Holland's hip hop hitting the books: the state and status of Dutch hip hop studies

Roest, F.A. de

AAFJE DE ROEST
Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society

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ABSTRACT

With peak numbers on Spotify and doing well on the charts, Dutch rap/hip hop music has captured the attention of Dutch audiences in recent years. Its current commercial success and immense popularity have sparked academic interest, resulting in studies that analyse Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music in the local context of the Netherlands – paying attention to its specific political and cultural characteristics. In this review article, the author outlines the current state of Dutch hip hop studies, identifying its prominent research themes. By uniting the research field on paper, the author aims to permanently put it on the map and encourage further hip hop research in the Dutch context in the future.

KEYWORDS

Dutch hip hop studies
the Netherlands
local hip hop
   communities
cultural identity
representing
realness
Nederlandse hiphop

'We didn't go to school, but we will be in the books', Dutch rapper Frenna raps in his 2016 track 'Wasteman'. His bars are not far from the truth: in recent years, Dutch rap/hip hop music has broken one streaming record after another. Both US-American and Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music have been popular for years, but starting in 2013 and continuing until today, the latter began reaching peak numbers in the Dutch charts (Duijsings and Van Niekerk 2018; cf. NOS 2018). In 2018, for example, eight out of ten music streams in the Netherlands were Dutch hip hop. In 2019, Frenna's music was streamed over a billion times, and in 2020 and 2021, Spotify's top lists were filled with

1. Resembling (and also differing from) the translation of the colonial past in French or British hip hop (Huq 2006: 14) and of the representation of the past of labour migration in German hip hop music (Bennett [1999] 2011: 78).

Dutch hip hop artists. Today, Dutch rap/hip hop music and other elements of hip hop culture, such as dance and street art, are omnipresent in contemporary youth culture in the Netherlands. Hip hop plays a significant part in the lives of Dutch youth from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and inevitably becomes part of their cultural identity constructs.

Hip hop, a 'glocal' culture (Forman and Neal 2011: 157), is characterized by constant exchange between the global and the local. Although strongly influenced by the US-American tradition, contemporary Dutch hip hop has both local and national aspects: through the prominent use of the Dutch language and incorporation of specific cultural and political input. Through its overt focus on 'the local' and sociocultural issues related to spatial awareness and identity, it is able to integrate itself into unique local dynamics and dimensions (Forman 2002: 3). Dutch youth create, re-create, interpret and reinterpret hip hop, tailoring the music genre and its accompanying youth culture to local needs and priorities in the Netherlands.

As Dutch hip hop strongly mirrors the US-American tradition, insights from the academic field on US-American hip hop can often be fruitfully applied to Dutch case studies. However, while the genre's identification as an originally US-American product plays a central role in Dutch hip hop culture, these hip hop practices are also appropriated and altered in the local, regional and national (and thus social, cultural and economic) contexts of the Netherlands, acquiring new meanings (cf. Kuppens 2008: 42). Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music is, among other things, strongly influenced by the specific Dutch history of colonization and migration (Krims 2000: 157).[1] To adequately analyse rap/hip hop's role in Dutch society, attention must be paid to its historical, political and sociocultural specificity (Whiteley et al. 2004: 3; Krims 2000: 10; Gazzah 2008: 32).

Both musicologist Adam Krims and anthropologist Miriam Gazzah, pioneers in Dutch rap/hip hop music research, did just this in their respective works: *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Krims 2000) and *Rhythms and Rhymes of Life* (Gazzah 2008). However, while their research indicated promising research possibilities for the future and underscored the societal and academic relevance of the subject in the Netherlands, scepticism towards the analysis of popular music discouraged further research in subsequent years. Krims and Gazzah's calls to action faded, and Dutch academia has remained silent on the topic since 2008.

With the current increase in the popularity of Dutch hip hop, the field of 'Dutch hip hop studies' has been reinvigorated. Scholars are beginning to respond to Krims's and Gazzah's earlier calls for more research into Dutch rap/hip hop music, supported by updated and strengthened academic arguments concerning the academic and societal relevance of the study of hip hop and increased interest from societal stakeholders such as journalists, teachers, politicians, policymakers and members of the hip hop scene. However, since there is no clear overview of the existing works and what they have yielded in relation to each other, individual scholars often feel required to 'reinvent the wheel', making it difficult to build a research tradition.

In this article, my goal is to change this by mapping out the current state of academic research on Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music, laying a foundation for future research. After a brief introduction to the Dutch rap/hip hop music scene from the 1990s to the present, I guide the reader through the existing studies that focus on production and reception. This work can be organized by a thematic focus on (1) local and national hip hop identities from

a global perspective; (2) (re)definitions of representing and realness; (3) hip hop language; (4) hip hop's 'rebellious' character; and (5) hip hop's legitimation. I will review the studies in this thematic order, analyse trends and central concerns in the existing work and discuss the studies' methodologies. I will conclude with future research possibilities for the study of Dutch hip hop. By uniting the field of 'Dutch hip hop studies' on paper, I aim to put it on the map permanently, encouraging further hip hop research in the Dutch context.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO DUTCH HIP HOP

