

East Ends:

Race, place and community in the story of the
emergence of Grime music

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Abstract

This thesis tells the story of the emergence of Grime music. Grime, as a music sub-culture has its origins in the Caribbean community of East London, at the turn of the twenty-first century and can be seen as a continuation of the lineage of Caribbean and Caribbean-British music genres that also takes in influences from other parts of the world. I will be describing the story of Grime from a particular angle: that which considers the racial prejudice, and cultural suppression faced by London's black communities in the period before Grime's emergence, as well as during it, and the effects of economic gentrification in the area. I will demonstrate that a combination of British racism and local gentrification were responsible for Grime being pushed out of its traditional communities. I will support this, despite a paucity of academic texts, by drawing on vast wealth of online resources that followed Grime's forced transition from the physical environment of East London to the digital world. I will also argue that this transition, though an unintentional effect of suppression, is the cause behind Grime's rise to becoming a mainstream culture that now represents Britain's wider working-class black and ethnic minority community while maintaining its street authenticity: its life-source and central ethos.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2002, in the densely populated boroughs of London's East End, there was a palpable positivity among young music lovers and party-goers. Something almost tangible, but not yet fully defined was evolving high up in council estates in Bow and Stratford and being felt down on the surrounding streets from the Docklands to Epping Forest, in the youth clubs, school yards and markets.¹ Rogue DJs with semi-mythical hero status climbed lift shafts and scaled the sides of buildings to illegally rig up equipment and transmit music that floated down in waves from the highest floors of the towers like snowflakes until it covered the entire East End in a blanket of sound.

At first there was no name for it and like the typically short-lived London snowfalls that melted as soon as they settled, one would have been forgiven for thinking that the new sound would be just as fleeting. It was ephemeral by nature - disseminated in secretive broadcasts or performances at house parties, illegal raves or street gatherings; consumed, then immediately consigned to the memories of those they had excited. DJ sets were sometimes recorded, in poor quality, and circulated in schools and youth clubs on cassette tapes. The only high-quality copies of instrumentals came in the form of white label records that were rare and expensive, familiar yet elusive, widely heard but exclusively owned. For most fans, it is still impossible to get hold of any copy of good quality from the early days "even though they know every

¹ Chris Champion, 'Inside Grime', *The Guardian*, 23 May 2004. Accessed: 15/11/2017
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/may/23/urban1>

lyrical bar inside out from live shows, mix-tapes and DVDs, or from pirate radio.”²

The music being made had come, most directly, from a genre called UK Garage, but had deep lineal roots in Caribbean/British forms from the nineties and before. Dancehall, Jungle and Drum 'n' Bass had all followed the formula of electronically produced instrumentals spun by a DJ with accompanying Jamaican 'toaster'-style MCing and a dependence on pirate radio airtime. But at the turn of the millennium, disenfranchised by the glossy champagne bling of the Garage club scene as much as they were by the society they lived in, groups of teenage producers, DJs and MCs moved in a different direction and looked inward for inspiration. Their defiant introspection illuminated the darkness of the quotidian council estate reality, as they rejected the West-end clubs and practiced their art in more familiar areas. The form their expression took echoed that of their brutalist, architectural surroundings, yet despite the hard-faced impression of the new movement, for its practitioners and early followers, it was positive and thrilling to be a part of. The sense that a truly independent scene was in creation was not lost on the first pioneers of the form: “there was a sense of kids reacting against something; garage, the system, school, life. It was so exciting, man, so exciting. It was just about energy” explained the MC Kano.³ It was stylistically grittier, more minimalist and more unapologetically aggressive than Garage. Given the historical portrayals (and realities) of its birthplace, the chosen brand-name

² Dan Hancox, 'A History Of Grime By The People Who Created It', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2012. Accessed: 15/11/2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/dec/06/a-history-of-grime>

³ Hattie Collins & Olivia Rose, *This Is Grime* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), p. 71.

‘Grime’ was as accurately synonymous a term as could have been coined for a culture so distinctly of East London. The music and accompanying culture in development were inextricably linked to their location.

Looking at exactly why Grime music came specifically from four boroughs of East London (and an additional one, Haringey, in North London), will be a key question of this thesis. The estates, clubs and pirate radio stations that were so important in shaping the genre can all be placed within this area. The map below is intended to provide a visual aid to the telling of this story. Mentions of significant locations in the coming chapters can be checked back against this map and a greater sense of the geography of Grime music will hopefully be gained.

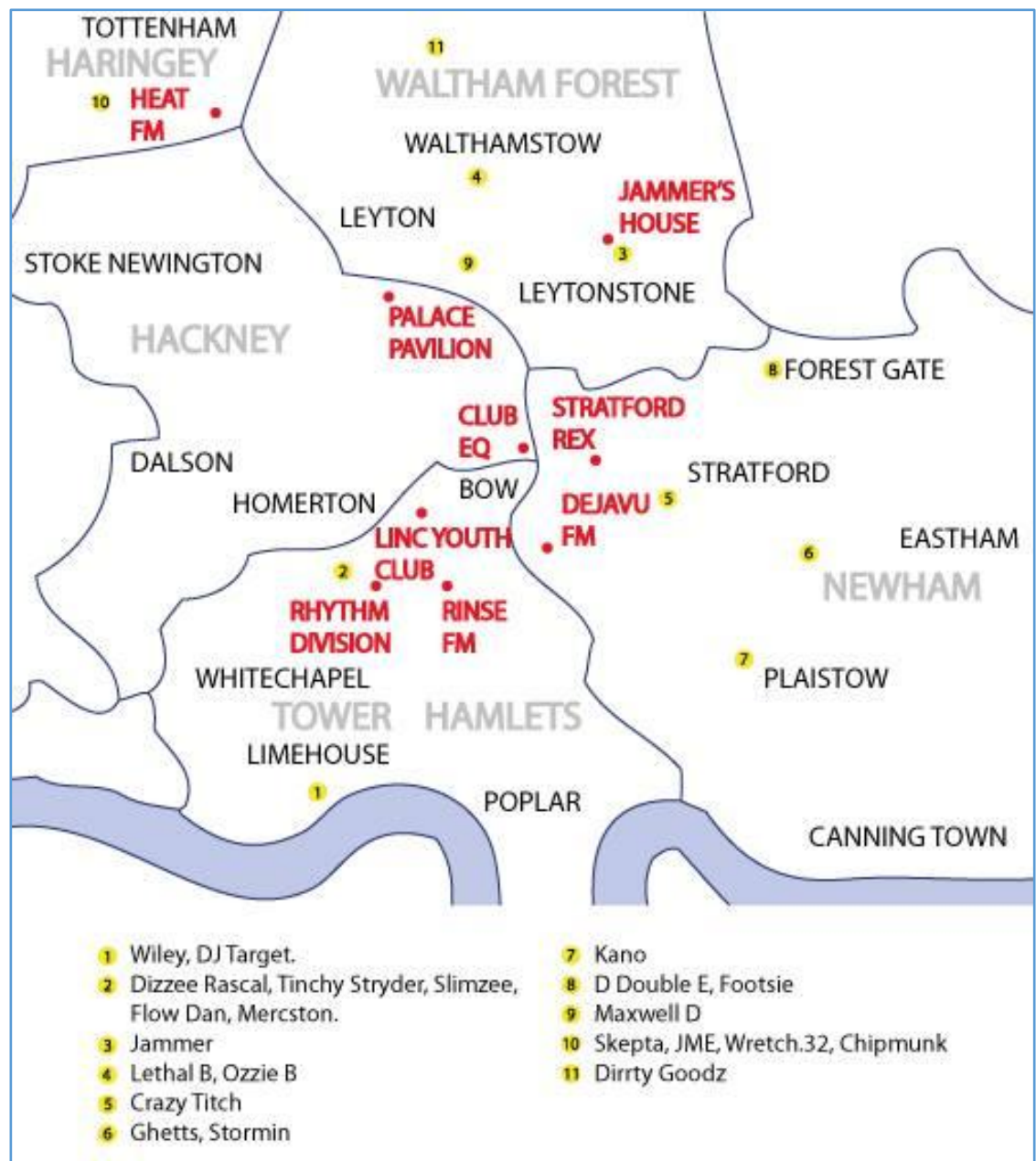


Figure 1: A map of Grime hubs and key figures in the East End.

The map shows us that, while Hackney was home to some important venues, and had been significant in the earlier black-British sub-culture of Jungle, there were few Grime artists from the borough. Newham and Tower Hamlets are responsible for producing the majority of Grime artists, with Waltham Forest and Haringey also contributing. The map also shows us some of the key hubs of the genre's early years,

such as Jammer's house, the Rhythm Division record shop and the Linc Youth Club, as well as club venues and pirate radio station locations.⁴

Grime's family tree

The other unbreakable connection that ran through the backbone of Grime music was tradition and the historical lineage of Caribbean music that had preceded it, fostered by strong community togetherness. These immigrant communities in the mid-twentieth century had united in the face of British racism at street level and in the institutions that were supposed to serve them as British citizens. Music, alongside protest, became one of the major expressions of discontent against these issues, as well as an outlet of artistic expression in an environment where a voice was denied and culture had to be crafted not bought. This tradition of 'do it yourself' (DIY) music production was a staple part of the Caribbean musical family tree and it thrived in Britain, giving birth to a whole branch of new forms. It is important in the telling of this story that the stylistic, technological, social and political inheritance that went into shaping Grime music, is understood. To that end an examination and explanation of the following family tree is necessary.

⁴ While some of the towers that stations transmitted from are known, pirates were often forced to change location to evade the law. In some cases, we just don't know where they were.

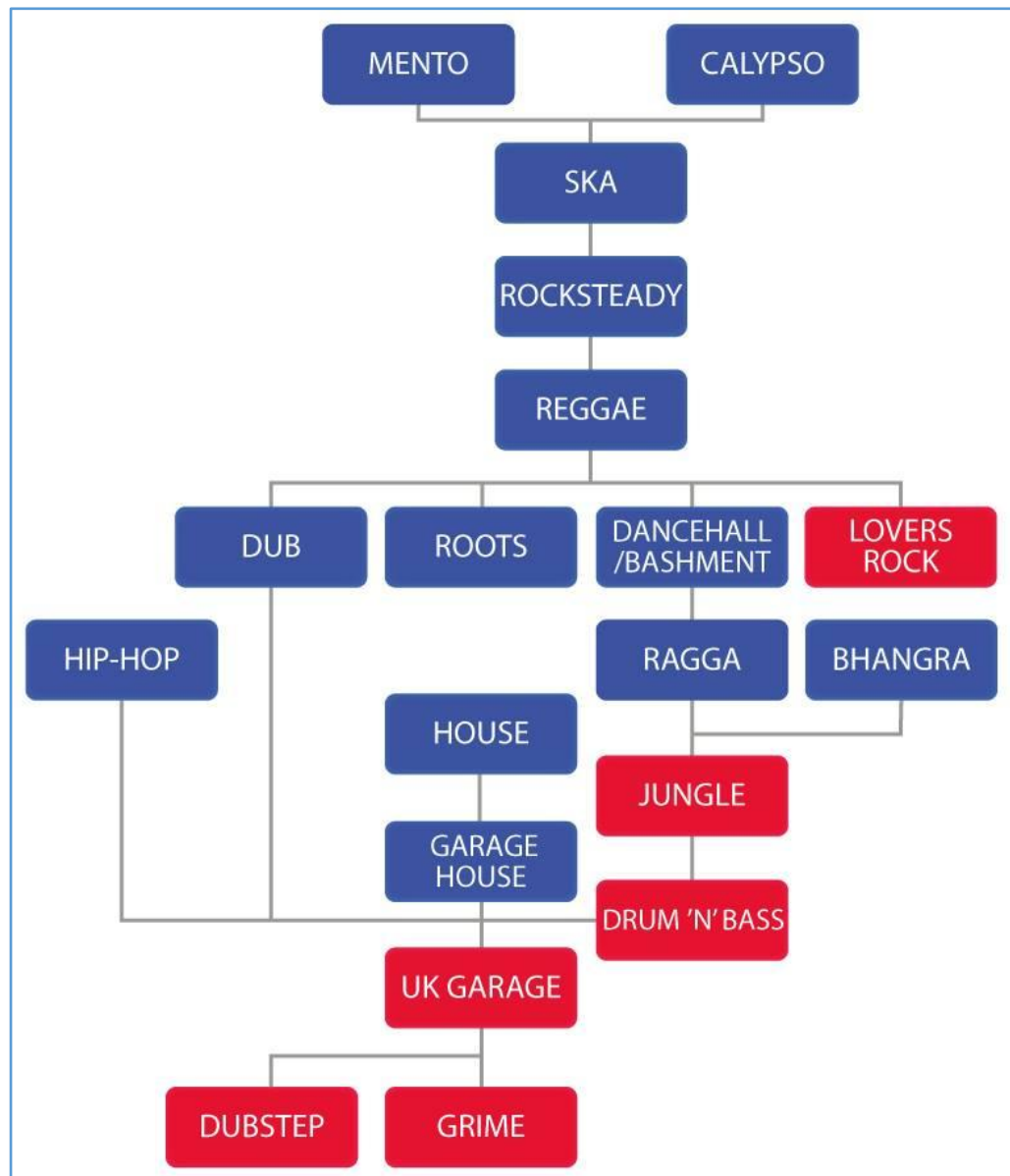


Figure 1: A family tree of Grime music and its ancestral forms.

The graphic shows us a list of musical genres that either travelled to Britain with immigration, were born in this country as the descendants of those genres or influenced that lineage from outside. Those born in Britain (London to be exact) are indicated by the colour red. All others are blue. Mento (Jamaica) and Calypso (Trinidad and Tobago) are early folk music genres that date back to a time that is

unrecorded. They came to Britain first with immigrants in the late-forties and early-fifties. From those came Ska, a vastly popular Caribbean form with a steady, danceable off-beat drum style. It gave birth to Rocksteady and then Reggae, which would take over the world and spawn dozens of further branches on the tree, but it would also inspire 2-Tone, a British sub-genre that would gain popularity in the 1980s and bring skinheads, punks and young black people together. Through a DIY sound system culture of building their own equipment and independently hosting parties, pioneers such as Prince Buster and Coxsone Dodd are credited with championing the sound in Britain and laying the foundations of the DIY culture that would serve future Caribbean/British forms so well.

Just as significantly on the road to Grime, Reggae emerged and put Caribbean music on the map worldwide. It sat at a tempo of around 80-110 beats per minute (BPM) and often carried a more politically-conscious message than Ska and Rocksteady, which chimed with the disaffected youth of Jamaica, as well as Britain. Its biggest star and chief-ambassador, Bob Marley, began making Ska in the early-1960s like many of his contemporaries, before pioneering the Reggae sound. Another pioneering group was Toots and the Maytals, whose 1968 single 'Do The Reggay' coined the genre's name.⁵ As a Ska and Reggae band, Toots and the Maytals were a significant influence on British Ska-Punk. While Ska is the original ancestor in the British/Caribbean family tree, Reggae was where the genres truly branched out. From Reggae came many strands of music, with sub-genres that connected it with

⁵'Do The Reggay', Toots and the Maytals (Kingston: Beverly's Records, 1968).

ancestors of other musical origins, such as Hip Hop, House and Bhangra to create a plethora of original forms. Reggae's big influence can be attributed to its dependence on bass instruments and their use almost as percussion instruments. A heavy bass sound would become the staple element on which all future genres on the family tree would rely.

From Reggae, a large group of genres spawned. In the Caribbean, Dub, Dancehall and Roots Reggae were born and thrived throughout the 1970-80s, with artists in the UK and USA following the patterns of bass-heavy DJ sets in local neighbourhood venues, parks and house-parties. These sound system events were community gatherings that strengthened unity in the face of social and economic inequalities. It was at this time that commentary on the reality of these situations shifted in emphasis from singing to toasting. Toasters would take the microphone and 'chat' their message or hype up the crowd, supporting the DJ in getting the party going. While both employed toasting, Dub and Dancehall split in different directions and both arguably staked a claim to become the "most influential reggae sub-genre of all."⁶ Dub was slower at around 60-90 BPM while Dancehall sped up to as fast as 125 BPM. Both forms took advantage of technological advances in electronic music production, with Dub utilising more psychedelic sound effects and Dancehall focussing on steady rhythmic instrumental tracks, known as 'riddims', which served perfectly as backing-tracks for MCs to rap lyrics. What Dancehall MCs did differently was that they used Jamaican

⁶David Katz, 'Dubbing Is A Must: A Beginner's Guide To Jamaica's Most Influential Genre', *Factmag*, 16 April 2016. Accessed: 21/7/18.
<http://www.factmag.com/2014/04/16/dubbing-is-a-must-a-beginners-guide-to-jamaicas-most-influent-genre/>

Patois much more than standard English, as found in Reggae and Ska. This would be a key influence on the forms that came next.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s British-born genres were starting to emerge on the Caribbean musical family tree. Lovers Rock started out in clubs in South and East London and was a slower, softer alternative to the bassiness of Dub, the aggression of Dancehall and the politics of Roots Reggae. Its general theme of love and predominant use of female vocals made it extremely popular and showed that the Caribbean diaspora abroad could produce forms of its own to rival those back home. In the 1990s this idea would be taken further as electronic music and Ragga (more aggressive, rap-heavy Dancehall) blended with an Indian music, Bhangra, also found in Britain due to immigration from her former colonies. This created Jungle, a crucially influential form in the development of Grime, as it introduced a generation of London teenagers to a sound-system culture that sounded as though it came from “down the road”.⁷ Jungle took Bhangra-inspired sampled variations of the famous Amen Break, a drum break from a sixties funk record, ‘Amen, Brother’ by The Winstons, and added Patios MCing at speeds of up to 140 BPM.⁸ This tempo was crucial to Grime, as its future pioneers, the likes of Wiley, Dizze Rascal, D Double E and others, all started off with Jungle and when they carved out their own genre years later, this was the tempo they felt most comfortable using.

From Jungle and from influences as diverse as US Hip-Hop, House and Garage House, UK Garage (or simply Garage), hit the streets

⁷DJ Target, *Grime Kids* (London: Trapeze, 2018), p. 19.

⁸ ‘Amen, Brother’, The Winstons (New York: Metromedia Records, 1969).

of London in the mid-nineties, bringing more mainstream chart success to British artists, but relying less heavily on the traditions of Caribbean sound system culture, despite many of its well-known acts being a part of the diaspora. Artists were often signed to big labels, but careers were short-lived and before long, as we shall see in Chapter Two of this thesis, the cultural and political need for a more locally-rooted and authentic form of musical expression opened the door to Grime music. Grime borrowed heavily from Garage, especially rap-infused Garage, in developing its style. Its tempo was 140 BPM, a slight increase on the 130 BPM favoured by Garage but using the same syncopated high-hats in its drum beats. MC style was less about hyping the crowd, as it was in Garage, and more about delivering the message, a depiction of the surroundings of East London that its artists lived in. Bass sounds were deeper, synths more commonly used, and the favoured tool of production was the Korg keyboard and the production software, Fruity Loops. These elements all gave early Grime its unique sound, distinct from the high-production style of chart Garage. The sound often inspired adjectives such as ‘colder’ ‘darker’ or ‘harder’ when compared with Garage, but this was also a description of the lyrical content that reflected the environments and communities Grime came from.

Grime’s pride in its ties to place, its DIY sound system origins and its underground status are paradoxically present in much of the imagery and marketing of mainstream Grime music today, in 2018. Back in its early heyday, around the turn of the millennium, after dislodging the more commercial Garage, Grime was firmly underground

and then pushed further into the shadows by an authoritarian clampdown on its practice, after 2005. This is the story that I seek to tell and to explore in the following chapters. It is a story that has not been fully outlined in academic scholarship or journalistic accounts of the genre. In particular, the significance of Grime's relationship to the history of British/Caribbean communities and cultures in London has not been fully detailed. In piecing together the story of Grime's emergence, rise, fall and rebirth I will focus on this relationship, especially the music's connections with black British communities in East London from where it draws its energy and its claims to be an authentic voice of marginalised and frequently oppressed social groups.

The theme of maintaining underground authenticity, resisting wide popularity and rejecting the commercialism that contributed to the collapse of Garage, while maintaining a platform, is an important one in Grime. As Todd Dedman puts it, Grime's "resistance to major label output and their ways of working is clear" as a reflection of a subcultural "suspicion of record labels and the control they enjoy."⁹ Grime's underground status was in part a consequence of its extreme sound and its confrontational aesthetic. As Hattie Collins states, it was "so unlike anything anybody had heard before; they [major labels] had no idea how to promote or present this insanely aggressive sound."¹⁰ But this thesis will also show how an authoritarian clamp-down inadvertently helped Grime to maintain its authenticity, survive, and with the use of

⁹ Todd Dedman, 'Agency In UK Hip Hop And Grime Youth Subcultures – peripherals and purists', *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol 14 – No. 5, p.519, August 2011. Accessed: 02/03/19.

¹⁰ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 16.

online platforms re-emerge to become the most marketable musical form in Britain after 2014.

A central concern of this thesis is to examine Grime's environments, the history of black British communities in East London and the role of music within them. In going back in time, tracing the movement of the Caribbean population in London, the story will take us out of the East and back to areas in the south and west of the capital that were the first homes of new arrivals from the Caribbean. The baggage of history that those communities brought from Brixton and Notting Hill over to the 'Grime Boroughs' (Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Haringey and Waltham Forest) will show how Grime fits socially and politically into the lineage of Caribbean/British forms. How it does so musically will of course also be examined. In showing how Grime emerged and developed in the first thirteen years of its life as a genre, this thesis will argue that Grime has been shaped by several constants that have existed throughout the Caribbean story in Britain. These constants are the problems of racial tension with local white populations, the police force and the state and the suppression of black communities' artistic expressions of discontent.

How these factors played out in new ways for the new millennium, how they then directly influenced the music being made in East London and how that music reflected back on those happenings, is the main focus of this thesis. Grime grew out of and was forced to adapt to new manifestations of well-established patterns of racism and class oppression which took the form of deliberate bureaucratic obstacles and

government measures of austerity that targeted poor communities, with devastating effects. After its emergence the rapid gentrification of East London would bring about a transformation of the way in which Grime music was made and consumed. This thesis aims to document phenomena such as these in order to place Grime in its proper social and cultural context as a musical expression of Caribbean and mixed-race working-class communities in East London. But I would also argue that an understanding of Grime's fluctuating fortunes between 2001 and 2014 can help illuminate broader social, cultural and political developments, including the nature of urban gentrification, the role of the internet in shaping music production and dissemination, and the shifts in British race relations and political culture that lead to our current situation.

Methodology and reasoning

In writing this thesis, I have relied on a relatively limited number of sources. Given the contemporary nature of this subject, a paucity of academic writing exists on Grime and no outright academic Grime books. Grime music is an ongoing musical phenomenon that is only just beginning to receive the recognition it deserves. There are however some non-academic texts that are of use. They include Hattie Collins and Olivia Rose's *This is Grime*, the autobiography of Wiley, Eskiboy, DJ Target's 2018 release, *Grime Kids*, and Ewen Spenser's collection of personal accounts *Open Mic*. The lack of academic texts on the subject of Grime music leaves us with little choice but to adopt other

approaches and search through other sources of information in order to tell the story of the genre. Having acknowledged the paucity of academic publications on Grime music, it is however important to note that this is something that is likely to change greatly in the coming years. Grime music's growing popularity and continuing social relevance has taken on greater significance within mainstream popular culture, with politicians in particular taking a much keener interest in the mobilising power of the music and its associated culture. This evolution, layered on top of the gentrification of East London and the urban development of the area, has led to greater interest from the world of academia. While there are not any other academic books to refer to on the subject of Grime, since Grime's major re-emergence in 2014 and new-found prominence, studies that relate to or touch upon Grime have gradually increased.

Academics such as Maykaell Riley, Head of Music Production at the University of Westminster and Director of the Black Music Research Unit, have released studies that examine the connections between Grime music and politics, notably the 2017 report, 'State of Play - Grime' by Riley's student Sophia Rawcliffe that surveys public awareness and opinion of Form 696 and the #Grime4Corbyn hashtag, drawing conclusions that the hashtag helped secure votes for Labour from within the Grime community. Noticeably, and alarmingly for a culture that is so proudly self-representative as Grime is, none of the contributors narrating Grime in academia at the BMRU (which includes curators, visual artists, record company executives, film makers,

musicians and black cultural theorists) come from the Grime community itself. This is where my thesis can provide authenticity and agency. Otherwise, we must look elsewhere and to associated fields relating to the culture, where academics have added to the growing bank of resources that reference aspects of Grime culture. Todd Dedman (Christ Church College Canterbury), writing in 2011, argues the case for Grime to be termed sub-cultural, against the fashion to abandon the word in favour of labels such as ‘tribe’, ‘scene’ and ‘movement’. The paper, part of the *Journal of Youth Studies*, mentions that at that time there had been “few academic investigations into UK grime culture”, let alone publications.¹¹ Little has changed in terms of book releases, but the number of postgraduate investigations into the culture has certainly risen in the last eight years. As we have already seen, Dedman’s work also makes interesting arguments about the attitudes of mistrust towards the record industry with the Grime scene.

Another academic study from a different perspective is that of linguist, Rob Drummond at Manchester Metropolitan University, which examines the culture, its language and the sometimes racist perceptions of it. Coming from analyses of the way language is used and received, Drummond’s work picks up on commentary of other academics such as David Starkey, former professor of History at Cambridge University and the London School of Economics, who after the 2011 London Riots, bemoaned the perceived cultural colonisation of Britain by some kind of

¹¹ Todd Dedman, ‘Agency In UK Hip Hop And Grime Youth Subcultures – peripherals and purists’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol 14 – No. 5, p.519, August 2011. Accessed: 02/03/19.

“wholly false...Jamaican patois”.¹² His articles and books help to iron out the definitions of code-switching and the blurred lines between forms of English, including Standard English, Cockney, Patois and what he terms Multicultural Urban British English, the form used primarily in Grime lyricism. In the absence of any outright academic Grime publications, I will refer to sources such as those mentioned above to provide scholarly perspective on the subject.

