The 0161 rap gap: the marginalisation of Black rap musicians in Manchester's live music scene

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Abstract

Focusing on Manchester, the largest city in the north of England, this paper explores why and how Black rap practitioners have been excluded from performing and promoting rap music in its city centre during the last 20 years. Discussing the intersecting factors of policing of venues and racial bias and class stigma among Manchester's venue owners and promoters, while also scrutinising the city's neoliberal urban expansion and gentrification, the paper analyses the ways in which Black rappers and practitioners have been marginalised but also how they have attempted to resist and overcome these conditions. Drawing on cultural studies, critical race theory and urban geography, while employing qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews, this paper builds on existing research on the marginalisation of Black rap musicians and promoters. It builds on and moves beyond the scholarly emphasis on the policing of rap genres in London to argue that discrimination faced by Black rap practitioners extends far outside the capital and is part of a wider problem of racial capitalism of which policing is but one agent.

Introduction

Rap is the most streamed music genre in the US (MRC Data 2020), while in the UK, titles classified as rap and hip hop accounted for over a fifth of all UK singles consumption in 2020 (British Phonographic Industry 2020). And yet, rap music, both performed live and played by DJs, is regularly policed and shunned by music venue promoters and owners. With much of musicians' earnings continuing to come from playing live (Hesmondhalgh *et al.* 2021), this exclusion and discrimination[1] towards rap and Black rap musicians and practitioners especially puts livelihoods at risk and stunts the development of vital local music scenes.

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[1] 'Discrimination is generally understood as biased behaviour, which includes not only actions that directly harm or disadvantage another group, but those that unfairly favour one's own group (creating a relative disadvantage for other groups)' (Allport 1954, p. 51).

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Many scholars have focused in on this discrimination and the policing of rap, particularly in London (Street 2012; Bramwell 2015; Fatsis 2018, 2019; Ilan 2020; Scott 2020; White 2020), describing the ways in which rap music and its practitioners are shut down, both in music venues, such as via the Metropolitan Police Services' Form 696, or online, via the taking down of drill music videos. Mancunian Black rap musicians, promoters and DJs face similar problems. This is well illustrated by their scant representation in Manchester's city centre music venues. For example, successful Manchester rapper Bugzy Malone has performed in the city only seven times since 2015. In turn, local rappers such as Sleazy F Baby are forced to the margins of the city centre (Rymajdo 2018), while Manchester's biggest promoters such as the Warehouse Project and Parklife Festival either omit local Black rap acts from their lineups or host them on their smallest stages such as The Valley and Temple (stages on which the groups Levelz and have played between the years 2017 and 2019). Indeed, while Parklife festival made some improvements in this respect in 2021 with two Black and mixed race Mancunian artists (Abnormal Sleepz and Meekz Manny) playing the main stages, in comparison with how many other acts performed, including rap acts, this appears to be a tokenistic gesture.

However, not much academic attention has been given to regional rap music scenes, let alone the ways in which they are policed and marginalised. A potential reason for this in places like Manchester is that they have not traditionally been seen as rap hotbeds, despite the fact that the city has its own grime scene, and more recently, Bugzy Malone and Aitch have enjoyed national success. The lack of acknowledgement of the rap scene in Manchester stems partly from the fact that other music genres have been dominant, with strong associations with club culture and indie music, via the legacy of the Hacienda nightclub, 'Madchester' and bands like The Smiths, Happy Mondays and Oasis. Indeed, Manchester's municipal bodies, nightclubs, museums, art galleries and tourist shops continue to capitalise on this legacy, with exhibitions, films, street names and memorabilia still celebrating 'Madchester'.

This paper addresses this scholarly neglect of Manchester's live rap scene. It is based on semi-structured interviews with seven rappers, DJs, promoters and event producers conducted between June 2021 and September 2021. Respondents were identified by the authors, who both work in Manchester's music and culture scene, because they were established music industry practitioners in Manchester, some still currently active on the Manchester scene at the time of interview and others who were involved in the last 20 years, but have now either moved out of Manchester or are no longer pursuing rap music-related careers. Many of the respondents had or have multiple careers within the Manchester rap scene, such as being a rapper and promoter. Aged between 26 and 42 at time of interview, all interviewees identified as Black or mixed heritage; six identified as male, and one identified as female. As discussed below, they have all experienced police harassment and/or discrimination related to booking venues on the Manchester music scene firsthand. The article also goes on to consider how these Black and mixed race rappers and practitioners have tried to circumvent their lack of opportunities, to foster successful careers in spite of the discrimination they have faced. We conclude by offering some recommendations for future policy, to make Manchester's live music spaces more welcoming to Black rap performers and practitioners, and to take positive action to mitigate against racism and foster a level playing field, thus creating a richer and more credible musical infrastructure in the city.

