

Improvising Kanak Sprak: Feridun Zaimoğlu's Freestyle Forms and the Politics of Belonging

Jonas Teupert
The University of Melbourne

Public discourse often excludes the erroneous speech of migratory subjects, thus foreclosing social and political rapprochement. This paper argues that the position outside of pregiven, linguistic norms provides migratory speech with an improvisatory quality that can serve as a catalyst for community formation. Simulating freestyle forms in writing, Feridun Zaimoğlu's Kanak Sprak seeks to find a new language for the critique of xenophobia and to establish belonging based on precarious conditions. In a close reading of Fikret's monologue "Pity is that true vitamin," I show how improvisation disrupts established discourses and transforms the meaning of conventional hate speech tropes to forge transethnic alliances. The paper then turns to the subsequent volume Koppstoff and problematizes the commodification of Kanak speech in neoliberal pop culture. Çağıl's monologue "If you're smart, you take our side" hints at a different understanding of improvisation that reframes the relation between mainstream society and its others. Drawing on critical improvisation studies, the paper contributes to the understanding of linguistic interventions into social orders that determine who can say what, in which speech form, and according to which norms of belonging.

Jonas Teupert teaches German literature, culture, and language at The University of Melbourne. He received a PhD in German Studies with a designated emphasis in Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley in 2021. Afterwards, he was an Assistant Professor at the National Taiwan University for two years. His research addresses questions of displacement in literary form, bringing nineteenth-century German authors into constellation with migratory writing in a digital age. His publications include articles on refugee representations in literature (Senthuran Varatharajah) and film (Fatih Akin) as well as a book chapter on Heinrich von Kleist's fables.

Deviant uses of language have long held an emancipatory promise.¹ In the age of Donald Trump, improper language however enacts an obedience to neoliberal power, as Yuliya Komska, Michelle Moyd, and David Gramling suggest (1-22). Ignoring the rules of grammar and decorum, such speech is violent, patriarchal, and utterly irrational. As Trumpian rhetoric claims to express an 'authentic' voice

of the people, it frequently attacks migratory subjects whose linguistic otherness challenges the monolingualism of the nation. Ironically, the improvised use of hate speech, a mainstay of Trump's presidency, has often been associated with migratory forms of speaking such as freestyle rap. In the German context, Feridun Zaimoğlu's fictionalized documentation of an abrasive language practice called Kanak speech,² evoked political and scholarly controversies that reverberate until today. How can we distinguish improvised Kanak speech and its employment of hate speech from Trump's rambling tirades?³ And how can we conceptualize improvisation within the heated debates about migration and belonging? In a close reading of *Kanak Sprak* (1995), I argue that freestyle improvisation can serve as a catalyst to transform preexisting discourses and imagine a more compassionate community. I then turn to the subsequent volume *Koppstoff* (1998), which captures voices of the female-identifying Kanaks, to problematize the cooption of deviant languages by neoliberal subcultures. *Koppstoff* sheds critical light on the commodification of Kanak speech and raises questions about who can say what, in which speech form, and according to which norms of belonging.

***Kanak Sprak* and Freestyle Improvisation**

Zaimoğlu introduces *Kanak Sprak* as a quasi-ethnographic documentation of the jargon spoken by the children of the Turkish immigrants who sought work in Germany in the 60s.⁴ Neither having strong ties to Turkey nor being able to fully arrive in Germany, this generation experienced racial, religious, and linguistic othering, consequently finding itself at the margins of society. At the time of its publication, Tom Cheesman points out, the text came as a provocation to political agendas of integration ("Talking 'Kanak'"): *Kanak Sprak* accentuates the refusal to assimilate both through an often-offensive rhetoric and the transgression of what linguistic authorities deem adequate. Published in 1995, Zaimoğlu's collection responded to the racist riots of Rostock-Lichtenhagen where right-wing extremists attacked an asylum shelter with petrol bombs. Many speakers represented in the volume thus speak with rage against the Alman, a construct of the white German whose narrow-mindedness they disparage. In this context, scholars have closely

analyzed Zaimoğlu's citational use of hate speech, often referencing Judith Butler's influential work on the subject (Steiner, Kroesen 113-78, Stehle 132-33). While Guido Schenkel discerns an inversion of hate speech that is nevertheless "an attack in its own right, namely on those to blame for the speaker's marginalization" (33), Claudia Breger argues that *Kanak Sprak* critiques rather than reenacts such speech. Shifting the focus of these debates, I suggest that the monologues draw on preexisting hate speech merely as a starting point for improvisation, which has the force to effectively transcend this incendiary discourse. In the improvisatory unfolding, the monologues shift from defamation toward imagining a community beyond static oppositions.

