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Commodifying Compliance? UK Urban Music and the new Mediascape

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Introduction

In this paper, I build on an existing empirical case study of grime music in the UK to reflect on some of the debates around 'resistance' that are occurring in contemporary cultural criminology. As the sub-discipline matures and gains traction, there is increasing concern around the ways in which the term is being deployed. Some of this is attributable to external critique, but from an internal point of view, a perspective so concerned with meaning must also be attentive to the accuracy of the words that it uses. Given the status of subcultural theories as a key antecedent to contemporary forms of cultural criminology, it is no surprise that 'resistance' continues to be a matter of discussion, but its existence should only be noted where it is this, and not another social phenomenon that is being exhibited. Furthermore, given the role of music production and consumption in classic (British) discussions of subcultural resistance (and indeed its appropriation), this arena is arguably a fruitful area on which to base reflections. This is arguably further apt given contemporary cultural criminology's interest in the commodification of crime and marketization of transgression.

In what follows, I first summarise an earlier paper I wrote on the commodification of UK grime (Ilan, 2012), a genre of urban music which arose out of the 'underground' to win considerable commercial success. I follow this with a brief analysis of how the genre might be perceived and conceptualised vis-à-vis resistance, before considering a key critique of the use of 'resistance' as an analytical term within criminology. I then return to my earlier consideration of the grime genre to offer additional analysis of its message and the ways in which it has been commercialised, arguing that it can it can be problematic to distinguish between 'pop-commercial' and 'underground-authentic' music in any genuine sense. In arguing that grime artistes often express relatively mainstream values, I question the appropriateness of a resistance paradigm to understand their work (and indeed wider subcultural practices in general). Instead I suggest that it may be often more appropriate to speak of 'defiance'. Finally, I locate this proposition within classic criminological debates about resistance and offer some conclusions around when these two terms might both be most usefully deployed.

'The industry's the new road'

In a paper published in 2012, drawing on a wide-ranging media analysis I describe the emergence of grime, a distinctly English subgenre of urban music (see Ilan, 2012). Helpfully but inaccurately compared to rap music it shares a number of characteristics with its far more globally ubiquitous American cousin. It is a form of music that relies heavily on MCing – vocal chanting on top of produced electronic tracks. It emerged organically in 2001 from London's East End, drawing both its artistes and audiences from primarily disadvantaged areas. Significantly faster than rap/hip-hop music however, its aesthetics and influences owe more to the Jamaican dancehall and UK garage genres favoured in London, over the funk and disco that informed the early formation of its American equivalent. Interestingly, however, whilst US rappers in the 1990s and 2000s had emphasised their relationship to the disadvantaged inner-city and its criminogenic street culture (see Kubrin, 2005; Anderson, 1999), UK grime artistes were adopting a different strategy in order to

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prosper in the mainstream music industry. They were muting the street lyricality and aesthetic of their music and instead discussing themes of more universal resonance in order to sell music to a wider audience. It was this uncharacteristic jettisoning of rhetorical links to crime and violence and explicitly articulated use of media nous and 'respectable attitudes' that prompted my interest in the potential of the genre to say something important to existing cultural criminological understandings around the commodification of crime in popular entertainment.

Commodified Transgression

Contemporary cultural criminology has inherited a legacy of interest in the ways in which, in particular, youthful forms of transgression are appropriated by the mass cultural industries to add 'edge' to their products. Specifically, Birmingham School subcultural theory had articulated a firm line on the processes they understood to occur:

> 'Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones (think of the boost punk must have given haberdashery!)' (Hebdige, 1979/2005: 96).