From this analysis, the paper will demonstrate how the Black rap scene suffers from a lack of opportunity to thrive, resulting from racialised capitalism and racialised policing. Two determinative trends are exemplified in Manchester, typical of other urban centres but perhaps particularly acutely pursued in Manchester: an aggressive policy of urban gentrification leading to new and morphing forms of racially inflected social exclusion that impacted on live music venues and performers in tandem with endemic discrimination and the lack of accountability of the Greater Manchester Police. These added to the distinctly white-dominated legacies of Madchester to produce compounded processes of racialised exclusion. However, although the prejudicial regulation and exclusion of Black rap by police and venue owners have heavily thwarted the development of Manchester's rap music scene, artists and promoters have continued to find ways to subvert – although not yet to transform – these unequal and racist dynamics.

Policing and prosecuting rap in the UK

Music of Black origin has for years suffered at the hands of institutional racism in the UK (Fatsis 2019), including the notable early example of the Jamaican sound systems which first came into popularity in the 1950s. Consisting of homemade sound systems that would travel the country, sound system culture was characterised by battle clashing and showcased reggae talent (Yates 2019). However, clashes with the police at sound system events became more frequent, demonstrating the covertly racialised police practice of censorship towards Black Britons and Black sound. When grime, a future sounding genre, emerged from London's inner city in the early 2000s, it became a new central target of the police (White 2017; Bramwell 2015; Elliott-Cooper 2021).

In 2005, the Metropolitan Police Service launched risk assessment Form 696, apparently triggered by two shooting incidents that took place near to garage music events (BBC News 2006). The form became a key instrument in the suppression of grime's growth in London (Bramwell 2015), resulting in the police disproportionately targeting Black artists and shutting down venues where the main audience was Black. Form 696 required venue owners or promoters to declare the details of promoters, artists, DJs, music style, the ethnicity of the crowd and who the target audience was (Bernard 2018). The form drew criticism for its racist tone, resulting in the ethnicity and music style questions being removed in 2008 (Bernard 2018). However, the revised form still covertly targeted grime artists and events where the audience was predominantly Black, pushing certain genres of Black origin to the margins. As cultural studies scholar Brar states: 'In this sense what Form 696 did so effectively was to step into a wider circuit of racialised policing which, for a number of years, has cultivated a pernicious relationship to Black music in London, and by extension to impinge on the ability of Black populations in the city to move freely without the threat of state duress' (Brar 2021, p. 120).

Censorship practices became tighter when Peckham rapper Giggs had his tour cancelled after the police consulted with promoters, advising that there would be potential risks if the events had taken place (Jonze 2010). Giggs was under surveillance from Operation Trident, a police initiative set up in 1998 to tackle gun crime within Black communities in London (Laville 2012). In his paper, 'From gigs to Giggs, politics, law and live music', John Street (2012) draws on the work of Paul Chevigny to explore the complex politics of live music. Regulatory judgements are

made on who has the 'right' to perform live music (Street 2012). Street notes, 'Under the law, the police could not enforce a cancellation, but in advising venues to drop their booking on the grounds of the risk it represented, they exercised a de facto ban' (Street 2012, p. 580). Critics of the police argued that they were unfairly targeting grime artists, while the police claimed that they simply offered 'advice' to the venues. However, the venues commented that the advice given to them was unequivocal, given their relationships with the authorities. Street (2012) argues that little focus was given to the argument of freedom of expression, particularly since the UK does not have a first amendment law, and such a legal claim within this context would have likely been unsuccessful (Street 2012, p. 581). What this suggests is the police acted to pressure and intimidate club venues in order to cancel live rap acts in a manner that has correlatives, as we see below, in Manchester.