The subtitle of Zaimoğlu's collection *Discordant Notes from the Social Margins* [*Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*] marks an intricate link between social orders and forms of articulation. It insinuates that the speech of abject groups appears to the political mainstream as mere noise and that improper speech reinforces marginalization. Nevertheless, Zaimoğlu's introduction to the volume honors the performative quality of Kanak speech and turns its position outside the norm into an imaginative potential: "The force of the Kanak's speech manifests itself in a pressed, short-winded, and hybrid stutter without pause for breath, with arbitrary pauses and improvised turns of phrase."⁵ In the stylized transcriptions that follow the introduction, Zaimoğlu combines a long-winding syntax with continuous lower-case spelling to rearticulate the Kanaks' digressive freestyle improvisations. According to musicologist Ellie M. Hisama, the term *freestyle* initially referred to written texts that were without any specific topic and free of style. Later, the meaning shifted to spoken rap improvisation, which is the common usage today. Far from being unstructured, these improvisations build on a shared vocabulary and create their own form of coherence. In this sense, Zaimoğlu's writing provides a "coherent verbal image,"⁶ fixating freestyle improvisation in an aesthetic form that bears the trace of its procedural character.

Scholars have emphasized *Kanak Sprak's* intricate connection to rap music, highlighting the shared vocabulary, the speakers' associations with African American culture, as well as their ties to the rap milieu and the social conditions of

what they call ghetto life (Loentz, Yildiz, Stehle 20-64, Fachinger 98-111, Partridge 45-46). Yet the formal resemblance between the monologues and freestyle improvisation – an integral part of rap music – has not yet become the subject of close literary analysis. Expanding on previous scholarship, this paper explores the volume’s written simulation of freestyle improvisation, which allows me to bring together two main strands of Zaimoğlu studies. One body of scholarship addresses Zaimoğlu’s performative construction of hybrid identities (Günter, Minnaard 143-178, Hestermann, Kroessen 113-78, Mani 118-145) while another treats the aspect of community formation especially in the follow-up volume *Koppstoff* (Weber, Dickinson/Ellis/Layne). Engaging both issues, improvisation is a performative practice that constitutes a social bond between the improvisers, or between improviser and audience, as its success depends on closely listening and responding to one another (Bertram). In its spontaneity, improvisation furthermore recombines preexisting material to bring about something new, mirroring the performative construction of individual or collective identities.

Performativity provides improvisation with a decidedly political character. Especially in the African American context, scholars have considered improvisation a form of resistance against state power as well as a bond between the oppressed (Moten). The speakers in *Kanak Sprak* are highly aware of this tradition and establish their own speech in relation to it. Zaimoğlu attributes one monologue to the rapper M. Ali Aksoy, who was a member of the translingual German rap group Da Crime Posse, and who collaborated on a radio performance of *Kanak Sprak*. While we do not know whether Aksoy in fact provided the basis for the monologue, the attribution explicitly acknowledges the part which a larger rap community played in the creation of the book. Furthermore, Aksoy’s monologue mentions the influential US rapper Chuck D of the group Public Enemy and pays tribute to their unique sound. Public Enemy is known for their noisy aesthetics which emerged in improvised recording sessions (Scobie). Aksoy describes the sonic experience of listening to them as “riot and city hustle, to roaring sound and urban bellow and jarring notes,”⁷ which resonates with *Kanak Sprak*’s emphasis on “Mißtöne.” Noise is a key element of the politics of

improvisation as it breaks with the discursive norms of what constitutes an acceptable utterance. Against this backdrop, I argue that Zaimoğlu's freestyle forms both interrupt and reconstitute the social order from a position outside the norm.

To understand the transformative quality of noise, my close reading draws on Daniel Martin Feige's theory of "retroactive temporality." According to Feige, improvisation starts out with a contingent beginning and follows an "autopoietic, self-generating logic" (Feige 193) that creates its own criteria of coherence. Building on a Hegelian concept of history, Feige describes improvisation as an event that cannot be integrated by a preexisting order. The event causes an interruption and "inscribes itself into that order so every former event in a series of former events is retrospectively redetermined" (197). Improvisation constantly produces new framings based on which the previous material takes on a different meaning. Due to this retroactive temporality, improvisation can provide significance to discordant noise when embedding it in a context of its own creation. In my textual analysis of *Kanak Sprak*, I will show how the speaker lacks an overarching plan and relates each move to what came before. In this way, the speaker retroactively includes the noise that seemingly disrupted discourse into an ever-emerging order. Drawing on this notion, my approach illuminates an interdependency between the order of speaking and the social order in which it is embedded.

