Article

Negotiating Black urban screen identities: Recognition, audio-visual authenticity and Black youth cultures in London

Clive Chijioke Nwonka [iD]
University College London, UK

Abstract

The popular Black urban filmic and televisual genre is a mode of narrating Black British identity where we observe interactions between a range of social processes that register an impact at the aesthetic level; this being Black urban youthhood as an audio-visual culture and the vernacular expressions of 'realness' as its specific cultural value. However, other kinds of audio-visual practices have become central to the way these texts register some claim on Black authenticity, the images and sounds of Black identity offered by the subcultural products of grime, rap, and urban music performance. These practices also reveal the bi-directional production of forms of social knowledge, representation and recognition within the urban text. From one perspective, a counter-construction of the Black urban existence and from another, the alignment with the very criminalised hegemonies of Black urban identity. This article interrogates how different regimes of recognition are embedded in both Black youth's understandings of their representations on screen, its influence on their behaviour, and how the policing of Black urban music forms provides a vector through which the authenticity of audio-visual representations of 'Black' criminality can be both nuanced and accentuated through the urban text's use of music in its various iterations.

Keywords

Race, crime, film, grime music, drill music, rap music, Black identity, youth culture, media

Introduction

The question of representation, race and film and television has been an important yet still under-examined area of British cultural production (Nwonka, 2021; Saha, 2018; 2021). The Black urban film and television corpus, which emerged in the early 2000s as a means of the fictitious but 'real' depiction of the contemporary Black urban experience is a composite of interactive but sometimes

---

Corresponding author:
Clive Chijioke Nwonka, University College London, Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT, UK.
Email: c.nwonka@ucl.ac.uk

competing industrial, cultural and social agendas. It is also a highly affective genre of both mimesis and non-linearity. Its production is informed by the racial representation agendas in the UK screen industries - where such texts have been advanced and celebrated as an important source of cultural identification amongst a negated and marginalised Black urban identity and genre (Nwonka, 2021, 2023). However, the popularising of the genre's representations of Black urban existence and its attendant depictions of violence and criminality, just as the Black music forms that they interact with, have also been an extractive source of contemporary but historically ballasted and racially ossified moral panics. These are understood here as a mode of hegemony as analysed by Hall et al. (1978). Whilst there is a plethora of both intellectual and critical perspectives on the forms of Black cultural production (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 2004; Saha, 2021), the Black urban text as an indexical Black pathology can be conveyed in simple parlances as the reproduction of ossified and highly recognisable narratives of Black youth violence. Within dominant media and political discourses, such narratives enjoy an unfiltered and uncritical cultural proliferation that in turn produce harmful negative images that are internalised and performed by the very same social milieu. I argue that such implied indexical correspondences between the Black urban text (as fictitious imagery) and the re-enactments of its criminal *mise en scene* have been assumed rather than explored, pointing to the significance of qualitative perspectives on the meanings of Black urban textuality and how such representations are taken up and registered by its textual constituents and imagined audiences.

My use of the term 'urban' here, as noted and approached in other studies (Nwonka, 2023; White, 2016), points to its emergence in the early 2000s as a palatable but equally reductive and depoliticised industrial metonym to refence Black, working-class identity. This is a hegemonic term in that it became the all-encompassing descriptor for Black cultural production. Given that the representational imperatives of accuracy and fidelity have been firmly established as part of the Black urban corpus, such an organic claim to Black urban authenticity is also aggregated by other mediums and textual forms within the audio-visual sphere that attempt to augment its Black*ness* as 'realness'. Like Gilroy (2004), I view such developments through the lens of the unrelenting and inchoate persistence of postmodernity. Specifically, the glacial subsuming of Black music within audio-visual modes of interaction, and how its importance as a mode of Black communalism has surrendered its position to the commodifying logics of visuality and 'video-based simulations,' which for Gilroy retain 'no connection whatever to these cultural forms or to the people who have developed them' (214). However, where I reach a point of slender disunity with Gilroy's reading is in the hierarchical structure of the audial/visual nexus, or dyad if you will, showing how the capitalistic instincts of Black visual culture came not to eclipse the purely audial modes of connection, meaning making, and impact, but assist it. For the British Black urban text, its audio-visual continuity with Black urban music in rap, grime, and drill renders such music as an essential cohabitor with the neoliberal imperatives of Black popular culture (Hall, 1993), where Black urban music has come to function as an underwriting guarantor for the more valuable elements of both Black urban authenticity and crucially, representation (Nwonka, 2023).

At the base of the idea of an uncritical acceptance and internalisation of Black urban text's images of 'authenticity' is the question of recognition, and the attendant politics of recognition that point to the involvement and application of certain cultural artifacts, discourses, ideologies and industrial imperatives in the negotiation of identification. I accept that, even at this nascent point in my analysis, there is a danger in conflating what scholars have argued are the separate impulses of identification and recognition (Honneth, 1995; Ikäheimo, 2002; Taylor, 1992). However, it may be

that the public reactions that accompany Black screen representation's presence as a sharp development from lack (the absence of representation) to excess (the hypervisibility of the most hegemonic forms of representation) (Nwonka, 2023) allow for a more cogent engagement with such debates that interpret recognition *as* identification, drawing on the theoretical interventions by Paul Ricoeur (2005). Here, the taxonomic frames of recognition asserted by Ricoeur—these being recognition as identification, mutual recognition and the recognizing of the 'self' (16), based on his identification of recognition's normative centre as constructed upon Hegel's thinking of mutuality—become apt for the exploration of the contours of Black recognition found in the Black authorship of urban music. This is a term I use in *reluctant* acceptance of its hegemonic function as a commercial pseudonym for Black working-class identity.

It is the unexamined considerations of the influential spheres of the Black urban text as a site of recognition and realness that form the key analytical questions that concern this article. The key aims of this article is to explore the process of Black recognition amongst young people through popular Black urban films as processed thorough PSB and mainstream production contexts that use UK rap/grime/Drill music (alongside other filmic devises) to make a claim to the Black authentic, representational, and value, but are legitimised as such by specific racialised frames of representation and circulation that are concealed by the often highly celebratory, essentialist and valorised nature of the films within official publics. However, such texts are also subject by the same official publics to forms of denigration that renders the texts, and their reception, as ballast within a number of paradoxes. Firstly, I want to consider how the transition of both the thematic concerns of the Black urban text to a broader form of Black visual culture that relies on both a claim to cultural recognition and authenticity has established a convergence within Black urban music, visual culture and subsequently, a body of race fictions. Secondly, I evaluate these filmic and televisual examples of the popular Black Urban text as a broad and capacious generic corpus informed by the hegemonic understanding of Black urban popular cultural products as representative of a non-political racial existence, the relationship between the urban genre and its aestheticisation of discourses on youth moral decay, and the instrumentalist agency of these narratives in constructions and (de)constructions of the nation's vision of urban multiculture (Nwonka, 2023). To this end, Black urban film and the audio-visual cultures of rap, grime, and drill are both subjected to various forms of explicit and implicit anti-Black policing (Elliot Cooper, 2021; Fatsis, 2019a). Finally, I explore the validity and efficacy of the popular urban text's claim to authenticity, representation, and recognition through a novel qualitative analysis of how young Black people in London think about and respond to the images of Black urban criminality. Here, I consider the augmenting nature of Black urban music as a critical context to problematise the popular Black urban text as a secure form of counter facticity and knowledge. In doing so, I seek to argue that a more expansive understanding of the impact of the Black urban text on the Black audience reveals a Black urban audio-visual sphere structured by nuance and contradiction. The reliance of these texts on Black urban music performs a powerful and affective augmenting function in the films' claims to Black authenticity.

