

Policing the beats: The criminalisation of UK drill and grime music by the London Metropolitan Police

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Abstract

As debates on the rise of violent crime in London unfold, UK drill music is routinely accused of encouraging criminal behaviour among young Black Britons from deprived areas of the capital. Following a series of bans against drill music videos and the imposition of Criminal Behaviour Orders and gang injunctions against drill artists, discussions on the defensibility of such measures call for urgent, yet hitherto absent, sociological reflections on a topical issue. This article attempts to fill this gap, by demonstrating how UK drill and earlier Black music genres, like grime, have been criminalised and policed in ways that question the legitimacy of and reveal the discriminatory nature of policing young Black people by the London Metropolitan Police as the coercive arm of the British state. Drawing on the concept of racial neoliberalism, the policing of drill will be approached theoretically as an expression of the discriminatory politics that neoliberal economics facilitates in order to exclude those who the state deems undesirable or undeserving of its protection.

Keywords

drill music, grime, policing of Black music subcultures, police racism, race and crime, racial neoliberalism

In an atmosphere of rolling news stories about the ‘knife-crime epidemic’ that sweeps the UK’s capital (Channel 4 News, 2018; Lyness & Powell, 2018), drill music has emerged as the ‘soundtrack to London’s murders’ (Knight, 2018) and even blamed for ‘London’s wave of violent crime’ (Beaumont-Thomas, 2018). Various denounced as ‘demonic’ and ‘nihilistic’ (Mararike, Harper, & Gilligan, 2018; Simpson, 2018), this new rap (sub)

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culture has also been identified by the police as a public enemy, investigated as prime suspect, and used as a source of intelligence and evidence gathering in criminal investigations and court proceedings. In fact, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Cressida Dick, the Met's gang-crime chief, Commander Jim Stokley, and the Home Office are unanimous in their diagnosis of and response to UK drill as a music genre which serves to 'glamorise gang or drug-selling life, taunt rivals and normalise weapons carrying' (HM Government, 2018, p. 9; LBC, 2018; *The Telegraph*, 2018).

Against such exaggerated fears that depict UK drill as a veritable social ill which threatens public safety, this article attempts to acquit drill of the criminal charges that are levelled against it by reintroducing it as a music genre which naturalistically *broadcasts*, but does not *cause* violent crime. It will therefore be argued that drill music opens a window into the patterns of inequality and social exclusion that disproportionately affect young Black people (Equality and Human Rights Commission [EHRC], 2018; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2018), while also holding up a mirror to the unfair, hostile, illegitimate and discriminatory policing practices that criminalise young Black people and their forms of creative expression. To do so, the criminalisation of drill music by the London Metropolitan Police will be used as a case study which exposes the controversial methods by which drill music is policed, and reveals the discriminatory logic that underpins the policing of drill and earlier genres such as grime. Drawing on drill and grime lyrics, scenes of urban poverty, social isolation and police racism will be discussed as signs of 'racial neoliberalism' (Goldberg, 2009; Kapoor, 2013) by demonstrating how drill and grime MCs become both suspects and victims of state-administered racial injustice in an allegedly post-racial era.

Combining, as racial neoliberalism does, two words with their own loaded history and contested meanings its breadth can render it a vague catch-all (Bhattacharyya, 2013, p. 31). Yet, it provides a useful frame for interpreting the policing of 'blackness' as an unstated, yet no less devastating, state agenda. Understood here as a composite political ideology which merges neoliberal economics with discriminatory politics, racial neoliberalism manifests itself in two related ways: first, as a privatistic free-market agenda which disenfranchises disadvantaged social groups by and through disinvestment in and exclusion from state-supported welfare provision; and second, as a political doctrine which expects individuals to take responsibility for the structural disadvantage they suffer from as a result of state neglect. The social inequality and social exclusion that minority ethnic groups experience as racial outcasts is consequently blamed on themselves, rather than on the state's failure to protect them against discrimination or injustice. The concept of racial neoliberalism, therefore, usefully demonstrates how neoliberal economics encourages state practices that destroy the conditions required to sustain social welfare, but also censure and punish those who need it the most due to racialised patterns of urban social inequality and exclusion (Perera, 2019).