The censorship practices that have been put in place to police and control grime and more recently drill echo the myth of Black criminality (Gilroy 1982), resulting from moral panic surrounding the 'muggings' crisis following the increased visibility of young Black people in England in the 1970s and 1980s (Hall 1978, 2013; Patel 2018). Constructed as a 'Black crime' (Hall *et al.* 1987), the 'muggings' crisis became associated with young Black men, which encouraged and justified the intensive policing of Black communities at the time (Elliott-Cooper 2021; Warmington 2014), while also shaping the negative perceptions and public anxieties towards Black and ethnic minorities (Patel 2018). A longstanding history of the policing of Black people sadly remains prominent when we observe how Black rap and Black music practitioners in the UK are met with repackaged racialised bias from police authorities in order to censor and control their community, suggesting how the perception of Black people is still associated with being criminal by default, resulting in attempts to regulate these groups that are seen as 'innately criminal' (Williams and Clarke 2018). Most of this scholarly and press focus on the policing of rap is connected to London, but is the story the same in regional rap scenes, and specifically in the UK's third largest city, Manchester?

Policing of rap in Manchester

Evidence from the Macpherson Report in 1999 following the death of Stephen Lawrence exposed the police's deeply entrenched institutional racism (Gayle 2021). Policing in Manchester specifically has also demonstrated a strained relationship with the city's ethnic minority communities. In 1998, Greater Manchester Police were described as racist by then Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (GMP) David Willmott (Scheenhout 2013). Speaking at a public enquiry regarding the failure of the police in the Stephen Lawrence case, Willmott told the public, 'We live in a society that has institutional racism and Greater Manchester Police is no exception. We accept that we have a problem with some overt racism, and certainly that we have a problem with internalised racism' (Marks 1998). In July 2021, GMP published their 'Achieving Race Equality Report', drawing upon previous unpublished data from April 2020 to March 2021. The report exposed that people who were racialised as Black are 5.3 times more likely to have been stopped and searched, 4 times more likely to have force used against them and 5.7 times more likely to have a taser used against them (GMP 2021). Moreover, following a 2013 published report for Manchester City Council, Williams (2014) found that most of

those listed on the police 'gang' list were not involved in serious crime or violence, including 40 who were gang registered but had no previous convictions and a further 39 with no convictions during the 3 years prior to the study (Williams 2014). What becomes clear throughout the history of the GMP is that the racialised and discriminatory attitudes that are held towards ethnic minorities in Manchester remain. This becomes evident in the respondents' reflections about their experiences performing at and running live music events.

Indeed, four of our interviewees reported experiencing direct police interference with their events. Gaika is a rapper from Brixton who came to Manchester for university in 2001 and during this time and in the 12 years that followed spent time promoting for various nightclubs in the city. He describes several instances of police requests for paperwork akin to Form 696 to be filled in, police visits and being called into police stations, as well as club events he was hosting or promoting being shut down. Many of these instances of police intervention took place when he was working in the Baby Grand nightclub between the years 2007 and 2010 as its general manager. These experiences shaped how Gaika and his co-founders ran the Murkage Club, a club night that ran from 2008 to 2016, which evolved into a music group. 'Later on, as Murkage [the club night], we would stand our ground', he said. 'That directly came from me having that experience at a different level in places like Baby Grand or Circle [nightclub] or Relish [nightclub]. Because of that, when they came with [paperwork akin to Form] 696 for us to fill out, we just wouldn't fill it out, and you know, [as a result] we would get visits'.

In turn, DJ Silva, a Manchester DJ with 30 years' experience playing Black music genres, including rap, described more covert policing when it came to his performances in the city centre. He mentioned how police would speak to promoters and venue owners who had booked him to play, to warn them that his audience would cause trouble. 'My name was brought up in Manchester city centre. They would literally go to the clubs, to the club owners, and say, "You know, there may be trouble that's going to happen at this event"'. Comparing how many times his events resulted in police callouts to the daily callouts that he says take place in nightclubs frequented by predominantly white audiences, including events in the city's Gay Village, DJ Silva felt that his performances were unfairly targeted and/or penalised. He blamed this on a mix of racism and class-based stigma, saying the area where you were born or grew up played a part. 'It's down to the colour of your skin', DJ Silva said. 'I'm from Old Trafford. Maybe if I was born in a more affluent area, Altrincham, Sale, I might not have that stigma put on me, but because I am actually from the so-called "hood", the so-called "ghetto", what I [am assumed to] do is always bringing my people from there and it's going to cause trouble'. Respondents discussed how police interference and the resulting discrimination at music venues and nightclubs had an adverse effect on the careers of either themselves or their peers. 'Let's talk about Rio, let's talk about Wrigz, all those guys, they couldn't even really do shows in the city. They'd come to me as a booker, as a promoter, as a venue operator, they'd come to me and say we wanna do this and that party, or this show, and we'd try to do it and the police would slap you with [paperwork akin to Form] 696 or they'd just say, "We're going to shut you down." They'd find out who the owners are and terrify them', relayed Gaika.