Online articles make up the vast majority of what has been written on the subject and it is on these that much of this thesis is based. In looking at the history of racism against Caribbean communities in London, works of black cultural theory by academics such as Paul Gilroy, Ron Ramdin, Peter Fryer and A. Sivanandan have been employed, though again, for accounts directly from communities (particularly from those as marginalised as the ones I study here) interviews and newspaper articles provide the necessary detail. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the music itself must be mentioned. As detailed and analytical as a written study of music culture can be, nothing describes music as well as listening to it. Accompanying this thesis as an appendix is a playlist containing all the songs mentioned in it. It is highly advised that the reader turn immediately to this list and listen to the music we are about to explore.

The story of Grime music culture in East London communities and the exploration of its origins, causal factors and changing fortunes

¹² Rob Drummond, '(Mis)interpreting Urban Youth Language: White Kids Sounding Black', *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol 20 – No. 5, p. 3, November 2016. Accessed: 02/03/19.

is an area of study that is at present seriously underrepresented in academia. The following chapters will provide a detailed examination of how that story played out between 2001 and 2014: from the beginnings of the genre, through its dark ages of suppression when many called it 'dead', to the year when Grime 'came back'. This story has never been documented in an academic text and there is therefore a justifiable need to tell it in this way. In doing so, the thesis will show that there are several direct links to the same problems faced by previous musical genres developed in London's Caribbean communities and that Grime, in name and spirit, was the perfect musical form for expressing the disillusionment and hopelessness of impoverished black youth in the first two decades of the twenty-first-century East End.

Chapter One

Relations: the forging of London's black community in the face of British racism

In April 2004, Richard Cowie Jr, better known as the MC Wiley, released a track titled 'What Do You Call It'.¹ On it he made statements about the movement of his style of music away from the UK Garage roots that had preceded it, while listing some of the many names by which it was known. Included on the verse are references to the labels '2-step' and 'urban' but the artist could have extended his list to include '8-bar', 'sub-low' and 'nu-shape'. Each of these names is an announcement of a deviation from the progenitor form, UK Garage, but also denotes a distinct style or sub-genre, distinguishable from the others. Such subtle technical particularities include 8-bar's disposition for rap verses of eight bars in length; Sub-low's tendency for bass sounds to sit at around the 40 Hz mark; Nu-shape's typically longer rap verses (16/32 bars) with more intricate rhyme patterns.

What each small scene had in common with the others was that they were moving steadily away from the House-influenced club sound of UK Garage and into darker territory and a tempo of around 140bpm, but at this early stage in the breakaway, broader definitions were yet to be made. Each scene had its pioneers and fan bases in the various estates and streets of East and North London, but it was not until Wiley's emergence that bridges began to be formed. 'What Do You Call

¹ 'What Do You Call It', Wiley (London: XL, 5 April 2004).

It's catchy lyrics announced a dominant sound among the divergent sub-styles floating on the pirate radio airwaves and called it Eskibeat, a reference to the cold, minimal electronic sound pioneered by Wiley's production and directly to one particular beat, *Eskimo*, released on 12" white-label vinyl by Wiley Kat Recordings, two years earlier in July 2002.² Today the Eskimo beat is considered by many as the very beginning of what would become known as Grime music.

In 2003, the term Grime was still being floated as a possible umbrella label for the emergent genre, and certainly not one that was universally accepted. A Channel 4 documentary from that year features many recognisable faces from the scene discussing the various names for it, while only one, Stormin' of N.A.S.T.Y. Crew, names it 'Grime'.³ A May 2004 article in *The Guardian* titled 'Inside Grime' somewhat ironically addressed this point while repeatedly using the term as the preferred label, noting that "the desire of each crew to carve out its own territory in a crowded market has led some of them to tag their sound with its own particular brand name. The generic 'grime' or 'UK garage' just won't do."⁴ This points to a clear distaste among artists for the term Grime at this time, and a mere eight months previously, the same newspaper had struggled to explain or name the music made by Dizzee Rascal (recipient of the 2003 Mercury Music Prize), opting for vague and clumsy labels including "urban British" and "black music from the

² 'Eskimo', Wiley, (London: Wiley Kat Recordings, July 2002).

³ 'Wot Do U Call It Grime Documentary', *Channel 4*, 2003. Accessed: 4/6/18.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cyNn_MW8ik

⁴ Chris Champion, 'Inside Grime', *The Guardian*, 23 May 2004. Accessed: 1/7/18.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/may/23/urban1>

street”, while hailing the artist as “the future of both British garage and British hip-hop”.⁵

Dizzee Rascal (real name Dylan Mills) and Wiley were both part of the large Bow/Limehouse-based crew Roll Deep until the two fell out over the stabbing of Dizzee in Ayia Napa, Cyprus, just two months before his Mercury Music Prize win in 2003 with Dizzee reportedly blaming Wiley for starting the trouble that led to the incident.⁶ This feud and Dizzee’s departure from Roll Deep all occurred before the acceptance of the term Grime by both artists as the name for the music they still produce and are today proud to work under. What is ironic perhaps is that soon after Wiley and Dizzee had gone their separate ways and the term Grime had been coined, both had shifted to a more mainstream sound and Grime, before it even had a chance to live in its new skin, was perceived by many to have already seen its best days. By 2005, many of the elements that had defined the yet unlabelled scene had begun to disappear, with external pressure leading to a clamp-down on pirate radio DJs (the awarding of the first anti-social behaviour order—or ASBO—to Rinse FM’s DJ Slimzee) and the introduction of the Metropolitan Police Form 696 that restricted Grime nights at venues in the capital.⁷

By the end of the ‘noughties’, as the culture seemed to be losing popularity, gaining negative media attention and slipping back

⁵ Angelique Chrisafis, ‘Rapper Wins Mercury Prize’, *The Guardian*, 10 September 2003. Accessed 4/6/18. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/sep/10/arts.mercuryprize2003>

⁶ Alexi Duggins, ‘Wiley: You want to know the truth? I’m gonna tell you the truth’, *Time Out*, 9 June 2016. Accessed 1/5/18.

<https://www.timeout.com/london/music/wiley-you-want-to-know-the-truth-im-gonna-tell-you-the-truth>

⁷ Matheus Sanchez, ‘Asbo Bars Pirate DJ From The Rooftops’, *Evening Standard*, 15 April 2005. Accessed 1/5/18.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/asbo-bars-pirate-dj-from-the-rooftops-7173468.html>

underground, and government cuts attacked poor neighbourhoods, parallels were being drawn in black communities in London with chapters from recent history. Austerity measures introduced by the Conservative government in 2010 were immediately felt and opposed with up to five-hundred-thousand people marching on London in the largest union-led demonstration since the Second World War.⁸ Meanwhile a sense disconnect in black communities was creating a sense of worthlessness, while frustration at a lack of any deeper cultural recognition was symptomatic of the mainstreaming or gentrification of black urban music. These symptoms and others such as hostile treatment by the police, closure of youth services and cuts to the education maintenance allowance for poor teenagers, were listed by a *London School of Economics / The Guardian* report as among the causes of the 2011 London Riots.⁹ This chapter aims to delve back into the history of East London's Caribbean communities. It will explore their relationships with the police, with white indigenous communities and with the geographical locations they inhabited, whilst tracing the story of Caribbean music within those contexts and the winding route that black London culture has taken in order to explain the emergence of Grime music, a uniquely London sound for the twenty-first century.

The first waves of large-scale immigration from the British colonies in the West Indies began to arrive in Britain in the late 1940s.

⁸ Kevin Rawlinson, 'A Peaceful Protest. The Inevitable Aftermath', *Independent*, 27 March 2011. Accessed: 15/8/18.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/a-peaceful-protest-the-inevitable-aftermath-2254167.html>

⁹ 'Reading The Riots: Investigating England's Summer Of Disorder', *The Guardian / LSE*, 19 July 2012. Accessed 2/5/18.

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots%28published%29.pdf>

Former wartime troop-carriers such as the famous HMT Empire Windrush, which arrived in London from Kingston, Jamaica in 1948, delivered hundreds of young and enthusiastic immigrants ready to work and fill the gaps necessary to the rebuilding of the post-war motherland. Before embarking on their trans-Atlantic voyages, the various groups of Caribbean migrants had seen themselves as nationals of their countries first and British subjects second. It has been argued that the forging of a united Caribbean identity only developed in Britain from a solidarity born from shared experiences. Prior notions of regional dynamics and rivalry were challenged and rejected in what James Winston calls “the undermining of ‘island chauvinism’” which he explains thus:

Divided by the expanse of the sea—the distance between Port of Spain (Trinidad) and Kingston (Jamaica) is the equivalent of that from London to Moscow—and mutual suspicion in the Caribbean, the passage to Britain has brought Jamaicans, Barbadians, Grenadians, Kittitians, Guyanese, Trinidadians, and others into close proximity with each other for the first time. Although island loyalties remain, the people of the Caribbean have, through the agencies of London Transport, the National Health Service and, most of all, the centripetal forces of British racism, come to recognize their common class position and shared Caribbean identity.¹⁰

¹⁰ Winston James, ‘Migration, Racism And Identity: The Caribbean Experience In Britain’, *New Left Review* I-193, May/June 1992. Accessed: 4/5/18.
<https://newleftreview.org/I/193/winston-james-migration-racism-and-identity-the-caribbean-experience-in-britain>

The majority of the 1,027 passengers that disembarked the Windrush at Tilbury Docks were initially housed in a shelter in Clapham. A couple of miles away in Brixton many would find affordable accommodation, plentiful employment and the beginnings of the first major post-war Caribbean community in London. The principal area of employment for the first Caribbean settlers was in the public sector where “jobs were found immediately for 202 skilled men; the others didn’t have to wait long.”¹¹ Within fourteen years of Windrush, Britain had a Caribbean population of 278,000 and while many industries and their trade unions rejected large-scale hiring of Caribbean immigrants, many found work on busses and trains and in hospitals.¹²

The influx of newcomers to London and other British cities in the 1950s met with resistance not only from industries and institutions, but from indigenous white populations in neighbourhoods where immigrants settled in large numbers. Stoked by the fascist rhetoric of Oswald Mosley and the Union of British Freedom, groups of young white working-class ‘Teddy Boys’ began to target Caribbean settlers in one of the larger communities, Notting Hill.¹³ In 1958 small clashes there turned to riot (seen also in Nottingham and Birmingham) with several hundred Teddy Boys taking to the streets to attack businesses and individuals until, after five nights, the police finally quelled the trouble, making 108 arrests. The 1958 unrest has popularly been known as the Notting Hill Race Riots ever since, but in reality, it was nothing less than a racially motivated mob attack by angry white youths against

¹¹ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History Of Black People In Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 372.

¹² ‘Black History In Hackney And Britain – An Overview’, Hackney Council (2017), p. 3.

¹³ ‘Notting Hill Riots 1958’, Exploring 20th Century London Project, London Museums Hub (March 2011). <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/notting-hill-riots-1958>

a frightened black community. Police reports in the initial aftermath (released by the Public Records Office in Kew and reported in the national media in 2003) categorised the perpetrators as “ruffians, both coloured and white”.¹⁴ There were some reports of black vigilante groups and 36 local black residents were arrested, but the events marked the first major catalyst of what would become a long-standing distrust among London’s Caribbean population towards the Metropolitan Police.

While they were also the first examples in a history of riots to arise from racial tensions in London’s black neighbourhoods, which would later include unrest in Tottenham and Brixton (still seen as the Caribbean capital of Britain), the events of 1958 were shocking to the nation. For the first time, serious questions were prompted on the issues of “racial prejudice, community harmony and the scale of commonwealth immigration in the inner cities.”¹⁵ At the same time, Caribbean communities developed a unity in the face of the racist attacks and a perceived lack of assistance or unfair treatment from the police. The year after the riots, a Caribbean Carnival was established in St. Pancras in response to the riots and the sense of injustice felt by community, and by the 1960s, the carnival had moved to the streets of Notting Hill where it still takes place every August bank holiday, the anniversary of the ‘58 riots.

¹⁴ Alan Travis, ‘After 44 Years Secret Papers Reveal Truth About Five Nights Of Violence In Notting Hill’, *The Guardian*, 24 August 2002. Accessed:13/2/18
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/aug/24/artsandhumanities.nottinghillcarnival2002>

¹⁵ ‘Notting Hill Riots 1958’, Exploring 20th Century London Project, London Museums Hub (March 2011).
<http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/notting-hill-riots-1958>

Black Londoners took issue with what they saw as differential treatment from the Metropolitan Police. Acting for the most part in self-defence, they felt that a disproportionate number of the arrests made had been of black youths (36 out of a total of 108), and that police had done little to stop the attackers. This was a sentiment acknowledged by Public Relations Officer, Sir Austin Strutt, when he urged the Government to take the issue seriously and to consider an attempt at public reassurance:

They [the Caribbean community] saw provocation by White Defenders and Mosleyites carried out with apparent immunity...this made them feel that neither the Government nor anyone else in the white world cared about their predicament. If a broadcast of the kind proposed had been made very soon after the murder of Kelso Cochrane it might have been very helpful and reassuring.¹⁶

The murder of Kelso Cochrane, mentioned in the letter, had been committed one month earlier on 17 May 1959. The young man, originally from Antigua, had been walking to his home in Notting Hill when he was set upon by six white men and fatally stabbed. No one was ever found in connection with the murder and it became another in a long list of injustices perceived to be either perpetrated by or not investigated properly by the police. Following the advice of Strutt and recognising the need to address the situation in some form, the

¹⁶ Letter by Sir Austin Strutt, National Archives, 17 June 1959. Accessed: 24 April 2018. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/h0344-441.jpg>

Government decided to set up an investigative committee, chaired by one of the founders of *The West Indian Gazette*, the Pan-Africanist activist, Amy Ashwood Garvey, to come up with solutions to the racial tensions that were becoming more and more common.¹⁷ The public reaction was somewhat stronger and certainly provoked fear among those in Government, already anxious of more race-related violence. The neighbourhood rallied and “more than 1,000 people - both black and white - attended Kelso’s funeral and the next day the *News of the World* offered a substantial reward for the capture of his killer.”¹⁸

On the spot where Kelso was killed there is now a memorial plaque which reads, “Kelso Cochrane 1936-1959 Antiguan carpenter and student, was fatally wounded on this site. His death outraged and united the community, leading to the lasting cosmopolitan tradition in this area of North Kensington.”¹⁹ The aftermath of the murder and the immediate unifying effect on the local community is seen as hugely significant, with the formation of the Caribbean Carnival (organised by activist, Claudia Jones, co-founder with Amy Ashwood Garvey of *The West Indian Gazette*) that same year and a slump in support for Oswald Mosley, who polled just 2,621 votes in North Kensington, in the October General Election.²⁰ The outrage mentioned in Cochrane’s plaque was not confined to the local community. Labour MP Barbara Castle attacked the Conservative government’s valuation of black lives by

¹⁷ Black History Month Booklet, City of Westminster (2006).

¹⁸ Stephen Lawrence And Echoes Of The Past - blog, Review of Mark Olden’s *Murder In Notting Hill*, 3 January 2012. Accessed: 24 April 2018.

¹⁹ Kelso Cochrane Plaque, Open Plaques, Nubian Jak Community Trust, 2009. Accessed: 24 April 2018. <http://www.murderinnottinghill.com/2012/01/03/stephen-lawrence-case-and-echoes-of-the-past/>
<http://openplaques.org/plaques/4186>

²⁰ 1959 General Election Results for North Kensington, Election Hub. Accessed: 24 April 2018. <http://electionhub.co.uk/uk/1959/const/kensingtonno>

drawing comparisons to foreign policy in the colonies, arguing that “if the British people are going to allow those responsible for the beating of 11 detainees to death in the Hola concentration camp in Kenya to go untraced and unpunished we shall have given the green-light to every ‘nigger-baiting’ Teddy Boy in Notting Hill.”²¹

Government took a further six years before passing the 1965 Race Relations Act that outlawed discrimination on “grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins”, but in the meantime, the Caribbean Carnival had moved in 1964 to Notting Hill. Local and institutional racism had caused the black residents of Notting Hill, Brixton, Tottenham, Willesden and Hackney much frustration. Where would they find protection and sympathy if not from the state? The answer came in community, the strengthening of a pan-Caribbean identity and the embracing later in the twentieth century of what Paul Gilroy described as a wider ‘Black Atlantic’ culture.²² Carnival was at the heart of this and new innovations to musical forms born out of a hostile environment of racism would continue to ask questions about the place of black cultures in Britain. A long series of local and racially-motivated incidents in the late twentieth century that included, the trial of The Mangrove Nine (1969), the rioting at the Notting Hill Carnival (1979), the New Cross Fire (1981) the riots at Broadwater Farm, Tottenham (1981) and Brixton (1985), and the murder of Stephen Lawrence (1993), all solidified those notions of injustice and the importance of a defiantly

²¹ Mark Olden, *Murder In Notting Hill* (London: Zero Books, 2011), p. 6.

²² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity And Double-consciousness* (London: Verso 1993).

angry community spirit, referred to by the poet Linton Kwesi Johnson in 'New Crass Massahkah' (1984):

How the whole of black Britain turn a firey red

Not the callous red of the killers' eyes,

But red with rage like the flames of the fire...

...Look how the police and press try dem desperate best

Fe put a stop to a quest for the truth.²³

These themes would come to form a key part of the story of the Black Atlantic diaspora in Britain by the end of the twentieth century. The generation of children in Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and other boroughs of East London, that by then had significant and growing Caribbean populations, had grown up with this history and continuing reality of antagonistic police policies in the shape of 'stop and search' and the introduction of Form 696 in 2005. The latter would be used to suppress black music culture in the capital and was eventually condemned by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan and scrapped in 2017.²⁴ This was the generation responsible for Grime music, but by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, it seemed as though the genre had succumbed to shifting fashions and political pressures and slipped back underground. Then in 2011, a series of events including the deaths of two black men in the presence of the police,

²³'New Crass Massahkah', Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Making History*, (London: Island Records, 1984).

²⁴ Form 696: 'Racist Police Form' To Be Scrapped In London, *BBC News*, 10 November 2017.

Accessed: 15 December 2017.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41946915>

Mark Duggan and the musician, Smiley Culture, would lead to the worst rioting the capital had seen since the 1980s. It seemed as though history was repeating itself and that over 50 years of troublesome relations between the Metropolitan Police and London's black population had yielded few lessons.

Once again, the sentiment described by Peter Fryer in his book, *Staying Power*, that "the police had become, in effect, an army of occupation charged with the task of keeping black people in their place,"²⁵ was in the forefront of the minds of black Londoners, but once again the community looked inwards and culture flourished. The few big-name artists that were still putting out Grime music spoke out in tweets, interviews and most importantly, in music. The riots had started in Tottenham, a sort of second home of Grime after East London. Tottenham MCs such as Chipmunk, Skepta and Scorchers all put out RIP tweets to Mark Duggan, with Scorchers drawing comparisons to his own family tragedy that had led to the rioting at Broadwater Farm in 1985: "25 years ago police killed my grandma in her house in Tottenham and the whole ends rioted, 25 years on and they're still keepin up fuckry."²⁶ Lethal Bizzle, known for speaking out politically in songs such as 'Babylon's Burning The Ghetto', as well as for his 'beef' in the newspapers with the then Prime Minister David Cameron, spoke out again through the media in the wake of the 2011 riots.²⁷ In a *Guardian* article at the time of the riots, he said the unrest had "not just happened

²⁵ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History Of Black People In Britain*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 394.

²⁶ Scorchers, Twitter, @ScorchersLife, 6 August 2011. Accessed: 23 April 2018.

<https://twitter.com/ScorchersLife/status/99940353506934786>

²⁷ Lethal Bizzle, 'David Cameron Is A Donut', *The Guardian*, 8 June 2006. Accessed: 5/11/17.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/08/davidcameronisadonut>

out of the blue," and summarised that "the kids have seen the opportunity to take the piss now – because they feel like they've been taken the piss out of their whole lives – but it's been going on for years."²⁸

Grime's massive resurgence in the years after and the subsequent scrapping of the 2011 riots can undoubtedly trace some of their origins to the new voice and media prominence that the culture and its proponents reclaimed in the aftermath of the 2011 riots. Examining the degree to which police pressures and state legislation continued to unfairly target black communities in this period and impact upon the stylistic shaping of the genre and its place, both geographically and culturally, in the East End of London will be something that is addressed in the third chapter of this thesis. The following section of this chapter will focus on the ways in which generations of Caribbeans in Britain faced up to British racism and how music in particular was the principal expression of that struggle with London's black communities.

Babylon: reactions to British racism

In a 2002 introduction to a later edition of his seminal 1987 work *There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy reimagines the patterns of successive generational differences in the attitudes towards race, racism and the struggle among London's Caribbean community.

²⁸ Dan Hancox, 'Rap Responds To The Riots: They Have To Take Us Seriously', *The Guardian*, 12 August 2011. Accessed: 5 November 2017.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/aug/12/rap-riots-professor-green-lethal-bizzle-wiley>

The post-Windrush, “British-born children and grandchildren born roughly between Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘rivers of blood’ speech and the rioting of the mid-1980s” display in his view, a more ‘combative’ outlook on race and their place in the motherland than their parents.²⁹ This, he argues, is a result of having lived the racist reality of Britain in the 1970s and within a global context of post-colonial politicised blackness, made famous in the United States by groups such as the Black Panther Party. A. Sivanandan concurs in his description of the reality faced by many:

increasing police harassment, particularly of West Indians, mounting discrimination in employment and housing and the relegation of West Indian children to ESN (Educationally Sub-Normal) schools sparked off militant struggles in the Caribbean community. The black rebellion in America gave fillup to black nationalism.³⁰

In Britain, the influence of wider diasporic politics manifested itself in local community activism in groups such as the one which met regularly at The Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill under the direction of Frank Critchlow and Darcus Howe, both immigrants from Trinidad and Tobago, and both members of the Mangrove Nine. The restaurant had been subject to intense pressure from the police in its opening year (1968) with six raids on the property. The police had claimed to be searching for drugs, but nothing was found. In 1970, when

²⁹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack: The Cultural Politics Of Race And Nation (Third Edition)* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. xii.

³⁰ A. Sivanandan, *Race, Class & The State: The Black Experience In Britain* (Nottingham: Russell Press, 1976), p. 359.

a group of activists from The Mangrove marched on a local police station in protest, they were charged with inciting riot and sent to trial under the threat of deportation.³¹ In a case that changed the landscape of relations between Britain's black communities and the police, the nine defended themselves and were acquitted. It was the first case in British judicial history of an acknowledgment of institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police force.

This wouldn't be the only example of racism by the Met against The Mangrove and its leaders. It has been argued that by the 1980s and with Notting Hill becoming more fashionable and expensive, gentrification began to take over the area and black community hubs such as the Mangrove came under "almost overwhelming" pressure.³² In 1988, after a raid led by Deputy Assistant-Commissioner Paul Condon, Critchlow was again arrested, this time on serious drug charges. His anti-drug stance as a community leader was well-known locally and despite the sworn testimony of thirty-six police officers, the sheer weight of evidence showing his innocence was enough for the judge to throw out the charges on grounds of "false imprisonment, battery and malicious prosecution", acquit Critchlow with £50,000 damages, and expose the Metropolitan Police once more for institutional racism against black-British activists in London.³³

³¹ Robin Bunce & Paul Field, 'Mangrove Nine: The Court Challenge Against Police Racism In Notting Hill', *The Guardian*, 19 November 2010. Accessed: 24/7/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2010/nov/29/mangrove-nine-40th-anniversary>

³² Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics: Explorations In The Structure Of Urban Cultural Movements* (Los Angeles/Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 109.

³³ Heather Mills, 'Restaurant That Became A Symbol For Radicalism', *The Independent*, 13 October 1992. Accessed: 24/7/18.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/restaurant-that-became-a-symbol-for-radicalism-an-action-for-damages-by-a-civil-rights-leader-has-1557061.html>

The reaction to these incidents was that the wrongly-accused were welcomed back to the community as heroes that had won justice and helped expose what Caribbean and African residents in the capital already knew about the underhand tactics of the police. As Critchlow put it, “It was a turning point for black people. It put on trial the attitudes of the police, the Home Office, of everyone towards the black community. We took a stand and I’m proud of what we achieved – we forced them to sit down and rethink harassment.”³⁴ Critchlow and the other Mangrove activists put their efforts back into the community and continued with the work they had been doing in organising the Notting Hill Carnival. Music was, simultaneously, a cathartic process for a suppressed community, a platform for the expression of those experiences and a defiant reminder to the nation that these people were British by birth (either in Britain or in British colonies) and they were not going anywhere.

James Winston offers an alternative reason to Gilroy for the difference in approach to race and identity between those born in the Caribbean and those born in Britain by arguing that, rather than just reacting to British racism, the two generations had pre-conceived ideas about their roles, which in turn determined their thresholds for what was tolerable. For James, the first British-born generation differ from the Windrush generation in that “they compare their position and life chance within Britain not with conditions in pre-Independent

³⁴ Robin Bunce & Paul Field, ‘Frank Critchlow: Community Leader Who Made The Mangrove Restaurant The Beating Heart Of Notting Hill’, *The Independent*, 23 September 2010. Accessed: 24/7/18. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/frank-critchlow-community-leader-who-made-the-mangrove-restaurant-the-beating-heart-of-notting-hill-2086839.html>

Caribbean society but with their white British counterparts”. In other words, they no longer share the new-arrival optimism for British life that their parents had had, nor do they maintain the living memory of the poor conditions left behind in the Caribbean. It follows then, James surmises, that “it is therefore no surprise that their opposition to British racism is instantaneous and forthright”.³⁵

Where the Windrush generation had been shocked to find militant racist opposition to the establishment of large Caribbean communities in places like Notting Hill and Nottingham in the late fifties, their British-born descendants defiantly met the same racism head on. By the 1980s it wasn't angry white Teddy Boys rioting in those neighbourhoods, but disillusioned young black people protesting against widespread institutional racism. The cult 1980 film *Babylon* vividly depicts the daily encounters with British racism, both casual and institutional, through the experiences of a group of Dub-Reggae musicians in South London. One such encounter perfectly encapsulates the more combative attitude referred to by both Gilroy and James, as one of the youngsters fires back at an elderly racist white neighbour who would have remembered the time before the young man's parents had settled there. She aggressively confronts him: “This was a lovely area before you come here. Lovely...you fuck off back to your own countries, you jungle-bunny”, before he angrily retorts, “This is my fucking

³⁵ Winston James, ‘Migration, Racism And Identity: The Caribbean Experience In Britain’, *New Left Review* 1-193, May/June 1992. Accessed: 4/5/18.
<https://newleftreview.org/1/193/winston-james-migration-racism-and-identity-the-caribbean-experience-in-britain>

country, lady! And it's never been fucking lovely. It's always been a fucking tip, for as long as I can remember!"³⁶

If that attitude depicted in *Babylon* had come about within the context of twentieth-century black political activism and more specifically, as Gilroy puts it, "the combative mood of the 1970s", the political and social context of early Grime music can be seen quite differently.³⁷ No less disenfranchised and angry than their parents twenty-five years previously, the Grime pioneers hadn't inherited the same culture of protest and activism that their parents had been born into and then utilised in opposition to the racism they felt came from the Thatcher government all the way to the man on the street. The Millennial generation's frustrations towards racism and a lack of opportunities were just as much a result of cumulative racially-motivated incidents that often went unpunished, from regular racial slurs by police officers doing their routine stop and searches, to the nationally covered news story of institutional racism in the Stephen Lawrence murder (1993). What that generation lacked however, was organised black political opposition to British racism and leadership in creating a voice in mainstream British society for unrepresented communities. Grime would step up to fill that gap by the end of the millennium, emerging out of necessity and serving as, in the same way Chuck D had described Hip Hop in America, "CNN for black people".³⁸

³⁶ *Babylon*, Franco Rosso, National Film Finance Corporation (1980).