The Black urban text

There is a particular set of entanglements to be observed in the production, the circulation, and the popular reception of the Black British urban text. The analysis of these texts remains both reductive and extremely obscure in the various scholarships on British screen culture. The genre

can broadly be defined as the screen representations of Black, working-class youths living in the inner-city housing estates and urban locales, where violent internecine criminality is foregrounded as a natural facet of the Black life-world (Nwonka, 2023; Nwonka, 2021, Saha, 2018). Indeed, the marginality of Black urban texts and the subsequent reliance on public funding is sufficient cause to assert that Black film is bound within a triangulation of ownership (Nwonka and Saha, 2021). This concept finds its etymology in Stuart Hall's idea of the 'relations of representation' (1988) that offered a conceptual framework for describing the Black struggle over its authorship of Black moving images. The fetishist nature of Black representation and the replacing of negative depictions with positive imagery, plus the interdependency created by Black British film's historical reliance on institutional funding through public bodies such as the BBC, Channel Four, and the British Film Institute (BFI), places author, institution and audience within a contestation characterised by a triangular proprietorship. However, rather than such texts' existence within this triangulation being marked by fixity, resolution or settlement, the Black text (and its meanings) remain in perpetual flow, haphazardly pulled into the desires, agendas, and interpretations ascribed by the triangle's three constituents. This is a struggle for both representation and meaning. As a parenthesis to this triangle of ownership, we find that capitalism sits both at centre as the logic propelling Black film across these points of proprietorship, and equally, at the abridging and mediating axis of what is alleged to be the texts' both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic representations of Black identity.

This returns us to the capitalist logics that Black cultural politics demand for cinematic representation must engage with. The idea that Black urban film's depiction of mediacentric narratives of Black, inner-city criminality is the outcome of the concerted production of 'Blackness' argues that the Black urban text, from one perspective, can attend to the Black population's utopian desires but equally to the prevailing language of diversity and inclusion, signalling how the most sensationalist, traumatic, hegemonic and inferential forms of Black representation become most fertile and consensual within a space of representational lack. This frames the analysis of the relationship between authorship, narrative thematics and representation within an ossified set of epidermal relations. This does not mean that we must accept uncritically the idea of Black criminality and gun crime as the ultimate iconic descriptor for Black visual identity. Rather, the Black urban text's Black themes are ideas, images and materials that are socially constructed, ideological, and are rarefied through racial discourses of Black urban gun crime and genetic malevolence. These then become hegemonically structured as the basis for its articulation in filmic and televisual language that, as described by Hall (1988), are by no means secure or guaranteed. This pushes the analysis of Black British film towards the question of ownership, that the description of a Black film implies some degree of cultural *possession*; the proprietorship asserted over the texts by how they produce and achieve a subcultural and racial recognition.

Police, music and the Black audio-visual

A similar claim to Black subcultural recognition and authenticity has been observed through the emergence of grime and drill music as the subject of academic study, which has been approached through various forms of analyses within the entwining fields of sociology, cultural studies, urban geography, visual culture and criminology (Bramwell, 2015; White, 2016, 2020; Fatsis, 2019b). Beyond the general thrust of this research being invested in reading the historical concern with

the lyrical content of grime music and the innovative, creative subcultural practices the genre is both informed by and inspires (James, 2015; White, 2016), we've also observed the evolution of these music forms as an innovative audio-visual culture through the increasing significance, production and circulation of music videos (James, 2020; Nwonka, 2023). However, a negative but somewhat inevitable consequence of the popularising of Black audio-visual music forms has been their increasing use as admissible evidence in criminal prosecutions (Owusu Bempah, 2022a, b). Owusu-Bempah's intervention can be understood as an attempt to implant an empiricist legalistic rigour within a highly significant but nascent analytical paradigm that has seen less scholarly interrogation of the admissibility of rap music videos in criminal procedure in England and Wales than in the US which, Owusu-Bempah notes, has 'a longer history of putting 'rap on trial', and where serious concerns have been raised about the prejudicial and discriminatory nature of this practice' (427).

Owusu-Bempah's analysis of appeal cases reveals a systemic practice in convicting young Black men and boys in London of the most violent of crimes (including gun-related murder) where prosecutions have used both rap music, lyrical content and music videos as evidence against defendants, abetted by the kind of sensationalist media reporting indicative of a moral panic that finds its immediate genealogies in the criminalisation of UK garage music and the discriminatory use of form 696 (Pritchard, 2023). The repertoires of the criminalisation of rap videos demonstrate a racism that has oscillated between its use of evidence in criminal courts to modes of both explicit and implicit policing. This is identified in the redaction of drill music videos from YouTube at the behest of the Metropolitan Police, and the imposing of banning orders under the equally imprecise understanding of the composition and nature of 'Black gangs', 'most manifest in the restricting, for example, of participation in music videos, as well as what artists can rap about' (Owusu-Bempah, 2022b: 429). The impetus of the criminal justice system's racialised architecture's recourse to Black cultural production is motivated in part by both the police and society's inability to dismantle the seemingly ineradicable binds of recognition found by Black youths in the sounds, and now images of rap, grime and drill as a collective Black subcultural expressive practice and creative identity. For within the racial logics of state authority, Black music is the influential soundtrack, the authenticating aesthetic and the evidential preface of an enacted violent Black criminality.