In the late 1980s, the Netherlands had an active hip hop scene, representing all four hip hop elements: rapping, Djing, graffiti writing and break dancing (cf. Rabaka 2013: 7). Since the music genre played the most significant role in the culture's success in the Netherlands, my focus for this article will be on rap/hip hop music. After Danny Boy's 'Repper de Klep' (1980), MC Miker G's and DJ Sven's hit 'Holiday Rap' (1986) and Extince's release of his English-spoken track 'Rap around the Clock', Dutch-language rap/hip hop music started to gain ground in the Netherlands. The 1989 track 'Moordenaar'[2] by the Amsterdam hip hop collective Osdorp Posse is often considered the first official hip hop song to be released in Dutch, marking the beginning of the Dutch hip hop tradition (Krims 2000: 165). The Posse's members motivated others to rap in Dutch, such as the Eindhoven rapper Extince. In 1995, radio DJ and music journalist Kees de Koning founded the hip hop label Top Notch to release Extince's record 'Spraakwater'.[3] Today, Top Notch is the leading Dutch hip hop label, with a near-monopoly position on the Dutch music market. The Osdorp Posse and Extince became highly influential in Dutch hip hop in the 1990s and beyond, as did rappers Brainpower, Def Rhymz, Raymzter and Spookrijders. Into the 2000s, more local hip hop formations followed, often with spatial references in their titles, such as De Amersfoortse Coöperatie,[4] Den Haag Connection[5] and Opgezwolle.[6] In addition, artists such as Fresku, Hef, Kempi, Lange Frans and Baas B, and The Opposites became popular among Dutch youth. An essential factor in their popularization was the online hip hop platform 101Barz on YouTube, founded by presenter and rapper Rotjoch (Angelo Diop) as part of Dutch broadcaster BNN. Since its launch in 2006, the platform's rap sessions, featuring both emerging and established artists, have been viewed thousands of times.

The internet continued to play a considerable role in the growth of the Dutch hip hop music scene. While traditional media channels such as the radio mostly ignored the genre, denying it a platform,[7] social media enabled rappers to grab the mic and claim a self-created stage online. Social media platforms helped Dutch hip hop artists to make their music easily accessible and shareable (cf. Sigler and Balaji 2013: 349). The Rotterdam hip hop collective Broederliefde, for example, built an extensive, loyal fan base through the Dutch social media platform Hyves. Dutch rappers started getting hits on Spotify and YouTube. In 2013, the Dutch trade association of the entertainment industry (NVPI) decided to include online streams and views in the music charts, which brought to light the enormous *online* popularity of Dutch rap/hip hop music on the traditional level of hit charts. From then on, it dominated the online spheres of youth culture and the official domain of the charts.

In 2015, a new generation of Dutch hip hop artists, including Broederliefde, Ronnie Flex, Frenna, Jonna Fraser, Lil' Kleine, Bokoesam, Idaly, Lijpe, SFB and Ares (almost all signed to Top Notch at the time), joined forces on their

2. 'Murderer'. Unless otherwise indicated, all Dutch translations to English are my own.

3. 'Talking Juice'.

4. 'The Amersfoort Cooperation'.

5. 'The Hague Connection'.

6. 'Swollen-up', a wordplay on the name of the Dutch city Zwolle.

7. Much to the dissatisfaction of prominent figures in the scene, such as rapper Fresku, label boss Kees de Koning and journalist Rotjoch, who have explained the exclusion of hip hop on the radio (as part of Black culture) as a symptom of discrimination and racism in the Netherlands. For a creative example of this critique, see Fresku's 2015 track 'Zo Doe Je Dat' ('This Is How You Do It') in which the rapper paints himself white to be eligible to be played on Dutch radio.

8. 'Drinks & Drugs'.

9. 'The street speaks'.

10. 'Fuck the power'.

collaborative album *New Wave*. Strategically responding to the new rules for streaming in the Netherlands, *New Wave* was released exclusively online. The album, with its main hit 'Drank & Drugs'[8] by Ronnie Flex and Lil' Kleine, went platinum and sold over 50,000 copies. The tracks were played over 70 million times in 2016 and went platinum fifteen times and gold six times. In 2016, the album won the most prominent national music award: the Buma Culture Pop Award. The jury called it a 'historical project' in the Dutch music scene because of how the artists had shifted attention to the online domain and its (relatively) new distribution possibilities (3voor12 2016). These events meant the establishment of the 'internet generation', with the aforementioned rappers as its prominent members, including female rappers such as I am Aisha, Latifah, Lauwtje and S10, and more would follow. Hip hop's visible success motivated upcoming artists to claim their places, resulting in a large, active group of contemporary Dutch hip hop artists.

Dutch rap/hip hop music's historical development has coincided with the evolution of hip hop scholarship. Earlier works by Krims (2000), Wermuth (2002), Gazzah (2008) and Kooijman (2008) primarily focus on the group of performers from the 2000s to 2008. Recent works by Roks (2013), Goverts and Roks (2020), Dynarowicz (2018) and myself (2021) predominantly concentrate on the internet generation from 2010 until today.