³⁷ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack: The Cultural Politics Of Race And Nation (Third Edition)* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. xii.

³⁸ David Thorpe, Chuck D, *Bomb Magazine*, 1 July 1999. Accessed: 14/8/18.
<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/chuck-d/>

As with many elements of such a proudly underground movement, the politics of early Grime music were extremely localised. A large part of East London comprised the ‘ends’.³⁹ African and Caribbean communities within them shrank the definition further still and within those neighbourhoods there were social and political dynamics at play. Specific police relations with communities in council estates constitute a key topic for many of Grime’s notable figures, but this was a subject that had been regularly revisited in black-British music in the capital as far back as the 1980’s. The late, aforementioned Smiley Culture’s 1984 song ‘Police Officer’, which went to number twelve in the UK charts, alluded to the culture of police profiling and harassment that many black Londoners found all too familiar. In a wonderfully hypnotic rhythm and skilful switching between Cockney and Patois accents, he recites a dialogue between himself and the officers stopping him to look for drugs;

"What you got in the boot then son?"

"A cassette recorder. Would you like to have a look?"

"Shut your bloody mouth. We ask. You answer

Now take the keys out of the car and step out of the motor

Me and my colleagues have got a few questions to ask ya

You'll be on your way as soon as we get an answer"

³⁹ The term ‘the ends’ or ‘endz’ refers to one’s local neighbourhood. It is typically used to refer to an area as large as a borough but can occasionally be used on an even larger scale in speaking about a whole area of the city, such as East London.

As me come out of the car me a think and me a wonder
 What police officers could want with Smiley Culture
 Ca' with them a search the interior
 But whatever them look for me hiding place superior
 But the way them a search me had to ask them what they a look
 for
 But me try handle them coarse. Them just handle me coarser
 Then one draw handcuff, Put him hand 'pon me shoulder
 And say: "We ain't got time to waste, We don't think you have
 neither
 Just give us what we want - the real sensimilla"⁴⁰

The song has a jolly, comedic narration to it that actually concludes with the officers finding Smiley's stash and then letting him go in exchange for an autograph when they realise who he is, but racial profiling and the stop-and-search tactics depicted in the song are themes that would have struck a frustrated chord with many listeners. Rob Drummond notes that some within the black community, such as the broadcaster Lindsay Johns would campaign for an acceptance of 'proper English' and the abandonment of Patois, which he branded a "moronic language", blaming it for a lot of the societal ills that he felt plagued black Britain and completely rejecting the kind of code-

⁴⁰'Police Officer', Smiley Culture (London: Fashion Records, 1984).

switching that Smiley Culture so gracefully employed.⁴¹ The continuing bone of contention concerning stop and search in London's black communities was part of a greater sense of distrust for the police. 'Police Officer's release in 1984 was sandwiched by riots in the years immediately before and after, most notably the 1981 Brixton Riots in Smiley's home borough of Lambeth and the 1986 Broadwater Farm Riots in Tottenham. In the years between that period of protest and the 2011 London riots, the 1990s and the rise and fall of New Labour occurred, but that distrust of the police force remained in black communities, as did the expression of it in the music that came from them.

Still recording during Grime's golden age, but slightly older than many of its pioneers, the UK Hip-Hop artist, Klashnekoff, displayed similar stylistic qualities. In language, fashion, political attitudes, ethnic background and community origins, Klashnekoff can be considered a cultural peer. In his critique of the Metropolitan Police, 'Our Time', from the 2004 album, *Sagas of Klashnekoff*, he suggests a much darker, conspiratorial relationship between young black men and the local constabulary:

Twisted like contortion or coppers up in Hoxton

Who had certain black youts on road shottin' rocks for them

What? You think I've forgotten?

⁴¹ Rob Drummond, '(Mis)interpreting Urban Youth Language: White Kids Sounding Black', *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol 20 – No. 5, p. 3, November 2016. Accessed: 02/03/19.

Fuck Sir Paul Condon, your whole force is rotten!⁴²

Klashnekoff is claiming here that young black men (certain black youths – possibly including himself) had been tasked with selling crack (shottin’ rocks) by local Hackney police officers. He ends the verse by extending the criticism to the then Met commissioner Sir Paul Condon (1993-2000) and the entirety of London’s police force.

By the turn of the millennium, the time Klashnekoff and the early Grime artists were writing, attitudes towards activism in the community had changed. Fatigued by the lack of progress evident in cases such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence (1993) and its subsequent cover-up, in addition to the increased police pressure of the 1980s that we have already seen, there seemed to be little hope of improvement in the state of police relations with London’s black population. The old ‘sus law’ that had allowed officers to stop and search almost indiscriminately had been repealed following the 1981 Brixton Riots after acknowledgement that it may have been used unfairly to racially-profile members of black and ethnic minority groups.⁴³ The scaled down ‘stop and search’ practice that followed it was also criticised in the 1999 MacPherson Report into the handling of the Stephen Lawrence case, that again highlighted racial profiling and prejudicial treatment of ethnic minorities by the Met.⁴⁴

What this all meant was that by the time British/Caribbean millennials were coming of age (late 1990s/early 2000s), a long

⁴² ‘Our Time’, Klashnekoff, *Sagas of Klashnekoff* (London: Kemet Entertainment, 2004).

⁴³ The Power To Stop And Search, *BBC News*, 14 December 2010. Accessed: 24/7/18.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1070552.stm>

⁴⁴ The Police Foundation, *Police Foundation Stop And Search Briefing* (March 2012), p. 2.

generational pattern of hand-me-down distrust of the police and a sense of hopelessness in the face of institutional British racism, had taken its toll on the attitudes of young black people in London. Previous generations had responded differently to these problems. The Windrush generation had been able to favourably compare conditions in London with the deprivations of where they had come from and desired to just get on. The combative generation of British-born black Londoners were inspired by the black diasporic political activism of the 1970s and developed a greater belief in their right to stand up to prejudice. Grime's pioneers, the grandchildren of Windrush, had witnessed the activism of their parents and heard stories of early racial tension from their grandparents, but felt the ongoing and seemingly everlasting racism of the police and society continue.

Music played the same role that it had done for previous generations: in shebeens, in underground scenes and at Carnival. Grime was proudly DIY to the point that it rejected the norms of the mainstream music industry and shunned big record label demands and fashion trends. It was about depicting the truth of the communities and streets it came from, the language, the stories, the clothing *et al*, and in this sense (as we shall see in later analysis) it was certainly political. Black responses to racism and gentrification in London's urban culture had moved away from activist expression at Notting Hill Carnival and moved underground in the form of Grime music. Grime attached attitudes of disenfranchisement and a feeling of displacement within claustrophobic ghettoised neighbourhoods, to the musical traditions of

Caribbean sound-system culture and British club and radio scenes to create a new and unique form. The following section will focus on how the location of East London, especially its history, geography and demographics, was instrumental in the birth of Grime music and its culture.

‘The ends’: the move east and the beginnings of Grime’s community

As we have seen already, traditional and long-standing Caribbean communities were established in various corners of London from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The earliest and largest of these were in Brixton and Notting Hill and they would go on to develop as strong cultural bases for the diaspora in the capital. Of the figures we have seen thus far, artists Linton Kwesi Johnson, Brinsley Forde and Smiley Culture operated mainly from Brixton. Activists such as Claudia Jones, working out of an office in Brixton, connected the area with London’s other main Caribbean hub, Notting Hill, with her work on establishing the Carnival, but large groups of migrants had also settled in nearby Harlesden, known as “reggae headquarters” to some.⁴⁵ Gentrification following high rent increases would shift the boundaries of these communities throughout the late twentieth-century, most notably in

⁴⁵ Brent Clough, ‘What Happened To Brixton’s Reggae Revolution?’, *ABC*, 12 November 2013. Accessed: 10/07/18.
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/360/what-happened-to-brixtons-reggae-revolution/5107636>

the shape of the exodus of Caribbean migrants from Notting Hill to more welcoming and affordable areas of London. In Kensington (the borough in which Notting Hill is found), with its desirably central location and houses of relatively greater architectural value, rises in rent were inevitable. The dense population of the borough and cramped conditions in which many migrants lived meant that very soon “housing conditions deteriorated and rents increased. West Indians lived in poor accommodation and paid high rents”.⁴⁶

This situation and the fact that many migrants worked low-paid jobs meant that overcrowding followed and the neighbourhood became increasingly undesirable for families. Caribbean Londoners looked elsewhere, firstly to Brixton but also to Harlesden, Tottenham and the boroughs of the East End, which in particular and despite its strong white working-class culture, had long been a more tolerant and accepting place for foreigners wishing to make a home in Britain. As they left Oswald Mosley’s fascist headquarters in Notting Hill, they arrived in East End boroughs like Tower Hamlets where three decades earlier, 200,000 Eastenders had rallied in protest at Mosley’s group marching through their borough, resulting in The Battle of Cable Street (1936).⁴⁷ The family of Wiley (of Jamaican/Antiguan origin) were one of many to make the journey from South to East London, starting in Peckham (an extension of the Caribbean hub of Brixton) before ending up in Limehouse, in an estate at the very Western end of Cable Street

⁴⁶ Ron Ramdin, *The Making Of The Black Working Class In Britain* (London: Gower Publishing, 1987), p. 193.

⁴⁷ Mike Brooke, ‘They Shall Not Pass’, *East London Advertiser*, 29 September 2016. Accessed: 4/8/18. <http://www.eastlondonadvertiser.co.uk/news/heritage/they-shall-not-pass-message-from-the-past-for-battle-of-cable-street-80th-anniversary-1-4709578>

itself. While Caribbean cultural traditions were brought to East London with these movements from Brixton and Notting Hill, they joined a truly multicultural society there. Wiley's first music group with friends was named Cross Colours for its proud ethnic diversity.⁴⁸

The East End, which in the 1950's and '60's was still known for overcrowding and (white working-class) poverty of near-Dickensian levels, had initially been a much more difficult location for large migrant communities. As Ron Ramdin explains,

West Indians could not find accommodation in the working class districts of the East End and the southern riverside boroughs where, because of the stability of the population and tenancies, there was no room for sub-division. The ranks of the white working class were effectively closed.⁴⁹

When high rents began to drive Caribbean migrants out of their traditional bases, two of the most deprived and cheapest boroughs in England—Hackney and Tower Hamlets—became the destination of choice for many. Alongside Bow in Tower Hamlets, Hackney as a whole is centrally important for the number of pioneering Jungle and Grime artists to emerge from its streets. Neighbouring areas such as Leyton, Leytonstone, Walthamstow, Forest Gate, Stratford and East Ham also deserve a special mention and will be looked at in further detail in Chapter Two, but in telling the story of the pre-Grime period and the

⁴⁸ Emma Warren, 'Wiley: The Eski Boy', *Red Bull Music Academy Daily*, 26 May 2015. Accessed: 4/8/18. <http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2015/05/wiley-feature>

⁴⁹Ron Ramdin, *The Making Of The Black Working Class In Britain* (London: Gower Publishing, 1987), p 191-192.

initial years of the movement, the boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets are more immediately essential.

Walk around Bow and visually it will appear typical of many neighbourhoods across the capital. Streets of sturdy Victorian terraced houses connect to a main shopping thoroughfare – in this case, Roman Road, with its classic East End market. Particularly notable of East London are the new-build houses and flats that fill gaps in the 19th century architecture, left by the Blitz of 1940/41. From 1945 to the late 1960s, blocks of flats of varying sizes sprang up in the vacant plots of bomb-damaged Bow, slowly providing more densely packed and affordable housing to the expanding populations of baby-boomers and incoming migrants from the waning British Empire. Susan Lawrence House in Zealand Road, Lakeview and Cranbrook Estates off Old Ford Road and Lanfranc Estate on Roman Road were all constructed to meet this increased demand for housing. By 1962 London City Council had constructed a total of 2,317 flats in the Bethnal Green area (which includes Bow) and controlled 4,312.⁵⁰

Perhaps most recognisable to followers of Grime music is Roman Road itself. It was here, in the 2006 documentary *The Movement*, that fans saw artists Ghetts, Mercston, Scorchers and Wretch-32 ponder on the future of their scene while humorously reflecting on their surroundings. Plaistow native Ghetts teases his fellow artists: “We’re in Bow and I don’t know why”. “This is a nice area. Look how they’re building it up round here,” replies Mercston with a smile. “He [Ghetts]

⁵⁰ Bethnal Green: Building And Social Conditions After 1945 Social And Cultural Activities, *University Of London Institute For Historical Research*. Accessed: 12/11/2017
<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol11/pp135-147>

wants to live round here really. He's round here every day!" "My dad lives in Bow and I don't live in Bow so what does that say?" retorts Ghetts.⁵¹ This snippet is typically reflective of the love/hate relationship between Grime artists, the wider community from which they emerge and the areas they call home. They are simultaneously proud and ashamed: critical when depicting their surroundings and street life, while at the same time, keen to represent the borough or area they live in.

Kano touches on this paradoxical relationship in 'T-shirt Weather In The Manor', a nostalgic ode to his home borough Newham: "We shot the album front cover up by the shops / We just wanna rep the manor right, give it props.... They say the ends love you, then they hate you, then they love you again / Then you try change your postcode to W10".⁵² The conflicting feelings of how to relate to an environment that has held you back yet made you what you are is a common theme in much of Grime, as it is in black urban music the world over. When Kano says that the end switches between loving and hating you, he deliberately adopts a passive grammatical structure to show that it feels as though the pressures and loves are impacting upon him from a collective source, the wider community, rather than him actively expressing *his* love or hatred of the area. This powerful grammatical switch-up reflects on a deeper sense of community and a complex relationship with it that would otherwise be lost on the audience, a running theme of the artist's work as he touches on concepts

⁵¹ 'The Movement DVD', *Risky Roadz*, 2006. Accessed 19/12/17

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ra1HWDkv99Q>

⁵² Kano, 'T-shirt Weather In The Manor', *Made In The Manor*, Parlophone Records, London, 2016.

of family, friendship, support and upbringing, alongside poverty, crime, local feuds and the desire to explore outside his confined environment.

In a 2011 interview he expands on this pride in community:

If you look at other parts of London they tend to have a rich area and then the not-so-nice bits, but East London isn't really like that. It all just is what it is. It feels like more of a community, and we're good when it comes to making something out of nothing⁵³

Kano echoes what many others, both inside and outside the musical inner-circles of Grime culture have said before. Community is key and is the strength that allows the culture to be passed down and continued. Traditions and practices have been fostered and made popular by people of different ethnic backgrounds and locations, but at its root, the musical backbone to the lineage of Dub to Dancehall to Jungle to Garage to Grime comes directly from Jamaican soundsystem culture and the maze of streets, estates and parks that sprawl out within a roughly five-mile radius of Stratford, in Newham. It was in Stratford that a young Kano paid close attention when his “uncles used to play music in the house; they were really into their sound systems”.⁵⁴ The first Grime artists clearly owe a lot to London's Caribbean community (even if not all its practitioners came from that ethnic background) and particularly their parents within that community for the musical heritage they passed on. Slightly earlier than the youngsters who birthed Grime, came an age-group of older siblings and cousins

⁵³Chantelle Fiddy, 'Home sweet home: Kano talks East London, RE:Definition and Music', *Urban Development*, 2011. Accessed 10/01/18
<http://urbandevelopment.co.uk/blog-categories/features-reviews/features/profiles/home-sweet-home-kano-talks-east-london-redefiniti>

⁵⁴Hattie Collins & Olivia Rose, *This Is Grime* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), p. 16.

that had formed their own branch of the sound system tree and created Jungle (another huge influence on Kano and his contemporaries and something of which we will learn more in the following section), but others agreed that without the education provided by their parents' parties and performances, the foundations wouldn't have been there for Grime.

Footsie, one half of the celebrated pioneer duo Newham Generals, states the importance of that link to the Grime scene with his own family story: "We're just trying to take something and carry it on. I can't tell you anything my dad doesn't know – he's done it all, he's travelled...He understands what we do, so to have that support really helped".⁵⁵Footsie's father and his contemporaries, including the father of Wiley, the self-titled 'Godfather of Grime', Kano's uncles and a whole generation of West Indian musicians, had laid out the practice of their musical traditions that would serve their children in their own work.⁵⁶They travelled the country and played wherever they could, but on returning to East London, the community was there and business as usual meant local house parties and home-made speaker systems, DJs playing electronic based Dub music and toasters chatting on the mic. There were organised, illegal parties at squat-like houses, known as shebeens, that would serve as the only venues where most Reggae and Dub artists could perform.

One of the most famous shebeens was Fathers, run by DJ Weasel in Notting Hill, but others could be found wherever Caribbean

⁵⁵ Hattie Collins and Olivia Rose, *This Is Grime* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), p. 13.

⁵⁶ Footsie and Wiley were connected as children by their fathers, who played in a reggae band together in the 1980s. They only came to realise this after they had met as adults, through their own music.

communities existed in the capital. As with other elements of this underground music culture, the shebeen was ephemeral: here today, gone tomorrow and always under threat of closure and suppression by the authorities, just as the Grime radio stations and club nights would be in the post-2005 clamp down that we have touched on briefly already and will explore in more detail in the following chapter. The ephemeral nature of the shebeen was highlighted in a 1981 *New Musical Express* article on London's underground Caribbean music scene: "Shebeen come and shebeen go, so right now – you better take what you can get," Weasel, the dread DJ of Mossiah Sound toasts ominously into the mike'.⁵⁷ This was the appeal of the underground music scene. To those participating in one-off parties, radio transmissions or live performances, it was exclusively for them and their community, in that time and place. This was particularly true in the days before the internet and portable recording devices could spread the moment worldwide at the click of a button.

Grime was the last genre to enjoy its early heyday before online technology could come in and disseminate music indiscriminately. The value of the secret, fleeting 'moment' and the appeal it had was appreciated by the early Grime artists, high up in abandoned flats or the rooftops of East London, not least because they had learned of it from preceding generations. The DJ and blogger John Eden has created a number of mixes that illustrate the historic lineage of this musical education. One such seventy-four-minute mix, titled *Blogariddims* is

⁵⁷ Copy of an article in the blog of John Eden – The Big Sound System Spashdown (NME) (ISSN 00266362), *Uncarved* blog, 21 February 1981. Accessed: 30/01/2018
<http://www.uncarved.org/dub/splash/shebeen.html>

designed to show the direct similarities between Grime and its progenitors. Eden introduces it saying, “I got into Grime via Dancehall and Reggae but I was never sure if the lines I was drawing between the two were actually there.”⁵⁸

The opening track of the mix is taken from a Rinse FM set and features Jammer, one of Grime’s original MCs and producers, toasting a shout-out to the generation before, “hold tight my dad, yeah, cos I know you’re for this”. He also hails the sound system culture that inspired him: “hold tight all the Channel One massive, hold tight all the Aba Shanti sound man”, before stating unambiguously that “This is where this comes from.”⁵⁹

We have seen in this section that references to community and the previous generations of Caribbean families and musicians are rife within Grime music. We have seen acknowledgment of this by Kano, Wiley, Footsie and Jammer, but there are many more examples that could have been given. What they all also have in common in their music is an acknowledgement that East London has made the form what it is. Footsie’s Newham Generals partner, D Double E, summarises the connection between community and place in simple but certain terms in just a few lines of his song ‘Shenanigans’: “all I wanna do is rep for the borough / all I wanna do is rep for my sister, all I wanna do is rep for my brother”.⁶⁰ As one of the most respected, older MCs of the scene, whose words carry a lot of weight among his peers and fans,

⁵⁸ John Eden and Grievous Angel present grime in the dancehall, *Uncarved* blog, 28 April 2008. Accessed: 30/01/2018
<http://www.uncarved.org/blog/2008/04/blogariddims-40-john-eden-grievous-angel-present-grime-in-the-dancehall/>

⁵⁹ ‘Blogariddims 40’ (mix), John Eden and Grievous Angel. Accessed: 30/01/2018

⁶⁰ ‘Shenanigans’, D Double E, *Jackum*, Bluku Music, 31 August 2018.

further explanation in the lyrics is not necessary. It is immediately understood from those lines that the most important things are home and community. In the video for the song, D Double E sits surrounded by people of different ethnicities, while the editing cuts to shots of older people enjoying the party with him and his friends in the classic East London setting of an old-fashioned pub.

Many from the Caribbean communities of West and South-London had moved over to the East End, bringing with them their sound system traditions and community ties, as well as the weight of a long-history of British racism, but East London already had a strong community. Here, British/Caribbeans would mix in with more established locals, many of them from whiteworking-class families that had lived in the area for several generations. This is where Grime was born. A mixing of Jamaican Patois with Cockney slang, an already visible street culture, pride in the neighbourhoods they lived in and a mutual distrust of the authorities would all help foster a mixed-race music culture that despite coming from the lineage of Caribbean music, followed on from recent British/Caribbean joint efforts such as Jungle and Garage, while adding the strength of a proud location and community to solidify its place both geographically and culturally within the pantheon of London-born genres. In the following section, we will look more closely at that line of genres, particularly at Jungle and Garage and their relationship to Grime within the context of East-London locality, and at the importance of pirate radio stations in their development.

East End pirates rule the waves

Before UK Garage or Grime finally emerged and following on from the Dub and Dancehall period in which the parents of Grime's pioneers had grown up, a particularly British/Caribbean bridge formed between them. The rise of pirate radio stations in the 1980s, and their widespread popularity and growth in the 1990s in London, meant that DJs and MCs enjoyed a limitless training ground in which to hone skills and develop new sounds. 'Soundboys' in council estates across London were experimenting with and mixing older forms to create new hybrid musics.⁶¹ DJ Chef, of the seminal '90s Jungle pirate station Kool FM, remembers the development of Grime as a hardening of electronic rave music such as Acid House and Hardcore with DJs "bringing these hip-hop, soul, and ragga elements in".⁶² One element that came from Ragga and would become a staple part of Jungle, was the distinctly Jamaican sounding MCing, or 'toasting'. Throughout the 1990s big MC names like Skibadee, Dynamite MC and Ragga Twins were established and by the time the first Grime generation began to emerge some 10 years after Jungle had, 'the older guys had it locked down. [Jungle] was at full capacity'.⁶³

⁶¹ Jamaican term meaning an artist or producer of sound. Applicable to MCs, DJs or other musicians connected to a sound system.

⁶² Jamie Clifton, The History And Future Of Kool FM, London's Oldest Jungle Radio Station, *Vice*, 6 August 2015. Accessed: 31/01/2018.

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/4wba59/kool-fm-jungle-pirate-london-945

⁶³ Jamie Clifton, The History And Future Of Kool FM, London's Oldest Jungle Radio Station, *Vice*, 6 August 2015. Accessed: 31/01/2018.

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/4wba59/kool-fm-jungle-pirate-london-945

The Grime pioneers had plenty in common with their Jungle predecessors, both musically and culturally – more so than with the Garage MCs. It had seemed natural at first for the likes of Wiley and Dizzee Rascal to rap alongside UK Garage names, such as So Solid Crew and Heartless Crew, being of the same age-group. However, the more depictive lyrics and less-flashy vibe of these new artists soon alienated them from the UK Garage club scene, resplendent in imagery of jewellery, champagne and designer clothing. The new sound was often described as colder or darker, perhaps a reflection of the scaled back percussion and reliance on basic synth sounds that popped and pinged in a more minimalist production style compared to the standard sound of UK Garage. Many of the early Grime beats were made using the music production software Fruity Loops, an easily attainable programme that came with its own pre-set bank of electronic sounds that resembled the soundtrack of a computer game. This software, cheaper than more professional tools employed by recording studios, added to the feeling that the new form was very much a DIY production. Part of early Grime's underground appeal and mark of authenticity was that it really sounded like it had been made in a bedroom by someone who lived on the local estate. The idea that Grime was 'darker' than Jungle or Garage possibly came from the fact that the breakaway sound was attractive to dance to and more aggressively masculine. The gritty lyrics and bassier beats made songs less appealing to female fans and often led to dancefloors full of young men shouting back lyrical bars at the performers. Some songs, such as 'Pow! (Forward)' by Lethal Bizzle

were banned by venues because of the hysteria and violence that often followed their playing.⁶⁴

For young MCs of the emerging style, Jungle offered an obvious inspiration. Many of them had cut their teeth as Jungle and Drum 'n' Bass DJs and MCs but were too late to the party to become household names. They had wanted to impart a fast-paced rap, similar to that on Jungle tracks, to the template of UK Garage, but having been rejected because of their lyrical content, a breakaway had been necessary. How that happened was down to several factors, but one that was essential was the way in which pirate radio stations would spread the sound out to local fans in East London. The foundations for this were in place, with many long-established pirates already in the area and playing Jungle and Garage. It just needed one or two of them to take the leap and support the changing form that would become Grime.

