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"An investigation into the representation of masculinity in Grime and British rap music and how the media portray these genres"

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<u>Abstract</u>

Grime and British rap music are amongst the most popular genres of music in the United Kingdom today, but remain controversial due to lyrical content and the actions and comments of many artists involved in these genres. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how gender and race are represented in Grime, and in turn how Grime is represented by the media.

Although there has been substantial research into Grime, much of this was published before recent developments such as the #Grime4Corbyn movement, politically-charged Brit award performances, and the rise of related genres including Drill and Afroswing. Hence, analysis of Grime from its roots up to the present day was conducted in order to carry out this investigation, as well as considering associated genres and Black British culture.

This dissertation has six chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Representations of masculinity and gender in Grime and British rap music, How race and ethnicity are represented in Grime, The representations of Grime through the media and political class and Conclusion.

Table of Contents

"E3 side, that's where it started": Introduction

Since its origins in East London in the early 2000s, Grime has had a large degree of commercial success and cultural importance in the United Kingdom (Zuberi, 2014, pp.199-200). As a predominantly 'Black' genre, it has come to symbolise and represent contemporary Black Britain, but at the same time is often the victim of controversy, accused of misogyny, homophobia and glorifying criminality.

At the same time, the current wave of Grime, which we can loosely define as being from the mid-2010s onwards, has become increasingly political with many mainstream artists voicing their broadly left-leaning political views both in their music and outside of it, the #Grime4Corbyn movement being an example of this.

This dissertation aims to explore whether this negative representation of Grime is rooted in institutional racism and classism – the latest moral panic. At the same time, it's necessary to analyse just how gender and race are represented within Grime, and similar genres including but not limited to Drill, Trap, Afroswing, Road rap and Afrobeats, which for the purpose of this dissertation will be referred to under the umbrella term of 'British rap music'. Moreover, it will evaluate whether this negative reaction, often from right-wing media, is at least partly a reaction to the political activity of Grime artists.

The rate at which Grime has become one of the most popular British music genres has surpassed the rate at which research has been published, so there is a gap in the literature with regards to how Grime itself represents gender and research, and how it in turn is represented in the media. Thus, this dissertation aims to bridge the gap while offering a contemporary evaluation of Grime as a genre and a cultural marker.

Chapter I, *"Nah Mummy, I ain't gonna be those guys": Representations of masculinity and gender in Grime and British rap music*, focuses on how gender and sexuality are represented in Grime. The genre has been criticised for being misogynist and homophobic, and an analysis has been undertaken to evaluate whether this is fair to say. The chapter draws on histories of Black masculinities and considers US hip-hop culture as well as Grime and British rap music.

This flows onto Chapter II, *"If you don't wanna get it, then you're never gonna get it": How race and ethnicity are represented in Grime"*, which considers Grime as a form of Black British expression, and the similarities and differences between how Grime artists see themselves and how the media represent them. This chapter also looks at white artists, and their place as a minority here versus their majority status elsewhere in society.

In Chapter III, *"Don't comment on my culture, you ain't qualified": The representations of Grime through the media and political class*, we move onto analysing the representation of Grime in the media, through considering the functions of the media and the racist and classist lens through which Grime and British rap music are viewed by those who create the dominant narrative. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the polarity between the representations of Grime as negative, and the actual negative attitudes apparent in the genre as analysed in the preceding two chapters.

In summary, this dissertation aims to analyse Grime and UK rap music and their roles in contemporary British culture through their representation in the media and the way in which gender and race are represented in the genre. Grime is simultaneously a niche sub-genre and a huge cultural movement, so offers the opportunity to analyse its place in the United Kingdom today.

<u>"One of the first things they do is stop them reading": Literature Review</u>

This chapter provides a review of the literature that we can draw upon when analysing and examining masculinity in Grime and British rap music. Work focusing on these topics is rooted in both British racial studies and work on Hip-hop and masculinity in the USA. The representation of Black masculinity in Grime and British rap is an issue that has been touched on by Fatsis and Pinkney and Robinson-Edwards, amongst others, but there is relatively little research in this field so far compared to the topics mentioned above.

With Grime and associated genres becoming amongst the most popular in the UK in recent years (Official Charts, 2017), more research is needed into how they represent Black masculinity, and in turn, the representation of Grime by the media. By carrying out this research and drawing on the work of Fatsis, Gilroy, Hall, Cheney and others, I intend to analyse how these issues are interconnected in order to paint a picture of how Grime represents Black masculinity. Throughout my research, I concentrated on three core areas – race and representation in the UK, representation of Grime and British rap music in the media, and Hip-hop and masculinity in the US – which all interlink with my three main research questions:

<u>Race and Representation in the UK</u>

Gilroy (2002) offers a comprehensive analysis of race relations in the United Kingdom, as he looks at the criminalisation of Black British people in terms of their over-representation in the prison system and their being targeted by "authoritarian and populist policies" (p.xxviii) and alongside Hall (2013), he analyses the moral panic around 'Black muggers', through which "the Black presence is thus constructed as a problem or threat against which a homogenous, white, national 'we' could be unified (p.49) – Black people, as an 'alien culture', are portrayed as a threat and the reason for national failures (p.46).

In turn, Hall (2013, p.239) applies Bogle's study of Black characters in American films to British society – in particular the stereotype of the 'Bad Bucks': big, strong, violent, over-sexed males. He describes images of young Black men today as having traces of this stereotype, from the 'mugger' to the 'yardie', the 'n****s with attitude' groups and 'more generally Black youths on the rampage', which is often how contemporary Grime and Drill artists are often portrayed in some areas of the media, as corroborated by his 'muggers' case study, also mentioned by Gilroy.

Building on the relationships between different ethnic and racial groups, there is also a discussion to be had on intra-ethnic relations between Black African and African Caribbean communities in the UK. Gilroy (2002, p.xiii) describes the diasporas of Somalia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria as "dislodging the Caribbean from the centre of British Blackness", while Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) analyses the relationship, building on work by Mac an Ghaill (1999, p.61) which challenges the notion that racism is a 'white on Black' issue, instead moving beyond the "Black-white model of racism – the colour paradigm".

Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) claims that some African Caribbean people in the UK have internalised the notion that Africans are 'primitive' and that Africa is a 'dark continent', with an idea that to be 'cool Black' was to be 'African Caribbean – or American'. Interestingly, many prominent Grime MCs today belong to an African diaspora, brothers Skepta and Jme being Nigerian, and Stormzy and Lethal Bizzle being Ghanaian, amongst others.

Interestingly, Lam and Smith (2009) found that African-Caribbean adolescents were more likely to describe themselves as being British, or from England, than their African counterparts, while boys across both groups feeling more British, something that they argued was rooted in England's national sporting history. It would be interesting to explore whether music has a similar effect today.

However, Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) argues that conflict between Afro-Caribbeans and Africans cannot be compared to the racism faced by both communities from white British people as "Black groups do not have enough power to prevent access to

valuable social resources, or more specifically to 'create an oppressor/oppressed dyad'", the power imbalance between Black and white groups in the UK being somewhat overlooked by Mac an Ghaill.

Corroborating Gilroy's claims that African diaspora groups are diverting British 'Blackness' away from the Caribbean, Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) makes the point that Black culture in the UK has seen a move towards Africa in recent years, including in music, as Afrobeats, influenced by West African highlife, has risen in popularity in the UK through artists such as Fuse ODG, Wizkid and Burna Boy, the former born in the UK of Ghanaian descent and the latter two born in Nigeria.

With so many African Caribbean and Black African groups in the UK, there is an added dimension to discussions around race – Mac an Ghaill's views that racism is not simply 'white-on-Black' appear applicable to present day United Kingdom as a result. However, it cannot be ignored that there is broader, structural racism against Black Britons as a demographic, as Gilroy and Hall indicate.

Representations of Grime and British rap music in the media

Exploring Grime and questioning whether it is a "criminal subculture or public counterculture", Fatsis (2009) first looks at the infamous 'Form 696', used to prevent Grime events from taking place in London by the Metropolitan Police. He takes a somewhat positive view of Grime, arguing that its "creative inventiveness (*techne*) is equally democratic in spirit and attitude" and mentions its democratic qualities thanks in part to the use of pirated software. He also mentions media such as Channel U/Channel AKA and Rinse FM as being influential in spreading the genre.

Fatsis (2009) also focuses on Drill music, a subgenre of Trap and Road rap that takes influence from Grime and UK garage. He describes it as giving an insight into the systematic oppression faced by young Black people in the UK and shows how they are criminalised and discriminated against. There is a link back to the history of Black British music, as Drill and Grime are just the latest genres to be criminalised like Blues dances, Reggae, Carnival celebrations and UK garage before them (Fatsis, 2009).

Pinkney and Robinson-Edwards (2018) looked at video footage and music videos in particular when analysing how contemporary Black British music is represented in

the media, and the criminal and justice systems. They give the example of rapper Nines, who they describe as belonging to the 'Trap' genre, posting an Instagram video in which he and his friends taunt fellow rapper C Biz after stealing his jewellery. Less than 24 hours later, a murder on Nines' road resulted in a group of men, C Biz among them, being arrested.

A number of artists touch on these topics in their lyrics. In 'Fire in the Booth' (2016) Akala [Kingslee Daley] talks about the criminalisation of Black youth on both sides of the Altantic: "So when we celebrate going to jail/We are literally celebrating enslavement … Engineered social condition that breeds crime by design", while Dave [Omoregie] released the track 'Black' in 2019, featuring lyrics along the lines of "If he's white you give him a chance/He's ill and confused/If he's Black he's probably armed/You see him and shoot".

Bradley (2013, p.340) looks at Grime in terms of the history of Black British music, noting its links to the other British genres of Jungle, UK garage and Dubstep. However, it has to be noted that having published this work in 2013, it precedes the 'second wave' of Grime (Biswas, 2018) marked by Skepta's album *Konnichiwa* and the emergence of Stormzy, and so lacks coverage of the media portrayal of the genre in recent years.

Although there is a relative lack of research around this particular topic, existing articles suggest that Grime and British rap music are represented in a negative manner, with connotations of criminality, despite Grime's links to decades of Black British music. Accordingly, racial profiling and discrimination based on race are often topics in the music of these genres.

Hip-hop and masculinity in the US

Cheney (2005) analyses masculinity through the lens of US Hip-hop music and culture. Although this dissertation focuses on Grime and associated genres, we can draw parallels between masculinity – particularly Black masculinity – in US Hip-hop and UK Grime.

One way to look at Grime is through the lens of its socio-political impact, and likewise Hip-hop in the US promoted African American rights to the youth of the time period, no matter their own race or gender (Cheney, 2005, p.2), while Black American culture was also prevalent in the UK (Daley, 2019, p.249). It's noteworthy that as Cheney (2005, p.65-66) shows how Hip-hop artists were influenced by activists like Louis Farrakhan, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, the same pro-Black

narratives come through in contemporary Grime and British rap music, as could be seen from the lyrics of Akala and Dave, amongst others.

Preceding Cheney's work is that of American intersectional feminist bell hooks (2004) as she describes Black men as existing in a culture of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p.xi), while pointing to a culture of misogyny amongst male civil rights activists, who although struggled alongside their female counterparts in the movement expected that afterwards, "Black females would take their rightful place subordinate to the superior will of men" (p.7-8). There are parallels with Grime and British rap music here, as a number of anti-racist artists have made misogynistic remarks in lyrics.

Hooks (2004, p.27) continues by pointing out that making money has traditionally been a way for Black men to acquire masculine capital, something that can link into the consumerism of Hip-hop, particularly with many artists in both the US and the UK coming from underprivileged backgrounds. She describes 'gangsta culture' as being "the essence of patriarchal masculinity", and this can be linked to Hall's stereotypes of young Black men in the UK.