Indeed what they understood as the 'resistance' occurring in working-class youth cultural practice (the symbolic, unconscious and ultimately unsuccessful challenging of mainstream norms and values – see Hall and Jefferson, 1976) may indeed significantly underpin the challenges with deploying the term that are considered below. Post-subcultural theory questioned these earlier ideas, highlighting the extent to which contemporary youth cultures are more akin to instrumental 'taste tribes', unashamedly embracing the consumerism and individualism of mainstream neo-liberal values; and furthermore whether any youth cultural movements can be seen as such political phenomenon, given that they are primarily vehicles for enjoyment (see Muggleton, 2000; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003; Hayward and Ilan, 2011). Cultural criminology has embraced both subcultural theory and the late-modern social theory underpinning its critiques as key antecedents of its current manifestation (see Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2008: Chapter 2). It is thus not surprising that some conceptual tensions remain to be resolved.

This matter has not, however, stood in the way of cultural criminology offering a cogent analysis of the ubiquity of images of crime and transgression in a plethora of media products. Thus for example, hip-hop graffiti is conceptualised as the inspiration for mass marketing strategies and government information campaigns, as much as a sub-rosa world of deviant artists (see Alvelos, 2004; Snyder, 2009; Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2008: Chapter 5). In a late-modern world of mass mediation, instant information flow and circulating images, cannot one person's 'resistance' be another's titillation? Yes, whilst protest groups and social movements alongside the marketeers seize on the tactics of youth cultural practitioners, there remain vital questions as to what it is that might constitute 'resistance' in the first place. Crucially, cultural criminology has also paid attention to urban music, specifically American rap music in demonstrating the extent to which mainstream values are expressed by a once 'true' subcultural movement *par excellence*. Tracing the evolution of the genre from its 'golden age' concerns of life in America's impoverished inner-city to its contemporary trumpeting of hyper-consumerism, an argument is made for its ultimate adherence to mainstream values (see De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006; Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2008). Perhaps, paradoxically, however, the genre retains its tendency to embody the behavioural norms of the

tough 'street culture' that has long had ties to ghetto living (see Kubrin, 2005; Ilan, forthcoming). Where these norms are considerably more outwardly violent and heedless of private property rights than their mainstream equivalent, something of a Mertonian disjuncture between goals/values and rules/norms begins to emerge (see Merton, 1938). Thus already, the question of the extent to which youth subcultural practice embodies a strong resistance (at the level of values) or a weaker variant (around the extent to which particular elements of behaviour are acceptable) emerges.

In Search of Resistance

Some might argue that a form of cultural practice ultimately concerned with making money and sporting luxury goods cannot represent any true form of resistance. Leaving aside until later the question of whether a weaker form of resistance (that we might call 'defiance') nevertheless exists in these circumstances, it is first important to consider why resistance was first seen as existing within subcultural practice. Whilst US subcultural theory had specifically examined the 'delinquent' condition of street gang members and other overtly criminal associations, the Birmingham School scholars had instead focused their inquiries on young people whose most distinctive features were their fashion and leisure choices (see Hayward and Ilan, 2011). Nevertheless, these same young people were also interesting due to their association with a variety of criminal or deviant behaviours, be it drug use (the mods), violence (the skins) or general anti-social behaviour (the punks).Responding to their national contexts and historical periods, both US and UK scholars examined why different types of youth groups seemed to defy behavioural conventions. Although criminality was emphasised in the US and leisure in the UK, but sets of scholars might be understood as sharing the same ultimate concerns.

As cultural criminologists do today, the Birmingham scholars refused to view these activities as 'mindless criminality'. Instead they drew narratives explaining both the leisure practices and crimes associated with those various groups. They reached for Marx to provide a structural explanation for these behaviours as a reaction to the predicaments in which various sections of the working-class found themselves at various points during the 1960s and 1970s. More than this, they reached for Gramsci to analyse the stylistic practices of the subcultures, finding within them a secret language of codes and symbols that allowed them to communicate their discontent through otherwise banal activities such as wearing clothes or listening to music. It was arguably this Marxist orientation and desire to see political change that contributed to a lens through which youthful transgression could be seen as somewhat proto-political. Indeed, did not the renowned Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm see proto-revolutionaries in the bandits of centuries past (see Hobsbawm, 1959/2010)? Seemingly, there was a tendency to view those who engage in an amount of public criminality, 'hide in plain sight' and have a significant alliance with or connection to disadvantaged communities as steeped in the logic of resistance. They might not articulate a clear political narrative, or even seem to mention politics at all, but for certain elements of the left, these were clearly communities of resistance. Given this, and applying a similar frame of analysis, the grime artistes whose work I examined would clearly fit this typology.