Rinse FM, transmitting from towers in Bow and Stratford, was the main game-changer among pirate radio stations in the shift from Jungle to the lyrically darker form of UK Garage. The station, formed in 1994, had primarily played darker Jungle, Drum and Bass and some Garage, though never really the glitzy tunes storming the charts, and it opened its arms widely to the undefined, cold sound coming from the streets below. The station's founders, DJs Slimzee and Geeneus gave all of Grime's first MCs their break on-air in constantly changing, secret locations all over the East End. They came from the same communities and understood their frustrated disenfranchisement from society,

⁶⁴ 'Pow! (Forward)', Lethal Bizzle, (London: Relentless Records, 2004).

offering them a platform to develop away from the more commercial UK Garage scene. Grime MCs like Wiley would have to take their place by force on Rinse, as explained in a 2017 *Dazed* article with the DJ Uncle Dugs: “Garage MCs like Creed, Blakey, and Charlie Brown were making names for themselves in the city, but younger aspiring MCs found themselves locked out. ‘The older guys didn’t want the younger guys on with them’, says [Uncle] Dugs. ‘Creed would be bubbling nice and then Wiley would come on a hundred miles an hour talking about killing everyone.’”⁶⁵

Rinse FM’s closeness to the community it came from, and its willingness to help portray the darker realities going on outside the flats it transmitted from, was vital in its role in accepting the new form and giving it a platform to be heard:

In much the same way that pirate stations were a reaction against mainstream radio programming, Rinse was essential for giving space to grime when other stations wouldn’t embrace it. Partly, this was because the station was run by people from the same postcodes as many of Grime’s earliest MCs. While other stations might not understand if an MC was talking about guns or muggings or violence, because they had all grown up together, Rinse got it.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Alice Nicolov, ‘The History Of UK Pirate Radio – And Why It’s Still Here’, *Dazed*, 19 January 2017. Accessed: 31/01/2018.

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/34394/1/pirate-radio-history-and-future>

⁶⁶ Alice Nicolov, ‘The History Of UK Pirate Radio – And Why It’s Still Here’, *Dazed*, 19 January 2017. Accessed: 31/01/2018.

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/34394/1/pirate-radio-history-and-future>

Following from the huge local success of Rinse, other pirates in East and North London began to follow suit. Déjà vu, Heat and many others would host Grime MCs and clashes until the new sound became the most listened to across the pirate airwaves. When a young Dizzee Rascal (representing Grime) defeated So Solid's Asher D (a Garage MC) in a 2002 clash on Choice FM, the tide had well and truly turned. Fans phoned in and voted for the new sound, electing Dizzee and his crew Roll Deep their new leaders, and within a year, Garage seemed a thing of the past, while Dizzee collected the esteemed Mercury Music Prize.⁶⁷

Grime's emergence and victory over UK Garage had seemed rapid and out of the blue to many, including those in the Garage scene, but the process had been building for some years. It was in part due to groups like So Solid Crew and individuals such as Ms. Dynamite, who had blazed a trail for rap in Garage music. So Solid and other commercially successful Garage acts of the late nineties, such as Oxide and Neutrino or Pied Piper and the Masters of Ceremonies, had been enhancing and popularising the rap element of Garage in the mainstream media. What these artists didn't manage to gauge was that the flashy club vibe of the Garage scene was on its way out of fashion and that the public appetite for their own rather positive style of rap would be short-lived. Garage seemed to tail off towards the end of 2001 with mainstream audiences opting for other pop trends, while hardcore fans of the garage scene developed a preference for grittier lyricism,

⁶⁷ Angelique Chrisafis, 'Rapper Wins Mercury Prize', *The Guardian*, 10 September 2003. Accessed: 4/5/18. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/sep/10/arts.mercuryprize2003>

more minimal and bassy beats and a return to the edgy underground scene that had fostered Jungle prior to the commercialisation of Garage.

That this shift in taste happened when it did is no coincidence. Much as American Gangster Rap had emerged in the early nineties after years of built-up disenfranchisement in the housing projects and ghettos of New York and Los Angeles, the darker style of British urban music that would eventually be known as Grime represented a frustration among young people at a lack of opportunity and consistent police harassment. As we have established in this chapter, a sustained and continuous tradition of institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police force has contributed to incidents of civil unrest on many occasions, but it also became an accumulative weight on the shoulders of communities over many years. The 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence, an eighteen-year-old black boy from South London, by a group of white men, and its subsequent cover up by Met Police officers, made headline news in Britain throughout the nineteen-nineties.⁶⁸ By the time Sir William Macpherson's inquiry into the murder and its handling came out in 1999, it was clear that the problem of racism was deeply entrenched in many of Britain's most celebrated institutions.⁶⁹ Macpherson, as well as criticising the racism of the police, recommended that other organisations including the National Health Service, British Civil Service, schools and the judicial system all required

⁶⁸ The Macpherson Report Summary, *The Guardian*, 24 February 1999. Accessed: 6/1/18 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/feb/24/lawrence.ukcrime12>

⁶⁹ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, (The Macpherson Report) UK Government (London, 1999). Accessed: 6/1/18. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf

review and reform to combat racism in the way they worked.⁷⁰ This meant that, by the turn of the millennium, the advice to government was that the problem was very real and still in need of addressing. Macpherson concluded that nothing had been learnt from the rioting of the eighties and that the Scarman Report (1981) that had similarly recommended tackling institutional racism, had been ignored.

The feeling in black communities nationwide and particularly in East London's poor estates was one of hopelessness, both racially and economically. With price rises in neighbouring streets and a change in the demographic of their residents alongside a disproportionate lack of employment and education opportunities (which we will explore in more detail in the next chapter), young people, both black and white felt an urge to go underground in their search for cultural expression. The new scene breakaway from Garage would offer this and do so in a way that felt like a rebellion against the establishment forces that were perceived as being at the heart of the struggle to survive and succeed in East-London. The following chapter will document how this mood, the social and political context of the time and place, and the role of certain significant individuals, notably the group Roll Deep, made the shift from Garage to Grime possible, while looking at the importance of a local street culture that would foster the scene's development through its golden years. The theme of police interference in black culture and community in London will continue to feature in the following chapter, culminating in the introduction of the 696 and the targeting of pirate radio stations that would bring about a near end to Grime music by

⁷⁰ Policing and Society Journal (Vol 16), *Institutional Racism After Macpherson*, Issue 4, 2006.

2005. How the scene retreated and recovered in the years between 2005 and the ‘second coming’ of the genre in 2014 will be the focus of the third and final chapter of this thesis, which will include analysis of the impact of the 2011 London Riots and the continuation of East London gentrification on the urban music scene.

Chapter Two

Clash: The battle to reclaim the black narrative in London

In 2002, DJ Commander B’s late-night show on the licenced radio station Choice FM hosted perhaps the most defining clash in Grime music history. It was so significant because it simultaneously signalled the end for UK Garage’s most popular collective, So Solid Crew, while announcing Roll Deep and the new scene they represented as the dominant urban music sound in London. Following a disagreement between So Solid’s Asher D and Roll Deep’s Dizzee Rascal, a duel had been agreed in the traditional sound system fashion: a clash. They would meet at Choice’s studios in Borough High Street, South London, to decide once and for all who had the most popular sound with London’s young listeners. Both men claimed to be the more accomplished and favoured MC, but in truth they represented different styles and, to an extent, fan bases that were divided by geography and class. The result of the Asher D/Dizzee Rascal clash is a crucial part of

the story of Grime's rise to prominence and symbolised as wider cultural intention, by members of a marginalised community, to take back black music and represent the narrative of their impoverished reality. Before looking at the events that led up to it, it is important to understand the differences between So Solid as a crew and representative of UK Garage and Roll Deep and the other emerging Grime artists as the representatives of the change that was occurring at the time

At the beginning of 2001 So Solid Crew were nationally known and charting in the top ten with most new songs they released. They had a strong underground support base in South London's black working-class communities around Battersea, Lambeth and Lewisham as well as more mainstream base all over the country that transcended race and class, but towards the end of the year there had been signs of a slip in that popularity. Their debut album *They Don't Know* (2001) had reached #6 in the UK charts and had featured several singles, but each one would chart lower than the last in the build up to the eventual clash with Dizzee.⁷¹ The group's big hit that year was '21 Seconds', which reached #1 in the singles chart, but following that success, the trajectory was downwards with other singles 'They Don't Know' (#3) and 'Haters' (#8), at the beginning of 2002, failing to match the height of their debut release.⁷² Further into 2002, the group's only single 'Ride Wid Us', came

⁷¹*They Don't Know*, So Solid Crew (London: Relentless Records, 2001. Accessed: 5/8/18.

<http://www.officialcharts.com/search/albums/they-don't-know/>

⁷²21 Seconds/They Don't Know/Haterz, So Solid Crew, *They Don't Know* (London: Relentless Records, 2001). Accessed: 5/8/18.

<http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/9989/so-solid-crew/>

in at #19.⁷³ This coincided with the rise of the darker sub-genre emerging in East London which was being championed by Roll Deep. As we have seen in the last chapter, pirate radio airtime had been mostly given to Garage, Jungle and Drum 'n' Bass, but Rinse FM had broken the mould and was the first to accept the new sound. Sure enough, other stations in the East followed suit after the success of Rinse's rap-heavy Sunday sessions and the waves were being felt across the capital.

For So Solid this meant that London's underground fanbase was shifting their taste to a grittier, bassier, more minimalist musical sound that they just could not keep up with. Commander B had already hosted Dizzee Rascal and his former group N.A.S.T.Y Crew, while Wiley had featured with his own crew, Pay As U Go Cartel. Both groups made Garage, albeit a grittier version (just as So Solid had), but it was Pay As You Go, in particular, that emerged as a major rival to So Solid. In 2001, the East London based Pay As U Go, which counted future Roll Deep members, Wiley, Flow-Dan and Target among their number, released two big hits, 'Know We' and 'Champagne Dance', the latter reaching #12 in the UK charts.⁷⁴ Both Pay As U Go and So Solid Crew were instrumental in the shifting of Garage to a more rap-heavy sound, more identifiable with the lineage of other Caribbean/British genres on the musical family tree, Drum 'n' Bass, Jungle and Dancehall. However, while the East London crews were trying to bring street culture to their rap style and minimise the Garage beats they were working with, So

⁷³ Ride Wid Us, So Solid Crew, *They Don't Know* (London: Relentless Records, 2001). Accessed: 5/8/18. <http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/9989/so-solid-crew/>

⁷⁴ 'Know We', Pay As U Go Cartel (London: Solid City Records, 2001). 'Champagne Dance', Pay As U Go Cartel, (London: Sony Music Entertainment Inc, 2001). Accessed: 3/6/18. <http://www.officialcharts.com/search/singles/champagne%20dance/>

Solid were reluctant or unable to go down the same route. Their songs were similarly rap-heavy, but differed in their lyrical content, which leaned further towards the swagger and party atmosphere of other Garage acts such as Pied Piper, Oxide and Neutrino and Heartless Crew. In the imagery of their album cover and the videos for their singles, So Solid looked very much the part of a gang from one of South London's sprawling estates, but they never made the commercially risky leap of representing this style in their lyrics.

The aggressive lyrical content of Pay As U Go Cartel that would become the signature style of their follow-on group, Roll Deep, and other East London crews in 2001/2 was distinct and uncomfortable. It was hard for So Solid to abandon the safer lyrical style that had brought them significant commercial success up until that point and this ultimately led to their downfall and Roll Deep's ascent. In order to understand these differences properly, it is necessary to look at the lyrics of the most well-known songs of each group, side-by side. Laced with heavy Patois-derived East London slang, Pay As U Go's 'Know We' contains references to drug dealers, assault and robbery in several of its verses, most notably in that of the MC God's Gift:

Me and my crew, we are true top shotta

Shove a jack move 'cause the jack move's proper

Clock the dough 'cause I'm a true dough clocker

Dem boy they are fass. Never try cuss

Step to the G, you'll get your head bus'.⁷⁵

The Patois slang term 'top shotta' is much used in the Garage/Grime crossover period and has its origins in the drug world where it is used to refer to the number one dealer in an area. The significance of the term changed slightly to mean the number one (or ones in the case of the collective Pay As U Go Cartel) in any given field. Other slang references in the excerpt speak of a 'jack move' (robbery), 'dough clocker' (someone who successfully accumulates lots of money), 'fass' (from 'fassy', a derogatory term that denotes femininity or cowardice in a man), 'cuss' (to insult) and to 'get your head bus' (to be beaten up). Such references are common in the lyrics of the few popular songs by the crew in 2001. Their biggest hit of that year, 'Champagne Dance', features Wiley's rap "I got my gat I don't care, just pop it up / I make a soundboy run Immashut 'em up", 'gat' being slang for his gun and 'soundboy', slang for other musicians.⁷⁶ This lyrical quotation is a one of many examples by Wiley during this period and the type of content he was known for, as referred to by Uncle Dugs in the previous chapter.

Garage acts didn't know quite how to receive Wiley, so they didn't. Pay As U Go had attempted to use a Garage-friendly production style, with harsher lyrics. As we have already seen, they were not welcomed by the majority of pirate radio stations (or other Garage artists), but their brief foray into the charts had given them an indication that they were onto something with fans. Soon after the

⁷⁵ 'Know We', Pay As U Go Cartel (London: Solid City Records, 2001).

⁷⁶ 'Champagne Dance', Pay As U Go Cartel (London: Sony Music Entertainment Inc, 2001. Accessed: 3/6/18. <http://www.officialcharts.com/search/singles/champagne%20dance/>

unexpected success of 'Champagne Dance' almost breaking the UK singles chart top ten, Wiley doubled down on the darker image he was portraying, disbanding Pay As U Go, shedding any semblance of Garage imagery and forming his own, new group, Roll Deep. The crew was formed of several Pay As You Go members, including the Rinse FM DJs, Slimzee and Geeneus, who would be crucial in getting the new group airtime on the Eastend's most popular pirate station. They promptly shed the designer-label and jewellery look portrayed in the video for 'Champagne Dance' and dropped any mentions of champagne and dancing from their lyrics, to focus on more realistic depictions of the daily lives of the local residents tuning into their Sunday evening radio sets. Most significantly, Wiley managed to recruit 17-year-old Dizzee Rascal, known for his high-pitched angry voice and penchant for battling other MCs on radio shows with N.A.S.T.Y. Crew.

Meanwhile, So Solid's popularity was in decline. The lyrics in their songs reflected a much happier time of wealth and partying that was perhaps gone by 2001.⁷⁷ The crew were left behind by the new disillusioned outlook of London's youth, who didn't want to hear about bling anymore. Hattie Collins frames the shift in fan needs and genre styles in economic terms:

I think the perspective just changed from garage to grime, it was a different generation; it was a more austere time...[whereas during the height of Garage] it was more hopeful, there was more cash flowing in the country and whatever happened socially or

⁷⁷ Economic reports, such as LSE's 'Economic Story of the UK' chapter to the *Growth Commission Report*, show that in the 1990s, while the situation for black communities in deprived areas may not have been one of optimism, media coverage of the national economic situation was largely positive.

politically around that time meant that belts were tightened and these were the kids feeling the aftershock of that.⁷⁸

Roll Deep were able to tap into this feeling because they were those kids that Collins refers to. They had grown up and were still living on the estates in Bow and Limehouse that were home to pirate radio stations and record shops like Rhythm Division, as well as all the community and police issues that were a part of everyday life. Disillusionment and disenfranchisement were very real feelings. To So Solid Crew, there was no way of understanding this from the champagne bubble they had found themselves in. The group's only number one record, '21 Seconds' is a good example of this. Megaman, the group's one member with a 'ghetto' image, does begin the song with a short verse that includes a reference to 'gats', but beyond that, the song is lyrically and vocally (in regard to rap flow/singing style) of a Garage style of MCing. The following lines from the song are taken from the various members' verses and reflect the classic Garage lyricism that is dominant in the song.

Asher D: "Asher D's never fading / Strugglin' stay strong 'til I'm bathin [in money]"

GhostFace: "See me on the telly ha / Face gettin' popular"

Romeo: "First of all I'm gonna big up da ladies / Lookin' slender n' fine...mmm mine"

Harvey: "When I double my cash / When I double my dough"⁷⁹

⁷⁸Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 16

Each verse contains several braggadocious lines like these, celebrating the group's fame, ability to make money and their success with women. What the group were unaware of was that the song would be the last of this kind to top the UK charts and that their own decline would signal the decline of the Garage genre as a whole, while making way for their rivals Pay As U Go/Roll Deep. The latter would draw on local underground fan-bases that were already established as followers of the Jungle and Drum 'n' Bass forms that got airplay on Rinse and other stations nearby, by utilising the connections of the DJs within their group.

For many mainstream listeners of Garage tuning in to the two groups (before the establishment of Roll Deep) on national radio chart shows or watching their videos on MTV's urban channel, MTV BASE, the visual distinctions between them were perhaps less visible, but to underground fans and the Grime artists themselves, it was clear. Before the success of '21 Seconds' and 'Champagne Dance', both crews had amassed followers in their respective corners of London through radio sets and live club performances. Pay As You Go Cartel and other East London acts could be heard on local stations and occasionally seen at under 18s raves at local venues. Their unapologetically aggressive style was formed in these edgy environments and honed in the radio sets that are preserved in recordings uploaded to YouTube. One particular recording exists of a Rinse FM set from 1999 in which a 15 year old Dizzee Rascal is DJing Drum and Bass and Jungle tracks for the MCs

⁷⁹ 21 Seconds, So Solid Crew, *They Don't Know*, Relentless Records, London, 2001.

Stormin and Armour (later of N.A.S.T.Y. Crew) to rap on.⁸⁰ While the rhythmic flow of the raps on the recording is clearly similar to that of the Jungle and Drum and Bass MCs that had found local and national success a few years previously, some of the lyrical content is much grittier, more 'gangsta' and reflective of the area they living in. MC Adar aggressively depicts a scene where somebody is spotted by another person and attacked: "who's that, who's on the phone? / that boy better not be alone / 'cause when I see him he's gonna get smacked up alone".⁸¹

So Solid's few radio recordings are noticeably different. Examples from the years 2000 and 2001 are available on YouTube and show that the group were clearly rapping on more conventional Garage beats, full of high-hat drum sounds and vocal melodies, both as part of the hook and sung by the members of the group. The distinct Garage MC style of melodising the end of a rapped line is frequently used by So Solid and is audible in these taped sessions.⁸² It is comparable to much of the Garage music that charted so successfully in the late-nineties up to the year 2000, but as one looks at the follow up tracks by the group to 2001's '21 Seconds', a lack of development in this style is noticeable and the sound seems to stagnate. Where a progression in style to match the increasingly popular darker sound in the East was commercially necessary, So Solid failed to follow the trends.

⁸⁰ DJ Dizzee Rascal, YGS Crew (Stormin, Armour & Adar): Rinse FM 100.3 (1999). Accessed: 15/8/18
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZYP1JP4Hzk>

⁸¹ DJ Dizzee Rascal, YGS Crew (Stormin, Armour & Adar): Rinse FM 100.3 (1999), time of quote: 14:59.
 Accessed: 15/08/18
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZYP1JP4Hzk>

⁸² So Solid Freestyle: (2001) Part 1 (Delight FM) Megaman-Asher D-Skat D- DJ Oxide, Bullet Reaction, 23 Dec 2011. Accessed: 15/08/18.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRTFCF4sQ4c>

The Dizzee Rascal DJ set for Rinse is, along with similar sets by Wiley, Target and Genius (also from Rinse FM), one the earliest existing recordings of some of Grime's future pioneers testing their skills and broadcasting on pirate radio and it stylistically sets the trend for the scene that was to come. While the influences on Grime's beat production and tempo came from an array of genres, but most significantly Garage, the rap style influences for Grime's pioneers came more from Jungle and Drum and Bass, with a healthy sprinkling of edgy East London reality for lyrical content. This is where they differed from So Solid and the South London Garage rappers. There, the influence was just as much part of the chain of rapper/toaster styles that went back through Jungle to Jamaican Dancehall and Dub before that, but the rhythmic flow of their rapping had been shaped by commercial success and the fashion of melodising, and had even arguably leaned towards using American accents in some cases. By the year 2001, the Garage MC style had moved in a different direction from that of the fast paced, almost inaudible (and by then unsellable) Jungle MC. Commercial viability was the driving force behind this shift and for the East London rappers who, as we saw in Chapter One, were not able to break into the congested Jungle scene, this style was unappealing. As Dizzee Rascal puts it, "I didn't like garage and certain other things. I thought the singing part was cheesy."⁸³ Meanwhile, Dizzee, like most of his young peers "couldn't get into those [Garage] raves".⁸⁴ Fellow Roll Deep member Flow Dan echoes this sentiment and describes his preference at the time for other music: "I didn't go [to Garage raves],

⁸³Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 11.

⁸⁴Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 8.

man was into Bashment [Dancehall]. And it was different. It was a whole different vibe, a whole different dress code.”⁸⁵ The preference in the East was clearly for a more underground, Caribbean sounding music. When the likes of Dizzee and Flow Dan had turned to Jungle and Drum and Bass in the late nineties, they had found it oversaturated, with little space for newcomers on local radio stations (except for Rinse FM, as we saw in Chapter One). By the turn of the millennium, the elite Garage scene was equally closed to them due to their age, location in the East and unestablished status. By all accounts, it hadn’t been to their taste anyway. This is where the necessity to carve out a new, unique form came from.

In late 2001, a number of factors finally combined in the build-up to the climactic and decisive moment that would dictate the respective directions that Garage and Grime would go in. So Solid’s drop in popularity in the charts, Pay As U Go’s rebranding as an underground group and the sudden emergence of several other young crews in East London that supported the darker production styles that would become the backbone of a new, emerging culture, all beautifully set up the grand finale clash between Dizzee Rascal and Asher D. The appearance of these new, young artists and the apparent need to break into a form of their own was not as sudden as it appeared on the outside. Many of the rappers, as we have already established, were practicing over instrumental tracks from Jungle, Drum ‘n’ Bass or Bashment, before briefly experimenting with Garage. Where that trial run had turned out to be both commercially unworkable and disliked as a style by the artists

⁸⁵ Richard Cowie, *Eskiboy* (London: Penguin/Random House, 2017), p. 65.

themselves, a bold step into independence was made possible by a number of technological advancements and accidents, as described by Hattie Collins:

All of a sudden, music was a lot more obtainable; you didn't need a huge studio to go and make a track, you didn't need to pay an engineer. If you had a crappy old computer you could get a copy of Fruity Loops – or if you were flush, Logic – on there you could literally make a beat right there and then...and it was around that time that MSN and MySpace was starting, so people weren't so bothered about being signed to a label...then I guess sonically you had things like the Korgkeyboard...a lot of the early grime sounds were made from this.⁸⁶

The use of the bassy synth sounds of the Korg, along with the pre-set bank of drum and synth sounds stored in music production software such as Fruity Loops, allowed the likes of Wiley, Dizzee and Jammer to produce their own instrumental tracks for the first time. Advances in online file sharing through MSN and MySpace meant that they could distribute and show off these tracks easily. Suddenly, there was no need for the Garage labels. It would be a while before the power of the internet made pirate radio obsolete, but the beginnings of internet listening were happening, and this was a great aid to the early Grime scene.

A number of groups, namely Roll Deep, N.A.S.T.Y Crew and More Fire Crew were quick to produce or source beats that

⁸⁶ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 16-17.

corresponded to this new style in development. In Roll Deep, Wiley and Dizzee were producing their own, as were Jammer and N.A.S.T.Y. Crew. Lethal B, Ozzie B and Neeko, the members of More Fire, were not producers and had to source beats from elsewhere, but when they came across one particular beat and laid down vocal recordings, pirate radio audiences were immediately captured. 'Oi', which hit pirate airwaves in early 2001 and was released eventually released then next year, was a game-changer.⁸⁷ While many people site Wiley's 'Eskimo', Musical Mob's 'Pulse X' and Danny Weed's 'Creeper' as the first distinctly different instrumental beats of the scene (they wouldn't have recorded lyrical verses until later), *Oi* is almost unanimously seen as Grime's first complete, recorded song. School yards, youth clubs and barber shops were immediately captivated by the three young rappers from Walthamstow. By 2002 the group released a video with gritty imagery of an altercation on a local council estate and large groups of friends, propelling the song to reach #8 in the UK singles chart, but for most of 2001, the song's signature synthy bass-line and rap flows that borrowed heavily from Bashment would ensure it was a resounding underground hit in East London.⁸⁸

The underground scene suited groups like More Fire and Roll Deep. The angry sense of disenfranchisement in their song-writing made them untouchable to big record labels and a number of violent incidents at Garage raves, some including So Solid Crew, had meant that negative media and police attention was already on them before

⁸⁷'Oi', More Fire Crew (London:White Label, 2001).

⁸⁸ The name 'Bashment' is a more colloquial term for Dancehall and sometimes applied to its sub-genre Ragga.

they had a chance to succeed. This was another factor in the demise of So Solid, as we shall soon see, but it was also significant in the fashioning of Grime's introspective style – it was forced to operate within its own community and not outside it. Hattie Collins again paints the scene: “It was rare that you were able to go to a grime rave because they were hardly allowed to be on by the police or even the promoters. The scene happened within itself, of itself and to itself.”⁸⁹ More Fire's Lethal B concurs on the difficulties of following Garage and the importance of the innovations he and his peers were making was not lost on them:

The whole garage scene was just mad. It got bad publicity and got shut down. The media came down like a tonne of bricks. So Solid got a lot of the blame for it and no one wanted anything to do with us. We were the last crew, the last crossover, the post garage, pre-grime. ‘Cos when ‘Oi’ came out it was such a different record to what was previously out there. Even though So Solid were doing it, I still think we came from a different angle; we were speaking to a different generation and then it all just came tumbling down.⁹⁰

Lethal is right. His song did speak to a different group of youngsters, those between 15-18 years old who felt that the UK Garage scene, dominated by So Solid was aimed at a slightly older club-going generation. Artists like More Fire and Dizzee Rascal were the same age and attending college in those early days before fame took them to new

⁸⁹ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 16.

⁹⁰ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 56.

heights. They were easier to relate to, given their age, locality and slang, and as a united generational community in the schools and streets of East and North London, the age group took ownership and helped these artists surge into the limelight. At that precise period Dizzee Rascal was also making his name on pirate radio stations in the area and rapping at rave parties in large art-deco fronted venues that had, in a previous life, been cinemas and theatres. He explains the progression to these types of shows from playing around in the informal settings of local youth clubs, while placing notable importance on locality; ‘Hackney’, ‘south London’ the ‘hood’:

It started off as a youth club thing. You know, going to different youth clubs, clashing with other MCs or rapping with other MCs. Then it started getting on to under 18s raves. So the main venues I remember were places like Stratford Rex, Club EQ back in Hackney, Palace Pavilion. In south London place like Caesar, Imperial Gardens and Le Fez. Then later we started going west to the Tudor Rose, the small little rough venues. I would have been 17, 18. This was before we got to Sidewinder; before I even got with Roll Deep – that’s when we started doing Sidewinder, after I built my name up a bit more on the radio. Sidewinder was like a step up, I was doing things like Rumble, Stampede, those under 18 raves – the real hood raves.⁹¹

By 2001, the year of ‘Oi’'s release, “those under 18 raves” were the pinnacle of performance for emerging rappers. Clubs like Rex in

⁹¹ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 6.