It bears mentioning that Zaimoğlu's rewriting of the monologues, supposedly based on tape recordings of their spontaneous enactment, elides crucial features of freestyle improvisation. The moment of uncertainty in which the performer addresses an audience with open-ended lines gets replaced by the deferred reception of a written text which circulates in the reified book form. Commenting on Zaimoğlu's editorial intervention, David Gramling even claims that the project "insists on an apophatic aesthetics, of rendering the absent, hypotextual heteroglossia of Kanak speech comprehensible by *translating* it into a (somewhat impolite) German 'polite fiction'" (68). While I agree that Kanak speech as a constantly shifting language practice remains essentially absent from the text, I

claim that *Kanak Sprak* nevertheless retains – or skillfully refabricates – traces of improvised speech acts. While we do not have immediate access to the heterogeneous voices conveyed in *Kanak Sprak*, the book hints at a speech ensemble that transcends Zaimoğlu’s exclusive authorship of the text. The textual traces of spoken improvisation include the pervasive address to the second person singular, which implores the reader to respond to the ethical demands of the Kanaks. Most importantly – and this will be part of my larger argument – the monologues capture the movement of improvisation on a formal level, that is through the syntagmatic unfolding of ideas. Retracing this quality in the text requires a close reading of a complete monologue, which is why I have to limit my analysis to one exemplary case, Fikret’s monologue “pity is that true vitamin” [Erbarmen is’s wahre Vitamin]. I will show how Fikret sets out with seemingly dissonant tropes of eating and excreting and how the improvisatory recombination of these imageries unfolds a critique of xenophobia and the reluctance to show compassion for a foreign Other.

Reconstituting Community: “pity is that true vitamin”

Fikret, a 25-year-old unemployed man, begins his improvised speech with a contingent opening that cannot be understood on its own terms. His dissonant images, at times jarring to a German audience, breaks with established ways of speaking and disrupts communication by offending the addressee. Yet later, the monologue retroactively transforms the meaning of this opening and envisions a community based on compassion. Starting out in *medias res*, Fikret evokes a difference that only in hindsight can be understood as the difference between the engagement with, and the exclusion of, the Other:

such a delicate difference really has to click in your understanding no matter what, and there’s no understanding when you stand at the window and rattle at the drapes, and you see the man and all sorta creatures doing their thing, and you pull yourself away, cuz you have given in to such clever disdain, and like theorizing in your own private corner, with your dick all up on it.⁸

The domestic scene of standing at the window evokes the notion of being at home. Yet the long-winding sentence erodes that image and equates it with seclusion. Those who withdraw into privacy to observe others from a distance are deemed unable to understand the hard facts of life; “the nature of that fact is, that it’s tough.”⁹ Subsequently, Fikret gives the advice to toughen up, calling this a truth “that’s cobbled together from a few ideas of life.”¹⁰ The ideas of life provide practical maxims which relate to specific occasions and lack a systematic frame. The patchwork of ideas thus figures an improvisatory approach to life which Fikret posits against “theory shit.” Fikret draws the first important distinction as he assumes that theory prevents people from moving forward in an active manner, “where you’re so at ease in the wrong belief and so stubborn biting on fundamentally foreign nutrients, that you don’t even get around to head out in any direction.”¹¹ The metaphor of the foreign nutrients retroactively gives meaning to the expression “theory shit,” as Fikret claims that theory is indigestible. Eating comes to denote processes of incorporation, an imagery which prevails throughout the monologue, and which later takes on the social meaning of assimilation.

Taking a step back, Fikret calls his first stream of words a “prefacing,” which is necessary for the audience to “keep up with what I so recite of truth, which simply came to me.”¹² Fikret does not present his individual opinion but collective truths from the streets, a repertoire of verbal tropes for which he is not accountable, “lest this sets a trap for myself.”¹³ Notwithstanding, the following tirades against Germans count amongst *Kanak Sprak*’s most disturbing passages as they seemingly render political rapprochement impossible. Creating distance to his speaker position, Fikret assumes that his words will not convey any news to the German population, i.e. that his improvised speech merely picks up preexisting material: “I can make a full-blown speech here from the pulpit against the natives, but it won’t be news to them either, if I inform the alman that [...] what his lids close over is no eye, but a capsule full of illusions.”¹⁴ Stuck in their illusions of a homogeneous society, the “natives” supposedly do not see what Fikret calls the facts. As a consequence of this misrecognition, “the teutonic face like the ol’ bismarck statue in the park is consumed by dull copper rust. I call it the desolate

countenance of people who find themselves in a totally foreign scene directed by strangers, which bugs them for life.”¹⁵ As Fikret reverses the roles of so-called natives and immigrants, the Germans appear in a setting that is utterly foreign to them and where they are decidedly not at home. Furthermore, the rusty Bismarck statue evokes a nationalist German past, obsolete like those who reject the pluri-ethnic present. These people “would love to yammer something different,”¹⁶ but they repeat old scripts rather than improvising something new.

Reframing his previous remarks, Fikret inverts the psychoanalytic gaze usually directed at migrant subjects. He introduces a German superego in the shape of a mother: “such a super-mommy squats in his psyche and changes his shit-filled diapers three times a day.”¹⁷ According to Fikret, the German psyche is held together by a “coercive will, and they line up neatly in a power structure [...], so that they grind their ol’ teeth like a slumbering ruminant.”¹⁸ The monologue abstracts from the German individual to focus on an overarching power structure that could be identified with the state. This structure forces the individual to rehash xenophobic sentiments, a process which Fikret calls rumination: Germany regurgitates what it cannot digest, refusing to incorporate alterity. The resulting deformation of the German psyche manifests itself as a lack of pity: “where pity won’t show and where there’s no time for healing the invalid with a bowl of hot soup, there a demon reigns with a mean grin on its face.”¹⁹ The figure of the invalid triangulates the relation between Fikret and the Germans while also redefining altogether who belongs on which side. Undermining any clear-cut distinction, Fikret’s differentiation between us and them is not ethnically motivated but draws on a practical dimension of helping the other in need.

