with so many different cultures, and we could all live together peacefully if we would all just put some effort into it”. When asked whether the song had already gotten responses from the public, MP reports they had even received emails from people saying that “this is exactly what we have been thinking for a long time” and “finally a song like this has been released, describing how we South Tyroleans [German, Italian, and Ladins] actually live together” (“Homies 4 Life Südtirol” 2014).

Chackall, growing up in Bolzano as a bilingual youth, living on a mostly Italian-speaking street but spending his summers with his grandmother in Haslach, a German speaking part of town, describes how he felt “marginalized”, “excluded” in the Italian, as well as the German-speaking community:

We here always had the German and Italian issue. And I always felt at home in hip-hop, I always identified so much with it, because I always got picked on and beat. On one hand because I could speak Italian well and I hung out with the Italians a lot and so I would get beat by the German speakers, and the same thing with the Italians, who would give me shit because I often ran with the Germans. And so, I kind of made my own little story, and I identified as “marginalized” (personal interview 2012)

#### 5.4 Political dissatisfaction and dissent

H4L’s song “Wählt Mi” (“Vote for me”) is a humorous approach to local government elections. MP sarcastically constructs a political agenda he promises to implement if people vote for him. The song was well received by South Tyrolean people because it voiced the general disinterest and mistrust in politics and politicians. It reflected how absurd some promises made by politicians sound, and alluded to the many political

lies (“Homies 4 Life: Südtirol” 2014; “Homies 4 Life Sechster Streich” 2014; Röggl 2015). Furthermore, it is concerned with the fact that young people in South Tyrol are disillusioned with local politics and election participation is low. MP here takes on the role of a politician, becoming a representative for the youth they can relate to and trust, speaking to them in their language, which is the local dialect. MP uses satire and sarcasm, making promises – unlikely ones such as replacing a mountain road with a giant slide, or cars with skateboards, and more reasonable ones, like beginning to stop blaming others for one’s own problems:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Ausn Flugplotz in Bozen werd a Wosserpark gemocht           | The Bozen Airport will be converted into a water park      |
| Weil nor nimmer lei die Politik eppes davon hot             | o not only politicians can profit from it                  |
| [...] stott in Ausländer die Schuld zu geben kehr i vor dor | [...] instead of blaming the immigrants I’ll start putting |
| Haustir   | our own mess in order                                      |
| [...] Olle Nazis werden ausgewiesen und sel glei            | [...] All the Nazis will be deported, first thing          |
| Weil donn isch Südtirol glei a bissele mehr gschei          | because then South Tyrol will become a bit more intelli-   |
|   | gent   |

(Homies 4 Life 2013, “Wählt Mi”)

MP claims that he will turn the local airport into a water park (line 1). This is a reference only South Tyroleans will understand, as the local airport has been the cause of many political discussions and arguments, dividing the political spectrum and society into a pro-airport faction and those fiercely against it as a public airport (cf. Brûlé 2015). He proposes a solution: remove it and turn it into something ridiculous but fun instead, so not only politicians will profit from it, but everybody. In lines 4–5 he refers to racism and hate against immigrants and foreigners, something common as well, since the region has had a considerable influx of immigrants since the 1990s (cf. Benedikter 2005). MP alludes to a practice in the media and perhaps by certain politicians of scapegoating immigrants for crime and unemployment, a topic familiar to most countries. He would put his own house in order before blaming other people. Finally, all Neo-Nazis shall be deported, which, according to him, would contribute to the region’s intellectual state. H4L seem to speak up against Nazism and racism throughout their musical career (cf. Homies 4 Life 2007, 2014, 2016; MP 2010), also mirrored in the “Love Music Hate Racism” slogan on their website and band merchandise (cf. [www.h4l.it](http://www.h4l.it)).