This view is also reflected in the work of Kitwana (2002, p.85-87) as he focuses on the misogynistic language in hip-hop, and in particular Gangsta rap, as "the very same contempt that young Black men held for racist policing … was also directed at Black women." However, he argues the point that rap music actually addresses the gender issues faced by young Black people, the same people that it's made by – the only genre to do so (Kitwana, 2002, 87).

Another aspect of how Black masculinity has been portrayed is through the over-sexualisation of Black males. Black men are seen as "con artists in hiding", "violent" and potential "sexual harassers or rapists", and thus a self-fulfilling prophecy is created; "If you are going to be seen as a beast you may as well act like one" (hooks, 2004, p.49). More to the point, she uses the term 'soul murder' to refer to the way in which the spirit of young Black males is crushed in childhood, often by parents who don't want their sons to be 'soft' (hooks, 2004, p.87).

Returning again to Hall (2013, p.251-2), he connects the representation of Black masculinity to the historical treatment of Black men through slavery, colonialism and imperialism. The portrayal of Black men as being overly sexual stems from infantilization by slave masters 'symbolically castrating them' – he argues that as a response to being treated in a childish manner, some Black men "adopted a 'macho', aggressive – masculine style". Moving onto Black masculinity and Hip-hop

specifically, hooks (2004, p.151) describes Hip-hop as reflecting "the ruling values of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" in that it's representative of "Black men wanting to be 'in charge'".

Despite this research being US-centric, much of the discourse around Hip-hop and masculinity in the US is mirrored in the conversation around Grime and British rap in the UK. Of course, it's vital to bear in mind that African-Americans in the US and Black Britons have had different histories, when considering slavery and segregation in North America and the Commonwealth, Windrush and direct African migration to the UK, and as such nuance is needed when comparing the two.

Although there is a degree of research surrounding criminality and Grime, research looking more specifically at how masculinity is represented is somewhat limited. However, there is a wealth of research surrounding race and representation in the UK, and Hip-hop culture in the US, that we can draw upon when considering representation of masculinity in Grime and British rap music.

To that end, there is something of a research gap that becomes apparent, but there is enough past research to apply to modern trends in race and representation in Grime and British rap music today.

"Nah Mummy, I ain't gonna be those guys": Representations of masculinity and gender in Grime and British rap music

Since the early 2000s emergence of Dizzee Rascal, Wiley and a 14-year-old Tinchy Stryder, Grime has been dominated by men. This is in comparison to UK garage and to an extent British rap music, which had female stars like Ms. Dynamite, So Solid Crew's Lisa Maffia, and Estelle (Bradley, 2013, p.379-381).

If we view gender as something that is 'done', the process can be seen as involving "a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126). Boakye says that grime "very much plays by the rules, and masculinity is the referee" and "promotes those same macho ideals that run through our global community: extroversion, power, control, status and aggression".

Hence, Grime has largely been an expression of masculinity as West and Zimmerman would describe it, and in particular a style of Black masculinity similar to that historically seen in US hip-hop and African-American culture.

Hall takes Bogle's 1973 study of Black character archetypes in movies, and applies the character of the 'Bad Buck' to contemporary young Black men. The 'Bad Bucks' are described as "no-good violent renegades … 'full of Black rage' … 'over-sexed ad savaged'". He then compares these to modern images of young Black men as being "on the rampage", and "'the mugger' … the gansta-rap [sic] singer, the 'n****s with attitude' bands". We only need to look at lyrics from popular Grime and British rap tracks to see that this is how masculinity is portrayed, and how these artists 'do' gender.

Using Giggs' 2007 track 'Talkin The Hardest' as an example, he raps the line "Anybody thinks they can talk to my clique/Will end up covered in red like a portion of chips", clearly alluding to violence by evoking intense imagery, and it's no surprise that Giggs is generally considered to fall under the genre of Road rap, a genre often compared to American Gangsta rap, that has also been described as "slower and meaner than Grime" (Yates, 2016, p.81).

This use of violent language to convey masculinity has long been a key part of Gangsta rap in the US, where in the song 'Long Kiss Goodnight' by The Notorious B.I.G. featuring Puff Daddy lyrics include "I'ma keep stomping your motherfucking head in" and "I'm flamin' gats, aimin' at/These fuckin' maniacs, put my name in raps". This is part of an attempt to remasculate Black men through "hypermasculine gender politicking" (Cheney, pp.100-101)

Anderson (1999, pp.9-10) describes a 'code of the street', or informal rules and guidelines in inner-city areas, and it's argued by Ilan (2012) that Gangsta rap provided "discursive grammar" in which this code could be explored. This is similar to the way in which Road rap, Grime and Drill can be seen today. The street is dominated by men, with the marginality of girls and women from subcultures (McRobbie and Garber, 1993, p.179) also seen here.

There is an argument that girls are excluded from 'the street' and thus from Grime. Certainly, there have been a number of controversies surrounding the representation of women in Hip-hop (Barron, 2013) and the way in which Black women are perceived in UK culture can go some way to explaining their relative absence in Grime.

Hirsch (2018, p.98-100) describes her experiences as growing up as a mixed-race girl: "One of my earliest experiences of having a Black identity was the way boys behaved towards me". She goes on to highlight that many interracial relationships are between Black men and white women, with even Black men rejecting Black

female bodies – a form of 'misogynoir', a term coined by Black feminist Moya Bailey to describe racist misogyny aimed at Black women, after she "was troubled by the way straight Black men talked about Black women online and in music" (Bailey and Trudy, 2018).

If it's these same boys who are active in Grime, it seems logical that they may then exclude girls from the genre. If Grime is a subculture, it makes sense that it is rooted in hegemonic masculinity, in particular with regards to the link between certain patterns of aggression and hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.834).