A clear indication of racial disparity can be seen in the treatment of rap music DJs, with Black DJs facing stigma and exclusion for playing the same highly popular

Black music genres during their sets as their white counterparts. Some Black practitioners seemed to be so aware of this racist construct that they knew not to be visible to venue owners when proposing an event to them, as DJ Silva discussed when describing putting on an event at city centre venue Impossible, where it was his white business partner who dealt with the venue to secure the booking. He described believing this to be the best strategy, also owing to the fact he had experienced racial discrimination at the hands of the venue's bouncers. 'I know if it was me that went to them, it wouldn't be happening. You have to get certain faces to go, put in front, and let them do the talk, which is wrong, totally wrong, I don't like it, but that's how it is in this society', he said. DJ Silva's experience demonstrates how ordinary internalised racism remains apparent within the lens of society. It also demonstrates how the myth of Black criminality is instrumental in the Black experience when navigating live music venues. In this concept, Black music practitioners are faced with racial boundaries first, that become reflected in their music, preventing them from receiving bookings to play within the city centre. DJ Silva explained that in Manchester's Northern Quarter, white DJs are booked in bars and clubs to play the same popular rap music as Black DJs play to largely white crowds. This discrimination affects the opportunities of Black rappers and practitioners to perform, opportunities that are further circumscribed by pro-capitalist urban development policies pursued in Manchester since the 1990s.

Urban change and racial exclusion in Manchester's music scene

Compounding this discrimination are other factors affecting Black rap musicians and practitioners such as challenges within the live music sector in the UK and beyond as it faces increasing regulation (Terrill *et al.* 2015), detrimental planning and policy decisions (Cohen 2013) and economic challenges (van der Hoeven and Hitters 2020). As argued by Terrill *et al.*, 'Business licensing, liquor licensing, transportation planning and parking, as well as land-use planning all have an impact on the health of the music economy' (Terrill *et al.* 2015, pp. 13–14) and reports such as those produced by the Music Venue Trust suggest that many venues find existing regulations too restrictive (Music Venue Trust 2015), while noise complaints restrain venues in areas that have experienced rapid urban expansion or gentrification (van der Hoeven and Hitters 2020, p. 37). Within the UK, studies reveal that it is the small to medium-sized venues which suffer the most from such factors (Behr *et al.* 2020, p. 502; Holt and Wergin 2013, p. 19) and as summarised by Arno van der Hoeven and Erik Hitters in their review of contemporary developments in the live music sector, these changes are most detrimental to the artists who play such venues (van der Hoeven and Hitters 2020, p. 38).

One scholar who has seen this firsthand is sociologist Joy White, who describes how local authorities' desire to attract more affluent demographics into the area has pushed music, and specifically the genres of grime and drill, to the margin in her home borough of Newham in East London. 'In a bid to make Newham a place where people will choose to live, work and stay, the public locations where music was made are now categorized as places of fear and deficit. The young people who occupy these spaces are rendered as troublesome and become subject to control and surveillance', she argues in her book *Terraformed* (White 2020, p. 54). Making a similar point about the prioritisation of certain music genres to the

detriment of others within the context of gentrification, Sara Cohen writes about the exclusion of rap genres when Liverpool became the European Capital of Culture in 2008. Interviewing musicians who drew maps of their music making in the city, Cohen found that while rock musicians' maps were rich with venues they have played or spaces associated with their contemporaries within their scenes, 'live public performance venues were generally absent from the maps produced by grime and hip-hop musicians, who commonly complained that they and their music were excluded from the city center by those who managed and promoted those venues' (Cohen 2013, p. 34).