(G)LOCAL (HIP HOP) IDENTITIES

This section offers an overview of Dutch rap/hip hop music studies centred on local and national identities that take shape in their constant exchange with a global context. Researchers from various disciplines (musicology, criminology, cultural anthropology, and media and communication studies) are interested in questions concerning hip hop's role in processes of identity formation. Before I dive into the main themes in their research, let me briefly introduce these authors and their studies. In his internationally acclaimed study, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000), the aforementioned musicologist Adam Krims provides a social and musicological analysis of rap/hip hop music in new places where it has settled, such as the Netherlands. Through a combined analysis of international case studies (including the Dutch hip hop group Spookrijders) and interviews with fans and music artists (producers, rappers), he constructs an audience-based idea of hip hop poetics to see how rap musically shapes the identity processes of both artists and audiences. In *No Sell Out* (2002), communication scholar Mir Wermuth examines the popularization of hip hop culture in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands with a production- and reception-oriented approach, paying attention to the street identities formed in Dutch hip hop. Such local identities are also central to criminologist Robby Roks's article 'De straat praat'[9] (2013), which focuses on the complex interactions between rap music, street culture and crime. In his article 'Fok de macht'[10] (2008), media scholar Jaap Kooijman investigates how pop and politics intertwine in four Dutch commercial rap tracks by Ali B, Lange Frans & Baas B, Raymzter and Salah Edin. They speak out about Dutch society after 9/11 and the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh. This political climate also forms the background of cultural anthropologist Miriam Gazzah's dissertation *Rhythms and Rhymes of Life* (2008), which studies the identity formation processes of Dutch-Moroccan youth through music, focusing on Dutch rap music with Moroccan (or broader: Maghreb) elements in one chapter. Years later, literary and Dutch studies scholar Ewa Dynarowicz

presents an imagological study of 'Polishness' in the hip hop oeuvre of the Polish-Dutch rapper Mr Polska in her article 'Stereotypes as the source of cultural capital' (2018).

All these scholars unanimously identify the cultural and commercial dominance of the United States in the development of Dutch rap/hip hop music (and thus in the cultural and Dutch national identities it presents). Their studies illustrate how Dutch hip hop artists draw heavily on images, styles and reality representations from the globalized US-American tradition, translating them into local and national situations in the Netherlands. Kooijman (2008) interprets the tracks by Ali B, Lange Frans & Baas B, Raymzter and Salah Edin as examples of Americanization and active cultural appropriation. Although the Netherlands differs from the United States in socio-economic terms (e.g. there are disadvantaged neighbourhoods, but not in the sense that they can be called 'ghettos'), Dutch artists present street identities inspired by US-American hip hop (Wermuth 2002). Some Dutch rappers, for example, deliberately exaggerate the 'ghetto' character of their neighbourhood (Krims 2000; Wermuth 2002). The audience is willing to go along with their representations (even when it is clear that they do not correspond one to one with Dutch reality) since the US-American hip hop rhetoric of the ghetto and the 'hood, when translated and adapted, allows the rappers to address structural problems in Dutch society such as discrimination, racism or socio-economic disadvantage. Other rappers acknowledge the state of their Dutch geographical setting as less grim (by, e.g., changing their street-style behaviour from 'drug dealing' into 'pizza delivery') (Kooijman 2008: 201), with a 'truthfulness' that provides them, again, with the credibility to address Dutch deprivation issues legitimately.

Thus, while cultural sociologist Rian Koreman (whose article 'Legitimating local music' [2014] will be discussed in a later section) claims that the main forces behind the seemingly sudden rise of Dutch rap/hip hop culture are commercial rather than originating 'in societal discontent' (2014: 511), research by Kooijman (2008), Krims (2000), Gazzah (2008), Roks (2013) and myself proves otherwise. Emancipatory interests play an equally important part in this success since Dutch youth see hip hop as a vehicle for addressing social and political issues (which corresponds with earlier insights on the international hip hop tradition by Ogbar [2007, 175], Osumare [2001: 173], Rabaka [2013]). Krims (2000), Wermuth (2002), Gazzah (2008), Kooijman (2008) and Roks (2013) bring forth rich illustrations of how active appropriations of US-American hip hop practices by Dutch artists and their audiences serve as an interpretive framework for understanding their own lives in a Dutch context. The new wave of academic literature on Dutch rap/hip hop music takes into account the unique socio-economic, historical, cultural, geographical and political factors at play in the Netherlands – such as the smaller geographic area, the smaller target market for cultural-historical particularities – and how Dutch rappers negotiate their identity constructs in relation to these factors.

Gazzah's research (2008) reveals another central focus point in studying local and national hip hop identities in Dutch rap/hip hop: the role of cultural stereotypes in artists' self-presentation (Kooijman 2008; Gazzah 2008; Dynarowicz 2018) – specifically for artists from multiethnic backgrounds. Using an ethnographic, lyrics-centred and experience-centred approach (rather than, as she calls it herself, a strictly 'musical' approach), Gazzah (2008) argues how Dutch-Moroccan rap/hip hop artists rebel against such stereotypes in rap/hip hop music. Her insights into the self-presentations of Dutch-Moroccan youth

are of specific societal and academic importance because many right-wing political parties were emerging in the Netherlands at the time of her research (the early 2000s), and Dutch-Moroccan youth were often portrayed negatively in Dutch political debate. Gazzah illustrates how hip hop music offers them a platform to flip the script on negative stereotypes and express their frustrations with the political discussion of integration and (inter)national political events and developments.

A similar play with cultural stereotypes is analysed by Dynarowicz (2018). Using a rap music–oriented approach (textual and visual self-presentation in music videos, social media and websites), her research delineates how the Polish-Dutch rapper Mr Polska relies heavily on essentialized and exoticized stereotypes about Poland and the Polish in his artist profiling. Dynarowicz argues that negative stereotypes used in a multicultural environment acquire a new, positive meaning in the artist's image. She claims that, unlike other rappers such as the ones discussed in Kooijman's (2008) and Gazzah's (2008) research, Mr Polska's goal does not appear to be social or political engagement. Instead, he makes a conscious use of cultural elements that evoke associations with (Polish) 'otherness', authenticating and legitimizing him in a context of marketability. Dynarowicz shows the cultural and social motivation of the artist in his self-presentation while at the same time being alert to Mr Polska's commercial objectives. By drawing attention to the fact that stereotypes can be commodified in a multicultural environment to build a distinctive profile to sell oneself as an artist, her study illustrates the value of combining a culturally oriented research perspective with a keen awareness of financial interests.