Stratford and Palace Pavilion in Hackney were located right at the heart of their audience's neighbourhood, the geographical and cultural centre of the extended 'ends'. The cluster of major pirate radio stations, Rinse in Bow/Stratford, Flava in Canning Town, Déjà vu in Stratford, were all within a couple of miles of these venues and their listeners flocked to club nights in their hundreds from the surrounding boroughs. The fact that many fans came together from these surrounding and normally separate areas to venues that were centrally located within East London such as EQ Club, Hackney Ocean and PalacePavilion, all in Hackney, or Rex in Stratford, meant that there were sometimes violent territorial disputes and always an atmosphere of danger in the air. "Even on a Thursday night you'd have all blood up the mirrors from where someone had been glassed" recalls DJ Slipmatt of Club UN in Tottenham.⁹²

Stepping out onto the street after a rave was a daunting prospect to rave-goers. It meant walking the streets of an unfamiliar borough that would not normally be visited out of fear of muggings and assaults, but the draw of the club nights was powerful and as the culture's presence grew, so did the number of events being put on. In 2001, members Heartless Crew, Pay As You Go Cartel, Roll Deep, N.A.S.T.Y Crew and More Fire Crew were all performing at nights such as Sidewinder (Hackney Ocean), Young Man Standing (Palace Pavilion) and Stampede (Stratford Rex), but the increasing level of violence and petty crime that accompanied them would quickly bring about an end to

⁹² A Photogeographic Guide To Grime, *Medium*, 15 December 2016, Accessed: 12/06/18.
<https://medium.com/workandlife/a-psychogeographic-guide-to-grime-4151f989ceed>

such events in the area.⁹³ In November 2001, an incident at the Astoria club in Central London in which two men were shot at a So Solid Crew party, led to a city-wide clamp down by police on Garage and Grime events.⁹⁴ For So Solid it came at a bad time, just after two top ten singles, limiting their chance to capitalise on their success and making them practically unbookable by major venues. For the urban music as a whole, it meant that any new up-and-coming acts had to operate almost solely in the underground shadows. This is where the ‘under 18’ tag came from – out of a need to rebrand and evade the attentions of the police. The period of the under 18 raves for the new generation of teenage artists such as Dizzee Rascal and Lethal B was short-lived. As an aspirational Ozzie B exclaims on his verse on ‘Oi’, “I rocked the Club Rex like Aztecs / What venue’s next?”⁹⁵ What was next was the necessary move by promoters to take nights outside of London, with such towns as Watford and Milton Keynes hosting nights like Sidewinder, representing early Grime’s first forays out of the capital, bringing the sound to new audiences.

In early 2002, the scene was perfectly set for a big clash. The battle was advertised by Choice FM as a clash of MCs, Asher D and Dizzee Rascal, but it was really much more than that—a clash of crews, styles, genres and entire music cultures. It would symbolise the change in trends on London’s urban music scene, helping to convince radio stations that the new sound in the East was more marketable than they

⁹³ A Photogeographic Guide To Grime, *Medium*, 15 December 2016, Accessed: 12/06/18. <https://medium.com/workandlife/a-psychogeographic-guide-to-grime-4151f989ceed>

⁹⁴ Two Shot At So Solid Crew Party, *BBC News*, 1 November 2001, Accessed: 12/06/18 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1632801.stm>

⁹⁵ ‘Oi’, *More Fire Crew* (London: White Label, 2001).

had believed and show listeners across the capital, in places where East End pirates couldn't reach, what the sound was about and most significantly, why it was taking over from Garage. The clash took place at Choice FM's studios in the London Borough of Lambeth, So Solid territory, south of the river Thames. At least two members of Roll Deep, Wiley and Dizzee, arrived for the session and after some disagreement as to which style of instrumental, Hip Hop or Garage, would be used, the only agreed solution was for the two MCs to battle each other acapella. Asher D finally agreed to go first and went straight on the attack with his opening bars:

It all started when this little boy got a notion
 That he should get the underground devotion
 Studied my flow, listened to the radio constantly
 Even saw him front at my concert now
 When I say little, this boy is young
 Probably still sucks his thumb, avoids his mum and runs.⁹⁶

Dizzee Rascal retorts with these opening lines:

I've heard the gossip from the street to the slammer
 Trying to see if Dizzee stays true to his grammar
 Being a celebrity don't mean shit to me

⁹⁶ Dizzee Rascal vs Asher D Clash (Choice FM, 2002), *Get Darker*. Accessed: 18/6/18.
<https://getdarker.com/audio/sets/dizzee-rascal-v-asha-d-roll-deep-v-so-solid-clash-choice-fm-2002/>

Fuck the glitz and glamour, hit them with the bricks and hammer.⁹⁷

If anything captured the dichotomy of what the two artists and their respective scenes represented to listeners, at that very point in 2002, it was this opening exchange of the clash. Asher D's opening bars attack Dizze directly, painting him as the upstart, a young boy out of his depth who idolises the older, more experienced Asher and should know his place. He references Dizze's desire for an underground devotion, which in truth had already become a reality, but also mentions Dizze attending a So Solid concert and being front-row, creating an image of the "little" boy, looking up both physically and metaphorically to his opponent. Dizze's opening lines jump straight into creating a contrasting picture in the listener's mind. It is deliberately strategic and brilliantly planned. Dizze is fully aware of the schism in the underground scene and the balance that is tipping in favour of his own sound. He uses heavily visual lyricism to depict this division, calling on images of the streets and prison, while claiming that he doesn't seek fame and fortune in the way his adversary does. The line "fuck the glitz and glamour, hit them with the bricks and hammer" is perhaps the most perfect poetic summarisation of the differences between the emerging Grime mentality and the fading bling of Garage in 2002.

After the initial shots were fired, the battle progressed with both MCs laying down their best lines, full of bravado, insult and displays of

⁹⁷Dizze Rascal vs Asher D Clash (Choice FM, 2002) *Get Darker*. Accessed: 18/6/18.
<https://getdarker.com/audio/sets/dizze-rascal-v-asha-d-roll-deep-v-so-solid-clash-choice-fm-2002/>

lyrical dexterity. Commander B stops their back-and-forth verses after about fifteen minutes to allow the news to be played and then introduces a period of music, where both Roll Deep and So Solid have the opportunity to perform a track of their choosing. This becomes a chance for the two groups' leaders, Megaman and Wiley to jump in and take part in the clash. Perhaps the most interesting part of this performance in analysing the differing styles is when So Solid's Megaman interrupts Wiley's to insult his style of rapping. At a point in his verse, Wiley repeats the phrase "What do you mean?" several times. Megaman cuts him off: "raise your vocabulary...how much 'what you doing' in that one paragraph, man?"⁹⁸ Repetition of lines is, in Grime as it is in Dancehall and Bashment, a common technique, but Megaman's interjection and criticism of this is indicative of his contrasting, more Hip-Hop influenced background. He sees repetition as inferior. To Wiley, repeating a line is no less artistically legitimate than rhyming one.

After constant interruptions, intermissions and background shouting, and with Commander B's increasingly exasperated tone clearly audible ("it's not gonna get resolved"⁹⁹), the battle is finally concluded and a peace made. Both crews agree that music is the priority, expressing their mutual respect for each other, though it is hard to believe given the animosity of their lyrics and prior on-air arguments. Commander B then announces, in true pre-internet fashion,

⁹⁸ Dizzee Rascal vs Asher D Clash (Choice FM, 2002) Get Darker. Accessed: 18/6/18.

<https://getdarker.com/audio/sets/dizzee-rascal-v-asha-d-roll-deep-v-so-solid-clash-choice-fm-2002/>

⁹⁹ Dizzee Rascal vs Asher D Clash (Choice FM, 2002) Get Darker. Accessed: 18/6/18.

<https://getdarker.com/audio/sets/dizzee-rascal-v-asha-d-roll-deep-v-so-solid-clash-choice-fm-2002/>

a phone-in poll to decide who has won the clash. The calls start to come in and a cocky Asher D immediately takes an early lead, reaching five votes to one, before a barrage of calls in favour of Dizzee Rascal takes him into a lead that Asher D will not recover from. Perhaps sensing the direction of the vote at the half way stage, Commander B turns to Asher D and asks, “Asher, why don’t you do Garage no more?” “Err...I’ve just moved on”, replies Asher. “I’ve got stuff coming up for them [Garage fans], but I’ve got to promote my album.” The comments reflect the already shifting trend in the underground, which is testing new styles and fashions in music before chart releases. It indicates that by 2002, despite continuing to release Garage singles, So Solid are moving away from the form. The slow acapella style of the clash is more akin to Hip Hop and given So Solid’s move into that style of music, comments from callers start to contain criticisms: “Oi Asher, on Garage Dizzee will rip you apart”; “So Solid, stop trying to sound American.”

At the final count, Commander B declares Dizzee Rascal the winner by eleven votes to three and Asher D concedes defeat. What this meant for both Garage and Grime, and their respective practitioners, was a rather uncomfortable passing of the torch. So Solid didn’t seem to know that the end was coming. They had lost touch with their fan-base and, as we have seen from chart numbers, their time had passed. The initial dismissal of Grime as unworthy of sharing the same stage and limelight was the real death of Garage. In putting up elitist barriers to the young artists trying to evolve the form, Garage artists like So Solid not only forced Roll Deep and others underground into an environment

in which they would thrive; they also fatally underestimated where Grime would go.

So Solid were particularly driven by commercial success and had they realised the marketing power of the new sound within London's black communities and the need for this grittier, more realist kind of music sooner, they may have survived. As it happened, So Solid's recognition of the commercial and artistic value of Grime came far too late. In 2004, with the term Grime in popular use, Dizzee Rascal having won a Mercury Prize for his album *Boy In Da Corner* and the whole of London seemingly on board with the Grime music revolution, So Solid released a single entitled 'So Grimey', in a desperate attempt to come back.¹⁰⁰ The song failed to break the Top 40 and the group's only other single was 2010's 'Since You Went Away', which charted at #82.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss the group entirely. They are recognised widely, if somewhat inaccurately, as a crossover group between Garage and Grime. In truth, there was no Grime to crossover to when So Solid were making most of their music. Garage was fading, and they certainly changed the way it was being made to a more rap-heavy version of the form, which helped pave the way for new artists to follow on, but as soon as Grime started on its own path, So Solid were left behind. The deeper-lying reason for the death of the group and collapse of Garage's popularity is undoubtedly one of perceived authenticity. Young fans and artists alike did not feel

¹⁰⁰Dizzee Rascal, *Boy In Da Corner* (London: XL Recordings, 2003).

¹⁰¹*So Grimey*, So Solid Crew, Independiente, London, 2004

Since You Went Away, So Solid Crew, Mega & Co, London, 2010. Accessed 1/9/18.

<http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/9989/so-solid-crew/>

represented by Garage rappers and could not relate to the champagne, cars and designer clothes in their music videos. On the streets of Caribbean and multicultural communities in all parts of London, an austere reality was becoming dominant.

We have seen that Dizzee Rascal and some fans regarded the melodising of rap vocals and use of American accents as ‘cheesy’, while Flow Dan represented what many felt when he bemoaned the dress-code that accompanied Garage and its club scene. Hattie Collins has shown us that there were economic sentiments at play in the shifting mood towards a darker form of lyrical expression. Sonically, this shift was clearly materialising in the instrumental tracks of More Fire Crew and Roll Deep, but there were other artists also starting to reflect the transition in 2001. While not as fully Grime sounding as the production of Wiley or Jammer, Genius Cru’s ‘Boom Selection’ contained some of the same stylistic hallmarks as many Garage songs from crews like So Solid and Heartless, but it was possible to “just about hear Grime knocking quietly through the song’s syncopated kicks and menacing bass.”¹⁰² The vocal connection is there to be made too. The Patois accented chorus sets the tune apart from other Garage songs of the time and ties it much more closely to Grime and its Jungle or Dancehall influences.

Also in 2001 came Pay As U Go member Maxwell D’s solo effort, ‘Serious’, which took the link even further, merging the production styles of Bashment and Garage with both choruses and verses in the

¹⁰² ‘Boom Selection’, Genius Cru (London: Incentive, 2001).
Jeffrey Boakye, *Hold Tight* (London: Influx Press, 2017), p. 72.

Cockney/Patois hybrid accent, familiar to fans of Pay As U Go's previous work.¹⁰³ Everywhere there were Garage artists trying to break away from the scene's perceived fakery and carve out a more authentic expression in tune with their own cultural heritage, in homage to the sonic traditions of Dancehall. None did this to greater effect and with more success in 2001 than Ms Dynamite, whose song 'Boo' became arguably the biggest rave tune of the year, reaching #12 in the UK singles chart and confirming the transitory form's ability to fill dancefloors nationwide and claim prestigious awards such as the Mercury Prize, which she picked up the following year.¹⁰⁴ Patois infused lyricism and hard hitting basslines were definitely the fashion of 2001 in the club scene and increasingly in the charts, but the need to represent the communities and geographical origins of the music was overriding. Aside from the aforementioned pioneers that transmitted their street truths from tower blocks in East London, a London/Birmingham based group, The Streets, led by poet/rapper Mike Skinner were experimenting with Garage and other electronic influences to provide instrumental backing to their own completely independent and particularly realist brand of spoken-word poetry to great critical acclaim. The opening lines of their big hit of 2001, 'Has It Come To This?' proclaim that "this is original pirate material / you're listening to The Streets".¹⁰⁵ This was of course a play on the group's name. The

¹⁰³ 'Serious', Maxwell D (London: 4 Liberty Records, 2001).

¹⁰⁴ 'Boo', Ms Dynamite (London: Social Circles, 2001). Accessed: 6/8/18.

<http://www.officialcharts.com/search/singles/booo/>
 Ms Dynamite Wins Mercury Prize, *BBC News*, 17 September 2002. Accessed: 6/8/18.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/2262195.stm>

¹⁰⁵ 'Has It Come To This?', The Streets (London: Independent, 2001).

listener was indeed listening to a sound directly taken from the streets it came from. It was real and refreshing.

Authenticity, as it had been to the DIY sound system collectives operating in the 1980s, came from independence. Home-produced music, small independent record labels, track-suits and caps rather than Moschino jeans and a strict rule of never deviating from painting the reality of the ends was how Grime stayed true to itself and its community. A fierce anti-establishment theme, in which anti-racism was prevalent, and an inherent political message in the brutalist depictions of council estate life that ran through Grime's lyrics, were merely following the lineage of Caribbean musical forms that came before it, as established in Chapter One. What Garage failed to do was operate within those traditions as Grime would, and eventually, the value of an authentic musical form that was by the people and for the people was what won out in East London and then across Britain.

Grime's takeover from Garage can be seen as an inherently political ousting and the start of a reclaiming of the black-British narrative in the mainstream that would unfold over the next decade and a half. How Grime represented its communities amidst the social pressures of gentrification and attempts by the police to clamp down on live performances and radio broadcasting the years leading up to the widespread rioting of 2011, will be examined closely in Chapter Three. However, before that, we will look at the golden years of Grime, from 2002-05 and how, before it had fully reached its potential, Grime was

stopped in its tracks by “draconian” police barriers that were perceived as another racist assault on Caribbean culture in London.¹⁰⁶

2005 and beyond: the fallout of violent imagery and police action against Grime

By 2002 the Grime scene felt ready to take off. Critical approval and moderate chart success had started to back up the underground buzz that was completely taking over East London’s clubs, radio shows and record shops. Dizzee Rascal’s scooping of the Mercury Prize in 2003 was expected by many in the scene to be as the start of bigger things, the catalyst that would spark a mainstreaming of the culture. Despite much retrospective appreciation of Dizzee’s award-winning record *Boy In Da Corner* and the acknowledgment that it is, as music journalist John Doran puts it, a “genre defining album”, in the immediate couple of years following its release it seemed that the power of that single body of work would not be enough to propel Grime past the numerous factors stopping it from going mainstream.¹⁰⁷ The essence of Grime in those early years was still very much underground. The recognition that Dizzee Rascal (and Ms Dynamite before him) had received, was both unexpected and out of type for the proudly non-establishment genre. It wouldn’t be until 2014, with a renaissance in the form and the release of songs that would later form another Grime album to win a Mercury Prize, Skepta’s *Konnichiwa*, that the genre would finally break the

¹⁰⁶ Dan Hancox, ‘Public Enemy no 696’, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2009. Accessed: 15/6/18.
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/jan/21/police-form-696-garage-music>

¹⁰⁷ ‘Dizzee Rascal - The British Masters - Chapter 10’, *Noisey*, 4 October 2013. Accessed: 9/4/18.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWViT6YrqiA>

charts and cement itself as the nation's favourite sound in schools, the pop charts and on social media platforms.¹⁰⁸

Looking back now from a time where the culture has enjoyed four healthy years of commercial success (2014-18), while emphasising many of the underground qualities that gave it its unique appeal in the first place, we can pose the question of why it took Grime so long to reach this point. Between 2005 and 2014 Grime was dead in the eyes of many who followed and practiced it. An acrimonious split between its two biggest stars, Wiley and Dizzee Rascal, led to the latter leaving the genre's seminal group Roll Deep in 2003, just as *Boy In Da Corner* was being released. The result was that Roll Deep lost its most talented and coveted MC and needed to regroup. It would be another two years before their own debut album, *In At The Deep End*, would come out, but by then, Grime was already on the back foot.¹⁰⁹ Wiley, the group's leader, had sensed this and shifted their musical direction so that only a handful of songs on the album resembled the Grime form at all, many of the tracks being closer to Hip-Hop in tempos and style. While Dizzee Rascal seemed to have fully crossed over to the world of chart Pop in after *Boy In Da Corner*, securing top 10 hits and moderate success in America, Roll Deep for the most part, continued to put out similarly unorthodox records in the post-2005 period. This experimentation and shift into a more commercialised sound by the two biggest names in Grime is undoubtedly what led to the final conclusion of many that it was dead, but this hadn't happened without reason. It is now important

¹⁰⁸Skeptakonnichiwa (London: Boy Better Know, 2016).

¹⁰⁹Roll Deep, *In At The Deep End*(London: Relentless Records, 2005).

to look at the factors that drove that shift in the form and reflect on how connected they are to the communities and places that Grime was operating in, while explaining why 2005 was such a crucial year for the genre.

As we have remarked upon already, Grime's golden years were extremely short and chaotic. The name Grime was still not universally accepted by the time Roll Deep lost Dizzee Rascal in 2004. Wiley was referring to the scene by his own moniker, Eskibeat, while 'Grime' seemed to be winning out among other artists over a variety of other terms being circulated. With the three years between Dizzee Rascal's triumph over Asher D (2001) and his departure from Roll Deep (2004), the genre enjoyed a period of rapid growth underground and saw the rise of a large number of talented new artists that became stars of pirate radio shows and raves such as Sidewinder and Wiley's Eskimo Dance. Less than a year after Dizzee and Asher's clash on Choice FM, and seeing the success that the station was having with urban music in the capital, The BBC launched its own urban station, 1Xtra.¹¹⁰ The station would take Grime nationwide for the first time certainly helped in the promotion on a wider scale of Ms Dynamite and Dizzee Rascal prior to their Mercury Prize successes.

Artists who had been working within other musical spheres came under the umbrella of Grime. D Double E, Kano and Lethal B all stepped into the light to make bigger names for themselves, while new characters such as the group The Movement, including members Ghetts,

¹¹⁰'BBC 1Xtra PressRelease', BBC 1Xtra, 16 August 2002. Accessed: 4/6/18.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002/08_august/16/1xtra_launch.shtml

Scorcher, Wretch.³², Devlin and Mercston, began to emerge. Ruff Sqwad with its young leader Tinchy Strider and the brothers Crazy Titch and DurrtyGoodz (aka Doogz) also appeared at this time, and soon there were frequent radio sets being recorded on tower block roof tops from Walthamstow to Plaistow. Fronting this architectural backdrop were tightly-packed crowds of MCs, hungry to have their turn on the microphone. The sessions are as close to the pure heart of Grime music culture as it is possible to get. The much-used analogy with coldness is entirely appropriate in describing both the sound coming through from those recordings and the visuals from the few filmed sessions that survive. Cold tower block settings, emotionally cold lyrical content and visibly cold delivery in the voices and faces in recordings. The common use of 'colder' as a comparative adjective in describing the difference between Grime and Garage, or the fact that Wiley's truly genre defining instrumentals of the period often carried names such as 'Eskimo', 'Igloo' and 'Snowman' make much more sense when one has viewed the Conflict DVD, featuring footage taken Deja Vu FM in 2003.¹¹¹

The film begins with Wiley acting as host and lead MC of the set, mixed by DJ Carnage. MCs Maxwell D, Dizzee Rascal and Tinchy Strider among others take turns rapping short verses of eight or sixteen bars, while others wait eagerly for a chance to impress the 'godfather'. The video is typical of sets at this time that are still viewable on the internet today. Few of the MCs smile at any point, unlike in sets that exist from 2004 or later. There is a tension about the gathering, possibly a sign of

¹¹¹ 'Conflict DVD', *Media Gang*, London, 2003. Accessed: 3/11/17.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u3C2k3YF1k>

the times: Grime was still in its unsure beginnings at this stage with Wiley an established name, but others still trying to find a way to break through. The anxious competitiveness in the footage is as palpable as the desire to break free is audible in the lyrics being spoken. Hattie Collins talks of sensing this atmosphere at the time with a lot of “talk of aspiring to be more and being stuck, being caged, trapped”.¹¹²

A year later, with many more young MCs and DJs getting underground recognition, the mood in similar videos of radio sets is visibly more positive and the participants look to be having fun, even when clashing each other. By then, a camaraderie had formed between MCs regardless of where they came from. They knew they were working together for the culture. Back in 2003, the Grime scene was still blighted by the reputation of violent Garage raves from a few years previously, as well as the frequent reflections in its lyrics of both real life and imagined violence, but it still lacked the status or confidence at that point to own and enjoy the aggressive imagery that appealed so much to fans. This is probably the reason for the serious facial expressions on view in the video, but equally, it may just be because those present are aware of the imminent arrival of the feared Crazy Titch, a notoriously erratic and violent young MC who half-way into the set, and in typical fashion, bursts in, takes the mic and immediately launches into a verse about killing other MCs.¹¹³ Whether this is meant as an analogy for out-performing them or literally killing them is as undeterminable to us now as it is to his fellow MCs in room, looking nervously on.

¹¹² Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 16

¹¹³ ‘Conflict DVD’, *Media Gang*, London, 2003. Accessed: 3/11/17.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u3C2k3YF1k>

Crazy Titch was, at that point, one of the most recognisable MCs to listeners. His brash, loud and fast-paced rapping style meant that he often dominated cyphers (sessions where MCs rotate the microphone and take turns rapping) and won the most ‘wheel ups’. Achieving a wheel up, hitting the beat with perfect rhythm at the perfect time and then holding it for several bars in such a way that the DJ rewinds the record by hand and restarts the track, is the main goal of any Grime MC. Doing so, shows that you have done what the other MCs possibly couldn’t and is a sign that the most musically respected person in the room, the DJ, has acknowledged your abilities. Titch was a master at this, helped no doubt by the aggression with which he came in on a beat. As Wiley states in his autobiography of 2017, Titch “was the rudeboy MC – shouting, jumping around, badding up [successfully aggressing] all the MCs there – he was the king of that sort of thing.”¹¹⁴

This aggression came naturally for Titch and was a reflection of his genuine, everyday persona. He was known for fighting and criminal activity and this transferred to his lyrical content and love of clashing other MCs. In the Conflict DVD (so named because of Titch’s actions in it), the MC sets his sights on the godfather’s favourite prodigy, Dizzee Rascal, and fires off a tirade of bars that prompt him to respond. The unwritten etiquette of the Grime cypher is that you hand over the mic after your eight or sixteen bars are up, giving the next MC the chance to rap. When Crazy Titch snubs that etiquette by first holding out the mic to Dizzee as if to hand it over and then pulling it away and continuing to rap, he not only breaks convention, but disrespects Dizzee, suggesting

¹¹⁴ Richard Cowie: *Eskiboy*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 128.

that he isn't worthy of his turn. Dizzee's reaction is to try to grab it back, sparking a face-off with threats issued and a halt to the music. Crowds of MCs jump in to separate the two and a fight is narrowly avoided.¹¹⁵

The fallout of this incident was that both Titch and Dizzee would go on to record 'diss-tracks', songs verbally attacking one another, but another violent confrontation was avoided. An article in *The Guardian* in 2006 claimed that "most beefs in grime are merely theatrical, concocted for mutual publicity" in following on from Titch's own comments that "A lot of MCs talk about guns, but they haven't really got them."¹¹⁶ Titch was of course right. The majority of Grime MCs, despite their upbringings on rough council estates and exposure to criminal activity, wanted nothing to do with violence. Titch, however, was genuinely involved in a life of violence that would lead to him being convicted in 2006 for murder.¹¹⁷ The incident had arisen after Titch had taken offence to a diss-track by a relatively unknown rapper, aimed at his brother, DirrtyGoodz. He and an associate tracked down the producer of the song and shot him in the leg and back, killing him. On 2 November 2006, Crazy Titch was given a life sentence in prison.