Fikret’s sense of belonging builds on neighborliness rather than identity. He elaborates on his thought: “if my ol’ neighbor hungers, I wanna nurture him at his doorstep.”²⁰ The image of the door evokes a threshold which separates those living in adjacency while also opening a space where they can encounter each other. In this liminal space, Fikret bases community on the need of the Other, towards whom he claims to move unconditionally. This movement transgresses boundaries between different ethnicities: “if I see that an afrika brother feels distress, where

that's caused by white-ass jerks, I right away change the color of my skin and become his champion."²¹ Skin color appears to be a flexible construct, depending on affinities and shared battles rather than descent. Even when they extend to other continents, these affinities create a sense of belonging in the here and now, open to Others who might yet arrive.

While Fikret condemns white people for causing distress to ethnic Others, he does not imply that all Germans are of such a kind. In retrospect, his use of the term "Alman" refers not to Germans in their entirety but to those who do not follow the imperative "that you for once have to get from the pitiful to pity."²² In this instance, we can observe an improvisatory transformation of meaning as Fikret's speech moves by way of phonetic association: The pitiful ("erbärmlich") living conditions of some people call upon the population to show pity ("erbarmen") while refusing to help would be disgraceful ("erbärmlich"). At the same time, Fikret does not simply ask the Germans for pity but imagines a transethnic community which leaves room for anyone who associates with those in need.²³ The following proclamation, "pity is that true vitamin, which you better produce on-site in the body,"²⁴ implies that the social body depends on a compassionate practice. Fikret derives this fact from the conditions of life: "this I call first fact of a dog's life."²⁵ Because life is precarious, especially in the case of a dog's life, it needs to be safeguarded. Yet not everyone understands this. Considering the population in quantitative terms, the Alman refuses to ingest the ethnic Other: "the alman thinks, he has too much of something, but he has too little of something, and that's a reason he won't wanna ingest."²⁶ According to Fikret, the Alman would rather regurgitate what he cannot fully assimilate "than grasp pity for once."²⁷ Unconditional compassion would transcend the quantitative approach of too much/too little as it opens toward an uncountable multitude. The Alman, however, fears a loss of clear boundaries that inevitably challenges every monadic conception of home.²⁸

None of the monologue's individual images, which are mostly conventional tropes, would have the power to shape Fikret's vision. Only in the improvisatory unfolding of these tropes, they retroactively assume more profound meaning.

Expanding on each image through the following one “to paint it vivid in a neat form,”²⁹ Fikret secures the intelligibility of his improvisation while displaying a reflexivity that goes beyond formless association. In fact, the images complement each other and draw a complex picture of xenophobia as a contagious practice that ties the individual to the social body. Fikret moves from image to image, each adding a new layer of meaning to the previous one: Xenophobia is a contagion, “a pestilent streak that reigns in all bodies,”³⁰ or a form of governance “as though he [the king of cads] were really blue-blooded and could reign over a subordinated body.”³¹ The images shift from individual bodies that spread xenophobia to a form of power that seeks to maintain the ethnic homogeneity of the social body. Fikret then links this xenophobia to a psychological wound for which he later finds the metaphor of a gaping hole.

The shared precarity of life retroactively grounds the demand for pity as a force that reconstitutes community. Returning to the images of rust and decay, Fikret addresses his audience: “such an idea of life seriously has to get under your ol’ skin, so that age and decay won’t come as a nasty surprise.”³² Concerning everyone, the idea of finitude has the force to undo social hierarchies “and tips over an established order.”³³ The Alman, however, represses this knowledge:

the archeologist with a pickax reason, he wants to patch together the utter horrors that jump out there to a neat matter and hurl it back into the gorge, or the alman gets grumpy and sees something oozing out, that smells of jew and bolshevik, and that is a league too foreign for his paunch brains, so he just buries the misery.³⁴

Combining imageries of psychoanalysis and archeology—the gorge connotes both the unconscious and the sedimented past—Fikret provides a historical explanation for the Alman’s disposition. Germany’s dark Nazi past perseveres in the contemporary hatred of foreigners because the Alman is unable to confront the repressed, “so he just buries the misery.” According to Leslie Adelson, Zaimoğlu’s “touching” tales, in which the figures of the Turk and the Jew approximate without standing in for each other, are “riddled with the affect of taboo, even unthinkable without it” (102). I would add that Fikret’s monologue employs the taboo in two

different ways: It first supplies preexisting discursive material which creates a shocking and disruptive effect. Secondly, this disruption propels the improviser in his attempt to find new forms of relation.