CONSTRUCTING HIP HOP REAL: (RE)DEFINITIONS OF REPRESENTING AND HIP HOP AUTHENTICITY

Central to studies on hip hop identities are questions on the definitions and value of the hip hop practices of representing, keeping it real and street credibility in a Dutch context. In their constructions of street-credible local hip hop representations, Dutch rappers try to *keep it real*, as Gazzah et al. (2008) and I show in a diachronic perspective (from 2000 to the present). In my article 'What has less street credibility than representation?' (2021a), I build on my master's research (2017) on local representations of the Dutch cities of Rotterdam and Eindhoven in the contemporary oeuvres of four Dutch hip hop artists: Ares, Broederliefde, Hef and Killer Kamal. Using the literary poetics of the Dutch poet and critic Jeroen Mettes on the potential of art for social criticism, I redefine the notional value of street credibility, realness and representing. These concepts have a built-in awareness that, although they represent society, they can still stretch its ideological boundaries.

Roks (2013) also considers local representations and the idea of street credibility, using a combination of fieldwork, interviews, informal conversations and online and offline observations. His study exemplifies how hip hop youth perform street identities in both domains and fruitfully illustrates how the layered constructions of hip hop realness and representing therein (with high levels of performativity that make it difficult to decide where the music begins, the street ends and vice versa) can be deconstructed with insights from performativity theory and the field of theatre studies. One pitfall of this research is that it persists hip hop's emphasis on masculinity, relying on a test group consisting of 40 men aged 16–45. Since the research concerns men's

perception of hip hop and street culture, gender becomes a factor in the study despite never being explicitly indicated. At the same time, Roks's study does explore rich source material on highly relevant casuistry, from both a societal and an academic perspective, especially since some violent incidents in the Netherlands have been tenuously linked to hip hop culture. His research also highlights the intense intertwinement of offline and online hip hop expressions. This is particularly interesting and necessary because, although most contemporary Dutch hip hop culture takes place online, its digital aspects had not yet been researched in a Dutch context.

Dutch hip hop artists create identity constructions and hip hop authenticities that are as 'credible' as possible. But what elements define hip hop authenticity in a Dutch context? In their article 'Keepin' it real: Linguistic models of authenticity judgments for artificially generated rap lyrics' (2019), computational scholars Folgert Karsdorp, Enrique Manjacavas and Mike Kestemont offer a critical rethinking of the notion of authenticity in rap/hip hop music. The authors presented the visitors of a large, mainstream contemporary music festival in the Netherlands with both computer-generated flows (created by Deepflow [n.d.], an 'artificial intelligence hip hop generator trained with thousands of lyrics from both Dutch and English raps') and existing flows, letting the audience decide on the authenticity of these sounds. The results show that participants find it hard to distinguish between authentic and generated material. Linguistic properties such as 'syntactic complexity', 'lexical diversity' and 'rhyme density' add to the user's perception of authentic texts. However, this study also shows that participants gradually learn to correct their initial biases, indicating complex learning effects. The study, which questions whether computers can rap, contributes to improving the quality and credibility of generated text, but it also enhances our understanding of 'objective' versus 'perceived' authenticity, according to the authors. It would have been fruitful, though, to have taken Roks's and my own argument that there *is* no such thing as 'objective authenticity' – all forms of authenticity are constructed – into greater consideration. However, this small critical note does not take away from the powerful impetus this excellent research provides for further computational research into rap lyrics and more linguistic analysis into (hip hop) authenticity.

Conceptions of authenticity need to be sharpened in some of the other works mentioned above, such as Krims (2000) and Wermuth (2002). Krims, for example, follows his interviewees from the Dutch hip hop scene in their claim that Dutch hip hop authenticity is founded primarily on geographic location, topics and language use; colour plays less of a role. At the time of Krims's research, overall, Dutch-language rappers were white (such as the members of the Osdorp Posse). Their music mainly appealed to white Dutch fans (Krims 2000: 165). However, Neerlandophone rap was considered a form of cultural appropriation by Dutch fans of colour (something Krims only hints at), not only because of its language but primarily because of the position of its new performers. The latter would have been said to have claimed unearned access to hip hop culture. Ethnic-racial dimensions define (and have always defined) organizational principles in Dutch society (Wekker 2016: 23) and, thereby, as I claim, in local and national Dutch hip hop identities. Ethnic-racial aspects play a significant role in hip hop's cultural authenticity, too – something Krims does not sufficiently address. His study continues the colour-blind view of his participants (Bonilla-Silva 2003), which implies a denial of the role that skin colour plays in 'the differences in opportunities of different ethnic-racial

11. Terkourafi edited *The Languages of Global Hip Hop* (2010), a book about global hip hop languages and their local variations in the light of top-down corporatization and bottom-up globalization.

12. Gilbers recently received his doctorate on regional language variations in Tupac's oeuvre (2021) at the University of Groningen.