In such a context where the state sheds its soft welfare skin to grow a rough penal one, its law enforcement agencies are enlisted to police the victims of the neoliberal social order as its enemies, with UK drill artists starring as the 'Black folk devil[s]' (Williams, 2014) who are to blame for urban crime and disorder. In a skilful sleight of hand racial neoliberalism, as a state ideology, denies responsibility for the disorder that its anti-welfare policies create and scapegoats those who have to live in such disorder

by blaming them for their misfortune. Instead of repairing the desolate environments that drill artists describe in their lyrics, the neoliberal state accuses residents for the deterioration in their surroundings; often attributing such decline to a lack of civility and a cultural propensity for gang violence, instead of the state's reckless disregard for the safety of its citizens.

This being the theoretical prism through which the policing of drill is seen, this article addresses a topical issue within a slim but emerging body of literature (Irwin-Rogers & Pinkney, 2017; Pinkney & Robinson-Edwards, 2018), while also paving the way for hitherto neglected discussions on the criminalisation of Black music genres in the UK. While some illuminating academic research on drill's stylistic predecessor, grime, has been undertaken within sociology and criminology, the criminalisation of both genres by the Metropolitan Police remains largely under-researched. Notable exceptions include two journal articles and a book which explore the 'mediatisation' and 'commodification' of crime and street culture through new media (respectively, Ilan, 2012; Pinkney & Robinson-Edwards, 2018; Irwin-Rogers & Pinkney, 2017), and another two articles that discuss the 'juridification' of nightlife and alternative culture (Talbot, 2011), and reintroduce grime as a 'public counterculture' rather than a 'criminal subculture' (Fatsis, 2018). All other relevant research on the topic fails to address the criminalisation of Black 'urban' music in the UK, specifically or at any adequate length, focusing instead on other aspects of grime, rap and hip-hop. Much of this literature discusses the cultural ethics and aesthetics of UK hip-hop and grime (Bramwell, 2015), the entrepreneurial streak of grime artists (White, 2016, 2018), rap culture's subcultural belonging (Dedman, 2011), the cultural activism of hip-hop, rap and grime (Perera, 2018; Turner, 2010, 2017), the links between 'race', spirituality, class and gender in grime (Charles, 2016a, 2016b), or the intersections between urban multiculturalism, marginalisation and youth politics (James, 2015).

The remainder of this article will therefore attempt to respond to such a gap in current sociological and criminological research by tackling the ways in which UK drill music has been treated as a danger and a threat to public order by the London Metropolitan Police.

Policing UK drill music

UK drill music is an adaptation of Chicago drill music, which sprang in the mid-noughties from the impoverished suburbs of the Windy City's South Side and is characterised by the 'drilling', whirring sound of its rhythmic structure (beats) and the graphic imagery of its lyrical content. The unabashedly edgy and violent posture of Chicago drill music, spearheaded by artists like King Louie and Chief Keef, became a *cause célèbre*, attracting the attention of law enforcement agencies after a series of shootings and violent incidents were attributed to drill music videos that circulated online in various video-sharing platforms such as YouTube. UK drill music treads in the footsteps of its Chicagoan counterpart, featuring masked-up 'crews' of rappers, like 67, Moscow17 and the Harlem Spartans, who deliver their lyrics over distorted, makeshift beats that fiercely express the harsh reality of life in deprived South London social housing estates, and the artists' loyalties to their immediate locale. This often involves taunting rivals in vividly shocking terms, describing the harm that awaits them, and keeping a tally of stabbings in YouTube 'scoreboards' as a sign of each collective's transgressive capital. Like Chicago drill, UK drill music videos

have been used as evidence in court proceedings to establish links between inciting violence and actual murders, which involve UK ‘drillers’ such as Mdot, Showkey and Rhyhiem Barton, aspiring music producers like Dean Pascal-Modeste, and even innocent bystanders like Jermaine Goupall (Hancox, 2018a). This being the seamy underbelly of drill music, it is equally important to stress some of its more positive aspects that are often overlooked. Artists like the Hope Dealers see drill music as a medium for expression, spirituality, faith and social change (BBC Radio 1, 2018), while journalist and youth worker Ciaran Thapar (2018a) and journalist Dan Hancox (2018a), among others, highlight the genre’s potential to function as a culturally and socio-politically conscious youth subculture that voices valid, yet neglected, concerns about the experience of social life in London’s ill-mannered manors (Hancox, 2018b, pp. 304–305).

Having provided a thumbnail sketch of UK drill music, a brief overview of how drill music has been closely monitored, intensely surveilled and repeatedly clamped down by the London Metropolitan Police seems necessary in order to critically evaluate the fairness and legitimacy of such practices, as well as question the rationale that informs them.