Similarly, in the last two decades, Manchester city centre (here understood as encompassing also the areas of Castlefield, Ancoats and the Green Quarter) has also undergone rapid expansion and gentrification. The 1996 IRA bomb provided opportunity for the redevelopment of the city centre, when 49,000 square metres of prime retail space were destroyed (Massey 2005), while successful bids for the 2000 Olympics and 2002 Commonwealth Games propelled mass property development and the creation of new spaces of leisure and consumption, without commensurate social housing (Wallace 2015; Pieri 2018). In turn, in the city's Northern Quarter, urbanisation and gentrification came following changes which took place after the erection of the Arndale Centre, a shopping mall built in the 1970s. More recently, Castlefield and Ancoats have been transformed by drastic regeneration as dilapidated warehouses were converted into residential property, while many of its working class residents living in social housing were moved on to make room for new residential and leisure developments.

At the heart of these transformations were partnerships between local government and private companies, as the city began to operate in line with the neoliberal policies of then prime minister Tony Blair (Carter 2012; Wallace 2015; Pieri 2018; Bratchford 2020). The aim was to rebuild a 'post-industrial city' on the New Labour ideological basis of strategic partnerships 'which embraced public, private and voluntary sectors and professionals and residents' (Blakeley and Evans 2013, pp. 109–10). In 'Business goes local: dissecting the "business agenda" in Manchester', Peck and Tickell argue that these partnerships were selective and unbalanced (1995, p. 56), leading to exclusions of women, Black people, community groups and the interests of other racially minoritised groups. Indeed, according to the 2011 Census, the city centre's residents were largely white, with a lower number of residents of mixed ethnicity and a much lower number of Black residents than the rest of Manchester – only 2.4% *vs.* the 8.6% average for the city (Office for National Statistics 2011). The change could also be felt in the social spaces of the city centre as bars, restaurants and music venues began to reflect the tastes of the new young, middle class residents who moved in, becoming 'opaque instances of exclusion' (Sibley 1995). Much as White found in Newham, a consequence of this was that the previous inhabitants and users of the area were rendered invisible, with the newly arrived inhabitants' presence 'replacing and displacing local narratives and local autonomy' (Bratchford 2020, p. 144). Scholars Blakeley and Evans go one step further to not only point out that the partnerships were unbalanced but that, in Manchester, partnerships as an urban regeneration policy did not work, creating exclusionary and socially segregated urban spaces (Blakeley and Evans 2013, p. 193).

Perhaps because of this success of one dominant partner over others, with the passing of time in Manchester, a small select group of white men have risen to

notable positions of power. Indeed, many of those involved in the urban regeneration projects have been given key roles in the city. For example, Urban Splash developer Tom Bloxham became the Chancellor of Manchester University and was awarded an MBE (Milestone 2016), while Tim Heatley, who features in 2020 BBC documentary *Manctopia: Billion Pound Property Boom*, was chosen by Manchester mayor Andy Burnham as the chairman of his charity A Bed Every Night. Milestone (2016) argues that the danger of such elevations from a narrow demographic of people within a city results in a culture where that demographic prevails across other facets of society, such as men dominating the creative industries in Manchester, to the detriment of women. To this point can be added one argued by social scientist Elisa Pieri in 'Urban futures and competing trajectories for Manchester city centre' for *Realising the City: Urban ethnography in Manchester*. Referring to the sociology of expectation, she argues that the built environment 'provides a powerful material and visual conduit for futures envisaged for such spaces . . . promoting certain activities and uses of space and discouraging others from taking place' (Pieri 2018, p. 132). For example, the built environment of Salford's Media City 'visually replaces the dereliction associated with deindustrialisation and strongly suggests the presence of creative industries and of the kind of economic and media activity that would connect this area with other global media circuits' (Pieri 2018, p. 132). The dominance of certain demographics in Manchester city centre and in positions of power in the bodies that preside over it, coupled with the specific connotations of the changing landscape and thus the city's vision for its future, see no notable place for Black people – and by extension, their culture. Rap music, as made and performed by them, has little place to thrive in Manchester.

