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De nieuwe golf: culturele identiteit in hedendaagse Nederlands(talig)e hiphop 2015 tot heden

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Summary in English

Contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop is one of the dominant music genres and youth cultures in the Netherlands. The music genre and its accompanying youth culture tell both individual and collective histories – stories in which the voice of the artists themselves can be heard, but also, indirectly, that of the people they represent. These stories find a stage and audience on digital platforms, and their popularity is now clearly reflected in the Dutch charts. Behind the seemingly sudden rise of hip hop in societies in different parts of the world, there is almost always a strong need for identity on the part of young people. Hip hop is pre-eminently about cultural identity and influences how young people shape their cultural identity. So when Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop experienced a revival in 2015, it sparked a question in my mind: what specific identity needs does this particular variant of hip hop fulfill? While listening to hip hop myself and seeing so many others doing the same – in clubs, on the subway, or on Dutch streets, I wonder: what is it that makes Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop so appealing to young people in this era of globalization and internationalization? Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop seems to tell stories that the audience (consisting of mainly young people with diverse backgrounds) want to hear. What is being told in those stories, specifically in terms of cultural identity? In this dissertation, I answer the question: *what stories do Dutch hip hop artists tell in contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop and how do they form their cultural identity in it?*

My research shows that the stories in contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop bring societal issues to the forefront. These are stories in which hip hop artists shape their cultural identity against a local background, from a global perspective. Stories that question and at times, repeat stereotypical identity scripts—whether as part of a critique or simply through repetition. Stories that illuminate the identity needs and issues of young people in the Netherlands, from diverse backgrounds and from different perspectives, giving them a platform. Stories that, despite their commercial success, which may seem paradoxical given their opposition to the socio-political mainstream, create a politics of their own. They are emancipatory, because they offer young people the chance to express their vision of Dutch society. Contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop, in short, tells stories worth exploring.

In Chapter 1, I explain how contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop became increasingly popular in the Netherlands from 2013 onwards, with 2018 as the peak year of its popularity. I mark two pivotal moments in its development; the decision of *The Dutch Association of Producers and Importers of image and sound carriers* to include ‘streams’ in the charts and the publication of the album *New Wave* (2015) by the hip hop collective of the same name. In agreement with international researchers, I note that hip hop’s seemingly sudden rise almost always reveals underlying identity questions among those involved in the culture, something that Dutch scholarship and society need to better understand. In Chapter 2, on the cultural-historical context of hip hop, I briefly trace the history of hip hop in the United States and the Netherlands and show how hip hop, at its core, is about authenticity, the local (both place and space) and cultural identity. In Chapter 3, I outline a theoretical framework in which I explain how I conceptualize authenticity (keeping it real, realness), representing and cultural identity. I engage with the debate on authenticity in hip hop, particularly around the ideas of the hood and the posse – recurring concepts in the

thematization of the local in hip hop. In Chapter 4, I introduce my methodology, a multimodal discourse analysis, providing several arguments for applying this approach to (contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone) hip hop. In a short intermezzo, I reflect on my own positionality: what do I bring to the table as a researcher?

In the five following chapters, I analyze exemplary multimodal hip hop expressions (tracks, music videos) of contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists, and the cultural identity constructions presented within them. In Chapter 5, I argue that in the track and music video for “Never Forget The Neighborhood [“Vergeet De Buurt Nooit”]” (2018), hip hop artist Lijpe depicts his own identity quest and that of Moroccan-Dutch boys, on how to reconcile being “street,” hip hop and Muslim simultaneously. I demonstrate how Lijpe advocates staying on the right path, while ambiguous about his own involvement in street life, and how he advocates resisting the gaze of a society that turns you into an Other.

In Chapter 6, in seven hip hop tracks and accompanying music videos, I analyze how the members of hip hop collective SMIB formulate answers to the question of how Black youth – specifically from the Bijlmer, Amsterdam-Southeast – can take a stance in Dutch society, where the traces of Dutch colonial history are still felt through territorial stigmatization and both institutional and everyday racism. Through their local youth language vernacular “Smibanese”, this hip hop collective points to the oppressive effect of Dutch language, with an emancipatory effect. In their Smibanese-spoken hip hop expressions, they raise broader questions of identity: what does the concept of “Dutchness” actually mean, who “fits” within this definition – and who would determine this?

Both Lijpe and the members of SMIB make use of a “hood discourse”, which takes on different meanings in the intersection with other identity markers. For Lijpe, the street and hood, intersecting with his Moroccan and Muslim background and masculinity, transforms into a mini-umma; with SMIB, the hood intersecting with Blackness transforms into a space of glocal resistance. At the same time, through hood discourse, both Lijpe and the members of SMIB seek to connect with worlds beyond, with a religious or black-Atlantic Diaspora.

In Chapter 7, I analyze the hip hop/punk album *A* (2021) by Abel, arguing that this hip hop punk artist constructs a cultural identity in which he presents his hometown Amsterdam as both punk and hip hop, and in which he seeks to dismantle his own white privilege. Abel’s identity construction is part of a larger anti-racist and anti-capitalist social critique, urging his audience to become more knowledgeable about each other, thus fostering mutual understanding. The artist illustrates – by trial and error – what the impact of hip hop can be in processes of raising awareness among white youth about the benefits associated with their whiteness.