Alternatively, there's an argument to be had that part of the reason why female MCs – the likes of Amplify Dot, Cleo (formerly Mz Bratt), Lady Leshurr – are not more popular is because "their power and assertiveness as MCs does not allow them to be sexualized and objectified in the same ways as Black women … in other genres (Zuberi, 2014, p.197). Here, we can bring in West's archetypes of Black women, namely the 'Angry Black Women' and 'Sistas with Attitude' (2018, p.149) as examples of how Black women can, rather than being seen as hypersexual, are seen as 'loud, tough, strong' (West, 2018, p.149).

Even if these women can 'intrude' on male spaces, as a result it can mean limited commercial success with the likes of Ms. Dynamite and Speech Debelle being anomalies (Zuberi, 2014, p.197). In general, female MCs are not reaching the same levels of success as their most popular male counterparts (Bakare, 2019; Myers, 2017).

In many ways, Grime and British rap music have similarities to US hip-hop, in terms of the overt masculinity expressed. Cheney (2005, p.8-9) describes the classic Hip-hop track 'The Message' by Grandmaster Flash as painting a picture of the "urban crisis" that Hip-hop manifested from in the late 20th century, and can be compared to the inner-city origins of Grime.

Intersectional feminist writer bell hooks describes the learned gender differences between her brother and herself as they reached adolescence, whereby being a boy was "to be tough, to mask one's feelings, to stand one's ground and fight" (2015, p. 87). She also uses term "soul murder" to describe how parents 'crush' the spirit of the Black sons in childhood as they don't want them to be 'soft' (2004, p.87).

There's subtle homophobia present in 'The Message', with references to being an "undercover f*g" in prison. This hyper-masculinity and homophobia in Rap has a strong effect on young people as they form their own masculine identities particularly at school (Chiu, 2005, p.27). This sort of homophobia can be a response to the way

in which Black men were "infantilized" historically (Hall, 2013, p.252) in particular by their white counterparts. Homophobia and misogyny may be seen as the means in which Black men can exert some form of power. As far back as the 19th century this has been evident.

At the same time, deviant and criminal activity can be a way to achieve a sort of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995, p.26). By being part of a subculture with opposing values to the mainstream, young males can still meet "criteria of status" when they may not have the means to do so in mainstream culture (Cohen, 2015, p.140). To this end, we can see that for many young Black men, masculinity through criminal activity is seen as a way of proving their worth – the sorts of pursuits that are categorized as 'male' by these groups can often be criminal.

For example, young rapper J Hus, credited with popularizing the genre Afroswing, was sentenced to eight months in prison for carrying a knife in a public place in 2018 (Snapes, 2018). Fellow rapper Akala [Kingslee Daley] outlines his own experinces of growing up as a young mixed-race man, describing both "the violence of the state" and "the violence of my peers" as "both integral and inescapable parts of Black male adolescence in London" (Daley, 2018, p.169)

Thus, it seems apparent that for Grime artists growing up in this sort of environment, masculinity is required for acceptance to some degree. Particularly in education, where teachers build an image of a white, middle-class 'ideal student' as opposed to other pupils, "from slum areas", which they describe as being "the most difficult group to teach successfully, lacking in interest in school, learning ability, and outside training" (Becker, 1970, pp.139-140).

However, there are signs that, at least in the mainstream Grime scene, homophobia may be on the decline. Stormzy, perhaps the Grime artist with the most mainstream appeal today, apologized in 2017 for homophobic language previously used on Twitter before rising to fame (Beaumont-Thomas, 2017). Since then, he has collaborated with MNEK, an openly gay British artist and producer of Nigerian descent.

Perhaps part of the problem is that being Black and gay are seen as opposing identities, whereby homosexuality is seen as 'white', and Black gay men in particular struggle with conflicting identities (Hunter, 2010, pp.81-92). J Hus' tweets about Europeans "'forcing LGBT onto' Africa and 'weaponising' homosexuality" reflect a lack of understanding in terms of intersectionality (Harrison, 2019).

This brings us back to the present day, and how Grime and British rap artists 'do' gender. West and Zimmerman (1987, p.126) describe gender as being 'done' by "women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its

production" – if we exchange 'society' in this scenario for the subculture these men belong to, it's clear to see that the way in which gender is 'done' is by conforming to hypermasculine norms.

Interestingly, despite Drill being seen as overwhelmingly male and conforming to a heterosexual, masculine norm, there have been a small number of female MCs rapping over Drill beats, with the likes of Abigail Asante and Ivorian Doll aiming to popularise female Drill artists (Adegoke, 2019). Similarly, Drill/Trap rapper Mr Strange came out as gay in 2020, the first Drill artist to do so (Grant, 2020). As a result, it can be suggested that perhaps British rap genres are becoming more accessible to those outside of the hyper-masculine norm.

While it's clear to see that Grime is firmly rooted in the predominantly male subculture of 'the street' and the hyper-masculine characteristics of US hip-hop culture, the scene continues to evolve as we can see from the likes of not only female and LGBTQ+ artists themselves but also major stars including Stormzy apologizing for past comments and positioning themselves as socially progressive allies. While artists continue to celebrate anti-racist causes, their activism is perhaps coinciding with the rise of intersectionality to include the LGBTQ+ community and women in this. However, there is clearly still clear progress to be made, with the sort of hegemonic masculinity that Connell and Messerschmidt describe still prevalent.

"If you don't wanna get it, then you're never gonna get it": How race and ethnicity are represented in Grime

The UK has undergone large demographic changes since the mid-20th century and of particular focus here are the migration of skilled and semi-skilled Caribbean individuals to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s (Phillips and Phillips, 1998, pp.120-123) and the "flows of music and people back and forth between England and mainly Ghana and Nigeria (Zuberi, 2014, p.192). Both these Afro-Caribbean and African disaporas have greatly influenced Black British music, including Grime and British rap music.

Around the time of migration of Afro-Caribbean people to the UK, some white Britons listened to African-American blues artists, while in the 1960s and 70s ska and

reggae were popular, with white bands like The Police appropriating elements of ska and reggae into their pop and rock music. Although white British people enjoyed 'Black' music, their tolerance for the Afro-Caribbean communities in the country was at a lower level (Stratton, 2014, pp.29-30).