The culmination of the monologue links with the beginning, which can now be understood in retrospect. “the alman, brother, munches crisis, shits crisis, and infects you with a brooding microbe, so there’s crisis in you and a clanging until judgement day.”³⁵ Reluctant to incorporate what appears foreign, the Alman cannot reconcile with the Other and a crisis of consciousness unfolds, on which he or she must chew. Consequently, the Alman ponders too much and produces “theory shit,” as Fikret calls it, rather than actively changing the precarious living conditions of the Kanaks. We can now see that the person behind the window portrayed in the beginning – and addressed by Fikret as “you” – is neither clearly Kanak nor Alman but anyone who remains in the enclosure of a home without opening it up to others. As previously mentioned, Fikret directs his demand to act with compassion at an addressee, who might be the interlocutor Feridun Zaimoğlu but who, by way of *Kanak Sprak*’s circulation, also includes a larger readership that pays attention to Fikret’s claims. What Fikret initially means by “delicate difference” is exactly the distinction between those who respond to him through action and those who dismiss his speech as mere noise.

We have now seen how seemingly discordant articulations, which make *Kanak Sprak* a notoriously jarring reading experience, unfold an improvisatory movement that retroactively creates new meanings. As Zaimoğlu’s Kanaks seek to insert their noise into public discourse, dissonance is not resolved but becomes the very condition for their extemporaneous speech. Fikret’s abrasive language first disrupts community as several offenses against the Alman seem to broaden the gap between us and them. Yet the monologue reconstitutes a community which is based on compassion rather than assimilation. Hence, Fikret’s speech has a collective dimension that connects it to the other monologues in the volume. As improvisation constitutes a “common language practice” (Feige 193), these other monologues draw on similar tropes as Fikret such as the deformation of the psyche or the creatureliness of a dog’s life. The speakers take these images into

different directions, with the rapper Abdurrahman denouncing “brain lazy dog’s life”³⁶ to critique conformist pop culture. The speakers draw on a shared terminology, yet improvisation breaks away from the preconceived notions behind these terms and creates individual forms of expression. Zaimoğlu situates his textual assemblage *Kanak Sprak* in the midst of this collective practice, drawing authority from the multitude he claims to represent, and mediating what he calls a form of extra-parliamentary opposition. As mentioned above, however, we must be careful not to confuse his literary reworkings with the spontaneous products of improvisation. The media difference between extemporaneous performance and commodified book has considerable implications for our readings of *Kanak Sprak*.

Critiquing Neoliberal Appropriations: “If you’re smart, you take our side”

Three years after the publication of *Kanak Sprak*, Zaimoğlu delivered the subsequent volume *Koppstoff*, a collection of female voices from the Kanak community. In the preface, Zaimoğlu remarks that a persistent presence of the extreme right continues to overshadow the lives of the Kanaks in Germany. Notwithstanding, *Koppstoff* shows less aggression and more stylistic variation than the previous volume, as Kristin Dickinson, Robin Ellis, and Pricilla Layne point out. The more considerate tone of the monologues can be attributed to a growing awareness of representation and its political, aesthetic, and imaginary dimensions.³⁷ The law student Hatice, for example, approaches Zaimoğlu after a reading and criticizes the language of *Kanak Sprak* and the misrepresentation of Muslims. In her monologue, she speaks with moderation and presents Islam as a tolerant and emancipatory religion (*Ko* 67-71). As her speech employs short and argumentative sentences, it appears less improvisatory and more structured than Fikret’s. The student Çağıl takes control over the documentation even further as she supposedly provides Zaimoğlu with her own protocol of the conversation, a claim which could be part of the author’s staging of authenticity. Like Hatice, Çağıl structures her text around a clear outline and mostly does away with the simulation of extemporaneous speech. In this sense, her monologue “If you’re smart, you take

our side” reads like a meta-commentary on, rather than a continuation of, *Kanak Sprak*.

Like many of her peers, Çağıl criticizes processes of cultural assimilation. As a child she aspired to become German by mastering the language and imitating the customs of mainstream society (Ko 56-7). Later, she came to resent so-called “Assimilfatmas” who “dedicated themselves to negating their being.”³⁸ For this self-negating form of assimilation, Çağıl finds the image of moving in with the Germans. Living together supposedly requires the Kanaks to ingest German excrements, which reverses the trope previously employed by Fikret. While Fikret suggests that the Germans refuse to ingest the ethnic Other, Çağıl claims that the “Assimilfatmas” seek to incorporate Germaneness in their attempt to integrate themselves. Yet the Kanaks cannot fully succeed in the process and “their stomach will rebel one day.”³⁹ Çağıl deems complete assimilation impossible, rather choosing a temporary way of life symbolized by a tent, which can be disassembled and relocated with ease, allowing her to escape, “when the old house of Germany collapses.”⁴⁰ For Çağıl, the static conception of Germany as a home for a homogeneous population will break down eventually, making room for a more diverse society to emerge among the rubble.

