“Really, Really, Real”

The Globalization of Kendrick Lamar and the Transcultural Conceptualization of Hiphop Culture and the African-American Experience

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Abstract

Kendrick Lamar (Compton, CA 1987) is one of the most universally claimed voices in rap music today. Known for conceptually dense albums containing strong political messages, Lamar reached audiences beyond Hiphop culture all over the world. This thesis researches a threefold of representations of Kendrick Lamar; firstly, Lamar's self-representation as articulated through his music; secondly, the representation of Lamar I will argue that by defining Lamar, Hiphop culture and the African-American community are defined as well. Representations of Lamar portray him as a uniquely sane and innocent voice in a culture that has been deteriorating because of increased commercialism, sexism, and expressions of violence. In the Dutch media, Lamar's 2015 album *To Pimp a Butterfly* was able to catalyze debates on Dutch perceptions of Hiphop culture and race at large.

Table of contents

Introduction 4

1. Self-representation 15
    1.1 Introduction 15
    1.2 Narratives 19
    1.3 Lamar's worldview 21
        1.3.1 Community and social issues 21
        1.3.2 Music industry and commercialism 34
        1.3.3 Religion and spirituality 40
    1.4 Conclusion 46
2. Representation through U.S. media 47
    2.1 Introduction 47
    2.2 Background and social context 48
    2.3 Analysis of U.S. media representations 52
    2.4 Conclusion 66
3. Representation through Dutch media 68
    3.1 Introduction 68
    3.2 Hiphop and the Netherlands 70
    3.3 Analysis of Dutch media representations 76
    3.4 Conclusion 86

Conclusion 88

Bibliography 90

Introduction

This essay is centralizes three questions concerning the representation of American rapper Kendrick Lamar; firstly, how does Lamar represent himself through his music; secondly, how is Lamar represented in American media; and thirdly, how is Lamar represented in Dutch media. In order to answer the question how Kendrick Lamar's music is understood in the United States and the Netherlands, several matters must be researched, which I will do in three chapters. In the first chapter I will explore the ways in which Kendrick Lamar constructs his identity and his philosophy as an artist and as a public figure, additionally emphasizing the possible discrepancy between authenticity and representation. I will do this by analyzing Kendrick Lamar's music directly, the accompanying music videos, several interviews with Kendrick Lamar, and other public appearances. I will read all of these as text, categorizing the method mainly as discourse analysis. Secondly, I will explore the social context of the United States, reaching from wider notions on (African-)American history to the way Hip-Hop culture and specifically the perception of Kendrick Lamar and his music negotiate meaning in the United States. For this, I will mainly use academic literature and analysis of American media in which Kendrick Lamar is portrayed. The third chapter will provide the same for the Netherlands, focusing mainly on the way Hip-Hop culture both lives and does not live in the Netherlands and the ways in which Kendrick Lamar and his music are embraced and neglected. While doing this third step, I will continuously make comparisons to the understandings found in the second chapter, ultimately showing the ways in which nationally particular social environments either change or do not change understandings and perceptions of Kendrick Lamar and his music in this particular case study.

I will examine the understanding of the music of Kendrick Lamar as negotiated through different social contexts, keeping in mind larger ideas on the globalization, commercialization, and conceptualization of Hiphop culture. This analysis will begin by explaining e the complex global structures Hip-Hop moves and negotiates within. I will explore the music of Kendrick Lamar with focus on the discursive conceptualization of black culture by consumers as well as creators in two particular (Hip-Hop) sites: the United States and the Netherlands. For artists of the commercial and artistic stature of Kendrick Lamar, the practical use and understanding will inevitably be different from

the Hip-Hop I assign to marginalized youths. The music of Kendrick Lamar and artists like him reaches into a global culture industry, speaking to groups of people whose experience cannot be described as 'similar yet different', but mostly as 'different'. Lamar and his peers are forced to communicate their thoughts and experiences in ways that cohere with expectations and perceptions of global audiences that do not necessarily connect with Hip-Hop or youth culture.[1] Academics before me have linked this notion of culture industry to a challenged sense of authenticity, problematizing the idea of the existence of a truly Black, empowering art form. This essay, however, will use this tension to explore the ways in which experiences and ideas are communicated and eventually perceived, understood, and practiced across cultural 'boundaries', ultimately showing the ways in which social contexts either do or do not influence the perception, understanding, and use of cultural produce.

I will argue that because of his lyrical excellence and continuous distinguishing between an authentic self and inauthentic communities in the form of the Compton ghetto and the rap industry, Lamar reinforces a discourse that stereotypes Hiphop culture and the African-American community, while simultaneously sparking global debate on the perception of Hiphop culture and non-whiteness. Globally, Lamar is portrayed as a leading figure in a new movement in Hiphop that favor the art form and socio-political engagement to shallow commercialism. Portraying Lamar as enlightening, skilled, and authentic portrays Hiphop culture and the African-American community lesser, mostly because of the commercial drive that is identified within Hiphop by global media. Personally, I reject the notion that the commercialization and popularization of Hiphop culture is a negative development. Hiphop's growing eclectic popularity has the potential to provide widespread platforms of expression for minority youth, invites to social cohesion between youth of every ethnicity, and sparks conversation between (minority) youth and institutions. Portraying this as negative can be seen as a form of Othering, whereas I believeHiphop culture's growing influence on pop culture is largely meant to unite.

Hip-Hop erupted out of the Bronx in New York in the late '60s and early '70s. Ever since then the music and the culture have provided a stage for powerful, unique

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[1] M. Elizabeth Blair, "Commercialization of the Rap Music Subculture", in: Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (ed.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York 2004) 497-504, 497-498.

Black and other marginalized voices. In recent years, one of the most powerfully unique and uniquely powerful voices came from Kendrick Lamar (Compton, Los Angeles, 1987), a critically acclaimed Los Angeles rapper who is known for tightly woven, conceptually dense, and politically charged concept albums in a musical industry that puts focus mostly on chart topping singles. Lamar's music enables audiences and writer to speculate and theorize about Hip-Hop, Black culture, and institutionalized racism. When Lamar releases a project, Hip-Hop fans around the world start listening to it, speculating about it, and theorizing it.

Just like many expressions of Hip-Hop culture, Kendrick Lamar's music is consumed globally while communicating local and individually specific experiences, sentiments, and ideologies. The understanding of these localities can be expected to be similar in different social contexts over the world – the music and words of Lamar's music do not change in relation to the spaces they're played in. However, as American scholar Murray Forman has argued, spaces and places (and the network of social connotations linked to these localities) influence the way rap music is made, consumed, and understood.[2] This allows for different social situations to be paralleled, turning rap music into a potential tool for understanding and coping individual situations

Hip-Hop originated in the late '60s and early '70s in the then socio-economically disadvantaged area of the Bronx in New York City. Part of the culture in these marginalized ethnic communities involves practicing most of their activities on the street as opposed to in their homes. So residents would organize outdoor parties and gatherings that usually involved four newly invented aspects of musical expression that would later be identified as the four characteristic elements of Hip-Hop: 1. turntablism 2. rap (emcee'ing) 3. breakdance 4. graffiti. Later, as acknowledged by American Hip-Hop scholars Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett, the fifth element of 'knowledge' was added.[3] This particular musical form spread quickly, creating its own rules, conventions, and traditions, becoming closer to a lifestyle. As pointed out by Morgan, these manifested as a language ideology, using African American English vernacular

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[2] Murray Forman, "Race, Murray Forman, "'Represent': race, space and place in rap music", in: *Popular Music* 19 (2000) 1, 65-90, 65-67.

[3] Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett, "Hip-hop & the global imprint of a black cultural form", in: Daedalus 140 (2011) 2, 176-196, 177.

(AAE) as the main means of articulating itself.[4] Even though rules, conventions, and traditions inevitably overlapped, these had very locally specific identities. This created several 'camps' within New York City, each representing itself and to some extent rivaling each other. Spreading quickly over the United States, more of these local 'camps' started developing in urban, mostly Black areas, each having the five elements at the heart of local, idiosyncratic practice. The music, the street culture, and the locality, worked together to create the conditions for hip hop – a new cultural form, and one that has influenced both popular culture and politics, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

For a few years, Hip-Hop existed in this way mostly as a subculture.[5] Until 1979, when the Sugarhill Gang, a rap group from Englewood, New Jersey, came out with what is now known as the first rap hit on the planet, "Rapper's Delight". This is largely considered as the moment Hip-Hop entered the mainstream, growing outside of the parameters of a subculture. In the following years, Hip-Hop rapidly gained popularity throughout the United States, bringing forth groundbreaking and widely selling groups and artists like Public Enemy, N.W.A., 2Pac, Missy Elliott, Lauryn Hill, Nas, Jay-Z, and many more. With Hip-Hop growing not only in the musical landscape, but as a cultural force, Hip-Hop started resembling pop culture and pop culture started resembling Hip-Hop. Lines between pop culture and Hip-Hop culture became increasingly blurred on a global scale, to the extent that Hip-Hop became the biggest influence on youth culture in the world.[6]

By no means does this imply that Hip-Hop is the same everywhere in the world. Hip-Hop is a musical form, it is a cultural practice, and it is also a social construct. It creates an imagined global community. However, it is also practice, identity, and a form of tangible expression. So-called Hip-Hop Headz (a group of mostly youth that participates in the active consumption and negotiation of Hip-Hop culture) around the world are connected through a love for Hip-Hop, but more importantly, through a set of knowledges that define Hip-Hop. As implied, these knowledges are plural, culturally

[4] Marcyliena Morgan, ""Nuthin'but a G thang": Grammar and language ideology in Hip-Hop identity", in: Sociocultural and historical contexts of African American English (2001) 187-210, 187-189.
[5] For more information on subcultures, see: Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London 1979).
[6] Morgan and D. Bennett, "Hip-hop and the global imprint of a black cultural form", 178.

sensitive and locally specific in senses of consumption, understanding, and practice.[7] Nevertheless, we can speak of a Hip-Hop Nation that stretches globally, conceptually connecting individuals involved in particular Hip-Hop cultures.[8] In recent academic tradition of particularizing and complicating notions, it can be concluded that Hip-Hop grew past the boundaries of its five elements, now consisting of different ideologies and networks of thoughts, depending on a wide variety of factors, including socio-economic, spatial, and individual factors.

In the edited volume *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.,* scholars discuss how Hip-Hop has manifested in particular ways on different scales, ranging from extremely regional (for instance, the particular culture of a street corner) to national to global (the Hip-Hop Nation). All these manifestations of Hip-Hop culture are relative to social contexts, regional politics, capital, and many other societal aspects.[9] In that sense, Hip-Hop cultures around the globe have a particularist tendency. However, the fifth element of Hip-Hop, the knowledges that tie different elements of Hip-Hop together, can be seen as universalist. This makes for an interesting tension when it comes to a transnational understanding of Hip-Hop culture. Will Hip-Hop culture be consumed, identified, acknowledged, and *understood* in a far away place the same way it will in the place it originated?

The answer is inevitably: yes and no. Culture that is based on its ability to emphasize regional difference in global contexts, creating global (conceptual as well as communicative) connections in the process, will always consist of part locality and part globality. It is argued that marginalized youth have often used Hiphop music in order to make sense of geopolitical, -historical, -social, and –economical processes in particular. These processes ventually impacted the particular position these youths were in, identifying with other marginalized groups they themselves do not have any direct relation with. This allowed these youths to consider themselves part of a global majority as opposed to a local minority.[10] Understandings and experiences will thus both be similar and different. Different groups of people and individuals will adopt different

[7] Ibidem, 176-178.
[8] Morgan, ""Nuthin' But a G-Thang", 192-193.
[9] Tony Mitchell, "Introduction: Another Root – Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.", in: Tony Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.* (Middletown 2001) 1-32, 31-32.
[10] Morgan and D. Bennet, "Hip-hop & the global imprint of a black cultural form", 187-190.

(idiosyncratic) points of view that borrow their knowledge from the network of connections that is laid out by global Hip-Hop culture. These experiences are often translated in newly formed manifestations of Hip-Hop culture, carrying and representing their own ethnically, locally, and individually specific identities.

In scholarly literature, the locality of Hip-Hop is largely articulated through the perspective of local, mostly (but definitely not exclusively) ethnic youth that utilize Hip-Hop in order to create spaces in which they can self-identify and feel at home – mostly in places where home seems far away. It is about appropriating spaces, constructing conventions and traditions, and performing identities within these spaces. Central is the focus on the way the global and the local intertwine and shape one another. In Hip-Hop, the local is never solely local (anymore[11]) and the global always draws heavy influence from the local, sometimes going as far as to globally represent local 'realities' and experiences. Moreover, this academic discussion focuses on the way Hip-Hop is produced and performed as a cultural force, more than the way it is consumed and understood.

Central to the discussion on Hip-Hop and localities is American scholar Murray Forman's work on race, space, and place. Forman argues the importance of race, space, and place in Hip-Hop, presenting the concept as a way of analyzing and researching Hip-Hop. Forman stresses the construction of the concept of the 'hood', the often impoverished and dangerous ghettos (mostly) African American rappers originate from, describing it as an 'arena of experience' that is under constant negotiation with larger global trends concerning economics, social mobility, political positions, et al. Forman goes on to describe the conceptualization of the hood as a 'response to conditions occurring on meta level,' highlighting that different messages are being communicated to people occupying different places and places of different scales. Ultimately, according to Forman, the hood directly shapes Hip-Hop lyrically, sonically, visually, and conceptually and then the 'hood itself, as both a place and a concept, is eventually shaped by larger global tendencies.[12]

The British sociologist and pop music writer Andy Bennett adds to the understanding of space as both local and global in hiphop in his examination of two

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[11] As I will explore later on, the authenticity of rappers through the representation of locality is highly contested because of the inevitable adherence to postmodern global market structures.

[12] Forman, "Represent", 220-221.

particular Hip-Hop cultures outside of the United States, Frankfurt am Main and Newcastle on the Tyne respectively. Bennett shows how these two movements erupted in places that are not as characterized by Blackness as, say, the South Bronx or Queens. Bennett describes the way German and British youths manifest what he calls 'blackness in the absence of blackness'.[13] In Frankfurt, this is done by linking the situations of African Americans to the position of marginalized immigrants in the outskirts of Frankfurt. Ethnic youths face institutionalized racism on a daily basis, ultimately coping with these challenges by partaking in a vibrant Hip-Hop scene that is simultaneously particularly German (expressed through language and local specificities) and anti-German (creating content that criticizes German nationalism, for instance), providing them with unique identities and lifestyles that draws from the original black cultural form of Hip-Hop, while rejecting inherent blackness for their own personal styles.[14] In Newcastle, however, Hip-Hop culture is practiced in predominately white spaces, constantly negotiating ways to participate in an original culture that respects the African American roots it is influenced by without appropriating, copying, or undermining Hip-Hop's Africanist aesthetic.[15] All of this is to 'undo' Hip-Hop culture of essentialist blackness, presenting it as a global culture that can exist in many different forms, shapes, and practices.

This argument finds support from American historian and cultural critic Davarian L. Baldwin. Baldwin mentions that Hip-Hop has been criticized by the right for its challenge of traditions, conventions, and (family) values and by the left for misogyny and homophobia, after which he stresses how these critiques ignore the performative aspects of black pop culture. Baldwin goes on to show how Hip-Hop's position of difference is often self-induced, how different concepts and identities are performed through rap, most noticeably the concept of 'the nigga' through gangsta rap and the emergence of a performed Hip-Hop Bourgeoisie. The former portrays the 'desire of the gangsta' (wealth and resistance among others) as the desire of its consumers and its creators, while showing that so-called 'nigga behavior' is present in all segments of

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[13] Andy Bennett, "Hip-Hop am Main, Rappin' on the Tyne: Hip-Hop Culture as Local Construct in Two European Cities", in: Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (ed.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York 2004) 177-200, 182.
[14] A. Bennett, "Hip-Hop am Main, Rappin' on the Tyne", 182-188.
[15] Ibidem, 188-197.

American life.[16] The Hip-Hop Bourgeoisie flaunts its wealth mostly in relation to the wealth of others, including their previous selves.[17] Baldwin argues that the constructed nature of performed identity allows for forms of individual cultural particularism, while simultaneously being forced into spaces of 'Othering' by its predominantly white consumers.[18]

These analyses of Hip-Hop culture and its relation to the global and the local focus mainly on the use of race, space, and place in Hip-Hop cultures all over the world. They emphasize the utilization and active participation and manifestation of Hip-Hop culture as daily practice and lived experience. However, others have focused on the global consumption of Hip-Hop culture and its uses as a global cultural force. For instance, professor Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett describe the extent to which Hip-Hop culture grew as a global cultural force in their joint article "Hip-hop & the global imprint of a black cultural form" (2011). Morgan and Bennett describe Hip-Hop as a force that has the ability to penetrate a global mainstream; more particularly youth pop cultures in different places.

African American Studies scholar Halifu Osumare has also been present in the academic discussion surrounding global Hip-Hop. Her book *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop* (2007) focuses on the ways Hip-Hop culture exceeds local African American 'blackness' with its wide appeal and manifestations all over the world while maintaining blackness and what she calls an 'Africanist aesthetic', which she describes as

> a processual mode of expressivity that privileges the negotiation of the self in the moment through a complex use of rhythmic timing, verbal or non-verbal rhetorical strategies, and multiple layers of meaning that draw from its sociocultural context and its audience.[19]

Osumare particularly stresses conceptualization of the globalized 'black hood' by creators and consumers within Hip-Hop culture, highlighting Hip-Hop culture's

[16] Davarian L. Baldwin, "Black Empires, White Desires: The Spatial Politics of Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop", in: Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (ed.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York 2004) 159-176, 165-168.
[17] Baldwin, "Black Empires, White Desires", 168-174.
[18] Ibidem, 162-165, 174.
[19] Halifu Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop. Power Moves* (New York 2007) 12.

potential to transcend racial boundaries while still being bound to concepts of blackness. She furthermore distinguishes the Hip Hop Nation and the Hip Hop Globe. The former is defined by a complex global network of interactions and ideologies based around performances of Hip-Hop practices and identities within a globally imagined community, where the latter mostly expresses the innumerous ways in which particularist Hip-Hop cultures have manifested around the globe, creating culturally specific forms of art within the Hip-Hop spectrum. The Hip-Hop globe then inevitably shapes understandings of and perspectives on Hip-Hop culture, constantly negotiating what it means to 'be Hip-Hop'.[20]

As British pop music scholar Keith Negus illustrated, the struggle of Hip-Hop as global culture springing from local specificities is inherently connected to the commercialization of Hip-Hop as cultural product. Negus highlights the paradox between what is referred to as the 'streets' and the (executive) 'suites' – the streets symbolizing the place the cultural product emanated and is eventually marketed, the suites symbolizing the corporate spaces where the cultural products are capitalized and shaped to suit market structures.[21] These two experiences are expected to be separated for authenticity's sake. This very authenticity, including its representations and strong senses of cooperation within affiliations, makes Hip-Hop a difficult product to market. In turn, the rap industry, as Negus continues to argue, creates a 'narrow structure of expectations' in order to contain rap as a market. These expectations, then, are maintained through discursive practices articulating conceptualizations of the streets.[22] Ultimately, Negus' article shows us the way in which the suites and the streets reinforce each other's existence and urgency. As shown above, this works similarly for the dialogue between the local and the global, which in turn influences the tensions between the streets and the suites and vice versa.

At this moment we can identify four dichotomized juxtapositions that do not seem to mutually exclude each other. As a matter of fact, these ostensible dichotomies seem to be in conversation, enforcing one another. The tensions I identified in the academic discussion mentioned above are 1. local vs. global 2. authentic vs. commercial

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[20] Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop*, 1-20.

[21] Keith Negus, "The Business of Rap: Between the Street and the Executive Suite", in: Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (ed.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York 2004) 525-540, 526.

[22] Negus, "The Business of Rap", 532-534.

3. creators vs. consumers, and ultimately 4. Black (or non-white) vs. white. As mentioned, these tensions are only dichotomous at first glance. In reality, these seemingly opposed forces influence each other individually and collectively, shaping our practice and therewith understanding of Hip-Hop culture. This 'system' can be illustrated as follows: Hip-Hop culture is locally established, including conceptualizations of space and place, invoking senses – illusions, if you will – of authenticity. This in turn becomes a necessity for the commercialization of Hip-Hop products, transforming the cultural produce and challenging its authenticity. Creators keep this in mind, amplifying the constructed sense of authentic locality in order to cohere with (partially industry constructed) white consumer expectations of blackness – or non-whiteness at least. Even though I painted the system as a sequence for the sake of clarity, the process of commercialized Hip-Hop practice, consumption and understanding is by no means subjected to a specific order, but are rather entangled in negotiations. Osumare points out in the aforementioned quote that these are simultaneously conceptualized and manifested 'on the ground'.[23]

Additionally, it is important to note this thesis' focus on the conceptual articulation of space, place, sociopolitical context, and (Hip-Hop) culture in general, in similar fashion to Osumare's approach. She writes:

> Hip-Hop culture on both commercial and street levels is creating what I see as a global hood, where local subjectivities dance with a global culture that primarily exists *virtually*; however, this globality does *truly* manifest within transnational capital that uses local sites as exploitable "landing stations".[24]

Osumare affirms the idea that Hip-Hop culture manifests in shared forms of knowledges, spreading through global media, the Internet not in the least place. Coming from there, Hip-Hop culture is *conceptually* connected, transformed, and negotiated through new impulses from within and without these networks of knowledges. It focuses on the dialogue between conceptual understanding and daily, tangible practice. The music of Kendrick Lamar *is* a dialogue between conceptual understanding and daily, tangible practice. Lamar conceptualizes day-to-day activities from his younger days in Compton,

[23] Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop*, 18.
[24] Ibidem, 18. Italics are mine.

while constantly referring to features from Hiphop culture, such as artists or specific foods and liquors. In other words, Lamar lived (a form of) Hiphop and translates it to music on a global scale, allowing for the listeners around the globe to engage with these conceptualizations.

