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Bachelor Thesis Comparative Literature
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Rapping about Dutch Racism and Blackness from the Dutch-Caribbean Perspective in *Lobi da Basi* and *Nooit Meer Terug*.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Not much has been written or said about Dutch hip-hop, specifically and especially as identity formation, and as imaginative and stylized narration of issues of racism and blackness. Most research I found tends to focus on the subcultural characteristics of the genre, and its conventions; less so on the messages, and experiences therein, that the music and lyrics convey. I intend to explore the workings and mechanisms of Dutch racism, from the productive vantage point of the artistic expressions of two recent works by two similar Dutch rappers, Typhoon and Fresku. Both rappers are Dutch, of similar age, and are second generation immigrants of Caribbean descent. Typhoon (whose real name is Glenn de Randamie) was born in 1984, in the Dutch village 't Harde, and is of Surinamese descent. Fresku (Roy Michael Reymound) was born in 1986, in Eindhoven to a Curaçaoan father and a Dutch mother. Both their albums, respectively *Lobi da Basi* and *Nooit Meer Terug*, are spoken in Dutch, and were released within one year from each other, on the same established Dutch hip-hop label 'Top Notch'. Most importantly, both albums directly and explicitly confront the lived, personal experiences of the black, Dutch-Caribbean diaspora in the Netherlands of each of the rappers. The poetic and musical qualities of either album, and the poignancy of the lyrics, show that if Dutch hip-hop hadn't yet matured, it is doing so rapidly.

As a musical genre, Dutch hip-hop (or Nederhop) suits perfectly as a means of local storytelling. So how do Fresku's *Nooit Meer Terug* (2015) and Typhoon's *Lobi da Basi* (2014) deal with experiences of racism, blackness, and the Dutch-Caribbean diaspora in the Netherlands, both explicitly and implicitly, once we compare and contrast the lyrics of the two albums?

Both albums draw from the same well of the Dutch-Caribbean tradition and experience in the Netherlands, and broadly portray the same experienced inequalities, racism and discrimination. However, they each approach these issues with different attitudes. With *Lobi da*

Basi, Typhoon explores his Surinamese heritage to construct an Afro-Dutch Caribbean identity that allows him to place himself outside or above white Dutch national identity – by which I generally refer to the national identity that has created the racist institutions both rappers rebel against, a dialectical construct within the context of these albums – and from this vantage point formulates a message based around spiritual, universalistic love, to counter Dutch racism and ignorance. Fresku, on the other hand, uses his Dutch-Antillean heritage to construct a lateral identity that places him right in between the Dutch-Caribbean minority and Dutch racism, confronting white Dutch institutions with the racism they perpetrate or perpetuate.

Both albums read like a targeted response to prevalent Dutch racism. Essed and Hoving (2014) describe a tendency in Dutch politics and culture, where the multi-cultural society has come to be seen as a failure – especially in the last fifteen years, with prominent incidents such as the assassinations of Dutch right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo van Gogh (p. 17). The notion by Essed and Hoving that there is an “increasing acceptance and spiraling of racism in all areas of Dutch society” (p. 11) adds a temporal element to the albums discussed here: the issues of racism are timeless, but it seems hardly coincidental that these two contemporary rappers address Dutch racism and blackness so explicitly. As of this writing, it has been only two weeks ago since Dutch police stopped Typhoon in his car, admittedly due to the mismatch between the color of his skin and the relative expensiveness of his station wagon. This incident blew up the debate on racial profiling to a national level. (Çankaya, 2016)

Within this thesis I intend to provide insight into, firstly, the current, lived Dutch-Caribbean experience in the Netherlands, and secondly, (de)constructive Dutch-Caribbean voices vis-à-vis Dutch racism. As I am white-skinned myself, I hope my research will come to represent an increase in insight and assumed responsibility for Dutch colonial history, and present day Dutch racism. As a student of comparative literature, my focus will be mainly on the lyrical content of both albums, as the lyrics are an integral part of hip-hop music, which places a particular emphasis on the verbal performance. Or to put it another way: “rhymed storytelling” (Rose, as cited in Walter, 2006, p. 7), in which rap serves as an aestheticized means to tell a story. For the purpose of this thesis, rhyme as part of a performance is less relevant than the message contained within the lyrics themselves. The focus will lie solely on the contents, not form. In order to reconcile the Dutch lyrics and English language written here, I will use lyrics translated to English by myself, with the original Dutch texts included in an appendix. I will provide clarifications when relevant.

In the remainder of this chapter I will elaborate on how the second generation Dutch-Caribbean experience is defined (also by the Dutch-Caribbean diaspora of earlier generations), and how both albums fit within, and represent (dis-)continuations of, the traditions of hip-hop, or Nederhop, as part of Afro-Dutch subculture and a genre of music in the broader sense. In the

second chapter I will perform two separate analyses of the textual, and to a lesser extent, musical elements in each of the albums. In the third and final chapter I will compare and contrast any insights gained from the previous chapter, in order to form a conclusion to support my hypothesis.