In the aftermath of a series of stabbings and shootings that were linked to drill music (Pinkney & Robinson-Edwards, 2018, p. 109), a number of criminal justice responses have been launched. These include the continuation of Operation Domain launched by the Met with the aim of taking action against gang-related videos, the consolidation of a Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018), and the intention to pursue ‘drillers’ as ‘terror suspects’ echoing the Terrorism Act 2000 (Morrison, 2018; Thapar, 2018b; *The Telegraph*, 2018). These measures have resulted in the use of drill-related YouTube videos as sources of intelligence collection in order to bring convictions against individuals that are identified in those videos, ‘without any proof that the targeted music videos were linked to specific acts of violence’ (Hancox, 2018a).

As a result of this approach, 30 YouTube videos have been removed so far (Waterson, 2018), and ‘anyone identified in the slick videos can be targeted with action including Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) that can prevent suspects from associating with certain people, entering designated areas, wearing hoods, or using social media and unregistered mobile phones’ (Dearden, 2018). Five members of the drill group 1011 had a CBO made against them, which requires them to inform the police 24 hours in advance of their intention to publish any videos online while also demanding that they give a 48 hour warning of the date and locations of any planned live performance (Browne & Hudson, 2018). Established under Part 2 of the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 CBOs are an order, a command, an instruction rather than a sentence, but breaching a CBO is itself a criminal offence and any members of 1011 who do so risk being fined and jailed (Crown Prosecution Service [CPS], 2018). More recently, Skengdo and AM of the Brixton-based group 410 received a suspended sentence for performing *Attempted 1.0*, which allegedly incited violence against rival gang members. While the lyrics of *Attempted 1.0* are undeniably violent, there is no evidence of gang membership or gang activity. Yet, 410 were classified as a gang under the Policing and Crime Act 2009, resulting in bans from one London postcode (SE11), prohibiting incitement to violence and banning references to individuals, events and places. Sixty-five signatories from human rights organisations, as well as musicians, lawyers and academics criticised this move as an affront to civil liberties under the guise of tough-on-crime policies,

stressing that few 'now-celebrated artists and poets and polemicists would survive such limitations' (*The Guardian*, 2019).

While the aforementioned examples demonstrate how drill found itself in the grip of the criminal justice system, the most spectacular episode in the policing of this music genre is captured by the filming of a stop and search operation in London Fields, which targeted the shooting of a video for drill artist Balistic. Three armed police officers arrived at the scene clutching their machine guns and shouting at Balistic and his entourage of teenage boys to put their hands above their heads, while a helicopter circled the 'suspects' from above. Although there was no evidence of any wrongdoing, the Metropolitan Police said that it was reacting to a report of a firearm in what looks like a noticeably excessive response to a drill music video recording (Virk, 2018).

Despite the arguably exaggerated suspicion with which 'drillers' have been treated by law enforcement agencies, police chiefs, the Crown Court and the Home Office have all welcomed such iron-fisted, militaristic responses as effective crime-fighting methods (HM Government, 2018; LBC, 2018; *The Telegraph*, 2018). This may seem like a reasonable position to adopt by the authorities that are charged with overseeing public safety, but it also raises a number of important questions especially when measured against the scepticism voiced by human rights organisations, campaign groups, youth violence commissions and academic researchers who criticise such responses to drill music and knife crime in general.

The Youth Violence Commission's interim report categorically states that 'debates around the potential impact of drill music on youth violence are, in the main, a populist distraction from understanding and tackling the real root causes' such as 'childhood trauma, undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues, inadequate state provision, deficient parental support, poverty and social inequality' (Youth Violence Commission, 2018, p. 5). Contrary to heavy-handed law enforcement approaches to knife crime, the Youth Violence Commission advocates a public health approach modelled after Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit and the nascent Violence Reduction Unit in London. In a similar vein, human rights and freedom of speech organisations such as RightsInfo and Index on Censorship have raised concerns about the use of CBOs against 'drillers', which they see as an unjustified restriction on freedom of expression (Browne & Hudson, 2018; Evans, 2018).

Such disputes over how to best respond to knife crime, with drill providing the sombre soundtrack, reached fever pitch following five deaths in six days in the first week of November 2018 and reignited similar debates about controversial, yet popular, policing tools such as stop and search and gang databases. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Cressida Dick, went as far as declaring a 'relentless war on gangs' (Davenport, De Peyer, Lamuye, & Sheppard, 2018) through increased use of stop and search to seize knives and draw on intelligence to prevent further attacks. Much like the methods used to police drill music, such responses to knife crime are not only controversial, given their historically disproportionate use against Black and minority ethnic groups, but also ineffective; thereby casting doubt about the Met's intentions and motives.