I will now focus on a threefold of representation of Kendrick Lamar, each having different implications. Firstly, I will elaborate on Lamar's multifaceted worldview concerning the Compton community, religion, and the music industry. Lamar presents a way of authentic living by criticizing the Compton community and the rap industry and embracing religion instead. He paints himself as a well-intentioned individual resisting the temptations provided by the Compton community and the rap industry, mostly characterized by negative stereotypes surround African-Americans and Hiphop culture. Through the establishment of this worldview, Lamar transcends himself over these two communities, portraying selective experiences as daily practice, therefore reinforcing stereotypes while proving himself unique. Secondly, I will show how U.S. media extend these stereotypes through representation of Lamar as uniquely thoughtful, engaged, and skilled in an environment that is conventionally ruled by destructive commercialism. Thirdly, I will show an example of global translation of Lamar's music by analyzing representation on Lamar by Dutch music, showing the way different social contexts provide different, yet similar sorts of conceptualizations on Hiphop culture while allowing for parallels to be drawn in public thought. Dutch media present Lamar similar to the American rhetoric as a uniquely sensible character in Hiphop culture, containing the potential to transform the entire genre. It seems that especially the release of Lamar's second major label album *To Pimp a Butterfly* induced growing interest towards Hiphop culture, sparking discussions on public perceptions and attitudes towards Hiphop culture and minorities on a national scale.

Chapter 1: Self-representation

1.1 Introduction

On June 17 1987, Kendrick Lamar Duckworth was born in Compton, California. At sixteen and 5'5", Lamar buried his dreams of becoming a professional basketball player and released his first mixtape *Youngest Head Nigga In Charge (Hub City Threat: Minor of the Year)* in 2004 under his K-Dot alias.[25] The mixtape won the attention of a newly founded independent record label Top Dawg Entertainment, based in California.[26] Lamar was signed later that year. After releasing several other mixtapes, Lamar released his independent debut album *Section .80* in 2011 bringing his music to the attention of a wider public. After this, Lamar was introduced to André Brown, better known as gangsta rap icon and former N.W.A. member Dr. Dre. However, he might be most known for pioneering the G-funk sound. G-funk is 'a style of generally West Coast rap whose musical tracks tend to deploy live instrumentation, heavy on bass and keyboards, with minimal (sometimes no) sampling and often highly conventional harmonic progressions and harmonies.'[27] Brown took Lamar as his protégé, signed him to his Interscope/Aftermath Records label, resulting in Lamar's major label debut *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (2012), a strong concept album with a clear autobiographical narrative of a young Black male growing up in Compton. Lamar then became visible, successful, and influential. *good kid, m.A.A.d city* transformed Lamar from a member of the Hiphop 'underground' to a mainstream pop culture figure. The record sold 242,000 copies in the first week of sales and was certified platinum in March 2015, besides being nominated for four Grammy awards, including Album of the Year. On March 15 2015, Lamar's third album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (*To Pimp a Butterfly*) was released on Swedish streaming service Spotify and in the iTunes Store, eight days ahead of the scheduled release. The

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[25] A mixtape is a non-commercial collection of songs, usually published in order to showcase an artist's talents, with the hopes of resulting in a record deal with a label.
[26] A record label is independent when it is not overruled by another label. Good. Will need these.
[27] Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge 2000) 74.

album broke the record for first-day streams with 9.600.000 listens on Spotify only. Outside of widespread, universal critical acclaim, *To Pimp a Butterfly* reached platinum status with 850,000 album sales in March 2016. That same month, a collection of outtakes named *untitled unmastered.* was released, debuting on top of popular music chart Billboard's *Hot 200* list. After this, a relative silence surrounded Lamar's solo performance. He was, however, featured on a handful of pop records by Australian band Maroon 5 and pop music icon Taylor Swift. Lamar released his fourth studio album *DAMN.* on April 14th 2017.

This chapter engages with the critical impact of his work on perceptions of black urban environments. It shows that Kendrick Lamar's music is not merely the expression of a young black male's survival amidst gang violence, crime, and poverty, but also an alternate take on the imagery of 'gangstas' and a common Hiphop trope Baldwin labeled the 'nigga as performance.'[28] I will discuss two of Lamar's most successful albums as an entry point into the question of his philosophy, his critical stance, and its presence in his music. I will argue that Lamar's worldview, as presented through his concept albums *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp A Butterfly*, presents himself as a well-intentioned, virtuous individual in the generally scathing environments of the Black community and the Hiphop industry, while simultaneously aiming to empower these communities through the historically recurring idea of self-love.

This chapter will focus on the way Lamar represents his worldview in two albums in particular: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly*. The discussion of these two albums will illustrate how Lamar critiques the music industry explicitly, and his critical stance is part of his self-representation, of his identity and of his philosophy. I have chosen to analyze the records that defined Kendrick Lamar as a mainstream rapper and established him as a global, commercial Hip-Hop artist. As mentioned, 2011's *Section .80* was a record that brought Lamar some attention as an independent rap artist, but *good kid, m.A.A.d city* transcended Lamar from lyrical and artistic talent to an influential force in music and politics. Additionally, *Section .80*, despite its consistence in portraying Lamar's ideology, does not seem to express full circle narratives in the way *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly* did. More importantly, *Section .80* is not intertwined in the meta-narrative of those two albums. I will elaborate on this meta-narrative later in this chapter. Since the album was more of a collection of take-outs and

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[28] Baldwin, "Black Empires, White Desires", 165-168.

demos from *To Pimp a Butterfly* recordings, I will use *untitled unmastered.* in order to tie the concepts of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly* together and to show the coherence and density of Kendrick Lamar's solo work, instead of treating it as a standalone album in the Kendrick Lamar narrative. Finally, I will not use 2017's *DAMN.* for the mere reason that its release is too fresh in order to adequately analyze its complex conceptualizations, themes, and layers. Lamar's unique 'prophet' status in the contemporary musical landscape, which was confirmed by the two albums under discussion in this chapter, was evident in reactions to his latest album, *DAMN.*, which inspired theories about Lamar's work from Hip-Hop fans around the world who read into Lamar's lyrics deeply for hints, concepts, and context. This is to say that such deep investigation of Kendrick Lamar's music is not uncommon; it was the case for *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly*, and it will most likely be true for a future release as well. Finally, I will not use Lamar's features on other artist's music, with the exception of Big Sean's "Control" featuring Kendrick Lamar and Jay Electronica (G.O.O.D. Music, 2014), since Lamar's verse contains heavy industry critique as I will illustrate later in this chapter.

Before I commence with the exploration of the narratives of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly* respectively, it is important to note the social context, reputation, and (historic) representation of Compton, California. Besides being Lamar's birthplace, it is also used in his music to represent an array of social aspects of race and music in America. American sociologist Josh Sides describes Compton's transformation from white, near utopic suburbia in the 1920s to the Black ghetto it is perceived as today. He mentions desegregation of a Black middle class against a reluctance among white inhabitants of the area, resulting in very visible and present institutionalized racism.[29] This has resulted in the ongoing racial tensions that culminated in the Watts riots of 1965, which left 34 dead, 1,032 injured, and 3,043 arrested.[30] This caused a substantial number of white residents to leave the Compton areas, taking their smaller (and bigger) business and factories with them, leaving blue-collar as well middle class Blacks unemployed and causing local markets to crash. This pattern of "white flight" is

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[29] Josh Sides, "Straight Into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb", in: *American Quarterly* 56 (September 2004) 3, 583-605, 586.

[30] Art Berman, "Looting Spreads! City Block Afire", in: *Los Angeles Times* 82 (August 14 1965) 1-3, 1.

characteristic of urban America and has shaped the rise of Hiphop as mentioned in the introduction.[31]

'Compton', Sides argues, is a lot more than simply the definition of particular geographic space, as it implies a network of images, presumptions, and feelings that have been, either righteously or not, assigned to the area. As a result of these economic changes and social conditions, towards the end of the 1970s, youth started to organize in two notable, rivaling gangs: Bloods and Crips. Despite the difference in names and the fierce rivalry, both gangs shared similarities. Both of these gangs participated in drug dealing, creating businesses on the street as an alternative to legitimate employment. As Sides writes, Compton then became the 'epicenter of gang violence'.[32] Sides additionally stresses how 'Compton' turned into a metonymy through capitalized representations of rap music and the film industry, portraying Compton's inhabitants as Black gangsters, pursuing criminality and violence. These images, even though admittedly selective and exaggerated in order to create a shocking and sensational experience for the consumer, address criminality, toughness, police brutality, and the exertion of gang violence.[33]

Sides assigns the larger influence of these representations to films about Compton. Other scholars, however, such as Davarian L. Baldwin highlight the representation of the (Compton) ghetto experience through gangsta rap. Baldwin identifies this phenomenon, through which Compton and the cluster of social, economic and racial issues at work in the city, as 'the "nigga" as performance.' This phrase highlights how rap depicts a dramatized reality, distancing (Black) artists from a media-produced public perception of criminality without trivializing the often-distressing environments these artists come from.[34] Political analyst Bakari Kitwana takes this analysis further. He argues that the 'gangsta' image (and therewith the image of all Black people) has been shaped because of the process of funding and producing black music. The fact that black artists are capitalized by mostly white culture industry serving mostly white 'consumer desires' and expectations of blackness.[35] In this sense, Baldwin's 'nigga as performance' is not as much an individual (maybe even artistic) choice of

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[31] See for instance: Eric Aliva, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Oakland 2004).
[32] Sides, "Straight Into Compton", 593.
[33] Ibidem, 598-602.
[34] Baldwin, "Black Empires, White Desires", 165-168.
[35] Bakari Kitwana, *The Rap on Gangsta Rap. Who Run It?: Gangsta Rap and Visions of Black Violence* (Chicago 1994) 14-23.

performed identity, but a mandate – or at least negotiation – imposed by white entrepreneurs and consumers. Sides, Baldwin, and Kitwana then, stress the performance of identities, the (mis)representations of those identities by the media, and the exploitation of these identities by entertainment industry. As I will illustrate later this chapter, Lamar also engages with the representation of 'Compton' identities by conceptualizing the Compton ghetto as both the stereotypically violent and criminal place it is presented as, as well as showing the possibility for benevolent individuals to spring from that place.

Ultimately, Compton is neither free of violence, crime, or other 'gangsterisms', nor is it solely that. Kendrick Lamar emerged from this background and it is this background that his music actively and explicitly portrays. I will argue that. I will show how these issues are explicit in Lamar's music by analyzing different aspects of Lamar's philosophy as expressed through his lyrics and public appearances. I will first discuss the intertwining narratives of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly*, after which I will explore Lamar's (almost exclusively multi-faceted) views on community and social issues, religion and spirituality, and culture industry. These views tie together, presenting himself as a good kid in a mad city, where the good kid is an analogy for the embrace of Christianity and the mad city is symbolized by both the Compton community and the rap industry. He portrays the embrace of Christianity as authentic and the behaviors and identities performed by the Compton community and the rap industry as inauthentic. With this, Lamar reinforces stereotypes on the African-American community and Hiphop culture, challenging these communities in order to induce resistance towards deep rooted social issues.

1.2 Narratives

The narratives of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly* play a central part in the untangling of Lamar's worldview. *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (m.A.A.d being an acronym for either 'my Angry Adolescence divided' or 'my Angels on Angel dust', according to Lamar) was aptly subtitled 'A Short Film by Kendrick Lamar', implying that the music production would feature narrative and vivid imagery.[36] [37] Lamar tells a pseudo-

[36] 'Angel Dust' is a slang term for the hallucinatory drug PCP.

biographical, non-chronologic story about his younger self struggling to 'make it out' of the impoverished, dangerous, and moreover, sinful ghetto he finds himself growing up in. The main story, told largely through voicemails and skits throughout the songs, revolves around a young Lamar taking his mother's van to go about meeting a girl named Sherane. Their relation starts off as a result of lust lasting over the summer. The fact that Sherane is from Paramount, a different suburb than Compton, however, becomes problematic as he gets halted by two males in black hoodies aggressively asking him where he's from. Apparently, these figures objected to Lamar's presence in what they see as their territory and they end up assaulting Lamar. As Lamar tells this stories to his 'homies', who throughout the album have been portrayed as careless, gang-affiliated youths on the way to a path of criminality and gangbanging, they decide to take revenge on the assaulters. A shootout commences, leaving the assaulters murdered, as well as Dave, one of Lamar's friends. The boys run off disoriented, torn between a yearning for revenge and exhaustion from the threatening environment that surrounds them. That is when they run into a wise woman, voiced by famous poet Maya Angelou, who guides them in performing The Sinner's Prayer from the Bible, marking it the start their 'new life' as newborn Christians. The album ends after displays of affection and wisdom from his parents, exploring the definition of authenticity (being 'real'), which could be perceived as a play on the commonly stated (and implicitly racist) idea of the dysfunctional Black family, congratulating Lamar on his successful attempt of getting into a professional music studio to record his music.[38] Lamar portrays his family as imperfect: his father can be heard yelling inebriated and his mother curses. However, as I will later show, the family is ultimately supportive and caring.

To Pimp A Butterfly (both a conscious play on legendary 1990s rapper Tupac Shakur's name and Harper Lee's classic 1960 novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*) sees Lamar struggling with his successes, resulting in what is called 'survivor's guilt' and depression. In this sense, *To Pimp a Butterfly* seems like a direct answer to *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, in which Lamar critiqued the community he's from, focused on Lamar's escape of the

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[37] LA Leakers, "Kendrick Lamar Breaks Down The Meaning Behind good kid, m.A.A.D city w/ The L.A. Leakers" (version October 19 2012) https://youtu.be/YlFL32aeW28 (May 6 2017).

[38] For more information on perceptions of the Black family, see: Robert Staples, "Towards a Sociology of the Black Family: A Theoretical and Methodological Assessment", in: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 33 (February 1971) 2, 119-138.

locality and its negativities. In it, Lamar shaped an image of Compton as a backward city, driven by violence, crime, and sin, but moreover, he showed that he was able to transcend that situation, making him *better* than people still in the Compton ghetto. This tension between a desire of transcending local realities while maintaining close relations to those realities and more importantly, the people inhabiting those realities, is (as I mentioned earlier in this paper) a common one in commercial rap music, yet commonly not as explicit as on *To Pimp a Butterfly* – particularly, the song "Momma". The concept is not connected through narrative, but rather through recurring themes (culture industry, racism, Black depression, survivor's guilt), characters ('Lucy', as in Lucifer, and Uncle Sam, symbolizing the devil and the United States, cooperating in order to achieve Lamar's financial downfall), and a poem directed towards slain rapper Tupac Shakur, with whom Lamar reconstructed an interview at the end of the album's closer "Mortal Man". The album is as much a celebration of Black culture as it is a call for a united stance for Black people towards their oppressors, a critique of culture industry exploiting Black artists, an exploration of Lamar's survivor's guilt and depression, and Lamar's (self-)proclamation of a prophet status.

1.3 Lamar's worldview

Now that I have presented the narratives of Lamar's two most important records, we can take a look at the philosophy and persona he expresses throughout these records and the way he expresses them. As mentioned, I will focus on the expression of his views on his community and social issues, religion and spirituality, and culture industry and commercialism, as these are crucial to understanding Lamar's appeal as (more than) an artist.

1.3.1 Community and social issues

As shown in the explanation of the narratives of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Lamar paints different pictures of his community, implying a multifaceted look on the place he is from. On one hand, Lamar describes Compton as a place of threat, violence, and sin in which he as an innocent, well meaning individual struggles to maintain his innocence in his struggle for survival. On the other hand,

Compton is characterized as a *Heimat*, a space containing ideas, practices, materials, and people Lamar truly loves – a part of him that is truly his. These ideas are usually portrayed as co-existing as opposed to conflicted. I will illustrate this by firstly analyzing the way Lamar constructs the ghetto in *good kid m.A.A.d city*, after which I will discuss the continuities and discontinuities in this conceptualization as expressed through *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

The first time Lamar introduced a major global audience to his sophisticated relationship to his neighborhood was in *good kid, m.A.A.d city.* In the opening sequence "Sherane a.k.a. Master Splinter's Daughter". Lamar raps:

> It's deep rooted, the music of being young and dumb
> It's never muted; in fact, it's much louder where I'm from[39]

Lamar differentiates his neighborhood – it's safe to assume that he is referring to Compton and the surrounding ghettos – from other places by addressing a lack of rational, adult decision-making, disguised in youthful behaviors, expressed through and kept alive with the music stemming from these places: rap music. Important to notice is the fact that Lamar raps this after proclaiming his senses of lust and sin even in the face of threat; Sherane, the girl central to the album's narrative, mentions that she is not from Compton, but Paramount, an area that has been claimed territory by an exclusive group of people as Lamar's storytelling would later make clear. In other words, in the first song of Lamar's major label debut, he already paints a neighborhood whose cultural character is historically defined by ideas of youth, space, race, and place, threat, ignorance, and (Christian) sin.

This is amplified through the album's third song and first single "Backseat Freestyle". The song has Lamar boasting his ego by claiming his desire for three things in particular: money, power, and respect. If that is not granted to him, he will not shy away from killing those who deny it to him with a gun. The lyrics state: "All my life I want money and power / Respect my mind, or die from lead shower." At first glance, the song seems like 'typical' rap music bravado, covering topics like violence, sex, masculinity,

[39] Kendrick Lamar, "Sherane a.k.a. Master Splinter's Daughter", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).

and respect, all of which are stereotypical postures in rap songs. Yet, the 'skit'[40] introducing the song on the album puts the song in a different perspective. 'K-Dot, get in the car, nigga! (...) Nigga, I got a pack of blacks and a beats cd. Get your freestyles ready!'[41] To clarify, K-Dot was Lamar's stage name before he denounced it in his song "Kendrick Lamar". 'Blacks' refers to the Black & Mild cigar brand, commonly used for mixing the tobacco with marijuana. 'Beats cd' refers to a compact disc containing beats, Hip-Hop music without lyrics, here used by young people to freestyle over. Freestyling is a form of rapping where a beat is played in a social setting, then having an emcee rap either pre-written or improvised lines over it. In this light, "Backseat Freestyle" does not refer to a 25-year-old Lamar's cravings for money, power, and respect, but a 17-year old K-Dot performing Baldwin's 'nigga' identity, including stereotypical desires and behaviors.[42] That is to say the lyrics are framed by the skit in which the K-dot figure, Kendrick's younger self – is invited into the car to "freestyle"- performing a free improvised piece of music that is self-consciously rap – freestyle – relying on the signifiers of identity identified by Baldwin. Lamar seems to shine attention on the performed nature of Black males through (gangsta rap) by constructing behavior and later deconstructing that by placing that identity in a context of social pressure, ultimately proving those behaviors and the identity performing them *inauthentic*.

The follow-up song "The Art of Peer Pressure" confirms that stereotypical identity and behaviors are inauthentic to Lamar; Lamar presents himself drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, performing violent and criminal behavior, and ultimately exerting a planned robbery, in a context of peer pressure. He contrasts these behaviours with his usual behaviors, which are innocent in nature:

> Smokin' on the finest dope – ay-ay-ay-ah
> Drank until I can't no more – ay-ay-ay-ah
> Really I'm a sober soul
> But I'm with the homies right now
> And we askin' for no favors – rush a nigga quick

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[40] A skit is a piece of recorded conversation or monologue, often (but not exclusively) staged, commonly used between songs in rap music in order to provide insight or context.

[41] Kendrick Lamar, "Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).

[42] Baldwin, "Black Empires, White Desires", 165-168.

Then laugh about it later – ay-ay-ay-ah
Really I'm a peacemaker
But I'm with the homies right now.[43]

'Dope' is a slang word for marijuana. 'The homies' is slang for a set group of friends, usually represented as a 'posse'.[44] 'Askin' for no favors' and 'rush a nigga quick' refer to the persuasiveness and power exertion of the group. In other words, when the group is disrespected, they will not cower from using violence to gain respect. Lamar shows a structural obstruction of innocence through the normalization and trivialization of what he considers immoral actions. Ending sentences in 'ay-ay-ay-ah', filling open spaces that may normally leave room for thought with something that either represents laughter or simple joy, enforces this sentiment. In the song "Poetic Justice", Lamar raps: 'if I told you that a flower bloomed in a dark room, would you trust it?', further building on the idea that a structural immorality may prevent beauty and innocence (represented by the flower) from existing.