13. In an article for *Parallax* (2022), I analyse how the hip hop collective uses this variety to flip the script on stigmatizing representations of their neighbourhood that have been prevalent in Dutch mainstream media, reclaiming place and space through their local youth language. I illustrate how placing this resistance vernacular in the dictionary makes their representations available to a broader audience.

14. 'Troublemakers'.

groups in Dutch society' (Schaap and Berkers 2019: 124). Koreman (2014, to be discussed in depth later) presents a similar perspective on Dutch hip hop authenticity: that it is primarily about 'being true to yourself' and less based on race and place. However, that self, and how that self is perceived, is strongly influenced by ethnic-racial dynamics, specifically in a white, Dutch and hegemonic society – to which the researchers should have been more attentive.

Wermuth (2002: 305) presents a slightly different view of Dutch hip hop authenticity, namely that it can never *be* authentic because 'rap music is an American phenomenon and thus the natural original'. Kooijman (2008: 199) notes that seeing the artificial and highly fabricated American pop culture as the 'authentic original' is also problematic. These notions of authenticity thus need to be thought out further in future research on Dutch Neerlandophone hip hop identities, for which Roks (2013) and my article (2021a) lay a solid basis.

HIP HOP LANGUAGE

Both linguists Marina Terkourafi[11] and Steven Gilbers[12] have published highly regarded work on language in international rap/hip hop music and culture. Since this article discusses research into Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music, their work will not be discussed further. It should, however, be noted that it has positively influenced the Dutch research climate in the study of hip hop language.

Dutch local youth varieties, which play a vital role in hip hop, have been thoroughly studied by Dutch linguists such as René Appel, Leonie Cornips, Margreet Dorleijn, Maarten Kossmann, Jacomine Nortier, Khalid Mourigh, Alex Reuneker, Vivien Waszink and Ton van der Wouden – by some of these authors in relation to rap/hip hop music. Early studies often refer to local youth varieties in hip hop as 'straattaal' (a term coined in the Dutch context by linguist René Appel in 1998). Some scholars continue to use this term in later work as unproblematic. In contrast, others (such as Nortier and Waszink) now use other terms, such as 'local youth language varieties' or 'hip hop language'. Although they do not give reasons for their choice of words, these conceptual choices probably stem from the now-more-accepted conviction that 'slang' is a value judgement that denigrates marginalized speech communities, and that continuing the term would be a form of linguistic stereotyping. Members of the Dutch hip hop scene also have objections to the word – the members of the Amsterdam hip hop collective Smib, for instance, who documented the Amsterdam Zuidoost linguistic variant 'Smibanese' in a dictionary (2019), prefer to speak of 'local youth languages'.[13]

Waszink's popular scientific publication *Word!* (2013) playfully examines the Dutch hip hop language. The same is true for Waszink et al.'s unpublished quantitative research paper (2017) on the vocabulary of Dutch rappers versus that of Dutch writers, which caused controversy in the Netherlands since it showed that some Dutch rappers had a richer vocabulary than a few Dutch canonical authors. Fruitful insights into Dutch hip hop linguistics are presented in Jacomine Nortier's 2016 article on Urban Youth Speech Styles (UYSS). She discusses examples from Dutch rap music, such as lyrics by rappers Nina, Appa and the Utrecht hip hop collective 'Relschoppers',[14] to demonstrate that UYSS features are part of language use by multiethnic groups of young people (Nortier 2016: 182) and that rappers from a smaller Dutch city like Utrecht

adopt dialect sounds from the Amsterdam capital (2016: 174). It would be fascinating to see why they change their sound – I expect to make it appeal to a metropolitan idea of hip hop cool, but this outcome is not explained further. By comparing different media forms, such as reactions on forums, rapping practices and offline speech practices, Nortier also demonstrates the richness of internet resources for researching the language practices of Dutch youth. Both her research and Roks (2013) draw attention to the online domain as the place where contemporary Dutch hip hop identity practices take shape.

HIP HOP'S 'REBELLIOUS CHARACTER': CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

As in other places where rap/hip hop music ends up, its rebellious nature (and the suspected influence on listeners) is also regularly discussed in the Netherlands.[15] Criminologists and social scientists respond to these societal debates by studying the production (Roks and Goverts 2020) and reception (Mulder et al. 2009) of hip hop's representations of conspicuous consumption (of luxury products, but also drinking and smoking). In their 2020 article, Roks and fellow criminologist Robbert Goverts conduct a textual analysis of 283 tracks by the most popular Dutch-language rappers of 2018, concluding that conspicuous consumption is central to their lyrics. These hip hop representations emphasize, for example, the importance of generating money, the importance of spending *and* saving money and the coolness of having it. According to the researchers, expressions of conspicuous consumption are rooted in and fuelled by the experiences of socio-economically marginalized youth groups due to poverty, stigmatization and discrimination. Thus, when one pierces through the veneer of luxury goods and wasted money, Dutch rap/hip hop music offers an opportunity to gain more insight into the world and experiences of young people who grow up in vulnerable neighbourhoods in the Netherlands (Goverts and Roks 2020: 35). In that sense, rap/hip hop music can play a positive role in the lives of young people, for instance, because they are inspired by the possibilities for upward social mobility in the Netherlands (Goverts and Roks 2020: 31).