Even in the most capacious of definitions, UK rap, drill and grime music and Black urban film as visual cultures enjoy a number of continuities. Firstly, the *instrumentalism* that characterised PSB investment in the Black urban film genre as a sphere of social intervention is in many ways replicated, perhaps in less institutionally vertical sentiments, in what Owusu-Bempah describes as rap's potential to 'serve as an outlet for creativity and self-expression, facilitate identity development, support emotional intelligence and build self-esteem' (2022b: 428). Secondly, and as shared by both Bramwell (2015) and White (2020), rap, grime and its subgeneric offshoots (such as drill music) can offer a pedagogical value in expressions hitherto untold or marginalised perspectives on the Black youth experience (Fatsis, 2019b). Finally, such audio practices can be understood as possessing a *counter-hegemonic* political imperative in becoming a repository for such identities to challenge certain forms of misrecognition and totalising narratives of Black urbanity, which for Owusu-Bempah renders the genre as a 'an attractive alternative to participation in the criminal exploits that some rap about' (2022b:427). Indeed, the prominence of the subgenre of drill, its lyrical and thematic content and its emergence as a powerful audio-visual culture, accentuate the continuities between music and Black urban film not simply in terms of the indissociability between

both mediums in the use of intertextual screen talent, shared aesthetic principles, and an innate claim to authenticity and realness, but consequently, their subjecting to more ossified and official systems, technologies and institutions of anti-Black racism. Scholars have of course been alive to the historical force of anti-Black racism embedded in the criminalisation of Black youth subcultures, an undiminished mode of racialised oppression that has transcended both social period and cultural form (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 1982, 1987; Nwonka, 2021, 2023; White, 2016). With this in mind, there is little conceptual basis to refuse the assertion that the practice of the criminalisation of grime, rap and drill music serves as a continuation of the criminalisation of young Black people, performed here via the utility of Black audio-visual cultural production in its contemporary use as 'bad character evidence' (Owusu-Bempah, 2022a; Schwarze and Fatsis, 2022).

Despite the interventive value of the above scholarship, given the natural alignment between the urban film text (and its talent) and grime/drill/rap music videos within the broader Black urban audio-visual corpus, the omnipresence of 'Blackness' as their representative abridger, their shared set of aesthetic co-ordinates or how the two mediums are subjected to almost identical denigrative nomenclatures, it is of some surprise that the Black urban film text has yet to emerge as a valuable contribution to the study of the textual properties implicated in the criminalisation of Black men and youths. This is either through the conceptual lens of its position as a source of moral panic, its understanding as a form of Black urban intertextuality and cultural extensivity, or its potential to become vulnerable to the racially invidious technologies of the criminal justice system (Quinn, 2024). Notably, we find value in recent scholarships that have observed the continuities between Black youth music production and the popular filmic and televisual depictions of Black urban existences (Bakkali, 2019; James, 2020). However, such scholarship can be described as offering only a citational engagement with the medium, this primarily being the text's valorising as site of representational indexicality, but neglects an analysis of the Black urban texts more substantive function as a cohabited form of Black audio-visual subcultural production, recognition, and crucially, its accompanying denigration (Nwonka, 2023). In this more concentrated analysis, we find these texts possesses both the intra-diegetic and extradiegetic continuities of Black urban authenticity and recognition. In the specific example of *Top Boy* (2013–2023) and *Supacell* (2024) grime, rap and drill music feature as both intra and extradiegetic narrative components and as their accompanying soundtracks, in the perceptibility of their the fictive narratives of 'on road' culture (Bakkali, 2019) they offer a regional specificity in the aesthetic use and reference to real locations that augment its claim to realness and authenticity. Further, the foregrounding of noted grime and UK rap artists as lead actors in the series (Kano Robinson, Little Simz, Bashy, Santan Dave, Ghetts) furnish the texts with a subcultural embeddedness that firmly ballast filmic and televisual texts within a more capacious Black urban audio-visual culture. Here, Black urban audio-visual culture can be understood as the convergence of creative mediums and forms of cultural production by Black British identities, possessing both commercial and cultural imperatives. These are essentialized as Black cultural value by an alluring but heavily contested claim to authenticity, counter-hegemony, representations of the unrepresented, and 'truth telling'. This is an undifferentiated audio-visual corpus where Black youths can invest emotionally in the spectacle of Black cultural intertextuality (Nwonka, 2023). But equally and inevitably, the source text of both perpetual media fervour and protracted intra-racial perturbation over the legitimacy of *Top Boy's* aesthetic of Black criminality as a singular and celebratory pole of Black representation. And from another perspective, as the product of the voyeuristic desires for images of the pathology of Black youth criminality as held within the white imagination (Andrews, 2013).

Much of what Schwarze and Fatsis (2022) have observed in their analysis of the most per-formative exemplars of drill and grime YouTube videos' ability to 'titillate audiences with lurid imagery of "criminal lifestyles"' and in turn 'attract audiences, increase viewership and generate profit through the criminalisation of the drillers' creative output'(463) can without question or coarseness be identified in the aesthetic codes and applied to the industrial imperatives, however implicit, of the Black British urban text (Nwonka, 2023). Indeed, if an examination of British urban cinema's investment in young Black men reveals a prevailing orthodoxy in which the films are unable to reconfigure the accepted perception of the real, in films such as *Blue Story* (2019), a distinction is found in the genesis of the film's dramatic public role as both an intradiegetic repre-sentation *of* and an alleged extra-textual vessel *for* Black youth criminality. Whilst the narrative conventions that have defined the vast majority of popular urban films have built around an intra-race representation of social decay, the socially antagonistic threat producing the urban film's dramatic conflict now emerges from an external source. Here, urban films retain both conventions and conferred meanings that are associative of the central tenets of the criminalisation of rap, grime and drill videos that prime such texts for their use as easily serviceable race fictions. We find a particularly apt example in the film *Blue Story*, the film by British rapper Rapman (Andrew Onwubolu) and produced by BBC Films and Paramount, which operates firmly within what has been termed the *popular* British urban film genre (Nwonka, 2017, 2023). Here, social life (not exclusively, but predominantly) germane to London's Black youths is narrativized through the recognisable themes of violent conflict and, accompanying this, an educative sermon to both its target demographic and liberal whiteness on the causes and effects of gang culture and knife/gun violence. However, *Blue Story* would become the subject of a protracted and unprecedented mediatised discussion over familiar questions of morality, Black youth criminality and censorship, for upon its release, major cinema chains Vue and Showcase would both withdraw *Blue Story* after claiming up to 100 young people were involved in a mass brawl at a Vue Cinema chain in Birmingham during the film's screening. This resulted in the West Midlands Police making a num-ber of arrests, with Vue claiming there were '25 "significant incidents" in 24 hours involving screenings of the film at its cinemas across the UK' (Bakare, 2019).

