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Breaking down European Attitudes towards Migrant/Minority Stereotypes


Work stream 1

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT FINDINGS

This research project takes UK rap videos from the last twenty years as a ‘case study’ for the examination of stereotyping in popular culture of UK ethnic minority and migrant groups. It seeks answers to the following questions:

To what extent are the representations in these videos reinforcing or challenging stereotypes of ethnic minority and migrant groups?

What are the implications for the citizenship of ethnic minorities and migrant groups of these images? How might they assist in or be a barrier to employment, for example?

There are seven key contexts to our findings:

1. The highly diverse ethnic composition of contemporary Britain.

2. The renunciation of multiculturalism as policy and its substitution by notions of social, cultural and community cohesion.

3. The abjection of ethnic minority and migrant communities within mainstream politics and the media in a situation of economic crisis (austerity) and uncertainty about what British identity is.

4. The empirical facts on the ground in UK cities of successive iterations going back to the post-war period of youth intercultural practices and identities as an aspect of ordinary/unremarked multi-culture.

5. The rise of user-generated video content and the possibilities this creates for a) ethnic minority producers and artists to create media works in which they have far greater choice and control over the treatment, meaning and circulation of stereotyped images; and b) the use of these videos as a means for ethnic minorities to develop and hone skills in media communication, production, promotion and entrepreneurship.

6. The saliency of performing identity, ‘debating’ authenticity, and cultural boundary marking within hip hop culture.
7. The globalization of hip hop culture, including the adoption of ‘blackness’ as an expressive idiom by a diverse range of ethnic identities.

Having initially identified something in the region of sixty videos featuring artists from as broad a range of UK based ethnic minority and migrant communities as possible we arrived at a final sample of fifteen videos. These videos were analysed for their ‘discursive construction’ of stereotypes. That is, we explored how the videos produced their effects through visual, sonic and linguistic features and through this their treatment of stereotyped figures and behaviour.

In addition to the analysis of the videos we carried out in-depth ‘qualitative’ interviews with subjects chosen for their expertise, knowledge and practitioner experience of UK hip hop culture. Emerging from the analysis of the interview data are three overarching themes relating to the role of stereotyping in our sample of UK rap videos:

1. **Identity**: in relation to racialised and classed constructions of ‘street’ culture, new vernaculars and ideas of authenticity.

2. **Representation and stereotyping**: in terms of arguments for and against rap as ‘street’ reportage, the critical role of representational diversity, and visible ethnicity.

3. **Production**: as this relates to possibilities for democratised communications and the trans-national distribution of creative output by diasporic hip hop artists.

Overall, we conclude that it would be mistaken to view the videos in our analysis as simply producing or reproducing ethnic, racial, cultural, class or gender stereotypes. Whilst a few of the videos arguably offer crude and possibly de-humanising representations they are all, in our view, at some level engaged in the act of resisting stereotyping. The form such resistance takes is quite variable, sometimes subtle, and can be complex. However, we believe that in the process of analysing the videos we have been able to identify some common and shared patterns to this. Some of the videos are putting up a resistance to stereotyping that involves self-stereotyping as a form of defiance. Others are attempting to substitute positive for negative stereotypes. Others still are seeking to contest stereotyping through the playful use of stereotypes. In our view, only the last of these three strategies constitutes a genuine critique of stereotyping.
We conclude that what is needed is not the suppression of that British popular culture in which ethnic minority and migrant groups feature in stereotyped form but a critical awareness of its conditions of production and the political power that undergirds it. Linked to this we call for a greater range of representations within British media and culture so that UK ethnic minorities and migrants are made visible in all their complexity and diversity. Finally, we recommend that there be a renewed attention to the importance of critical cultural and media studies in the analysis of racial and cultural stereotyping. In order for this to be of relevance to grassroots educational activity scholars working within sociology and cultural studies would need to get together with educational and community work practitioners. This kind of dialogue would assist in making more widely available the knowledge and skills required for the application of critical discourse analysis to popular culture.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION ON THE CONTEXT AND APPLIED METHODS

Intolerant, dismissive or actively oppressive attitudes amongst the citizenry of a country towards ethnic minority and migrant groups are generated through a set of dynamic, complex processes. State immigration and integration policies, the pronouncements of politicians and influential commentators, and a range of representations in the print and audio/visual media, play off against and catalyse one another (see Hickman et al, 2012; Tyler, 2013). In the realm of popular culture it is the production and re-production of stereotyped images that is of pivotal importance in this process. For ours is a hyper-visual culture of ‘surfaces and depthlessness’ where ‘the well-concocted image says it all’ (Rojek, 2007: 108). However, there is some scope for resistance to this powerful image regime with its innumerable means of producing and circulating de-humanising stereotypes. As Chris Rojek asserts ‘we can decode the images and, by doing so, break the sorcery that aesthetic force exerts over culture as a whole’ (ibid).

Hoping to learn something about the social construction and consequences of difference, we have chosen a sample of UK rap videos from the last twenty years as our case study for the examination of stereotyping in popular culture of UK ethnic minority and migrant groups. We have opted for this form for the following reasons. First, in its own way, the rap video, like the television soap opera, tabloid newspaper report and print and media advert
is a medium with a popular reputation for being stereotyped (see Khosravinik, 2008; Rose, 2008). They are all (admittedly there are exceptions) associated with a lack of complexity and subtlety in their representations of minority and dissident identities of all sorts, be they ethnic, racial, cultural, sexual or political (see Hall, 2003). They are seen as constructing at once proverbial and exaggerated minority images that play up difference and deviance from the cultural norm. The apparent simplicity of their message/narrative provides affirmation of a (mythical) median identity - at least by implication if not design (see Rojek, 2007). Any departure from this representational regime usually takes the form of a dramatic reversal – again demonstrating the powerful pull of normalcy. Second, hip hop culture itself has a fundamentally equivocal relationship to stereotyping linked to the idiom it has fashioned and made global out of Black Atlantic vernacular cultures (Gilroy, 2002). A crucial aspect of this idiom and its iconic association with blackness is precisely the boundary work hip hoppers ceaselessly engage in to have their identities validated in the culture (Harkness, 2012). Third, and finally, UK hip hop has played a significant part in the emergence over recent decades of an urban-based youth ‘intercultural sensibility’ (Gidley, 2007: 146). This Creolized culture has supplied Britain’s diverse ethnic minority and migrant youth, established and recent, with repertoire, tools and semi-autonomous spaces for their own expressive needs. The rap videos in this study, the majority of them ‘user-generated’ and disseminated virally online, are one of the signature mediums of this Creolized culture in its current iteration. Finally, the ethnic and cultural diversity of these videos, not to mention their creative range, evidence something arguably far more complex and enduring than the simple appropriation or stereotyped reproduction of African American vernacular cultures (see Drissel, 2011). How they articulate and re-articulate hip hop idioms in terms of stereotyping around race, ethnicity, class, age and gender is at the centre of our analysis.

**From multiculturalism to social cohesion**

The UK has had a long tradition stretching back to the post-war era of working towards the integration of its immigrant communities following an approach based on the importance of minority groups and the recognition of multiculturalism as a social and political feature of British society (Hickman et al, 2012). However, multiculturalism as semi-official UK policy – as opposed to the dynamic and evolving facts of everyday multi-cultures – has been loudly
renounced by all parts of the British political establishment for well over a decade (see Gilroy, 2012). A situation of rhetorical support for ‘cultural diversity’ and equality of opportunity now sits uneasily alongside a loudly proclaimed commitment to social and cultural cohesion (Gidley and Jayaweera, 2010). Indeed, in 2011, British prime-minister David Cameron notoriously argued that a ‘muscular liberalism’ was now required to mend the fraying social fabric arising from a myopic embrace of multiculturalism during the 1960s (Gilroy, 2012). According to proponents of this latter view, multiculturalism, in tandem with disruptive globalisation, has produced ethno-cultural balkanisation in UK cities (Goodhart, 2013). Communalist, ethnic and religious loyalties and identities are said now to trump those of British nationality and citizenship. Britain is seen, particularly in the wake of 9/11 and 7/7, as a place where alienation is widespread. And this rending of the social fabric undermines, moreover, the kind of social solidarities required for a collective welfare system of mutual rights and obligations (Goodhart, 2013). Closely linked to this are anxieties about being overrun by those perennial bogeys of the tabloid press: opportunistic and parasitical illegal asylum seekers and refugees (see Tyler, 2013).

However, the current situation in the UK in terms of cultural stereotyping and its relationship to policy is far from tidy. It is true that immigration and integration policies in the UK have become far more illiberal in recent years (Spenser, 2003). As far back as 1971 the UK acted to restrict immigration, making it possible only through family reunion, marriage or studies. The Nationality Act of 1981, however, which removed the automatic right of citizenship to anyone born in the UK, marked a true watershed in this shift (Tyler, 2013). But the recent financial crisis and resulting austerity has obviously been a gift for those only too happy to stoke fears about unearned social entitlements, alien cultural values and enemies within. Fomented by a hysterical right-wing tabloid media and the increasingly influential UKIP— not to mention the BNP and EDL –mainstream political parties have felt compelled to reflect the purportedly embattled attitudes to migration of ‘ordinary British people’. The context to this cannot be overstated: stagnant incomes, price inflation, and competition for scarce, poorly paid, part-time service work, along with a lack of affordable housing and increasingly rationed, conditional welfare benefits. Add to the mix the long incubating, atomising effects of post-industrialisation and the neoliberal ideology of
individualism (Harvey, 2007) and you have the required sense of social fracture for divide and rule. Hall (2003) reminds us that the symbolic power of the dominant hegemonic faction undergirds all forms of exploitation and disenfranchisement (see Tyler, 2013). Negative representations of ethnic minorities and migrants, then, provide not only a ready scapegoat for resentments and despair lacking any progressive political outlet but include the power of ‘ritualized expulsion’ (Hall, 2003: 259).

Yet, what Paul Gilroy (2006) refers to as ordinary/unremarked multi-culture, particularly at the level of youth and popular cultures, has also been for the last few decades an established and resilient aspect of urban British life (see also Hickman et al, 2012). Today, for example, London’s population (8,174,100 in 2011) is one of the most ethnically diverse on earth. As of 2007, there are over 300 languages spoken in it and more than 50 non-indigenous communities with a population of more than 10,000. According to the 2011 Census, 44.9% of London’s residents are White British. London is the only place in the United Kingdom in which White Britons comprise less than half of the total population. 37% of the population were born outside the UK. Moreover, the censuses can underestimate ethnic groups with illegal immigrants not being accounted for and ethnic groups being less likely to take part. Notwithstanding simmering tensions and occasional eruptions of violent conflict (see Bassel, 2012), UK cities frequently present a convivial muddle of a great many different cultural-ethnic identities (Back, 1999). On the ground, in contradiction of tabloid fear-mongering, and with considerable social challenges, diverse ethnic identities and communities co-exist in close proximity, variously interacting, ignoring each other and coalescing in ways that evidence something far more complex and profound than the couplet tolerance/intolerance. Stuart Hall famously termed this Britain’s ‘multicultural drift’.