Recent data from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) on gangs show no concrete evidence of the link between knife crime and gang membership (Grimshaw &

Ford, 2018, p. 9; MOPAC, 2016), nor does the evidence from Stopwatch and Amnesty International on the Metropolitan Police Gang Matrix (Amnesty, 2018; Williams, 2018). To make matters worse, a recent investigation by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) found the Matrix in breach of data protection laws 'with the potential to cause damage and distress to the disproportionate number of young, black men on the Matrix' (ICO, 2018). This echoes criticisms voiced against the Matrix which describe it as 'racist' (Clarke, 2018), due to its disproportionate use as 'the basis for surveillance operations against young men and boys who are predominantly black and are listed as potential future violent offenders, sometimes without any basis' (OHCHR, 2018). Unfortunately, stop and search fares just as badly according to the latest evidence, which demonstrates that this ostensibly indispensable police power is as ineffective and ill-judged as it is discriminatory (EHRC, 2010, 2012; Grimshaw & Ford, 2018; OHCHR, 2018; Shiner, Carre, Delson, & Eastwood, 2018; Tiratelli, Quinton, & Bradford, 2018) and 'criminogenic' even, due to its damaging effect on the public's trust of the police (Brennan, 2018; Keeling, 2017). Indeed, as Shiner et al. (2018, p. 2) note, the 'defensive rhetoric' around stop and search as 'a "vital tool" in the fight against knife crime does not "stand-up to empirical scrutiny"'. Contrary to 'police narratives about stop and search' which 'revolve around knives, gangs, organised crime groups, drug supply, county lines and modern slavery', Shiner et al.'s (2018, p. 2) 'analysis tells a different story – one of deprived, minority communities being over-policed and selectively criminalised'.

These may seem peripheral issues to the policing of drill were they not shaping the context within which drill music is policed. In fact, the Met's 'war on gangs' by means of discredited policing tools reveals what Williams and Clarke (2016, p. 3) describe as 'dangerous associations of a series of negative constructs, signifying racialised stereotypes that endure and underpin contemporary policing and prosecution strategies in relation to serious youth violence in England and Wales'. In the case of drill music, such 'dangerous associations' between Black youth subcultures and criminality become especially relevant given that information gleaned from sharing YouTube videos and other social media activity online is considered a possible indicator of likely gang affiliation and is used as potential criteria for inclusion in the Matrix. According to Amnesty International (2018, p. 46), 'people are therefore being profiled and monitored by police Gangs Units simply because of the subculture to which they belong and the people with whom they associate online'.

The policing of drill therefore becomes one of the battles with which the Met's war on gangs is fought. But it also raises important concerns about the persistence of institutional racism within the London Metropolitan Police, three decades after the term was popularised following the Scarman and Macpherson reports on the 1981 riots and the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson, 1999; Scarman, 1981).¹ Having so far demonstrated how a Black British music genre like drill came to be targeted, monitored and suppressed by the London Metropolitan Police, the following section will focus on the policing of drill as a painful reminder of the prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions that surround the policing of young Black Britons and their music subcultures. A comparison with drill's kindred genre, grime, will also be made to highlight continuities in the ways in which the two genres have been monitored and suppressed by the London Metropolitan Police.

Like grime, like drill: Institutional racism reloaded?

In the latter part of 2018 UK drill's former existence as an obscure, underground 'branch of the rap family tree' (Hancox, 2018b, p. 304) ended abruptly after this new-found 'problem genre' came into the orbit of the police as a suspect in connection with the rise of violent crime in London. Yet drill is by no means the only or the first Black British music subculture to be monitored, regulated and suppressed by the Met. Despite its soaring popularity and gradual absorption into the pop mainstream, drill's equally 'dangerous' predecessor, grime, was just as hotly pursued. Other Black music genres and cultural events have received a similar treatment, in a continuum that spans the last six decades from blues dances, early reggae soundsystems and Carnival celebrations to UK garage, grime and drill (Coon, 1976; Fatsis, 2018; Gilroy, 1987, pp. 95–104, 115–116; Gilroy, 2007, p. 152). This section, however, focuses exclusively on drill's parent genre, grime, due to similarities in the way drill and grime have been cast (out) as threats to public safety.