It is absolutely correct that Vue's withdrawal of *Blue Story* (and their rationale) should be read as a simple variant of anti-Black policing through textual censorship (Nwonka, 2021), a mode of official cultural erasure that finds an identical register in the censoring of grime and drill music by public service broadcasters (De Lacey, 2022). However, I want to complicate the *simplicity* of our disavowal of the criminal pathologizing of Black youth identity through Black audio-visual prac-tices. This requires a recognition of popular Black visual culture's cohabitation with neoliberalism that both nuances our reading of the dynamics of its production of 'realness' and requires the consideration of *medium specificity*. For the Black urban text possesses particular authenticating conventions that are undoubtedly the outcome of a number of production practices, generic corpuses and curatorial strategies that add value to the films claims to a Black urban realism, cin-ema verité cinematography, generally low-budgeted film productions, and the emphasis placed on representational truth-telling (Forrest, 2020).

Therefore, whilst the negative official framings and the supposed authentic literality of rap, grime and drill pose a more direct and consequential outcome for Black youths in relation to the racial technologies of the criminal justice system through the admissibility of music videos as evi-dence in criminal trials, for the Black urban text, its status as scripted drama renders the genre as the influencing aesthetic of a Black youth criminality. Here, a normalising sphere of violent

performativity that allures both the racialised public imaginary and the Black youth imagination via the cultural legitimacy afforded by the use of public funds in its production, diversity politics and social emancipatory ideals of the mainstream screen industry (Nwonka, 2021, 2023). *Blue Story*, undoubtedly serves as the *urtext* for the empirical observation of how the pathology of young Black men is drawn in both textual reception and cultural perception. For the allegation that underpinned the theatrical banning of the film is that young Black people are specifically afflicted by a racially determined incubus producing an inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish forms of Black urban audio-visual narration as works of fiction or reality (although it should be noted that the very curatorial and marketing strategies used by film institutions that places emphasis on the Black urban texts as an instinctive source of Black cultural value is somewhat reliant on the liminality of this perceptive sphere).

I accept that the analyses undertaken by scholars in the criminalisation of drill music in its visual modes are specifically focused not on the online platforms themselves (YouTube etc) but the drill compilation videos made by drill artists that become the subject of malicious and cursory police monitoring (Ilan, 2020; Schwarze and Fatsis, 2022). However, even the most homespun and coarse productions are contributive in the creation of a sub-industry of Black urban visual culture. Here, such productions display an interchangeability with other mediums and where its authenticity is also constructed upon the generic and cultural verisimilitude of its *own* audio-visual aesthetic of representational truth-telling, albeit composed by differing tonalities, modes of production and production values. The content-sharing spaces of YouTube and online streaming platforms have allowed for an unprecedented circulation never previously enjoyed by Black cultural production. In the case of *Top Boy*, its 2019 recommissioning on Netflix has further solidified the indissociability between the Black urban film text and the very Black music forms that Owusu Bempah (2022a) has identified as essential to the racialised criminalisation of Black subculture and the incarceration of young Black men. This informs an understanding of rap, grime and drill music videos as not just an intradiegetic feature in its soundtracks or augmented through its acting talents drawn from the Black urban corpus, but the extradiegetic incorporation of its most commodifying and alluring element – the representations of Black urban criminality *as* Black visual identity – to within its sphere of social and cultural identification and influence.

Methodology

This article's aim to explore the empirical basis for (over)indexicality between Black urban texts points to the significance of audience studies in analysing how, and by what means and registers, do those who are both depicted and primarily targeted for the consumption of Black urban texts find authenticity and representation in them. But equally, the centrality of rap and grime music as both a narrational device in augmenting a sense of recognition and realness and crucially, the internalisation and performance of the fictitious acts depicted. In this regard, the approach is indicative of what can be understood as the post-structuralist iteration of British Cultural Studies that was concerned with the ideological permeation and impact of television, film and questions of how people and societies respond to such texts (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978; Hall, 1981). This Hallian approach embedded the idea that certain cultural texts possess a limited material existence, function or meaning, until they're processed by a viewer, and the exploration and attendant interrogation of the power structures, often but not exclusively racial, that condition that processing (Hall, 1988, 2002). Building on this,

the centrality of film to this study and the expectation for participants to interpret such texts 'as functions of their life situations and engagements' (Barker, 2012: 189) necessitates an approach that relies on what Forrest (2023) has termed as 'film elicitation'. This approach marries the structure of loose and semi-structured interviews with 'the discursive, polyphonous qualities of the focus group, providing participants with a platform to offer contesting or contrasting readings of a film', and where such methods 'direct participants' attention on visual stimuli, to the focused contemplation of film' (2023: 227). The objective of the group screenings was to understand the ways in which Black youths find recognition and construct meaning through Black urban film, with a particular emphasis on the interpretive materials and social experiences laden within the Black urban audio-visual corpus that the participants draw upon as an organic interpretative framework, and the influence of the Black criminality discourses around them. This places such empirical audience research study approaches drawn from the more cultural studies inflection of film and television studies in dialogue with the ethnographical approaches predominantly found within the sociological analyses of urban mulitculture and Black life (Back, 1996; Campion, 2021), particularly those concerned the experiences of inequality and injustice amongst young Black people (Bakkali, 2019; Joseph-Sailsbury, 2019).

With this in mind, this study's participants were comprised entirely of Black/Black mixed-race youths in London (where all the films and dramas are set). Whilst one accepts that the sample cannot perform as a totalising reading of the reception of the Black urban text, the study does serve as a source of valuable and novel knowledges that assist in the development of an affirmative philosophy for understanding the dynamics of Black textual recognition and the production of authenticity. This is achieved through loose and semi-structured interviews and discussions, both individually and in groups of between 8 and 12, which were conducted between 2021 and 2023 and made use of a range of popular texts that sit within the Black urban film genre. All the participants were known to each other, and group discussions were conducted in the presence of parental or staff/youth worker supervision within formal and organised Black community spaces and youth clubs in Northwest London with participants aged between 16 and 18, with the individual interviews conducted directly with participants aged 18 to 19. There was an equal gender balance across the groups, reflective of how dominant interpretations of the Black urban audio-visual corpus and the 'on road' cultures that populate them have been devoid of and in turn require female perspectives (Bakkali and Chigbo, 2024; Levell et al., 2023). It is undoubtedly the case that my own positionality as a Black academic who grew up on a council estate within a densely Black area within Northwest London (a setting shared with both the participants and the very Black urban texts in question) granted me a particular privilege within such Black community spaces, and such 'insider perspective' emerged as a concerted research methodology (Bakkali, 2019). In practice, and augmented by the familiarity of community centre settings the screenings took place in, this inside privilege manifest in the ability of the participants in displaying no reticence or trepidation in speaking candidly amongst each other and in their own natural cultural/subcultural vernaculars. In correspondence, this allowed for an informality of discussions to achieve a certain horizontality of engagement and communication between myself and the participants.