This scenario at once reflects the high degree of social and cultural diversity in British cities and, crucially, the diversified and democratised range of media platforms now available in the age of digital and social media where the internet and smart technology become the means of more targeted and extensive cultural consumption and sharing (see Siapera, 2010). Where music is concerned, for example, the internet has replaced television as, in Rojek’s (2011) words, ‘the celestial jukebox’ (195). Reciprocally, young people and minority identities are now able to be makers and exchangers of affordable ‘user-generated content’
outside of modern hierarchical structures and institutions of communication. Through blogs, wiki, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, the internet and smart technology has arguably provided the tools and peer-to-peer virtual spaces for cultural ‘voice’, recognition and counter-representations (see Murthy, 2013: 30-33). It has also enabled small-time entrepreneurship, skills development, networking and showcasing talent. Two Youtube channels started by young British entrepreneurs of colour, SBTV and Link Up TV, currently dominate in the broadcasting and web-based media promotion of UK rap. What is apparent from our study is that intercultural production in the age of ‘user-generated content’ offers pedagogic and some economic opportunities outside the mainstream to British ethnic diaspora populations.

**Description of the chosen samples and methodology**

Having initially identified something in the region of sixty videos through the online platform Youtube featuring artists from as broad a range of UK based ethnic minority and migrant communities as possible we arrived at a final sample of fifteen videos. We have conducted a thematic and discourse analysis of the videos and have carried out four qualitative individual interviews with producers and artists currently working in UK hip hop. Together this constitutes the principal data for this project.

The ethnicity of the selected artists are: Indian; Pakistani; African-Caribbean; Sri-Lankan; White Polish; Bangladeshi; Turkish; Palestinian; White Russian; White English; Somali; African; Iranian; Saudi-Arabian. Their gender distribution is 11-12 males and 3-4 females.

The sample of fifteen videos was chosen on the following criteria:

- A combination of ‘maximum variety’, ‘theoretical’ and ‘convenience’ sampling that:
- Covers the period 1993 to 2013.
- Reflects diversity in the range of communities participating in hip hop culture as producers and consumers.
- Gives some gender balance.
- Reflects as far as possible the diversity of themes, types of production and stylistic variants to be found in UK rap videos.

For the interviews we selected four representative practitioners from the world of UK hip hop who have been active within the culture over the time-line of the data sample. We will say more about these individuals and how we approached the interviewing and analysis of the data in the introduction to the interview findings.

**Theoretical framework of the data analysis**

We will now outline the theoretical framework we have adopted in our analysis of the video data. We start from an understanding that representations of things be they in linguistic, visual or sonic/musical/rhythmic form do not merely reflect, record, present and/or mimic some pre-existing content or reality but are *productive* in their own right (Hall, 2003). This is, of course, pivotal to how we treat stereotyped images and processes of stereotyping. Sterotyped representations of things and people (deliberately or not) reduce complex beings to simple ones. Whether this process results in images that are stigmatized or idealised, each is a distortion. As Hall (2003) puts it ‘stereotyping reduces people to a few simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature’ (257). In a highly circular process, people work with some pre-existing content to produce stereotyped representations which are, in turn, potentially generative of attitudes and practices that through their circulation contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes. In this sense stereotypes and their discourses ‘subjectify’, that is, bring social subjects into being (Tyler,
2013: 214; see also Bhaba, 1994). Hence, when we speak of ‘discourses’ in this study we refer to groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking’ (Rose, 2012: 190). Hip hop videos combine the visual, linguistic, stylistic and sonic/musical. Thus as practices formative of ‘discourse’ they comprise many intersecting components, all of which can be analysed and interpreted (see Hall, 2003; Rose, 2012).

**Hip hop culture, global adaptation and cultural articulation**

In dealing with rap videos we are working with public performances of identity that operate in a shared cultural idiom or register (see Hall, 2003). This idiom is part musical, lyrical, stylistic and gestural. In order to qualify as ‘hip hop’ the ethnically and culturally diverse artists featured in our sample of rap videos are required in some way to project this idiom and its generic conventions in their work. Although as we shall show this takes in a variety of modulations, all are in some fundamental way engaged in the act of doing boundary work around cultural identity (see Lawler, 2007; St Louis, 2009). Their legitimacy as hip hop artists requires it. A very easy mistake to make when approaching rap videos is to take the graphic presence of particular postures, gestures, styles, settings and vernaculars as conclusive evidence of stereotyped cultural expression. The minimal co-presence of black derived vernacular (e.g. Jafaican speech\(^1\)) and associations with urban spaces and popular cultures are enough to create the impression that hip hop identities are irretrievably stereotyped. If we follow this logic, then our starting point is that hip hop culture in toto deserves our condemnation for the production and reproduction of, particularly, race, class and gender stereotypes.

Hip hop’s globalisation has spawned a multiplicity of ‘trans-local’ hip hop scenes in which hyphenated cultural identities get created and curated (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006; Bennett, 2004; Mitchell, 2001). Locally, blackness has played an extremely significant role in the inter-culture that is UK hip hop. The videos in our sample are ample confirmation of this reality. But this has Atlantic roots and routes - US and Caribbean – that pre-date the arrival

\(^1\) ‘Jafaican’ is a term used for Multicultural London English, a hybrid of Jamaican patois, London Cockney and any number of local ethnic vernacular inflections, particularly South Asian (see Harris, 2006). We will use this term throughout to refer to a youth vernacular common now in all British Cities that have established African-Caribbean and Asian communities.
of hip hop to these shores by many decades (see Gilroy, 2002). Several British cities contain longstanding African-Caribbean communities, and black culture at a musical, sartorial and organisational level has been creatively reconfigured within successive waves of multi-racial British youth subcultures from the post-war period up to the present day (see Gidley, 2007; Hebdige, 2005; Jones, 1988). London, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Cardiff, and Birmingham have all been sites for the collective redrawing of ‘new cultural maps’ by black, brown and white youth (Back, 1999; Gilroy, 2006; Jones, 1988). Each has correspondingly been a cradle for the emergence over the last thirty years of regional multicultural hip hop scenes and sonic hybrids fusing Black American RnB, soul, rap and Jazz with Caribbean reggae and dancehall and, in recent decades, South Asian styles (see Drissel, 2011; Harris, 2006; Hutnyk, 2000). UK Garage, ‘Jungle’ and Grime are each the mongrel offspring of this marriage of musical genres and vernaculars (see Gidley, 2007; Reynolds, 2009). For many UK urban youth identity is now ‘versioned’ (Gidley, 2007), its Jafaican vernacular heteroglot. To simply dismiss (or condemn) these creolized identities therefore as incorrigibly or stereotypically ‘black’ is to fail to re-focus one’s view of cultural identity in light of globalization.

In order to make fuller sense of this we make use of cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s concept of articulation. In this approach, cultural practices, formations and groups are not simply reducible to the socio-economic conditions within which they are produced. Cultures are a ‘unity’ formed of articulated diverse practices which can be re-articulated (Hall, 2003). They are at once linked to social structure and autonomous from it (see Slack, 2005: 115). Lena (2008) states that ‘Popular culture is thus a critical site for struggles between dominant and subordinate groups. Subordinate groups resist not through the rejection of dominant ideology but through its adaptation’ (264) or re-articulation. Hip hop culture has evolved particular idioms, identities and a politics precisely through the complex adaptation and re-articulation of racist and gendered categories rather than through their straightforward acceptance or rejection. Hence, the hip hop videos in our study are not simply ideological. They do not just ‘represent the world’ in such a way as to ‘exhibit the characteristic structures of domination’ (Rose, 2012: 106).
ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEOS

INTRODUCTION

As Hall (2003) reminds us ‘we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them’ (3). UK hip hop interculture offers a mutually meaningful discursive ground to the ethnic minority rap artists/groups in this study. Despite different experiences of migration, stability, place, racial and class domination, they are able to ‘interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world in ways which will be understood by each other’ (Hall, 2003: 2). Even if a few of the videos in the sample arguably offer crude and possibly de-humanising representations they are all, in our view, at some level engaged in the act of resisting stereotyping. The form such resistance takes – indeed the extent of its realisation - is quite variable, sometimes subtle, and can be complex. However, we believe that in the process of analysing the videos we have been able to distinguish some discursive patterns to this. Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (2003), we have arrived at three analytic categories or sets, each of which reflects a distinctive orientation toward stereotyping:


The third is: ‘contesting the stereotype’. In these videos, stereotyped representations are arguably turned against themselves and played with so that the result is neither caricature in reverse nor outright dis-identification but a less conclusive, more open account of identity. This approach, we would argue, is the only one of the three that opens up a creative prospect beyond either negative or positive stereotypes. The videos in this category are: Roots Manuva (2001) ‘Witness (1 Hope)’; Riz MC (2006) ‘Post 9/11 Blues’; M.I.A. (2007) ‘Paper Planes’; Oxxxymiron (2011) ‘Russky Cockney’; Shadia Mansour (2010) ‘RohaBala Raj3a’.

In what follows, all the aforesaid orientations towards stereotyping are on display and are discussed but in a way that hopefully avoids an overly reductive or schematic treatment. Whilst suggesting where stereotypes are reversed, substituted or contested in these videos, we also wanted to be able to retain something of their artistic distinctiveness as well as those thematic resonances or points of commonality between videos that deal with stereotypes quite differently. Hence, sections one and two follow a chronological/thematic structure and section three sees all the foreign language – ‘native tongue’ – videos discussed together. Also uniting the three sections is the double meaning of the word ‘flow’: as both influx/movement and rapping.

UK rap, urban multi-culture and migratory flow

Looking through the sample chronologically, we get confirmation of how migratory flows and concentrations over the last twenty years have contributed to the increasingly hyper-diverse character of global cities such as London. Further, we can discern in these videos evidence of not only the increasingly uncertain provenance of urban youth identities but their composite, often fissile, and within certain parameters, elective nature (see Gidley, 2007). In this hybridized social space, ‘disparate cultures’, in anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt’s words, ‘meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical conditions of domination and subordination’ (in Mercer, 2010: 41).