That this is the case is illustrated by what the respondents told us. 'There isn't anywhere for the whole of Black music', DJ Silva said. 'There was, but they shut it down and told us we can't have it. It was in the heart of the city, in the heart of Moss Side, the Zion Centre, and they've just done so many things to stop events there. People have also gone into town to buy venues and they've raised the price, doubled the price even, business rates, to make sure they can't have a venue in town. They [local government] pull every single stunt, as soon as they hear R&B, hip hop, dancehall, the police come down like a tonne of bricks, like we are terrorists, basically'. This point was echoed by Oneda, a Manchester rapper active on the Manchester scene periodically over a number of years, but performing and releasing music consistently since 2018, who pointed to a lack of Black venue managers and promoters operating in the city centre: 'I don't know where the Black promoters are, putting things on. I don't get any Black promoters booking me', she said. In turn, Tunde Adekoya, a London hailing cultural events producer and artistic director of Big People Music, an agency producing artistic, cultural and music transformation projects worldwide, who came to Manchester in 2007 for university, described having his event cancelled at the last minute by the owners of nightclubs such as Relish (a 2007 opened restaurant-cum-nightclub within the Great Northern Warehouse): 'We've had instances where venues have kind of shunned us based on discrimination and prejudice. Even though we had it programmed in, someone overturned it'. More recently, Adekoya described experiencing objections to a planned Street Party in Moss Side by the local authority, who must first approve such an event. 'You realise how much people are not supportive of that kind of thing. It's almost like they do it to kind of find out what you're about', he said. However, as highlighted by DJ Silva, a lack of Black venue owners and promoters

does not mean that rap and other Black music genres are not played in the city centre. 'I've seen white DJs playing R&B and hip hop, and [that's when] it's fine', he said, echoing the sentiment of other respondents.

Not only Black Mancunian promoters and DJs but also Black patrons are subject to profiling and expulsion. For example, Sleazy F Baby, a Rusholme hailing hip hop and trap artist formerly known as Wordz, who started his career in 2013, described the racial bias he experienced as a Black man trying to get into venues as a patron. 'Being a young Black man – we can't even get in the club. As it is, we've gotta line up with a girl or be in twos or whatever, there's no way. I feel like they already have that prejudice'. Danny Fahey (previously known as the rapper Fallacy, active from 1995 to 2013 and affiliated with Murkage), a director of the creative agency Thirty Pound Gentleman who is from South London and moved to Manchester in 2003, also described a hostile environment for Black patrons. Discussing the Pressure nightclub, which operated between the years 2003 and 2006 and was located on the High Street opposite the Arndale Centre, he described a hostile environment in and around the club, which he characterised as being one of the only venues in the city centre to play genres like garage, grime and drum 'n' bass, and catering to Black patrons. 'It was a venue that was sur-rounded by a construction cage', he remembered of the nightclub. 'It was impossible to queue up outside of. When you did finally get inside, you had to go through a turnstile that was floor to ceiling like a football turnstile and if you were a paying customer, you'd have to pay your money to somebody that was in a kiosk behind a two-way mirror. You didn't know who that person was, but they could see you. Then you had to look at a security camera, face on and in profile, and only then could you get into the club', he recalled. Fahey described attending the venue as 'a manifestation of all of the stress that you would have had to go through just to have a night out as a young Black person looking for, you know, a bit of your culture in the [city] centre'.

While, as Fahey rightly argues, the effects of such hostility are felt by the whole of the Black community, they especially affect musicians who experience loss of earn-ings or lack of opportunity to develop as an artist as a result of such policies. Birmingham hailing rapper ZZ The Pharaoh who came to Manchester in 2013 for university and joined the rap group Roots Raddix before embarking on a solo career, expressed these effects to be more restricting than direct police harassment. 'There isn't many venues that do cater solely to [live performance of] hip hop, it's always more catered to DJs and disco vibes', ZZ said. The promoters and venue owners that do host emerging rappers tend to do so on lineups which feature a mix of Black music genres. 'It's always like a mix of jazz or soul or there's a live band playing, and then you'll have like a hip hop artist maybe rapping over the bands playing, the instruments in the background or whatever, or there might be just one slot in the night for one hip hop artist and then the rest will be singers or they'll have a longer set', reported ZZ. Similarly, Oneda said, 'There's never just been Black venues where you know that it's just this music being played. We always have to filter into other things, placed in shows with other genres. There's hardly any "just hip hop" shows'. She namechecked BBC Introducing as being an event where she had to perform alongside acts from other genres, including indie and rock, and where journalists writing in promotion of the event singled her out as being a Black performer, while other artists' race and ethnicity were not men-tioned. That hip hop artists often find themselves performing among artists from

other genres, which was echoed by Danny Fahey, who said that rappers would often need to supplement their earnings from rap by taking on associated jobs, such as MCing at drum 'n' bass events.