In their exploratory study, 'The soundtrack of substance use: Music preferences and adolescent smoking and drinking' (2009), Juul Mulder et al. investigate 'consumption' in terms of smoking and drinking in the reception of Dutch rap/hip hop. The study reports results from a 2003 National School Survey on Substance Use (DNSSSU) in the Netherlands – a self-report questionnaire among a representative school-based sample of 7324 adolescents aged 12–16 years, which evaluated music preferences, tobacco and alcohol use and a range of relevant covariates related to both substance use and music preference. In their study, the genres most prominently identified in previous literature (i.e. heavy metal and rap/hip hop) were not significantly important for substance use in the Dutch setting. Rap/hip hop music was associated with more tobacco use among girls, but negatively associated with alcohol use among boys, 'which may hint at cross-national differences in the association between substance use and music', according to the researchers, 'or may reflect an international tendency toward the "softening" of rap and the advent of other "nonmainstream", "defiant", "rebellious" genres' (Mulder et al. 2009: 524).

This research raises the question of how personal characteristics such as rebelliousness, recklessness and thrill-seeking underlie the attraction to

15. As shown by calls for a radio boycott of the Dutch-Algerian rapper Boef's rap/hip hop music and controversies around the aforementioned hit 'Drank & Drugs', because it was said to promote substance use. Cf. 3voor12 (2018) and 3voor12 (2015).

non-mainstream music, smoking and drinking. Because these individual factors were not included, nor were social factors and media influences, they deserve attention in a follow-up study. After all, hip hop reflects society and social behaviour (which influences that behaviour). This insight is now often presented as an *outcome* of research rather than a *starting point*. Follow-up studies (hopefully with equally large corpora) can *start* from this premise to directly identify and further explore the significant societal developments and factors that lie beneath the social representations in Dutch hip hop.

HIP HOP'S REBELLIOUS CHARACTER: 'PROBLEMATIC' REPRESENTATIONS, PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOUR?

Just as international studies question the continuation of social problems around sexism, misogyny, homophobia and the glorification of crime and violence in hip hop, these issues are also points of discussion in Dutch society and academia, especially in social studies. Several works by cultural psychologists and criminologists question 'problematic' hip hop images (about gender and sexuality and violence in threatening rap representations) and if or how they influence youth's behaviour or realities in general. In 'Shake it baby, shake it: Media preferences, sexual attitudes and gender stereotypes among adolescents' (2010), Ter Bogt et al. examine the relationship between adolescents' media references (including hip hop) and their adherence to permissive sexual attitudes and gender stereotypes (i.e. views of men as sex-driven and tough, and of women as sex objects). Their multivariate structural analysis of data from a school-based sample of 480 13- to 16-year-old Dutch students demonstrates that hip hop and hard-house music preferences were positively associated with gender stereotypes for both girls and boys. In comparison, preferences for classical music were negatively associated with gender stereotypes.

On the one hand, it is interesting to see how research in the Netherlands indicates that rap/hip hop music influences how young people perceive gender relations. On the other hand, a wider analysis of how hip hop reflects pre-existing social problems and attempts to address them is lacking. Moreover, it is also logical that classical music does not influence how gender stereotypes are viewed. Comparatively, hip hop explicitly actively incorporates these gender sexual stereotypes, perpetuates them, but also challenges and questions them. The interpretation of the results could have been given a deeper nuance with a broader cultural and artistic embedding of rap/hip hop music in its social context.

Selfhout et al. (2008) analyse the stability of preferences of Dutch adolescents for heavy metal and hip hop youth culture styles, examining the long-term association between their preferences and externalizing problem behaviour and the moderating role of gender in these associations. A questionnaire among 931 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 in two waves with a two-year interval shows that an appreciation of rap/hip hop music is associated with externalizing problems. In addition, their results at least indicate that adolescents' cultural preferences precede externalizing problems rather than the other way around. Other factors seem to be of greater importance, and researchers have therefore rightly indicated that future studies should examine longitudinal links between personality, youth culture style preferences and externalizing problems across different cultural contexts,

incorporating a wider variety of subgenres to understand better the complex interplay of risk factors for problem behaviour.

The question of when problematic behaviour from rap touches on reality is central to the research of legal scholars and criminologists Sven Bakker and Veerle van de Wetering, who combine a legal and artistic research perspective on rap music in their study, 'Threatening rap and the art exception' (2015). They study five case studies of court cases in which a Dutch rap song (lyrics and/or image) with a threatening character was discussed, such as the case of DHC's anti-Hirsi Ali rap (found guilty), Mo$heb's anti-Wilders rap (found not guilty), Raheem, Dope-D and Hozny's Wilders disses (all three found guilty). It is notable that rap disses regularly target right-wing politicians, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, who often praise the freedom of speech as an idealized, assumed value in the Dutch self-image (cf. Van Der Pijl and Goulordava 2014: 270). Dutch rappers stretch this freedom to give these politicians a taste of their own medicine. Bakker and van de Wetering form an answer to the question of the extent to which there is room for a successful appeal to the art exception when someone is suspected of expressing threats in a rap song. While the idea of freedom of expression dominates Dutch self-image, reality shows a different picture: protection against death threats almost always prevails over perceptions of artistic freedom or free speech. Bakker and van de Wetering focus on the jurisprudential aspects of these legal interventions. However, the verdicts in these cases raise questions about the autonomous position of Dutch rap music as an art form, which should be addressed in future research.[16]

DUTCH HIP HOP'S LEGITIMATION

Multiple studies focus on the processes of legitimation and classification in the reception of rap/hip hop music by critics (Van Venrooij 2011; Koreman 2014) and, as we saw earlier, by consumers (Krims 2000; Wermuth 2002). Cultural sociologists Alex Van Venrooij and Rian Koreman use comparative methods to focus on newspaper critics' reception of rap/hip hop music. In 'Classifying popular music' (2011), Van Venrooij applies Rosengren's 'mentions technique' to investigate cross-national differences in commercial, aesthetic and racial logic in classifying famous music artists, and relates these to field-level and macrostructural differences between the United States and the Netherlands. Koreman uses content analysis to investigate the critical reception and legitimation of local music genres, such as folk music, hip hop/rap and dance music, in elite Dutch newspapers. As the production and consumption of Dutch music have increased, Koreman expects that Dutch critics will also cover local music more often.