So, for example, London Posse’s video from 1993, ‘How’s Life in London’, provides very much an insider’s account, addressed to the global hip hop fraternity, of an urban life world typically pathologised in official reporting (see Tyler, 2013). The opening shot of the video is
a close-up image of London’s Big Ben in wintry daylight. Over this image we hear a female radio presenter’s voice declaring: ‘BBC World Service presents...’. Cut to a formally dressed white male ‘reporter’ who completes the bulletin with: ‘this is London’. The camera then pans immediately to a group of eight glowering young black males standing in the foreground wearing the characteristic hip hop oversize garb of the time. Big Ben and ‘bad-ass black men with attitude’ (Hall, 2003: 271) form a single composition. We hear a brief stentorian film-score phrase and the trans-coding of Big Ben’s imperial/metropolitan ‘phallic formant’ (Sennett, 1996) is complete. The rest of the video has the rappers, Rodney P and Bionic, and their crew play up the black ‘folk-devil’ stereotype for the camera as they rove menacingly around a series of urban spaces: street, food store, clothing store, council estate. Code-switching between Jamaican patois, London cockney and a hybrid of the two (Jafaican), they deliver a graphic news bulletin ‘direct from the streets’ on the profane and hedonistic complexion of everyday life in London for some working-class Black British youth. The chorus urges on us that all this resides within a network of trans-national connections: ‘when we go to Tokyo they go how’s life in London?’

Another video from 1993, Fun-Da-Mental’s ‘Country Man’, by contrast, essays the post-colonial theme of diaspora alienation from a racist, violent and materialist metropolitan core (Bradford). The video, which stylistically situates Fun-Da-Mental’s hip hop as global world music, produces plentiful fusions (see Drissel, 2011): continents, film stock, musical flavours, rap styles, sartorial styles. It depicts two young men simultaneously making opposite journeys. A Westernised black man leaves a drab and racist England to find rustic peace in a sensuous and colour drenched Pakistan. Reciprocally, an Asian man travels from Pakistan in traditional garbs to a grey English ghetto where he immediately confronts the same white racists the young black man has managed to escape.

‘Witness (1 Hope)’ from 2001, by African Caribbean London rapper, Roots Manuva, is, we would argue, sui generis. It offers a lyrically encrypted existential voyage through alcohol and cannabis fuelled inertia, trans-nationality and identity crises. Again, like London Posse, the epigrammatic lyrics embody their ‘glocal’ character by code-switching. From Caribbean patois and cultural references: ‘Let go me ting Duppy, let go me hand’; ‘Jerk chicken, jerk

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2 ‘Code-switching’: shifting between different kinds of speech.
fish’; to British vernacular and cultural references: ‘drown ten pints of bitter’; ‘contented with this cheese on toast’. The rap makes extensive creative use of slang, word play, punning, archaisms and neologism. Its thickly allusive weave also arises from its syncretic character, with Roots ‘sampling’ tropes both from charismatic Christian practice (glossolalia) and Caribbean folklore: ‘Until he gained the skill of tongues’; ‘Esoteric quotes most frightening/Duppy took hold of my hand while I was writing’.

The visual narrative, depicts Roots’ intense physical preparation through exercise and diet for a sports-day at his old primary school (‘witness the fitness’) where he will compete with children aged ten or eleven, cheat, and literally run off with the top prize in order to vanquish the painful memory of having lost in all three events in 1982: the egg and spoon race, the three legged race and the assault course. But the whole self-deflationary tone is complicated by Roots’ irreverence and moral equivocation towards his ex-primary school. For instance, on first meeting the class of school children he inserts ‘Manuva’ on the blackboard below the bowdlerised rendering of his moniker by the teacher as ‘Manoeuvre’.

In the video’s final image, moreover, one which, like the opening shot of London Posse’s ‘How’s Life in London’ explicitly associates black men and phallic power, we see Roots sat in his red sports car wearing shades, the school trophy he has just won perched over his member. The rap and the sports day at an end and he is now – with an ironic piquancy suggesting bitterness - waxing in clichés on his ‘emotion’, what ‘words cannot describe’, and how ‘the school gave me so much’.

By 2006 the UK has mostly cast off the institutionalised multiculturalism (see Jones, 1988) still prevalent in the early 1990s. It is thus in a context of assimilationist imperatives that Riz MC, like Fun-Da-Mental of Pakistani origin, creates a rap video, ‘Post 9/11 Blues’. This video speaks directly to the panic whipped up by the media and parliament over home grown Islamic terrorists after ‘9/11’ and ‘7/7’ and the routine state harassment and scapegoating of certain ethnic minorities that has ensued. His approach, however, is one of broad humour, contrasting sharply with the earnest solemnity of ‘Countryman’. Moreover, it is the everyday Islamophobia Riz MC now encounters – and the communalist tensions this

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3 ‘Duppy’: of North-West African origin trans-located to the Caribbean, meaning ghost or spirit. ‘Jerk chicken’: a characteristic Jamaican cuisine chicken preparation.
reflects - and not his own radical alienation from mainstream British life that is the subject of his rap. The video, which makes great visual use of the stock of contemporary folk-devils, essentially offers a comic inventory of the ludicrous snares and traps now set for any person of Asian or Islamic appearance, irrespective of religious and political outlook, as they attempt to go about their daily lives in the capital city.

In the video for M.I.A.’s ‘Paper Planes’ from 2007 we see a British woman of Sri-Lankan origin portrayed as a migrant working at the social and economic margins to make money, but not in a British city: in New York. In characteristic fashion, M.I.A. is puckishly cool and flirtatious as she sells ethnic food from a van and punts clothing from a street stall. Inverting a standard ‘realist’ account of migrant victimhood, we see her aesthetic swagger and calculated sensuality enabling her to navigate a socially precarious situation with much savoir-faire. However, there is a question mark over the nature of the cultural trans-location and the diaspora identity being retailed: who is this woman and where she is from? Do we see a female British migrant of colour attempting to survive in New York, or a Sri-Lankan national? Or in this imaginative visual/sonic space is M.I.A.’s a cosmopolitan identity un-bound by origins? In her knowingly arch performance of a strongly gendered visible ethnicity is she in fact confirming that for the well-travelled cultural ‘omnivore’ (see Skeggs, 2005) identity is pliable, a tidy expedient for getting on and getting by?

Bangladeshi rapper Flex Ali’s ‘Givin me Stare’ from 2010 evinces a quite different approach to British Asian youth identity much closer in style, sensibility and delivery to ‘How’s Life in London’ and Professor Green’s ‘Jungle’ (see below). Here, the stakes around identity appear on the face of it to have very little to do with race relations, diasporic trans-location or the predicament of minority religious communities (see Drissel, 2011). They appear instead to revolve around generic working-class youth cultural concerns related to consumption, image and reputation on the street. The Bangladeshi youth in this video streak through London’s East End at night in souped up flash cars projecting a sartorial élan and flaunting their emceeing ability in a rapid-fire, ceaseless flow of dire threats and warnings to artistic rivals. There is indeed, a politics of identity to this. In her video for

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5 ‘Emceeing’: rapping.
6 ‘Flow’: verbal delivery of rap lyrics.
‘Paper Planes’ we see M.I.A. abjure the subject position of female migrant victim through displays of feminine braggadocio. Respectively, Flex Ali et al in adopting the prideful, insubordinate postures of a (negatively) stereotyped hip hop identity dissociate themselves with the traditional cultural stereotype of South Asians as passive and meek (see Alexander, 2005).

Another, highly controversial, ‘insider’s account’ of London subcultural life, one that begins with a cruelly ironic ‘welcome to Hackney’, is Professor Green’s ‘Jungle’ from 2011. This video, for successful white UK rapper, Green, offers up a far less arch style of reportage than that of London Posse’s ‘How’s Life in London’. It manages, however, to give graphic form to every raced and classed tabloid horror story and youth folk devil imaginable. We see feral black youth posture, scowl and gesticulate directly into the camera with beer and spliff in hand. Amid the mandatory night time urban and council estate backdrop garbed in the mandatory hip hop style of baseball cap, big trainers, hoodies, chunky gold chains and low hanging jeans, we see young males fashioning the mandatory digit symbols of cocked handguns and sliced throats, growling bull terriers straining at short, chained leashes. As with London Posse’s video we are left in no doubt that this is the world of the homosocial ‘endz’, a place where women alternate between sexualised ornaments or objects of male sexualised violence. We receive a rhythmic, sonic and visual bludgeoning of jagged beats, disorderly urban spaces and acts of violence. The look and feel of the video – night-time streets, low-angle shot positioning and jumpy editing - and the sonic qualities of the music and rap - high-tempo and hard-edged - is homologous. The major scandal of this video, however, is that Professor Green and his singing side-kick, Maverik Sabre are both white. We thus see two white men standing at the head of a baying mob of tattooed, hooded, armed and dangerous black youth. The white men, moreover, are offering a rapped and sung commentary on behalf of the black men in their midst that employs the extended metaphor of a ‘Jungle’ – replete with personified apes, cheetahs and hyenas. The very crude racialization here – unintended or not – has been the subject of great controversy in UK rap circles and is taken up in the interviews further on in this report.

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7 ‘Spliff’: cannabis cigarette.
8 ‘Endz’: neighbourhood/territory.
Pushing against the flow: songs of dis-identification


Somalian Rapper Young B, for instance, belongs to a migrant group who occupy a similarly lowly socio-economic position to that of the British Bangladeshis in Flex Ali’s video. However, whereas the ‘Asian gang’ is something of a recent phenomenon in the UK urban imaginary (Alexander, 2005) Somalian youth have long served as a folk devil, associated with violence, criminality and gang membership ever since their arrival to these shores some twenty five years ago (see Wood, 2010). In his 2011 video for the song ‘Champion’, it is significant therefore that Young B produces lyrical and visual content almost at the opposite end of the ethical spectrum to that of Flex Ali. Young B’s rap is a toned down, sober display of penitence for past youthful excesses and mistakes, in which he pledges from now on to use his creative ability and social influence to serve his community. Invoking the authority of his Muslim religion (as Awate also does), the video has him issue his rapped sermon on personal responsibility in the daylight company of a group of placidly smiling, visibly supportive Somalian friends. Set amid a diurnal, blandly exurban environment of car-parks and municipal buildings the video does its upmost to represent this group of youths minus the threatening postures and gestures typically associated with the youth gang. If Flex Ali’s creative work as London grime recalls in lo-fi⁹ form the style and texture of such British predecessors as So-Solid Crew and Lethal Bizzle (see Reynolds, 2007), Young B’s more restrained approach – also very lo-fi - is deliberately mining a more ‘positive’ and ethically up-lifting seam.