1.1 Nederhop as local storytelling and identity formation

As a musical genre, rap functions as a fitting means for societal critique: both Typhoon and Fresku perform their criticism of Dutch racism through the lyrical content of their music. Their written work, approached as literature, constitutes an intermedial performance that functions as a societal or ideological critique, as well as an artistic expression. Simply put: both the lyrics and the music perform aesthetically in a poetic sense and critically in a ideological and cultural sense (Brillenburger and Rigney, 2006, pp. 148-150, 370-373).

Although hip-hop made its first major contact with a Dutch audience in the mid-1980s, Mir Wermuth (2001:1) traces the actual origins of Dutch-spoken hip-hop to the early 1990s, which by then reached a mostly white audience (p. 832). Despite its initial popularity within Dutch-Antillean and Dutch-Surinamese neighborhoods (Wermuth, 2005, p. 830), until the latter half of the 2000s at least, the most popular Dutch-spoken hip-hop artists and groups were white. Wermuth cites examples like Extince, the first rapper to enter the mainstream hitparade, in 1998 (p. 832).

The term 'Nederhop' was coined to denote hip-hop music made in the Netherlands in general, regardless of its language (p. 830); since then it has been used to refer to Dutch-spoken hip-hop specifically, especially in contrast to American-English-spoken rap predominantly by people of Surinamese origin (Pennycook, 2007, p. 102). In order to differentiate it from any Dutch hip-hop, I will use the term 'Nederhop' to refer solely to Dutch-spoken hip-hop music from here on out. Since the early 1990s, Nederhop has come to be regarded as being more 'authentic' language within the underground scene (Walter, 2006, p. 9), and generally as a way to "articulate a sense of national (but also local) identity" (p. 14). In the case of Typhoon and Fresku, this articulation of a national-local identity constitutes a process of self-identification, "a practice of self-styling" of an Afro-Dutch identity (De Witte, 2014, p. 263), that informs both the literary and musical characteristics of their music, as well as the construction of the outward image of the rappers themselves. In this way, they represent a trend of "renewed interest in African roots and self-styling among Dutch people of Afro-Caribbean (Surinamese, Antillean) backgrounds" (p. 264-265). Chamberlain et al. (2002) provide ample support for the thesis that Caribbean culture, as an island culture, has been global from the start, (Chamberlain, p. 4) and as such has had "a world beyond, as well as a world left behind" (p. 4).

According to De Witte (2014), a "hyphenated category of Afro-Dutch" (p. 267) has emerged only recently, and coincides with the "retreat of multiculturalism" (p. 268) in the Netherlands.

Essed and Hoving (2014) confirm the stagnation in the acceptance of otherness by Dutch whites. They write that "[t]he Netherlands, in contrast [to the US], has remained stagnant and generally accepting in the face of racism" (p. 11), and even state that "[r]acism and extremism are increasing sharply" in the 21st century (p. 13). As self-styled Dutch Afro-Caribbean rappers, Typhoon and Fresku explicitly tangle with these national developments (or rather: regressions) of racism in their music. Pennycook (2007) and Walter (2006) weigh in on the issue of locality, authenticity and the use of local language versus English, within a global hip-hop sphere. Pennycook contends that hip-hop has moved from being exclusively "an expression African-American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world" (as cited in Pennycook, 2007, p. 102). He adds that "[l]anguage use in any context is subject to the interpretation of those languages through local language ideologies" (p. 112), these ideologies in this case being the engagement with the aforementioned local themes and registers of race, identity and racism. Yet there is an overlap, or an interplay, between the global and local dimensions of hip-hop, between the African-American origins and ideologies of the genre, and the politics of local language to engage with local issues. Bennet calls this combination between local and global forms "glocalization" (as cited in Walter, 2006, p. 10). Walter homes in on the local characteristics of hip-hop: "identity grounded through local context is better communicated through the local language. In the case of the Netherlands, Dutch hip hop has become a way to articulate a sense of national (but also local) identity" (p. 14). On the other end, Guadeloupe and De Rooij (2014) underline the universal characteristics of black music as the "primary product and producer of urban blackness" (p. 61), which in a Dutch context translates to "acknowledging the continuing struggle of the descendants of those who survived the Middle Passage from West Africa to the West Indies, and about identifying with the subjectivities offered in Black Atlantic music" (p. 61). So, in summation, while black hip-hop seems to possess certain shared global characteristics, the choice of local language or dialect is interconnected with the engagement of local subject matter and ideologies, and to a certain extent, a politics of language.

From this perspective, it makes sense that Fresku and Typhoon create and perform Nederhop to tackle issues, both personal and societal, of Dutch racism and blackness, and the Afro-Caribbean diaspora – and vice versa: that their engagement with Nederhop is informed by the pervasiveness of Dutch racism. The way both rappers go about this, however, appears to differ completely. My research on both rappers thus focuses on the overlap, and more interestingly, the contrasts in the "articulation of identity" and the "process of self-styling" by both rappers.