Van Venrooij's study shows that US reviewers mention commercially successful artists more often than their Dutch colleagues. He suggests that commercial interests in the United States have a more substantial influence on hip hop's critical reception than in the Netherlands. That insight would not hold true today. Due to Top Notch's dominant position in the market, Dutch critics depend heavily on good relations with the label, which can hinder their critical stance. According to Van Venrooij, both US-American and Dutch reviewers classify and compare artists within racial categories that overlap genre boundaries. This, he argues, indicates that 'although macrosocial racial boundaries are relatively absent in the Netherlands compared to the United States, Dutch reviewers do invoke race as a salient boundary', which seems to

16. For example, in comparison with other genres, such as literature. In the Netherlands, the well-known Dutch author Gerard Reve was indeed absolved of responsibility for statements made by his literary characters, in what is called in Dutch 'Het Ezelsproces' ('The Donkey Procedure') in 1976.

be a '"side effect" of using institutionalized, field-internal genre boundaries as categories of perception, which have been historically codified within a racial frame in the United States' (Van Venrooij 2011: 620). Van Venrooij continues that 'both the cross-national comparative analysis of the commercial character of the mentions and the salience of racial classifications indicate that reviewers' classifications are influenced by field-level institutional structures rather than broader societal features' (2011: 620). Yet, these institutional structures are already largely determined by broad social characteristics. Whiteness determines how musical genres are racialized and how they are classified within invisible power processes. To claim that macrosocial racial boundaries are relatively absent in the Netherlands (even when compared to the United States) is to deny the power of whiteness in Dutch institutions. Van Venrooij's colourblind, quite naïve view of music classification processes lays bare the exact invisibility of the forces with which whiteness repeatedly renders its privileges in a white, hegemonic Dutch society (cf. Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016).

In contrast to Van Venrooij, music sociologists Julian Schaap and Pauwke Berkers, in their article 'De nieuwe hendrix' (2019), are highly aware of ethnic-racial aspects' role in the assessment processes of, in this case, rock music and hip hop. I will not discuss this article because it primarily explores rock, with hip hop music only being sporadically cited for comparison. However, I will quickly mention that non-white artists are marked more often than white artists based on race and ethnicity. Albums by white artists are rarely discussed in ethnic-racial terms, and their whiteness never plays a role in evaluating their music (Schaap and Berkers 2019). Schaap and Berkers's research illustrates why a colour-conscious approach of the weight of ethnic-racial dimensions in music's reception would have been welcome in Van Venrooij's analysis too.

Koreman links a positive reception and dominant presence of Dutch hip hop in elitist Dutch newspapers to legitimacy, concluding that Dutch hip hop/rap music has now become legitimized. However, the repeated hassles surrounding Dutch Neerlandophone hip hop (cf. De Volkskrant 2019), insults about its alleged lack of quality and its continued exclusion and absence from Dutch radio make me say that hip hop is not yet legitimized in every cultural domain in the Netherlands. Koreman's research brings up the question of according to whom the genre is (and should be) legitimized. While I believe the scene and its media forms should be dominant in such determinations, Koreman follows the outdated idea that traditional, dominant channels and institutions still determine the positions of music genres – even though hip hop's immense success in recent years precisely proves the relevance of other, bottom-up channels and the growing autonomy of the Dutch hip hop scene. Wermuth's (2002) analysis of niche media, such as special-interest media focused on youth and music, supports my claim that *these* play a crucial role in establishing Dutch hip hop rather than traditional newspaper platforms – and therefore, the first deserves more academic attention in future research.

FUTURE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Research on Dutch rap/hip hop music generally focuses on production, reception or the combination thereof. The musical component of this youth culture and its reception by consumers and critical parties is dominant in the research, with only one study (Vanderveen and Eijk 2016) on the moral,

jurisprudential, economic and artistic judgements on graffiti – framing the expression of street art as vandalism rather than as a part of hip hop culture – as an exception. It needs no explanation that this generally creates a knowledge gap about the other elements of hip hop, on which more research is needed in the future.

As I have indicated, early studies on Dutch hip hop (with the emphatic exception of Gazzah [2008] and Kooijman [2008]) use colour-blind attitudes and tropes here and there (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Essed and Hoving 2014: 11; Wekker 2016) that are characteristic of how ethnic-racial but also class themes are dealt with (i.e. ignored or downplayed) in Dutch society. This results in problematic linguistic stereotyping terms such as 'slang' or in labelling the use of voice as 'black sounding' (Krims 2000). In recent years, Dutch scholarship has increased awareness of such expressions of epistemic violence (Spivak 1988). Researchers have become more alert to how terminology and scientific insights can do injustice *and* justice to their research objects. Researchers in general are now more aware of their responsibilities in these processes.