For much of its existence grime music tended to almost exclusively embody the concerns and aesthetics of 'road culture' the British accented variant of street culture (see Anderson, 1999; Gunter, 2008). In common with its American variant, this orientation calls for the display of tough, rugged masculinity, consumerist acumen and distinction, as well as crimino-entrepreneurialism to

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produce the means of participating in it. Crime and violence thus feature both as lyrical themes and within the biographies of some of its artistes. Indeed, the trope of the 'badman' celebrated in Jamaican street culture finds expression here: the cold, shoot-first-ask-questions-later persona of the gunmen from Hollywood cinema that struck a chord with the 'rudeboy' criminals of the Kingston slums (see Stolzoff, 2000; Gunst: 2003). Grime music is thus peppered with violent metaphor and criminal mythology whilst its culture is hyper-competitive and at times ambiguously connected to groups of young men who profess involvement in serious street criminality (see Ilan, 2012).

Given its historically distinct communities of practice and appreciation, grime has been said to clearly exhibit subcultural as opposed to post-subcultural characteristics (Dedman, 2011). Moreover, the manner in which the mainstream music industry and indeed the agents of law enforcement dealt with the genre was marked by processes of exclusion and criminalization (see Hancox, 2009). In the case of the industry, despite some critical acclaim and early signs of potential profitability, they were reluctant to engage with the scene for the most part, with the exception of Dizzee Rascal, now a globally successful urban musician. In the case of the authorities, their use of arguably racially prejudicial risk management forms was reported to have made it extremely difficult for those who promoted the music to engage with venue owners in order to run live events. The net effect of these measures was to restrict grime to the 'underground'. As will become clear, this has had consequences both for the way in which labels of resistance might be attached to the music as well as the ways in which it has been commodified.

Following the Birmingham School logic set out earlier, this state of affairs should have eventually paid dividends for the grime movement possessed of the 'authenticity' that is said to attach almost exclusively to underground subcultures. Indeed, taste-making connoisseurs of urban and/or bass-driven electronic music had embraced it alongside a variety of niche dance music subgenres that had emerged from various impoverished inner-city areas throughout the world (see Devereux, 2007). Whilst an awareness of grime vested underground performers, DJs, promoters, journalists and editors with the 'subcultural capital' that can be derived from obscure knowledge (see Thornton, 1995), this was not to directly translate into a direct route for the genre to gain commercial success. This stands in contrast to the fate of 'gangsta rap' music in the USA, or indeed the more general variants of rap music, which were able to utilize rhetorical references to crime, violence and inner-city life to vest their material with a transgressive appeal to the general youth market (see Quinn, 2005). This example, indeed, typifies (and perhaps sets the standard for) the commodification of urban music generally, where the more raw, 'ghetto' and/or transgressive the product, the greater the potential for record sales.

One explanation I offered for the differences in the fates of these two urban music genres on either side of the Atlantic is the existence of physical and cultural space between privilege and disadvantage in the US that does not always exist in the same way within the UK and thus perhaps does not generate the same sense of the 'exotic other' (Ilan, 2012). Certainly, as I noted, where grime artistes deliberately and self-knowingly altered the contents of their lyrics and the aesthetic of their electronically produced backing tracks, they were able to make a far bigger impact on the commercial market, earning number 1 hits, major record deals, even performing for a member of the royal family in the case of Dizzee Rascal and ultimately seeing their fortunes change in a very marked way. Names such as Tinchy Stryder and Tinie Tempah have thus since become part of the British pop music pantheon. This was achieved through switching from 'road' orientated lyrics and

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beats to the more universal themes of drinking, partying and engaging with the opposite sex. Grime artistes used their privileged positions within the cultural industries to identify the most current trends in electronic dance music in order to ensure that they were able to consistently crest the musical *zeitgeist*. Moreover, the links they had built with their fans directly through social media (as opposed to those musicians whose public engagement was mediated through major record labels) left them in an ideal position to succeed within the new mediascape which is such an important factor within the contemporary music industry.