Ultimately, these lyrics show Lamar battling structural 'wrongs' in his 'hood, trying to maintain innocence in a place crawling with immorality and sin. This culminates in the two songs central to the album: "good kid" and (unsurprisingly) "m.A.A.d city". In the former Lamar identifies two different threats: one from inside of the community, and one from the outside. The threat from the inside of the community is personified in anonymous males – 'he' not being a specific person or group, but representing more of a filtered mindset, ideology, or conceptualization *based on* actual experiences – and one which views Lamar's innocence with suspicion:

No better picture to paint than me walking from Bible study
And called his homies 'cause he said he noticed my face
From a function that taken place
They was wonderin' if I bang
Step on my neck and get blood on your Nike checks[45]

[43] Kendrick Lamar, "The Art of Peer Pressure", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).
[44] See: Murray Forman *The 'Hood Comes First!: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown 2002) for more information on posses representation.
[45] Kendrick Lamar, "good kid", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).

'A function that taken place' most likely refers to a conflict between gang members. 'Banging' is short for 'gangbanging', being the active participation in violence and criminality exerted by gangs. 'Nike checks' is slang for the 'Swoosh' Nike brand logo that is typically displayed on Nike shoes. The vagueness of the caller's identity in this section creates a pervasive sense of threat – anyone could be looking suspicious towards Lamar's behavior, giving them more or less free credit to act on any move Lamar would make. Furthermore, the fact that Lamar is being observed with that sort of suspicion enforces a feeling of paranoia – amplified by renowned musician Pharrell Williams' stress inducing production – since even the innocence of the most innocent person in that area (through the album, Lamar keeps on proving himself to be just that) does not seem to be self-evident. So the threat from inside the community is the attitude that views other community members with suspicion and refuses to permit them to move outside of an implied world of violence and gang life.

The second threat comes from police officers are suspicious of Lamar's intentions without any susceptible wrongdoing on Lamar's end:

> Everytime you [a personified police officer] clock in the morning I feel you wanna just kill
> My innocence while ignoring my purpose to persevere
> As a better person
> (...)
> And you ask "lift up your shirt" 'cause you wonder if a tattoo
> Of affiliation can make it a pleasure to put me through
> Gang files, but that don't matter, because the matter is racial profile
> I heard 'em chatter "he's probably young, but I know that he's down"[46]

Lamar discusses the perception of Black youths by the police, showing how stereotyping of Compton youths leads to racial profiling and the arrest and terrorization of innocent Black males, while simultaneously providing a Black youth's perspective on the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). In 1992, riots broke out in Compton after four officers were acquitted of using excessive force with the beating of an African-American male by the name of Rodney King, after whom the riots were eventually named. The

[46] Kendrick Lamar, "m.A.A.d city", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).

riots protested the unequally violent treatment of African-Americans by the LAPD. The riots were a culmination of a sentiment that had been present for a longer time, also audible in Hiphop, most notably with N.W.A.'s hit single "Fuck Tha Police" from 1988.[47] Lamar conceptualizes this historical continuity by providing a personal example of racial profiling, translating negative experiences of young African-American males to publics that may not be conscious of such experiences.

"m.A.A.d city" projects the sentiments of paranoia, chaos, and stress even further, initially portraying a conflict of Lamar's corrupted neighborhood vs. Lamar, after which he complicates the problem by highlighting his participation in the immorality of the environment he inhabits – either way, Lamar addresses structural problems within the ghetto, created or at least *maintained* by people within that ghetto. "m.A.A.d city" most viciously represents Compton as a one-dimensional place of wrongdoings: violence takes place on 'every porch', Lamar hears gunshots 'everytime [he is] in the streets', and the 'whole city' seems to plot against him. Additionally, the presence of MC Eiht, a rapper from Compton's Most Wanted, one of the first famous Compton rap groups, reaffirms the longevity and circularity of oppressive environment of unwritten rules and codes induced by gang activity by addressing the same drugs, violence, and criminality as Lamar over a nostalgic, '80s reminiscing beat, creating the sense that hardly anything has changed since the Rodney King riots. Ultimately, Lamar points out the corrupting nature of Compton's 'street politics', abstaining anyone from these places from absolute innocence. Lamar raps,

> If I told you I had killed a nigga at sixteen, would you believe me
> Or see me to be innocent Kendrick you seen in the streets?[48]

after which, at the end of the verse, he announces: 'Compton *made* me an Angel on Angel dust', describing Compton as the toxic polluting his virtuous Self. It could be argued Lamar does not distance himself from sin, but from blame, expressing Compton's structural internal issues as a main cause for its own social problems. Although,

[47] Clarence Lusane, "Rap, Race, and Politics", in: Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, (ed.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York 2004) 351-362. 357-359.

[48] Kendrick Lamar, "m.A.A.d city", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).

combination with the two threats displayed in "good kid", Compton's problems are created and maintained from the outside as well as the inside. The problems one can solve, however, are the problem that one self has created, which is why Lamar decides to focus on criticism of his community. Lamar finds a solution in the idea of self-love, which I will elaborate in the following paragraphs.

Further down the album, Lamar's stance towards his community grows more ambiguous. In the first part of the song "Sing About, I'm Dying of Thirst", Lamar raps from the perspectives of one of his friends, Dave's mourning brother, and a local prostitute. With this, Lamar humanizes Compton, invoking a sense of empathy with the listener with which he shows investment in and care for Compton, transporting that towards the listener, transcending Compton from a place of pure malignance and sin to a place that holds the deeply (structurally) troubled, yet well-intentioned and *strong* subaltern whose story needs to be told. This is most striking in the first verse of the song, where the character Lamar performs explains his affiliation with the Bloods gang, after which he says: 'and if I die before your album drop...', followed by three quick, clean gunshots, silencing the boy's narrative and leaving space for the beat to breathe (and the listener to be shocked), resolving in the song's hook: 'promise that you will sing about me'.

In the last verse of the first part of "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst", Lamar raps from his own perspective, presenting the people in Compton as his main motivation for creating his music:

> And you're right, your brother [Dave] was a brother to me
> And your sister's situation [the prostitute's sister whom Lamar had rapped about on *Section .80*] was the one that pulled me
> In direction to speak of something
> That is realer than the TV screen[49]

Not only does Lamar show love and care for his neighborhood as a driving factor for the (relatively) serious contents of his music, he also characterizes these stories as 'real', or *authentic* in opposition to media outlet (symbolized by the TV screen). At first glance this seems to refer to falsely negative and stereotypical representation of Black people

[49] Kendrick Lamar, "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst", in: *good kid, m.A.Ad city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).

through (news) media, or, more superficial, a critique on modern (commercial) television's dramatization and detachment from reality. Yet, combined with Lamar's previously elaborated stance on authenticity and performativity of rappers, Lamar addresses the discrepancy between the way commercial rap artists represent themselves, therewith *distinguishing* himself from other rappers, proving his music as more authentic than that of other rappers without distancing himself from the Black community. If anything, this representation makes Lamar appear closer in touch with his community in comparison to other artists.

Thus far I have elaborated on two ways Lamar represents his community in *good kid, m.A.A.d city*; as a place corrupted by gang violence and sin; and as a place he loves and cares for, containing stories that need be told. These two, as mentioned, have been co-existing rather than conflicting up to this point. This changes on the second to last song on *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, "Real", where Lamar, after showing the affections of and for a generalized male and female in two respective verses, resorts to a question of self-love, repeating the question 'what's love got to do with it when you don't love yourself?' The conflict becomes most in clear in the sentence 'I love so much, I love when love hurts', making clear that loving his community is not evident, or without complications.[50] He elaborates on this in the last verse, where he reflects on himself and his own sense of self-love:

> But what love got to do with it if I don't love myself
> To the point I should hate everything I do love
> (...)
> Should I hate street credibility I'm talkin' 'bout?
> Hating all money, power, respect in my will
> Or hating the fact that none of that shit make me *real*?[51]

Lamar presents his inner conflict as a natural position of affection that has potential negative consequences for his own well-being. He asks rhetorical questions of what he 'should' love or hate, implying ambiguity in his ultimately expressing that he should hate 'the fact' that none of the conflicting affections he describes provide him with the

[50] These sentiments are further explored in *To Pimp a Butterfly*'s "u" and "i".
[51] Kendrick Lamar, "Real", in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012). Italics are mine.

authenticity he aims to reach, resorting to a 'hate the game, not the player' mentality. Self-love, in the perspective of this song, then, is holding a critical stance towards what or whom one loves in relation to the ways in which that affects one's own well-being. This idea of self-love has historically been used as a prominent act of resistance in African-American history. For instance, influential African American poet and scholar Audre Lorde (1934-1992) is known for her theories on Black womanhood, advocating the definition of self in order to prevent definition by others. This allows people in repressed positions to take control over the way they are defined, resisting defintion and repression by others.[52] Additionally, this could relate to Lamar's strong sense of faith in Christianity, as I will explain later in this chapter. This interpretation could also be applied to Kendrick's view on the culture industry, which I will also be addressed later.

"Compton" (featuring Dr. Dre), *good kid, m.A.A.d city*'s final track, Lamar shows unambiguous praise for the city, boasting himself and his city in more conventional ways; Kendrick raps about Compton's drugs, murders, criminality, and gang violence with pride – as if he never found it problematic in the first place. At the end of the song, first a rewinding tape recorder is heard, then Lamar saying: 'Mom, I finna [slang for 'going to'] use the van real quick, be back in fifteen minutes!', after which a door closes rapidly.[53] This completes the album's narrative, creating a full circle, with a special position for "Compton". The song could either be seen as a celebration of its community despite its complexities and troubles, or, similar to "Backseat Freestyle", a sixteen-year-old Lamar performing Baldwin's 'nigga' identity through love for his city as the capitol of gangsta rap. This again *shows* the complexity of Lamar's relationship with his community without explicitly having to mention that or in what ways 'loving [the community] is complicated'.[54]

As a commercial and (therefore) popular artist, Lamar has found it difficult to maintain this sense of nuance and complexity in a narrative – especially in pop music, where narrative is not necessarily a main characteristic or requirement. This is not to

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[52] Keith D. Leonard, ""Which Me Will Survive": Rethinking Identity, Reclaiming Audre Lorde", in: *Callaloo* 35 (2012) 3, 758–777.
[53] Kendrick Lamar, "Compton", by Kendrick Lamar and Dr. Dre, in: *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2012).
[54] Kendrick Lamar, "u", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).

say that the narrative Lamar laid out was completely ignored; in fact, it was highly praised. However, the plurality and multiplicity of the narrative got lost in the major success the album received. Lamar sensed that *good kid, m.A.A.d city* was largely seen as the story of another Black boy trying to escape 'the ghetto', finding much awarded redemption and solace. In fact, Lamar felt like he owed that to himself: he himself had negatively portrayed his own community in order to gain individual success, instead of sharing his newly gained wealth his community. This refers back to idea of 'the streets vs. the suites' mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, implying that conceptualizations of impoverished urban environments (symbolized by 'the streets') can mobilize individuals to better socio-economic positions and spaces (symbolized by 'the suites'). This can become problematic in light of financially empowering impoverished communities, since the communities have to be stereotyped in order to financially transcend the individual creating the conceptualizations, mostly benefiting the artist and the corporation behind the artist while potentially harming the community.[55]

Moreover, Lamar felt detached from his community, as if he deliberately chose to transcend his hometown because of his relative superiority.[56] This sense of 'survivor's guilt' is not uncommon for artists (most notably rappers) coming from 'underprivileged' socioeconomic backgrounds, yet it is unique to center an album around this sentiment, especially when making statements on social issues in the way Lamar did with *To Pimp a Butterfly*. *To Pimp a Butterfly* saw Kendrick returning to Compton, searching for (and finding) reattachment; the video for the album's lead single "King Kunta", referencing a the largely fictional slave Kunta Kinte from the 1970s television show *Roots*, shows Lamar in a stereotypical setting of harmony with the community. The video shows a large group of (exclusively) Black people standing behind Lamar with tuned muscle cars, dancing, laughing, and partying along to the song. For a brief moment, in the background a voice can be heard: 'K-Dot back in the hood, nigga!', most explicitly confirming Lamar's return to his roots.[57] The song draws a parallel between Kunta Kinte and himself – by

[55] Negus, "The Business of Rap", 532-534.
[56] Clique, "Kendrick Lamar: How to Clique a Butterfly" (version: 11 June 2015) https://youtu.be/yndiXwJ5yEM (28 July 2017).
[57] Kendrick Lamar, "King Kunta", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).

placing one of the best known slaves in African-American history in the position of a king, he expresses the ability to empower oneself through self-boasting.

The songs on *To Pimp a Butterfly* that are most notably about community are “u”, “Alright”, “Momma”, and “i”. In these songs we can find Lamar stressing the ambiguity of his feelings towards his community and turning these feelings inward, ultimately reaffirming his self-induced idea that love for that community starts with love of self. “u” sees Lamar rapping from the perspective of his community, or, more likely, Lamar talking to himself interpreting what a Compton resident would criticize him for – ultimately becoming an exercise of self-loathing. Yet, in light of *good kid, m.A.A.d city*’s main sentiment of Lamar’s troublesome relationship with his home, the hook repeating the line ‘loving you is complicated’ can be interpreted as either Lamar struggling with his own sense of self-love because of ‘failing’ his community, or as a direct acknowledgement of the complexity in loving his community, explaining why he might not have been there to witness or support. With this, Lamar presents another dimension to his already multi-faceted stance on Compton.

The song “Alright”, however, sheds a more progressive and hopeful light on the troubles of the Compton community, and even broader, the Black community:

> We been hurt, been down before
> Nigga, when our pride was low
> Lookin’ at the world, like ‘where do we go’?
> And we hate po-po[58]
> [They] wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho’
> I’m at the preacher’s door
> My knees getting weak and my gun might blow
> But we gon’ be alright[59]

The song is a direct reference to New Jersey rap group Naughty By Nature’s 1991 hit single “Everything’s Gonna Be Alright”, which sampled Jamaican reggae legend Bob Marley’s hit single of the same name. The irony in Naughty By Nature’s song lies in its insincere use of the sample as they rap about their perceived captivity within the

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[58] ‘Po-po’ is slang for the police.
[59] Kendrick Lamar, “Alright”, in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).

socioeconomically disadvantaged communities the rappers were born and raised in, resorting to a fairly common sense of nihilism.[60] Lamar flips that script by confidently stating that 'we' (the Black community) will survive and overcome institutionalized racism – as long as it is within God's will. American scholar Nick De Genova has argued in the '90s that Hip Hop is ultimately nihilistic, thriving on the ideology that change is futile and nothing truly matters, representing a widespread notion of purposelessness.[61] Scholars like Marcyliena Morgan have later challenged this notion by shifting focus towards Hip Hop's constructive purpose granting potential.[62] Lamar summarizes a long history of the Black community struggling to reach equity, overcoming the aftermath of Western imperialism and slavery, provoking a sense of segregation with the unanswered question 'looking at the world, like "where do we go?"', which simultaneously calls for a united stance within this community that should be ready and able to fight for their rights.

This united stance was largely achieved in the summer of 2015, when, after extended media coverage of unjustified murder of multiple Black boys and men in different locations across the United States, a group of hundreds of people started chanting the lines cited above during a Black Lives Matter protest at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio. Other Black Lives Matter protests over the United States started using the chant as well and "Alright" became a 'protester's anthem'.[63] The Grammy nominated video for the song Lamar had touched on social issues before, but never had his music actively been used as a tool for the pursuit of social change.

As professional music blog Mic pointed out in a longread on how "Alright" become close to an anthem for the Black Lives Matter movement, the 'sudden' praise for Lamar's music is not self-evident. Lamar had previously been criticized by the movement due to one of the album's leading singles "The Blacker the Berry". In the song, Lamar presents himself (or the persona he performs) as 'the biggest hypocrite of 2015', claiming that no matter how devout his loyalty to civil rights activists such as Marcus

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[60] Morgan, ""Nuthin' But a G-Thang"", 189-191.

[61] See: Nick De Genova, "Gangster rap and nihilism in Black America", in: *Social Text* 43 (1995) 89–132.

[62] I will elaborate on this in a later section.

[63] Jamilah King, "The Improbable Story of How Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" Became a Protest Anthem" (version: 11 February 2016) https://mic.com/articles/134764/the-improbable-story-of-how-kendrick-lamar-s-alright-became-a-protest-anthem#.yrJCRtnA3 (28 July 2017).

Garvey, the Black Panthers, or even the Black Lives Matter movement is, the cause and intention will be diminished by black-on-black violence:

> So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the streets
> When gangbanging made me kill a nigga blacker than me?
> Hypocrite![64]

Trayvon Martin was a high school student from Miami, Florida who was fatally shot by police officer George Zimmerman in February 2012, inciting protest marches.[65] Lamar had later been criticized by the Black Lives Matter movement for ignoring institutionalized racism and historical systematic oppression, eventually 'blaming the victim'. After all, it could be read from these sentences, the Black community is as guilty of and responsible for the community's social issues as the police officer unjustly murdering Trayvon Martin because of gang violence and, more importantly, a severe lack of self-respect.

In this section, the discussion has illustrated how Kendrick Lamar represents his community as both an oppressive place polluted by gang violence and a home for himself and people like him, aiming to show the complex situations in which the social issues in his neighborhood are circularly maintained. In historical tradition of reclaiming identities by seminal figures such as Audre Lorde, Lamar presents self-love as a solution for overcoming institutional racism. This institutional racism, however, is also a double-edged sword in the music industry, as I will show in the next sub-chapter. Damaging behaviors, as Lamar represents them, are exploited and amplified through the music industry, negatively influencing the Black community. Lamar blames this on corporate industry exploiting stereotypical behavior for revenue, as well as on artists performing these stereotypes of sex, violence, and commercialism.

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[64] Kendrick Lamar, "The Blacker the Berry", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).
[65] Matt Williams, "Trayvon Martin protests being held in more than 100 US cities" (version: 20 July 2013) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/20/trayvon-martin-protests-us-cities (28 July 2017). Martin's death has since regularly been referenced in (Black) music from the likes of Frank Ocean, Wyclef Jean, and Yasiin Bey (formerly known as Mos Def).

1.3.3 Music industry and commercialism

A third prominent topic Lamar frequently discusses in his music is the (rap) music industry. Lamar's critique of the of the music industry is most explicit in *To Pimp a Butterfly*, where industry critique forms the main thread of the album's narrative, showing how Black culture and Black artists are 'pimped'[66] to suit marketing needs, eventually creating wealth for (white owned) labels and corporations, while sustaining problematic stereotypical rap imagery, preventing larger improvements in the socio-economic situations of Black ghettos. This, however, as I have touched on briefly in other sections of this chapter, is in Lamar's depiction recycled and maintained within Black ghettos themselves where young people perform 'gangsta' identities on a daily basis. These selectively filtered behaviors then, *become* Black culture as well as – more importantly – the *perception* of Black culture. I argue that with his two-sided critique of the rap music industry, Lamar simultaneously debunks and confirms Black stereotypes and ghettocentricity through the commercial distribution of ghettocentric products.[67] This is vital to Lamar's philosophy of the ways in which emancipation and (Black) socio-economic progress should manifest, as it shows fault on two sides, putting the initiative of social change in the hands of Black people. This can be seen as empowerment, as it provides 'the subaltern' with *agency*, countering the (academic) idea that Hip Hop is inherently nihilistic.

The first time Lamar critiques the rap industry in the albums I am discussing is in *good kid, m.A.A.d city*'s hit single "Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe". In this song, Lamar criticizes conceptualizations of rap behaviors, more than aiming at rappers specifically, more commonly known as 'beef'. Lamar boasts his own authenticity while doubting the authenticity of other rappers:

> I'm trying to keep it alive and not compromise the feeling we love
> You're trying to keep it deprived and only co-sign what radio does
> And I'm looking right past you
> You live in a world, we live in a world

[66] 'Pimped' as in exploited, taken advantage of in order to acquire wealth for oneself.
[67] As I will argue later in this thesis, this is not perceived as such by national or global media.

On two different axles[68]

Lamar opposes himself to other rappers in the industry by invoking the image of two different axles in this world, depicting his art as authentic and undistorted, whereas the constructed mindset and behaviors Lamar mentions are presented as commercialized and therefore untrue. Additionally, Lamar shows his ability to see through commercialized and constructed behavior, openly preferring his own style of what is called 'conscious rap' to rap that is made for radio, sometimes degradingly referred to as 'pop rap'.

On "Money Trees", Lamar discusses the influence of rappers on young males in the Black ghetto. In the skit closing the song preluding "Money Trees", "The Art of Peer Pressure", Young Jeezy is quoted, showing how teenagers aim to replicate the (often stereotypical) behaviors expressed by rappers through their music. 'What's that Jeezy song say again, nigga?' one of Lamar's friends asked. The group answers: 'Last time I checked I was the man on these streets!' 'That's right,' the initiator replies, 'I'm trying to be the nigga in these streets.' Herewith, Lamar briefly shows the desire of young males to acquire power status in their communities, as often exemplified by 'the streets'. Connotations associated with such a power status are drugs, violence, and gangs among others. This is amplified in "Money Trees", where the line 'dreams of living lives like rappers do' is recurring, juxtaposed with display of wealth, sex, and gang violence. Los Angeles rapper E-40 is also quoted, followed by the ironic 'Earl Stevens [E-40's birth name] had us thinking rational', portraying how rap songs can invoke a sense of truth and normality, even though Lamar (now) sees that the behaviors and identities performed by the rapper are selective display of dramatized realities. For the youths, however, these become goals. Black ghetto experiences, from this perspective, are not necessarily communicated by rappers through their songs, but *create* experiences and understandings for people outside of and within that ghetto alike.