While she has come to acknowledge her own difference, Çağıl knows about the mechanisms that put the Kanaks into their place. “This is how things are sorted, and the pieces that are too small, too big or too colorful get separated out.”⁴¹ Marginalization, however, takes a surprising turn, which inverts the relation between margin and center: “the rejects slowly form a mosaic against which the grey [...] pieces are fading big time.”⁴² Mosaics, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles” and are composed of “the distinct and the disparate” (28) rather than integrating their parts in a totality. Çağıl’s social mosaic gathers discarded forms of difference, which in their caprice, come to outshine the norm. Through this aesthetic judgement, Çağıl posits disparity against assimilation and a radically diverse society against a homogeneous one.

The success of *Kanak Sprak* and its entry into German pop culture seem to corroborate Çağıl's account.⁴³ More precisely, the mainstream has gradually absorbed the difference of the Kanaks and their speech because, in Çağıl's words, "the philistine squareness has now come to an end and suffices no longer on the CV."⁴⁴ Ironically, the cultural inclusion of the Kanaks commodifies their otherness. Under the neoliberal "creativity dispositif," to use a term coined by Andreas Reckwitz, cultural difference becomes a new form of capital and ethnic minorities are seen as an aesthetic surplus to the creative city. In its commodified form, Çağıl's colorful mosaic gives way to prepackaged forms of otherness. This process of normalization also affects Kanak speech and its improvisatory quality. Earlier, I defined improvisation by its position outside a given norm, which lays the ground for fabricating something unpremeditated. Yet as popular culture incorporates Kanak speech, the language becomes formulaic, exemplified by the spread of dictionaries that offer one-to-one translations between German and Kanak speech. As I consider the latter a spontaneous practice rather than a static set of words, dictionaries cannot account for the improvisatory process in which expressions take on new meanings.

Even freestyle rap is not immune to neoliberal appropriations, giving up its position outside the norm from which it drew its resistant potential. Commenting on the commodification of improvisation, the dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster contends that the standardization of improvisation for the sake of generating a marketable outcome does away with its spontaneity. By polishing the improvisations for a larger audience, Zaimoğlu unwittingly neutralized their force, thus failing to engender *Kanak Sprak's* radical project of transcending the norm. The consequences can be observed in the commodified afterlife of *Kanak Sprak* on postmigrant theater stages (Steward). In some commercial productions, however, Foster sees a self-reflexive quality as well as "strategies designed to unravel that which is already commodified" (122). Along these lines, Çağıl's monologue offers meta-reflections on the book publication of *Kanak Sprak* as well as strategies to overcome its commodification. Her intervention asks us to question

the book's authenticity, as the 'authentic' has been coopted by neoliberalism, and to search for new forms of improvisation.

As social orders are shifting, alternative models of resistant speech might arise that draw new lines of demarcation. Çağıl projects: "Now, the true Others are coming. And they are not like that as a hobby or out of coolness, but because they cannot be any other way."⁴⁵ At first glance, the statement seems to essentialize difference for the sake of establishing authenticity. Yet Çağıl's subsequent rant undermines the neoliberal notion of the authentic and provides a more complex vision of otherness. Picking up speed, she directs her aggravated run-on sentences against stereotypical forms of representations: "Yes, the mongrels are coming, but not with kebab, export store kitsch, multicultural clattering of a tearful literature 'from abroad,' and bad rap, draped with gold in sultan chic and babbling Anatolian songs, how the German would like it."⁴⁶ Çağıl deconstructs the exotic image of the Turk consisting solely of elements that can be marketed as ethnic. From so-called migrant literature and rap music to supposedly authentic food, she dismantles a form of Turkish-German culture that merely exists for German consumption.⁴⁷ By contrast, Çağıl announces that the Turks are arriving not from outside but from inside Germany as they have lived there for decades. In this sense, arrival does not refer to a spatial movement but to a temporal process of coming into one's own.

Against the image of the ethnic Turk, Çağıl's posits the mongrel, who embodies "Prussian discipline" and an "acquired resilience."⁴⁸ Rather than implying that assimilation is a condition for belonging, this reference to Prussia retroactively appropriates the nation's past. The mongrel transforms the tropes of the nation from a position of otherness and engenders surprising new forms of belonging. These are not based on identity but on the improvisatory negotiation of what it means to be at home in Germany. Being neither a part of mainstream society nor an absolute Other, the mongrel evades the neoliberal imaginary and the commodification of ethnic and linguistic differences. He or she picks up Prussian discipline, retroactively provides it with new meaning, and forges it into a tool of resistance, constituting improvisation as a practice of daily life. As such,

improvisation is ever-changing and cannot be represented in Zaimoğlu's book without losing its dynamic force. All that Çağıl can envision for the Turkish-German community within the boundaries of the printed text is the constant working-through of self-negation, commodification, and exoticization. In this process, the boundaries of community may open up again for transethnic alliances as Çağıl invites the readership: "If you're smart, you take our side."