The chorus incorporates straightforward dissatisfaction and dissent. In line 3, MP explicitly states that the region needs a change or else times will look rather dim. The expression “Sem isch der Ski ou”, literally translating to “then the ski will be broken”, is a local vernacular way of saying that things will collapse, change for the worse. Lines 4–5 reflect the impression that politicians merely lie and make false promises, which basically anyone has the capacity to do, and the region’s politicians are incompetent, the state of politics frustrating:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Wenn es no net wisst wem wähl'n, donn wählt oanfoch<br>mi, yo  | If you don't know whom to vote for, then just vote for<br>me, yo  |
| Wenn mir net epps ändern donn isch bold dor ski ou<br>Lei awia bled reden und versprechen kann i a<br>Weil echte Politik isch in dean Lond schun rar<br>(Homies 4 Life 2013, "Wählt Mi") | If we don't change something, then things will be fucked<br>Bullshitting and making promises- I can do that, too<br>Real politics are rare in this country, now |

### 5.5 Fuck you, South Tyrol

In 2007, H4L performed "Fick Dich Südtirol" ("Fuck you, South Tyrol"), a song that explicitly expresses the rappers' frustration with the society and the land they live in. The title as well as the refrain reveal a strong feeling of anger and dissent:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Das ist unser Land? Man, dann geb ich einen Fick darauf.<br>Fick dich Südtirol- wir schalten deine Lichter aus.<br>Es tut mir leid, doch es tut mir nicht mal leid für dich,<br>weil du für mich nichts, nichts außer Scheiße bist<br>(Homies 4 Life 2007, "Fick Dich Südtirol") | This is our land? Well, then I don't give a fuck about it.<br>Fuck you, South Tyrol – we're shutting down your lights.<br>I'm sorry, but I'm not even sorry for you,<br>because to me you are nothing, nothing more than shit. |
|--|--|

At the time, the crew was still rapping in Standard German. The rappers, 15–16 years old, express frustration and opposition in a youthful and rebellious manner. In this song, H4L express their frustration and views of South Tyrol's society in general, not balking at the use of explicit and offensive language. With the refrain above, it seems they are not only expressing dissent but also a certain degree of despise and even shame to be part of this region. The song opens in the following way:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Willkommen im Land der Faschisten,<br>Nationalsozialisten, korrupten Polizisten, dieses Land ist<br>beschissen.<br>[...] Bullen gehen vor nach rassistischen Methoden.<br>[...] Das ist die Gesellschaft, man ich will da nicht dazuge-<br>hören [...]<br>Auf der Straße bekomm ich nur hasserfüllte Blicke.<br>Ich hasse das Gefühl, unter dem Hass zu ersticken.<br>In Italien sind wir die reichste Region, und dazu<br>sind wir auch noch autonom.<br>Doch manche Leute hier reden von einem Tirol.<br>Ich glaub die haben das Gehirn ihrer Schweine gestohlen.<br>(Homies 4 Life 2007, "Fick Dich Südtirol") | Welcome to the land of fascists,<br>national socialists, corrupt police officers, this land is shit.<br>[...] The cops operate with racist methods.<br>[...] This is society and dude, I don't wanna be part of it<br>[...]<br>On the streets, all I get are looks filled with hate.<br>I hate the feeling of suffocating from the hate.<br>We are the richest province of Italy, and guess what,<br>we are autonomous.<br>But some folks here talk about "one Tyrol".<br>Seems to me that they have stolen the brains of their pigs. |
|---|---|