DJ Silva also complained of a lack of opportunities, comparing the situation in Manchester with London, where he said many more rap artists got to play, much earlier in their careers. 'I've not heard of one venue, unless it was Bugzy Malone, once he got big, or maybe Aitch now, [who have put on emerging rap artists]. In London you can go to little shows at Scala or these other little places and you've got the big artists coming to see the up-and-coming artists and you've got these venues booking these artists to showcase them. It doesn't happen here. But I think that's down to gentrification, the music genre not being accepted in the city centre still, properly, unless it makes them money', he asserted. Oneda also made a similar observation about her career, saying that 'Earlier on, especially when I was a part of [hip hop group] Envy, we did a lot more things in London that we did in Manchester, where people were a lot more receptive than here. Performing in Manchester, you're always met with hard faces'. She laid some of the blame for this hostility towards local rap acts on local DJs, who she said were unwilling to play their music, at least, not until they had found national mainstream success, like Bugzy Malone or IAMDDB. 'I was a bit vexed with some of these DJs and some of them I still am. There is still a lot [of them], where they don't support', she said, while also noting the different attitude to local acts in the capital: 'In London, they champion their artists. They don't wait for them to get big and then play them'. This may risk romanticising the situation in London, but what clearly emerges is that the Manchester scene experiences serious constraints from music venue owners and bookers.

Overall, a convergence of regulation, policy and gentrification, on the one hand, and hostility and discrimination towards Black music genres and Black people on the other, leads to a chronic lack of opportunities for Black rap musicians and DJs in Manchester. The result is that Black rap practitioners face the most extreme challenges when it comes to performing and earning a living from their craft.

Circumventing exclusion and tackling discrimination

In response to these challenges, many of our interviewees have tried to circumvent the exclusionary practices. For example, in response to the lack of interest or outright rejection of the city's grime scene and crews such as Mayhem, Fahey would book young grime artists to perform at arts venues like Contact Theatre and Z-Arts, formerly known as The Zion Arts Centre. 'Mayhem were pretty much blacklisted everywhere. I was one of the only people that would put them on and I would put them on in spaces outside the city centre, because grime had to find itself in unique spaces, especially locally', he recalled. Other grime scene members decided to start their own nights like the one at Alibi (formerly Babaloos) nightclub in Sale. ZZ also discussed putting on his own events as a solution to a lack of opportunities.

Meanwhile, Gaika described strategies for navigating shut downs. 'We'd find a way of putting it back on and argue the case, like, wait a minute, we're students, [co-founder Murkage] Dave's parents are lawyers – they didn't really want it with us, but they did try it', he said. Having a white, middle class, student audience also helped the event evade police attention. 'If we had a Black, working class, not

Manchester University student audience for the first few years, I don't think we would have been able to stay open', remarked Gaika. Another strategy was to create promotional artwork which would suggest theirs was an alternative music event. One way they did this was by using avant garde images and avoiding a gloss finish to their flyers. Intersectional class and race power dynamics are at play, demonstrating these musicians' tactical means of circumventing rather than overcoming discrimination.

For others, the solution has been performing in venues which traditionally catered to indie and rock, or smaller venues, with less experience putting on live music. Sleazy F Baby recounted how he ended up playing rock venue Rebellion, because the owners were simply interested in turning a profit: 'They don't care. They just wanted the doe [money] for the venue, but who would think about booking Rebellion?' DJ Silva told of similar experiences: 'I had to play in the little dingy clubs, starting on Oldham Street at places like Aquarium, or Rocket Bar as it was called, that's Rebellion now, places like that, the little dingy places that not a lot of people would go, 200 or 300 people'. For Tunde Adekoya, that venue was Joshua Brooks, now a well-known and popular nightclub, but in the early 2010s, a struggling one. 'This was before Joshua Brooks was a thing, so we went there and they were just happy that people were gonna come and use the venue', Adekoya recalled.