The achievement of commercial success was not thus achieved through trumpeting real or contrived links to street codes, crime and violence (for some, a kind of proto-resistance) but through actively muting them (although there ephemeral presence in the background may have been decisive in vesting these artistes with just enough transgressive appeal). Moreover, this was not the case of commercially illiterate subcultural artistes being exploited by the dead hand of the cultural industries, but a scenario in which the grime artistes lead the commercial charge and had the music industry following in their wake. This is noteworthy as it highlights the agency of creative artistes in the new mediascape and cultural industries and moreover demonstrates the extent to which 'resistance' was absent from the cultural practices of those crossover grime artistes. Often maintaining a dual repertoire (material for the streets and separate material for the charts) these young people articulate lyrically and in interviews the extent to which mainstream success is part and parcel of their subcultural practice, problematizing the traditional Birmingham School schism between authentic subcultures and commercial artifice. Indeed, anyone familiar with the profession of music might question the veracity of any theoretical position which read to one level would suggest that many subcultural practitioners do not actively seek commercial gain.

The presentation of respectable public personas on the one hand (and far more obscure subcultural personas on the other) makes clear that it is not a case of transgression and/or resistance being commodified by grime artistes, but ultimately a sense of compliance with overall economic values and music industry practice. This is a theme that will be considered in further detail slightly later, for now it is germane to consider why some might see resistance in grime music in the first place. In the sociological literature, resistance can be attributed based on the intention of those who are said to exhibit it, its recognition by its targets and its recognition by others (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). In the case of grime, there is arguably thus a case of either 'unwitting resistance' (recognised by targets and others) or 'externally defined resistance' (recognised only by others) occurring (see ibid: 544). In the former case, there are arguably problems assigning the label of resistance based on the perceptions of so-called targets, i.e. the police and mainstream industry, when ultimately these forces need to be courted in order to become a commercially successful musician. Granted, street/road culture articulates a strong distaste for the police and a taboo against speaking or cooperating with them, a theme often taken up in grime lyrics. Arguably however, such conflict is based on mutually reinforcing enmities driven by clashing attitudes towards particular norms and behaviours. Where there is no real schism in fundamental values: what individuals feel is important/should be prioritised in life, but instead disagreement over the roles occupied by parties within the status quo and how individuals behave within it, there is arguably the potential for 'defiance' to emerge, as opposed to 'resistance' which given the word's legacy is arguably more suited to described more fundamental schisms. This leaves the latter variant of resistance, which resonates with the earlier identification of the phenomenon being assigned on the basis of the

existence of subcultural codes and connections to criminality. If resistance in particular subcultural forms is thus really only in the eye of the beholder as it were, then it becomes necessary to ask why.

Whilst admittedly a form of speculation, it could be argued that there is a tendency for those from a particular branch of the left, who some might label as 'liberal' (see Hall, Winlow and Ancrum, 2008) to lionize the cultural practice of the disadvantage as a form of resistance based on an aspiration that it is some kind of basis for transformational politics. In this sense, when grime music featured as part of the student demonstrations in London in 2011 it precipitated comment (see Hancox, 2011; Mason, 2013: 52). A somewhat wider argument can thus be made about the energy and aggressive aesthetic of grime music specifically and street cultural forms more widely. Perhaps, there is a hope that the anger sensed in these cultural forms of the disposed might naturally channel itself into political demands for a more equal society. In this way, a transformational politics (the most unquestionable form of resistance) might emerge organically, without the need for a marshalling of the underprivileged against social structures so powerful that they naturally reproduce their injustices.