Future Dutch hip hop studies should do justice to complex expressions of Dutch hip hop and its communities by being aware of the defining role that ethnic-racial dimensions play in Dutch society and thus in the hip hop practices produced, reproduced and perceived in this context. From 2018 to today, the Dutch childcare benefits scandal made it painfully clear how whiteness – even if its power is made invisible or normalized in discursive processes (Essed and Hoving 2014) – still strongly influences the reality of the Netherlands today.

Partly due to the impact of anti-racism movements such as Kick Out Zwarte Piet and Black Lives Matter, awareness of everyday and institutional racism in the Netherlands increases. A colour-aware perspective is more often adopted in public *and* academic debates (cf. Schaap and Berkers 2019: 125). This is necessary for Dutch hip hop studies, too, in my view, precisely because of hip hop's presumed influence on cultural identities. Dutch hip hop representations of ethnicity and race must be critically examined without falling into rigid black-and-white thinking based on outdated and conservative notions of ethnic-racial identities (and tending towards a problematic racialization of the genre and its accompanying youth culture) and without falling into a naïve colour-blind thinking that denies all the influence of skin colour in Dutch hip hop (and tending towards a smugly ignorant view of ethnic-racial hip hop themes).

Current work on Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music is characterized by a substantive focus on its cultural and social function, leaving room for future studies on its underexposed artistic, economic, educational, historical and political aspects. Future research could work from interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and focus on the historical value of Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music in a diachronic perspective, archival possibilities in the Netherlands, production processes, political effects and educational potential in the Netherlands. For example, in a recent article (2021b) for the Dutch Society of Reading, I explore the role of Dutch rap/hip hop lyrics in Dutch youth's reading culture. More attention could be paid to contemporary Dutch hip hop's current digital form and how this mediation shapes the construction of 'new' hip hop identities. From a methodological standpoint, qualitative and quantitative approaches can be more often combined, since computational methods can bring us further in distant readings *and* close readings of contemporary hip hop practices.

My Ph.D. research plays into these knowledge gaps by examining what happens now when Dutch rap/hip hop musical practices are played out online. It studies the practice of *representing*, which emphasizes the uniqueness of the local (Forman 2002: 89). In the Netherlands, youth with diverse backgrounds meet each other in online hip hop play, shaping their cultural identity along the local axis. Due to the growing popularity and accessibility of hip hop through social media, all kinds of youths, not just artists but also amateurs and the active audience, are able to *represent*. My research project starts from the assumption that social media has changed what it is to *represent*. It is no longer a sign from artists to their local fans, but has become an open, collaborative performance within the Dutch hip hop community at large, in which multiple markers of identity can be tested, developed and expanded by all parties involved. From the perspective of literary studies and Dutch studies, I ask what happens to localized stories in rap/hip hop music now that the streets and 'hoods have moved to the online domain. I investigate how Dutch youth (hip hop artists, amateurs and the active audience) use the hip hop strategy of representing *online* to create and negotiate their cultural identity along different axes of locality, ethnicity, religion, gender, class and age in a global perspective. By combining multimodal discourse analysis of professional and amateurish hip hop performances with an (online) ethnography of the reactions to these performances, I analyse how representing different parts of the Netherlands enables Dutch youth to construct and reconstruct their cultural identities.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how academics in the Netherlands investigate Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music as a flourishing cultural expression of Dutch youth. I have highlighted the most critical insights on Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music the field of Dutch hip hop studies has already brought to light. Piece by piece, these studies illustrate the importance of studying Dutch Neerlandophone hip hop in the light of local political and cultural factors. In a 2020 interview with urban studies expert Séverin Guillard, hip hop studies expert Murray Forman reiterated that specific knowledge of the cultural codes, symbols and social processes in local hip hop can best be recognized by local researchers since

> They'll know best what urgencies and priorities demand research attention and they can frame hip hop in ways that ideally capture the deeper values and meanings of a hip hop way of life in relation to, say, their media institutions, their educational, religious or political institutions, and other social factors across racial or ethnic differences, class divisions, gender relations, or intergenerational relations.
>
> (Guillard 2020: n.pag.)

The studies discussed here take the first steps in that direction.

In the developing field of Dutch hip hop studies, working together, supporting and learning from each other are vital. Bringing the field together can lead to more visibility and connectivity, contributing to the field's sustainability and thus hopefully leading to more affluent, interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches to Dutch Neerlandophone rap/hip hop music. Future research projects do not necessarily need to have an academic form. Hip hop is a vehicle

for change, challenging us to think through disruptive and unconventional forms of research and presentation that may revise *and* revive current infra-structures and invent new ones. I would love to see more work from Dutch hip hop researchers in the broadest sense of the word, in both the scene *and* academia. In short: consider this writing piece both a state of the art *and* a call to action to let Dutch hip hop take its place 'in the books'. May it reverberate and resonate among future Dutch hip hop scholars for a long time.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Aafje de Roest is a Ph.D. researcher in Dutch literary studies at Leiden University. Her dissertation focuses on how contemporary Dutch hip hop artists and members of their online, active audience negotiate their cultural identities against a local background in a global context through contemporary Dutch hip hop. The project is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

Contact: Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society, Arsenaal, Room A1.50, Arsenaalstraat 1, 2311 CT, Leiden, the Netherlands.
E-mail: f.a.de.roest@hum.leidenuniv.nl

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8653-8378