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⁹ ‘Lo-fi’: basic/inexpensive.
Iranian female rapper Shay D’s concerns centre largely on themes related to contemporary female sexuality and identity and make no direct or implied reference to her ethnicity. Her rap essentially takes the form of a morality tale in which she arraigns certain young women of her generation (the eponymous ‘Other Side Chicks’) for succumbing to stereotypes of hyper-sexual femininity and living as rapacious, drug-using, welfare grabbing sluts. This is a symbolic display of hip hop ‘real talk’ in which Shay’s strength, integrity and articulacy are put forcefully on trial: ‘harsh words fam but its reality’ as she puts it. The video propounds this single theme by setting up a series of stark rhetorical oppositions at the level of narrative and image. In it she reads out a charge-sheet of the loose behaviour, vanity, falseness and humiliations of ‘weak’ female ‘typicals’ or ‘skets’\(^{10}\), graphically describing their inevitable downfall and proverbial comeuppance. This she explicitly contrasts to the authentic womanhood and pride that she and her multi-ethnic female crew represent.

Revealing the patriarchal inflections of her message she repeatedly returns to the plaint: ‘we want a family man, they want celebrities’. The alleged gulf in female authenticity here is both visually evoked and verbally described. The lo-fi monochrome look of the video seeks to visually associate Shay’s moral harangue with an authentically gritty yet not quite ghetto urban space. She thus delivers her earnest rap, variously, atop a graffitied skate-board half-pipe, on the tow-path of a canal and on a set of adjacent wrought iron stairs. Shay and the young female ‘crew’ are all got up in a declaredly gender neutral hip hop style that she describes as ‘high-tops and baggy jeans’, ‘tracksuits and caps’. The camera lingers over these sartorial details which include Shay’s t-shirt bearing the legend ‘Rap minus lies = Hip Hop’. To drive home the point, the video makes use of cut away shots on busy shopping streets of heavily made-up, scantily clad young women, going close-up on their tight, short skirts and high heels (see Skeggs, 1997).

Native Sun’s ‘Legacy’, the work of a male/female hip hop duo of Mozambique and African-Caribbean extraction, essentially elaborates the sententious message on Shay D’s t-shirt. Hence, the disavowed ‘other’ in this video is the profanity and materialism of mainstream rap with its Eurocentric value system and psychic self-mutilation (see Asante Jr., 2008). ‘Real hip hop not commercialised pop’ as Native Sun declare with a flourish of wagging fingers.

\(^{10}\) ‘Sket’: a pejorative Jafaican term for a sexually loose female.
The video is adroitly put together in a retro ‘negritude’ style that makes use of 1960s black American jazz album covers and recalls the black power art of Emory Douglas. To a melodious mbira hook, it places the dancing male rapper and dreadlocked, dashiki garbed, hand-drumming female singer amid a swirling collage of colourful animated projections, graphics, photo-stills and film footage. We receive a chronicle of the ‘the journey of this legacy’ through an onrush of lush foliage, iconic black figures and historic moments from black music and politics. This is interspersed with images of the ancestral life-ways of the African motherland. The pious lyrics, ‘proud of my heritage, express the passion in me, express it in the verse no need for glass of Remy. I’m high off life alone’, embellish the archival imagery. Their chief purpose is to index key Afrocentric themes of wholesome, natural living, the importance of cultural memory and Afro-consciousness (see Noble, 2005). The insertion of a short passage of rap in the male artist’s native Mozambique tongue displays, as with some of the other videos in the sample, pride in heritage.

‘Legacy’s’ ‘hip hop versus rap’ theme and didactic tone is given a more polemical and aesthetically stripped down treatment in Saudi Arabian rapper Awate’s ‘Austerity’. If the ‘other’ in Native Sun’s work is the wilful suppression of ancestral heritage embodied in ‘pop rap’, the ‘other’ in Awate is the witlessness and irresponsibility that follows from this. His rap is essentially a scatter-gun broadside against the UK government, its welfare policies and uneven treatment of different sections of society (hence ‘Austerity’). Along the way it takes in policing, street protest, geo-politics and the prevalence amongst UK youth of a hyper-sexualised, ‘bling’ consumer culture. At one point, echoing Shay D, he raps: ‘This makes no sense, I’m lost, girls are wearing nothing but lingerie and a cross’. The video is filmed indoors against a bright white – *austere* – background, mostly in close-up on the bearded ‘backpacker’ styled Awate. Its few stylistic flourishes are effective. For example, the jump-cut editing is synced to the music, or used to punctuate the rap’s rhetorical flow. Large upper-case colourful captions are superimposed in different parts of the shot-frame at regular intervals, providing a Brechtian meta-narrative of ‘RIOT’; ‘KILL TORIES’; ‘FREE PALESTINE’; ‘SMILE’ etc.

11 ‘Backpacker’: a hip hop aficionado who eschews the overly tough ‘street’ trappings of much hip hop style and lays great emphasis on their learned commitment to hip hop culture (see Harrison, 2009).
Diaspora flow: UK rap in native tongues

Four of the videos in the sample feature artists in a recognisably London milieu rapping in their native tongue: these are Tekmill (Turkish), WJDN (Polish), Oxxxymiron (Russian) and Shadia Mansour (Palestinian). In these videos, ethnic identity (language, accent), cultural identity (rap, hip hop style), civic identity (British society) and geographic identity (London streets) clamour, merge at points, and comprise the principle subject matter, verbally and visually. In two instances, the Polish and Russian rap of WJDN and Oxxxymiron makes use of English words that refer to place names and aspects of British popular culture. WJDN’s rap offers a narrative commentary on the rapidity with which Polish migrants have in the last decade entered British life. Logging the various UK locations that now host Polish communities: ‘London, Liverpool, Newcastle…’ the video has cut away shots of various coach terminals. To further underscore this sense of migrant movement, dislocation and estrangement, there are split-screen shots of trains travelling in opposite directions and images of the young male rapper standing amid busy London traffic, commuters and pedestrians impervious to the ‘alien’ in their midst. The migrant artist’s rapped verdict on life in Great Britain for Poles is delivered against a series of exemplary backdrops: council estate tower blocks, caged basket-ball courts, London’s West-End, Stratford’s Olympic Village. There are also frequent cut-away shots throughout of shop windows and white vans proclaiming the names of Polish businesses. Everything about the production, from the high-grade film-work and emotive piano hook, through to the penultimate shot of a copy of The Daily Mail being dramatically tossed aside, seems intended as a dignified riposte to the negative stereotyping of Polish migrants (see Anderson et al, 2006).

Oxxxymiron’s concerns are more ethnographic, his ambit more local: East London street culture. We accompany him – much of the video is shot from the rappers point-of-view - making an incursion into this greyly exotic urban locale direct from London’s City airport clutching a suitcase, A-Z and English phrase book. Once he arrives at his destination by minicab he undergoes a rapid series of ill-starred encounters with East-End locals as he attempts to penetrate the hip hop subculture. The song leads in with recorded snippets of authentic East London argot: ‘listen, I give you three grand now’/‘always on a hype ting’ – a female vocal trilling in the background. In a kind lexical primer Oxxxymiron interleaves his own high-
tempo bellicose Russian flow with London Jafaican and indigenous references: ‘man dem bredren’, ‘Wa’gwan waste-man’, ‘fix-up’, ‘council-estate’. In stark contrast to London Posse and Professor Green, Oxxxymiron’s street reportage is decidedly through the eyes of a cultural greenhorn. The jokey tone of ‘How’s Life in London’, for example, is braggadocio throughout, the sexual and criminal set-pieces always redounding to the reputational credit of the protagonists. Oxxxymiron, on the other hand, consistently depicts himself in incidents involving money, sex, drugs and violence in which he is victimised and made to look hapless.

The opening shot to Tekmill’s video, which stylistically invokes the work of US ‘gangster’ rapper 50 Cent, is a close up of a barking pit-bull dog being restrained on a short leash, behind a fence, gun-shot sounds in the beat. Tekmill begins his growling Turkish rap, gesturing and grimacing into a low angle camera, on a fire-escape amid a similarly claustrophobic London to that of Oxxxymiron’s: rubbish strewn back-yards, steel fencing and sullen skies. He breaks up the rhythmic, stylistic and narrative flow of the video, however, to incorporate a spoken word interlude set in a Caribbean café on a presumably nearby council estate. Here he launches into a slightly surreal verbal exchange in patois behind a pair of dark shades with a dreadlocked black waiter amid a décor of African carvings, hand-drums and red, gold and black Ghanaian flag: ‘yeah big man, listen to this yeah, give me jerk chicken fried rice, yeah, with peas, yeah...keep it Turkish style, y’know how we do cousin, y’donlo’. This is all physically accented by a punch-bounce greeting between the two young men, and in a diasporic flourish is subtitled in Turkish. Do we encounter mimicry in this video: a Turkish youth patronisingly donning ‘black-face’ because he wishes to ingratiate himself with an African-Caribbean youth? Or, rather, is this an instance of that unremarked intercultural sensibility in UK cities (Gilroy, 2006) where such code-switching is a part of the ‘natural attitude’?

Shadia Mansour’s video features a fashion photographic shoot on the street that has her parading and dancing around the swankiest parts of Knightsbridge in the middle of the day in traditional Arabic clothing. Switching from exotic mannequin to dancer, and dripping with heavy jewellery, she models a succession of richly coloured, embroidered costumes, all to the booming soundtrack of her Palestinian language rap. There are cut-away shots of a busy Sloane Street, a London double decker red bus, the facade and interior of couture
fashion houses and close-ups of exclusive brands. The abiding impression is one of cultural disjuncture: a bricolage of upscale London landmarks, expensive commodities, heritage icons and orientalist ‘drag’. Under the gaze of disconcerted passers-by – one that she invites and returns – Shadia Mansour is creating what Michel Foucault calls a heterotopia or space of otherness. There is also a kind post-colonial ‘Empire Strikes Back’ narrative at work here (see CCCS, 1982). Her subaltern protagonist is taking occupation of this high-class milieu in a manner recalling the journey in traditional dress from subcontinental periphery to metropolitan core of Fun-Da-Mental’s ‘Country Man’. These tropes of spatial appropriation, cultural inversion and speaking back to power also echo the image in London Posse’s ‘How’s Life in London’ of black youth in front of Big Ben commandeering a World Service broadcast so as to deliver their own subaltern bulletin.