In-keeping with the film elicitation method advanced by Forrest and Merrington (2021), the study forgoes full screenings for use of film clips that were selected because they captured the key narrative elements, dramatic scenes, themes and aesthetic principles germanane to the genre,

whist providing the participants with a reliable entry point to the film; the clips contain fictive material so central to the criminalised Black urban hegemony. These 'isolating' audience research methods in focusing on specific elements of a text to encourage direct commentary, in effect *anatomising* the film, work to encourage an interpretive disinhibition amongst the participants, and the use of clips as discussion prompts also becomes conducive to the horizontality aims of the study. Indeed, as observed by Forrest, the application of film elicitation, particularly in the use of clips in ballasting the participants within a clear a focal point for 'the discussion within a time limited group' allows for the presence of the researcher to be 'more conspicuous than in more conventional focus group discussions (2023: 227). Further, such a methodology circumvented the analytical orthodoxy found in film audience research that Forrest observes as 'the limitations of a critical consensus which privileges a solely academic account of meaning making in and through film' (225) for a more primal and primitive reading of the texts. These invoke the very generative responses specific to the film elicitation approach, whilst equally providing a degree of mitigation for a participant group devoid of the benefit of formal cineliteracy.

Group discussions and interviews were informed by the viewing of clips from a number of texts—*Top Boy, Bullet Boy, Blue Story, Badman, NW* and *Adulthood/Kidulthood/Brotherhood*—as well as the contextual citing of other films within the Black urban corpus through the use of screenshots and mainstream print media and online responses from Instagram and Twitter. This centred around four interweaving interpretative themes imbricated in the question of reception and meaning: *Authenticity, Recognition, Positive/Negative Representation*, and *Influence*. Whilst a general attempt was made to situate certain texts within each thematic context, the homogenising interchangeability of the texts in both subject matter, theme and iconography meant that certain texts were re-referenced in discussions that were directed towards these differing themes. Whilst the vast majority participants and interviewees had watched all the films in question, some had not. However the over-familiarity with the generic conventions of the films as an intertextual corpus meant we encountered no absence of knowledge about the films under discussion in terms of interpretation and *meaning*.

Black youth perspectives

Dominant Halian theories of recognition argue that the development of human (self) identity is holistically determined by the forms of recognition bestowed upon them from both other immediate subjects of recognition and from society more broadly (Gray, 2013; Hall, 2001). From this reading of recognition as a *conferred* experience, considering the subjectivities of recognising and constructing Black urban identity through the optic of film, television and music as a mass medium where such politics of recognition are negotiated, requires a concern with what is being recognised within a text, but by whom, by what means, and upon which terms. Indeed, the participants were first asked to introduce themselves individually and talk about the ways in which they consume film and its significance in their lives and sense of self, cultural and subcultural identify.

Participants were shown 10 minutes of the opening scenes from both *Blue Story* and *Bullet Boy*, where the film's two protagonists become embroiled in a violent altercation with another set of youths over a clipped windscreen, which results in the aggressor attacking them with a pit bull terrier as they flee the scene. Given the notoriety of *Blue Story*, which they had all watched, there were substantive and unified responses in the group viewings amongst the 16–18-year-olds.

Whilst the participants unanimously agreed that *Bullet Boy* was a form of negative representation, and in turn questioned the plausibility of early scenes which seemed to 'rush to get the gun crime started', others saw this as being accurately reflective of the diurnal flows of living within the inner city. As one participant explained, when asked by another participant if they concurred that the scene was steeped in negative Black portrayal:

> I'm kind of agreeing, yeah. I mean, what's interesting is on the one hand, yeah, it's showing a particular negative experience of being black from the ends. But guess what? We say that it's realistic, though. That's the thing I'm saying, because obviously it's negative, but also, it's real. So, I mean, who's seen scenes like that outside of your house or walking the street? I mean, every day you see people arguing about a minor thing that becomes a big thing.

Another participant returned to *Blue Story* and its authenticity as an outcome of its capacious capturing of the diurnal experiences of Black urban youths:

> Yeah, I think it's realistic because in that time it was a lot of violence against, I think gangs and like the confliction between being a different post code. I think that's when it kind of blew. And with this being powerful, in gaining awareness, everyone's like, this is what happens in the streets, but like not everyone is a part of that life just because of what they look like and that. Like, I just think it's so powerful because it just shows like, the day-to-day life of what people have to go through.

Here, the participant recognised the film's ability to capture recognisable experiences of 'street life' (Bakkali, 2019). However, the participants also observe the contradictory positions that the films are able to hold in some kind of correspondence images of both positivity and negativity:

> But then I feel like it's also negative representation because people will be scared of what some, like, a Black person looks like, because the main characters are Black. So it's a bit of a conflictive view, but it's a good one (film). All of them are good.

The regional specificity of *Blue Story* may have contributed to the fact that the participants were already aware of the discourse around post-code conflicts prior to watching the film. Indeed, one participant would state that they "knew about postcode wars still. You can't get caught stepping into another manor. You can go certain areas, but you need to watch where you're from. You can't go too far to outside areas, you stay where you're from. You know what I mean?". Thus, this renders the screen as a space where Black youths do not come into recognition through the production of new narrative images, but one that reaffirms, renews and re-represents what is already understood, accepted and encountered (Nwonka, 2023). Here, the Black urban text is not simply a form of pedagogy (although its narrative may retain certain moral instructive elements) but of recognition. The participants claimed they find an attraction to the genre through its reflection of a recognisable experience and identity, which is, to recall Ricoeur (1995), where recognition and identification becomes symbiotic. The discussion also revealed a generational factor to not just the textual processes of recognition, but the very themes that inform its claim to authenticity. For whilst the participants recognised the genre's emergence at a point where such conflicts around

regional allegiances became a source of media reportage and correspondingly, an iteration of a Black moral panic (Hall et al., 1978; Nwonka, 2023), for those who had older siblings or young parents, such concerns did not seem to have been prevalent during their own youthhoods, despite growing up in the same areas, and in some cases, the same housing estates. This, for one participant, nuances the Black urban text's mode of recognition *as* authenticity, particularly when watched as a cross-generational and communal spectatorial experience. As they stated:

> The funny thing is, like when I watched it with my brother and my mum, they said that when they were growing up, that wasn't the case. Like, I even asked my older cousins in Kilburn Park. My brother would go there every single day and it was not a problem. Only became that like maybe like around 10 years ago, where it became like you can't go to certain post code, even ones quite close to you because there could be a beef. So when I watch the films with them they kind of don't get the realness about it, but it's real for me because I see it all the time. You can't go certain ends. And my mum and brother don't get it, they don't know a thing like post code wars, do you know what I'm saying? So it seems quite recent this, as you were saying, and for them they don't understand that its real but they wanna watch it. I've always known about it, but the films make them think that it's just beginning to kind of creep in. That there was a post code issue in like, certain areas of the same area like East London and you can't go to because there's another gang there or group or certain man.