Denying Resistance

These ideas around resistance and politics are an anathema to the 'traditional left', whatever its more contemporary configurations. In classic Marxist style (again, irrespective of what theories it now discusses), there is arguably a tendency from this perspective to see genuine resistance as linked solely to a particular analysis of socio-economic structures and particular means of organizing in response. From this perspective, the liberal left's championing of various 'causes' and celebration of various forms of 'authentic' expression are dangerous distractions, arguably diverting those in greatest need of transformational politics and their natural allies in the intelligentsia from the important task at hand. Again, somewhat speculatively, it might be argued that this orientation has contributed somewhat to some important critiques of cultural criminology (and by proxy classic British subcultural theory, which although avowedly Marxist, may seem somewhat decorative to those dedicated to exposing structural injustices and concerned about academic theories which veer overly from their outright condemnation).

There is thus the critique that cultural criminology has focused on 'exotic' forms of crime and criminals (or even pseudo-criminals): the skateboarders and graffiti writers wrapped up in lifestyle practices, to the exclusion of those engaging in the graft of dedicated acquisitive criminality and the violence that this entails (Hall and Winlow, 2007). Indeed, this has suggested a romanticism about crime and its capacity to carry meanings of resistance that is much more difficult to conjure when confronted with the brutality of life in the socio-economic margins. For Hall, Winlow and Ancrum (2008) thus, the often violent consumer-criminals they studied in the north of England demonstrated a hostility to any politics and were concerned primarily with acquiring the means of spending on luxury consumer items: designer clothing and expensive nights out as a means of distinguishing themselves from their impoverished neighbours. These authors theorise that contemporary criminality is thus linked to a colonisation of the self by a narcissism that is a direct consequence of the Western neo-liberal consumerist economy. Criminals, they say, have internalised the competitive individualism and consumerist self-narration that are essential constituents of contemporary culture. Crime has little or no meaning beyond this and cultural criminologists (and

other brands of criminology they label as 'liberal') are engaged in little more than an entertaining but ultimately hollow project if they attempt to seek it.

This argument might be understood as raising important issues, although its totalised scope and exclusion of nuance are perhaps open to critique. Adherents to street culture, for example, have been shown to seek a subculturally mediated sense of dignity and respect through seeking to earn money in a manner that corresponds to an inherited orientation to rugged masculinity (see Bourgouis, 2003). In this sense, such respect cannot be reduced to consumerist competition, but is connected to wider concerns around identity and the self for marginalized men in the context of the deindustrialized West. Indeed, Blackman (2005) notes that post-modern critiques of subcultural theory still see energy and creativity in the activities they simultaneously see as relatively empty of resistant momentum. Arguably, a synthesis of these theoretical positions suggests the need for a way of understanding what kind of response to exclusion is present within certain relevant subcultural behaviours, if it is not as strong as 'resistance' *per se*. Returning to the analysis of grime music, and its practitioners who have attained commercial success, there is ample empirical material to explore the above position and eventually to tease out a 'third way' between a potential liberal over-ascription of resistance and the denial of wider meaning that is part of the colonised-self perspective. Firstly, the case of grime illustrates the extent to which commercially and new-media savvy individuals can attain agency within the cultural industries. Their use of this position, however, as already noted, embodies a form of compliance with prevailing mainstream norms as opposed to resisting them. Is this an indication that they have unthinkingly internalised neo-liberal, consumerist culture? Arguably, this is not the case. Excavating their lyrical content and statements in media interviews reveals that many grime artistes do not espouse the extreme dedication to consumerist practice that De Jong & Schuilenburg (2006) correctly identify. As opposed to presenting the trappings of extreme wealth as ends in themselves, grime artistes have consistently championed the 'respectable' entrepreneurial strategies often required to live a sustainable moderately-wealthy life: gaining educational qualifications, carefully building a small business from the ground up and dutifully attending to craft (see Ilan, 2012).