Each of these verbal and visual spectacles located at that uncertain intersection of cultures where identities mesh and blur (Bhaba, 1994) serve as a kind of online speaking postcard. For the respective ethnic communities based here in Britain, members of the global diaspora based elsewhere, and those who live ‘back home’, these videos furnish a sense of local place and culture whilst offering some critical or droll commentary. This evidently also has a commercial/economic dimension related to the opportunities for small-time entrepreneurship opened up by online ‘user-generated’ content and social media. Two of the native tongue artists (Tekmill and WJDN), for example, explicitly market their CDs, downloads and sundry merchandised items such as T-shirts in the videos. These items are brandished in front of the camera as pop-ups direct potential purchasers to blogs and Facebook pages.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

These interviews were conducted during July 2013 at London Metropolitan University. The interviewees were Paul Hampartsoumian, a photographer who worked for a number of years for the premier UK hip hop magazine, Hip Hop Connection; Ty, a highly respected and well known UK hip hop artist of some longstanding; Jasmine Dotiwala, Executive Producer at The Media Trust, former reporter for MTV news and former head of MTV Base, the 24-hour
music and entertainment channel on which hip hop has featured prominently; and XYM, a UK hip hop artist who in addition to being a rapper is an innovative practitioner in the emerging field of hip hop theatre. All the interviewees consented to being identified in the research findings.

The interviewees were shown a sub-sample of the videos: Tekmill’s ‘Can Pazarı’ (2011); Professor Green’s ‘Jungle’ (2011); Shay D’s ‘The Other Side Chicks’ (2012); Awate’s ‘Austerity’ (2013), and this formed the basis of our subsequent audio-recorded conversation. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and a half. Whilst a common set of questions had been prepared in advance relating to the video sample and the core concerns of the project, the approach taken was flexible allowing the interviewees to develop (relevant) themes of their own arising from the videos. The transcribed interview data was then analysed for common patterns and themes and coded/labelled and grouped accordingly. With some further refining we arrived at the thematic structure for the findings, and this forms the basis of the discussion that now follows.

IDENTITY AND APPROPRIATION

What instantly came across was that all the interviewees were wrestling with and were aware of others wrestling with the racial politics of the interculture these videos are arguably exemplary of. For example, what in fact are the various strands – racial, ethnic and cultural - that go to make up this culture? Is it accurate to describe it as the product of the globalization of ‘blackness’ through the planetary diffusion of African American popular culture? If so, what are the consequences for black people of this? Has it gone beyond ‘black culture’ and become an inter-ethnic, generic ‘street’ culture with corresponding set of trade-mark aesthetics?

Blackness, Jafaican, ‘street’

The closely related issues of origins, appropriation and authenticity with regards to the intercultural identities we see in this sample are particularly vexed when it comes to the role of race and whether or not we ought to be talking about UK hip hop as ‘black’ culture, doing ‘blackness’ or something else (Gilroy, 2006). As Paul put it, black culture is so thoroughly engrained in this intercultural sensibility that ‘the white kids that are starting to rap now
they’ve never even been aware of the fact that it was black music with mostly black artists, so it’s changed a lot.’ However, Jasmine questions the cultural and racial substance of this intercultural sensibility, concerned with the racial posturing and masquerading by non-blacks it encourages (Johnson, 2004). She regards Tekmill, for example, as part of ‘that whole thing of all these young kids trying to be black’. XYM’s desire to confront this issue head-on illustrates some of the challenges involved in clarifying just what and whose this identity is:

If someone’s saying ‘you know, he’s sounds black; or she sounds black’ I know exactly what they mean and I’m not gonna get on a high-horse and be all sensitive about it; I know what they mean. But, but what I would say is: is that even black? This new black idiom, which is here [in the UK], no one in Jamaica sounds like that, but it’s got Jamaican influences; it’s also got African influences, but it’s also got Sri-Lankan influences, Bangladeshi influences and everything. So it’s a new thing which I don’t think black people can claim. So I don’t think: ‘is Shay D trying to sound black?’

So, according to XYM, this scenario resists easy definition and calls for us to entertain apparently contradictory possibilities. What we can call Jafaican is a ‘black idiom’ but at the same time, in its ‘proliferating array of ethnicities and crossed heritages’ (Gidley, 2007: 156-157), not one that ‘black people can claim’ their absolute own. With specific reference to the passage in Tekmill’s video in which the latter switches from rapping in Turkish to speaking with a black waiter in Jamaican patois, XYM maintains that even this example cannot be regarded as simple cultural mimicry. That is to say, this is not just one national-ethnic-cultural identity: Turkish, appropriating another national-ethnic-cultural identity: Jamaican. Being authentic in how one projects one’s identity is important to XYM. But such authenticity is a matter of being true to the primary influences that have shaped one’s identity within the environment in which one was raised, not one’s inherited skin-colour, nationality or any abstract cultural typology that makes no allowance for social change and cultural blending. So of Tekmill XYM states:

If that’s how he speaks, that’s how he speaks, if he’s grown up around that, people speaking like that, and he’s been doing it since he was a kid, since he came off the boat from Turkey or whatever, if that’s the environment and that’s what he speaks, that’s
what he speaks. You know, I won’t deny that language, that way of talking has been heavily influenced by black people, and a lot of black people will speak in a similar way or like that or whatever. Errm, I understand when people say about talking black but I don’t think it’s something necessarily that black people can claim sole ownership to.

This recalls Paul Gilroy’s (2010) recent observation on black cultures in urban conditions of ‘globality’ that ‘though they are staged in distinctive, local scenes, the necessarily profane and picaresque cultural formation of the black vernacular no longer belongs to any discrete group and cannot therefore be held under ethno-historical copyright.’ (151).

Blackness, hip hop and street interculture

Ty was asked how he regarded the role of a globalized blackness in the formation of an intercultural sensibility amongst the different ethnicities in our sample of UK rap videos. His answer was significant in terms of the definitional ambiguity we have been attempting to unspool here. He was adamant that blackness ‘is not what I’m seeing’ in these videos but rather a globalized ‘street culture’:

I think blackness and street culture are two different things. What I’m saying that I’m seeing in these videos is an accepted idea of what street culture is. Street culture that, initially, has been pretty much fermented by black youth in the UK under a certain time. But [...] the baton has been passed on. And I would say that I’m not seeing the globalization of black because not one of the groups are openly admitting that’s a black culture that they’re doing; they’re doing a ‘street’ thing which is valuable to them.

Ty’s essential point is that this ‘street culture’ is all about an attitude of hardness, braggadocio swagger and adaptive creativity. It is, in his words, irrespective of one’s sex, an implicitly masculinist ‘code of ethics’, inscribed on the body. So that ‘in the videos you’re seeing nobody is suggesting that being weak is cool; [there is] no suggestion that being timid is cool. In every video there is a suggestion that you’ve got to be in control, you’ve got to have a particular type of confidence’. This is, he believes, ‘valuable’ at one level for the young ethnic minority rap artists in the sample because it offers them an assertive idiom adaptable to their own identities and uses. But crucially, for Ty, the aforementioned set of ‘street’ attributes and the culture it begets should not be confused with, or taken as
representative of, ‘blackness’ per se. He states that ‘what I’m seeing in those videos’ is only ‘street culture from a black perspective that has now become [a] global perspective’. This manner of ‘standing in front of a video and how they’re talking, this is a particular street cadence’ that was, as he says, ‘fermented by black youth in the UK under a certain time’. However, it has now, according to Ty, ‘become colourless which is brilliant’. These intercultural facts on the ground are of service to black people because, he maintains, this idiom ‘shouldn’t be colourful […] black people shouldn’t be comfortable with that representing them in the whole because it doesn’t: it’s a street thing.’ Ty is speaking to the tendency to reduce ‘blackness’ to attitudes of anti-sociality and disenfranchisement. He regards Tekmill’s video as confirmation that such attitudes solidly pertain now to a generic, trans-racial ‘street’ identity, thereby undermining their customary association with working-class black youth:

Like Tekmill, the way the way that he’s standing and sitting in his restaurant is not the way that Turkish boys will sit if they have respect for the owner. It’s the way that thugs will sit in a restaurant if they have no respect for anyone else. It’s the ‘I don’t care about society. I don’t care about anyone, I’m here innit? Anyone can’t tell me anything’. It should be recognized that this comes from a particular group of people but that group of people is not black; it’s black people that are disenfranchised, that are disconnected from society, that feel a particular way, that are thugged out, that don’t care, that have learnt to do what they do how they do. That is not – that is an element of black culture, it’s not the only element.

For Ty, multi-ethnic young people who rap and act ‘hard’ are not, then, appropriating blackness per se; they are only appropriating that part of blackness – ‘street black’ – that for ideological and commercial reasons has become a metonym for black culture. In other words, in appropriating and adapting this stereotype of blackness – thereby creating an intercultural dialogue - they are supposedly divesting it of its ‘colour’ connotations and in the process destabilising the long-standing racist libel.

**Street culture and authenticity**

Jasmine and Paul approached this matter somewhat differently. They were concerned that ‘street’ was leading to a vulgarised form of rap and a stereotyped, inauthentic youth identity
based on posturing and mimicry. For example, seeing and hearing Tekmill made Jasmine ‘think of the really stereotypical, quite commercial Kidulthood/Adulthood/Adam Deaconesque\textsuperscript{12} type kids that feel that they need to go down that route to be cool and hard, and it’s all a bit of a stereotype about the swagger.’ She also observed: ‘y’know, I know that young Turkish boys go around with young black and white kids and I know they all try and talk street slanguage.’ Paul had also said of Tekmill: ‘The way he was speaking it was almost comedic, it was almost Ali G’\textsuperscript{13} (see Gilroy, 2006). So does the Turkish rapper Tekmill epitomise an ‘intercultural sensibility’ (Gidley, 2007) or a new kind of conformism amongst British urban youth? Jasmine appeared to plump for the latter. For her, performances such as Tekmill’s cross a line from the comparatively innocent ‘flattery’ of emulating sartorial ‘Jamaicanisms’ to the offensive ‘game’ of ‘taking on a persona that they clearly haven’t grown up with or isn’t of their background.’ For Jasmine, too much UK rap therefore consists in either relatively privileged youth mimicking the styles and postures of the dispossessed or relatively disadvantaged youth self-stereotyping: the proverbial ‘corrugated iron gate, the bull dog on a lead [...] gun-shot fingers’ as she puts it.