After these broadly aimed conceptual critiques, Lamar turned to contemporary rappers specifically on a feature of Detroit rapper Big Sean's 2013 single "Control".

[68] Lamar, "Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe".

Lamar's verse shows him boasting about dominating the rap game on both coasts[69], after which he starts listing contemporary rappers:

> I'm usually homeboys with the same niggas I'm rhyming with
> But this is Hip Hop and y'all niggas should know what time it is
> And that goes for Jermaine Cole, Big K.R.I.T., Wale
> (...)
> Big Sean, Jay Electron [both on the song this verse stems from], Tyler[, the Creator], Mac Miller
> I got love for y'all, but I'm trying to murder you niggas
> Trying to make sure your core fans never heard of you niggas
> They don't wanna hear not one more noun or verb from you niggas
> What is competition? I'm trying to raise the bar high[70]

Lamar challenges contemporary rappers – eleven in total specifically, but presumably aiming for the non-mentioned rappers as well, as a reference is this verse could be seen as a symbol for influence – to strive for lyrical greatness, mostly referring to the fact that the rappers mentioned frequently release music that perpetuate the above mentioned stereotypes and performed identities. Lamar urges for a change in rap music, focusing on lyricism and competition (conveyed through lyricism) in order to keep a quality standard. This is highly associated with the idea of 'conscious rap', which addresses social issues as (seemingly and stereotypically) opposed to advocating gang violence, substance abuse, wealth display, and sexuality.

Most importantly, the verse aimed to make rappers rethink their influence on Hip Hop culture and encourage them to turn that into something productive. Lamar has openly stated several times that this was the core question behind the making of *To Pimp a Butterfly*:

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[69] Historically, West Coast and East Coast rappers have had feuds, each expressing certain local identities, adding load to Lamar's line 'I'm the King of New York / West Coast, East Coast, I juggle 'em both'. Currently, rap has become more eclectic, mixing localities, genres, and styles.

[70] Kendrick Lamar, "Control" by Big Sean, Kendrick Lamar, and Jay Electronica (G.O.O.D Music 2013).

> I think my music is always conflicted. (...) The confliction of today is... How can I use my leadership? You know, knowing what to do with it, for better or for worse. That's the confliction, you know. 'Cause you come from this place of negativity or you come from this place of not having nothing or following people you look up to and now you're taking the lead for thousands of people around the world, now that right there brings a whole lotta change. So that's the confliction. Do I utilize it in a negative way? And that's the core of this album.[71]

In this 2015 interview with French music blog Clique, Lamar addresses the influence rappers can have on kids in Black ghettos, showing doubt in the ways he emerged as a rapper. With *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Lamar gained the power to influence; with *To Pimp a Butterfly* he reflects, questioning whether he used his power for good, most likely referring to the ambiguous way he represented his community. As I have shown, (a part of the) blame lies within the community in Lamar's philosophy. With *To Pimp a Butterfly*, a change of pace is seen. Despite removing responsibility from Black people completely, Lamar does address exploitation of Black people by the music industry, inspiring stereotypical 'gangsta' behavior that can be marketed through the marketable idea of 'ghettocentricity', therefore maintaining and reinforcing social issues such as criminality and violence in Black ghettos and systematic racism.

To Pimp a Butterfly's opener "Wesley's Theory" starts off with this critique. From silence, the crackling of a needle on a record is heard and from the background a voice fades in, singing: 'every nigger is a star'. It's a sample from Jamaican reggae singer Boris Gardiner's 1973 soundtrack "Every Nigger Is a Star". The line has a double meaning. Firstly, and most obviously, it is a show of affection for Black people, endearing the once singularly toxic n-word. Secondly, and more specific to the context of *To Pimp a Butterfly*, it shows how the entertainment industry envisions potential products in Black people. Socio-economic mobility is not common for people from Black ghettos, yet rap is commonly seen as a tool for 'transcending' the current situation of individuals. "Wesley's Theory" shows Lamar rapping from the perspective of a younger self, before he acquired a record deal. He is planning to 'act a fool', live a life filled with parties, materialism, promiscuity, and violence, yet promises in the second verse to 'put the Compton Swap

[71] Clique, 'Kendrick Lamar: How To Clique A Butterfly' (version: June 11 2015) https://youtu.be/yndiXwJ5yEM (April 8 2017).

Meet at the White House', symbolizing his aim to help his community move upward socially. As the academic (and public) discussion of 'the streets vs. the suites' points out, the fact that the well-being of one individual's situation improves while empowering (white owned) corporate industry keeping institutional racism and oppression in tact is problematic. Lamar expresses to see this struggle, aiming to solve social issues instead of producing wealth for corporate industry.

"Wesley's Theory" also introduces a recurring character: Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam, as often personifying the United States, is portrayed as a greedy and deceiving figure that will express a desire to help, but ends up profiting himself:

> What you want? You a house, you a car?
> Forty acres and a mule?
> A piano, a guitar?
> Anything, see my name is Uncle Sam
> I'm your dog
> Motherfucker, you can live at the mall[72]

Slaves that were freed after the Civil War were promised ownership over forty acres of land and a mule in order to make a living for themselves and being able to properly participate in society.[73] In the end, however, these repayments were denied.[74] Furthermore, Black people are steered to an entrance into the entertainment industry, not only making money for the American government through taxes, but also inspiring a form of consumerism, to the extent that Uncle Sam invites Lamar to live at the mall so he can buy any- and everything he sees.

In the follow-up song, "For Free? (Interlude)", the music industry is personified by a nameless woman who keeps degrading Lamar, showing the ways Black artists are challenged to work harder for the industry through competition with other rappers. Lamar reacts by stating that 'this dick ain't free', making a rough and powerful stance

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[72] Kendrick Lamar, "Wesley's Theory", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).
[73] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Truth Behind '40 acres and a mule'" (version: 7 January 2013) http://www.theroot.com/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule-1790894780 (28 July 2017).
[74] Some activists, such as rapper Killer Mike, still advocate for a repayment of a sort.

against exploitation by the industry.[75] With free jazz running over the background, Lamar spurts his demands in a dizzying verse, showing that the industry does not have power over his artistry or his persona, again touching on authenticity. The industry reacts with 'Imma get my Uncle Sam to fuck you up, you ain't no king!', showing the tight relation between the United States (and all its oppressing, racist, and capitalist connotations) and the entertainment industry, expressing that when a potential career in this industry fails – N.B., earlier presented as one of the only ways for minorities to gain upward social mobility – there is no social safety net.[76] One can work for the industry and make a better living for oneself; or lose it all.

"Institutionalized", then, provides more of a solution than an addressing of problems. The hook repeats advice by Lamar's 'grandma', saying: 'shit don't change until you get up and wash your ass, nigga'. Therewith, one of Lamar's key solutions to social issues comes to the surface: *agency*. Now he has talked about social issues, it is time for him to be active in that situation, inducing change himself. This is amplified in the second verse, telling the story of how Lamar took a childhood friend to the Black Entertainment Television Awards (one of the more prestigious award shows focused solely on Black music) and seeing how all these Black artists have made proper livings for themselves, flaunting it by wearing jewelry and showing up in luxury cars, while his childhood friend is still living in an economically troubled environment. With this, Lamar shows insight in the situation, implying that he himself and rappers in general can induce social change. In other words, by pointing out the factors of agency and initiative, Lamar aims to advocate for change from within, solving threat from outside.

In conclusion, Lamar's view on the industry is a double-edged sword. On one hand, Black artists have represented performed behaviors and identities that are still being copied by the youths that look up to those rappers as role models, ultimately negatively influencing situations in Black ghetto. On the other hand, the entertainment industry provides a tool for social mobility, but their main interest lies in entrepreneurship for the (white owned) corporation, maintaining and reinforcing institutionalized racism and oppression. The problem, then, is a complex interaction, a negotiation of sorts, as opposed a one-way street, of which the solution lies in the

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[75] Kendrick Lamar, "For Free? (Interlude)", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).
[76] Lamar, "For Free? (Interlude)".

willingness of Black artists to speak and act on social issues. With all of this, Lamar reinforces and debunks stereotypes about rappers simultaneously, ultimately urging for artists to stand up against social injustice, improving the situations in the socio-economically troubled localities they came from.

1.3.2 Religion and Spirituality

Historically, religion has played a substantial role in African-American history. One of the more conventional ways for Black people to rise to fame was either through affiliation with the Black Church or direct relation to someone affiliated with the Black Church.[77] Furthermore, a multitude of religions, commonly not singular, has been expressed through Hip Hop. Therefore, faith in Hip Hop has been commonly referred to as 'spirituality'; artists have seemed to express idiosyncratic relationships to the spiritual, taking elements from Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism among others in order to convey. This reinforces the idea that Hip Hop is not bound specific (religious) institutions, but rather portrays (constructed) individual experience that converse with conventions and traditions, shaping conceptions on these.

Lamar's relation to spirituality, however, does relate to a singular institutionalized version of Christianity. Lamar refers to his faith as exclusively Christian, referencing the Bible subliminally as well explicitly. I will focus on the larger narrative of Lamar's spirituality as expressed through the album narratives of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly*. As mentioned, I will show Lamar's self-announced development from newborn Christian to prophet, placing Christianity at the center of his philosophy, laying bare the preaching nature of his projects.

good kid, m.A.A.d city starts off with the Sinner's prayer from the Bible, the opening words being somewhat sheepishly spoken by a group of young men: 'Lord God, I come to you a sinner and I humbly repent for my sins.' The skit is a flash-forward to the outro to the song "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst", but in the

[77] Cornel West, "Martin v. Malcolm: Prophetic Christianity and Prophetic Islam", Lecture, Introduction to African American Studies from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, April 12th 2017.

context of the album's opener, it is more an announcement for what to expect and, moreover, symbolic and explanatory for the album narrative. In this light, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* becomes a personal journey to individual salvation: Lamar is confessing his sins (drugs, criminality, lust, among others) in order to absolve from them and continue a life on a 'righteous' path.

However, Lamar's prayer reaches, whether intentionally or not, beyond a personal choice of lifestyle. Ultimately, Lamar does not only show his individual salvation – a safe haven in a stressful environment – but that listeners in similar situations can find this salvation, too. The second part of "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst" shows Lamar and his friends running from the shootout that left their friend Dave and, not unimportantly, Dave's murderers killed. After summing up several stereotypical, ghettocentric issues and continuously linking these to death, the skit shows Lamar and his friends running into an elderly woman, advising them to get 'baptized with the spirit of the Lord'. The youths do not answer, nor ask questions; they obediently repeat the woman's prayer. After the prayer has finished, the woman states: 'Alright now, remember this day as the beginning of a new life – your *real* life.'[78]

Despite the fact that the emphasis on the word 'real' may shallowly be interpreted as merely a smooth segue into the next song, "Real", it is telling and perhaps even crucial to Lamar's views on faith and authenticity. The skit containing Lamar and his friends repeating the Sinner's prayer symbolizes the conversion of these young men, which is then directly being related to authenticity, expressing the message that a faithful life is an authentic life. Again this shows previous behaviors of criminality, boasting, peer pressure, drug abuse, etcetera as *performed*. According to Lamar's representation, this performativity can successfully be shed off after the conversion to religion, after which the individuals can lead *truer*, more virtuous lives.

This is amplified in "Real", where his father and his mother respectively promote religion as the righteous path for Lamar. 'Any nigga can kill a man,' his father argues. 'That don't make you a real nigga. Real is responsibility. Real is taking care of your

[78] Kendrick Lamar, "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst." Italics are mine, but it must be noted that the word 'real' is also vocally emphasized in the original album skit.

motherfucking family. Real is God, nigga.'[79] Herewith, Lamar presents conservative (and religious) ideas such as the family as society's cornerstone – quite probably referring to standardized ideas of the dysfunctional Black family – as authentic, or at least *more* authentic than performed 'gangsta' identity. After the hook, confirming that Lamar is 'really, really real', his mother is heard:

> '[The neighbors] was preaching to you over there, telling you about the Good Book, because right about now, that's what y'all need. Oh, and Top Dawg [the independent record label Lamar was first and is currently signed to] called the house, too. I guess they want you and Dave [Free, one of Lamar's closer friends who ended up collaborating with him on several occasions – N.B.: not the same Dave that got shot earlier in the narrative] to come to the studio.[80]

Not only does Lamar show the Bible as a tool for salvation and solace, he additionally shows an upward spiral in his life since his conversion to Christianity; he feels authentic; his parents express love and affinity towards him; and he gets a record deal with Top Dawg Entertainment. The idea that religion is not only an answer for Lamar, but for the community in general, is amplified by his mother closing the song "Real":

> I hope you come back and learn from your mistakes. Come back a man, tell your stories to these black and brown kids in Compton. Let 'em know you was just like them, but you still rose from that dark place of violence, becoming a positive person.[81]

Lamar juxtaposes himself and the children from his community, advising the children to follow paths similar to his own. Seeing this in light of his quickly positively developing life after religious conversion, this might be an attempt at speaking to his community directly, showing that religion improved Lamar's life and that conversion might do the same for them.

To Pimp a Butterfly does not strive away from this perspective on religion and spirituality. In fact, Lamar cements his self-proclaimed status as obedient follower of God, presenting himself as a true 'prophet'. Despite the fact that the term 'prophet' is

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[79] Kendrick Lamar, "Real".
[80] Ibidem.
[81] Ibidem.

rather interpretable – never does Lamar explicitly state what exactly he is a prophet *of* – its religious connotations are evident. It does, however, show a broader interpretation of religion and spirituality, tying (Black) worldly leaders, activists, and even athletes and pop artists together in the realm of prophets. Religion, then, is no longer exclusively bound to some relation with any deity, but manifested in earthly practices. The 'word of God' in that sense, mostly exemplified in Black role models, is translated through the fight for social justice. As I will show, this is mostly present in the songs "Alright", "For Sale? (Interlude)", "How Much a Dollar Cost", and "Mortal Man".

"Alright", having become a protester's anthem, represents the achievement social justice through religion. This is mostly expressed through the last sentences of the intro:

> Nazareth! I'm fucked up
> Homie, you fucked up
> But if God got us, then
> We gon' be alright[82]

This precedes the song's first hook, which contains acclaimed hip hop and pop music producer Pharrell Williams repeating the line: 'we gon' be alright, nigga'. With this, Lamar does two things. Firstly, he draws the connection between Nazareth and Compton and, therefore, him and none less but Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Much like Compton, Nazareth was known as a place from which no good could stem – much in line with the line 'if I told you that a flower bloomed in a dark room / would you trust it?' – yet brought forward one of the world's most prominent prophets. Compton, in that sense, can bring forward a similarly strong leader in the form of Kendrick Lamar. However subliminally, this is the first time Lamar presents himself as a prophet. This becomes clearer when analyzing the album in context, especially when connecting the lyrics of "Alright" to those of "Mortal Man", which I will discuss later in this sub-chapter. Secondly, and more explicitly, Lamar assimilates social justice and faith in God, clearly stating that the Black community shall overcome *as long as* it is in God's plan. In line with the religious message expressed in *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Lamar presents religion as an answer to social issues. However, *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Lamar was praying; with *To*

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[82] Kendrick Lamar, "Alright", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015).

Pimp a Butterfly, he was preaching. *good kid, m.A.A.d city* showed benevolent consequences of conversion to Christianity, whereas "Alright" urges for faith in God and faith in Lamar as a prophet in order to pursue social justice.

In the second verse, Lamar introduces Lucy (short for Lucifer, the Devil from the Bible), who aims to seduce Lamar into spending the money he acquired from rapping on worldly pleasures. Lamar then represents himself as perceiving Lucy's goal to seduce him, ending the verse in the proclamation: 'I write till I'm right with God', placing his faith and his art, presented as inherently connected, before the 'evils' of materialism. Lucy is more elaborately introduced in the follow-up to "Alright", "For Sale? (Interlude)". With boorish voice, Lamar raps from the perspective of a part of his mind that is willing to fall for the earthly, temporary pleasures Lucy offers him, including drug (ab)use, materiality, and sexuality. These pleasures, it must be noted, are largely related to rap industry – most obviously seen in the line: 'Lucy got million stories / about these other rappers I cam after when they was boring' – reaffirming his status as a prophet amongst sinners. In this light, Lucy represents the music industry as an environment filled with sinful temptation which Kendrick, not unlike Jesus Christ himself, has known to resist. In short, Lucy represents earthly temptation (associated with the music industry) that stands in the way of his art and his message as a prophet and therefore social justice.

In the song "How Much a Dollar Cost", Lamar also describes an encounter with God, with which he ingrains his prophet status by representing an actual conversation with God. The song tells the story of Lamar's (spiritual) trip to South-Africa where a homeless man comes up to him at a gas station where Lamar is filling up the tank of his car. The man, reeking of alcohol, asks Lamar for a single dollar. Assuming the man is an addict, Lamar denies him the bill, praising himself for earning the money in the first place and arrogantly shooing the homeless man. The man, however, is persistent, presenting Lamar with the chance to give him the dollar a total of three times before revealing himself as God and denying Lamar a place in Heaven for his pride and greed. Lamar, voiced here by The Isley Brother's Ronald Isley, is humbled, asking God to help him show the way. Lamar shows how he overcame sin (pride and greed in particular) by speaking to God, simultaneously preaching that the listener should do the same by explicitly expressing his behavior as unjust.

Having portrayed himself as a prophet implicitly, Lamar seems to close the deal in *To Pimp a Butterfly*'s closer "Mortal Man". As mentioned, Lamar alternates between

appraisal of worldly Black leaders and asking the listeners if they are willing to follow him the way they would a prophet. In "Mortal Man", Lamar most clearly announces his prophet status through the recurring lines:

> But a prophet ain't a prophet till he ask this question:
> When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?[83]

Lamar encourages listeners to ask themselves to what extent they are willing to follow Lamar as a prophet. When the fight for social justice and racial equality starts manifesting in violence – as is predicted by slain rapper Tupac Shakur in the interview closing up "Mortal Man" and therefore the album – will the listener still be able to relate to the stories Lamar has been telling over his past two albums and, more importantly, be willing to put the empathy Lamar has been building up into action?

By no means am I aiming to portray Lamar as a religious bigot advocating 'the one true religion' – he never accused anyone of holding on to a wrongful sense of religion, nor did he ever explicitly attempt to convert listeners to Christianity. After all, the global market he taps into consists of a predominantly liberally oriented group, meaning he either holds politically liberal ideas himself – as I showed earlier, his music and public actions have been categorized as politically progressive – or is unable to market religiously conservative ideas to his target audience. Yet, as his artistic development progresses, so does his religious zealotry. 2017's *DAMN.* shows Lamar struggling with his (self-proclaimed) prophet status, presenting social and racial issues as theologically structural through the highlighting of his cousin Carl Duckworth's beliefs in the Black Israelite movement. Whether this is symbolic or Lamar's true belief is not discussed, but it must both be noted that the album on one hand is filled with religious speculation on the 'damnation' of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans and, on the other, could be symbolic for Lamar's sense of struggle to solve large socio-economic and –cultural issues while staying virtuous himself, extending the legacy of Black prophetic leaders such as Marthin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Huey Newton.

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[83] Kendrick Lamar, "Mortal Man", in: *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg Entertainment 2015.

1.4 Conclusion

Kendrick Lamar represents himself as a virtuous, innocent individual, utilizing religion in his struggle to cope with the damaging environments he finds himself in, being the Compton ghetto and, after that, the rap industry. Lamar paints the negative features of these two as closely related in behaviors where machismo, wealth display, sexuality, violence, and criminality are the norm. All of these features are both stereotypical to Hiphop culture and the African-American community at large, transcending himself above the African-American community as well as the rap game. With this transcendence of self comes the inevitable, yet in Lamar's case very explicit rejection of African-American community and Hiphop culture. This is problematic, since these are the communities Lamar is simultaneously trying to help prosper. He aims to establish this through the idea of self-love, which has been historically prominent within oppressed minorities, for instance notable in the African-American through the works of Audre Lorde. The pursuit of Christian religion and the achievement self-love are synonymous in Lamar's worldview; similar to the way the rap industry and the African-American community are characterized by sinful flaws. In Lamar's worldview as he represents it, self-love is the only thing that is actually authentic, proving performed behaviors and identities within the African-American community and Hiphop culture Self-love implies the rejection of the Christian sins that are portrayed as prevalent within the Black community and the Hiphop community.

Chapter 2: Representations by U.S. media

2.1 Introduction

After showing how Lamar represents himself through his music, as well as how he is to be placed in socio-historical context of his locality (Compton and Los Angeles), it is important that we see how his worldviews are translated in a broader context. Obviously, listeners' opinions are affected by many things, among them professional institutions such as media outlets. This is not to deprive the listener from agency, but rather to address the power media institutions can have on our understanding of artists and their work. Think-pieces about artists and cultural products shape a discourse about them which can be telling about the way culture is practiced, consumed, and understood. In the next two chapters, I will look at written pieces on Lamar and his music from two different nationalities (the United States and the Netherlands, specifically) in order to shine a light on this discourse and to explore similarities and discrepancies between Lamar's self-representation, representations of him by others from a national perspective, and representations of him from a foreign perspective.