Grime emerged in the early noughties as an offshoot of and a response to UK garage's 'bling aesthetic' and 'syrupy chart hits' (Skepta, in Hancox, 2016), representing instead the raw, 'gritty authenticity' (Hancox, 2013, ch. 4) of life in the capital's council estates, primarily in East London, where a lot of grime artists lived and honed their rhyming skills in impromptu rooftop performances that were recorded, transmitted and broadcast on pirate radio stations such as Rinse FM which was once based in the Crossways Estate in Bow.² In the words of two of the genre's Mercury-prize winning stars, Dizzee Rascal and Skepta, grime is less concerned with 'champagne and cars, more concerned with, y'know, the grime' (Dizzee Rascal, *Showtime*), stressing that 'it's all born from poverty, it's all born from pain' (Skepta, in Hancox, 2016). This self-identification with the dark side of urban life experienced as a combination of marginalisation through 'lack of opportunities', the proliferation of 'the code of the street' and 'negative experiences of policing' (Ilan, 2012, p. 42) gave grime its unique aesthetic, socio-cultural and political edge starkly portraying, as it does, the 'lived experience of young metropolitan black working-class life' (Perera, 2018, p. 87).

Like UK drill, grime has also been subjected to police scrutiny primarily through the Promotion Event Risk Assessment Form 696, which was launched by the London Metropolitan Police in 2008 with the aim of 'identify[ing] and minimis[ing] any risk of most serious violent crime happening at the proposed event' (London Metropolitan Police Service, 2009, p. 1).³ The creation of Form 696 was set against a backdrop of heightened anxiety about postcode wars and gang violence in the early years of this millennium. This was reflected in the media outcry (Curtis, 2008; Day & Gibson, 2006; *Panorama*, 2009; Rose, 2008; Sergeant, 2009; Sherwin, 2007; Sweeney, 2008; Travis, 2008), and the renewed impetus that was given to anti-gang initiatives such as Operation Trident and the Metropolitan Police Gang Matrix, while also introducing new ones like Operation Shield.

While the launch of Form 696 was prompted by incidents of fatal shootings in UK garage concerts (BBC News, 2006), it was grime that became the real target of the form (BBC News, 2003; Muir, 2006; *The Independent*, 2008). Unsurprisingly, the introduction of Form 696 caused much consternation among grime artists, venue promoters and fans, who perceived the Form as a 'key instrument in suppressing the scene's growth in the capital' by 'disproportionately affect[ing] black artists' (Bramwell, 2015, p. 63). This

eventually led to a revision of the Form by the London Assembly's Metropolitan Police Association in 2009, followed by its removal in November 2017, after an intervention from the London Mayor Sadiq Khan (News Met Police, 2017).

The main area of contention between custodians of grime, on the one hand, and the Metropolitan Police, on the other, concerns the Form's controversial wording and subtext which 'has the potential to be perceived as discriminatory', as the Metropolitan Police Authority itself acknowledged (MPA, 2009). The original version of Form 696 that was in use from 2008 to 2009 requested details of the '[m]usic style to be played/performed', listing only '[b]ashment, R'n'B, [and] garage' as examples, and requiring promoters to specify 'the target audience' for the planned event as well as provide details of 'the make up of the patrons' (London Metropolitan Police Service, 2008, pp. 1, 3). The amended version that was used between 2009 and 2011 no longer contained a list of music styles, but specified that the Form would need to be completed if an event 'predominantly features DJs or MCs performing to a backing track' (London Metropolitan Police Service, 2009, p. 2). All subsequent versions of Form 696 (2011–2017, 2017) retained this change in the wording until the Form's final withdrawal in the autumn of 2017.

The effects that Form 696 had on grime artists, event promoters and fans have been damaging in a number of ways. The Form's discriminatory language, and rationale alone, clearly demonstrated its intent to target music events that are primarily performed and attended by young Black Britons. Questions about the 'target audience', the ethnic or racial 'make up' of attendees and the nature of the performance ('Bashment, R'n'B, garage', 'DJs or MCs performing to a backing track') remain openly discriminatory even when clumsily disguised in the subsequently reworded version of the Form. The list and description of the genres and kinds of performers mentioned or implied only applies to music genres that are predominantly 'Black', both sonically as well as demographically, thereby making the Form 696 discriminatory by design if not by default. Even when Form 696 was removed, the Met's announcement offered no apology for, nor did it denounce the wording of the Form. Instead, it only vaguely acknowledged 'concerns raised by members of the London music industry, particularly around a perception that events associated with some genres of music were disproportionately affected by this process' (News Met Police, 2017). The very phrasing of this statement, therefore, suggests that Form 696 was simply *perceived negatively* by those affected rather than being *recognised as inappropriate* by the London Metropolitan Police – showing little regard for the harm done by the Form to the artists, fans and communities that were affected by it. To make matters worse, the emphasis of the announcement was on the impact that the Form had on 'the night-time economy', rather than on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals and groups. This clearly prioritises the adverse financial impact the Form had on the night-time economy over the concern with BAME people's lack of trust and confidence in a police force 'that relies upon the goodwill of the public to perform its role effectively' (Sharp & Atherton, 2007, p. 759).