In Jasmine’s opinion, the prevalence in UK rap of cultural slumming and a reluctance to retire the lumpen clichés helps explain why a commercially successful black British rapper like Tynchy Stridah was initially reluctant to reveal he had a university degree for fear of damaging his authentic ‘street’ credentials. She says that it took another UK black rapper, Chipmunk, to overcome such apprehensions and ‘come out’ in public to his fans about the university education he had received. With none of Ty’s optimism that ‘street culture’ has become ‘colourless’, she claims that it tends to be the most ‘street’ black rappers, such as Dizzee Rascal, who are the dominant ‘role models’ to rappers of other ethnicities. Jasmine:

I find it really frightening that the media portrayal of successful hip hop artists is always aggressive black male stereotyping and because that is the pinnacle of success visually then everybody is clearly going to copy it because the role models are the ones that are successful.

\textsuperscript{12} ‘Kidulthood’ and ‘Adulthood’: two recent British films that depict the intercultural youth ‘street’ subculture in London at its most violent and criminal. ‘Adam Deacon’: a young London/Moroccan actor who features in both films and has come to epitomise this intercultural identity and its Jafaican speech.

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Ali G’: a comic television and film character created by actor Sacha Baron-Cohen that has also become a symbol of the London youth intercultural identity at its most stereotyped.
She believes changes to ‘the perception of young black men’ are ‘coming from inside the black community’ as opposed to other cultures. ‘I think other cultures are happy to let black people stay in their box’, she says. This suggests that Ty’s faith in the capacity of new synthetic intercultural identities to delink blackness and ‘street’ has to reckon with the pressure black rappers come under – much of it internalised and barely conscious - from mainstream media and society to perform their allotted cultural role. Like ‘urban’, ‘street’ for many is a euphemism for black. How this might be linked to white and ethnic minority rappers doing ‘street’ is an issue we shall pick up further on.

**REPRESENTATION**

In these interview findings, we have so far begun to unpick the intertwined strands that go to make up a British creolised youth vernacular and identity of uncertain racial and ethnic provenance. We have considered whether ‘street’ as an adjective applied to multi-ethnic UK hip hoppers might serve to expose the reductive and racist conflation of black culture with street blackness. We have also examined how UK hip hop as a ‘street’ interculture is allegedly encouraging stereotyped artistic expression and the assumption of inauthentic identities. With a particular focus on Professor Green’s controversial video for his 2011 rap song ‘Jungle’ we now turn to questions of representation and consider some of the discursive grounds on which our expert interviewees affirmed or denied the legitimacy of such work.

**Reportage or Daily Mail?**

The long-standing defence of content in rap lyrics and rap video imagery deemed offensive, shocking or negatively stereotyping is that such content either accurately documents the life worlds of its makers or at the very least unapologetically embodies the social nihilism that is the engine of modern day capitalism (see Perry, 2004; Rose, 2008). As Paul says of Professor Green’s ‘Jungle’: ‘that’s the one that showed the darkest side of poverty and what-not on the street; the darkest parts of society.’ This is known as the ‘reality’ or ‘reportage’ defence’ (see Rose, 2008) and it claims that it is unfair to ‘shoot the messenger’ for ‘telling it like it is’.

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14 ‘Daily Mail’: British tabloid newspaper with a well-deserved reputation for fear-mongering and whipping up resentment towards immigrants and asylum seekers as well as any aspects of British life that appears to deviate from strongly conservative, nationalistic norms.
As we shall see, the reality defence makes socio-cultural authenticity its chief alibi and seeks to shift responsibility for negative self-stereotyping away from individuals and onto the social structures that determine the kinds of life-choices available to those same individuals. However, as we shall also see, our interviewees quite understandably vacillated in their attempts to offer an even-handed account of how ‘Jungle’, in particular, worked as reportage, reflecting how these debates resist any easy resolution.

Ty summarises the perceptual challenge of establishing the veracity of any particular representation in a rap video in terms of the specific role stereotypes play. First of all there is the question of what people think they are seeing and hearing or able to see and hear owing to their cultural knowledge and expectations: ‘I think that, errm, stereotyping that appears in the videos, appears in the music and is expected of people is sometimes to do with limitations in regards to what people [viewers/listeners] know of people. Sometimes to do with what people are only willing to see’. But he goes on to say that the stereotypes in these videos are not always a projection of their viewers, nor are they simply the deliberate or inadvertent distortions of their makers. They may in fact be firmly anchored in empirical reality (see Mercer and Julien, in Hall, 2003). In other words, the rap video is merely ‘reporting’ the stereotyped identities and lifestyles of real people. He states: ‘sometimes the stereotype are what they are. Hence, as painful as it was to watch, when I watched the stereotypes in the Professor Green video I see stereotypes that I’m aware exist’. He raises this again in relation to what he calls Shay D’s ‘vitriolic’ treatment of female working-class sexuality: ‘The stereotypes for women that she was challenging was very interesting in that - but they exist. I think, I hate to say it but all of the stereotypes exist’. XYM approaches this issue by way of a contrast between the ‘consciousness’ and positivity of Awate and Professor Green’s disenchanted realism:

He [Awate] was, I think, trying to go against stereotype – maybe on purpose with the images of it but definitely on purpose with the lyrics: ‘don’t drug deal’ and stuff he was saying, as opposed to Professor Green which was kind of ‘do it’; or not even so much to do it but kind of ‘this is what goes on. We’ve got no choice. This is Hackney’. This is Hackney.

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15 ‘Hackney’: London borough in the East of the city. Associated with poverty, crime and a highly diverse ethnic minority and migrant population but has undergone much gentrification in recent years.
what we are. It’s about money. It’s about ‘paper’\textsuperscript{16}. It’s about violence, and that’s kind of it’.

The one, Professor Green, appears to exalt in the risky manoeuvring, violent rivalry and self-gratification that allegedly typifies the adrenaline fuelled existence of many Hackney youth; the other, Awate, denounces those who succumb to this lifestyle for their a-morality and fatalistic conforming to a script written for them by the powers-that-be. But XYM is emphatic that it is the reality that is to blame not those who catalogue and report it:

I do also think hip hop reflects life so I will always defend it, even the negative stuff, I’ll defend it and be like ‘look if this wasn’t true what Professor Green was rapping about - it might be glorifying it might be exaggerating aspects of it – but if it was a complete lie no one would buy into it.

For XYM, Professor Green’s credibility as a reporter of Hackney ‘life’ depends upon the circumstances of his birth and upbringing, his social location. In the case of ‘Jungle’, this is complicated by the fact that he and his singing partner, Maverick Sabre, are both white. Not only are the majority of the actors in the video black but the whole narrative relies upon an extended metaphor of Hackney as a dangerous Jungle populated by savage beasts including ‘apes’. So the imagery and narrative are highly racialised but worse, those offering the bitterly ironic ‘welcome to Hackney’ as they stand at the head of a baying black mob are two white men. XYM, although ultimately troubled by the clumsiness of ‘Jungle’\textquotesingle s negative racial imagery, is prepared to give Professor Green the benefit of the doubt provided his account of Hackney is that of a genuine cultural insider, anchored in autobiographical reality. So for XYM the key question is whether or not Professor Green and Maverick Sabre grew up in Hackney and lived around working-class black youth; whether or not they shared a common set of formative experiences and references points, a common intercultural identity. Inverting the moral panic voiced by historian David Starkey after the UK riots in August 2011 that in Britain ‘white youth were now becoming black’, XYM avers:

If that’s what they’ve grown up around and of course they’re storytellers so they’re gonna exaggerate maybe some of the bad points but if that’s what they’ve grown up around, I’ve no problem with them then reflecting the reality they’ve grown up around.

\textsuperscript{16} ‘Paper’: money.
If it really turned out they were from the, you know, the kind of yuppy part of Hackney and they were kind of voyeurs and looking at that and then they’re rapping about they’re pretending they’re part of that. That’s different because then, no why reflect that? Reflect the actual life that you grew up around. But if that’s their life and they’re trying to reflect their life, and if, they’re pretty much they were the two white people on the video, right, and everyone else is black – so, if that was actually their group of friends, that’s, I’m cool with that.

Paul, who also ultimately feels that ‘Jungle’ commits – albeit unintended - grievous racial blunders, is keen to corroborate Professor Green’s fitness to speak about Hackney’s violent underbelly with an authority born of direct experience. He says, ‘I know Pro [Professor Green] and I know where he’s come from and I know what he’s experienced and stuff’. However, he goes on to say that ‘while all of that is real to him most people are not going to understand it, they’re not going to read it in the way that he is telling it’. This last point is crucial as it gestures towards a key objection to the reality defence: reproducing stereotypes in the cause of reportage is critically worthless and socially irresponsible (see Rose, 2008). That is because it simply bears too close a resemblance to the stigmatising representations of minority, oppressed and dissident identities produced by mainstream and establishment interests. Hence, Jasmine and XYM were each concerned that ‘Jungle’ could, ironically, be seen as more-or-less in tune with the less than sympathetic approach to black and ethnic minority youth of the conservative British tabloid newspaper The Daily Mail (see Alexander, 2008). For example, XYM said: ‘Professor Green’s video was The Daily Mail Hackney. That’s what it was. It was Daily Mail Hackney; this is what people are scared of; this is why people won’t go to Hackney because that goes on.’ However, despite XYM’s declared hatred of The Daily Mail he takes the position that it is only really doing what Professor Green is doing, that is, reflecting an existing reality:

It might exaggerate the numbers or it will talk about the stabblings rather than some positive things going on in the community because bad news is news, but for The Daily Mail to tell all these stories they exist in the first place and for Professor Green to tell all these stories they exist in the first place.

For Jasmine, Professor Green’s video and The Daily Mail are equally culpable:
I think Professor Green’s ‘Jungle’ was definitely a massive stereotype. Especially when you say ‘welcome to Hackney’ at the beginning of the track, and then your whole image of Hackney is young black boys killing and beating each other up, and you as the white person is discussing and narrating it all. I think that is really scary and quite [laughing] Daily Mail/UKIP and can see why that would make people vote for them.

Paul expressed a similar anxiety about some of the possible real-life consequences of ‘Jungle’ and its ‘negative stereotype’ of ‘black guys’ as all ‘thugs’:

If you’re from a place where you don’t see black people, it’s going to have an effect on the way you look at black people, and that’s already a problem and it’s like a really serious problem: disproportionate numbers of stop and search and these kinds of things.

In sum, videos like ‘Jungle’ can be viewed as providing ideological cover for racially discriminatory policies towards black British and other migrant communities of colour. As Jasmine put it, with reference to ‘Jungle’,

I think those stereotypes can frighten the indigenous population here in the UK. Y’know, some people watching that will think ‘oh my god, this is why we shouldn’t let immigrants in, because this is what they’re all about’.

Representing what? Who is representing?