This chapter will focus on the way Lamar is discussed in the American musical landscape. The aim is to provide insight into the way Lamar is perceived as an artist, which additionally implies the perceptions of Hiphop culture in a broader sense. How is Lamar represented through U.S. media and how does this fit in the historical representation of Black music in the United States? In order to explore this, I will first provide socio-historical context on African Americans and, inevitably, the emergence and representation of Hiphop culture. Having done that, I will do a close reading of several different U.S. media sources on Kendrick Lamar, both music related platforms as broader news media, placing these representations in socio-historical context as well as highlighting the specific expressions and ideas of particular platforms. I will compare these outcomes, showing similarities and differences, ultimately showing general recurring trends in the discourse surrounding Lamar.

In this chapter, I will argue that Lamar is represented as a 'savior' of Hiphop, based on his skill, conceptual depth, and political engagement. On the other hand, contemporary rap music is depicted as shallow, commercial, and inauthentic. Whether intentional or not, US media incite a widely spread idea of a deteriorating Hiphop

culture through representations of Lamar as a sole genius, reminiscent of the 'glory days' of Hiphop. This fuels a contemporary debate on the current state of rap music, which focuses less on lyricism and explicit ideological content, but more on the blurring and transcending of Hiphop's borders and the implicit representation of sentiment rather than explicit announcements of style. That debate recalls a larger historical debate on high art and pop culture, gathering Lamar and well-established rap artists from Hiphop's so-called 'Golden Age' (1985-1992), whereas contemporary rap at large counts as low culture to the extent that a hierarchy is created within rap music itself. High art forms in rap music such as 'conscious rap', as they are represented through US media, are characterized as rare, largely diminishing the social, artistic, and cultural significance of Hiphop culture and reinforcing stereotypes on African American culture.

2.2 Background and social context

Hiphop, as an art form, is part of a long historical tradition within African American history. The black experience in the United States has been underrepresented and misrepresented in school systems globally, but it has been shaped by artists, scholars, politicians, and preachers, aiming to take control over their own narratives.[84] These expressions have in turn been channeled and translated for larger publics through different media ranging from journalism to scholarship to literature. The African American experience has been discussed through lenses of Black stereotypes, shaping these public stereotypes, influencing perceptions on the African American experience, as well as the African American experience itself. Hiphop, currently being a prominent manifestation of Black culture, stands in a long tradition of expressing and representing the African American experience, however selective or distorted it may be, and U.S. media stands in a long tradition of portraying and shaping the African American experience in one-dimensional ways.[85] This creates consumer expectations on what Black culture should be – as Los Angeles rapper Vince Staples recently put it in an interview with New York radio station Hot 97: 'In general, Black people sell trauma' –

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[84] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Art versus Propaganda (Part 1)", Lecture, Introduction to African American Studies from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, February 13th 2017.
[85] Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Hébert, "Gender, Race, and Media Representation", in: *Handbook of Gender and Communication* 16 (2006) 297-317, 297-298.

and those expectations are in turn marketed to (as mentioned earlier, predominantly white) audiences.[86]

Lamar's music may be unique in many ways, but in terms of shaping (views on) the African American experience through conceptualization of the ghetto, Lamar shows continuity with his predecessors. On the other end, U.S. media equally fulfill their role of diluting the already filtered expressions of African American experience through Lamar's music and conceptualized artistry. In this chapter, I will show the ways the ghetto Lamar has conceptualized in *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly* are translated through music and broader media in the United States. I will discuss the way Lamar is presented as a rapper and how the African American experience is portrayed by these media. I will argue that Lamar is presented as a calculated virtuoso, someone completely in control of an authentic form of art, in opposition to his peers that have been commercialized. The ghetto conceptualized by these media is largely one-dimensional, portraying Lamar's consciousness and personal (religious) salvation as the exception as opposed to the rule – much like Lamar expressed himself through his albums. This shows that widely acclaimed artists are hardly critiqued for the societal implications they might induce, but more so appreciated for technical ability and conceptual coherence and depth of their artistry. This is not problematic per se, as it surely shines a positive light on Black artists and brings forth discussions on social issues. Yet, translating art in this way also legitimizes highly constructed and filtered expectations as *authentic* and *true* as opposed to highlighting its fictitiousness, maintaining perceived stereotypes and recycling stereotypical behaviors and identities.

Historically, this is reminiscent of African American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of 'double-consciousness'. Originally coined in Du Bois' seminal work *The Soul of Black Folk* (1903), double-consciousness refers to the African American experience as 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.'[87] Not only does Du Bois refer to the sense of having to adhere to (inherently white) American social structure and expectations, he also touches on duality within African American identity. He mentions a twofold of African American desire, that seem to be in conflict with one

[86] Hot 97, "Vince Staples Gets Real & Uncensored w/ Ebro in the Morning" (version: 28 June 2017) https://youtu.be/kMS9J26kctI (28 July 2017).
[87] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk. Essays and Sketches* (Oxford 2007) 8.

another; firstly to be accepted as a full American citizen; secondly, to maintain 'Negro' identity.[88] This struggle is exemplary for the ways African American identity is viewed and pursued. On one hand, African Americans are continuously exposed to imagery of themselves, therefore shaping their view of self according to ideology of others – white Americans in this case. However, because of negative American representation of African Americans, broadcasted to African Americans as well as white Americans, it became increasingly difficult for African Americans to express a form of 'authentic' Blackness that was agreeable for the American public at large. If Blackness is looked down upon, how does one represent a Blackness that is, in the first place, worthy? Secondly, how does one represent a Blackness that is true to Self? These questions are central to many African-American art forms, including Hiphop. The music of Kendrick Lamar, as I have shown in the previous chapter, is particularly preoccupied with this. The explicit definition of Self and self-love relating to the African-American experience and Hiphop culture in Lamar's music is simultaneously invites US media to in turn define those two, as I will become clear later in this chapter.

These struggles are also more tangibly apparent when we dig deeper into the sociological context of the African-American community. Historically speaking, the present is simultaneously the best and the worst age for African Americans. One of the main dilemmas in the Black community today is the fact that the Black middle class is bigger than it has ever been, while the number of incarcerated Black men is also higher than ever.[89] This is an indication of the way institutional, systematic racism has developed governmentally and has been ingrained culturally, as well as institutionally, for instance in police forces. Two prominent academics in this field of research are Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Professor Lawrence Bobo. The Gates, Bobo, et al edited *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship* (2012) asks the question 'whether African Americans can achieve full, "unmarked" U.S. citizenship'.[90]

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[88] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 9-11.

[89] Lawrence Bobo, 'An American Conundrum: Race, Sociology, and the African American Road to Citizenship', in: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Claude Steele, Lawrence Bobo, et al (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship. 1865-Present* (Oxford 2012) 19-70, 19.

[90] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'African American Citizenship', in: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Claude Steele, Lawrence Bobo, et al (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship. 1865-Present* (Oxford 2012) 3-16, 5.

In the introduction to the sociological section of the book, Bobo highlights the three positions in the debate on African American citizenship. The first position Bobo identifies is the American Liberal Tradition. This school of thought pursues the liberal *laissez-faire* ideology, implying that (socio-)economic issues will resolve themselves as long as government intervention is kept to a minimum. The second standpoint concerning African American citizenship is referred to as the American Tragic Flaw. This ideology assumes the impossibility of full, 'unmarked' African American citizenship at large, stressing the structural and systemized nature of African American struggles. Thirdly, the debate on African American citizenship is characterized by what is called the idea of 'multiple traditions' within the American system. This idea amplifies the eclectic nature of America's society, arguing that there are several traditional forces at work in American political culture, such as liberal and republican for example, without constituting at as a whole. In other words, this angle takes the deterministic edge of the American Tragic Flaw, while acknowledging the force of liberalism in American political culture.[91] Bobo blatantly rejects the first category, arguing that the African American road to citizenship is obstructed by systematic and institutionalized causes and that it is historically and empirically proven that those problems will not solve themselves. However, Bobo does not take the approach of the American Tragic Flaw, positioning himself in the third category. He argues that progress has occurred for African Americans throughout history, yet always confronted with resistance and resentment. However, in Bobo's view, this does not erase the possibility of full, 'unmarked' African American citizenship.[92] Ultimately, Bobo aims to show that racial integration still has not manifested sufficiently in the United States, as African Americans are still disadvantaged and impeded at many levels in American society, and, more importantly, that there is something to be done about this.

This sociological stuation, that America is still segregated and African Americans are still disadvantaged in opportunity as well as outcome is a key aspect of the context within which Lamarr is received in the States. His reputation and reception is also connected with broader historical and sociological development in the perception of African Americans. Sociologist Maria Krysan's work shows the development in racial attitudes from World War II up to the present. She argues a shift in attitudes over the

[91] Bobo, "An American Conundrum", 20-22.
[92] Ibidem, 22.

decades that indicates a liberalization of attitude towards Blacks and their integration in society.[93] Krysan's analysis starts from Swedish economist and sociologist's Gunnar Myldar's seminal work *An American Dilemma* (1944). Myldar describes impediments in full integration of Black people in American society based on what he calls 'the doctrine of anti-amalgamation'. This implies an ideology held by White Americans during World War II that called for a 'separate but equal' treatment of African Americans.[94] Krysan points out a general decrease of differentiating Black people based on biological or inborn factors, however, with no sign of desired integration.[95] In the Civil Rights Era (1965-1974), Krysan argues in the second chapter, attitudes became increasingly liberal, showing significant support for growing integration from both Whites and Blacks. However, after the Civil Rights Era (1976 until the present), when social policy starts reflecting these changing attitudes, debates on race that previously seemed resolved through 'color blind' ideology start re-emerging, showing resistance for integration through policy as well as expressions of Myrdal's doctrine of anti-amalgamation. Ultimately, this implies trust in America's 'liberal nature', as people seem to be attracted to the idea of *laissez-faire* in the debate on African American citizenship, assuming that African American social issues will resolve themselves as long as there is no government intervention.[96] However, Lamar's music brings these debates into play again and his worldview opens space for the critical commentary on his work to engage with these broader questions. The fact that critical commentary does so brings us back to the larger point about how Kenrdick Lamar and his work are received in the States and how this illustrates certain national particularities that don't translate to the Dutch context.

2.3 Analysis of U.S. media representations

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[93] Maria Krysan, 'From Color Caste to Color Blind, Part III: Contemporary Era Racial Attitudes', in: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Claude Steele, Lawrence Bobo, et al (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship. 1865-Present* (Oxford 2012) 235-275, 264-265.
[94] Maria Krysan, 'From Color Caste to Color Blind, Part I: Social Attitudes During World War II', in: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Claude Steele, Lawrence Bobo, et al (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship. 1865-Present* (Oxford 2012) 178-194, 183-184.
[95] Krysan, 'From Color Caste to Color Blind, Part I', 192.
[96] Krysan, 'From Color Caste to Color Blind, Part III', 262-264.

For the analysis of representation of Kendrick Lamar in the United States, I had to make a selection – it is impossible and undesirable to consider all sources in which Lamar was mentioned. I have chosen two written news media: music journalism and nationwide journalism. I believe these to be most explicit and substantial in conceptualizing and representing Lamar and his music. Within these media, I was still urged to filter certain media outlets, simply due to sheer quantity of the outlets. For news media, I have chosen the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, because of their status as the nation's most widely spread newspapers, implying the wide appeal of their content. This is the exact same reason I chose *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone*, *SPIN*, and *Mass Appeal* for the music specific news media. The magazines and web logs are well read and respected among readers. That is not to say that every reader will agree on the content of the representations of Lamar – every reader conceptualizes idiosyncratically, in some cases blatantly rejecting the pieces in question. Despite, media does shape (artist) imagery through discourse, be it explicit or implicit, conscious or sub-conscious.

In the analysis, I will focus on two levels of representation; firstly, the representation of Lamar and his music; secondly, sometimes following from the first level, representation of Hiphop culture and the state of rap music. I will argue that most media outlets portray Lamar as a 'savior' of Hiphop culture, highlighting substance of subject matter, lyrical and technical skill, and sanity as authentic. This is in sharp contrast with the representation of current (mainstream) Hiphop, which is portrayed as sexually aggressive, violent, and commercial. Hiphop of the past, even in brief but meaningful appearances in the articles, is often simplified and glorified as equally urgent, politically charged, and of overall higher quality than contemporary rap music. Representation on Lamar in light of broader discourse on Hiphop represents him as uniquely benign. Finally, he receives praise for his progressive politics, despite some aspects of conservatism in his expressed worldview (as I have shown in the previous chapter).

It may be noted that I have focused on news outlets that target liberal demographics. This means that flat rejections of Lamar's politics and Hiphop in general are a priori less likely to have occurred than in right wing media as, say, *FOX News*.[97] The

[97] In fact, *FOX News* covered an item on Lamar's song "Alright", claiming the lyrics encouraged violence against police officers. Lamar initially responded by reprimanding

bias towards favoring Lamar's worldview on race and his community through individual activism, however, does not imply a lack of stereotyping concerning African Americans and Hiphop. If anything, this shows the deep-rootedness of racial stereotypes through understanding of Hiphop, even in light of favoring Lamar and his message of Black empowerment.

In large lines, national news media represent Lamar have a stronger focus on the sonic component of his music. What a record sounds like seems to overall be of higher importance than what a record says. After all, reviews are generally rather listener recommendations than they are explorations of (socio-)cultural, historical, or political ideas expressed through the music. However, especially since *To Pimp a Butterfly*'s release in March 2015, it is near impossible to write about Lamar's music without at least addressing its political implications. I will largely ignore this focus on alleged sound experimentation, unless when these are (explicitly or implicitly) connected to representation of Lamar's artistry and worldview.

This distinction is amplified by both of the articles in the *New York Times* through explicit mentions of claimed deterioration of mainstream rap. Mainstream rap, as can be read from these articles, is seen as commercial, diluted, and inauthentic, as opposed to (unspecified) Hiphop from the past. Lamar, however, reminisces of earlier stages in Hiphop culture due to his strong focus on lyricism and political engagement, therefore 'saving' Hiphop. This is most obvious in the use of sentences such as 'Mr. Lamar is working to *purify* [italics mine] hip-hop, a genre he hopes to ground in his true experiences of growing up poor', or 'the genre [Hiphop] is far from where it was even a decade ago (...) Broadly speaking, it has reframed its concerns as universal, not specific.' [98] It shows Hiphop, or more specifically (mainstream) rap music, as compromised, attempting to adhere to the broadest possible audience as opposed to the 'authentic' expressions of the African American experience of the past.

This relates to a common debate in Hiphop on its alleged 'Golden Age'. Rap's 'Golden Age' is commonly periodized between Run DMC's *King of Rock* (1985) and Dr.

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the news channel for turning his message of positivity into something negative. Last March (2017), he sampled the news fragment in the song "DNA.", chopping up his own voice repeating 'I live a better life / fuck your life'.

[98] Jon Caramanica, "Kendrick Lamar, Emboldened, but Burdened, by Success" (version: March 17 2015) https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-emboldened-but-burdened-by-success.html (July 3 2017).

Dre's *The Chronic* (1992). This period, as argued by literary critics Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois sparked 'fertile creation' and created 'standards' in Hiphop culture.[99] These standards implied focus on beats, wordplay, brotherhood, and lyrics, shifting of content to explicitly political, growth of rap industry, and increasing lyrical and stylistic experimentation.[100] These notions were mostly challenged after rap's breakthrough to the mainstream with the sub-genre of 'gangsta rap', marked by the release of Dr. Dre's *The Cronic*. This is also when the explicit content of rap lyrics start to spark controversies. According to Bradley and DuBois, this created an earlier absent sense of commercialism in rap music, which further developed in the early 2000s. This 'New Millennium Rap', as Bradley and DuBois refer to it as, is characterized by a deep-rooted commercialism, industry tactics, and developing digital technology.[101] From that point onward mainstream rap music seemed to have lost precious values of 'authentic' representation of (African American) experiences that came with deeper notions on human nature and important socio-political situations.

This debate, in turn, reminds of the more general, long-lasting high art/pop culture debate. German-American sociologist Herbert Gans discussed the high art/pop culture debate in his book *Popular Culture and High Culture* (1999). Gans denies the existence of a strong dichotomy between high culture and popular culture, as he acknowledges a more complex reality. Individuals are increasingly becoming cultural omnivores, borrowing styles and arts from many different cultures and classes, instead of sticking to one particular form of art or culture.[102] However, Gans hardly answers his own questions explicitly. The remainder of his book does that for him. Gans makes clear that he disagrees with the critics of popular culture, dismantling recurring critique on popular culture, showing that popular culture usually does not find itself guilty of accusations and showing that high culture does.[103] Further on, he continues to explore the relation between high culture, popular culture and the perceptions of these. Gans

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[99] Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, "The Golden Age 1985-1992", in: Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois (ed.), *The Anthology of Rap* (New Haven 2010) 119-130, 119.
[100] Bradley and DuBois, "The Golden Age 1985-1992", 120.
[101] Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, "Introduction", in: Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois (ed.), *The Anthology of Rap* (New Haven 2010) xxix-xlvii, xliv-xlv.
[102] Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture. An Analysis and Evalutation of Taste* (New York 1999) 5-13.
[103] Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 77-87.

questions the validity of the distinction, but he continues to explore characteristics of both 'cultures'. His argument, in the end, becomes more of a question than a statement.

With the famous work *La Distinction* (1979) of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in mind, notions on hierarchy in culture can be dismantled. Bourdieu challenged the Kantian idea of 'pure aesthetic' that was (ab)used by dominant elites. In this sense, 'taste' becomes a tool for power projection and power exertion, causing oppression towards groups that did not adhere to the 'right' taste.[104] Gans communicates with these notions with his approach of 'taste cultures', acknowledging differences in and between tastes, while not designating any form of hierarchy in these tastes. However, Gans idenitifies five different taste cultures, ranging from 'high' to 'low/quasifolk', based mostly on socio-economical backgrounds and class.[105] Notions of high and low culture are deep-rooted in American society, defining perceptions of cultural products based on factors like class, gender, and race. The idea that some forms of mainstream Hiphop have lost part of their power and meaning through commercialism is partially based on these conceived notions of hierarchy in art utilized as power projection. The idea that the commercialization of Hiphop is damaging culture is thus more a product of consumer expectation and stereotyping of Hiphop culture than the objective downfall of a culture.

Historically speaking, Hiphop belongs without a doubt to low/quasifolk culture. Since its break through the mainstream – some argue after 1979's "Rapper's Delight", others argue after its commercialization by gangsta rap – rap music has had its own divide in higher and lower forms of art. High rap has established in the so-called 'Golden Age' with the earlier mentioned change in lyrical forms and styles, explicitly political content, and blooming industry. In the contemporary debate on the new generation of rappers – characterized by an eclectic style of music, drawing from rock and pop music, experimenting with melodic flows, largely rejecting previous notions and focus on lyricism, most typically (and degradingly) referred to as 'mumble rap' – the standards set by 'Golden Age' rappers are still the standards that rappers are measured and challenged by. Artistic intention and expression in mumble rap are usually ignored or denied of existence and opposed to thoughtful and fertile creation of the Golden Age. In

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[104] Bourdieu's *La Distinction* has been neatly summarized by cultural historian Simon Gunn in his book *History and Cultural Theory* (New York 2006) 70-79.
[105] Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 94-100.

this debate, Lamar emerges as the anti-mumble rapper, providing ratio and substance to a culture of wealth, sexual aggression, and thoughtlessness. In that sense, Lamar is seen to 'save' rap music from its intellectual and artistic downfall; a sentiment highly backed (and, to some extent, shaped) by US news media outlets.

The most elaborate portrayals of Lamar come from the *New York Times*; in a timespan two days in 2015 (March 16th and 17th – after *To Pimp a Butterfly* had already been suprise released) the newspaper posted two longreads on the Compton rapper. One article, "Kendrick Lamar on His New Album and the Weight of Clarity" contained a lengthy interview with Lamar as he showed the writers around Compton. The second article, "Kendrick Lamar, Emboldened, but Burdened, by Success", was part of a column called "Critic's Notebook", a series that reviews cultural products (albums, movies, theatre shows, etc.) beyond recommendations and description of sonic experience. Both portray Lamar as a particularly sensible. The first sentence of the interview goes: 'Following the success of his major label debut, "good kid, m.A.A.d. city," in 2012, the rapper Kendrick Lamar did not indulge in earthly luxuries. Instead, he got baptized.'[106] The sentence firstly lays bare an initial expectation, namely 'indulgence in luxury' after success, and it secondly indicates a discrepancy between these expectations and the actual outcome. It shows disconnect between Lamar and presumably other rappers: where others would invest wealth and status in individual mobility and luxuries, Lamar chose Christianity. Historically, Hiphop has been critiqued for this focus on wealth display and power projection, making it presumable that the *New York Times* are painting Lamar as different and, not importantly, more virtuous than other rappers, from the first sentence.