The song describes an extremely unfriendly land, a region actually wealthy and popular with tourists is described here as “shit”, a land of “Nazis”, “fascists”, and a corrupted police. These denominations have historical as well as contemporary weight. South Tyrol suffered from the rulings and dealings of Hitler and Mussolini, the Italian and the Tyrolean language and culture have collided and fought for space ever since. There are actual groups of Neo-Nazis and, of course, also right-winged radicals on the Italian side, which would be the fascists they are referring to. It can be assumed that also right-wing radical politicians on both sides are included in the reference (lines 1–2). The image of and frustration with corrupt police forces is something common in rap music, of course, especially among younger generations and subcultures. In South Tyrol, this gains an extra layer of meaning as often police are Italian native speakers and function as a symbol of fascist attitudes, refusing to speak German (Marchetti 2012). MP mentions the common practice of racial profiling (line 4). But it is not only the law and government that are targets of his frustration. Society in general has left him disappointed. He describes a society hostile to “otherness”, judgmental, and prejudiced. He does not feel comfortable in nor wants to be associated with it (line 5–6). In lines 7–8, there is an alliteration with the words “hasserfüllt” (hate-filled), “hasse” (I hate) and “Hass” (the hate). MP speaks of hateful looks on the street, and of how he hates the feeling of drowning in this hate, being suffocated by it, an allusion to a general atmosphere of hate amongst society.

In the last part of this excerpt, MP speaks about the wealth and autonomy of South Tyrol. The region is the wealthiest in Italy, enjoys certain freedoms, and is exempt from Italian governmental rule in certain aspects (cf. Bell 2012; Giuffrida 2015; Marchetti 2014). Yet, so many people are unhappy and demand independence from Italy and a reunification with Tyrol (lines 9–11) (cf. Bell 2012, Giuffrida 2015; Wolf 2011). He ridicules this wish for independence (lines 12–13), suggesting that the separatist movements are rather simple-minded farmers. To MP, it seems irrational that so many are unhappy when they are blessed with a better economic and political reality than the rest of Italy (Bell 2012, Giuffrida, 2015; Marchetti 2014; Wolf 2011). Partially, this may be a generational divide, as a South Tyrolean, interviewed by Zlatevska (2014b) states:

We younger people see this linguistic richness as a blessing, as a way to have a mixed group of friends and see things from their perspective. Our grandparents, however, are not as open as us, obviously due to history.  
(Florian)

The “Fuck you” in this song goes to the South Tyrol that refuses to move forward, to compromise, and to welcome change and otherness. It addresses the South Tyrol that is still stuck in the past with its racism, fascism, Nazism, its differences between Italian and Tyrolean, and the age-old identity crisis of the region that is creating a separatist atmosphere and society (Zlatevska 2014; Bell 2012).

## 6 Outro

German language rap in South Tyrol, originally produced in mostly Standard German, now is seeing a strong pull towards the use of the local German dialect and vernacular. One of the most popular and productive crews, H4L, has been releasing many socio-critical songs in a regionally universally understood dialect which has the power to reach a larger audience within the region, ranging from youths to older generations, allowing people to identify and understand, to relate to the contents and views of the rappers.

Results of the research demonstrate how this crew uses rap music as a tool for expressing their views on society and politics, to voice frustration, criticism and resistance, in a socio-economic context that is comparably wealthy and politically privileged compared to the rest of Italy. Their dissatisfaction and dissent is generated largely by the region's age-old segregation and hate between the language communities, racism and prejudice, the corruption, hypocrisy, and ineffectiveness of politics.

Using the local dialect along with informal, colloquial, and offensive language generates greater expressivity, credibility, and authenticity as well as enhances hip-hop's subversive resistance character. A song featuring some explicit contents, strong language, or metaphors is more likely to successfully reach and touch its audience. The artists cited and studied in this work make use of their own language material, and continue rap's seemingly forgotten purpose of voicing concerns, delivering reports of reality, saying what nobody else wants or dares to say, disturbing the peace. Finally, when rappers in South Tyrol choose to use their dialect, they are adhering to rap's principle of using the "realist" language, the language of the people, the language that distinguishes, that solidifies the "in-group", the language that will disturb the peace, since official issues in South Tyrol, after all, are treated in the Standard language. The fact that hip-hop is being embraced, practiced, and heard in a region so far away and distant from an inner-city context, it almost seems like a fairy tale land, speaks volumes for the expressive power of this culture.

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