XYM was having none of it. He maintained that just because some people might (wilfully) misconstrue the cabinet of racialised social horrors that is ‘Jungle’ that is no reason to censure its makers. For XYM the real problem is just how willing so many people are to find confirmation for their own existing prejudices. Therefore, according to him, it is not a matter of suppressing or changing the ‘art’ but rather changing how it is perceived: ‘for me, I’ve got a bigger problem with people who are stupid enough to believe every black person is like that than actually Professor Green for making the video’. And yet, XYM still believes Professor Green was at fault for failing to use his commercial success and influence more responsibly. With the ‘Jungle’ video he had essentially produced a piece of ghetto porn with
all the familiar tropes and trappings of *Grand Theft Auto*.\(^{17}\) Ty was emphatic that the makers of certain representations must be answerable to those they represent:

> Black people should have a right to say ‘how come we’re looking like monkeys and apes in this video and when the word ape come ups in this video it cuts to black people in a coffin? There’s no white people dying in the ghetto? What are we saying’?

For XYM, however, Professor Green’s real crime was not just that he confirmed existing prejudices towards black British youth. It was that his video appeared to endorse, even celebrate, the kinds of narrow cultural horizons bequeathed to young people in places like Hackney by neoliberalism and poverty (Archer et al, 2010). And yet, he takes the position that no single rap video should be expected to assume the burden for offering a completely balanced and sensitive rendering of black British identity. It is not about creating a single representation that would pass a diversity test or about simply producing uplifting work in which positive stereotypes are substituted for negative ones (see Hall, 2003). The real issue, as XYM sees it, are the structuring conditions in which stereotypes are formed; the way in which perceptions of race and ethnicity are shaped by what is made available in the mainstream British media and culture. He argues that because only a narrow range of images of black people currently receive media exposure there are few opportunities for white people in particular to become properly informed about those who look and sound racially and ethnically different from themselves. Of ‘Jungle’, he thus concludes, ‘I don’t think the video’s racist - I just think people’s interpretations of it will be because they’re not seeing black people for the diverse people they are.’

However, the concern raised by Jasmine and Paul of non-blacks doing ‘street blackness’, propagating, as they see it, a negative racial stereotype, has a further important dimension. Whilst non-blacks, particularly those who are white-skinned, may derive ‘cool value’ (Skeggs, 2005) from doing ‘street blackness’, for black people this spells epidermal incarceration. Whites are able to enjoy a ‘prosthetic’ identity – one they can take on and off - and with it a set of privileges denied to people with black skin (ibid). Thus, XYM, despite being of the opinion that UK hip hop’s intercultural sensibility belongs to no single race or ethnic group is still troubled by the hidden privileges of whiteness: ‘the thing that amuses

\(^{17}\) ‘Grand Theft Auto’: violent video game set in Los-Angeles.
me is when people are ‘black’ when it suits them, and obviously black people don’t have that choice: they’re black all the time’. Black people can code-switch verbally but unlike whites are indissolubly attached through epidermis to their visible ethnicity (see Gilborn, 2008).

**PRODUCTION**

It is beyond the scope of this study to do more than sketch some of the ways that UK rap videos respond to the social and racial inequalities and differential access to cultural goods and opportunities experienced by British ethnic minority and migrant populations. Establishing with any degree of precision social, cultural and economic impacts of participation in UK rap for people of different skin-colours and ethnicities, let alone social classes and genders, presents a formidable methodological challenge. However, we were able to explore with our expert interviewees how online user-generated content and diaspora production offered UK ethnic minority and migrant rappers the chance to engage in small acts of citizenship and entrepreneurship. We asked them what they regarded as the most salient aspects of an emerging situation where due to the internet, social media and smart technologies artistic exposure, access to audiences and feedback are now relatively inexpensive, instant and planetary. The picture that emerges is equivocal. Low threshold access to online video platforms certainly marks an expansion of expressive domains for hip hop artists, providing opportunities for trans-national communication and self-promotion. However, as an economic model it has its limitations.

**User-generated content and diaspora production**

Ty was asked how he views these videos, in light of the current attitudes to ethnic minorities and migrants within mainstream political discourse. He responded that at one level he regards the videos as democratic and inclusive, an alternative media platform where disadvantaged UK youth, in a context of austerity, can find recognition and validation:

I think the bigger thing that this [rap video] vehicle’s offered is a vehicle to appreciate, look up to and admire people of different racial backgrounds in a way that modern society doesn’t offer [...] you can see anybody in a music video and as long as you like the song
they can become your heroes; and then what’s happening with the self-generated content people are watching people like themselves.

What he is saying is that the usual forms of ethnic and cultural filtering in mainstream media do not apply with this digital and online material. As Ty puts it, ‘they’re able to have multi-coloured heroes – nobody’s allowing it, disallowing it, it’s up to them in a way that was not [formerly] available.’ Moreover, the fact that young people themselves stumble across, seek out and circulate this content through digital and social media is important to their sense of agency: ‘It’s something that I found for myself’ [...] They get to set the parameters, not their parents, not society’. As an example of somebody choosing their own heroes, Ty cites Tekmill’s referencing of 50 Cent stylistically in his video and his inclusion of a comedic sketch as his homage to such gangsta rap videos as Ice Cube’s ‘It was a Good Day’. Linked to this are the possibilities for raising consciousness horizontally through a rap video’s capacity for re-articulating dominant ideology. Using the example of Awate’s politically literate rap on modern Britain, Ty thus speaks of ‘the power that self-generated material can have to be influential and implode in a young person’s mind’.

Being able to shoot rap videos on easy to use cheap cameras and mobile phones and then edit them on home computers significantly expands access to technological resources and eliminates a formerly onerous and prohibitive layer of expense. Reciprocally, the emergence of file sharing, streaming, downloading, home mixing (see Potter, 2006) and being able to upload one’s work instantly to online video channels, social media sites and blogs has given rise to a particular kind of homespun artistic entrepreneurship. Paul thus speaks about the prevalence amongst contemporary UK rappers of a ‘DIY mentality – get it on Channel U, get it on YouTube; the new way of doing things for aspiring artists’. This he contrasts to an earlier era of rap video making – pre-user-generated content – where a series of gatekeepers jealously guarded access to technological and financial resources and enabled or restricted public exposure. So, as he puts it, the sequence tended to be: obtain a record contact and then record a promotional video which, if you were lucky, one of the relatively few cable TV channels that played rap such as MTV would broadcast. Paul expressed satisfaction that the rise of user-generated content was expanding and democratising access to expressive resources: ‘It’s exciting in that it’s now accessible to
anyone and if you have the right person saying the right things then they can spread really really quickly’.

Paul also spoke of how this expanded accessibility is related to the internet supporting niche markets and the development of fan feedback, participation and relationship development: ‘it certainly gets closer with Twitter and Facebook or social media generally, they can connect more directly.’ On watching Tekmill and Oxxymiron’s videos, in which both UK based artists rap in their native tongues, Jasmine asked the obvious but highly pertinent question ‘who are they rapping for?’ If we relate this phenomenon to the rise of niche, user-generated content on the internet it would appear to suggest that these rappers are clearly creating work targeted at audiences in the diaspora, local and global, and to audiences in their home nations. Jasmine registers a productive ambiguity in this work:

It must be their own communities because everybody else doesn’t understand it. Or are they rapping in their native tongues so that we can get a sense of who they are? Because some of it you can obviously understand. I mean even Russky Cockney, I’ve got the storyline and I didn’t even need to know what he was saying, I kind of got it. So it was a bit of both. Like was he preaching to his community and his background and ethnicity or is it for us?

Ty is emphatic that the intended audiences for these diaspora, native tongue rap videos are properly global: ‘the market is never ever UK centric’. These rap videos are trans-national, ‘they’re both. They’re here and there.’ The globalisation of popular media genres means also that the available platforms for broadcast and advertising include not only Youtube but indigenous forms of music television. However, According to Ty, where once Youtube might have been seen as a calling card for terrestrial television, ‘It’s changing now that people are making Youtube the actual TV station and just bringing it all into the video’.

Jasmine was asked for her take on these ‘diaspora productions’ being a vehicle – either as a side-line or dedicated career - for selling hip hop product - mix-tapes and various forms of merchandising - locally and globally. So that these UK based rap artists were attempting to develop an active fan-base by uploading videos onto the internet amongst people from their own ethnic communities in the UK as well as those in far flung parts of the world such as
Russia, Turkey, Poland and Iran. Drawing on her extensive experience of using social media to promote UK rap and RnB artists, Jasmine offered this set of insights:

I think we can’t ignore the fact that in the next two years when it comes to digital media and social media, big things are going to be content and data; and content is people making their own content and putting it up there because we’ve seen that artists have done that and become really famous really very quickly; and data is obviously who’s looking at it. If you’ve got a white rapper, here for example, who is of a Russian background and ethnicity and he’s making content where he knows his data shows that back in Russia or any of the Russian speaking world they’re listening to him, he could catapult into being a superstar very quickly [...] So, the world could be the oyster for someone like Shay D. Y’know, she could be huge as an Iranian rapper.

This would seem to suggest that the creation of online user-generated content by ethnic minority and migrant UK rappers might offer some prospect for developing a musical career, or at least moving product, at a time when record labels are far less prepared to invest in emerging talent. However, the ease with which one can now receive exposure through the internet and social media means operating in an over-crowded market where people surf and quickly forget content. As Paul observes, ‘because there’s so much coming through all the time you forget what you watched last week. It’s like, everything is so momentary it’s difficult – you can become relevant for a minute but to stay relevant is really really difficult.’ So, on the one hand, there is more cultural democratisation and greater accessibility in the manner described by Ty, with opportunities, pace Jasmine, for entrepreneurial uses of content and data. But on the other hand, being able to reach more people means a glut of content and having to contend with the shrinking attention span of online and digital audiences. Paul thus pointed out that unless a rap artist is also able to earn money from live performances most will struggle now to earn a living from their art. As he put it, connecting through Facebook and Twitter ‘doesn’t pay the bills. If you want to be able to devote all your time to your craft, you need to be able to pay the bills’. Furthermore, the scenario that Jasmine sketches opens up an intriguing – if disconcerting - prospect: is a non-black ethnic minority rapper such as Tekmill able to derive economic benefits by propagating a negative stereotype of blackness in his native tongue? Could this be a novel form of cultural

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18 That is, information on the who and where and when of customers/audiences for particular content.
remittance where stereotypes of urban ‘negritude’ are marketed to diaspora and trans-national audiences?