This process of identity formation, informed by the Dutch-Caribbean diaspora, within Nederhop is not unprecedented. Markus and Verboord (2012) cite the examples of both Raymzter and Ali B, two Dutch-Moroccan rappers (p. 29). In 2002, Raymzter had a hit with the song

'Kutmarrokanen?!', a powerful and provocative response to the negative stereotyping of Dutch-Moroccans by an Amsterdam municipal politician. Ali B self-styled a much more positive image of love and acceptance which resonated much more broadly with the (white) Dutch audience (although Ali B has since received the slightly mocking moniker "knuffelmarokkaan") (p. 29) with songs like 'Leipe Mocro Flavour' and the *War Child* protest song 'Wat zou je doen?'. Wermuth (2005) names 2005 as the year in which Ali B's popularity was both ubiquitous and definitive (p. 958). Typhoon has since enjoyed a similar succes and image to Ali B: both have enjoyed commercial successes, and both proclaim predominantly positive messages that were deemed fit to be performed in front of the Dutch royal family. Ali B memorably hugged the queen (Wermuth, 2005, p. 959); Typhoon performed 'Van de regen naar de zon' before the king and queen, as part of the 200th anniversary of the Dutch kingdom.

It is important to note that the self-styling of their identity is informed by both rappers being second generation immigrants: even though Fresku has lived part of his teenage years with his father in Curaçao (Kleijwegt, 2015, p. 18), and though Typhoon visited Suriname for an extended period between the release of his first and second album, (Alfonso, 2015) both were born and have been predominantly raised in the Netherlands. So while both rappers have not experienced the actual Caribbean-Dutch migration, they are irrevocably linked to it: either by their time spent in Suriname and Curaçao, or by the experiences passed on from their (grand)parents. It is important to note that while technically Suriname isn't part of the Caribbean, especially within the context of the Dutch colonial empire, Suriname is seen as an extension of the same region (Chamberlain, 2002, p. 10). The majority of second generation Antillean and Surinamese immigrants in the Netherlands "belong to the lower strata of Dutch society" (Leydesdorff, in Chamberlain (Ed.), 2002, p. 83). They experience what is called an "unauthorized existence" (Lutz, in Chamberlain (Ed.), 2002, p. 103). Lutz elaborates: "These young people express feelings of not 'really' belonging to the Dutch people and the Dutch nation and not being in accordance with the contemporary symbolism of nationality and its boundaries" (p. 103). However, despite not having experienced the migration from the Caribbean first-hand, these experiences "are transferred to the next generation and children learn the lessons and guidelines born of the experiences of their parents and grandparents" (p. 106). In a way, second generation Caribbean immigrants in the Netherlands have a strong sense of their migration from their homeland, and feel alienated from Dutch society. The lyrics will show if Typhoon's and Fresku's first-hand experiences with Suriname and Curaçao respectively has informed and amplified both sentiments.

Chapter 2: Analysis of the lyrics

Note: Each translated quote has a number referring to a corresponding entry in the appendix.

2.1 Typhoon - *Lobi da Basi*

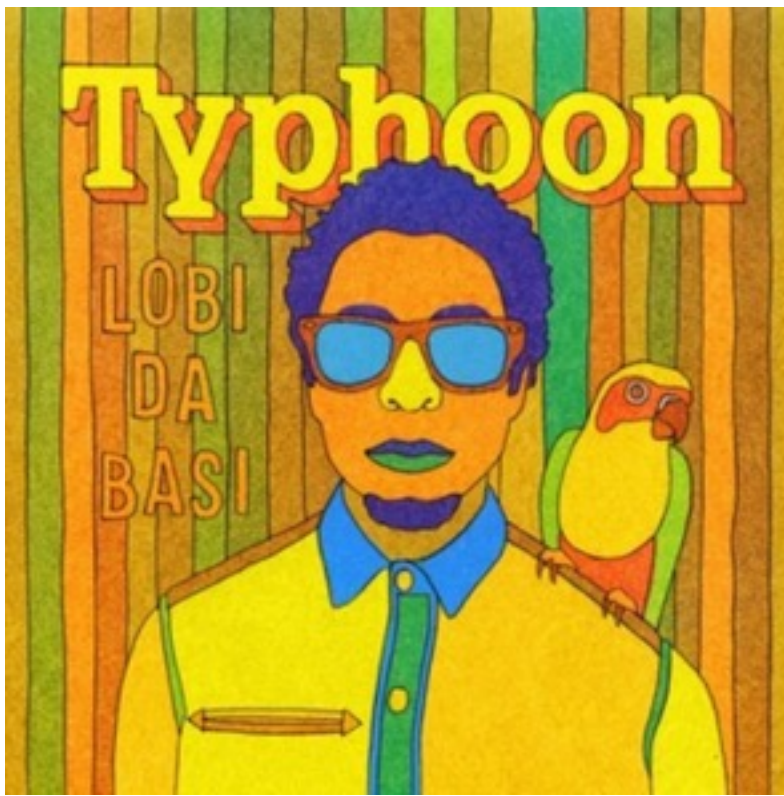


Fig. 1: The cover image for the album *Lobi da Basi* by Typhoon.