The attitudes that grime artistes display towards tactics of consumerism are furthermore interesting. Despite containing frequent references to designer clothing and expensive cars, there is a modesty and ultimately 'respectable' attitude towards consumer decision-making articulated within grime music:

> 'Dem man are happy with a reload, me I want a big back yard in Finchley.' (Frisco in 'Big Man Ting', Jammer ft. Frisco & Tempa T, Boy Better Know Records, 2009).

Here, rather than expressing a desire for the trappings of the hyper-wealthy: mansions, private yachts etc. (items often cited by American rappers), what is referenced as important to a 'big man' (a more mature and respect-worthy individual) is a good-sized house and garden in one of London's leafy near-suburbs. This is not expressing affinity with, and a desire for, what the wealthiest in society can afford, but a statement of more modest aspirations: traditionally what have been the possessions of the more financially successful middle-classes. In expressing a desire for what their dentists may have, grime artistes are certainly not espousing resistance! What is interesting about this situation, however, is the theoretical implications it has for criminologists.

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The more universal and 'respectable' consumerist imperative expressed above are not the 'ghetto fabulous' tendencies of those who are so far from meaningful inclusion in post-industrial society that they have effectively abandoned all hope of achieving it (see Nightingale, 1993; Hayward, 2004). Rather, this is arguably evidence of familiar Mertonian 'cultural goals' – the persistence of a more universal desire for a reasonable and comfortable standard of living with a smattering of luxury. Moreover, whilst the avowed desire for such things may not be evidence of resistance, it arguably demonstrates meaning in producing grime music beyond the internalisation of insatiable and unsustainable consumerism with the rabid competiveness (indeed, near vindictiveness) that is said to accompany it. Indeed, it points to the relevance of a range of meanings and intentions beyond this: the commitment to artistic craft and a wider cultural movement, asserting a positive self-identity, attaining the means to self-determination and social inclusion, including a standard of living often far beyond the reach of disadvantaged inner-city young people. Cultural criminologists, dedicated to uncovering the meanings intertwined with crime and justice (and their mediations which are enmeshed with their reality) should thus exercise care to avoid lazily or over-enthusiastically ascribing mislabels of resistance to particular activities, but they should not be dismissive of their demonstrable meanings which should not be limited to internalised consumerism.

A Third Way?

In such a manner, a 'third way' between these two positions is not only possible, but arguably a particularly useful theoretical posture given wider social developments. The emergence of Mertonian themes in this analysis and the imperative to look beyond classical British subcultural theory arguably suggests a role for a reinvigoration of some of the analyses initially posited by early US subcultural theorists. This body of work was consistently concerned with key questions around the presence of resistance in street cultures: to what extent were they different from mainstream cultures? Were they products of inherent values or reactions to exclusion? In what ways did they mediate between society's collectively asserted values and dominant behavioural expectations? In Merton's classic strain theory (1938) those acquisitive criminal 'innovators' who might embody the notion of subcultural 'resistance' are clearly distinguished from 'rebels' who are clearly associated with strong resistance: seeking to change both values and norms. It could be argued that this notion of 'innovation' is perhaps somewhat euphemistic where in truth many of its practitioners are involved in the visceral performance of behaviours that are violent and exploitative and very much in defiance of the role that society tends to assign to those on the bottom rungs of the socio-economic structure. Although Blackman (2005) views Merton's position as somewhat individualistic and thus perhaps not always a comfortable fit for ways of thinking about group practices, much of early US subcultural theory owes this position a significant debt, where individual orientations can coalesce into group norms and practice.