In a sense, this is still the case today. Many Black British artists allude to race in their lyrics, and these are often politicised; a response to the often-negative portrayal of their communities in the media: "the Black presence is thus constructed as a problem or threat" (Gilroy, 2002, p.49). This explains why a largely Black community could come together in 2017, and to an extent in 2019, to support white Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn (Perera, 2018). Although the Labour Party and more generally party politics can be perceived as a 'white environment', it had enough credibility amongst young Black Britons to support them in part thanks to Corbyn's 'realness' and 'relatability' (Perera, 2018). This is a far cry from the first wave of Grime, which existed under the rule of New Labour, coinciding with 'ASBO Britain' (Perera, 2018) and Dizzee Rascal's claim on his 2003 track 'Hold Ya Mouf' that "I'm a problem for Anthony [Tony] Blair", the Labour Prime Minister of the time whose governments introduced measures for dealing with crime to pacify "middle Britain", which disproportionately target and affected Black Britons (Benyon and Kushnick, 2009).

If the first wave of Grime and New Labour weren't on great terms, the relationship between Grime in the late 2010s and Theresa May and Boris Johnson's Conservative governments was worse. Shortly after the 2017 election, when the #Grime4Corbyn movement was still in full swing, London's Grenfell Tower burnt down. The 24-storey residential block in Kensington and Chelsea sat in an estate "home to predominantly lower and modest income, working class, and many Black and minority ethnic people, some of whom are migrants" (Macleod, 2018) – in short, the sort of community that many Grime and British rap artists had grown up in. With at least 72 fatalities, it was seen by many in the community as a failing of the Conservative government to protect working-class BAME people, and led to protests.

Following this, young London MC Big Zuu released a 'Grenfell Tower Tribute' song (Hancox, 2018, p.290) while Stormzy and Dave have both used their performances at the Brit awards in recent years to mention Grenfell Tower amongst other injustices, with fellow rapper Slowthai going as far as to holding up a dummy of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's severed head at the Mercury Prize 2019 (Joseph, 2020; Michallon, 2019). Dave's performance of his track 'Black' at the 2020 Brit awards mentioned Grenfell Tower, 'reparations' and 'plantations', a reference to the transatlantic slave trade, while Stormzy's 2018 performance included the lines "Theresa May, where's the money for Grenfell?/You forgot about Grenfell/You criminals, and you got the cheek to call us savages" (Peters, 2019, p.146)

This links into the idea of the 'ideal' or 'good immigrant' (Hirsch, 2018, p.285). The example Hirsch gives is of Great British Bake Off winner Nadiya Hussain, of Bangladeshi descent, who had been largely accepted by mainstream British society until she spoke about her experiences of racism of Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*. Likewise, Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis-Hill, of Somalian and mixed Jamaican-English descent respectively, were celebrated as 'good' after winning gold medals for Great Britain at the 2012 Olympics (Zuberi, 2014, p.189). This is in comparison to artists like Stormzy and Dave, who have used their platform to speak out against inequalities in British society, and have been criticised in some quarters for doing so.

This anti-racist activism by prominent artists invites the question of whether or not Grime is 'British', and what that entails. Grime is clearly a British genre at its heart, although it encompasses influences from Africa, the US, and the Caribbean. In linguistic terms, it uses the grammar, accent and slang of Multicultural London English (MLE) (Perera, 2018), colloquially labelled 'Jafaican' for its Caribbean influence. Green (2014, pp.62-71) describes MLE as "the new 'youthspeak'", and explains that it has roots in DJ Smiley Culture's 1984 dancehall record 'Cockney Translation', referring to Grime as a "cultural 'showcase'" for MLE, as "streetwise, cross-cultural music". If MLE is a linguistic representation of contemporary Britain, then it makes sense that Grime is a musical representation of contemporary Britain. This is exemplified further with the rise of genres including Afroswing, Afrobashment and Afro-trap, all the product of a multicultural, multi-influence Britain.

While race relations are often considered in the context of a white and Black dichotomy – or an issue existing between minority (the oppressed) and majority (the oppressor) groups, Mac an Ghaill (1999, p.61) points out that it is more complex than that. There has been a shift from the "colour paradigm" to a model of racism "in which cultural and religious identities are foregrounded", and the relationships between African and Afro-Caribbean communities would be an example of this – it would be too simplistic to assume that as both communities share Blackness, or similar West African heritage, there's little difference between them.

A report by Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) analyses the relationships between African and Afro-Caribbean diasporas in the UK, and conflicts between the two communities, noting both tension and unity between them over the past few decades, something that has of course crossed over into Black British music. Many MCs involved in the first wave of Grime were of Caribbean descent. Grime evolved in part from UK garage, a genre with a Jamaican influence, as well as from "African diaspora music tradtions" (Zuberi, 2014, p.196; Perera, 2018).

On the whole, Black British culture has generally been more Caribbean in nature due to generations of migration from the region, and Afro-Caribbean culture was seen as 'cool Black' (Zuberi, 2014, p.190; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2017). Although Dizzee Rascal was of Nigerian and Ghanaian descent he seldom referred to his African roots

(Zuberi, 2014, p.192) but many of his Grime successors (e.g. Dave, Stormzy) have done so.