In 2015 Typhoon released his second album *Lobi da Basi*, eight years after his debut *Tussen Lucht en Licht*. In between the release of both albums, Typhoon visited Suriname in order to explore his roots (Alfonso, 2015, De Vrieze, 2014). The album booklet contains a picture of him, partially submerged in a Surinamese river. The album cover, illustrated by Jay Sunsmith, evokes a certain Caribbean 'feel', with its bright yellow, orange, brown and green hues, with blue solely being used to separate Typhoon from the background. He stares straight at us, and has a parrot on his shoulder, symbolically establishing the tropical character of the cover. Although Typhoon hides his eyes behind sunglasses, the cover is welcoming. Its deliberate Surinamese self-styling is apparent.

This self-styling of a Dutch-Surinamese diaspora identity is the central theme of the album. In the first place, it seems to be a search for and reconstruction of Typhoon's Surinamese heritage. The songs 'Surfen', 'Ijswater', 'Zandloper', 'Glenn 1984', 'Ochtend Weer', and 'Niets Verwacht' are introspective soul-searching; six out of twelve songs on the album. For the record: of the remaining songs, two are love songs, two are explicitly political, one ('Hemel Valt') is a hybrid, and one is an instrumental. Of all of these, four reference Suriname, either through direct reference, or indirectly

through (familial) heritage. Identity construction constitutes the greater part of the album, of which Suriname takes up a significant portion.

It starts with the title: 'Lobi da Basi' means 'Love is the Master' (1) in Surinamese. This is Typhoon's declaration that love is the dominant force behind human and spiritual/religious creation and interaction. This universalistic notion of love is also the central theme in 'Hemel Valt', the second song on the album. In the second verse, Typhoon raps: "Maybe I'm a simple boy, / but my God tell me why / people keep proclaiming Sin if Love is the source. / That's not bread but crumbs / from the hands of men" (2). Love is opposed, simply, to hate. Both of these forces contend as organizing principles of our soul and our society. When Typhoon observes in the same song that "Even if it's going well / sometimes this paradise seems suspiciously like a hell. / But still, I'm astonished, stand still and remember / everything's already inside of me" (3), he affirms his own notion that we are made from love, and that we can rely and fall back on it. Hate, or sin, or any of the names Typhoon gives the opposite, seems merely a temporary product of mankind that distracts from our divine essence of love. Love placates; it takes away doubts and insecurities, yet it is also rebellious and revolutionary.

This gives *Lobi da Basi* a overwhelmingly optimistic message – one that does not compromise its call for societal change and improvement – that resonates throughout the album. It's noteworthy that the album's title (and slogan) is written in Surinamese. It implies that Typhoon's message finds its roots in his Surinamese heritage – again, as Lutz (2002) writes: "children learn the lessons and guidelines born of the experiences of their parents and grandparents" (in Chamberlain (Ed.), p. 103). In 'Hemel Valt', Typhoon raps about his mother: "To always be there for everyone and everything / a bit like my own mom / she's too good for this world" (4). Here he directly links love and his Surinamese heritage. His mother becomes an exemplary personification of love, and of home. Elsewhere, on the song 'Niets Verwacht', Typhoon mentions the lessons imparted to him by his family. The first verse mentions "his earth" as being "abandoned plantations and the marrons." Marrons are the descendants of African slaves who fled into the Surinamese jungle, free from slavery. He also mentions the anti-colonial activist Anton de Kom, "one of the first in the Caribbean—leaving aside Haiti and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean—to rewrite the history of his country in an anti-colonial manner" (Oostindie, in Chamberlain (Ed.), 2002, p. 150). While Typhoon goes into specifics here, this knowledge also leads to the adherence to a universalistic concept of love: part historical consciousness, it seems to mostly serve the construction of his Surinamese identity. This is crucial, as it informs Typhoon's attitude to the issues of racism and colonialism (hate, as opposed to his concept of Love, capital L) he addresses elsewhere on the album. It also informs his rhetoric:

We talk of family wisdoms: / don't let your love depend on others. / The shame of not greeting, / is greater than the shame of not being greeted. / And that does not mean self-effacement, / because the self is the only thing that is constant. / Constant, constant / profess the love that you are / now with the fire of praise. (5)

Typhoon is a professor of Love. Through their historical characteristics, the lyrics are sometimes didactic and lay the darker parts of Dutch colonial history bare, forcing the listener to deal with them. The songs on the album that exclusively deal with (the struggle with) racism (opening track 'We zijn er', and 'Van de regen naar de zon'), or at least partially ('Hemel Valt', 'Niets Verwacht') are consistently approached from this perspective. 'We Zijn Er', for example, uses the sonic imagery of jungle, barking dogs and the panting of two humans to paint a picture of escaped slaves. Its opening lyrics are spoken from the perspective of one fugitive slave to another ("As beautiful as the forest is, / so dangerous is the escape route. But everything's better / than having to return to the master") (6). In the verses Typhoon describes specific hardships, switching seemingly at will between the exotic imagery of the slaves fleeing from the hounds, and seemingly less pressing present-day issues of empty phone batteries and train delays. Yet in the pre-chorus, he comforts the fears and doubts: "It's not mine, not for me, not by me. / Neither yours, nor mine. / My heaven the proof" (7). He concludes at the end of the third verse: "We're here. / We're still here. / Yes we're here" (8). Through faith in the divine, suffering becomes temporary, and so Typhoon comforts. From his perspective, the racist struggle is merely a deviation, inevitably corrected by the performative act of love.