Albert Cohen's notions of 'status frustration' and 'reaction formation' (1955), whereby defiant actions and attitudes become a virtue for those who are emotively moved by their palpable exclusion from the standards of living and levels of respect that they see as more naturally flowing to those who are included, would seem to thus merit consideration here. The active rejection of mainstream behavioural expectations, whilst nevertheless retaining the shared desire for mainstream goals, is an understandable reaction to this position. This becomes a 'weak' form of resistance that might be better spoken of as 'defiance' in order to clearly distinguish it from those forms of resistance that have links to notions of transformative politics. Those who engage in

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subcultural practices on this basis may well demonstrate and discuss behaviours which are seemingly an anathema to those more widely expected; on the other hand, their values are not different to those more widely shared that their norms in this regard cannot be muted where the opportunities for greater inclusion are made available. Thus, the key issue at stake remains the democratisation of opportunity for the classic decent standard of living and the extent to which this is available in the early 21st century.

This position is bolstered by some important correctives to classic subcultural theory, the work of Sykes and Matza on 'subterranean values' (1961) which notes the extent to which mainstream Western capitalist culture reveres not just 'rationality' and economic productivity, but also excitement, irrationality and excessive consumption (although these are seldom explicitly trumpeted). With this in mind, looking for defiant norms as opposed to resistant values becomes further logical still. The word 'defiance' does not share with 'resistance' its implied association with transformative politics and instead is more unambiguously associated with the more straightforward refusal to comply with structural imperatives. Returning to the example of grime artistes, here we see individuals perhaps furthermore defying the life trajectory (into the world of road culture) that lies ahead of many of their peers and instead adopting more compliant behaviours. Indeed, defiant behaviours and norms can take on a variety of forms, given that it is immediate circumstances as opposed to fundamental value schisms which underpin them. In one context, enacting or discussing street culture becomes a possible means of defiantly reacting to one's circumstances, in another actively muting such tendencies to embrace a rare opportunity for a decent living becomes an alternative. Here one could argue that the traditional narratives of urban music entrepreneurship are a target of defiance, they are not, however, being resisted, where their overall commercial values are not sought to be challenged.

The notion of defiance indeed resonates with the sense of frustration that surrounds new social movements such as Occupy, the Indignados etc. which are vague around whether they espouse a truly transformational politics, but are clear in their frustration that the standard of living that was once the province of a contended majority (home ownership, decently paid employment etc.) seems now only available to gilded elites. The demise of the traditional left and the triumph of neo-liberalism as the only mainstream political discourse have significantly reduced the scope for the proliferation of strong resistance, but represents fertile ground for the status frustration and defiance of a greatly expanded population of the excluded. Whilst not a matter analysed in depth in this paper, there is scope to further reflect on parallels between the performance of defiant street culture and protest within contemporary society. Of course, the excluded themselves are stratified and it is within those enclaves of particularly entrenched and concentrated poverty and disadvantage that this defiance burns most viscerally. Here it can take the shape of a particularly individualistic, competitive and predatory form of consumerist desire and violent practice. This is not, however, a totalised understanding and a range of other meanings can coexist or indeed trump these imperatives.

Conclusion

The goal for cultural criminologists remains to excavate the wider meanings of behaviour and discourse, to locate them within lived experiences of broader social structures and to accurately describe and analyse their significance. This cause is not particularly well served by the over-

assignment of resistance into activities that more probably exist either as forms of lifestylism or as predatory criminal practice. Nor, however, is it served by the denial of any meaning to criminality beyond this. There should as ever be particular attentiveness given to empirical realities over theoretical projects and to 'the real world' over excessive optimism or pessimism. Arguably, there is a tendency within particular forms of localized subcultural production (such as grime), and street culture more broadly, to engage in discourses and activities which defy widespread behavioural expectations to various degrees, be they the rejection of: the state authority represented by the police, or norms prescribing appropriately peaceful behaviours and legitimate/well-trodden routes to socio-economic realisation. Ultimately a return to considering 'status frustration' and the defiant behaviours/norms linked to it would seem like a fruitful avenue for research seeking to understand the nature of counter-normative conduct in contemporary society.

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