While praising more inclusion of Black music genres in recent years, Tunde Adekoya described the contradiction of the opportunities the historic discrimination of Manchester's rap scene has resulted in. In the light of the Black Lives Matter movement, organisations are taking steps to be more representative of the city's different communities. The historic lack of people from racially minoritised communities in the roles of bookers and promoters means that he has carved a niche as a programmer of events featuring global majority and ethnic performers. He said, 'I do feel it is a disconnect between the institutions and the communities, and in an ironic way, that almost put me where I am, you know?' He described much of this activity as tokenism, and called for 'changing the genetic makeup of organisations' to include people of Pan African heritage and other minorities in positions of power. 'If you want programming from a particular group of people, then you need it from people that come from the culture. Likewise, I think another step is about getting people to understand that they could be a rapper, MC, event producer or programmer who could eventually run their own venues based on their learned experiences, because they're definitely calling out for more venues run by us, for us', he summed up.

For all the ingenuity and focus of the respondents and some promising constructive changes in attitudes and practices just recently from venues and festivals, we believe policy change is needed to bring about the level of transformation required to address the problem of exclusion and discrimination as described throughout this article. Indeed, to make Manchester live music spaces more welcoming for Black music practitioners, we suggest that venues and festival organisations need to adhere more rigorously to diversity and inclusion protocol, thereby working more proactively against racialised unconscious bias and police institutional racism as well as individual racist practices. This will help to dismantle racial attitudes that stakeholders may hold towards Black music practitioners. We also suggest that leadership programmes be created and advertised to aspiring Black promoters as this will provide more Black music practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary so that they can navigate the music business within the city and potentially

encourage practitioners to own their own venues. This will bridge the disconnect that exists between institutions and local communities within the city, along with encouraging more creation of opportunities. Such moves would create a critical mass of Black culture and Black cultural knowledge within the city for music practitioners within and between local communities. Major Manchester festivals such as Parklife and Manchester International Festival should go further than they already have to create a Black advisory board, where they work with local Black music business leaders in the programming and producing of these festivals, so Black programmers and practitioners do not feel they have been employed in a tokenistic gesture. However, we believe that even with these changes, in order for true equality to be achieved, deeper structural change is needed to reverse the gentrification trends, the extreme and complex inequalities in the city and the discriminatory cultures in the police and among venue owners.

Conclusion

To our knowledge, Manchester did not officially have a Form 696. However, our research has demonstrated that through institutionally racialised police attitudes and policies towards ethnic minorities regionally, Black live music events and Black music practitioners in the Manchester scene have faced major discriminatory challenges. This has contributed to vital creative practice and enterprise being heavily constrained economically and geographically. Our findings suggest that a culture of racism within the police force is exposed through the impact that the police presence has at live music venues where the audience is predominantly Black, resulting in the events being cancelled in comparison with venues where the audiences are predominately white. In turn, this reproduces a logic that Black live music cannot be performed publicly owing to the assumption and anxieties that the music has a capacity for uncontrollable violence, further reinforcing negative stereotypes upon Black music practitioners.

Moreover, the policing and marginalising of rap in Manchester reflects a history of discrimination towards Black sound. Indeed, a lack of venues for Black music practitioners reflects the struggle that Black music faces to survive (Scott 2020), and once compounded by gentrification, leads to further austerity within the Black live music economy, contributing to a minimising of the culture. The gentrification within the city centre acts as a 'whitewashing' of the area, which can be felt among Black rap practitioners. It can also act as a means of control and potentially reaffirms that Black people are objects that need to be socially controlled (Williams and Clarke 2018).

Although the racism and exclusion of live rap culture in London is well known and has been widely documented, the situation is equally as bad in Manchester, and probably other urban regions too. Moreover, because London has an extensive Black and musical infrastructure, there has been concerted push back against state policing and regulation that has opened substantial space for rap live performance, despite the wide moral panic and punitive state strategies. Manchester has had far less potential to mount concerted opposition to its marginalisation, leading to a vicious cycle whereby state repression of the scene weakens its power which in turn further weakens its ability to combat prejudicial business interests and state repression. Things are starting to change a little, but much more needs to be done regarding

the complex and profound racialised inequalities in Manchester, to fully enable Manchester's vital Black rap culture to realise its potential.

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