In 'Van de regen naar de zon' Typhoon unfolds his perspective on Dutch racism, not only as it manifests in the present, but also as part of a national tradition that finds its origins in slavery and the slave trade. The song attempts to summarize and contribute to Dutch national identity, while also criticizing its more violent aspects. On the one hand the Netherlands is a small-but-great country, seemingly welcoming and tolerant to all sorts of religious and ethnic minorities; on the other, it is a country with a colonial legacy and a strong reaction to allegations of racism in the present day. Typhoon alludes to the Dutch celebration of Sinterklaas, the white saint figure, and his helper Black Pete, in blackface, large earrings and afro curls – the source of much debate and contention over the racist elements inherent in this celebration. This becomes clearest near the end of the song:

We've seen so much, grown so large, but when it pivots, / we see mass murder, apartheid, / slavery and the slave trade. / Without the dark the light can't know itself, / thus the

ignorance surrounding December 5th. / The world keeps on turning, / we float along, we hold on tight (9).

The "ignorance" resonates with Essed and Hoving's (2014) assertion that "the Dutch tendency to ignore "race" is the nation's main strategy of dealing with it" (p. 10). In 'Hemel Valt' Typhoon implies that at least one of the reasons behind Dutch racism is resentment following the 2008 financial crisis – resentment that leads to polarization.

We want more / plus the crisis has made everyone stingy. / and then that eternal struggle, / when drama comes around, everyone joins in / Yes, we want to be right / and back it by the ideas of preferably one truth (10).

Throughout the album, Typhoon is confident: he puts the issues he raps about into perspective, considering their relative (un)importance in comparison to his Love-concept, and the belief that the world is already changing for the good. As he raps in 'Van de regen naar de zon': "Change is confronting, I experience it every day. / [...] "We" is decided by where we go, / not where we were. Keep the power with the people, let the fear go" (11). In response to a racist worldview he perceives as parochial, Typhoon adopts a decidedly more progressive stance. He supports this stance with a cosmopolitan eclecticism, by self-styling his Surinamese diaspora identity throughout the album. Here, he plays being Dutch-Surinamese to his strengths: it allows him to proclaim a broader worldview, having seen the racism argument from both sides. In 'Glenn 1984' (referring to his name and year of birth) he affirms his cosmopolitanism by naming his eclectic artistic influences: Basquiat, Magritte, and Satchmo (Louis Armstrong), to name a few. Regarding Nederhop he names white rapper Extince's album *Binnenlandse Funk* from 1998, as well as the black group Postmen and the mixed group Opgezwolle. The use of the term cosmopolitanism here is an umbrella term, informed by a postcolonial cosmopolitan perspective, that refers generally to the appropriation of a variety of global, cultural influences by the subject.

By taking both a spiritual and cosmopolitan high ground, Typhoon gains the confidence to proclaim his message of Love, full of generosity and forgiveness. In his universalistic proclamations he tends to generalize (note how often he starts a sentence with "we") to the point of banality. In doing so, he has created songs full of positive energy, in an effort to counter the issues of racism and colonialism that he and his ancestors have faced, although the messages of songs themselves aren't very constructive in a pragmatic sense. The music on the album is mostly mellow and jazzy, meaning there are rarely any harsh sounds to be heard, and most of the instruments are

played live. The result is an album as warm, pleasant and welcoming as its cover. It's Typhoon's way of combating the silly hatred that lies at the heart of racism.

2.2 Fresku - Nooit meer terug

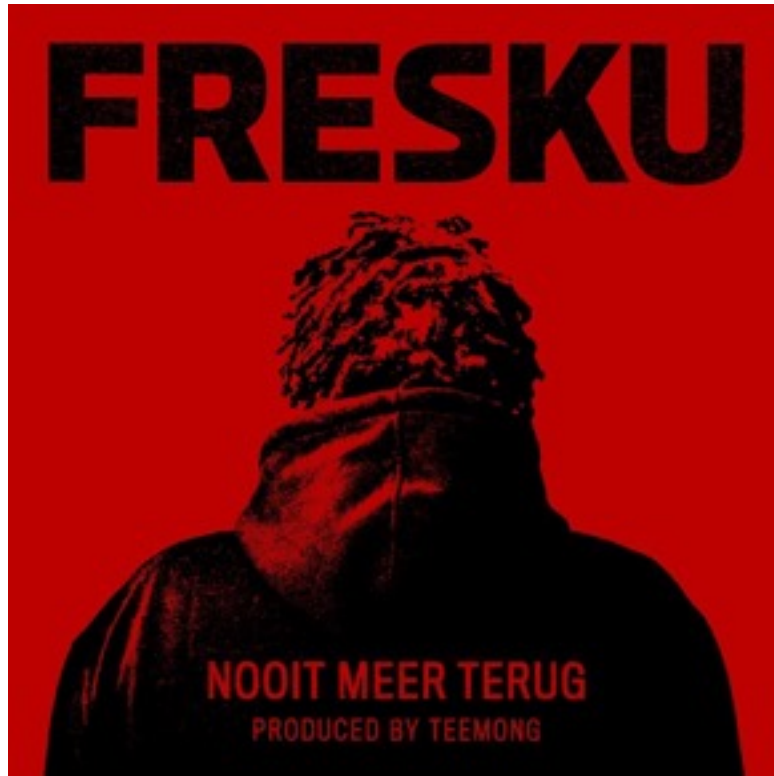


Fig. 2: The cover image for the album *Nooit meer terug* by Fresku.