Afrobeats – a mix of a number of West African genres including Afrobeat and highlife – with Western hip-hop and particularly UK funky – has become popularised by British and West African rappers including Fuse ODG (Ghana), Burna Boy and Wizkid (both Nigeria). Similarly, Afroswing became popular through the likes of J Hus (The Gambia), Kojo Funds (Ghana) and Not3s (Nigeria) (Bernard, 2019). Even Gilroy (2002, p.xiii) notes that "the recent history of African countries like Somalia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria is dislodging the Caribbean from the centre of British Blackness", and this generation of Black Britons are playing a key part in that. Taking Fuse ODG as an example, his debut album was titled *T.I.N.A.* or *This Is New Africa*, also a movement in UK music "based on this confident assertion of African identity by British-born Black artists (Hirsch, 2018, p.296)

21-year-old rapper Dave [Omoregie] is of Nigerian descent (Sawyer, 2019), and through the lyrics of his 2019 song 'Black' exemplifies both pro-Black and pan-African messages. Through the lyrics "Black is my Ghanaian brother reading into scriptures/Doing research on his lineage, finding out that he's Egyptian" (Omoregie, 2019) there is a connection between Ghana, Egypt and Nigeria (through his own heritage), three prominent African countries, highlighting the way in which British Blackness is becoming more Afro-centric, alongside its Caribbean influence.

Part of the historic 'split' between the two groups has been that Africans have historically been regarded as 'primitive' and Africa as a 'Dark Continent' (Darboe, 2006). Though this is a Eurocentric view, it has been internalised by African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans throughout their time in a predominantly 'white' society, although amongst younger people there is less of a divide due to higher interaction between the communities (Owusu-Kwarteng, 2017).

Kojo Funds in particular perhaps exemplifies the blending of cultures, being of both Ghanaian and Dominican descent. As Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) explains that African culture is influencing Black British culture to a greater extent in the present day, there is also an increase of 'pan-ethnicity' in friendship groups, so it appears logical that there would currently be young people of mixed African and African-Caribbean descent. Perhaps, with a reported increase in racism in recent years, there is an element of unity between Black British groups against what they consider to be institutional racism. Furthermore, the various Black British groups (including Black Caribbean, Black African, mixed white and Black Caribbean and mixed white and Black African) "were more likely to forge intra ethnic ties with each other, than with other groups (Owusu-Kwarteng, 2017).

Returning back to Dave's performance at the Brit awards, we can see that he talks about both the Windrush generation and 'our people … on plantations'. Despite

being of African descent rather than Afro-Caribbean or African American, that he refers to members of other Black groups as 'our people' shows a togetherness and corroborates Owusu-Kwarteng's findings regarding 'pan-ethnicity'. Then, there are those Africans in the UK who aren't of West African heritage. Rapper Deno has Eritrean parents (Sony Music, n.d.), while Octavian was originally born to an Angolan family in France (Monroe, 2018).

In contrast to Mac an Ghaill's views on the way racism is moving beyond 'white' and 'Black', there's an argument that the power structures in place prevent racisms between Black British communities from being the same severity as the racism from white groups to Black groups - "Black groups do not have enough power to prevent access to valuable social resources, or more specifically to 'create an oppressor/oppressed dyad'" (Owusu-Kwarteng, 2017).

As well as analysing African and Afro-Caribbean communities in Grime, there are also a number of white artists also involved. Mike Skinner's project The Streets spans UK garage, Grime and Hip-hop, and explains his role in the history of giving urban music in the early 2000s a British identity: "Language and accent were a big part of it. I've got a lot of credit over the years for 'giving hip-hop an English voice" (Skinner, 2012, p.21)

Alongside Skinner, prominent white artists in the scene include Devlin, Dappy and Tulisa of N-Dubz, Aitch, Lady Sovereign, Plan B, Verb T and Fliptrix, although Grime and British rap music are dominated by those of African and Caribbean descent. Their music may also be socio-political in nature – Plan B's 2012 *ill Manors*, influenced by the 2011 riots, being an example (Peters, 2019, p.143).

It may be tempting to compare the roles of white people in Grime and British rap with those of women, but doing so ignores the objectification of women that is so prevalent in the genre. To some extent, race might have been an advantage for them, particularly in the period around the late 2000s, between the first and second waves of Grime. The likes of The Streets, Plan B and Lady Sovereign may have had an advantage in the industry thanks to their 'whiteness', and when The Streets sold more album copies than Wiley, this may have been because white consumers could relate more to the lyrical matter in the former's music (Fiddy in Hancox, 2018, p.189)

Overall, Grime and British rap are dominated by Black British people. In many ways, it is the dominant form of young Black British culture, an amalgamation of African, Afro-Caribbean, African-American and other cultures, reflecting the diversity of the UK in the 21st century. Although a handful of white artists have made an impact within these genres, they are primarily centred around Afro-Caribbean and African artists. It is apparent that Black British culture, and in turn the music, is more heavily influenced by Africa than it was in earlier decades, and as a result there is a lot of crossover between Afro-Caribbean and African communities.

"Don't comment on my culture, you ain't qualified":

The representations of Grime through the media

and political class

When considering historical coverage of Black Britons in the UK media and their treatment by the British state, it's unsurprising that Grime is often represented negatively in the media today. Gutzmore (2000, p.332) makes reference to "violence and open confrontation" between the state and what he describes as "the cultures of the Black masses", and this hostility to Black British culture is still apparent in the 21st century, as can be seen from the Metropolitan Police Service's Form 696 and "systematically monitoring, targeting and shutting down Black music night" (Hancox, 2018, pp.170-171).

Through the work of Chomsky, Hall, Barthes and others, we can start to analyse how the media are systemically representing Grime and other Black British genres in a negative manner. This has been part of a tradition of negative BAME representation in the media to construct a certain narrative – or myth – as I will expand on further. However, it's necessary to first analyse the relationship between the media and government.

Herman and Chomsky (1998, pp.18-19) describe a "symbiotic relationship" between the mass media, part of the state Gutzmore refers to, and "powerful sources of information" – that is, the government and corporations. This echoes Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses functioning "by ideology", all forms of ISA being united by "the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class" (Althusser, 1971, pp.246-247)

For McCombs (2014, p.1) a key role of the news media is to "influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day"; in other words, the role of "agenda-setting". Agenda-setting is evidently effective - as far back as the 1960s in the US, there was a high level of correlation between public perception of the country's most important issues and the news coverage of various issues (McCombs, 2014, p.25), which goes some way to explaining how anti-Black racism presents itself in the public.