Such reflections that emerged in response to the film draw particular attention to how *specific* audiences place interpretive emphasis on mimesis as a key textual constituent in the meaning making process.

Authenticity and recognition

The participants were then asked to respond to the music video/short film *Badman* by the grime collective Roll Deep. The choice of text was motivated by an attempt to demonstrate how grime as a more historical development within the Black urban music sphere augments both audio-visual recognition, identification and authenticity. The video was made in collaboration with the Metropolitan Police's Black gun crime unit, Operation Trident, to try and create a story about a young person getting involved in gun crime and what the consequences of that mistake are to become (his death). There is nothing unsurprising about the police's strategic use of grime music, which is obviously historically but not explicitly a Black genre from London (Gunter and Watt, 2009; White, 2016). What is of particular importance is the association that is being asserted by the music video *as* film narrative between being young, being Black, and being involved in grime music as the prerequisites of gun crime (Owusu-Bempah, 2022a, b). The participants responses revealed that hegemonic understandings of the Black urban text as an uncontested site of authenticity is in fact a nebulous field marked by contradiction. On the one hand, the video advances a positive message through its disavowal of youth violence within the Black urban environment but does so through a bidirectional reliance on a negative moral panic of Black criminality, and a natural connection between the genre, the music and the crime itself. When probed, the participants expressed feelings of uncomfortable intensity accentuated by both the images and the associative familiarity of grime music:

> There was just a lot going on, but I drew my attention to him as the being the main character. He made a mistake and everything came crashing down on him, and I feel like the music as well made it feel quite intense, like the fast beat of it.

Another participant pointed to both how the use of grime music contributed to a sense of representational overfamiliarity and hyper-recognition, noting that:

> The story being told so many times. And it's just making it seem like it's more common than actually is. It's like, OK. yeah, at that time it happened a lot, but I feel like what they are doing is making people scared.

Again, the potential for the recognition of Black urban identity in *Blue Story* to spill into negative worldviews was noted by a participant who stated:

> Say a kid is watching that who lives in that area. These are the people that they are around. And like seeing those people as role models because you're a child growing up in that society. And the media is saying this is how people that live on your own block of flats are living in. It kind of, you know, minimizes how your life is going to go. Or like what you can and can't do because at the end of the day, in most of these depictions and films we are thinking about at this time and even now, it's like they try to make it out and they never do. And it's like, it kind of reinforcing that idea that you can try as much as you want but this is going to be your life and it's nothing you can do about it. You get me?

Tellingly, all participants doubted that such a film could be made now in collaboration with the police given the series of incidents that have taken place since the video (such as George Floyd), and their general understandings of drill music as a more confrontational, underground, 'raw' and non-mainstream iteration of Black urban music that, in contrast to grime, was described as 'being in opposition to the police rather than collaborating with them'. Yet was an acknowledgment that there was a symbiosis between the film's images of 'Black' gun crime and grime music that produced an uneasy affect on the participants:

> What she was saying about it being intense, like I can't really imagine the film with any other type of music because, like the reason it was intense and fearful is because in the type of music, that's why it was like that, I thought.

For the participants, such representations also impact the way they are perceived outside of the urban environment, specifically the association between grime/drill music, urban identity, blackness and crime, and despite their sense of recognition, the nature of the images can still be quite uncomfortable and harrowing. That the participants noted that the texts create fear both outside and inside the Black urban environment suggests that the urban text possesses a bidirectional audio-visual schema that uses negative images for positive *intention* that still produce negative *outcomes.* Despite this, participants claimed that they still felt enticed (and for come compelled) to persevere through its negative aesthetic and are drawn to the screen, as a result of the paucity of such Black youth representations and its citational popularity amongst Black peer groups. Indeed, one of the themes that emerged from these discissions was that of *language*, and the

importance of the texts as a form of linguistic *mimesis;* this being authenticity through the recognition of their vernacular identities. Within all of this, even though there was a general understanding of the themes of films as negative, there was a positive sense of recognition that they may feel from having their language forms and subcultural practices being seen but also heard on screen through the elaborated use of slang. As one participant stated:

> Sometimes it can be a barrier as someone from the outside might want to watch it but think they might not understand, compared to someone that might want to watch it because it's what they know and think they completely understand.

This recourse to the recognisable lived experience presented in the films continuously emerged as the interpretative basis for their responses to the clips. As another participant reflected:

> I think you can get a sense of pride as well because like we're seeing representation of how we speak, on TV so it's a sense of pride. My brother has watched these over and over and he's a little boy, he's 8 years old. He's watched these movies. Because he sees, like how his family or the people he's around speaks like this. He's more drawn to it so then, like he's feeling like that's like his people, even though it's a bad representation. But like it's cause it's black and like he kind of like relates. I don't know, but like he feels comfortable. I'm watching it because he knows that's his area. How his family speaks in that type of slang, that language. So I think it give us pride.

The invoking of the term 'pride' is of particular salience. The recognition of Black urban textuality as a sphere of cultural influence in many ways draws on the very prejudices underpinning the 'deliberate tactic' of persecuting Black urban identity as identified through the criminological/legalistic approaches to Black youth visuality and its circulatory use as a form of admissible bad character evidence (Owusu Bempah, 2022b). Just as the grime, rap and drill videos that are subjected to racialised characterisation by way of the criminal justice system's exploitation of the Black male youth's alleged natural susceptibility to the absorbing and enacting of its 'reality', the urban text can possess a powerful, racially determined register on the behaviours of young Black people. To this end, both *Top Boy* and *Blue Story* offered a more immediate point of reference for participants across both modalities (interviews and group discussions) when clips were shown of the texts, for all had watched the two most recent seasons of *Top Boy* and *Blue Story* in their entirety prior to the discussions.