Like Typhoon, Fresku uses the language of his ancestral homeland on the cover of his album. Instead of the album's title however, it's his own name: Fresku means "brutaal" in Papiamentu, which translates into English as "cheeky" or "fresh", the latter meaning "presumptuous or impudent toward someone, especially in a sexual way," according to the Oxford New American Dictionary. The album covers share another similarity, as they have both been designed by the same Jay Sunsmith, and were released on the same Top Notch label: the posture by both rappers – from the shoulder up – is the same. The differences, however, are more striking: the stark contrast between red and black is far removed from the bright colors of *Lobi da Basi*. Most importantly: Fresku is facing the other way, showing his back. If *Lobi da Basi* looks inviting, *Nooit meer terug* looks recalcitrant.

The album's title, *Nooit meer terug* meaning "Never (going) back", refers to Fresku's intentions regarding the choice he's made in life, and is going to make in the future. On 'Nooit meer terug', the first song on the album, Fresku elaborates fully where the title came from. In the past he has given his all, and despite hardships and haters, he keeps on running ("But who walks towards success? Exactly.") (12).

In the storm I find calm, every step with purpose, to keep on growing is a must. Never going back. I put my life in a verse, Never again going in reverse, I don't want to be in that rut. Never again (13).

Fresku is purposeful and unapologetic. He too finds confidence in his faith: "Not to be arrogant but God is with me, I'm certain of it" (14), God being Allah. Now that Fresku has "broken through" he does not intend to stop. Stop what? For Fresku making music seems to mean to create a peaceful life with plenty for him, his second wife and the daughter he has with his first. In the song 'Kreeft' he describes how his successes have made him unapologetically decadent: "This is how I deal with my traumas nigga. I used to eat chicken with rice. Now you'll often find me at the house of fish" (15). In this case, Fresku makes lobster a symbol for a decadent western lifestyle. Even though he seems to always be earnest in his approach, Fresku is playful, and wickedly funny. Note how he addresses in advance criticisms leveled against him, that eating lobster has further removed him from his Antillean roots, in this case being, specifically and symbolically, the eating of chicken and rice. If anything, Fresku is resisting being perceived as solely Antillean. That does not mean Fresku resists his Antillean heritage. In 'Trots', he recounts the lessons by his father on taking responsibility for the people you care about. The song ends with a spoken voicemail by his father, declaring his pride in Fresku becoming a successful musician and father himself. And throughout the album Fresku peppers his lyrics with Papiementu, or slang derived from it.

When Fresku boasts in 'Nooit meer terug' that "Nobody is going to break me" (16), who does he mean by "nobody"? His most prominent opponents and decriers are the "haters" he names in the song. Haters is a collective term for the hypothetical opposing forces that nevertheless stem from actual experience. In 'Kreeft', as mentioned, the haters are those who decry Fresku for trading in his black Antillean authenticity for wealth. Within hip-hop, local authenticity conventionally allows to "claim greater global authenticity in terms of the discourses of marginalization and racial identification" (Pennycook, 2007, p. 102), the implication here being that by adopting a wealthy, western lifestyle, Fresku's grappling with issues of blackness and class throughout the album loses its integrity. Fresku bluntly disagrees ("when things go badly you think I'm real, lick my willy [...] I eat lobster") (17); he speaks his mind undeterred – including on his personal struggles and insecurities. In 'Gooi jezelf weg' he ponders if he's allowed to lecture others when he's no saint himself. In comparison, Typhoon only admits to insecurities within the context of a romantic relationship ('Surfen', 'Ijswater'). This seems fitting: on the album covers Typhoon covers part of his face with sunglasses, while Fresku may show his back, but that leaves one all the more vulnerable.

On the other side of the spectrum, the haters are the white, Dutch institutions and the structural racism they enforce and reproduce. The strongest examples are 'Zo doe je dat' and 'Angst' – especially 'Zo doe je dat' is emblematic for Fresku's idiom of resisting Dutch stereotyping and institutional racism. In 'Zo doe je dat' Fresku narrates to himself with a thick Caribbean accent, lecturing himself on how to break into mainstream Dutch radio: be less black. That means trading in authenticity ("Fuck having respect in the rap game, Buma/Stemra that's what really pays") (18), and despite any amount of success a black rapper may have had within its own subculture, it leaves no mark on white radio and its white audiences ("Even if white teenagers bounce along to your tracks, Hilversum doesn't want black rappers per se, no blackface, nigger") (19). All the while the music sounds "much too Jamaican. No drums and rattles, that's negro noise" (20). He tells himself to stop playing the victim if he wants to make it, even to bleach his skin in order to look white. The third verse is narrated by Fresku's white producer and director Teemong, with a posh and denigrating Dutch accent. Teemong represents the radio stations, telling Fresku that, too bad, Dutch radio is partial to white music (with the additional provision that in order for hiphop to be successful, it has to come from white artists). They don't like black artists making a fuss and playing the victim ("Stop playing the victim like Quinsy Gario. White privilege, why don't you go back to Paramaribo") (21). Teemong's attitude fits within Essed and Hoving's (2014) descriptions of "Dutch innocence" and "smug ignorance": being purposefully ignorant (and so remaining innocent) of the taint of racism within ones own institutions (p. 24). He continues:

Because we only want rock or dance, stop that rap, unless you're a white boy. Here in Hilversum we decide how cool you are, fuck your fans, the black ("blaka") man remains unknown (22).

In response, after the chorus following the third verse, the music changes from a black sound to a more mainstream guitar sound. This segment is introduced by cut up sound fragments from a prominent Dutch radio DJ, introducing Fresku along with the white, Dutch band Go Back To the Zoo. Fresku starts to sing more banal English lyrics, accompanied by sentimental guitar and synthesizer driven music. Fresku has adopted a white, radio-friendly persona, while remorsefully singing lines like "I'm in a scary place, dwelling on the past again, It's so embarrassing, to have to say, I am a slave and I am ashamed." He has renounced his blackness and his cultural heritage in order to fit into the white institutions that decide whether he can be successful as an artist or not.

In 'Angst', the final song on the album, Fresku attacks Dutch national identity, for discriminating against and perpetrating violence against ethnic minorities, and Islam and Muslims. He lists many racist tropes: ethnic profiling, Islamophobia, Dutch entitlement (Essed and Hoving,

2014, p. 25) – to claim gratitude from minorities and the right to offend. Fresku places these issues within a timeframe: in his eyes, racism and Islamophobia have sharply increased in the last 15 years (“15 years of stigmas, 15 years of crime”) (23), in line with the observation by Essed and Hoving (2014) that a “new form of racism” (p. 16) has appeared in the wake of several political events, including the assassination of the Dutch populist politician Pim Fortuyn. Not coincidentally, Fresku rejects Fortuyn as a personal hero at the beginning of the song. While ‘Zo doe je dat’ Fresku attacks institutional racism on the radio, in ‘Angst’ he attacks and condemns racism and Islamophobia from (popular) individuals, in politics, in the media in general, and, like Typhoon, warns against fear and its polarizing effect on the debate (hence the title, ‘Fear’). Other songs on the album cover Dutch racism: in ‘Nooit Goed’ he rejects the presumably appointed role of black minstrel (a callback to his description of black stereotyping by the Dutch music industry in ‘Zo doe je dat’), and disregards haters in general. ‘Gevangen’ is a song about the unfair incarceration of ethnic minorities. As further explorations of black experiences in the Netherlands, these songs are insightful and interesting in their own right, and deserve their own analyses. However, for now I lack the space, and for the most part these songs support the framing of Fresku presented here. The remaining songs are mostly about personal insecurities regarding the raising of his daughter, or the continuation of his career.

As a relatively successful Dutch-Caribbean artist, Fresku feels personal responsibility for the persecution of not only himself, but any Dutch ethnic minorities. In ‘Gooi Jezelf Weg’ he admits to his reluctance to do so, and the toll that it takes on him, but that it’s how he was raised, and that he can’t help himself. He styles himself a martyr, who takes up the cause of combating Dutch racism because of his Curaçaoan roots, and the privilege his success as a Dutch musician grants him. Unlike Typhoon, his diaspora identity places him in between Dutch racism and ethnic minorities, not outside or above. Fresku places confidence in faith in Allah, but as long as he sees suffering around him, he can’t stop inserting himself into these issues. He’s too invested.

Chapter 3: Conclusion and further research

In naming and confronting the specific mechanisms of Dutch racism, Fresku is the more convincing rapper. He agitates and foregrounds several specific examples of discrimination and stereotyping, and then critiques and satirizes them in colorful language. Within the Dutch racism debate he positions himself laterally: as a black rapper of Caribbean descent, he is familiar with being subjected to racism and the disadvantageous position it may put him in, with regard to his career and the reception of his art. On the other hand, as a successful rapper and satirist he is able to use, and does use, the privilege of his audible voice to represent those like him who otherwise could not. He places himself fully 'in-between', but that means a certain estrangement from his Surinamese roots – he runs the risk of no longer being perceived as 'real' and authentic – while at the same time, because of his attitude and message, he seems never to be completely welcome in the Dutch (media) institutions. So in effecting change, I have doubts about its constructiveness. Fresku is confrontational, sometimes abrasive, and sometimes assumes the role of the victim. This is where Typhoon differs and complements: Typhoon's more distant generalizations of love and faith are more generous, gentle and reassuring. His lyrics show the confidence that change, or rather improvement, in Dutch racism is inevitable and forthcoming, and he professes the high spirits and goodwill to effect that change. That is the power of his love. It is a utopian sentiment, but one that seems constructive in countering the feelings of resentment and anger that fuel racism, and with the accessibility of his message he may reach a wider audience and create a broader understanding of the Dutch-Caribbean experience of racism and blackness in the Netherlands, than any other popular Dutch musician has.