The media will represent different groups in different ways relative to the amount of capital held by these communities. Taking Bourdieu's concept of class habitus, it

becomes evident that those involved in the media industry and those targeted through the media have different levels of cultural and economic capital, and a differing habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, pp.95;284).

The people represented by and through Grime are largely not the same people involved in the media. Traditionally, #Grime4Corbyn notwithstanding, the participation levels of young Black Britons in politics has not been high. If Black communities are disconnected and alienated from a media that they do not feel represented in, through which the media have the power to set the agenda, the political participation of these communities is limited as there is a higher degree of abstentionism (Bourdieu, 1984, p.399).

In a sense, Black British communities (and in turn, their music) threaten the cultural hegemony of Western, or European, culture. As Gramsci (1971, p.418) puts it:

> "If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge … then and only then is the relationship one of representation."

As the interaction between media and individual is unequal in terms of power, the media can use language to exclude groups lacking in cultural capital – i.e. Black British groups. This links back to the idea of agenda-setting, in that the media representation of Black British culture is likely to be negative, in part to influence public opinion but also because Black Britons do not have the means of which to counter their media representation.

We can compare this to the coverage of the European Union in British media, as it increased in the early 2010s, leading to the eventual vote for the UK to leave in 2016. The coverage of Europe in the UK press has been described as "persistently critical, and often distorted, misleading and occasionally xenophobic" (Gavin, 2018). In other words, there was a degree of Eurosceptic sentiment (e.g. UKIP) around 2010, but this was reinforced by the media in such a way that it became a lot more pronounced and the EU a major public concern.

Taking these theories and applying them to the contemporary coverage of Grime, it's clear that there is an effort to represent Grime negatively, with connotations of crime and criminality, as the media work in tandem with the government. If we can assume that there are already preconceptions against BAME communities amongst the UK populace, it makes sense that the media may then reinforce these ideas, whether through the 'Black muggers' moral panic in the 1970s, or through making connections between Grime and British rap music and criminality and deviant behaviour.

Although the problem isn't as visible in the UK as it is in the US, there is "hugely disproportionate over-representation of Black and other minority prisoners" (Gilroy, 2002, p.xxviii). Successive UK governments have implemented "authoritarian and populist policies in the specific context of neo-liberalism's destruction of welfare" (Gilroy, 2002, p.xxviii), and Black Britons have been used as a scapegoat for these policies to go through. Black Britons were something for the white population to unite against – "a problem or threat against which a homogenous, white, national 'we' could be unified" (Gilroy, 2002, p.49). Grime can be perceived as a symbol of Black Britain, and so gains negative connotations.

Arguably, the media have created a number of myths around Grime and British rap music, representing the genres through delivering a message that divides into both a connoted and denoted system (Barthes, 1977, pp.165-166). On the face of it, Grime is a genre of music born in the early 2000s and influenced by UK garage, Drum and bass, and Hip-hop. But what sort of connotations are now attached to Grime – what does the concept of Grime symbolize?

Bringing in Barthes' ideas around the press photograph, a comparison between the photograph and the writing in the media today can be made, as they have both been "worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms" (1977, p.19). Where the reader is consuming the text in the form of signs, there has been a conscious decision by the media to talk about Grime in such a way that it evokes these connotations of criminality, gang culture and deviance.

This invites the sort of reaction expanded on in the previous chapter, whereby artists from Dizzee Rascal to Stormzy and Dave have taken jabs at the government of the time. There is a close relationship between the mainstream media and political class that we cannot ignore when discussing the representation of Grime in the media. As far back as during the Thatcher era, the conservative press would tend to report Margaret Thatcher's policies relating to race and ethnicity in a positive light (van Dijk, 1991, p.250), setting a precedent whereby white became positive and Black negative.

We can see the media's role as Ideological State Apparatus here, as it not only passively reports on government policy and news stories but "actively contributes to the construction of dominant ideologies" (van Dijk, 1991, p.250). The negative representation of Black communities in conjunction with the praising of conservative policies works to form anti-Black narratives in the public consciousness to strengthen cultural hegemony.

In response to a Daily Mail article in which it was reported that Grime lyrics glorified cannabis use, once again drawing links between Grime and deviant behavior, Stormzy told them to "just admit you're anti-Black and fuck off you tramps" via

Twitter, and has also told Eamonn Holmes to "get the fuck out of here" after comments on Meghan, Duchess of Sussex (Crack, 2017; Harrison, 2020). As mentioned earlier, Black Britons do not have the means, or influential power, to counter their representation in mass media. One of the few ways in which this is possible to some degree is through their music. Hence, we see some artists making political statements or addressing the media and politicians through their lyrics.

Perhaps the only other sphere of British public life where Black individuals (both those of British nationality and African nationals) have as much power as music is sport (Owusu-Kwarteng, 2017). Hence, the relationship between Black sportsperson and the media mirrors that between Black musician and the media; footballers Raheem Sterling, Danny Rose and Eniola Aluko have been vocal around the issue of racism (Burdsey, 2019) while Sterling in particular has been represented negatively in the press, as there appears to have been attempts to draw him into negative stereotypes of the young Black man (Fifield, 2018; Hattenstone, 2018).

This is part of a wider trend of negative representation of BAME communities in the UK. Hall et al (1978, pp.83-84) refer to the Handsworth 'mugging' case of 1972, where the age of the primary perpetrator, the sentence, and the subject matter of 'mugging' were all amplified by the news media. Reportage of mugging in the media increased with a peak in October 1972, with 23 events reported across the Daily Mirror and Guardian in the month (Hall et al., 1978, pp.70-71). At the same time, it was clear that the social group "with which … 'mugging' has come to be identified" was Black youth (Hall et al., 1978, p.327).

Through the following decades, the image of the young Black man has become almost synonymous with criminality, with one case of which being when "the picture of a young Black man with dreadlocks was emblazoned across the front pages" as a "'pot smoking Rastafarian on the dole for two years" – this criminality can be seen as inherently cultural through this representation, through an "inferred definition of the deviant West Indian culture in which these unfortunate traits apparently have their roots" (Gilroy, 2002, pp.84-87).