As may be expected from the most widespread newspaper from the nation's political capitol, the *Washington Post* differentiates Lamar from other rappers by a strong focus on his political theory. Firstly, the article compares *To Pimp a Butterfly* to 'great albums of an earlier era of politically committed and musically diverse hip-hop,' later referred to as 'glory days', implying the lack political commitment and musical diversity in today's Hiphop despite identifying a contemporary tendency in politically

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[106] Joe Coscarelli, "Kendrick Lamar on His New Album and the Weight of Clarity" (Version: March 16 2015) https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-on-his-new-album-and-the-weight-of-clarity.html (July 3 2017).

charged rap of the likes of rappers such as J. Cole and Killer Mike.[107] Secondly, contemporary rap music is characterized as shallow:

> Where talented contemporaries like Drake rarely venture a thought deeper than "being rich makes me sad," Kendrick grapples with core political theory questions of power, identity and the ethics of leadership. (...) And, lest you worry that you're in for a tedious sermon, he does so without ever being less than lyrically and musically thrilling, cultivating a sound utterly unlike hip-hop's state of the art.[108]

So not only does contemporary rap music (exemplified by Toronto rapper Drake, perhaps the best selling rap artist at the moment) lack depth, Lamar's political theory, substance, and skill are inherently *unlike* Hiphop. This is amplified by the writer's description of contemporary rap songs as 'brain-dead club thumpers', implying a general lack of rationality and a shallow desire for accessible and danceable songs. Thirdly, and most interestingly, the writer praises Lamar for his self-questioning; again, as opposed to the way other rappers have discussed politics that, according to the writer, showed 'certainty in action'.

In short, the *Washington Post* seem to admire Lamar for his theoretically dense music in a musical landscape characterized by shallowness and commercialism, reminding them of earlier, *better* times in Hiphop culture. The *Post* advocates Lamar's political ideas of Black empowerment through self-love and inward criticism while praising him for highlighting the complexities of the African American experience which, in a way, obstruct action, making him favorable over past rappers that touched on politics. This is reminiscent of Krysan's research on racial attitudes of the past seventy years: conceptually, in attitude, the *Post* is open to change; yet it is not necessarily open to action. Rather, the *Post* praises Lamar for substance and complexity of the content, combined with lyrical skill, as many articles do. This is not to say that the *Washington Post* finds actual racial equality to be undesirable, but it is striking how the article prefers political theory to direct action.

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[107] Marc Lynch, "The political theory of Kendrick Lamar", (version: March 23 2015) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/03/23/the-political-theory-of-kendrick-lamar/?utm_term=.2ed26d1e1b5b (July 3 2017).
[108] Marc Lynch, "The political theory of Kendrick Lamar".

In contrast to the previously discussed news media, *USA Today* does not distance Lamar from contemporary rap. In fact, the newspaper identifies a tendency in contemporary rap music that has 'revitalized the industry'.[109] While their four star review (out of four) of *To Pimp a Butterfly* praised Lamar for its sonic experimental drift, non-commercial nature, and border-crossing artistry – the review called Lamar not only one of the 'most innovative' rappers, but *artists* of our time[110] – the article "Why 2015 is the year of hip-hop" (written by the same writer) aligns Lamar with Drake, New York rapper A$AP Rocky, and Atlanta rapper Future among others. This article praises contemporary rap music (specifically, 2015 rap) for its 'uncommercial' focus on the art form rather than temporary, quick selling singles. Still, in this article, rap music is critiqued through the stereotype of being a misogynist, sexually aggressive, and violent genre. In short, while the article does not detach Lamar from his peers – denying him unique savior status, but rather showing him as part of a *movement* that is reviving the music – it still reinforces negative stereotypes on Hiphop culture.

Of the music news media I have analyzed, half show stronger portrayal of Lamar as leader of a new movement in rap music, extending the line of national newspapers. The other half presents itself critically towards such glorification that usually comes with the diminishing and stereotyping of Hiphop culture and African-Americans. The latter media mostly show a creator-oriented approach to Lamar's music, which is usually associated with high art.[111] These media, unlike national newspapers, do not focus on the claimed superficiality of contemporary Hiphop or Lamar's exceptionalism as much as they focus on consumer engagement with Lamar's music and worldview.

SPIN and *Rolling Stone* both show Lamar as inherently innocent, persisting from his childhood to his adolescence. Without actually judging Lamar's peers directly, the cover stories of *SPIN* magazine and *Rolling Stone* portray Lamar as remarkable and praiseworthy seeing the threatening neighborhood the article describes. This recalls a study by American cultural historian Robin Bernstein by the name of *Racial Innocence* (2011). Bernstein argues that the concept of 'childhood innocence', the nineteenth

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[109] Patrick Ryan, "Why 2015 is the year of hip-hop" (version: August 16 2015) https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2015/08/16/hip-hop-2015-kendrick-lamar-drake-j-cole/31393617/ (July 3 2017).

[110] Patrick Ryan, "Album review: Lamar's might "Butterfly"" (version: March 16 2015) https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2015/03/16/kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly/24847853/ (July 3 2017).

[111] Gans, *High Culture and Popular Culture*, 76.

century idea that children are touched by 'blissful obliviousness' and are therefore guiltless of wrongs in their actions, is a privileged feat of whiteness. According to Bernstein, this justified and legitimized ideologies of dichotomized whiteness and non-whiteness, reinforcing the power status of whiteness as an undefined category while simultaneously denying non-whiteness the feature of innocence. In other words, where 'wrongful' behaviors with white children are usually perceived as innocent, oblivious, and integral to childhood, the same behaviors with non-white children is more likely to be perceived as intentionally malign.[112] In the *Rolling Stone* cover story, Lamar's innocence and the perseverance thereof is a feature unique to him as a Black kid growing up in Compton, showing criminal behavior as a norm for the social landscape of Compton. This is then pushed through to his adult life as a rapper, where he maintains his innocence within a culture associated with hyper-sexuality, violence, criminality, etc. Thus, unintentionally, Lamar's status of unique innocence adds to the elevation of his persona from the African-American community and Hiphop culture, which in turn reinforces negative stereotypes and perceptions of those social spheres.

Rolling Stone's 2015 cover story on Lamar portrayed him similarly to national news media, but particularly highlights his decent behavior, which is apparent from his youth until his present career. Especially as a child, Lamar is presented as the good kid in the mad city he has stalled out himself. The article explicitly draws attention to Lamar's intelligence and innocence that was already present as a child. The sentence '[Lamar] grew up surrounded by gangs' implies imagery of threat within Lamar's direct physical environment, in which he himself stands as a sole factor of purity and innocence. The article's mention of the 'sudden' experience of the previously mentioned Rodney King riots, the revocation of memories of Lamar's friends who were murdered in several different spaces within the neighborhood, and the description of tension when the sirens of a police truck are heard, further amplify the imagery of threat in the article. Lamar, however, remains calm, thoughtful, and consoling, especially towards children. The article's imagery implies a source of innocence integral to Lamar, unique in his dangerous environment, which he then channels through to other children in his neighborhoods that are apparently not inherently featured with innocence. The ending paragraph describes a group of people singing 'happy birthday' to one of Lamar's in-

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112 Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American childhood and race from slavery to civil rights* (New York 2011) 1-8.

house producers, Sounwave. Sounwave is asked to make a wish after he blows out the candles, but before he can commence, Lamar steps forward, saying: 'I wish for hot beats!' This childlike scenario combined with the earlier invocation of threat and Lamar's puckish way of denying Sounwave his birthday wish creates a sense of endearment and innocence in an environment in which such features are not evident.

This idea of Lamar's childlike innocence is often portrayed through his love for cereal. On a picture in the *SPIN* cover story, Lamar is depicted sitting on a leather couch in front of a television wearing colorful sweatpants and slippers, pouring cereal in a bowl, the jug of milk placed on the table in front of him. The image creates a feeling of childhood nostalgia, invoking memories that many American children have of carelessly and ignorantly watching cartoons on a Saturday morning. In an interview with Nardwuar, a Canadian interviewer known for his deep research of artists and theatrical and awkward performance, Lamar initially ridicules the interviewer in front of his crew, but changes his attitude and voice to a more childlike position when he explains he sometimes had to steal a box of Fruity Pebbles cereal because they're his favorite kind of cereal and he didn't always have money to buy it.[113] A video by *Complex News* from 2012 shows Lamar talking about his favorite cartoons and cereal. Lamar pours Fruit Pebbles into a red plastic bowl while his 2012 song "Cartoon and Cereal" plays in the background. The song's hook imitates gunshots with vocals, ending in the phrase 'that's ironic' while different colorful boxes of cereal are displayed aligning with the rhythm of the beat.[114] To summarize, Lamar's childhood innocence is partially symbolized by his portrayed love for cereal, moving the concept of childhood innocence away from whiteness, while simultaneously portraying childhood innocence as unique within the African-American community and the rap industry.

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[113] NardwuarServiette, "Nardwuar vs. Kendrick Lamar" (version: 23 March 2012) https://youtu.be/6s5vlQdQp4s (July 24 2017).

[114] Complex, "Kendrick Lamar Breaks Down His Favorite Cartoons and Cereals | Complex" (version: 23 October 2012) https://youtu.be/yheoOn-mbZc (July 24 2017).

Kendrick Lamar is depicted in a setting invoking childhood nostalgia and innocence. Picture by Dan Monick (2012). Courtesy of SPIN *magazine.*

SPIN magazine actively labeled Lamar 'Not Your Everyday Rap Savior' in a 2012 cover story, praising his untypical characteristics: 'unlike most new rap stars, he is humble, composed, mature, and palpably aware of what he's already lost. Which means he might be the most special of them all.'[115] In the first paragraph, Lamar is also explicitly disconnected from the Compton community as well as the rap industry:

> The story of Kendrick Lamar is not the story of a rapper from Compton. (...) It might be the story of how hip hop got real in 2012. But the only story that Kendrick Lamar wants to tell is how he got out.[116]

Later in the cover story:

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[115] Jessica Hopper, "Kendrick Lamar: Not Your Average Rap Savior" (version: 9 October 2012) http://www.spin.com/2012/10/kendrick-lamar-not-your-average-everyday-rap-savior/ (3 July 2017).

[116] Hopper, "Kendrick Lamar: Not Your Average Rap Savior" (version: 9 October 2012) http://www.spin.com/2012/10/kendrick-lamar-not-your-average-everyday-rap-savior/ (3 July 2017).

> So, is the world ready for this next evolution? Kendrick Lamar, the earnest, introspective Compton kid, an emotionally sober non-gangster rapping his ass off? What about an album that doesn't promote unchecked hedonism, that doesn't luxuriate in copious consumption of lobster bisque for breakfast?[117]

Similar to national newspapers, *SPIN* identifies a new impulse in rap music with a leading role for Lamar, but sees this in 2012 already. Lamar is an honest and self-reflective 'kid', whereas Hiphop is reduced to 'unchecked hedonism', often associated with a lack of appreciation for rationality or intelligence, and ridiculous application of luxury items. With sentences like the ones mentioned above and the explicit defining of Lamar as a 'rap savior', *SPIN* most strongly portrays Hiphop as a deteriorating genre in need of saving, bringing forth Lamar as exemplary for the direction in which the culture should move.

The features newspapers and music journalism associate with Lamar (intelligent, calculated, honest, innocent) are generally rigidly contrasted with Hiphop's flaws (hedonistic, nihilistic, shallow, commercial). However, music blog *Pitchfork* and lifestyle magazine *Mass Appeal* have criticized Lamar's portrayal of rap savior. In a short thinkpiece for *Mass Appeal*, music critic Craig Jenkins argued that Hiphop fans have been quick to assume upcoming rappers that strongly focus on lyrical content to revive the previously mentioned Golden Age.[118] Jenkins goes on to point out that these assumptions more often than not end in disappointment, whereas budding rappers can not live up to the expectations set by fans hoping for a revival of a certain Golden Age:

> Whether Kendrick flops, sells out, or ushers in a new Golden Age of lyrical commercial rap is beside the point. The expectations we've piled onto new artists are unreasonable. All Kendrick or anyone else needs to do for the rap game is sell a few records and get a few heads nodding. Instead of clamoring for saviors, we should be giving artists space to grow

[117] Hopper, "Kendrick Lamar: Not Your Average Rap Savior" (version: 9 October 2012) http://www.spin.com/2012/10/kendrick-lamar-not-your-average-everyday-rap-savior/ (3 July 2017).

[118] I have favored the names of the writers over the names of the blogs with these two particular articles, as these articles are closer to opionon pieces than they are to explanations. The core of the articles thus reflect the opinions of the writers more than the representation of the entire medium.

> and evolve to the level of a Jay[-Z] or a Nas. Greatness is achieved through time and experience, and we'll probably never see it again if we keep looking for overnight sensations.[119]

Jenkins is wary in portraying Lamar as the leader of a new movement in the genre, but more importantly portrays the outcome of Lamar's artistry as insignificant. By pleading for fans to be hesitant before claiming grand statements on an artist's future achievements and therefore steering the development of the artistry, Jenkins takes Lamar out of a situation in which he is forced to live up to a specific type of consumer expectation, shifting responsibility to consumers instead of producers of cultural products.

By doing this, the *Mass Appeal* article takes a creator-oriented approach to rap music – something that is historically associated with high art. Gans describes that high art is more likely to value creator intention over consumer verdict, perceiving the latter as irrelevant to the creation and understanding of the art. Gans adds that this largely ignores the fact that creators have to adhere to consumer expectations in order to sell the art. User-orientation is largely assigned to popular culture, whose main goal it is to satisfy wishes of the audience. A creator-oriented approach to art, then, is used to protect the artist from compromising to audience expectations.[120] The *Mass Appeal* article does exactly this by urging fans to lay off expectations and let artist develop according to their own desires – or the desires of their label. This, according to Jenkins, leads to progression of the culture these artists represent. Different from previously described articles, however, Jenkins takes this as a rule of thumb for all (Hiphop) artists, criticizing Hiphop fans that aim to steer

Pitchfork writer Carvell Wallace also adopts this creator-oriented approach in a 2015 thinkpiece criticizing discourse on Lamar's music while praising his ability to translate idiosyncratic African-American experience to a wide audience. More importantly so, Wallace rejects the notion of Lamar as a Hiphop leader or savior:

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[119] Craig Jenkins, "Kendrick Lamar and Hip-Hop's Savior Complex" (10 October 2012) https://massappeal.com/kendrick-lamar-hip-hops-savior-complex14248/ (25 July 2017).

[120] Gans, *Popular Culture & High Culture*, 75-77.

> Kendrick Lamar is deeply powerful. He is deeply powerful because he can flow and flow is, in many ways, the magic ingredient that turns despair into hope, pain into action.
> (...)
>
> Kendrick makes the kind of music that can lead you to fight for your own survival. He is not a savior or a leader, as some have attempted to cast him. He is a man who can flow.
>
> (...)
>
> I don't know Kendrick Lamar. This is important to say because in most articles about rappers the author tries to act like they know the guy. Like they're homies. [121]

Wallace praises Lamar for his technical skill, symbolized by 'flow', emphasizing that technical skill can translate experiences and emotions to audiences that are not familiar with those. This recalls Spradlin's notion of music as a tool for trans-cultural understanding, yet Wallace does not accredit Lamar with exceptional conceptual construction of space related identity, but rather with his skill to speak of Black emotion and the African American experience in a catchy way. In fact, Wallace criticizes other writers for falling for the illusion of having lived Lamar's experiences through his (perhaps unintentional) adherence to the audience's ghettocentricity.[122] In other words, Wallace praises Lamar for creating a record (*To Pimp a Butterfly*) that reaches beyond the listening experience, resulting in action, but similar to Jenkins' thinkpiece in *Mass Appeal*, denies Lamar a unique position that would allow him to be transcended above the rap industry or the African-American community. Wallace additionally, again similarly to Jenkins, shifts responsibility to consumers:

> Rather than reviewing this album, let's review what we do with it.

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[121] Carvell Wallace, "On Kendrick Lamar and Black Humanity" (version: 29 March 2015) http://pitchfork.com/thepitch/704-on-kendrick-lamar-and-black-humanity/ (25 July 2017).

[122] For more information on (white) audiences and ghettocentricity, see Halifu Osumare's *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves* (2007).

> Kendrick's music cannot free us. But how we respond to Kendrick's music just might.[123]

Thus, the articles on *Mass Appeal* and *Pitchfork* counter conventional representations of Lamar's music as a high art artist giving new impulses to a low culture, furthermore shying away from stereotypical portrayal of the African-American experience. Ultimately, the articles present Lamar's music as a tool for change, aiming to reach beyond the music itself and advocating Lamar's worldview to consumers in hopes that they will actively engage with it.

In conclusion, U.S. music media portray Lamar similar to larger news media, yet the approaches to Lamar's music can be slightly more polemical. Lamar is often portrayed as a uniquely sensible and authentic force in Hiphop, savior and/or leader of Hiphop culture, leading it in more substantial, self-reflective, complex, and nostalgic directions. Other platforms, however, deny Lamar such a position of uniqueness without discrediting the skillful execution of his music, reminding us that the implied change in Hiphop culture is not necessary per se, while the advocated change in the social situation of African-Americans can be achieved not by placing Lamar on a pedestal – and therefore undermining other forms of Hiphop culture by reinforcing stereotypes – but by putting Lamar's words into individual action.

2.4 Conclusion

Despite some discrepancy, Lamar is largely displayed as a savior of rap music in (music) news outlets, restoring the genre to its full potential with political engagement, lyrical virtuosity, and experimental style. This simultaneously portrays contemporary rap music as shallow, commercial, and inauthentic. Lamar, then, is returning hierarchy to a largely democratizing genre, being an example of high art in a landscape of malign popular culture. Similar to the way he has ambiguously portrayed himself, Lamar is represented as virtuous and rational, with which his peers and his community are represented as lesser. In short, Lamar is not only defined by what he is (intelligent, modest, sensible, skilled), but as always also by what he is not (commercial,

[123] Carvell Wallace, "On Kendrick Lamar and Black Humanity" (version: 29 March 2015) http://pitchfork.com/thepitch/704-on-kendrick-lamar-and-black-humanity/ (25 July 2017).

compromising, shallow). Therewith, Lamar's characteristics as displayed by US media define and shape imagery of contemporary Hiphop at large, which invokes stereotyping of the African American experience. This is the curse of traditionally excellent (rap) artists; by excelling, they transcend themselves and get transcended through media representation, leaving behind and potentially harming their communities by shaping or maintaining stereotypes through the conceptualization of those communities. This is not to say I believe this to be mostly benign – in fact, I believe the opposite. The spread of knowledge and familiarity with blackness through music can incite change of attitude or even spark action (take the Black Lives Matter movement, for example) with formerly unconscious audiences, reaching the ultimate goal of these artists. It should, however, not be forgotten that with this comes a negative side-effect that is amplified in this research in order to lay it bare.

Chapter 3: Representations by Dutch media

3.1 Introduction

Hiphop culture is not taken seriously by Dutch cultural critics and academics as a socio-cultural force, despite its undeniable grip on contemporary youth culture. Indeed, Hiphop is covered in national media – mass media and pop music media alike. It is played extensively on some radio stations, but Hiphop generally lacks the attention that other forms of popular culture receive in the Netherlands.[124] Moreover, the discourse on Hiphop, even in positive coverage, invokes negative stereotypes of Hiphop culture and more broadly, and more problematically, of the African American and other multi-ethnic experiences. There seems to exist a detachment between Hiphop culture and Dutch national culture and a lack of knowledge and understanding on both sides of the gap. These Dutch misunderstandings of what Hiphop culture perpetuates, contains, and represents are the main motivations for this thesis, bringing forth one of the larger questions this thesis asks: how are American Hiphop cultural products understood in the Netherlands? Specifically, I ask this question in this chapter for Kendrick Lamar's two albums *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* and *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

The broadest outcome to this question involves a rather unsatisfying answer, namely that it is difficult to gauge the ways in which Lamar's albums are discussed and understood, because they are hardly discussed in written (mass) media. For instance, one of the Netherlands' biggest newspapers, *Algemeen Dagblad,* did not discuss Kendrick Lamar or his music at all prior to the release of *DAMN* in early 2017.. Another big national newspaper, *De Telegraaf*, only covered details on Lamar's personal life and visits to the Netherlands, for instance his performance at the Lowlands festival in Biddinghuizen in July 2015.[125] The other three big Dutch newspapers, *Trouw*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *de Volkskrant* have covered Lamar's music since *gkmc* and more in-depth since *TPAB* and they focus mostly on its socio-political relevance.[126]

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[124] This becomes clear later in this chapter.
[125] De Telegraaf, "Kendrick Lamar naar Lowlands" (version: 29 April 2015) http://www.telegraaf.nl/filmenuitgaan/muziek/23983527/__Kendrick_Lamar_naar_Lowlands__.html (25 July 2017).
[126] *De Volkskrant* also published an interview with Lamar in 2013.

As mentioned, around the time *TPAB* was released, protest marches had been held in several cities throughout the United States addressing police brutality. With police brutality and Black Lives Matter protests all over Dutch news, the Netherlands did appear a receptive market for a grand statement on the African American community – *TPAB* received overwhelmingly positive reviews. An appealing soundtrack to these events seemed urgent and, moreover, educating. It additionally presented the opportunity for newspapers to showcase their position in the political spectrum; historically (center-)left oriented newspapers with a stronger focus on cultural coverage *Trouw* (which is also considered historically Christian, which might have helped Lamar's case), *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant* decided to praise *TPAB* in reviews and each newspaper individually wrote longer pieces on the state of Hiphop and African Americans in the United States; historically right-wing newspapers, *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad* did not cover the music at all, besides for a few quick mentions in the 'Showbiz' sections.[127] The lack of coverage in the latter two newspapers are the main reason I will only discuss representations of Lamar's music in *Trouw*, *de Volkskrant*, and *NRC Handelsblad*, mostly from 2015, when coverage on Lamar was most elaborate.