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

In this report we examined the role of racial, cultural and ethnic stereotyping in an aspect of British popular culture: UK rap videos from 1993 to 2013. Our sample of fifteen videos featured the work of a highly ethnically diverse range of UK based rap artists. We explored how racial, cultural and ethnic stereotyping in these videos was constructed discursively through visual, textual and sonic means. In our video analysis we were able to identify the reversing, substituting and contesting of racial, cultural and ethnic stereotypes across the sample. We were also able to discern and discuss resonances between identities, themes and images that could not simply be reduced to the aforesaid categories. Moreover, our interviews with experts on UK hip hop culture demonstrated the interpretive scope of these videos. We were able to explore the mode and extent of their stereotyping, their potential for re-casting identity and how they might enhance the social situations of their makers. We thus looked at the role of blackness, ‘street’ culture and authenticity in UK rap; the equivocal character of ‘reportage’ in rap; responsibility in representation; and the trans-national opportunities for self-expression and entrepreneurial activity opened up by online user-generated content.

CONCLUSIONS

The picture that actually emerges in terms of the role stereotypes play in these videos is extremely mixed and varied and open to a number of interpretations. For example, if we take those videos which we argue serve to reverse the stereotype we can discern something of the following at work: the working-class, ethnic minority and migrant youth that are given representation take up a position, deliberately or not, as threats to the symbolic order. They are those who ‘the rules [of a society] are designed to exclude’ (Hall, 2003: 257). Hip hop culture in these videos gets associated with stigmatised urban territories and baleful images of a youth underclass with no respect for ‘British values’ and no stake in British citizenship. This self-stereotyping thus yields representations that appear to correspond to constructions of ‘national abjects’ (Tyler, 2013) generated within the mainstream media and
politics. Hence, one important way of accounting for the self-stereotyping in this set of UK rap videos is to understand it as that part of the hip hop cultural armoury: ‘toughness as a defensive response’ - adopted and adapted the world over as a way of living with the ‘ideological fictions of racism’ and classist stigma (see Hall, 2003: 263). This may be psychoculturally reasonable and adaptive but has the ultimate effect of confirming and perpetuating the original racist and classist libel. As Hall (2003) avers, ‘Thus, ‘victims’ can be trapped by the stereotype, unconsciously confirming it by the very terms in which they try to oppose and resist it’ (263).

Those videos which we argue substitute the stereotype are involved in what Tyler (2013) calls a ‘de-classificatory politics’, an attempt to cast off a negatively stereotyped identity bestowed from above by mainstream discourses. The ethnic minority and migrant artists who feature in these videos thus make every possible effort to distance themselves psychoculturally from the aforementioned folk-devils, to send these subjects into symbolic exile (Hall, 2003: 258). In their discourse they ‘right the balance’, inverting what is conventionally negative, thereby producing themselves as proud, exemplary - positive stereotypes - of woman, young conscious man of colour etc (see Hall, 2003: 272-273). But they can only fully dis-identify with the negative social identity that hovers too close to comfort in terms of how they see themselves perceived by others by reproducing the stigmatised ‘other’ in their own discourse (see Tyler, 2013: 169). In that sense, there is ironically something of ‘The Daily Mail’ in their sermonising towards the disreputable and their shoring up of their own respectability. Hence, this strategy, which maintains the positive/negative binary, ultimately risks reinforcing the ‘classificatory violence’ that it ostensibly seeks to contest (ibid).

Those videos which we argue contest the stereotype, are, in the words of Hall (2003), ‘working within the complexities and ambivalences of representation itself’ (274). They are contesting stereotyping from within. Instead of making the content of representation the key focus, e.g. ‘righting the balance’ and forming a strategic alliance around positive essential identities, this strategy attends to the playful possibilities offered by its forms. A signal feature of videos that contest the stereotype is their reflexive awareness of how meaning is shifting and unstable (ibid). Hence, this form of representation takes the stereotyped and abject symbolism of, say, black bodies, migrant non-citizenship, ethnic
enemies within and underclass urban culture, and makes ‘the stereotypes work against themselves’ (ibid). This strategy embraces the exoticizing gaze on ‘otherness’ only to subvert it by making strange the stereotyped image. Humour and clever caricatures are part of this form of ‘trans-coding’ so that we laugh with rather than at the representations.

To conclude, we argue, with Imogen Tyler, that the work of critique entails shifting our attention from the ‘identification of images as positive or negative’, to more nuanced understandings of ‘the processes of subjectification’ made possible (and plausible) through stereotyped discourse’ (Tyler, 2013: 214). Whether we are looking at UK rap videos or examples of popular culture from elsewhere such as the tabloid print media, we need to ask: who produces the negative stereotypes ‘migrant scroungers’, ‘underclass scum’ and ‘lazy blacks’? And what political-economic interests do these discursive productions serve? What are their effects and who benefits? This is a quite different strategy than calling for censorship or respectable counter-representations in UK rap. To repeat, positing an essentialised ethical identity remains trapped within a binary thinking that relies on a disavowed negative other as its constitutive limit (St Louis, 2009). As we have seen, moreover, the fact that a representation such as ‘street’ can, according to one’s perspective, connote blackness, a trans-racial intercultural identity or both, illustrates the perils of casting any of the rap videos in our sample as straightforwardly negative, false or distorting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Like our interviewees we believe that one of the most important ways of countering stereotyped views of ethnic minority and migrant communities in Britain is for there to be as broad and diverse a range of representations of these groups as possible in the mainstream media and popular culture. However, as XYM argues, this should not involve the suppression of representations which could give offence to some people or cause discomfort. If people are only exposed to the antipodes of any particular identity – saint or sinner – and not its range and complexity, then we should not be surprised if the majority persist in holding stereotyped views. All that said, we have to contend with the fact that a plural, individualized media-sphere of targeted/niche and user-generated content can promote a certain parochialism amongst ‘empowered’ consumers. How will viewers and listeners actually get exposed to a greater range of representations in the absence of the
kind of shared media spaces where content can be selected and thoughtfully curated to ensure genuine diversity and cultural richness?

We suggest that there is still an important role within mainstream and informal education for a critical cultural and media studies (see Giroux, 2006; Hooks, 2006; Richards, 2011), one that obviously incorporates the changing ways in which cultural content is now produced, accessed, sold and shared. Specifically, we see rap videos in all their variety as both a topic and resource for such educational work with young people and adults. Used for critical education rather than prophylactic or regulatory ends rap videos and related material has much to offer schools, youth clubs and community organisations looking to counter stereotyping. Not least, how to acquire the tools to counter simplistic readings of popular culture, or what Perry (2004) terms ‘the empathic fallacy’; a belief in the transparent meaningfulness of intentions, ideas and feelings – positive or negative – as these are directly transmitted in acts of communication (Perry, 2004: 49/51). This, then, could be of service in educating people who feel discriminated against as a consequence of stereotyping in popular culture as well as those less directly affected whose relationship with hip hop operates on a continuum from casual consumer to professional producer. This will, however, require the proper training and skills development amongst teachers and other practitioners to avoid reproducing the simplifications and binarisms we have discussed above. One means of approaching this would be to create regionally based programmes where academics from sociology and cultural studies could share their expertise in the discursive analysis of popular culture with a range of educational practitioners and community workers.

London now has a hip hop education forum which attracts hip hop artists and others with varying degrees of experience of using hip hop educationally. One of the shared goals of this forum is precisely to provide the kind of inter-generational transmission of hip hop history some of our interviewees thought currently so lacking and partly behind the prevalence in UK rap of off-the-peg ‘street’ clichés. This, in conjunction with the critical media and cultural studies approach to rap discussed above, could really help to enlarge the cultural palette of those young people currently consuming and producing rap music. However, a word of caution: in our view, to be genuinely educational and not just vindicatory it would need to
avoid replicating the kind of lionization hip hop culture has a tendency to indulge in. If studying hip hop is to be an aid to understanding some of the complex processes of stereotyping then just as surely as we need to get beyond simplistic notions of positive and negative rap so we need much more than a roll call of hip hop’s greats.

We will now indicate how the findings overall influence the proposed form to be taken by the open meeting in Work Stream 2 of the project.

THE OPEN MEETINGS IN WS2

The open meetings will be an opportunity to explore our findings and data with members of the public who have a stake in many or some of the issues we have thus far discussed.

Meeting 1: We intend to produce a presentation for the first meeting in which we discuss the interim findings of the project. In it we will more-or-less follow the structure of the report. We will then open this up to discussion to the invited members and explore with them our approach to analysing stereotyping, particularly around ideas of discursive construction and articulation theory. For this, we will use a smaller representative sample of the videos: nine in total, framed within our three key analytic categories for stereotyping. We will then explore how the participant’s responses challenge, develop, confirm or contradict our own analysis.

Meeting 2: In the second of these meetings it is our intention to follow a similar methodology but with an important difference. We will only show the video sub-sample and present as little as possible of own analysis. In this way the second meeting will take more of the form of a ‘focus group’ discussion. Some of the questions we have prepared for these meetings addressed to the videos include:

1. What is going on in these videos in terms of the stereotyping of ethnic minority and migrant identities?

2. What distinctive contribution do you think each of the ethnic groups seen in these videos is making?
3. What differences and similarities do you see in the identities represented in these videos?

4. How do you think non ethnic minorities might perceive these videos and the identities they represent?

5. What are some of the possible costs and benefits to ethnic minority and migrant groups of these videos?

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

**UK rap video sample: 1993 – 2013:**

1. Fun-Da-Mental ‘Country Man’ (1993); *Indian/Pakistani/mixed; male:* [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iENhUBR4Qsk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iENhUBR4Qsk)


5. M.I.A ‘Paper Planes’ (2007); *Sri-Lankan; female:*
6. WJDN ‘Great Britain’ (2009); White Polish; male
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaaTCgRb26o

7. Feat, Flex & Zaf ‘Giving Me Stare’ (2010); Bangladeshi; male
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOXG7vz_sDo

8. Shadia Mansour: ‘Roha Bala Raj3a’ (2010); Palestinian; female
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5Qlb9Zxq-4

9. Young B: ‘Champion’ (2011); Somali; male
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aog53j74zts&NR=1

10. Tekmill ‘Can Pazarı’ (2011); Turkish; male:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJnr3DV6Q14

11. Oxxxymiron ‘Russky Cockney’ (2011); White Russian; male:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM-pggWuC1k

12. Professor Green ‘Jungle’ (2011); White English Working Class; male:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLfEU5lelUM

13. Shay D ‘The Other Side Chicks’ (2012); Iranian; female:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOetG8s1UjU

14. Native Sun ‘Legacy’ (2012); African (Mozambique); African-Caribbean; male/female:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hfNf85ptlg

15. Awate ‘Austerity’ (2013); Saudi-Arabian; male:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7dC5eNJloY