As much as the media plays a vital role in the representation of Black British culture and Grime specifically, we cannot discuss the issue without referring to the policing of Black communities. Alongside Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses, he notes that the police force form part of the Repressive State Apparatus, which differ from the ISAs in that they make "direct or indirect use of physical violence" (Althusser, 1971, p.78).

Whereby the folk devil of 'muggers' came to symbolise and represent the Black British community in 1972, Grime and British rap does the same in contemporary Britain. We can refer back to the idea of the 'bad bucks' and the way in which they came to be one of the core representations of Blackness in the US. It's a form of

othering; Indie rock or Electropop do not represent white Britons in the 21st century, yet Grime and similar genres are perhaps what most associate with Black British people today. As such, the default label of young Black men in the UK is that of the 'bad buck'. Regardless of whether or not the individual in question fits the criteria, the likes of Stormzy and Sterling will be pigeonholed as 'bad bucks' by virtue of their race and their willingness to challenge a racist status quo.

Essentially, the way that Grime and Grime artists are represented by the media stems from the way that Black groups as a whole are represented. This is because Grime is perceived as a 'Black' genre of music, with connotations of criminality and deviance. As Grime and similar music genres are platforms where Black men can meet conventional societal goals succeed through innovative means rather than conformity (Merton, 1968, p.230) they threaten cultural hegemony.

"Sittin' at the front, just like Rosa Parks":

Conclusion

Through analysing both the representations of race and gender in Grime, and how Grime is represented in media, this dissertation has been able to show the ways in which both Grime and other similar genres are portrayed.

While it cannot be denied that there aren't some issues with regards to Grime and its representation of masculinity, women and race, it would be far too simplistic to suggest that the representations of Grime and similar genres are in any way accurate. As explained in the first chapter, Grime and British rap appears to be moving away from homophobia, mirroring Black male Americans, whose "elevated rates of homophobia" has "radically changed in recent years" (Anderson and Magrath, 2019, p.208).

What is true is that Grime, like Hip-hop in the US, has had a significant impact on British culture. We can point to the popularity of TV shows like Top Boy, starring rappers Kano, Dave and Asher D, to point out the spread of Grime and UK Hip-hop in modern popular culture. Grime comedy is something that hasn't been explored in this dissertation, but has been on the rise in the 2010s due to BBC Three's People Just Do Nothing, Big Narstie's various exploits, and Michael Dapaah's 'Big Shaq' character.

In exploring the impact of Grime, we can look at the prevalence of MLE amongst young people in the UK today. Many slang terms with roots in Black diasporas have risen to prominence through Grime music and comedy. While I described MLE as a 'linguistic representation of contemporary Britain' and Grime as a 'musical representation of contemporary Britain' in Chapter II, these don't exist in vacuums separate from each other. Grime and the surrounding culture has been perhaps the biggest vehicle for language evolution in the 21st century, Although MLE could be detected in lyrics as early as the mid-1980s with Smiley Culture and Tippa Irie (Green, 2014, p.66), although this was heavily influenced by Jamaican patois and Caribbean slang, whereas contemporary MLE looks towards the US and Africa too.

Moreover, the rise of artists based outside London shows an increased tendency of Black Britons to move away from London, perhaps starting to move away from London as the centre of Black Britain. Despite Grime's East London roots, notable Grime and British Hip-hop artists today include Nottingham duo Young T & Bugsey, Manchester's Bugzy Malone and Birmingham's Lady Leshurr. Finney and Simpson discussed the idea of other UK areas joining a collection of London boroughs as becoming 'plural cities' – having no majority ethnic group (2009, p.156), and this trend can explain how Grime is travelling across the UK. It seems that London is no longer the default option for many immigrant communities, and Black diasporas are taking their music with them.

More to the point, Grime is not one singular movement. From its origins to the state of the genre in 2020, it's manifested itself in numerous different ways. From the music to comedy, TV and mainstream radio shows, it feels as if Grime is becoming a way of life for many young British people.

Essentially, Grime and similar genres are an expression of contemporary Black Britain. To that end, it is by its very nature political, as artists will use Grime as a vehicle for societal change and progress while the media continue to vilify it for much the same reason.

It's difficult to argue that the negative representation of Grime isn't rooted in anti-Black racism. However, part of the reason for the negative representation of Grime in the media is the fear that through Grime, Black culture could 'corrupt' white communities, threatening the status quo. This explains why Grime and British rap music are treated in this manner.

Grime might be male-dominated, but is not inherently misogynistic or homophobic. However, it's unsurprising that it continues to be represented as such through the media as it prevents minority groups from unifying as part of a 'divide and rule' strategy. Where a newspaper represents Grime negatively, it does so using its own voice but is "expressed in its public idiom" – that is, the editorial viewpoint is represented as that of the public (Hall et al., 1978, pp.62-63). It can be argued that

"race war" is engineered as a rival to "class war" to prevent international, or cross-racial, class solidarity (Lentin, 2008, p.1903).

In short, it is in the media's interests to represent Grime in a negative light. However, we are seeing the beginnings of a shift whereby Grime is becoming accepted just like Jazz, Rock and Roll and Punk before it, with Drill becoming the latest scapegoat and moral panic. It could be argued that the public are becoming desensitised to Grime, but that would suggest that the genre is problematic in itself.

Returning back to Hip-hop in the US, we can see how gradually, genres and cultural movements that start out as controversial and 'shocking' become more widely accepted over time. Take, for example, Gangsta rapper Ice Cube, who has since become a "Hollywood mogul", becoming more of a family-friendly figure in recent years (Wright, 2016, pp.55-57). Even the mainstream coverage and success of Grime would have been unimaginable earlier on in this century; for now, it looks as if Drill is set to become the next 'folk devil' with racist connotations – in comparison, Grime is fast making itself at home in mainstream British culture.

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