Representation and influence

Why such texts enjoy an omnipresence within the popular imagination can be attributed to their cultural circulation, given the publicity afforded to *Top Boy* and the extremely public nature of *Blue Story's* theatrical release and subsequent withdrawal by Vue Cinema. However, whilst the responses from the participants were marked by a certain homogeneity, we find departures in how they perceive the recognition of particular themes as authentic, and the images of Black social identities. For when it was asked if the participants actually saw *themselves* in the films, particularly *Blue Story* and *Top Boy*, the majority stated that they did not. However, in asking for

a rationale, a different response emerged. Some participants saw the exaggerated nature of the depictions of the Black urban locale and existence as a point of nuance to the uniformity of the idea that the films are instinctively representative and there is a natural pleasure in having their identities affirmed within mainstream 'televisual' and cinematic representation. As one would state in response to the question of whether the texts produced feelings of pride in their accurate depictions of themselves, I found that:

> I would not say it was pride, I'll say it's absolutely ridiculous. But then it's like the way they say things is the way we say it, like the things they say is what we say and the way they act is a representation of how we act. And I feel that they are doing a mockery of Black people. And even in *Kidultoood* and *Adulthood* they dramatize to the point where you've got to look back and think, rah, do we really act like this? But that's the mockery, right? Like if someone from Cheshire was to watch that, they'd think all Black people from West London act how they act. And it's really not the case.

Such responses are indicative of the very textual interpretations emergent from film elicitation research methods that are described as 'polysemic' (Livingstone, 2019: 174). Here, such readings are organised by the primacy of the participant's 'lifeworld' (Livingstone, 2019: 171) and establishes a permissive disinhibition amongst the group where we are able to draw heterogenous readings from a racially homogenous participant field. These contributions to the discussion are understood as 'extratextual knowledge' (Livingstone, 2007: 7) that for Forrest (2023) expand and accentuate the scope of textual analysis to discourage 'monolithic' evaluations of both the texts and their audiences. An interviewee would also suggest that:

> The issue is about the language barrier. So anyone that that would watch this and they don't relate at all, they might be a bit that everybody like us does that. So you get the sense that the films are not necessarily for you, that they might be for another audience. Yeah, maybe an audience that doesn't know about this stuff. And then they'll just believe that all the violence is the depiction of us of that's but it's not a part of our culture, it's just what we've learned from young.

Perhaps as a result of its popularity and its omnipresence across a range of audio-visual mediums—on-demand, music, print media and fashion—the groups instantly referenced particular scenes upon hearing this response. However, and in complicating the theories of recognition to account for the subjectivities of Black identity and textuality, where the potential for inadequate recognition and its negative effects on the subject's self-esteem and worth is produced not through representational *absence*, but through representational *excess*, and the continuous circulation and influence of *Top Boy* upon others carries with it the potential for *misrecognition*, aided by the liminality of Black culture as it trajects into the popular (Hall, 1993; Nwonka, 2023). As a participant stated:

> Bare people just watched it and thought, 'yeah I'm on stuff' (criminality). I'm Sully and Dushane now. You could say that about any show, but because of the hype about *Top Boy*. It gets hyped. I see man skipping school on the first day it comes out. I did too. Next day, I'm coming

into school and I'm seeing people acting different. Talking different, body language, every-thing. Last week, none of that. Then then we'll get to school and their walking with their trousers down to their knees. I'm like, since when? You come from a good home!

Top Boy's utility as a source for the expression of authenticity retains a continuity with what is seen as 'the "exaggerated nature" of rap music and its subsequent subcultures' (Owusu-Bempah, 2022b: 432). Here, we see how the impact of *Top Boy* is interpreted as the juvenile performing of Black authenticity, although such re-enactments are limited to both the expressive subcultural gestures and languages as a mode of peer-to-peer 'mutual recognition' (Ricoeur, 1995) and cru-cially, within the racially convivial spaces of school rather than the 'roads'. As one participant claimed:

they're trying to be halfway crooks. Yeah. And they're not like that. Like you said, they are from good houses, but they're trying to actively pursue that life. And going out of their way to try and be like they're bad man. I know a white kid whose parents are MPs. They're copying a subculture. I don't like that man.

Building on this, participants would make specific refence to *Top Boy's* holistic use of Black urban music, and drill in particular, as accentuating its impact amongst peers:

I feel like *Top Boy's* drill music has an influence on great number of people in the subconscious. The stuff that you see in *Top Boy*, you pick it up, of course you do. You wouldn't be speaking that way if not.

Such responses speak to the specific efficacy of the film election modality, this being the atomising of a text's intradiegetic and extradiegetic elements, narrative devices and contextual factors to encourage direct responses work to augment, accentuate and authenticate the forms of interpre-tation that are evoked by the participants in response to their experience of the black urban film and their meaning formation. Here, the combinational impact of drill music throughout *Top Boy* as its soundtrack/score, as intra-diegetic performance by characters, and a reliant inter-textual feature of the Black urban textual corpus suggests that recognition *as* identification and then *as* authenticity is a cultural process that is energised by how the Black youth vernacular subcultural practices and languages forms present in *Top Boy* are drawn from the everyday Black urban lexi-con. These become superimposed onto the legitimising frames of popular Black audio-visual screen culture as a global phenomenon, and finally rerouted back to within the diurnal vernacular exchanges of the Black urban environment, now with all its newly accrued cultural significance and mass cultural circulation.

Conclusion

The Black urban filmic and televisual text possesses indissociable aesthetic, narrational and the-matic convergencies with audio-visual performative cultures of rap, grime and drill that in turn render the Black urban text a central part of a capacious Black urban audio-visual site of recogni-tion and authenticity, and stigmatic associations. The qualitative research undertaken for this

article also reveals a set of bidirectional cultural processes that asks that we are more receptive to the contradictions and nuances laden within the Black urban text as an authentic but performative audio-visual sphere. We find that Black youths within such dense environments do find recognition and representation in seeing their identities, subcultural practices and alleged criminal behaviours affirmed in mainstream film and television. Further, how the incorporation of such music forms to within the Black urban films in the production context of PSB film and cinematic television as both intra and extradiegetic music and as soundtrack are one of several ways in which PSB contexts attempt to mitigate for the struggle over meaning and ownership in the use of both textual and contextual elements to augment a sense of Black authenticity, Black cultural value, and through which we can critically observe forms of Black audience (participant) recognition. However, we find that participants are also highly cognisant of the performative nature of such texts, and are able to make the distinction between its fictive and non-fictive narrative elements. Crucially, they recognise the superficiality of the text's scope of influence, which are limited to vernacular subcultural expressions of dialect, gesture and peer-to-peer posturing, rather than actual criminal behaviour. This challenges the claimed (and racialised) indexical relationship between Black urban texts, its constituents, and the internalisation of Black audio-visual performativity. The aesthetic reification of Black Otherness within the framework of film and television resituates the popular urban text as a site of Black participation, recognition and identification, and the text's invaluating claim to *authenticity* is also informed by the organisation of the films as a counter hegemonic filmic experience. In turn, the inclusion of Black urban films into the corpus of Black urban audio-visual authenticity, as this article argues for, possesses considerable value to the continued study of the use of grime, drill and rap videos, aesthetics and performative audio-visual cultures as admissible evidence in criminal procedures. The potential for *Blue Story, Top Boy* and others to serve as a site for an ontological and epistemological nuancing of the dominant narratives of Black youth violence relies on an aesthetic and thematic continuity, here made viable by perceptible narrative images of Black urban music and cultural production as an audio-visual experience that supplant the materials of Black urban fictional matter.