Setting aside the prejudicial attitudes that were imprinted in the wording of Form 696, a series of sanctions have also accompanied its use. Examples include: the withholding of event promoters' passports, prison sentences and hefty fines (Hancox, 2009), as well as numerous event cancellations (Bramwell, 2015, p. 127; Channel 4 News, 2017; Jonze, 2010; *The Independent*, 2008), 'bashment bans' (Ellis-Petersen,

2017) and club closures (Grierson, 2016). Worse still, grime videos posted on video-sharing and social networking websites such as YouTube and Facebook were used by the Met's Gangs Unit 'to identify and map potential "gang members"', without any evidence that the targeted grime fans were 'involved in criminal wrongdoing' yet finding themselves 'at risk of being profiled and monitored by police Gangs Units' (Amnesty, 2018, p. 46).

At first blush, the Met's response to the perceived threat that grime ostensibly posed may seem entirely unproblematic, if not desirable even, given the seriousness of the offences that were blamed on it. Yet, a number of issues militate against such an optimistic assessment, the most important of which being the fact that isolated incidents aside, there has been 'no basis to infer anything but a coincidental link' between crime and grime (Ilan, 2012, p. 46). On the contrary, the relevant literature on the topic exonerates grime but finds the police guilty of misconduct (Barron, 2013; Bramwell, 2015, pp. 63, 127, 141–144; Fatsis, 2018; Talbot, 2011). In fact the policing tactics used against both drill and grime provide excellent case studies for demonstrating the persistence of institutional racism within the Met.

Defined by Macpherson (1999, para. 34) as the 'processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people', institutional racism seems to provide the very logic with which drill and grime have been policed. Understood as a set of prejudicial attitudes that lead to discriminatory action, institutional racism becomes the prime suspect in the criminalisation of Black music genres and the victimisation of artists and their audiences by the police through cultural stereotypes that are 'premised on judgements around the nature of the music's audience' and 'its relationship to criminality' (Ilan, 2012, p. 47). In targeting the two genres as 'suspicious', the prejudicial nature of that suspicion and the discriminatory practices used to act out that suspicion lose their credibility as defensible policing tools when their institutionally racist logic, intent and application are exposed.

As this article has already demonstrated, drill and grime were both subjected to a process which turned them into punishable offences (criminalisation), and singled out their followers for unjust treatment (victimisation) in ways that follow a predictable pattern of suppression. These could be perceived as superficial similarities, isolated cases or exceptions, were they not added to an already long charge sheet of discriminatory 'policing against' Black Britons (Fryer, 1984, pp. 391–399; Institute of Race Relations [IRR], 1987) which points to institutional racism as a default setting rather than a system error of the Met. This uncomfortable reality has left an indelible mark on the relations between Black Britons and the police from the late 1950s to the present day (Palmer, 2012; Whitfield, 2014), as evidenced by a number of discriminatory policing methods. Examples include 'suspicionless' stop and search operations (Bowling & Marks, 2017), 'sus laws', Special Patrol Groups (SPGs), swamp operations (Swamp '81) and controversial anti-gang initiatives (Operation Trident, Operation Blunt 2, Operation Shield, Gangs Matrix). The policing *against* drill and grime should therefore be seen as the latest conversation in a long and ongoing 'unhappy dialogue' (Whitfield, 2014) between Black Britons and the Met, where police racism and racial injustice become the subject matter of drill and grime lyrics, as the next and last section of this article demonstrates in turn.

Dangerous people or dangerous states?

Having so far discussed the discriminatory policing *against* drill and grime as evidence of institutional racism, this section mines drill and grime lyrics for their rich 'ethnographic' qualities (Barron, 2013; Bramwell, 2017, p. 479; Kelley, 1996, pp. 190–191). Drill and grime lyrics will therefore feature here as chronicles of the violence and disorder that young Black rappers *suffer from* rather than *cause* in the spatial and social milieus they inhabit. Instead of facilely blaming both genres for glamorising violence (Fatsis, 2018, p. 6; Ilan, 2012, p. 47), it will be argued that rappers are victimised by the violence they are accused of promoting. This tendency to interpret the violence in lyrics as a desired individual *lifestyle*, instead of an ugly *fact of social life*, is seen here as an expression of 'racial neoliberalism' (Goldberg, 2009; Kapoor, 2013). Approached as an ideology and political project which (mis)places the responsibility for inadequate public provision onto private individuals rather than the state, 'racial neoliberalism' is seen here as an (ideo)logical resource and a useful political tool with which to criminalise people for the unequal social arrangements and conditions they are victimised by.