The question of Grime's connection with criminality is a complex one. It is often implied in lyrics and music videos, glamorised in interviews and criticised by the authorities. Certain characters, such as Titch, were undeniably involved in criminal activity, as was Wiley by his

¹¹⁵ 'Conflict DVD', *Media Gang*, London, 2003. Accessed: 3/11/17.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u3C2k3YF1k>

¹¹⁶ Ned Beaman, 'Is Violence Holding Grime Back?', *The Guardian*, 6 November 2006. Accessed: 17/8/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2006/nov/06/isviolenceholdinggrimeback>

¹¹⁷ Hugh Muir, 'Rapper Who Killed Producer For 'Disrespect' Gets 30 Years', *The Guardian*, 3 November 2006, Accessed 17/8/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/nov/03/ukguns.musicnews>

own admission: “I was a drug dealer”.¹¹⁸ The imagery and romance of criminals evading the law has long been synonymous with the East End of London and chimed with its residents who have always promoted figures like this to folkloric status. From Dickens’ lovable-rogue character, the Artful Dodger, to the real-life gangsters, The Kray twins, who despite perpetrating horrific crimes in the 1960s, were revered as local heroes by many Eastenders, the working-class criminal success story has always captured the cockney imagination. This reverence of criminality is explained by the feeling that if someone from the poor local area, abandoned by the wealthier classes and given few opportunities in life, could achieve fame and fortune at great risk and in open disregard of the authority of the establishment, he could be forgiven his crimes. Defiance of the law, which rarely seemed to work on the side of poor East London communities (especially black ones) was a quality worth celebrating and Grime certainly attached itself to this.

The reality, even if real criminals occasionally entered Grime’s circles, was that the majority of its artists and their associates were not criminals. At live events, violence was again implied, but rarely materialised in the way that it had at So Solid’s Garage events or in the Ragga and Bashment scenes back in Jamaica. In fact, several of Grime’s most notable figures have come out and claimed that violence was non-existence in their experiences of raves and other events. The DJ Logan Sama has said “I haven't ever seen a serious violent incident at a grime rave... I've seen them at house raves, I've seen them at hip-hop raves,

¹¹⁸ ‘Wiley On Selling Drugs As A Kid’, *VLADTV*, 10 January 2017. Accessed: 15/8/18.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml5Kb6-Nq7k>

but I haven't ever at a grime rave".¹¹⁹ MC JME concurs: "I have never been in a club ever and somebody has been shot. I've never seen nobody pull out no knife and run into the crowd."¹²⁰ But despite these claims and a lack of any serious recorded incidents of violence at live events in the first decade of Grime, the imagery that the scene portrayed of its background in the streets was impacting upon the ease with which events could be promoted and held.

In 2005, the Metropolitan Police introduced a risk assessment procedure, Form 696, that required promoters and licenced venues to inform them of the nature of live music events. Included on the form were questions about the "music style to be played/performed (ed. bashment, R&B, garage)" and types of performer: "DJs, MCs, etc".¹²¹ The result of giving this information often led to the Police then advising venues to cancel Grime events under threat of revoking their licences. For venues, it was not worth the risk. For Grime artists, it meant that not only was their genre underground, it was not even allowed in local club venues. The view within the community that the motives of the Met were racist was widespread. The MC Giggs speaking after the cancellation of his 2010 tour, questioned this: "Why is it different? There's fights everywhere, there's situations everywhere at all types of shows, all types of things, whether its punk, rock, hip hop, pop,

¹¹⁹ Dan Hancox, 'Public Enemy no 696', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2009. Accessed: 15/6/18. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/jan/21/police-form-696-garage-music>

¹²⁰ 'The Police vs Grime Music – A Noisy Film', *Noisey*, 29 March 2014. Accessed: 15/6/18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW_juiPOpys

¹²¹ Dan Hancox, 'Public Enemy no 696', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2009. Accessed: 15/6/18. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/jan/21/police-form-696-garage-music>

whatever.”¹²² After a history of institutionally racist police actions in London’s Caribbean communities, the intentions of the police were perceived unquestionably as just another manifestation of prejudicial treatment and cultural suppression.

Although Grime was not entirely a black art form even in its early days (notable white artists include MCs, Devlin and Discarda and DJs, Slimzee and Logan Sama), the form was predominantly practiced by artists with African and Caribbean heritage. In the eyes of the media and police, it was culturally black. The Met had claimed that the form’s introduction had been a result of a “spate of shootings” at club events in the early 2000s, without giving specific examples.¹²³ The only incidents of that sort at that time were in South London and closely connected to the Garage scene, implicating So Solid Crew, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Incidents of violence had occasionally involved or happened to Grime acts, such as Dizze Rascal who was stabbed in Cyprus, with So Solid members again implicated, but by the time Grime was carving out its own scene in 2003 and 2004, reports of this sort were rare and, on the club scene, non-existent, confirming what JME and Logan Sama have claimed. It was obvious to those making or following Grime that the police were using past incidents that were nothing to do with their scene, as well as the violent imagery that came as a part of their music, to shut it down.

¹²² Form 696: ‘Racist Police Form To Be Scrapped In London, *BBC News*, 10 November 2017. Accessed: 10/11/17.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41946915>

¹²³ Form 696: ‘Racist Police Form To Be Scrapped In London, *BBC News*, 10 November 2017. Accessed: 10/11/17.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41946915>

In 2009, amendments were made to certain questions on Form 696 that asked for information on the ethnic background of artists, in response to criticisms of racial profiling, but it was not until 2017 that the form was eventually scrapped by London's mayor, Sadiq Khan.¹²⁴ The damage to Grime, however, had been done early on. With little opportunity to perform in London after the form's introduction and with the clamp down on pirate radio stations such as Rinse FM, artists found it increasingly difficult to make and share their music. Radio airtime for the culture was duopolised by the two mainstream, licenced radio stations, Choice FM and BBC Radio 1Xtra. Capital Radio Group opportunistically acquired Choice in 2005, sensing the need to fill the gap left by the closure of the pirates, and the significant role the station could play in the coming years.¹²⁵

With a need for an outlet, Grime turned to video footage from a number of sources and unbeknownst to those behind the cameras, preserved a visual musical history that would fuel the renaissance in the form in 2014. Back in 2005, fans began to rely on the music videos shown on Channel U (launched 2003), a cable channel designed to give airtime to black music genres. Alongside this came the *Lord of the Mics* series, started by Jammer in the basement of his parents' house in Walthamstow in 2004, and continued throughout the 'dark ages' of Grime, when it was sometimes hard to determine whether the genre still existed. Other footage, not intentionally filmed for posterity, but which

¹²⁴ Joe Nersessian, 'Form 696: Police Scrap 'Racist' Risk Assessment For MCs and DJs', *Independent*, 10 November 2017. Accessed: 11/11/18.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/form-696-scrapped-racist-police-paperwork-claims-london-mcs-djs-grime-garage-a8048821.html>

¹²⁵ Julia Day, 'Capital Gets Go-ahead For London Licence Merger', *The Guardian*, 12 October 2004. Accessed 3/4/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/oct/12/radio.commercialradio>

“came from the need for visuals” and to share their work somehow, were the aforementioned *The Movement DVD* and the work of Rooney Keefe, who documented MCs rapping in the streets they inhabited in his series, *Risky Roadz*.¹²⁶ These films would not only preserve the early days, but inspire later channels, such as *SB:TV*, as Grime entered the internet age as a “highly visual medium”.¹²⁷

This move into alternative media is what saved Grime and gave it the basis on which to thrive later on. Squeezed out of its traditionally inhabited spaces, it sought new platforms on which to continue. The paradox of course is that, in an art form so conscious of its own authenticity and need to stay true to the DIY cultures of sound systems and the streets it came from, was now desperately seeking to publicise itself. What happened was a compromise that worked for both artists and fans. Those making Grime (amid the commercial success of ‘sell out’ Grime artists in the Pop charts) were able to maintain credibility among fans by applying the DIY ethos to their new online platforms. Sites such as *MySpace* and *SoundCloud* allowed for independent music sharing, while YouTube channels such as *GRM Daily* and *SB:TV* made artists stars overnight, eliminating the need for management or major record labels. The implications of this forced adaptation to its new environment in relation to the traditional spaces that Grime exited and its relationship with East London will be discussed in Chapter Three.

¹²⁶ Adam Bychawski, ‘From Risky Roadz To That’s Not Me, The Story Of The Grime DVD’, *Noisey*, 23 November 2014. Accessed: 30/7/18.

https://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/article/r3ng78/why-the-grime-dvd-is-still-going-strong
Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 16.

¹²⁷ Adam Bychawski, ‘From Risky Roadz To That’s Not Me’, *Noisey*, 23 November 2014. Accessed: 30/7/18.

https://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/article/r3ng78/why-the-grime-dvd-is-still-going-strong

In this chapter, we have seen that male bravado, aggression, the Caribbean traditions of sound-clashing and the age-old East End penchant for the lovable villain are all prevalent in the lyricism of Grime and the depictions of it from within. Grime's image and even its name have never shied away from this. It was what allowed the genre to break from a Garage scene that failed to represent the realities of its impoverished communities. Equally, it is what the police force were able to latch onto to justify the obstacles they put in place to deny the scene a platform, bringing about a lull in the output of the music. The final chapter of this thesis will explore how Grime survived this period, through a small handful of persevering artists and documenters, in an increasingly tense environment that would culminate in a number of fatal incidents and a week of rioting, the likes of which London had never seen. The effects of Form 696 and the wider suppression of Grime culture at a time of national austerity and local gentrification will be explored. Documenting the culture post-riots and the eventual acknowledgment of its artistic and wider cultural value by politicians and media, will lead us to the end of the chapter before reflections on the current state of police relations with black communities in London are made in the conclusion.

Chapter Three

No place like home: the transformation of the East End and its impact on Grime, post-2005

In 2005, at the same time that Grime was coming under attack from the launch of Form 696 and only three months after the ASBO given to DJ Slimzee for his pirate radio escapades, a decision was made that would change beyond recognition the geographical landscape that had framed early Grime. On July 6 of that year, London was awarded the 2012 Olympic Games at a ceremony in Singapore.¹ Property prices had been rising since the late-nineties and a transformation in the demographics of boroughs like Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney was already becoming visible, as we will see in this chapter, but the awarding of the Olympics would push gentrification to new heights and reshape the area so that many of the streets, parks and buildings that had nurtured the rise of Grime music, suddenly disappeared as construction of the Olympic Park began. However, the darker implications of the Olympic Committee's decision were concealed to local residents as the next day, on the edge of Tower Hamlets at Aldgate Station, terrorists detonated one of four bombs in the capital in the worst loss of life in East London since the Blitz.²

Places evolve over time. Perhaps nowhere more rapidly than poor, inner-city areas like East London. Various waves of immigration

¹ 'London Beats Paris To 2012 Olympic Games', *BBC News*, 6 July 2005. Accessed: 1/9/18. news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/front_page/4655555.stm

² '7 July London Bombings: What Happened That Day?', *BBC News*, 3 July 2015. Accessed: 1/9/18. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33253598>

have come in and changed the culture at street level in the East End since the nineteenth century and destruction and reconstruction have been synonymous with it throughout its history. However, what had, until the twenty-first century been a constant, was that East London had been almost exclusively the home of the desperately poor. This was now beginning to change so that, along with those living below the poverty line, wealthier classes were beginning to inhabit the area. With poverty had come unity and community. People banded together so that wherever they had migrated from, they were soon just another part of the patch-work Cockney street culture that became famous worldwide. The Huguenots, poor Protestants fleeing persecution in France and Belgium, came in the eighteenth century before Jews escaping similar religious persecution in Eastern Europe arrived in the late nineteenth century, bringing a Yiddish influence to the local slang. With the waning of Empire came immigrants from India, Bangladesh and the Caribbean, all equally seeking a better life than the one they had left behind.

In East London they found the chance to get by, make a modest living by British standards and form part of the community. Assimilation was easily achieved by simply joining in with community life. Most people had come in from elsewhere and experienced the same transition, making for a mostly empathetic environment for new arrivals. The existing poor white-British population were divided on these various arrivals and many would leave the area over the years for London's suburbs and the outskirts of Essex, citing a loss of their own traditional culture and identity in what was known as 'white flight', but

many also stayed, making the area one of the most ethnically diverse places in the country.³ Statistics in this chapter will show that by the turn of the millennium, it was not poor migrant groups, but middle-class, white-British who were moving in. Not seeking a haven from persecution or poverty, they came looking for an opportunity to get on the property ladder or even profit from the regeneration taking place. The awarding of the Olympics would further escalate this trend and with it, wipe whole chunks of Grime history off the map.

The geographically central area of East London, where Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest almost converge within a mile of each other, is also the cultural heart of Grime. The famous club venues we have already mentioned, Stratford Rex and Club EQ, were located in this area. Rhythm Division, Grime's record shop Mecca and the various rooftops that secretly transmitted Rinse FM and Deja Vu FM were all within walking distance. It is also where a large number of Grime's key figures grew up, using the surrounding streets as the first training grounds for their lyrical abilities. Near to Stratford's central shopping area and train station were the homes of Crazy Titch (Skiers Street) and Kano (Manor Road).⁴ They could have walked to Rex, EQ, Rinse or Deja quite easily. Stratford's large train and bus station with connecting lines that branch out across London, is the biggest transport terminal in East London. The hubs of nightlife and pirate radio were

³ Jen Pharo, 'White Flight', *The Sun*, 14 May 2016. Accessed: 1/09/18
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1197977/you-come-out-of-the-tube-and-its-like-baghdad-documentary-shows-how-white-londoners-are-fleeing-the-east-end/>

⁴ 'Project Mayhem - Crazy Titch', *Off The Radar*, 4 February 2018. Accessed: 1/6/18.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6U8e7c5ZPWs&t=203s>

Killian Fox, 'Kano Live Review – You Know Just Where He's Coming From', *The Observer*, 28 August 2016. Accessed: 1/6/18.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/aug/28/kano-live-review-liverpool-arts-club-made-in-the-manor>

easily accessible to artists who lived further afield such as Skepta and JME in Tottenham or Lethal B in Walthamstow, and so Stratford became the place to be. Within a roughly two- or three-mile radius was also where the Caribbean community was largest. Venturing further into Hackney one would end up in Jewish neighbourhoods. Further into Tower Hamlets was the large Bangladeshi community around Brick Lane. Eastwards into Newham was Green Street, the area's large Indian population, and North into Walthamstow was a Pakistani community. But around central Stratford and the nearby parts of the neighbouring boroughs that bordered it, a strong African/Caribbean community existed and thrived culturally. This, along with the other reasons mentioned above, is why Grime came specifically from this part of the East End.

While Stratford and Bow are undoubtedly home to the majority of early pioneers of Grime music, the rapid spread of the movement in its first year (2001) soon reached neighbouring boroughs and the large number of artists, pirate radio stations and music venues outside of those two boroughs means that we must consider a wider geographical area when we speak about the 'home' of Grime. With a sizable and more long-standing Caribbean community than Newham or Tower Hamlets, as well as a skyline dotted with tower blocks, Hackney was already an established paradise for pirate stations and sound system culture a decade before the genesis of Grime. When pirate radio station Kool FM

first transmitted from Bannister House in the early nineties, just over a mile from Bow's Roman Road, "The audience was instant".⁵

The borough of Hackney is split by part of the unofficial boundary that divides East and North London, by popular consensus. In the Southern half of the borough, bordering on Bow and Bethnal Green, are Homerton, Dalston, Clapton and Hackney Central. These areas are considered very much a part of the traditional East End.



Figure 2: Map of Hackney, surrounded by Grime's other boroughs to the North, East and South.

Demographically, African and Caribbean populations here are far larger than in the North of the borough, where Stoke Newington and Stamford

⁵ Jamie Clifton, 'Jungle, Raves and Pirate Radio: The History and Future of Kool FM,' *Vice*, 6 August 2016. Accessed: 30/01/2018
https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/4wba59/kool-fm-jungle-pirate-london-945

Hill are more known for their large Turkish and Hasidic Jewish communities. The architecture changes too, with well-kept Victorian streets prevailing over new-build estates – aesthetics reflected in the difference in property prices. The estate agent Foxtons claims the average house price today in Stoke Newington to be around £630,000, while in Clapton the average is around £563,000.⁶ These are, of course, modern figures. Grime was born at the very beginnings of the property boom that would transform East London's race and class makeup over the first two decades of the twenty-first century and raise questions of gentrification and loss of community in the area.

A 2018 report on demographics by the London Borough of Hackney found that “Nearly 45% of all households in Hackney rent from a social landlord. They tend to have higher unemployment and lower average incomes than people living in other tenures.”⁷ The same report shows that the Black Caribbean population of the borough fell from 10.3% in the 2001 census to 7.8% in that of 2011⁸. Looking back to the time of Grime's beginnings and the 2001 census that showed a larger Caribbean population, we can turn to another collection of data from the area that helps to further illustrate the ethnic makeup of the Hackney's different wards. Hackney Council's

⁶ Foxtons estate agents, house price statistics for Hackney. Accessed 29/12/17.
<https://www.foxtons.co.uk/living-in/stoke-newington/>

⁷A *Profile Of Hackney, Its People And Place* (LB Hackney Policy Team, January 2018). p.4. Accessed 29/01/2018.

<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/2665/Hackney-profile/pdf/Hackney-Profile>

⁸A *Profile Of Hackney, Its People And Place* (LB Hackney Policy Team, January 2018). p.7. Accessed 29/01/2018.

<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/2665/Hackney-profile/pdf/Hackney-Profile>

analysis maps show not only that Southern and Eastern wards contained a significantly higher percentage of social housing, but that they also were overwhelmingly inhabited by groups “other than White-British”, with many wards home to between 53.9% and 79.4%.⁹

What does this data tell us? The ever-shifting demographic face of the borough is once again transforming, but this is the first time that the area has been sought-after in property terms. Two decades ago, at the turn of the new millennium, Grime was the perfect moniker for a music scene from this place. If it were coined today in the borough, the term perhaps would not carry the same weight of authenticity. Hackney is just one example, but it is the benchmark by which the gentrification of East London is measured. The changing demographics and increased property prices have also brought in new types of businesses and directly influenced the street culture that Grime came from in the early 2000s. Communities from what can be called the other ‘Grime boroughs’: Tower Hamlets, Newham, Waltham Forest and Haringey can tell a similar story, as existing working-class residents have been quickly replaced by employees in sectors considered more ‘middle-class’. A comparative study of data on professions, taken from the 2001 and 2011 censuses by the estate agent Savills, found that there had been a 65% increase in people working in ‘culture, media and sports’ in Hackney (see Figure 3), with the other aforementioned boroughs all close behind.

⁹ ‘Non White British Ethnic Groups And Super Output Areas With 50% Plus Social Housing (Census 2001)’, Hackney Council. Accessed 29/01/2018.
<http://www.map.hackney.gov.uk/gisMapGallery/Maps/Tom%20Duane%20Maps/Social%20Housing/Map%209%20-%20Social%20housing%20and%20Non-White%20British.pdf>

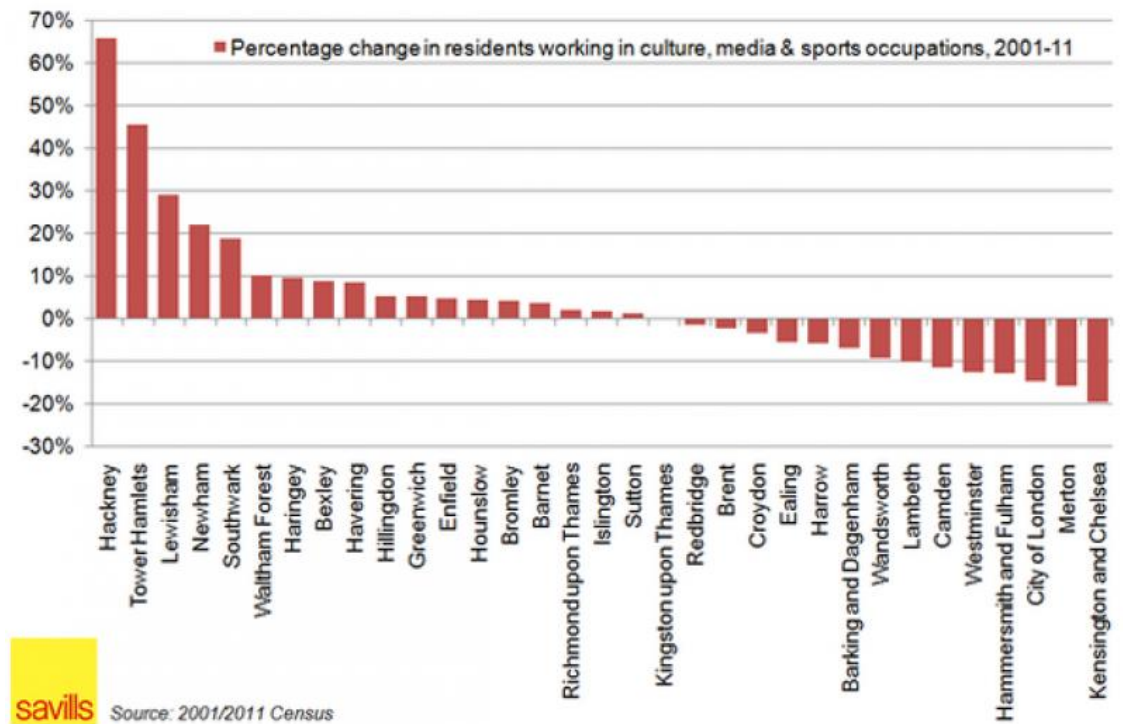


Figure 3: Chart by Savills showing the change in employment type of residents of London boroughs.

One well-known and much-lamented victim of this change in Tower Hamlets was Grime's renowned record shop, Rhythm Division on Roman Road. In its heyday of the early 2000s, the shop was arguably as important to the scene as any club night or individual artist, providing the only marketplace for white-label Grime records, as well as hosting recordings and live performances and generally serving as a gathering place for practitioners and devotees alike. It closed down in 2010 due to what was probably a collaboration of factors: the temporary decline of the Grime scene and vinyl records, increasing rents and the shift in the local culture at street level that many long-standing residents perceived negatively. Rhythm Division's owner, DJ Cheeky,

touched on this feeling when describing his return to the site, now a coffee shop, in an interview with *The Observer*: “The record shops were what brought Grime together, what made it a scene – people used to just link up and just jam; people from different crews and areas...I went in recently and said this used to be my shop, and bought a cake, thinking, Jesus Christ, what has this become?”¹⁰

The chronological lifespan of Grime and its changing fortunes, and the demographic evolutions taking place in the same neighbourhoods are certainly interesting when layered on top of each other. Grime’s honeymoon period lasted roughly half a decade (2001-2005) until the various factors we have already touched upon started to have an impact on its popularity and marketability. At the very same time, increasing rents and subsequent changes to the ethnic and professional makeup of local residents meant that the culture was in decline. Some tower blocks that once hid radio transmitters were demolished as part of the architectural regeneration of the area in the build-up to the 2012 London Olympics, while those individuals responsible for their broadcasting were clamped down on. In 2005, Rinse FM founder DJ Slimzee, became the first person to receive an Anti-social Banning Order, forbidding his physical presence on any rooftop in the borough of Tower Hamlets.¹¹

¹⁰ ‘Site And Sound: When Neighbourhoods Spawn New Forms Of Music’, *The Observer*, 26 April 2014. Accessed on 30/1/2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/apr/26/site-and-sound-when-cities-spawn-music-london-grime-trip-hop-bristol>

¹¹ Matheus Sanchez, ASBO Bars Pirate DJ From The Rooftops, *London Evening Standard*, 15 April 2005. Accessed: 30/01/2018
<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/asbo-bars-pirate-dj-from-the-rooftops-7173468.html>

The increased difficulty for pirates to operate, the closure of Rhythm Division and the dispersion of the local, black working-class community all pointed to a waning in the culture that had given birth to the Grime music scene – so much so that it was deemed by many to be dead. Artists quit or moved to Chart-Pop and other musical forms. The venues that had housed huge Grime raves ceased to be. Stratford Rex and Club EQ were closed down and demolished to make way for the Olympic Park respectively. The Palace Pavilion venue in Hackney that had once hosted Young Man Standing is now a church, while Hackney Ocean has become a “cosy arthouse cinema.”¹² Grime’s traditionally inhabited spaces no longer belonged to Grime and the expression ‘dropped off the map’ seemed entirely appropriate. Such was the acceptance that the movement was over that in 2014, Hattie Collins’ announcement in *The Guardian* of a “second-coming” remarked that “you might have been forgiven for assuming grime...was all but extinct.”¹³

Gentrification made an impact. The loss of Grime’s spaces and the influx of people working in traditionally middle-class sectors, meant that for youngsters trying to produce Grime music after 2005, the possibilities were limited and the community that had previously supported the area’s diverse culture was weakened by African/Caribbean people moving out. The overriding feeling among Eastenders towards gentrification and the perceived loss of community

¹² A Psychogeographic Guide To Grime, *Medium*, 15 December 2016, Accessed: 12/06/18.

<https://medium.com/workandlife/a-psychogeographic-guide-to-grime-4151f989ceed>

¹³ Hattie Collins, The Second Coming Of Grime, *The Guardian*, 27 March 2014. Accessed: 30/01/2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/mar/27/second-coming-of-grime-dizzee-rascal-wiley>

is generally a negative one, but for those who have made it out, the area doesn't always carry the same nostalgia. "I don't feel like I have the right to say," responds Dizzee Rascal when asked by *The Guardian* to speak about the gentrification of his hometown. "You'd have to ask people who still live there".¹⁴ Both Wiley and Dizzee, the genre's two biggest stars, now live outside London and, after years of flirting with palatable chart music, they have both recently re-joined the Grime resurgence, with Wiley in particular playing a pivotal role in the culture's very recent rebirth.

The place that many Grime stars once called home is no longer where they reside. The famous places that shaped the movement have become pilgrimage sites to fans and nostalgic reference points in the songs of their heroes. While there are new stars being born in different parts of the country, the new wave of Grime music is heavily based on remembering the work done by the old-guard and acknowledging where it came from. Rhythm Division may now be a café, Hackney Ocean a hipster cinema and half the towers that were home to artists and pirate stations no longer standing, but the appeal of East London and its grimey reality of past and present is still strong and inextricably linked to Grime's imagery and content. The scope of this thesis will not bring us fully to the present day, but it is important to understand that Grime, in its most recent revival since 2014, is still trading on its proud Eastender status.