Funding

ORCID iD

Clive Chijioke Nwonka https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3487-8127

Reference

Andrews K (2013) The Iconic Ghetto. In: Malik S (ed.) *Adjusting the Contrast: British Television and Constructs ofRace*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Back L (1996) *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture*. London. UCL Press

Bakare L (2019) 'Kneejerk' decision to stop showing Blue Story criticised by academics'. *The Guardian*, Monday 25 November.

Bakkali Y (2019) Dying to live: Youth violence and the munpain. *The Sociological Review* 67(6): 1317–133.

Bakkali Y and Chigbo E (2024) Tainted love: Intimate relationships and gendered violence on-road. In: Levell J, Young T and Rod Earle R (eds) *Exploring Urban Youth Culture Outside of the Gang Paradigm*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. pp. 39–58.

Barker M (2012) Crossing out the audience. In: Christie I (ed.) *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 187–205.

Bramwell R. (2015) *UK Hip-hop, Grime and the City: The Aesthetics and Ethics of London's Rap Scenes*. Routledge.

Brunsdon C and Morley D (1978) *Everyday Television: Nationwide*. London: BFI.

Campion K (2021) Mapping Black mixed-race Birmingham: Place, locality and identity. *The Sociological Review 69*(5): 937–955.

De Lacey A (2022) Live and direct? Censorship and Racialised public morality in grime and drill music. *Popular Music* 41/4: 495–510.

Elliot Cooper A (2021) *Black Resistance to British Policing*. Manchester University Press.

Fatsis L (2019a) Grime: Criminal subculture or public counterculture? A critical investigation into the criminalization of Black musical subculture in the UK. *Crime, Media, Culture* 15/3: 447–61.

Fatsis L (2019b) Policing the beats: The criminalisation of UK drill and grime music by the London Metropolitan Police. *Sociological Review* 67/6: 1300–1316.

Forrest D (2020) *New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Forrest D (2023) 'I'm no expert, but. . .': everyday textual analysis with film audiences in the English regions. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 19(2): 223–244.

Forrest D and Merrington P (2021) Viewing I, Daniel Blake in the English regions: Towards an understanding of realism through audience interpretation. *The Journal of British Cinema and Television 18*(3): 259–279.

Gilroy P (1982) The myth of Black criminality. *The Socialist Register* 19: 47–56.

Gilroy P (1987) *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*. Routledge.

Gilroy P (2004) *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*? Abingdon: Routledge.

Gray H (2013) Subjec(ed) to recognition American quarterly 65(4): 771–798.

Gunter A and Watt P (2009) Grafting, going to college and working on road: Youth transitions and cultures in an East London neighbourhood. *Journal of Youth Studies 12*: 515–529.

Hall S (2001) The Spectacle of the "Other". In Hall S (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. pp. 223–279.

Hall S (1988) 'New Ethnicities' (in) Mercer K (eds) Black Film British Cinema. ICA Documents.

Hall S (1993) What is this 'Black' in Black popular culture? *Social Justice* 20(½): 104–114.

Hall S (1981) *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular (in) Samuel R (eds) People's History and Social Theory*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 227–240.

Hall S, Critcher C, Jefferson T et al. (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. The Macmillan Press.

Honneth A (1995) *The Struggle For Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Oxford: Polity.

Ikäheimo H (2002) On the genus and species of recognition. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy 45*(4): 447–462.

Ilan J (2020) Digital street culture decoded: Why criminalizing drill music is street illiterate and counterproductive. *The British Journal of Criminology* 60(4): 994–1013.

James M (2015) *Urban Multiculture: Youth, Politics and Cultural Transformation in a Global City*. Palgrave Macmillan.

James M (2020) *Sonic Intimacy: Reggae Sound Systems, Jungle Pirate Radio and Grime YouTube Music Videos*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Joseph-Sailsbury J (2019) Wrangling with the Black monster: Young Black mixed-race men and masculinities. *The British Journal of Sociology* 70(5): 1754–1773.

Levell J, Young T and Earle R (eds) (2023) *Exploring Urban Youth Culture Outside of the Gang Paradigm: Critical Questions of Youth, Gender and Race On-Road*. Policy Press.

Livingstone S (2007) Audiences and interpretations: The active audience. *e-Compos* 10(1): 1–22.

Livingstone S (2019) Audiences in an age of datafication: Critical questions for media research. *Television & New Media* 20(2): 170–183.

Nwonka C (2021) *Diversity and Data: An Ontology of Race and Ethnicity in the British Film Institute's*. Diversity Standards.

Nwonka C and Saha A (2021) Film, culture, and the politics of Race. In: Nwonka C and Saha A (eds) *Black Film British Cinema II*. London: Goldsmiths Press/MIT Press.

Nwonka C (2023) *Black Boys: The Social Aesthetics of British Urban Film*. Bloomsbury.

Owusu Bempah A (2022a) The irrelevance of rap. *Criminal Law Review* 2: 130–151.

Owusu Bempah A (2022b) Prosecuting Rap: What does the case law tell us? *Popular Music* 41(4): 427–445.

Pritchard W (2023) "They're doing this by stealth": How the Met police continues to target Black music. *The Guardian*, *21* April. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/apr/21/theyre-doing-this-by-stealth-how-themet-police-continues-to-target-black-music (accessed 4 March 2024).

Quinn E (2024) Racist inferences and flawed data: Drill rap lyrics as criminal evidence in group prosecutions'. *Race & Class 65*(4): 3–25.

Ricoeur P (1995) *Oneself as Another* (trans. Blamey K). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ricoeur P (2005) *The Course of Recognition*. Harvard University Press.

Saha A (2021) *Race, Culture and Media*. Sage

Saha A (2018) *Race and the Cultural Industries*. Polity.

Schwarze T and Fatsis L (2022) Copping the blame: The role of YouTube videos in the criminalisation of UK drill music. *Popular Music 41*(4): 463–480.

Taylor C (1992) The politics of recognition. In: Gutmann A. (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 25–73.

White J (2016) *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship: Beats, Rhymes and Young People's Enterprise*. Routledge.

White J (2020) *Terraformed: Young Black Lives in the Inner City*. Repeater Books.

Author biography

Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka is Associate Professor in Film, Culture and Society in the School of European Languages, Culture and Society within University College London's Faculty of the Arts and Humanities, and a Faculty Associate of the UCL Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation. Nwonka's scholarship broadly centres on race and the humanities.