This being the socio-political context that informs the lyrical content of drill and grime, it is no surprise that experiences of disadvantage, discrimination, poverty, social exclusion and blocked opportunities are blasted out in full volume. Indeed, 'you can hear this in the music being made on Inner London's council estates, most notably in the rise of drill', as Hancox (2018b, p. 304) concurs. In *Lambeth Maps*, Y.SJ from the drill crew 67 sorrowfully observes that '[t]he roads ain't fun any more'. In *Kent Nizzy*, MizOrMac of the Harlem Spartans drill collective describes why and how life in 'Kent' [short for Kennington in South London] is not easy ('nizzy') when 'CID [= Criminal Investigation Department] tryna lock my city', while the song's chorus curses the anti-gang Operation Trident: 'Fuck Trident'. In a similar vein, drill rapper AM, in *Jump That Fence*, describes a social environment of 'broken hearts, broken phones' and 'diligent yutes [= youths] from broken homes', while MizOrMac, in *War*, recounts how 'I grew up in the Harlem slums, trapped in the trap with packs and cats, I'm trapped in the trap with drugs'. Criticising stop and search tactics, grime rapper Big Narstie, in *Pain Therapy*, sarcastically notes how: 'Feds love to stop man, I must be buff' [= attractive] cause they love to frisk me', while Krept and Konan featuring Skepta, in *F.W.T.S/Active*, resist what they perceive as arbitrary searches: 'Police stopped me, asked to search my whip [= car]. Said if you ain't got no grounds, you ain't searching shit.' In a similar manner JME, in *96 Fuckries*, recounts that 'frequently I get stopped by the gammon [= police] because my whip [= car] looks it should be owned by Jeremy Clarkson or Richard Hammond. Feds pull me like I'm a drug baron, chatting bare shit, can't understand "em".' This is a sentiment that is also expressed by Yungen and Sneakbo, in *Don't Waste My Time Remix*, who complain about how 'Feds try to pull me and say a nigga my age couldn't have a whip [= car] worth figures'. Adding to such unpleasant encounters with the police, Mostack and Mist, in *On My Ones*, comment on the use of police violence against black people: 'Fuck and now my heart keeps skipping, 'cause there's black lives missing 'cause the feds keep killing', as do Wretch 32 and Avelino, in *Fire in the Booth*, who claim: 'That's messed up, like them cops on the dayshift, who just can't stop and search without tazing'. Tinie Tempah featuring G Frsh and Wretch 32, in *All You*, also dramatise such hostilities,

as follows: 'Told the fed I can't breathe, and the copper pulled the baton, the shit we go through, man, you wouldn't even fathom'. On the controversies around Form 696 and the criminalisation of grime, Stormzy and Chip, in *Hear Dis*, vow to 'expose these racist clubs and feds, who can't mute me anymore', resisting efforts that 'Tryna' keep us hidden, tryna' keep us underground, (Yeah, underground), Only coverage we gets when London's burning down' (Lethal Bizzle featuring Stormzy, *Dude*). Or, as New Gen featuring 67 put it in *Jackets*: 'Obviously man can't do shows init, Feds wanna lock off man's shows so man's trapped in the hood'.

This snapshot of drill and grime lyrics upsets conventional depictions of rappers and their audiences as gangs of marauding Black youths. Instead, it offers an eloquent, albeit angry, testimony of stigmatisation, marginalisation and criminalisation by a police force which draws on bias, prejudice and stereotypes to suppress music genres that expose the violent effects of deprivation, while also pointing to the over-policing of young Black youths as *dangerous* instead of protecting them as *vulnerable*. This new insight into an old fact is consistent with law and order policies that 'crack down on potentially dangerous people rather than on demonstrably dangerous places' (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 60), but also indicates a process of state withdrawal from investing in social welfare; opting instead for policing the effects of social injustice by incriminating (responsibilising) those who suffer from it.