For further research, I'd be curious to explore the ways in which the accessibility and general acceptance of Typhoon's music and message by white audiences has influenced the critical and commercial reception and canonization of his music, again in comparison to the confrontational character of Fresku's album. Musically and lyrically, I personally find the latter to be the stronger of the two, which has made me curious to what the effects are of Fresku's abrasiveness on its reception by white audiences. Typhoon has made the year-end best-of lists, Fresku hasn't. Is this due to the perceived difference in qualities between both albums? Is it because one is more reliant on 'black' sounds than the other? Or is it because Fresku's confrontational message simply resonates less with a white audience than Typhoon's? In the latter two cases, are these evidence of elements of discrimination, or racism, in our reception and canonization of (black) Dutch music? And lastly, does Typhoon's music run the risk of being appropriated by a discourse of ignorant Dutch 'color blindness', (Essed and Hoving, 2014, p. 11) or similar discourses, due to its universalistic nature?

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APPENDIX

1. Translated directly from Surinamese to English it would be "Love is the Boss," but I believe 'master' to be more accurate, in this case meaning "a person who has dominance or control of something," from the Oxford New American Dictionary. The etymology therein for 'boss' even states: "early 19th cent. (originally US): from Dutch baas 'master.'"
2. "Misschien ben ik een domme jongen, / maar mijn God zeg me waarom / men Zonde blijft verkondigen als Liefde de bron is. / Da's geen brood maar kruimels / uit mensenhanden,"
3. "Al gaat 't goed, / dit paradijs lijkt soms verdacht op een hel. / Maar goed, ik sta versted, sta stil en herinner me, / alles is er al van binnen."
4. Er altijd zijn voor iedereen en alles / beetje zoals m'n eigen ma / zij is te goed voor deze wereld
5. We bespreken familiewijsheden: / laat je liefde niet afhangen van een ander. / De schande van het niet groeten, / is groter dan die van het niet gegroet worden. / En dat is niet het wegcijferen van het Zelf, / want het zelf is het enige wat blijvend is. / Constant, constant / beleid (sic) de liefde die je bent / nu met het vuur van een lofzang.
6. Zo mooi als het woud is, / zo gevaarlijk de vluchtroute. Maar alles beter / dan naar de baas terug te moeten.
7. Het is niet van mij, niet aan mij, niet door mij. / Noch van jou, Noch van mij / Mijn hemel het bewijs.
8. We zijn er. / We zijn er nog. / Ja we zijn er.
9. We zagen zoveel, zijn zo groot, maar als 't kantelt, / zien we massamoord, apartheid, / slavernij en de slavenhandel. / Zonder donker kan het licht zichzelf niet kennen, / vandaar de onwetendheid rond 5 december. / De wereld draait door, / we deinen mee, we houden vast.
10. We willen meer / plus door de crisis is iedereen skeer. / En dan die eeuwige strijd, / klopt drama aan de deur, is 'n ieder van de partij / Ja, we willen ons gelijk / opgehangen aan ideeën van het liefst één waarheid.
11. Verandering is confronterend, ik ervaar het elke dag. / [...] "Wij" wordt bepaald door waar we gaan, / niet waar we waren. / Houd de macht bij het volk, laat de angst varen.
12. Maar wie loopt er naar succes? Precies.
13. In de storm vind ik rust, elke stap is bewust, verder groeien is een must. Nooit meer terug. Ik zet m'n leven in een verse, ga nooit meer in reverse, ik wil niet meer in die sleur. Nooit meer.
14. Niet arrogant maar God is met me, ben er van verzekerd
15. Zo verwerk ik mijn trauma's nigga. Vroeger at ik vaak kip met rijst. Nu ben ik vaak te vinden in het vispaleis.
16. Niemand krijgt me nog stuk
17. Als het slecht gaat vindt je me real, lik aan me piel [...] ik eet kreeft.
18. "Fuck respect hebben in de rapgame, Buma/Stemra dat is wat je echt paid." Buma/Stemra is a major interest group that oversees the payment of royalties to Dutch musical artists.
19. "Al bouncen blanke pubers met jou tracks mee, Hilversum wil blanke rappers per se, Geen blackface, nigger." The Dutch town of Hilversum symbolically represents white radio stations, as most both public and commercial radio is seated there.
20. [...] veel te Jamaican. Geen trommels en ratelen, dat is negerherrie.
21. "Kom uit die slachtofferrol als Quinsy Gario. White privilege, ga lekker terug naar Paramaribo." Quinsy Gario is a prominent Dutch anti-racism activist. Also note that Fresku is not from Suriname.
22. Want we willen alleen rock of dance, stop die rap, tenzij je een blanke jongen bent. Hier in Hilversum bepalen wij hoe tof je bent, fuck je fans, de blakkaman blijft onbekend.
23. Al 15 jaar stigma's, al 15 jaar misdaad