Chapter 8 centers two hip hop albums, *happyland* (2017) and *Wavyman – Live from Mars* (2022), by respectively Jacin Trill and Ares. I demonstrate how these artists turn to the trope of the rural idyll to present an authentic, youthful hip hop identity as rebels within the regional fringes. Using escapist idyllic elements in their identity construction, they connect the rural-regional to traditional hip hop values of authenticity and self-sufficiency. As voices from the region, the artists express “regional frustration”, illustrating how this frustration translates into apathy and sometimes even depression, and into distrust of traditional institutions.

In Chapter 9, I examine how S10, Latifah, the members of Lionstorm and Famke Louise highlight the experiences of women and queer individuals in hip hop. By centering female and queer sexuality and gender in their identity constructions, they draw attention to the ongoing struggles over space—both in hip hop and in society—where others often dictate whether and how they can occupy it. These artists reclaim hip hop as a space to express themselves and (re)claim spaces like the neighborhood and the Internet. Additionally, they create their own spaces, such as a fictional kingdom, to rewrite restrictive identity narratives.

The contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists in this study present cultural identity constructions are glocal and intersectional: they reflect both global as well as local influences and take shape in the intersection of the socio-geographic marker with other identity markers such as ethnicity, race, religion, class, gender, sexuality and age. Contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists' identity constructions are full of play, irony and contradictions, confirming oppressive stereotypes and discourses, but also questioning them – often simultaneously. This dissertation shows that their identity constructions always contain a socio-critical component, even if that is not immediately apparent on the surface.

In an online environment, artists have relatively many resources at their disposal to help shape their cultural identity. This dissertation demonstrates how a multimodal discourse analysis uncovers how artists choose from a vast wealth of cultural influences, histories and traditions in the auditive, textual and visual modes of their hip hop expression. As palimpsests of cultural discourses, their tracks and music videos reflect the worlds they depict and represent. Sampling, lyrics, the use of local youth language varieties and the *mise en scène* of music videos appear to be important modes of meaning for contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists to express their cultural identity.

The discursive power of digital platforms opens up places, spaces and identities. Online, it becomes possible to be “present” where you are not physically and to identify yourself in imagined ways. My analysis shows that contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists play with these possibilities of identification. They create and reshape images of places and spaces that resonate with their audiences. They make use of associations around streets, neighborhoods, center and periphery, city and region, and spaces of ideas, and they themselves invoke new associations and discourses around physical places and spaces. These hip hop artists are thus not only representatives of a particular part of the Dutch hip hop scene, but also of (g)local communities. Their hip hop expressions can contribute to the revision of existing ideas about places, spaces and identities in a (g)local exchange, across borders.

Contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop serves as a mouthpiece for hip hop artists and their communities, providing a valuable social critique. ‘It’s bigger than hip hop,’ the American hip hop duo Dead Prez raps in the track of the same name (2000), and that is a winged hip hop saying for good reason. There is more at stake here. My research shows that contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists express a broader social critique through their identity constructions. In doing so, they play with stereotypes to undermine and reverse them. For example, Lijpe, SMIB and Abel seize on the materialism that both hip hop and society glorify, to simultaneously agitate against it. S10, Latifah, the members of

Lionstorm and Famke Louise play upon the prominence of the Madonna/whore dichotomy to address the pervasiveness of this discourse in hip hop as well as in Dutch society.

Contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists express social commentary and formulate political critiques. Like international hip hop artists, they employ paradoxes, exaggerations, irony, ambiguity and other strategies to make their point – while at the same time tailoring hip hop to the context of the Netherlands. Hip hop artists play with paradoxes: they adapt their identity constructions as needed and never take a fixed position for long. In my research, I see that contemporary Dutch hip hop artists are constantly moving between poles that are considered contradictory, also deconstructing these poles at times. In doing so, they strive to dismantle binary oppositions and look for opportunities to create a new “middle”, in their attempts to define hip hop authenticity in new ways. I show that such layered identity constructions as well as a layered concept of hip hop authenticity do not emerge in a straight line, but rather through side paths or by constantly adding something to the *loop*.

Contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop artists reveal how they see themselves and present their own images of themselves, their environment and the people around them. They regularly incorporate the image that someone might have of them or their environment into their identity construction and act against it by actively questioning this image and creating new, alternative images of themselves and their community. These might not always be clearly crystallized “good” examples – rather, these are examples full of (apparent) contradictions, with which the artists show that they, like their audience, are made up of multitudes, contain contradictions, are “real,” fallible people. They suggest new ways of seeing and thinking about people like themselves, the places they go, the stories they tell. As a result, hip hop artists can create opportunities for young people outside of their hip hop expressions, who (in whatever way) resemble them, who can identify with their stories. If there is a will from the audience to follow artists in their expressions, contemporary Dutch, Neerlandophone hip hop offers the space for something *real*: substantial change.