Such a process of 'punishing people rather than improving places' and perceiving 'disorder' as the result of 'the racial composition of a neighborhood' (Klinenberg, 2018, pp. 59, 61) does not only demonstrate an ideological reluctance to invest in social welfare policies. It also highlights an unwillingness to admit that such punishment is what the state does, through its 'coercion-wielding organizations' (Tilly, 1992, p. 70), to police the casualties of an unjust social and racial order. To make matters worse, such injustice is denied, even when its effects are reproduced in an era of 'racial neoliberalism' (Goldberg, 2009; Kapoor, 2013). Described as a moment in which the 'institutionalization of racism continues unbounded' through the regulation of 'racially perceived and defined threats' (Kapoor, 2013, p. 1028), racial neoliberalism thrives in a political atmosphere where 'race' and racism are 'evaporated and in denial' although the conditions that bring them about 'remain very much alive' (Goldberg, 2009, p. viii). The policing of drill and grime provides an ideal empirical referent for such theoretical explanations. Showing, as such policing methods do, the extent to which young Black Britons are still subjected to the criminalisation of their forms of creative expression and the 'juridification', 'regulation' and 'colonisation' of their 'lifeworld' (Talbot, 2011, pp. 89–90), the clampdown on drill and grime serves as an embodiment of racial neoliberalism. Understood as both logic and practice, racial neoliberalism helps us understand that it is possible to discriminate against Black people by policing their music, while also denying the discriminatory nature of such tactics. All that is required is the enforcement of 'racial structures through policing and militarization' by 'legitimizing such actions' under the pretext of perceived threats to public safety (Kapoor, 2013, p. 1029). 'Crime' is therefore quickly linked to 'race' in a scenario which blames Black music for the state's failure to keep its citizens safe.

Focusing on the criminalisation of the two most recent Black British music genres, drill and grime, this article has demonstrated the persistence of institutional racism within the Met through policing tactics that reveal stereotypical associations between race and

crime or ‘blackness’ and ‘criminality’. Having shown how Black cultural life is patrolled by hunting down artists who speak their minds or sound their rhymes as courageous truth-tellers about their life in a socially and racially unequal Britain, the article also challenges myths about the advent of post-racial times. By dismissing post-raciality as a fiction, it is instead described as an ideological state ploy, which defines young Black Britons out of citizenship by delineating their activities as dangerous, threatening and criminal. Three decades after its original publication, the ominous image of ‘the ‘black party’ that Paul Gilroy (1987, p. 130) offered as an ‘entrenched sign of disorder and criminality of a hedonistic and vicious black culture which was not recognisably British’ still rings alarmingly true today. From the ‘pimp of the 1950s to the Black power activist of the 1960s to the mugger of the 1970s to rioter of the 1980s ... to the underworld Yardie of the 1990s’ (Keith, 1993, p. 201) and the criminal garage, grime and drill MC of the noughties, the policing of blackness continues unabated. The policing of drill, therefore, serves as a useful reminder of how the state conspires to target, monitor, contain, control and cast out those who it deems undesirable or undeserving of its protection.

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Notes

1. The actual origins of the term can be traced much earlier in a co-authored book by the Black Power intellectual and activist Stokely Carmichael (aka. Kwame Ture) and the civil rights leader and academic Charles Hamilton (Ture & Hamilton, 1967).
2. Other pirate stations include: Deja Vu, Raw UK, Flex, Mode, Radar and Heat FM.
3. Hancox (2009, 2013) traces the origins of Form 696 in 2005, claiming that the original 2005 version of the Form contained the following question: ‘Is there a particular ethnic group attending? If “yes”, please state group.’ According to the information I have received, however, following a Freedom of Information (FOI) request for all versions of Form 696 this question does not appear on any of the forms that I have had access to.

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Discography

- 67, *Lambeth Maps*
- Big Narstie, *Pain Therapy*
- Dizzee Rascal, *Showtime*
- G Smarko (Kuku) x MizOrMac, *War*
- Harlem Spartans (Blanco x MizOrMac x Bis), *Kent Nizzy*
- JME, *96 Fuckries*
- Krept and Konan feat. Skepta, *F.W.T.S/Active*
- Lethal Bizzle feat. Stormzy, *Dude*
- Mostack and Mist, *On My Ones*
- New Gen feat. 67, *Jackets*
- Skengdo x AM, *Jump That Fence*
- Stormzy and Chip, *Hear Dis*
- Tinie Tempah feat. G Frsh and Wretch 32, *All You*
- Wretch 32 and Avelino, *Fire in the Booth*
- Yungen and Sneakbo, *Don't Waste My Time Remix*