¹⁴ Tim Jonze, 'Dizzee Rascal: I'm The One Person Who Can Say, Grime? Nah, I seen it, sorry!', *The Guardian*, 16 July 2017. Accessed: 31/01/2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/jul/16/dizzee-rascal-grime-nah-seen-it-new-album-raskit>

From the early days when it was only a small gathering of crews making similar, but undefined music, through the uncertainty of the post-2005 era when many artists stopped making records, to the rioting of 2011 when it felt as though the culture would either die for good or spring into new life, Grime has had a tumultuous and at times chaotic journey. That is, until now. Grime today is confident, sure of where it is going and dominant as the national sound of youth culture in Britain. And it no longer represents East London alone or the small communities that originally birthed it. The links to those communities, other than in nostalgic video shoots and references, seem practically lost. The extent to which Grime's newfound national and international success represents cultural gentrification and mainstreaming and has come about precisely because the links to its origins in tight-knit communities have been severed through economic gentrification and racially-motivated suppression of the culture in its home boroughs, will be explored in the conclusion to this study. Measuring how Grime eventually would thrive economically after that, as an indirect response to the same circumstances of suppression, will be important to consider also.

Going Underground: Grime's hibernation and resilience in the dark ages (2005-14)

We have already begun to tell the story of how Grime's growing popularity was curtailed in the years following 2005 and established

that the major causes for this decline in the form came from police closures of live events and pirate radio stations, stripping Grime of its two major platforms. We have also seen that simultaneous to these actions, the rapid gentrification of East London was starting to push out black residents, dividing and weakening the very communities on which the genre relied. Visually, the area those communities inhabited was changing too. Hackney Marshes, once home to the largest collection of full-sized football pitches in one place, was cut in two, half of the land given to the development of the Olympic Park.¹⁵ In the immediate pre-2011 Riots period this, along with the 2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent beginnings of austerity measures including cuts to local authorities by the Conservative Government, contributed to an ever-increasing sense of disillusionment and disenfranchisement among youth.

When considering the absence of extra-curricular activity provided locally, uncertain housing situations due to increased rents, fewer familiar and relatable faces on the streets and the disappearance of a creative outlet that not only kept young people out of trouble but united them with a common interest, it is much easier to understand how and why so many resorted to rioting and looting in the unrest that erupted during the summer of 2011. The list of factors that contributed to the changing face of the East End and its population, and the pressures resulting in the decline of Grime music culture, can make for depressing reading, especially when framed by the history of racial

¹⁵ Mathew Beard, 'Hackney Marshes, Home Of Sunday Football, To Be Bulldozed For Olympics Coach Park', *Independent*, 1 January 2005. Accessed: 1/9/18.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/hackney-marshes-home-of-sunday-football-to-be-bulldozed-for-olympics-coach-park-26702.html>

prejudice detailed in Chapter One. They read as a combination of racist policy in attempting to destroy black-British youth culture and economically-driven redevelopment by authorities and companies with no regard for the consequences to black and minority ethnic, working-class communities. This section will look at how Grime, under all these pressures, declined but ultimately survived, alongside how the wider local population coped with significant changes to their culture and lifestyle in the lead up to the 2011 Riots and 2012 Olympic Games.

One of the most enduringly symbolic images of Grime music culture is the first volume of the *Lord of the Mics* DVD (date?), shot by Jammer in the basement of his parents' Leytonstone house. The space has been used as a DIY recording studio for some of Grime's most notable early figures for some time, and previously, had been a rehearsal room for Jammer's father's band. "He built all of this" says Jammer, conscious of the role of his parents' generation (as seen in the opening words of his Rinse FM set, quoted in Chapter One) in setting him and his peers up for a music career and aware of the metaphorical sense of his words.¹⁶ His father had built the studio and figuratively laid the foundations for his child to become one Grime's most important artists and documenters. By 2004, Jammer had teamed up with friends, Ratty and Capo to produce a DVD of the kind of thing taking place in the basement. Grime's gauging of authenticity has always been based on how accurately its artists describe their real-life surroundings. Jammer applied this concept to film and, having witnessed many clashes at

¹⁶ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 26.

studio sessions, decided to direct a camera towards them and show the fans what Grime artists actually looked like.

Recognising that Grime lacked a visual element and that, aside from live events, most fans consumed only its audible products (tapes, records and radio broadcasts), Jammer's thinking, in his own words, was that "we need to put some faces to these voices, we need to let the people see who these guys are".¹⁷ After the traumatic events of 2005 and their impact on Grime's ability to operate, the "street DVD sold out of the back of Jammer's car and in local record stores" and initially intended merely as a creative visual aid to the scene, took on a far more important role. The second edition of the series, which came in 2006, was not just one of the only places to see Grime in action, it was one of the few documents of the music in any form. Nevertheless, *Lord of The Mics* was very much an underground product for an underground scene. It was not available in major retail stores and the internet had not advanced enough at that stage to make online sharing of the video widespread. Participants knew that any chance for self-publicity was worth a shot and grasped the opportunity willingly. The first volume featured Wiley battling Kano in what is still regarded as one of the most important and high-quality clashes in Grime history. The two MCs take turns to insult and rile each other, but the confrontation is purely musical and there was "a level of respect for the musician because we was all one community trying to get out of a situation."¹⁸

¹⁷ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 27.

¹⁸ Ewen Spencer, *Open Mic Vol. 2* (Berlin: Europrint, 2015), p. 28.

Whether Jammer, in lamenting the ‘situation’ of his ‘community’, is referring to the Grime community trying desperately to free themselves from operating in the dark, or to the wider local black community trying to represent themselves with strong culture in the face of social and political pressures, is unclear. Perhaps he is employing another double meaning here and is speaking of both simultaneously. What is clear, is that *Lord of The Mics* had a huge impact on the preservation of Grime music, as an interest to music historians and fans looking back at some of the rarest footage of the early scene, but more importantly as one of the key elements in keeping the embers of Grime burning until they could be relit in the years to come.

Volume 2 was particularly significant and pitted the up-and-coming Skepta against Birmingham MC, Devilman. By featuring an MC from a different city, *Lord of the Mics* helped to strengthen the genre’s reach beyond its traditional confines, but it also made a name for Skepta, who would go on to use his charismatic presence and highly technical rapping ability in helping to kick-start the Grime revival years later. With a hiatus of five years between Volumes 2 and 3 representing the darkest years for the scene, Jammer brought back *Lord of the Mics* in 2011, months after the London Riots and perhaps sensing that there was a mobilised youth movement taking place with young people who cared about the loss of their culture and community. Jammer tells the story of the reaction to Volume 3’s release: “Wiley phoned me up and said ‘you’ve done it, you’ve brought the grime scene back, I’m going

to bring back Eskimo Dance' [the grime scene's flagship live event, named after the classic Wiley beat, 'Eskimo']." ¹⁹

Eskimo Dance returned in 2012, but merely returning to the same format as five or six years previously was not guaranteed to work. It took a bold step by Skepta, who had been getting by comfortably on Pop songs with the likes of N Dubz that "didn't sound like grime" according to Jammer.²⁰ Skepta's concept was to make a modern Grime song that spoke in the first person but *for* an entire culture. It would feature modern sounding production, but use old instruments such as Jammer's keyboard, and a video that was filmed in the then closed-down Rhythm Division site and costing only £80 to make. The song, 'That's Not Me', was the perfect essence of what Grime needed to be to truly represent its community and its essence once more.²¹ With the aid of the internet, the video and song were downloadable and sharable in a way that no police force or banning order could control.

Having been conceptualised in 2012 off the back of the beginnings of the rival sparked by Jammer and Wiley, Skepta's song was first made available on YouTube in 2014 and went viral. It was picked up by the football video game franchise FIFA for the soundtrack of their 2015 edition and went on to win a MOBO [Music Of Black Origin] Award for Best Video.²² The song was a clear statement of Grime

¹⁹ Paul Gibbins, 'How A DVD Series Helped Shape A Decade Of Grime Culture', *Fader*, 11 September 2015. Accessed: 3/9/18.

<http://www.thefader.com/2015/09/11/jammer-lord-of-the-mics-interview>

²⁰ Paul Gibbins, 'How A DVD Series Helped Shape A Decade Of Grime Culture', *Fader*, 11 September 2015. Accessed: 3/9/18.

<http://www.thefader.com/2015/09/11/jammer-lord-of-the-mics-interview>

²¹ 'That's Not Me', Skepta (London: Boy Better Know, 2014).

²² Thomas Gorton, 'Skepta Wins MOBO Award With £80 Music Video', *Dazed*, 23 October 2014. Accessed: 3/9/18.

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/22281/1/skepta-wins-mobo-award-with-80-music-video>

culture's intentions to stand as an independent and self-defining art form in the midst of pressures from big labels, the police, the government and the force of gentrification causing upheaval in its communities. As a direct descendent of other oppressed Caribbean music forms, it had always had to stand alone and rely on a DIY sound-system culture. Now, with an increased marketability and growing national fan-base, afforded it by the power of online video sharing, it needed to declare its intentions to continue to represent, stand true and reject external pressures that could derail its comeback.

'That's Not Me's' visuals and lyrics both state unequivocally what Grime is about for 2014. Skepta begins his verse by announcing his return, but he could equally be speaking as the personification of Grime as a whole when he raps, "It's the return of the mack / I'm still alive just like 2Pac", a reference to the conspiracy theory that claims the US rapper 2pac is still alive. These layered metaphors are subtle, but delivered in a sonic clarity typical of Skepta that allows the listener to digest and understand them easily. In other lines from the song, Skepta and his brother, the MC JME, both make notable references to dress-sense, something that is also important to Grime in visually depicting an ethos of independent street culture:

JME: "I don't wear no bait designer brands / I spit deep bars in my black top"

Skepta: Yeah, I used to wear Gucci / I put it all in the bin 'cause
that's not me / True, I used to look like you / But dressing like a
mess? Nah, nah, nah.”²³

The lines are a statement that they and other young black people will not be dictated to by fashion labels, music labels or anyone else. It is their culture and they will popularise it on their own terms. The song would later feature on the critically-acclaimed album *Konnichiwa* which, as we have already seen, won the 2016 Mercury Prize. Also on that album was the other big single of Skepta’s rebranding, ‘Shutdown’, on which he followed up and expanded on the themes begun in ‘That’s Not Me’.²⁴ He defiantly exclaims:

They try to steal my vision

This ain't a culture, it's my religion

God knows I don't wanna go prison

But if a man wanna try me, trust me, listen

Me and my Gs ain't scared of police

We don't listen to no politician

Everybody on the same mission

We don't care about your -isms and schisms.²⁵

In raising the banner of war for the culture and declaring the police and politicians the enemy, Skepta is issuing a call to arms.

²³ ‘That’s Not Me’, Skepta (London: Boy Better Know, 2014).

²⁴ ‘Shutdown’, Skepta, (London: Boy Better Know, 2015).

²⁵ ‘Shutdown’, Skepta (London: Boy Better Know, 2015).

“Everyone on the same mission” is aimed at a sub-culture of music followers and a multicultural community that have felt let down by the state since before the 2011 riots. Skepta’s artistic articulation of those feelings capitalised on the mood in London for greater representation. It wasn’t coming politically or socially, so culture took over. Jammer’s documentation of the scene in its darkest days and his decision to bring it back in the aftermath of the riots was inspired. Wiley, ever the opportunist, saw an opening and did his part to help push it forward again. In fairness to Wiley, and despite Roll Deep’s albums of that period containing House and Pop tracks, ‘the godfather of Grime’ did do his part during that period.

While Lethal B and Dizzee Rascal dove headfirst into Hip-Hop and Pop sounds, Wiley had mixed things up by joining the newly formed group, Boy Better Know alongside Skepta, JME, Jammer, Frisco and others, in 2006. The group exclusively put out Grime music and built a strong brand with clothing and effective use of online platforms. The other big success of Grime integrity during this period was South London MC, Big Narstie, whose charismatic personality and equally effective online presence helped bring a more jovial side to what was often seen as a very serious culture. Narstie remained independent and true to the form, and therefore had to wait for his moment of success when Grime came back into the public eye. In a 2015 interview for Charlie Sloth’s radio show on 1Xtra, he was critical of former Grime artists Chipmunk and TinieTempah, who both left the scene in the mid-2000s to pursue solo Pop careers. “No one cared about Grime,” he said.

“When I was giving my Grime music [to radio stations], yeah and Chipmunk and Tinie and all these other people were giving you their commercial music, you lot couldn’t play my music...it was too urban.”²⁶

Other figures on the scene are less scathing. Former 1Xtra and Capital Xtra DJ Tim Westwood describes the situation in radio stations that led to artists like Tinie and Chip leaving Grime behind: “The editorial control was denying these artists their voice...they were getting shut down when it was live. When it was recorded, their story was getting edited.”²⁷ Yet despite this situation, Boy Better Know, Big Narstie and some others continued to make the music they loved. In his 2015 song ‘Funny’, produced by Drum ‘n’ Bass duo Chase & Status, Frisco reflectively jokes about the prevailing attitude towards his genre at the time: “they said Grime was dead, I couldn’t stop laughing, man I found that shit so funny.”²⁸ That the scene survived at all is almost entirely down to the persistence and defiance of a small number of artists, who refused to sign to big labels and sacrifice their artistic integrity, something alluded to by Heat FM founder Kris Jay in an interview with Frisco: “the scene was looking for token black boys, what they got was black boys who said ‘fuck you, we’re doing this shit ourselves.’”²⁹

By 2011/12, the other big names of the scene were on board with reclaiming the genre. It is perhaps a little cynical to suggest that Lethal

²⁶ ‘Big Narstie Keeps It Real About Grime’, *BBC Radio 1Xtra*, 30 January 2015. Accessed: 8/8/18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEwv8xOLUIQ>

²⁷ ‘Pirate Mentality: How Pirates Made Grime’, *SB:TV & All 4*, 17 February 2017. Accessed: 10/8/18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lSFWTx3L6Y&t=1446s>

²⁸ ‘Funny’, Chase & Status ft Frisco (London: MTA Records, 2015).

²⁹ ‘Pirate Mentality: How Pirates Made Grime’, *SB:TV & All 4*, 17 February 2017. Accessed: 10/8/18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lSFWTx3L6Y&t=1446s>

B (who renamed himself Lethal Bizzle) and Dizzee only came back to Grime off the back of a rejuvenated public appetite for the sound, given that they both truly were innovators and passionate advocates of it, but they *were* among those who turned away to pursue other financially profitable genres when Grime seemed unsellable. The significance of the internet in allowing audiences to consume Grime on such a wide scale, therefore enabling its stars to feel it was economically viable to produce it again, cannot be overstated. Lethal Bizzle's 'POW', a club rave favourite from 2004 was re-released and tweaked in 2011 to include the Grime All Stars, a collection of some of the genre's key players.³⁰ Whether Lethal was aware of the changing wind and sensed an opportunity to push the culture and his own music, or the release was merely intended as a nostalgic cashing in of the first version, is unknown and largely irrelevant. What *is* relevant is that it contributed to the growing list of songs, videos, interviews and awards that were putting Grime and its culture back on the map.

The effects of the police shut down on Grime and the loss of 'Grime spaces' such as Rhythm Division, local estates and radio stations all occurred in a seven-year period between 2005 and the 2012 Olympics. What is sometimes missed is the loss of media coverage at this time, which places even greater value on the documentation by people like Jammer, Rooney Keefe and others. *RWD Magazine*, which had previously covered black-British youth culture, underwent changes in 2007 to include all youth music genres, reflecting Grime's lack of

³⁰ Pow! (Forward), Lethal Bizzle (London: Relentless Records, 2004).

mainstream progress, and subsequently lost much of its readership who turned to online forums instead. Similarly, the cable station *Channel U*, which had been one of the earliest visual sources of Grime music, went into voluntary liquidation in 2009 before rebranding as *Channel AKA*, an eventual victim of *YouTube*'s dominance of the music video market in 2018.³¹

The closure of Grime institutions and venues previously mentioned meant that, by 2011, it was perfectly plausible to believe that the genre and its culture were beyond saving. The general sense of hopelessness and underrepresentation in East and North London at this time amounted to a feeling of being trapped in a system that did not serve black communities, ghettoising them and preventing them from even expressing their situation. Then, in August of that year, after the shooting of a young black man from Tottenham and the subsequent mishandling by police of information regarding the incident, protest turned into all out riot on the streets of North London. Within hours it had spread across the city to the East End and other British cities. It signified a boiling over of all the frustrations of the past decade and beyond. Local communities had not forgotten their history and the long list of incidents perpetrated against them. Grime artists, as we saw in Chapter One, came out in support for the protest and criticism of the police. The details of how those communities responded to the death of Mark Duggan and of one of their musical heroes, Smiley Culture (in March 2011), will constitute the bulk of the following section. How they

³¹ Yomi Adegoke, 'RIP Channel U: The Urban Music Champion That Gave Power To The People', *The Guardian*, 4 June 2018. Accessed: 15/9/18.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/04/rip-channel-u-urban-music-grime-dizzee-rascal-skeptak>

and other perceived injustices relate to Grime music culture will tell us a lot about the current state of the genre's role in communities and form the basis of some of the main conclusions that are eventually drawn from this thesis.

On 4 August 2011, a twenty-nine-year-old black man, Mark Duggan from Tottenham, was shot and killed as he travelled by taxi by an armed police unit working with Operation Trident, the city's anti-gun crime division. Duggan was being monitored by the police prior to his death and had, according to Detective Chief Inspector Mick Foote (speaking at the inquest into Duggan's death), been involved in class-A drug dealing and violent gang crime. Police said his shooting had been the result of him being in possession of a firearm, while the officer who killed him had had "an honest-held belief that he was in imminent danger of him and his colleagues being shot".³² The issue for Duggan's family, and the residents of Tottenham in the wake of his killing, was that they had not been notified until a day and a half later and had to wait still further for a family liaison officer to be assigned to them.³³ They immediately questioned the Met's version of events and marched with around one-hundred protesters from Broadwater Farm, the site of the 1985 riots, to Tottenham Police Station for answers. They were met by a chief-inspector, but demanded a higher-ranked officer, and when a sixteen-year-old girl threw an object at police officers, police retaliated,

³² Richard Moriarty, 'Duggan And The Mobster', *The Sun*, 11 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/712485/duggan-and-the-mobster/>

³³ Akilah Russell, 'Police Apologise To Duggan Family', *The Voice*, 10 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/police-apologise-duggan-family>

causing head injuries.³⁴ These were the sparks that grew into an inferno of unrest over the next week and left Britain once again debating policing methods in African/Caribbean communities.

The member of parliament for Tottenham, David Lammy, wrote that “cracks that already existed between the police and the community became deep fissures that would take years to heal”, describing the aftermath of the Broadwater Farm riots in his constituency.³⁵ His predecessor as MP had been Bernie Grant, the first black member of parliament, who famously claimed the police at Broadwater Farm had taken a “bloody good hiding”. Lammy adopted a more conciliatory tone as he went on to describe the violence against the police this time around, saying “eight policemen have been hospitalised. And none of this will bring back Mark Duggan back”, but the plight of his constituents remained his main priority: “People were suffering long before this riot.”³⁶

Ghosts of the past were raised in the media and an immediate placing of the latest riots within the narrative of continued police racism and black poverty in London was established by well-known older members of the community. The novelist Alex Wheatle, who had been arrested for his involvement in the 1981 Brixton Riots, asserted that there existed “a deep aggravation in the black community that despite the many deaths of young black men in police custody there has yet to

³⁴ Paul Lewis, ‘The Tottenham Riots: A Peaceful Protest, And Then All Hell Broke Loose’, *The Guardian*, 7 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

³⁵ David Lammy, ‘The Lesson Of Broadwater Farm’, *The Guardian*, 7 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/07/tottenham-riot-broadwater-farm>

³⁶ David Lammy, ‘The Lesson Of Broadwater Farm’, *The Guardian*, 7 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/07/tottenham-riot-broadwater-farm>

be a conviction of any policeman or policewoman”.³⁷ He also spoke of similar chants of “justice” that he had heard during the 1980s riots and those happening in 2011 and his words described a feeling that to many was all too familiar. The deaths of black people in police custody in Tottenham almost certainly contributed to the rioting there. As the violence spread to East London, Hackney could tell a similar story. Here, the scene of some of the most vicious battles between rioters and the police, a common theme could be identified. Writing in 1994, and looking back to the time of the unrest in the 1980s, Roy Porter explains that:

Over the last decade nine blacks have died in questionable circumstances in Stoke Newington police station alone; no one has ever been brought to account for their deaths. Poverty, deprivation, unemployment and poor police practices have fostered ghetto and criminal subcultures.³⁸

The famous, and tragic case of the death of one of Caribbean London’s favourite sons, Smiley Culture, occurred in March of 2011. Smiley, who released the classic hit ‘Police Officer’, which was quoted in Chapter One, had long been a critic of the police and their harassment of young black people. He had been a regular contributor to the Notting Hill Carnival and was well-known in his home town of Brixton, as well as throughout London’s Caribbean communities. On 15 March, police officers raided his home with a warrant to search the property for illegal

³⁷ Alex Wheatle, ‘We Need Answers About The Death Of Mark Duggan’, *Evening Standard*, 8 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/we-need-answers-about-the-death-of-mark-duggan-6430467.html>

³⁸ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994) p. 355.

drugs. Little is known about the details of what happened, but an hour and a half after police entered the house, Smiley Culture was dead. The coroner's report stated that he had died of a single stab-wound to the heart and ruled the death suicide. Aside from the fact that the act of stabbing oneself through the heart is an extremely difficult move to execute, suspicions were confounded by the reluctance of the Independent Police Complaints Commission to update the family of their ongoing investigation. In the end, on the advice of the coroner, no information regarding the incident was made available either publicly or to Smiley's family, with all four officers present cleared of any wrongdoing.³⁹ This sparked anger and disbelief in Brixton, with protests and a march on police headquarters at Scotland Yard.⁴⁰ It was shocking, but not surprising.

This story and others like it were revisited across London in August 2011 among black communities and in certain media outlets, but others were not as keen to portray an image of the police as anything other than professional peace-keepers who had been caught unawares by the sudden eruption of violence. They ran stories that said the actions of rioters were "criminality, pure and simple" (as labelled by the Prime Minister David Cameron) and that the police had acted with "incredible bravery".⁴¹ The major television networks seemed reluctant to allow the voice of black communities to be heard. None more so

³⁹ Amelia Hill, Smiley Culture's Death In Police Raid Does Not Justify Charges, IPCC Rules, *The Guardian*, 29 November 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/nov/29/smiley-culture-death-no-charges>

⁴⁰ 'Reggae Star Smiley Culture Stabbed Himself During Police Raid', *BBC News*, 2 July 2013. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-23146121>

⁴¹ Cameron: 'UK Riots Were Sickening', *ITN News*, 9 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UohyrhMKouo>

poignantly than when Darcus Howe, famous as one of the Mangrove Nine, who had been the first to establish that the Metropolitan Police were institutionally racist in the courts, spoke to BBC News. Howe talked about his grandson's experiences with police harassment and the general mood among young people: "If you looked at young blacks and young whites with a discerning eye and a careful hearing, they have been telling us, and we would not listen, that what is happening to them in this country is wrong."⁴² In an ill-tempered interview in which the reporter questioned him on whether he condoned the violence and on his own past involvement in rioting, Howe described the events as "an insurrection of the masses of the people" and told the reporter to "have some respect for an old West Indian negro".

In the aftermath of the riots and in the absence of a Scarman-style inquiry, *The Guardian* and the London School of Economics launched their own investigation. Darcus Howe's idea that the unrest had been more of an insurrection was echoed by many of those interviewed for the investigation, with one saying, "I still to this day don't class it as a riot...I think it was a protest."⁴³ Among the main causes of the riots, the document listed the "lack of opportunities [for employment], the cuts and the ending of the education maintenance allowance."⁴⁴ One area in particular that was hit by austerity measures was youth provision. Youth clubs were a foundation of Grime culture. In the days before widespread internet connections, one of the few ways to

⁴² Darcus Howe BBC News Interview On Riots, *BBC News*, 9 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzDQCToAJcw>

⁴³ Reading The Riots: Investigating England's Summer Of Disorder', *The Guardian / LSE*, 19 July 2012. Accessed 2/5/18. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots%28published%29.pdf>

⁴⁴ Reading The Riots: Investigating England's Summer Of Disorder', *The Guardian / LSE*, 19 July 2012. Accessed 2/5/18. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots%28published%29.pdf>

share and learn about new music was to attend youth clubs. Here, teenagers could listen to the latest Jungle and Garage sets, recorded from pirate radio, discuss their favourite MCs, and in many cases, use music facilities to hone their own skills. Many of the early Grime pioneers had their passion for music ignited in such institutions. “Many youth projects across London's inner-city estates have closed down due to funding cuts”, explains an earlier finding by *The Guardian* from 2011. It goes on to present shocking statistics that illustrate the desperate situation for young people growing up in the communities that were, only five years previously, proudly represented by a thriving Grime scene: “44% of Hackney's children live in poverty... In neighbouring Haringey, where youth project funding has been slashed by 75% this year, eight of the borough's 13 youth clubs have shut.”⁴⁵

One of Grime's legendary sites in its creation myth, along with Rhythm Division, Jammer's parents' basement and the rooftop in Stratford that Déjà vu transmitted from, is the Linc Youth Club, in Bow. It was here that a teenage Dizzee Rascal and members from Ruff Squad came to avoid the streets, make friends and take up new hobbies. They practiced rapping and DJing with the equipment available, something that is less available today, with the Linc Youth Club having 65% of its funding cut in a decade and the majority of Tower Hamlets' other youth clubs closing entirely.⁴⁶ Dizzee's response was to plead for authorities to “just put some money in the youth clubs” in an 2015 *Evening Standard*

⁴⁵ Tracy McVeigh, Hackney Riots: ‘The Message When Youth Clubs Close Is That No One Cares’, *The Guardian*, 13 August 2011. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/13/hackney-riots-youth-clubs-closure>

⁴⁶ Sam Diss, ‘Nowhere to Go: The Crisis in Local Youth Club Funding and Access to Music’, *Noisey*, 19 October 2016. Accessed: 4/9/18.

https://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/article/4w3awm/nowhere-to-go-the-crisis-in-local-youth-club-funding-and-access-to-music

interview in which he also nostalgically said he had “never lived anywhere with more sense of community than I did when I lived on a council estate”.⁴⁷ By 2011, with austerity measures taking their toll, little space for artistic expression or opportunities for employment, those communities on council estates around East and North London were strained.