Professional pop music media in the Netherlands are usually focused on certain genres, but the ones that have broader interests have also neglected Lamar largely. The Netherlands' biggest music magazine *OOR* only covered Lamar on a handful of occasions, providing only three, relatively small in-depth articles on Kendrick Lamar. *VPRO 3voor12*, the most popular Dutch music blog which is owned by a public broadcasting corporation *VPRO* covered Kendrick Lamar and his music fairly elaborately, providing an interview, several thinkpieces and in-depth album reviews. With this, *3voor12* has the largest in-depth coverage on Kendrick Lamar's music of any Dutch media outlet. Since *OOR* and *3voor12* are the only two professional pop music media that cover Kendrick Lamar somewhat frequently, I will analyze only these two.

The analysis led three conclusions on the representation of Kendrick Lamar's music in Dutch media outlets in 2015. Firstly, Lamar's music is discussed as an

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[127] See for instance: De Telegraaf, "Kendrick Lamar: album werkte als therapie" (version: 22 June 2015) http://www.telegraaf.nl/filmenuitgaan/24184778/__Album_werkte_als_therapie__.html (28 July 2017) or Algemeen Dagblad, "Obama kiest rapper Lamar als favoriet van 2015" (version: 4 February 2016) http://www.ad.nl/buitenland/obama-kiest-rapper-lamar-als-favoriet-van-2015~a5875a6c/ (28 July 2017).

informative update on the African American experience ever since Hiphop was last politically relevant (in the eyes of Dutch writers) with N.W.A. and Public Enemy. Secondly, similar to the American rhetoric, Lamar's music is seen as exemplary for a new tendency in rap music that is revitalizing Hiphop, shifting it away from the stereotypical display of wealth, sex, crime, and violence. Thirdly, and to lesser extent, Lamar's music sparked Dutch media institutions to look at the Dutch state of Hiphop and systematic racism. These conclusions show an initial lack of knowledge of and engagement with Hiphop culture, but also expresses growing interest in Hiphop and African American culture among certain Dutch media, some of which sparking internal discussions on white privilege in the Netherlands. With this, however, the social environment Lamar describes becomes synonymous to all African American social experiences, therefore reinforcing stereotypes on Hiphop culture and African Americans, even though admittedly less clearly than in U.S. media outlets.

3.2 Hiphop and the Netherlands

Dutch Hiphop history is not nearly as adventurous as American Hiphop history. Despite obvious, substantial Dutch involvement in the global slave trade, the Dutch association with Black people and slavery is not as obvious as it is may be in the United States, since the Dutch did not use slavery extensively on Dutch ground.[128] The Dutch were hardly ever visually confronted with the atrocities Dutch slavery had brought, substantially diminishing the association between blackness and trauma. Additionally, despite strong segregation in the Netherlands (largely known as 'verzuiling', pillarization) black people in the Netherlands never created a united identity in the way African Americans did. This is all to say that Dutch blackness and Dutch perceptions of blackness are fundamentally different from African American blackness and perceptions on African American blackness.[129]

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[128] Between 1729-1775 'only' 456 Black people were transported to the Netherlands, not all of which slave. (Source: Carl Haarnack en Dienke Hondius, 'Swart' in Nederland: Afrikanen en Creolen in de Noordelijke Nederlanden vanaf de middeleeuwen tot de twintigste eeuw', in: Esther Schreuder (ed.), *Black is beautiful: Rubens tot Dumas* (Amsterdam 2008) 88-106, 94.)
[129] Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (London 2016) 21-24.

On the other end, Dutch perceptions on the African American experience are different from American perceptions on the African American experience, as well. This is mostly expressed in absence of (high) education on America in general, let alone African Americans. African American history is not taught in schools and only few courses on that topic are taught in universities. Utrecht University used to offer a course on racism in the United States as a part of the American Studies minor, but with the rescission of this minor, the course was cancelled. This means that even seminal, superficial knowledge on African American history, for instance the Harlem Renaissance or the Civil Rights movement, is not self-evident among Dutch people. Specifically, this means it can be assumed that Hiphop culture in the Netherlands does not live or move in the same it does in the United States, but most importantly for this thesis, is not *perceived* in the same way it is in the United States.

Admittedly, Hiphop on the largest scale is a game played on in the United States. American Hiphop culture continues to be the forerunner for global Hiphop culture, influencing behaviors and identities of Hiphop localities outside of the U.S. Dutch Hiphop, as any Hiphop culture anywhere around the world, stems historically from that subculture that emerged from the Bronx in the early '70s of the twentieth century. Yet, as any global Hiphop culture, Dutch Hiphop culture is argued to have its own nationally distinct flavors. I am aware that there are no singular national visions on Hiphop culture or African American culture, nor do I think Hiphop culture or African American culture are monolithic in the first place. I am trying to indicate general difference between American Hiphop culture and Dutch Hiphop culture and the perception thereof, while providing historical context for these differences. Therefore, I think both cultures have to temporarily be discussed as singular in order to dissect main discrepancies and similarities in the understanding of Hiphop culture at large and Lamar's music specifically.

Dutch Hiphop culture has been acknowledged in several researches on the globalization of Hiphop, although the exploration of Dutch Hiphop culture remains slight. Only a few studies have actually centered Dutch Hiphop culture. The work of Dutch sociologist Mir Wermuth is solitarily central in academic approaches to Dutch Hiphop culture. Her articles "Weri Man!" (1993) and "Rap in the Low Countries" (2001) shed first light on the consistency, ideology, and perception Dutch Hiphop culture, laying strong emphasis on the perception of Dutch Hiphop as imitation of American styles and

therefore inauthentic, while the subculture itself was creating its own distinctive features and ideologies.[130][131] After a ten-year research, starting in 1992, Wermuth processed her evolving ideas on Dutch Hiphop culture, culminating in her seminal work *No Sell-Out* (2002).

In 1987, as Wermuth writes in her preface, New York rap groups the Beastie Boys (a trio of white rappers, rooted in punk music) and Public Enemy (a group of Black rappers strongly advocating Black power) were the first Hiphop artists to play in the Netherlands, which prior to their concert sparked quite some controversy. After rumors of Hiphop-related unrest in France and the United States, people feared that the aggressive and rebellious attitudes of these groups would incite 'ethnic riots' among the youthful audience. In the end, the concert was reported to be 'nothing but fun'.[132] This anecdote shows reluctance towards accepting Hiphop culture, as it was perceived as a possible threat to the public order. Sugar Hill Gang's "Rappers Delight" (1979) was not perceived all too well, and between 1982-1987, Hiphop culture in the Netherlands had already endured a phase of lowered popularity. In other words, (American) Hiphop culture had a bad reputation before it even landed in the Netherlands.

According to Wehrmuth, this reputation is partially due to two complex associations with Hiphop culture: gender relations and deviant behavior. Hiphop is generally seen as a male dominated street culture glorifying sexism and violence. In fact, of the scarce academic interpretations of Hiphop culture in the Netherlands, the article "Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop Style Preferences and Externalizing Problem Behavior" (2008) by social scientist Maarten Selfhout (et al.) is completely dedicated to the relation between Hiphop culture and deviant behavior. The study does not question the relation between, but rather states the relation as existing, focusing on the endurance of these behaviors over time.[133] Wermuth underscores the relation between Hiphop, sexism, and deviant behavior, by hardly challenging those perceptions and referring to

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[130] Mir Wermuth, "Weri Man!: een studie naar de Hiphop-cultuur in Nederland", in: *Kunst en Beleid Nederland* (1993) 63-112, 63-65.
[131] Mir Wermuth, "Rap in the Low Countries: Global Dichotomies on a National Scale", in: Mitchell, Tony (ed.), *Global Noise. Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown 2001) 149-180, 149-150.
[132] Mir Wermuth, *No Sell-Out: De popularisering van een subcultuur* (Amsterdam 2002) i.
[133] Selfhout, Maarten H.W., Delsing, Marc J.M.H., Ter Bogt, Tom F.M., and Meeus, Wim, H.J., "Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop Style Preferences and Externalizing Problem Behavior: A Two-Wave Longitudinal Study", in *Youth & Society* 39 (2008) 4, 435-452, 435-437.

gangster rap as 'sex and violence rap'.[134] Truth of the matter is, these expressions of sexism and violence have a broad base in societal, institutional, and structural problems, which is why other scholars have aimed to emphasize Hiphop culture's potential of empowerment for Black males and females alike.[135] Admittedly, Wermuth does mention pop music to be an easy target for criticism of sexism and violence caused by underlying societal structures, but she hardly provides this context for Hiphop culture or challenges its stereotypes.[136] Additionally, she states that the general opinion of Hiphop in the Netherlands had been nurtured with racist and ungrounded fears of Black political revolution, sexism, and violence.[137] These stereotypical views of Hiphop culture as sexist and violent are persistent, although I will argue later in this chapter that Hiphop culture in 2015, especially with Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*, is increasingly understood as a vehicle for emancipation. Through Lamar's music, Hiphop's potential for Black emancipation is laid bare to Dutch journalists and audiences, in which Lamar is considered a potential leader for this so-called 'revitalized' movement in Hiphop culture.

In her analysis of the popularizing of Hiphop culture in the Netherlands, Wermuth puts aside a special role for media representation. She identifies three different platforms: mass media, niche media, and micro media. Mass media, such as prime time television and national newspapers, have shown to approach Hiphop culture from a 'youth as problem' perspective, creating 'moral hysteria'[138] and trying to neutralize or disarm subcultural resistance of the public order. Niche media focuses on specific subjects and audiences, usually aimed at youth, fashion, music, and/or lifestyle. Niche media is also often termed 'special interest media', referring to the advocating of certain cultural products and lifestyles. Lastly, micro media is any sort communication by subcultural members for subcultural members, containing everything from homemade scrapbooks to mouth-to-mouth recommendations.[139] This chapter will focus solely on mass media and niche media in the form of national newspapers and music blogs and magazines respectively.

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[134] Wermuth, *No Sell-Out*, 65-66.
[135] See for instance the works of Marcyliena Morgan or Tricia Rose on Hiphop culture, feminism, and Black emancipation.
[136] Wermuth, *No Sell-Out*, 75.
[137] Ibidem, 115.
[138] Wermuth uses the term 'morele paniek', which literally translates to 'moral panic', but I found 'hysteria' to be more fitting.
[139] Wermuth, *No Sell-Out*, 76-78.

Wermuth defines a tendency in the coverage of Hiphop in media, in which she identifies three periods. In the first period (1981-1985), she argues that music journalists initially did not know how to define 'this Hiphop thing'. Reviews were speckled with confusion and focus on aspects outside of the sonic experience and no distinction between rap and Hiphop was made. In this period, however, journalists start defining Hiphop by comparing the music to other, whiter genres. Hiphop could not be characterized as a 'novelty trend' because of its tradition in Black culture, but still had to earn its right in the Dutch pop musical landscape by placement in frameworks of more familiar genres, making it seem as if Hiphop had no ground to exist in its own right.[140]

In the second period (1986-1990), the development of rap music is central to media coverage. The analysis of lyrics also becomes more prominent. In this period rap music is often compared with other (again, white) genres that are known to strive for political change. Additionally, imagery of Hiphop artists as political, violent, masculine, angry, and militant, but also lyrical and hard-hitting recurred in media coverage. In pcitures, for instance, rappers smiled less frequently, frowned more often, were more often shot in black and white, and were usually depicted with a fist in the air.[141] It must be noted that this period largely aligns with Hiphop's 'Golden Age' as periodized by Bradley and Dubois.[142] This imagery, then, does not only become strongly associated with Hiphop culture, but it is also seen as the 'best' kind of Hiphop.

As these perceptions on Hiphop culture were slowly sinking in, attention rose in the third period (1991-1994) with the arrival of Hiphop movies, such as *Boyz N the Hood* (1991). Hiphop culture has 'matured' in the eyes of journalist, being worthy of more in-depth analysis as journalists make more comparisons to other Hiphop artists or Black artists. However, rap artists that look and act more similarly to traditional rock groups still receive more coverage than other rap acts.[143] All in all, the perception of Hiphop culture in Dutch media changed between 1981-1994, being fully consolidated in the Dutch pop cultural media after 1994.

With that, stereotyping and fear of Hiphop culture unfortunately did not disappear. In her case study on the representation of Los Angeles rapper Snoop Dogg in Dutch media, Wermuth found that Hiphop was very much associated with the African

[140] Ibidem, 232-234.
[141] Ibidem, 236-237.
[142] Bradley and Dubois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 119-120.
[143] Wermuth, *No Sell-Out*, 237.

American ghetto as well as impoverishment, criminality, drug use, racism, and gang wars. Hiphop was seen as a way for Black youth to survive the environments that inevitably produced these things, providing a future perspective where there previously was none. At the same time, however, this is not supported in the Netherlands due to the previously mentioned 'moral hysteria' sparked by specific mass media, depending on the guardian function of the newspapers. Wermuth distinguishes two guardian functions: the newspaper as 'guardian of decency' and the newspaper as 'guardian of democracy'. The former are more likely to spark hysteria, which is not bound to specific artists or genres, but Black subculture in general. This changes when 'decent white youths' do no appear to suddenly start murdering, selling drugs, or prostituting; Hiphop culture is not always explicitly linked to violence and crime anymore, but certain incidents are still motivations for discussion on Hiphop culture's perceived violent, criminal, and sexist nature.[144]

Despite persistent stereotypes on Hiphop culture in media coverage, the popularization and globalization of rap artists and Hiphop culture can have positive consequences for Black communities and other minorities. When the local becomes commercialized, it presents the opportunity for people from different social groups and local realities to communicate with it. American philosopher Richard Spradlin argues that hiphop has the ability to create greater understanding of other bodies through the portrayed transformed narratives of the self.[145] This understanding is rested on the contradiction between the expectations of hiphop that are made through white constructed black space which the commercial artist is forced to adhere to and the actual 'experience' of such realities through music.[146] Simpler put, rap music has the ability to show certain (local) realities in narratives that allows listener from different social or racial groups to identify and relate to. Dutch listeners, most likely having no connection to African-Americans in other ways, can utilize Lamar's music in order to help achieve understanding of the African-American experience, or even to draw parallels with the experience of minorities So despite the impossibility of a truly authentic form of African-American expression expected by Dutch listeners, Lamar's

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[144] Wermuth, *No Sell-Out*, 267-268, 275.
[145] Richard Spradlin, '"Hood Politics": Racial Transformation in Hip-Hop', in: Richard Spradlin, *Stance: An International Undergraduate Philosophy Journal* 9 (April 2016) 41-50, 41.
[146] Spradlin, '"Hood Politics"', 42-45.

music can provide empathy and understanding, achieving larger political goals of tolerance and equality.

Having elaborated on Dutch Hiphop history, Dutch perception of Hiphop culture, and the importance of media in the popularizing and conceptual shaping of Hiphop culture, it is now time to analyze Dutch media's representation of Kendrick Lamar and his music. I will argue that Dutch media representation does not necessarily differ from U.S. media representation, but because of substantially lower coverage and lack of knowledge on Hiphop/African American history, Lamar's music serves as more of an educator on the current African American experience. In the most passive way, Lamar's music appears to be an update on the current African American experience since earlier conceptualizations of the American Black ghetto (for instance by NWA); in the most active, Lamar's music can work inspiring, inciting debates on Dutch (institutions') perception of (Black) minorities, encouraging audiences to look inward and be critical of racial relations in the Netherlands.

3.3 Analysis of Dutch media representations

When searching for representations on Kendrick Lamar in Dutch media, the first thing that stands out is a lack of useable sources. As mentioned, two national newspapers, *Algemeen Dagblad* and *de Telegraaf*, did not cover Lamar until 2017, besides some short articles in the showbiz.[147][148] More remarkable, though, is the lack of coverage on Lamar by the largest Dutch printed music magazine *OOR*: despite placing *TPAB* second place on their year list – it lost to American singer-songwriter Sufjan Steven's more conventional, yet deeply personal record by singer-songwriter *Carrie & Lowell* – Lamar is only covered in short reviews and a short article on the cover art for *TPAB*. It may also be noted that *To Pimp a Butterfly* is the only rap record that made it into *OOR*'s top 10 albums of the year. Furthermore, the edition the year list was presented in only featured white artists that almost exclusively use guitars in their

[147] Algemeen Dagblad, "Obama kiest rapper Lamar als favoriet van 2015" (version: 4 February 2016) http://www.ad.nl/buitenland/obama-kiest-rapper-lamar-als-favoriet-van-2015~a5875a6c/ (28 July 2017).
[148] De Telegraaf, "Kendrick Lamar: album werkte als therapie" (version: 22 June 2015) http://www.telegraaf.nl/filmenuitgaan/24184778/__Album_werkte_als_therapie__.html (28 July 2017).

music.[149] *OOR*'s reviews are also not as laudatory as most other reviews: sonically, both records are characterized as 'volatile'.[150] However, *OOR* does praise Lamar for his excellent storytelling, but it is striking that in both the review for *gkmc* and *TPAB* the storytelling is rated higher than the sonic experience of the album:

> Perhaps the story of *good kid, m.A.A.d city* is even more important [than the music].[151]

> When you don't like the music, there is all the more reason to listen what the 27-year old American has to say. And those are always amazing, beautifully formulated stories.[152]

It seems that *OOR* likes the Hiphop of Kendrick Lamar – *gkmc* is portrayed as a much needed 'hiphop revolution' – but more generally favors other genres, also notable in *OOR*'s praise of *TPAB*'s production where you can 'imagine the live band right in front of you'.[153][154] Such arguments relate to Wermuth's previously stated point that by critics, music made by conventional instruments rather than technology are more likely to be conceived as authentic.[155]

Furthermore, it is striking that it is not irregular to find (slight) factual or spelling mistakes in Dutch media representations of Lamar. For instance, in a review on *To Pimp a Butterfly*, De Vrieze ceases to mention that Kunta Kinte, the slave *TPAB*'s biggest hit single "King Kunta" references, is a largely fictionalized character.[156] He also claims that Kinte lost both of his feet to a punishment after a failed attempt to flee the plantation,

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[149] OOR, "Album van het Jaar: Sufjan Stevens!" (version: 27 November 2015) https://oor.nl/news/album_van_het_jaar_sufjan_stevens-1/ (28 July 2017).
[150] Alex van der Hulst, "Kendrick Lamar – To Pimp a Butterfly" (version: 20 March 2015) https://oor.nl/albums/to_pimp_a_butterfly/ (28 July 2017).
[151] Alex van der Hulst, "Kendrick Lamar – good kid, m.A.A.d city" (version: 27 November 2012) https://oor.nl/albums/good_kid_m_a_a_d_city/ (28 July 2017).
[152] Van der Hulst, "Kendrick Lamar – To Pimp a Butterfly" (version: 20 March 2015) https://oor.nl/albums/to_pimp_a_butterfly/ (28 July 2017).
[153] Van der Hulst, "Kendrick Lamar – good kid, m.A.A.d city" (version: 27 November 2012) https://oor.nl/albums/good_kid_m_a_a_d_city/ (28 July 2017).
[154] Van der Hulst, "Kendrick Lamar – To Pimp a Butterfly" (version: 20 March 2015) https://oor.nl/albums/to_pimp_a_butterfly/ (28 July 2017).
[155] Wermuth, *No Sell-Out*, ?.
[156] Atze de Vrieze, "3voor12 bespreekt Album van de Week (14): Kendrick Lamar" (version: 28 March 2015) https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2015/Album-van-de-Week/Week-14-Kendrick-Lamar.html (27 July 2017).

while in the show *Roots* (where Kinte is most known from) he only lost his right foot.[157] In another instance, when explaining the narrative of the song "u", De Vrieze claims that Lamar mourns over the death of his good friend who, according to De Vrieze, goes by the nickname of Little Brother. However, no source supports that Little Brother was actually a common nickname for Lamar's late friend.[158] In the previously mentioned review for *Straight Outta Compton*, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* is simply spelled out 'Good Kid, Mad City'.[159] *De Volkskrant*'s review of *TPAB* claims *gkmc* to stem from 2013.[160] These mistakes might seem insignificant and they may very well be harmless sloppiness from the writers. And to be fair, *gkmc*'s correct spelling is tricky and *TPAB* is a very dense in information. However, I do find it to be striking that besides a general lack of coverage on Lamar's music, the ones that do seem to be so overwhelmed by the quantity of knowledge that came with *TPAB* that simple editorial mistakes were made in the first place, but also overlooked in final editing. Even though mistakes are slight, the multitude of mistakes indicates a lack of knowledge and research on Kendrick Lamar in the first place.

When Lamar is covered, however, he is represented in similar ways to those of U.S. media. Dutch media largely portray Lamar as a unique voice in Hiphop, proving himself superior to other Hiphop artists by means of lyrical ability and political engagement. Again, contemporary Hiphop culture is perceived to be shallow and commercial and Lamar is seen to bring new impulses to a genre that has gradually been perishing in its own lusts for violence, luxury, and sex. For instance, national newspaper *Trouw* writes: 'Kendrick Lamar's introspection is a welcome change to the hiphop landscape that is known for its machismo, materialism, and peacocking.'[161] The article aligns Lamar's music with politically engaged rappers from previous decades, such as NWA and Tupac Shakur, pointing out that politically engaged Hiphop is not new per se.