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to return to my opening question of how we can distinguish migratory forms of improvisation from Trump's xenophobic tirades. In my close reading, I sought to show how freestyle improvisation departs from preestablished meanings to arrive at something unpremeditated. By contrast, Trump's non-conformity to established standards of public speech did not break with preconceived conceptions but rather confirmed common beliefs that had already been circulating among his supporters. Gabriele Dietze for example suggests that Trump's misogynist exclamations have to be understood against the backdrop of patriarchal structures that persevere in society. What seemed to be off-the-cuff remarks in fact reproduced existing political notions.⁴⁹ Zaimoğlu, by contrast, evokes speakers whose marginalized position propels them to take the risk of improvising without a prewritten script. *Kanak Sprak* struggles with the paradox that editing improvisation for a larger audience—or even just recording it—does away with its resistant nature and turns it into a commodity. I sought to show that the book nevertheless retains traces of ephemeral performances, which can help us understand freestyle improvisation as an integral part of migratory aesthetics. *Kanak Sprak's* freestyle forms turn marginality into their driving force, attempting to interrupt xenophobia and reconstitute a transethnic community. Freestyle breaks with linguistic norms to find a new language for this community, which traverses the precarious passage of improvisation in search for belonging and a more inclusive future society.

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¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari coined the term “minor literature” for a deterritorialized writing that intensifies language and opposes monolithic forms of power. According to Tom Cheesman, Feridun Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak Sprak* complicates this notion as it asserts the settlement of Turkish German culture on German soil (*Novels of Turkish German Settlement*, 100).

² “Kanake,” a German term of Polynesian origin, constitutes powerful hate speech directed at the non-white population. Public figures such as Zaimoğlu have resignified the term, which nowadays functions as a proud self-designation. In this paper, I will use the term Kanak speech to refer to a collective language practice in distinction from *Kanak Sprak*, the book published by Zaimoğlu. When using the term Kanak, I refer to the group identity imagined by the book.

³ Gary Schmidt for example critiques the “recuperation of misogynist and homophobic masculinities” (196) by Zaimoğlu’s first-person narrators, a dimension with an uncanny likeness to Trumpism.

⁴ While Zaimoğlu outlines a quasi-ethnographic procedure of recoding original voices in Kiel’s so-called Kanak-milieu, his book contains an artificial composition of various languages and codes (Yildiz, Loentz).

⁵ All English translation by myself. *Kanak Sprak* hereafter cited as *KS*. *Koppstoff* cited as *Ko*. German original quotes in footnotes. “Die Wortgewalt des Kanaken drückt sich aus in einem herausgepreßten, kurzatmigen und hybriden Gestammel ohne Punkt und Komma, mit willkürlich gesetzten Pausen und improvisierten Wendungen” (*KS* 13).

⁶ “in sich geschlossenes [...] Sprachbild” (*KS* 18).

⁷ “krawall und city-hektik, zu tosendem klang und stadtgebrüll und gellendem mißlaut” (*KS* 28).

⁸ “So’n heikler unterschied muß echt schon aufs biegen und brechen ins verständnis rasten, und’s verstehen gibt’s nicht, wo du man am fenster stehst und anner gardine rüttelst, und du siehst denn mensch und allerlei geschöpfarten ihren tagtäglichen weg zeichnen, und ziehst dich zurück, weil du dich so nem piffigen ekel ergeben, und groß gefallen gefunden hast, inner privatbarackigen bleibe theorie zu machen mit’m oberewigen schwanz dran” (*KS* 78).

⁹ “dem fakt seine natur is, daß er stramm beschaffen is” (*ibid.*).

¹⁰ “die da man aus ‘n paar lebensideen zusammengeflickt ist” (*KS* 79).

¹¹ “wo du, gelassen im falschen glauben und verbissen anner grundfremden nahrung, gar nicht dazu kommst irgendne direktion einzuschlagen” (*ibid.*).

¹² “kommst du man auch mit bei dem, was ich so an wahrheit wiedergebe, die schlicht auf mich zugekommen” (*ibid.*).

¹³ “auf daß sich mir draus nicht’n galgenstrick drehen läßt” (*ibid.*).