The combination of factors that led up to the 2011 riots—poverty, austerity, a sense of injustice in cases of police mistreatment of black people and the disappearance of a form of cultural expression that had been the only voice of the youth—were all brought to the public attention that summer. Whether they were picked up on and covered sufficiently by the media is up for debate, but what certainly occurred among Grime’s veterans was a realisation that they were needed then more than ever. The riots had shown Grime’s pioneers that the community spirit that had birthed their music in the first place, was still alive and willing to employ the same anti-establishment attitude in fighting on the streets, as they had used in their songs. Tapping into this would lead to a resurgence of Grime. Jammer’s relaunching of the *Lord of the Mics* series, Wiley’s Eskimo Dance and the push by Boy Better Know to record new Grime songs for a new age, all contributed to the new wave of popularity that the genre was about to enjoy.

In 2012, London hosted the Olympic Games in a brand-new, purpose-built stadium situated less than two miles from all of Grime’s

⁴⁷ Miranda Bryant, ‘Dizzee Rascal: Black, White, We’d All Fight...Then You Realise You’re All The Same’, *Evening Standard*, 13 November 2015. Accessed: 4/9/18.
<https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/dizzee-black-white-we-d-all-fight-then-you-realise-you-re-all-the-same-a3113816.html>

early hubs: Roman Road, the Linc Youth Club, the former site of Rhythm Division, the towers inhabited by pioneers and pirate stations and the building that had once housed Stratford Rex. The eyes of the world were on East London, but no one was looking at the communities suffering from austerity and perceived injustices. The organisers, as well as the government, were trying to forget the unrest of the previous year and as The Queen watched on from the stands, a beaming Dizzee Rascal opened the proceedings with his music. The local boy was being placed alongside the NHS, Harry Potter and the Industrial Revolution as a British institution in the Danny Boyle-curated opening ceremony. Looking back at it in 2017, Dizzee was less impressed at the legacy of the games for his old neighbourhood:

I wonder what the Olympics was all about now. Look at all the housing they built: it's this whole new postcode, this whole new clinical little town. Round here people's houses are getting knocked down and they're getting moved on because they can't afford what's being built in their place.⁴⁸

Bow's gentrification and the effects on the community Dizzee Rascal had grown up in are probably irreversible, the latest in a series of shifting demographic trends and architectural makeovers to hit the East End. But as already stated, this was the first time that working-class East London communities were forced out to make way for the middle-

⁴⁸ Alex Duggins, 'Dizzee Rascal: Read NME's Exclusive Comeback Interview', *NME*, 14 July 2017. Accessed: 4/9/18.
<https://www.nme.com/features/dizzee-rascal-interview-2017-raskit-nme-2109945>

classes.⁴⁹ Skepta may have returned to Roman Road in 2014 for the video to his remix of ‘That’s Not Me’, in homage to the home of Dizzee and Wiley, but Bow’s ties to that world were all but dead by then. The power of YouTube and online magazines were employed to help the culture’s rejuvenation and Skepta’s brother and fellow BBK member, JME was a particularly active figure in this area. He began filming every encounter he had with police (usually him being stopped in his car) and uploaded them to his YouTube channel.

The online music magazine *Noisey*, a branch of *Vice*, picked up on JME’s social commentary and worked with him to document the issue of police shutdowns of Grime events using Form 696, in 2014. The documentary, *The Police vs Grime Music*, follows the artist after he and fellow MC Big Narstie have had an event shut down at the Barbican centre, one of London’s most high-brow and esteemed venues. JME explains that Form 696’s purpose is to “minimise any risk of most serious violent crime happening at the proposed event” yet his own gig was shut down for reasons including the worry about “underage drinking” and “overcrowding”.⁵⁰ It is clear to see where the frustration comes from for artists who have never performed at an event where a serious incident has taken place, but still have to endure such measures. It is understandable, given the history of the Metropolitan Police’s mistreatment of black communities, why these shutdowns are perceived as a continuation of that history of racism.

⁴⁹ A greater understanding of Government and local authority approaches to race and ethnicity in urban planning policy can be gained from *Equality in a Multicultural Society* by Bikhchand Parekh. For more reading on London’s gentrification, Tim Butler’s *London Calling: The Middle Classes and the Remaking of Inner London* is an informative resource.

⁵⁰ ‘The Police vs Grime Music – A Noisy Film’, *Noisey*, 29 March 2014. Accessed: 15/6/18
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW_iujPQpys

The scrapping of Form 696 is, on the face of it, a victory for London's black music genres. Whether it results in fairer treatment for live Grime events remains to be seen. What certainly has changed, however, is the way the genre is viewed by the media and politicians. In 2016, Conservative Minister for Culture Matt Hancock claimed to be a big fan of Skepta, saying "we listen to it in the back of the ministerial car", but then failed to name a single song by the artist.⁵¹ In the lead-up to the 2017 General Election, and showing their disdain for Tory austerity, Grime stars including JME, Novelist and Akala came out in support for Labour's Jeremy Corbyn with a trending hashtag #Grime4Corbyn on twitter. Stormzy, currently the biggest selling name in Grime explained his backing for Corbyn: "I feel like he gets what the ethnic minorities are going through and the homeless and the working class."⁵² Corbyn accepted and reciprocated the support from Grime's elite and we are now at a point where political parties seem to be unable to ignore the phenomenal re-emergence of a once feared and misunderstood underground movement.

What is clear is that Grime music culture has, from being backed into a corner, had to seek out new spaces to inhabit and new arenas in which to adapt. The streets of East London and the underground nature of its origins are its badges of authenticity to this day. How it engages with that physic space and ideology have had to change in recent years

⁵¹ Selim Bulut, "Tory Minister Says He's A Skepta Fan, Can't Name Any Songs", *Dazed*, 20 September 2016. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/32962/1/tory-minister-can-t-name-skepta-songs>

⁵² 'Why UK Grime Artists Are Backing Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn', *BBC News*, 17 May 2017. Accessed: 4/9/18.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/39951532/why-uk-grime-artists-are-backing-labour-leader-jeremy-corbyn>

of course. While the occasional, opportunistic politician will attach themselves to anything trending in youth-culture, as Matt Hancock did, Labour's shift leftwards on the political spectrum under Jeremy Corbyn, has generated a rejuvenated sense of confidence in the Grime community that a society in which youth development, community bonds, solutions to urban poverty and encouragement of the arts, can all be tackled. Key to this new love story is the opening of dialogue and the acknowledgment by Labour of Grime's voice: a voice that still represents communities.

Grime came from and represented the grimey streets of East London. It represented the poor and underrepresented inhabitants of those streets and aggressively bit back at the establishment when attacked. It found its own voice in the immediate post-riot years, but using that voice in a new environment, with a more mainstream audience listening, has allowed Grime's wider culture to flourish and become dominant among young people all over Britain. The adoption of Grime culture's slang vocabulary that, fifteen years ago, would have been used almost exclusively in the neighbourhoods shown in *Figure 1* (found in the introduction), is now a nationwide phenomenon. Grime culture became Britain's urban youth-culture, a takeover that has coincided with an increase in the number of young people voting and by a large majority, for Jeremy Corbyn.⁵³ The role of Grime and the #Grime4Corbyn movement in mobilising young people to support a political movement that in turn supports their voice and future is

⁵³ Josh Holder, 'Young Voters, Class And Turnout: How Britain Voted In 2017', *The Guardian*, 2017. Accessed: 15/8/18.
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/ng-interactive/2017/jun/20/young-voters-class-and-turnout-how-britain-voted-in-2017>

perhaps one of the great successes to come out of Grime's re-emergence. How Grime continues to relate to young people and communities, geographical and digital spaces, and the politics of gentrification, marginalisation and socialism as it continues to grow into increasingly more mainstream shoes, will be a fascinating and no doubt unpredictable journey to document for future students of the culture.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken in order to tell a neglected part of Grime's story, a story that has not so far been academically told in publications and only marginally explored so far in academia at all. As a native of East-London, a member of its black community and an aficionado of the Grime subculture, that story is also my own. Telling that story has been a task of selective inclusions and omissions. The elements of that story developed in this thesis are just some of the strands of Grime's history and the scope of the study could not possibly cover the broad range of themes, sub-topics and potential arguments that such a wide subject contains. In looking at how the Grime music genre and its associated culture has developed from its genesis year in 2001 until the year of its 'second coming' in 2014, I have concentrated on the histories of racial prejudice in London and local gentrification as most significant in understanding the music. Those histories bring into focus Grime's relationship with East London's black communities, its geographical situation and its ideological position as a proud sub-culture within the mainstream. These are aspects of Grime that have not been explored in academic work thus far and it is hoped that this thesis will contribute not only to filling that gap, but to opening up new paths of research for future studies.

Grime emerged, as we have seen, out of the black-British story, particularly that of Caribbean immigrant communities in the twentieth century. This is at times a brutal story. We have encountered murder,

assault and targeted campaigns against residents, as well as a seemingly never-ending sequence of police mistreatment and policing policy that is at best carelessly racist and at worst a deliberate attempt to undermine the assimilation and inclusion of black people in this country. In areas such as Brixton and Notting Hill, racism led to a strengthening of community unity among Caribbeans of different national origins and their shared experiences helped to foster the beginnings of a new shared culture, that would later also incorporate black Africans as a reaction against the same “forces of British racism”.¹ In East London, common ground between racially marginalised black residents and their economically marginalised white neighbours, with whom they shared poverty in common, helped to create a multiracial anti-establishment culture.

It is from here that Grime drew inspiration for its ethos of proud independence and was able to appeal across racial lines, becoming a music of black British origin that expressed a broader, working-class outlook on the world. Points can be made about black entrepreneurialism in ‘the ends’ of East London, and they have, most significantly by Joy White in the book, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship: Beats, Rhymes and Young People's Enterprise*. But as mentioned at the start of this section, this topic’s inclusion goes beyond the limited scope of this study. Equally, theories on the hyper-masculinity that surrounds Grime music, reflecting the aggression and

¹Winston James, ‘Migration, Racism And Identity: The Caribbean Experience In Britain’, *New Left Review* I-193, May/June 1992. Accessed: 4/5/18.
<https://newleftreview.org/I/193/winston-james-migration-racism-and-identity-the-caribbean-experience-in-britain>

gang life that were at times touched upon in this thesis to address perceptions of the culture (particularly by the police), are useful, but not central to the analysis set out here. Grime's emphasis on authenticity and its relationship to the streets enabled it to take over from Garage as London's dominant music culture, setting itself up for a burst in output and growth in popularity in the early 2000s, mainly at an underground level. Its adoption of a DIY approach to sound system culture and artistic expression, through various media, kept it alive and maintained that level of authenticity that is crucial to both how artists are defined and how the music connects with communities. And it has maintained connections with the communities it came from, in large part, due to the internet. Despite the strong East London community being dispersed by gentrification, despite artists leaving the area, and despite the shutdown of venues and platforms from which communities could access Grime, the internet has spread Grime to black and working-class communities all over the country. Contemporary Grime is now a national music, no longer a local subculture.

Authenticity is perhaps the key concept that links Grime to its geographical origins.² Although a problematic concept, especially in popular music, authenticity is gained from depicting the realities of the music's communities of origin and reflecting the manifestations of British racism and class exploitation that affected them. The anti-establishment backbone that inherently runs through Grime culture sits particularly well with the politics of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party,

² For further reading, Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor's, *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*, is an excellent exploration of the complexity of ideas of authenticity in popular music.

given its shift to the left and mobilisation of large swathes of working-class youngsters in Britain, a process that began at almost the same time as Grime's re-emergence in 2014. Sophia Rawcliffe's *State of Play – Grime*, a report into opinions of Grime and its connections to politics and racism, found that "24% of grime fans who voted labour said the campaign influenced their vote."³ Of particular appeal to Grime's communities is Corbyn's declaration of war on "forced gentrification and social cleansing" in which "private developers move in and tenants and leaseholders are moved out."⁴ This sentiment chimes with working-class black and minority ethnic communities because of its timing, coming at the 2017 Labour Party Conference just three months after the Grenfell Tower fire, in which seventy-two people officially died. The disaster was seen by the local community (just as the 2011 riots) to have been fundamentally connected to gentrification and the undervaluation of black lives, caused by the carelessness of the Tory council and Tory government. In the aftermath of the disaster Grime star AJ Tracey, a resident on the same estate as Grenfell Tower and supporter of the #Grime4Corbyn movement, claimed to have "seen no government response". The Conservatives did little to dispel these opinions with Prime Minister Theresa May not meeting with victims while Jeremy Corbyn did.⁵

³ Sophia Rawcliffe, 'State of Play – Grime' p. 61, Ticketmaster, 2017.

⁴ Aditya Chakraboty, 'Jeremy Corbyn Has Declared War On Labour Councils Over Housing', The Guardian, 27 September 2017. Accessed: 11/7/18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/27/jeremy-corbyn-labour-councils-housing>

⁵ Laura Hughes, 'Theresa May Accused Of Failing To Show Humanity During Grenfell Tower Visit', The Telegraph, 16 June 2017. Accessed: 11/7/18.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/16/theresa-may-failed-show-humanity-grenfell-tower-visit-saysmichael/>

We have seen that authenticity in representing communities, whether as an elected member of parliament as Corbyn is in North Islington, or as an artist-spokesperson as many of Grime's stars are, comes more often than not in response to negative external forces. Institutional police racism is arguably the most significant. The degree to which it is state-sanctioned or endemic throughout the force, is not for this thesis to conclude, but what is certainly well-established is the idea that the Metropolitan Police have been institutionally racist throughout a large part of their history. From the trial of The Mangrove Nine, through the investigations into the 1980s riots and the handling of the Stephen Lawrence case, one pattern emerged: the Police in London, as a body rather than individuals, have consistently racially targeted the city's poor, black population. When individual officers have perpetrated misconduct or worse, alleged manslaughter or murder, the force has closed ranks and protected its own.

The effects of well-known cases such as Kelso Cochrane, Stephen Lawrence, Smiley Culture and Mark Duggan, highlighting the racial issues within the police force, have created a deep-rooted distrust of state authority among black Londoners that has its origins in the first years following the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush and, as documented in Chapter Three, exploded into rioting in 2011. During the research of this thesis a fresh scandal emerged in Britain in which members of the country's Caribbean community who migrated in the years following that first ship's docking at Tilbury, and named 'The Windrush Generation', were told they were no longer eligible to reside

here and were to be deported. Hundreds were scheduled for deportation, but the exact number that were removed is unknown. At least three people have died in the process of being moved and there is yet to be a solution to the crisis. Again, blame is being squarely placed at the door of the Conservative government and more questions are being raised about what it means to be British in relation to class, petty crimes (the rationale for some of the deportations) and most importantly, race.

Grime's engagement with these issues has been paradoxical and complex, as are many elements of its DNA. On the one hand, Grime is proud of its status as an independent, British-born scene, unswayed by the marketing pressures of American Hip-Hop or mainstream pop, carving its own niche from its own streets. On the other, it tells a story of marginalised communities which feel unwanted and uncared for by Britain and in certain respects not particularly British at all. Grime's self-proclaimed Britishness is perhaps a confusion of labelling. Skepta, performing to a sold-out crowd at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 2015, told the crowd "this is from Britain" before correcting himself: "it's is a London ting".⁶ A similar paradox is visible in the approach artists and other members of the community take towards the spaces they inhabit. A love-hate relationship exists between Grime and its geography, as Kano explained to us in Chapter One.

The dynamic of how these ideas sit with a dispersing and disappearing East London Grime community and a physically changing architectural landscape (as with the construction of the Olympic Park) is

⁶'Skepta: Top Boy (The Documentary)', Noisey, 18 November 2015. Accessed: 15/9/18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6XIe8w57OQ>

especially interesting as Grime's connection to the spaces that produced it loosens. The forced transition of Grime music onto digital platforms has thrown up fascinating results, notably the rebirth of Grime culture as the voice of a wider, not simply London-based black community. In the streets, Grime culture was susceptible to attack through systematic gentrification, police harassment, club-night closures and criminal charges (for example, against pirate radio practitioners or club venues). By taking the music and voice of the culture online, Grime has so far managed to evade such pressures and transcend the limitations of geographical and physical confines.

While both gentrification and the forces of British racism have contributed to the movement of Grime into the digital world, and its transformation from a sub-culture to the dominant mainstream British music culture post-2014, the genre has done remarkably well so far not to conform to any external pressures that might attempt to transform it stylistically or ideologically. Its East-end origins, its proud and inherited Caribbean sense of independence, even its very name, are ever-present reminders and reference-points in the works of the majority of Grime artists in 2018. Even if Grime cannot be described any longer as "a London ting", its authenticity is central to its appeal and power. YouTube channels such as GRM Daily, Not For The Radio and SB:TV are thriving, and while pirate radio may be dead, online radio stations have sprung up in great number and BBC Radio 1Xtra has continued to champion the sound. Grime artists choose to take advantage of the limitless possibilities for self-management afforded to them by the

internet and avoid working in organisations that represent the establishment and would jeopardise their artistic integrity. As we have seen, the careers of Wiley, Chip and Skepta illustrate what it means to 'go Pop' rather than truly represent your people. Grime's new reach draws on but supersedes its inherited history from its East London community, and the future of the genre looks strong. The age of youth-clubs, record-shops, local raves and school-yard self-reflection for Grime's followers and artists has made way for YouTube channels, streaming sites, international festivals and online forums. Grime may be intrinsically linked to the politics of race and community, but in moving out of 'the ends' of East London, it has found a place in which it can flourish culturally on both a local and national level, while continuing to represent its people politically.

Appendix of Figures

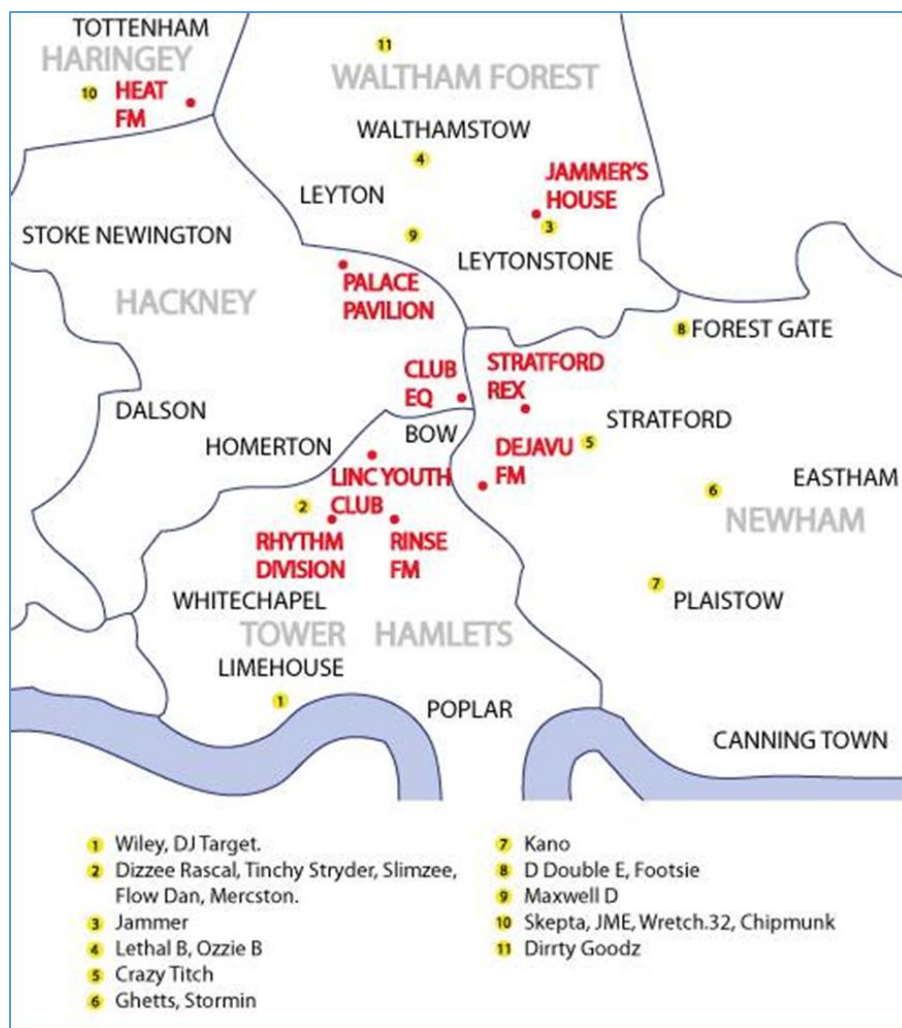


Figure 4: A map of Grime hubs and key figures in the East End.

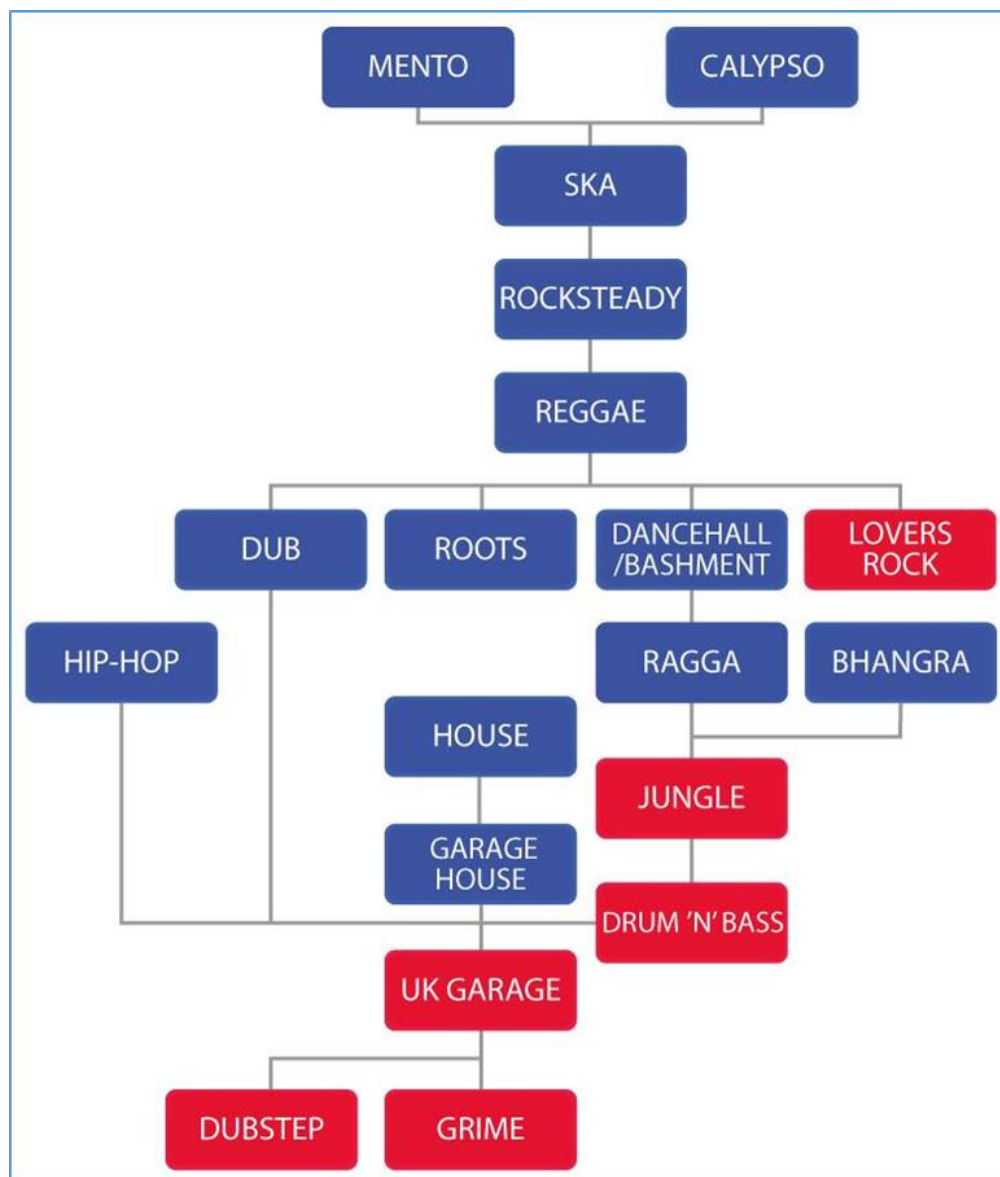


Figure 2: A family tree of Grime music and its ancestral forms.



Figure 5: Map of Hackney, surrounded by Grime's other boroughs to the North, East and South.

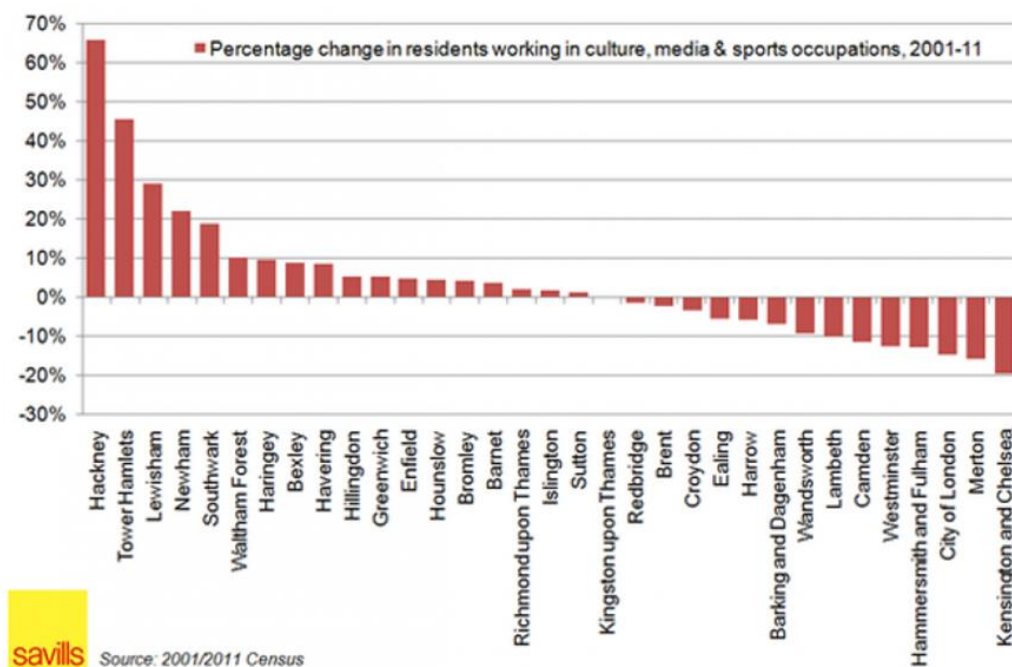


Figure 4: Chart by Savills showing the change in employment type of residents of London boroughs.

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