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[157] Wright, "Uprooting Kunta Kinte: n the Perils of Relying on Encyclopedic Informants", 205-217.
[158] Genius, "Kendrick Lamar – u Lyrics" https://genius.com/5039797 (27 July 2017).
[159] Belgers, "Beats vol zwarte woede" (version: 3 September 2015) https://www.trouw.nl/home/beats-vol-zwarte-woede~a9574bc4/ (27 July 2017).
[160] Robert van Gijssel, "To Pimp a Butterfly van Kendrick Lamar is buitencategorie" (version: 24 March 2015) https://www.volkskrant.nl/muziek/to-pimp-a-butterfly-van-kendrick-lamar-is-buitencategorie~a3923657/ (27 July 2017).
[161] Joris Belgers, "Een mijlpaal van een rapalbum" (version: 20 March 2015) https://www.trouw.nl/home/een-mijlpaal-van-een-rapalbum~a024c05d/ (27 July 2017).

‘However,’ they add, ‘ in the past decennium that engagement has been overwhelmed by brawling and peacocking on MTV.’[162] According to the writer, Lamar would never engage in this sort of bravado:

> Yes, Lamar too uses style figures such as hyperboles and braggadocio that never get out of fashion in hiphop. But outside of that he never practices ostentation. He doesn’t rap about bitches, doesn’t flaunt expensive clothes or expensive watches and doesn’t waste champagne. The calm thinker found God and is still reputably together with his high school sweetheart.[163]

Here we see the same type of arguments that I have elaborated in the analysis of U.S. media representation on Lamar. Lamar shies away from shallow and undesired ego boasting and flaunting of wealth and women, staying virtuous and discussing more urgent matters instead.

Even more than U.S. media, Dutch newspapers represent Lamar as the leader of a new impulse in Hiphop that emerged in 2015. *NRC Handelsblad* writes:

> In general it was a beautiful year for hiphop, as diverse as ever, from the psychedelic fuddle rap of A$AP Rocky to the hedonistic party rap of Rae Sremmurd, from the strong, raw debut of Vince Staples to the wonderful abstract universe of Young Thug and the omnipresent and excelling Future and Drake.
>
> But Lamar was the rapper that impressed most.[164]

NRC praises several rappers for making 2015 into a ‘beautiful year for hiphop’ through their diversity. Even though these artists broadened the spectrum of Hiphop, they do not

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[162] Belgers, “Een mijlpaal van een rapalbum” (version: 20 March 2015) https://www.trouw.nl/home/een-mijlpaal-van-een-rapalbum~a024c05d/ (27 July 2017).
[163] Ibidem.
[164] Saul van Stapele, “De rapper die de tijdsgeest raakt” (version: 30 December 2015) https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2015/12/30/de-rapper-die-de-tijdgeest-raakt-1570344-a691862 (27 July 2017).

beat Lamar's music, as he 'represents the zeitgeist like no other'.[165] Additionally, *NRC* points out that political engagement is not new within Hiphop, but it reached a broader audience because of growing media coverage on police brutality and institutional racism. Thus, according to *NRC*, the combination of correct timing of *TPAB*'s release and Lamar's ability to translate these experiences into music made for a new impulse in Hiphop that put the genre in a more mainstream limelight.

What is already prevalent in the *NRC* article, but further elaborated in other articles, is the idea of Dutch news media that 2015 marked a change in Hiphop history that would either disprove negative stereotypes concerning Hiphop culture or change the perception of audiences on those stereotypes. Dutch media see Lamar as largely responsible for this change, moving the artwork itself and the related socio-political engagement to the center of Hiphop culture. In a review for the 2015 film *Straight Outta Compton* on the rise of NWA, *Trouw* briefly mentions Lamar at the end, identifying a shift in Hiphop culture from the 'nihilistic decadence' of post-1992 (the year NWA broke up) back to 'intelligent, poetic, and optimistic lyrics'.[166] As many media did, Dutch and American alike, *3voor12* crowned *To Pimp a Butterfly* album of the year and also label 2015 'the year of hiphop' because of Lamar's album, his acclaimed performance on the Lowlands festival in Biddinghuizen, and the corresponding growing attention for Dutch rap artists.[167]

The idea of Lamar as exemplary of a movement saving Hiphop culture in 2015 becomes most clear in an article published by *de Volkskrant* late 2015. The article draws strong similarities to the *USA Today* article, crowning 2015 'the year of hiphop'. The title rang: "Hiphop: from women and weapons to moral leadership and vision". The lead to the article went as follows:

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[165] Van Stapele, "De rapper die de tijdsgeest raakt" (version: 30 December 2015) https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2015/12/30/de-rapper-die-de-tijdgeest-raakt-1570344-a691862 (27 July 2017).
[166] Belgers, "Beats vol zwarte woede" (version: 3 September 2015) https://www.trouw.nl/home/beats-vol-zwarte-woede~a9574bc4/ (27 July 2017).
[167] Sjoerd Huismans, "Jaaroverzicht deel 2: het jaar van de hiphop, Tame Impala en de streamingstrijd" (version: 23 December 2015) https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2015/Jaaroverzicht/Best-of-3voor12-2.html (27 July 2015).

New names, new generation, new anger: 2015 became the year of hiphop. You can call it a legendary hiphop year. How did that happen? For instance rappers stopped whining about money and prostitutes.[168]

De Volkskrant presents 2015 as the year in which a new generation provided a shift within Hiphop culture that strived away from display of ostensible wealth and hyper-sexuality, moving towards an art form that values art and socio-political engagement over commercialism. Eerily similar to American newspapers – especially *USA Today* – *de Volkskrant* pursues the Golden Age ideology, declaring an end to a long period of commercialized Hiphop, using arguments that have conventionally been used to stereotype Hiphop culture over decades.

Additionally striking is the seeming lack of knowledge on African-American history, Hiphop culture, and the African-American social situation at large with the writers, as well as an assumed lack of knowledge on these subjects with their audiences. Articles often contained mistakes, whether it be in the spelling of song names, the identification of certain characters in Lamar's music, or facts on African-American history. For instance, in response to the overwhelmingly positive reception of *To Pimp a Butterfly, 3voor12* posted an article by the name of "King Kunta en andere personages: Kendrick Lamar's grote parade" ("King Kunta and other characters: Kendrick's big parade") explaining some of the names that Lamar mentions on the album. *3voor12* goes as far to explain household names in African-American history like Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and Martin Luther King Jr. These characters are explained in a way that knowledge of these characters is not assumed:

The [sic] Pimp a Butterfly bursts with names of civil rights leaders.

Of course the name Martin Luther King is mentioned. He and Malcolm X were the most famous, and also the two that represented the most important camps: militant uprising

[168] Pablo Cabenda, Robert van Gijssel, Menno Pot, and Gijsbert Kramer, "Hiphop: van vrouwen en wapens naar moreel leiderschap en visie" (version: 15 December 2015) https://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/hiphop-van-vrouwen-en-wapens-naar-moreel-leiderschap-en-visie~a4208392 (27 July 2017).

versus peaceful reconciliation. Huey Newton is also mentioned, just like his organization the Black Panthers, and Jesse Jackson fits the same row, too.[169]

The writer, Atze de Vrieze, does not provide much context to the characters he promised to explain. In fact, he mentions Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Huey Newton's most obvious features without providing any further explanation. Reverend Jesse Jackson does not get any elaboration besides connecting him to the previously mentioned civil rights leaders. This leads me to think that De Vrieze might assume that his article will be an introduction to these seminal figures in African-American history for his audience.

Most importantly, Lamar's music created a platform for debate. Music writers urged to look critically towards Dutch perceptions of Hiphop culture. This was partially due to the release Dutch rapper Fresku's song "Zo Doe Je Dat" (roughly translated: "This Is How It's Done") in August 2015. The song featured heavy criticism on the whiteness of the Dutch entertainment industry, symbolized by Hilversum, the location from where most radio and tv shows are broadcasted. The song additionally contains a sample from 3FM radio show host Giel Beelen, one of the best-known Dutch radio deejays, claiming during one of his shows that the average listener rejects Hiphop, since the average listener allegedly thinks it 'doesn't make sense at all'.[170] Fresku's main claim was that Hiphop hardly received any recognition from big radio stations in Hilversum, while 'white sounding' artists, such as conventional rock bands or white artists appropriating Hiphop culture such as Iggy Azalea and Macklemore, do find a platform on Dutch mainstream radio. The song induced confusion and anger among audiences as they felt to be called out as racists where they had never anticipated being racist.

Unintentional or subconscious racism has been an increasing concern with Dutch culture in the 2010s, most clearly visible in the polarizing 'Zwarte Piet controversy'. The Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas (Saint Nicolas), a Roman Catholic saint that brings presents to children every December 5th, included a servant named Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) who is since the mid-nineteenth century portrayed in blackface, full red lips, nappy hair, and golden earrings. Debates on the racist nature of Zwarte Piet weren't exactly

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[169] Atze de Vrieze, "King Kunta en andere personages: Kendrick Lamar's grote parade" (version: 6 May 2015) https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2015/mei/King-Kunta-en-andere-personage--Kendrick-Lamar-s-grote-parade.html (26 July 2015).
[170] Fresku, "Zo Doe Je Dat", by Fresku, Braz, Teemong, and Go Back To The Zoo, in: *Nooit Meer Terug* (Top Notch 2015).

new in the 2010s, but were catalyzed by Dutch-Antillean activist and poet Quinsy Gario in 2012 with his national campaign 'Zwarte Piet is racisme', notably after a video of Gario forcefully being held down by police officers while he was holding peaceful protest surfaced on YouTube.[171] Opponents to Zwarte Piet ask for a change of Piet's appearance (for instance, losing all features that relate to historically racist imagery) or, in more radical instances, Piet's complete disposal. Proponents of Zwarte Piet deny the racist nature of Zwarte Piet, sometimes going as far as to portray opponents to Zwarte Piet as malevolent to Dutch tradition and society.[172] In the video for "Zo Doe Je Dat", Fresku paints himself white and wears a blonde wig at the end of the video, drawing associations with Zwarte Piet by reversing the process of blackface. This raised questions with certain audiences, asking whether why this would or would not count as racism towards white people.[173] This draws back to the Zwarte Piet controversy, where proponents of Zwarte Piet draw connections between the alleged racist of Zwarte Piet and white figures, such as snowmen and various types of food, claiming these to be equally racist and potentially hurtful.[174] Lamar's *TPAB* and Fresku's "Zo Doe Je Dat" arrived in this environment where discussions on racial issues were tense and coverage on racial issues in the United States was growing as well.

Lamar's music, then, was a way to draw parallels between the Dutch racial situation and the American. Awareness and intensity of these debates, however, are substantially different – as I have shown in the second chapter, African-Americans have been proactive in changing their socio-economic and socio-political situation for centuries, sparking public debate since before the Civil War.[175] In the Netherlands, however, these debates, despite being around for decades, are being discussed as new. Therefore, American tools are used to make sense of Dutch perceptions on racial issues, specifically Kendrick Lamar's music. This shows the function of Hiphop as a way of connecting the dots in geopolitical events before applying these to individually or locally

171 Sacha Hilhorst and Joke Hermes, "'We have given up so much': Passion and denial in the Dutch Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) controversy", in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (2016) 3, 218-233, 219-220.
172 Hilhorst and Hermes, "'We have given up so much'", 225-227.
173 A quick look at YouTube comments for the video for "Zo Doe Je Dat" point this out.
174 Hilhorst and Hermes, "We have given up so much", 224.
175 Gates, "African American Citizenship", 3.

specific situations.[176] Lamar's music specifically, containing explicit content on racial issues, seems particularly fitting for discussing Dutch racial situations, raising conversation on institutional behaviors towards race.

An article on institutional attitudes towards race written by Atze de Vrieze for *3voor12* exemplifies this. De Vrieze claims that Fresku is right about the whiteness of the Dutch entertainment industry. De Vrieze admits to initially being skeptical towards and hurt by claims of whiteness in his portrayal and preferences of pop music. However, after doing research, the whiteness of the Dutch entertainment industry became increasingly clear to him. De Vrieze explains the public discussion on white privilege and institutional racism as hardly present in Dutch society:

> We are tended to think that we are not racists, and that white privilege is only imagined by overly sensitive activists like Quinsy Gario. But in the American discussion on white and black hiphop – Americans are rather sensitive towards skin color, as you may know – white privilege is an overly known term. (...) The white audience and the white influencers of taste are more likely to identify with someone who has the same skin color, is the general conviction.[177]

Besides De Vrieze ignoring the fact that Hiphop has had white audiences ever since its emergence from the Bronx in the 1970s, again proving lack of knowledge on Hiphop history, he presents 'white privilege' as a term that is to be introduced in the Dutch public debate on Hiphop culture and institutional racism. The whiteness of the entertainment industry, as shown in the quote above, is result of audiences as well as institutions, as De Vrieze points out the influence of both.

Broadcasting manager Wilbert Mutsaers wrote an individual response to the debate in a piece following De Vrieze's article, in which Mutsaers does not deny the role of both tastemakers and audiences, but ultimately puts responsibility in the hands of the consumers. Mutsaers claims that 3FM has to adhere to audience expectations, and in his experience, audiences actively dislike Hiphop music:

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[176] Morgan and D. Bennett, "Hip-hop & the global imprint of a black cultural form", 187-190.

[177] Atze de Vrieze, "Fresku heeft wel een beetje gelijk over Hilversum" (version: 26 August 2015) https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2015/augustus/Fresku-heeft-wel-een-beetje-gelijk-over-Hilversum.html (28 July 2017).

Of the national FM-radio stations, most Dutch hiphop and crossover, Fresku including, is played by 3FM. When we ask listeners (18-24 year-olds), it unfortunately doesn't make them happy. I will make a one-time exception by exposing music research results gathered this week: the two least favorite records on 3FM are unfortunately the singles by Fresku and Lil' Kleine & Ronnie Flex [two Dutch rappers that scored a major hit as well as major controversy with their song "Drank & Drugs", translated: "Liquor and Drugs"].[178]

Besides claiming that the 3FM audience prefers other types of music to Hiphop, Mutsaers additionally says that audience expectations are not leading in the decisions concerning which music to air. After all, the radio station gave Fresku and Lil' Kleine & Ronnie Flex air play and gave Lamar's "King Kunta" megahit status.[179] Mutsaers says that despite general rejection of Lamar's music by the audience does not influence the quantity in which the music is played:

3FM named Kendrick Lamar megahit because we loved the single ["King Kunta"], despite us knowing that the average listener will disagree. Mission is a part of this profession.[180]

In other words, Mutsaers claims the institutions to be active in pursuing equal airplay for Hiphop in relation to other genres of music, but the audiences are unwilling; 3FM loves Kendrick Lamar (as I have shown, partially because of his simultaneous rejection and confirmation of Hiphop stereotypes), but consumers don't. Despite admitting to the existence of structural and institutional racism, according to 3FM, systematic rejection of Hiphop lies with mainstream audience, not with the institution.

To summarize, Hiphop culture helped spark a new debate within the Dutch entertainment industry, catalyzed by the music of Kendrick Lamar and Fresku. Lamar and Fresku are, in a sense, bringers of knowledge to these institutions that in turn

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[178] Wilbert Mutsaers, "Fresku heeft wel een beetje gelijk over Hilversum" (version: 26 August 2015) https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2015/augustus/Fresku-heeft-wel-een-beetje-gelijk-over-Hilversum.html (28 July 2017).
[179] NPO 3FM, "'King Kunta van Kendrick Lamar is megahit'" (version: 23 April 2015) http://www.npo3fm.nl/nieuws/3fm/372-muziek/megahit/362017-king-kunta-van-kendrick-lamar-is-3fm-megahit (28 July 2017). A 3FM megahit is a weekly rotating song that reveals strong approval from the 3FM deejays towards certain songs, providing these singles with increased airplay during that week.
[180] Mutsaers, "Fresku heeft wel een beetje gelijk over Hilversum" (version: 26 August 2015) https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2015/augustus/Fresku-heeft-wel-een-beetje-gelijk-over-Hilversum.html (28 July 2017).

translate that knowledge back to audiences. These forms of knowledge include Hiphop history, but also broader historical tendencies, such as institutionalized racism, as well as racial theory. Dutch media institutions claim to advocate this information, pursuing racial equality, placing responsibility concerning the actual establishment of Hiphop culture in mainstream society with mainstream audiences, which for the time being generally reject Hiphop. However, institutions do identify a new movement in Hiphop culture that centers Hiphop as art form as well as socio-political issues. Whether this movement is actually new or even existent is insignificant; it is important that this encourages the Dutch entertainment industry to look inward critically and fueling public debate on racial issues through Hiphop.

3.4 Conclusion

The initial lack of coverage on big names in Hiphop culture and the overall assumed lack of knowledge on Hiphop culture lead to the conclusion that the Dutch mainstream musical landscape has been relatively unfamiliar with Hiphop culture since its stereotypically rebellious, violent, and sexualized portrayal in Dutch media in the 90s. Institutions claim their audiences to be uninterested in rap music or Hiphop culture, yet they cautiously aim to bring Hiphop culture to those audiences by elaborating on Lamar's music and his strong messages, especially *To Pimp a Butterfly*. *TPAB*, then, symptomizes a shift in the Dutch understanding of Hiphop, or at least shows potential of what rap music can be and achieve when it adheres to certain ideas of subject matter, political engagement, and virtuosity. Dutch media portray this potential as new and show Lamar as seminal for this new potential, while simultaneously admitting to the historical tradition Lamar places himself in. *To Pimp a Butterfly* sparked interest in Hiphop culture for music writers and audiences alike – although it concerns a specific kind of Hiphop, mostly relating to politically engaged, 'conscious' Hiphop – at most effective sparking debates on the way Dutch institutions and audiences perceive Hiphop culture and non-white artistry. Lamar's music and message might not be as new as Dutch media made it seem – as I have shown in the previous chapters, if anything, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* and *TPAB* are somewhat conservative in terms of worldview, but

progressive in execution – but it may have forced foreign institutions and audiences to adjust their perceptions of Hiphop culture.[181]

[181] All of this relates to an emerging debate on (white) institutions and their interaction with Hiphop culture. I do not know whether radio stations actually adjusted policy to this changing stance, nor do I know whether consumer perceptions on Hiphop have transformed since. This could be material for further research.

Conclusion

Without African American history, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand Hiphop cultures wherever in the world. Without clear understanding of Hiphop culture, expressions of youth and minorities can be perceived as alienated from certain norms, creating certain detachments between youth culture Although youth may largely be liberal minded, embracing or at least tolerating Hiphop culture, the *3voor12* article shows that their audience (aged 18-24) is still substantially less likely to enjoy listening to rap music, proving this disconnect to be more severe than one might think while reading laudatory reviews from institutions. Moreover, it shows that increased airtime and coverage do not necessarily increase youth's active participation in, or understanding of Hiphop culture. This is not to say that there are certain obligations towards Hiphop culture – I truly believe anyone should be able to enjoy any form of cultural expression – but understanding of Hiphop culture does help us understand and interact with not only African American and Black experiences, but experiences of marginalized youth around the globe. As long as we keep neglecting, rejecting, and/or stereotyping contemporary Hiphop culture as a shallow culture of indecency and 'deviant behavior', segregation will increase in scale and in severity. That is to say that the same attitudes that see Hiphop as marginal or shallow undergird assumptions of normative whiteness or societies in which exclusion on the basis of race has been a historic norm. By failing to take the implicit and explicit social critique of Hiphop seriously listeners and critics fail to accept the demand for change made by that critique.

Kendrick Lamar, as represented through his music, U.S. media, and Dutch media, is understood as a unique pinnacle of authenticity, intelligence, and innocence in environments poisoned by violence, commercialism, and sexuality. These portrayals reinforce stereotypes of the African-American community and Hiphop culture while simultaneously empowering these communities through the creation of skillful art that resonates universally. By doing so, Lamar's music did inspire interest in the social situation of African-Americans in the U.S., as well as the Netherlands. The globalization of Kendrick Lamar's music allowed Dutch writers to draw parallels between the much-critiqued situation of African-Americans and the Dutch perception of Hiphop culture and minorities participating in Hiphop culture, advocating mostly for a change of pace in the

entertainment industry, implying active Writers, however, do claim Lamar's music to be inspiring change within the writers, but are skeptical towards the participation of the public in this. In the Netherlands, Dutch writers argue, the general consensus remains that Hiphop is not suited for radio, despite the Dutch entertainment industry's willingness to air more rap music.

However portrayed as negative by Lamar, U.S. media, and Dutch media, I believe that the commercialization and popularization of Hiphop is not a bad thing necessarily. Its eclectic popularity has the potential to provide widespread platforms of expression for minority youth, invites social cohesion between youth of every ethnicity, and sparks conversation between (minority) youth and institutions. Largely, though, commercialization and popularity of Hiphop culture are represented as negative; it either takes away from the authentic experience or exploits young Black boys trying to make it out the hood; or Hiphop is inherently sexist and violent, which is intoxicating our children. I think this is because of historical stereotyping of HIphop culture on two sides. Representations of Kendrick Lamar may spark racial debates and alter perceptions on the African-American experience and Hiphop culture in a way that benefits the African-American community, Hiphop culture, and even Lamar himself. But with the annunciation of excellence comes the degrading and challenging of cultures in a broader sense. Especially in an age where Hiphop culture rapidly evolves away from historically more acclaimed ideas of lyricism and political engagement, it seems to be more sensible to advocate these changing instead of fighting them, or at least allowing for multiple movements to coexist within Hiphop without presenting one as better or more authentic than the other.

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