- ¹⁴ "Ich kann hier voll von der Kanzel wider die Landeskinder Rede halten, doch neu wird's denen auch man nicht sein, wenn ich dem Alemannen attestier, daß [...] das, was ihm die Lider so umfangen, kein Aug ist, aber ne Illusionskapsel" (ibid.).
- ¹⁵ "daß's teutsche Gesicht wie die Olle Bismarckstatue im Park befallen is von sonem ungeistigen Grünspan. Ich nenn das verlassene Farbe von Leuten, die man sich in ner Wildfremden Szene wiederfinden, und'n Leben lang wurmt sie die Fremde Regie" (ibid.).
- ¹⁶ "würden gern 'n andern Text quatschen" (ibid.).
- ¹⁷ "so ne Obermutter [hockt] ihm inner Psyche, und [wechselt] ihm dreimal am Tag die vollgeschissenen Windeln" (KS 80).
- ¹⁸ "Zwingewille, und die Stehn innem Machtgefüge in Reih und Glied [...], so daß sie im Schlummer mit'n Ollen Zähnen mahlen wie'n Wiederkäuer" (ibid.).
- ¹⁹ "wo sich Erbarmen nicht zeigt und den Versehrten mit'm Teller warme Suppe heilen nicht drin ist, da herrscht 'n Dämon mit'm Fiesen Grinsen inner Visage" (ibid.).
- ²⁰ "Wenn mir der Olle Nachbar hungert, will ich ihm Ernährer sein an ihm seiner Haustür" (ibid.).
- ²¹ "wenn ich seh, daß'n Afrikabruder Drangsal spürt, wo die man von Weißarschmotzern gezeugt, Wechsel ich mir auf der Stelle die Farbe von der Pelle und bin ihm sein Streiter" (ibid.).
- ²² "daß du man vom Erbärmlichen zum Erbarmen kommen sollst" (KS 81).
- ²³ As Fatima El-Tayeb shows in *European Others*, activist groups such as *Kanak Attack*, with which Zaimoğlu was associated, counteract racial essentialism, and establish transethnic forms of community (144-161).
- ²⁴ "erbarmen is's wahre Vitamin, daß du man schön vonnem Körper hauseigen produzieren mußst" (KS 81).
- ²⁵ "das nenn ich ersten Fakt vonnem Hundeleben" (ibid.).
- ²⁶ "Der Alemanne denkt, er hat zu viel von was, aber der hat zu wenig von was, und das is 'n Grund, wo der man das nicht fressen will" (ibid.).
- ²⁷ "als daß er man Erbarmen begreifen täte" (ibid.).
- ²⁸ Jacques Derrida points out the complications of an unconditional hospitality that undoes the very home into which it invites uncountable others (*Of Hospitality*).
- ²⁹ "da's auch anschaulich wird inner prima form" (KS 82).
- ³⁰ "ne pestige Seuche, die in allen Körpern regiert" (KS 81).
- ³¹ "als wäre der [Flegelkönig] wirklich 'n Blaublut und könnte über'n anbefohlenen Leib herrschen" (ibid.).
- ³² "so ne Lebensidee muß du man orntlich unter deine Olle Schwarte ziehn lassen, damit's Altern und Siechen nicht ne böse Überraschung wird" (KS 82).
- ³³ "und kippt ne verfügte Ordnung" (KS 83).
- ³⁴ "Der Archäologe mit ner Spitzhackenrason, der will man amtlich 's kalte Grausen, was da Raushüpft, wieder zu ner schicken Materie zusammenpappen und wieder in'n Schlund ballern, sonst wird der Alemanne ja unwirsch und sieht was rausquellen, das nach Jude und Bolschewik riecht, und das ist für ihm sein Wansthirn ne Nummer zu Fremd, also schüttet er man die Misere zu" (ibid.).
- ³⁵ "Der Alemanne, Bruder, frißt Krise, scheidt Krise, und steckt dich mit ner Grübelmikrobe an, daß es auch in dir man kriselt und scheppert bis zum jüngsten Tag" (ibid.).
- ³⁶ "hirnfaules Hundeleben" (KS 20).
- ³⁷ On the three dimensions of representation, see Terkessidis.

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- ³⁸ “sich dem Verneinen ihres Wesens widmeten” (Ko 59).
- ³⁹ “ihr Magen wird eines Tages rebellieren” (Ko 60).
- ⁴⁰ “wenn das alte Haus Deutschland zusammenbricht” (ibid.).
- ⁴¹ “So wird hier ein- und aussortiert, und die Stücke, die zu klein, zu groß oder zu bunt sind, kommen an die Seite” (Ko 58).
- ⁴² “Der Ausschuß formt sich aber langsam zu einem Mosaik zusammen, das die grauen [...] Stücke daneben ganz schön verblassen läßt” (ibid.).
- ⁴³ On the pop-cultural commodification of Kanak speech, see Cheesman “Talking ‘Kanak,’” 98f.
- ⁴⁴ “die Spießmeierei hat jetzt ein Ende und reicht nicht mehr als Lebenslauf” (Ko 58).
- ⁴⁵ “Jetzt kommen nämlich die wirklich Andersartigen. Und sie sind es nicht aus Hobby oder aus Coolheit, sondern weil sie gar nicht anders sein können” (ibid.).
- ⁴⁶ “Ja, die Bastarde kommen, aber nicht mit Döner, Exportladenkitsch, Multikultigetrampel tränenreicher “In der Fremde”-Literatur und schlechtem Rap, goldbehangen im Sultanschick und anatolische Lieder lallend, wie’s der Deutsche gern hätte” (Ko 61).
- ⁴⁷ In fact, the Döner kebab in a sandwich, as it is offered in Germany, consists in a hybrid product that sought to make the dish more palatable to a German clientele (Çağlar).
- ⁴⁸ “preußische[] Disziplin” and “erworbene Widerstandsfähigkeit” (Ko 62).
- ⁴⁹ For a critique of Trump’s language, see Marlan.

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