

The Satirized Badman Performance in British Rap Music

How British Rap Music Can Be Seen as a Satirical Response
to Society and Presented Hypermasculinity



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Abstract

Inspired by Chicago drill rap, rappers in the British drill scene perform a hypermasculine badman trope as required of the musical framework. Critics argue that this performance induces violence and is therefore dangerous to society. This thesis, however, argues that these drill rappers portray the “authorised other” which is defined, accepted, and commercialised by white society. In mimicking the badman, these youths, which are often disadvantaged black males, can perform their specific mode of social critique. This is expressed as satire in slang to circumvent governmental restrictions. To support this statement, a close reading of *Crep Shop* (2019) and *Drilly Rucksack* (2020) will show that the incorporated machismo performance contains this social critique.

Keywords: *British rap, drill rap, hypermasculinity, social commentary, satire, mimesis, mimicry, United Kingdom*

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1. Introduction

Tricia Rose states that hip-hop in its formative years in the 1970's initially provided a means of community rehabilitation. Today, it contains an ethos that offers a graphic expression of the black lived experience and embodies a force for creativity, affirmation, and resistance (Rose IX). The hip-hop genre has branched into various alternatives, of which drill rap is an example and will be the focus of this research. The current drill music gained popularity in the United Kingdom during the mid-2010's, yet originates from the United States, specifically Chicago (Ilan 995). Lambros Fatsis characterises drill rap by its "drilling", a whirring sound in its rhythmic structure (beats), and by the graphic imagery of its lyrical content (1302). According to Jonathan Ilan, rappers performing within this genre seem to belong to a young, male, underprivileged and black demographic ("Digital Street Culture Decoded" 995). Furthermore, the graphic drill genre provides a way of inclusion for the disadvantaged youth of the United Kingdom ("The Industry's New Road" 40).

However, critics of drill rap argue that the genre causes an increase in violence and street crime, in addition to a misogynistic and homophobic ideology ("Digital Street Culture Decoded" 996). According to Joanna Antoniak, this criticism intends to expose the harmfulness of the genre and acts as a warning to young underprivileged men and boys (126). Still, these critics neglect to see that the exposure of gang life is not limited to drill but is seen in multiple commercialised rap genres in Britain. The British government responded to the drill genre by putting prohibitions on the artists by removing videos from the internet and cancelling shows, thus suppressing their emotive outlet and means of inclusion (Fatsis 1306). However, artists evolved to weaponize wit to circumvent these bans (Elliott 263), using satire in the shapes of innuendo, parody, and slang. Satire is a ritualized performance that weaponizes parody and wit to ridicule a person, institution, or subject (Elliott 65; Alliker Rabb 568). For instance, rapper Headie One, part of the group OFB, has inflicted a self-censoring "shh" in his song *Know Better*, describing gang-life and attacking opposing gang members, without the use of possibly implicating words (RV). By incorporating satire, these artists illustrate how society i.e., governmental institutions and opposing gangs, should behave whilst mocking the current institutions in place. In some cases, the lyrics use slang to covertly deliver their message. Using the UK slang dictionary, words are defined in their context to support the lyrical analysis. The semantic context provides a definition presented by the cultural environment of the words, whilst the

syntactic context provides a definition of associated words and sounds (Greenham 11). The dictionary has been set up as a guide to attempt to document and explain British slang often derived from Multicultural London English (genius). This slang is an example of adaptation to multicultural surroundings as found in London and represents a social performance in which the artists adapt to their environment (Potolsky 144). This adaptation and representation by artists is defined by Day as mimesis (87), which is evident in the understanding of rapper to their surroundings and the slang which emerged from it.

Not only did rappers merge with their environment and language, but also with the “thug life” aesthetic visible in their impoverished surroundings and the gangs they mimic. This is seen in the badman trope, performed by these young artists. The badman is a result of black suppression and empowers rappers to convey their satirical message in lyrics (Ogbar 10). More overt examples to such mimesis will be provided in this thesis to underscore the non-apologetic badman trope in British rap. In using satire and the badman trope, these artists can broadcast their experience as a disadvantaged youth in the UK, often scathingly pointing out the systematic racism still structured in society (Ogbar 270). For instance, Krept and Konan’s *F.W.T.S/Active* (2015) features the stop and frisks of young black men by police (Ilan 997). While Stormzy and Chip’s *Hear Dis* (2016) illustrate the criminalisation of British rap music by the government (Fatsis 1305). These songs illustrate the routine exclusion by Western society (“The Industry’s New Road” 40). This exclusion finds its origin in colonisation and supposed white superiority (Bhabha 122). This is part of the reason society has grounds to dislike this rap genre: it functions as a reminder to a history of slavery and colonisation instilled in present day society (Scott 59). This thesis argues that opposition to the drill genre fails to understand that this genre repels white privileged societal systems and offers a performative social critique by using satire.

To support this statement, I perform a close reading of *Crep Shop* (2019) and *Drilly Rucksack* (2020). I show how these songs, and the imagery they use, parallel ancient forms of nature (Elliott). Throughout this research, other songs are presented that exemplify the aforementioned features and so the following question is raised: *In how far does UK rap (2015-2020) contain expressions of social satire?* Chapter 2 delves into ancient forms of satire and provides a working definition for this thesis. To fully gauge the significance of satire to the genre of drill rap, I also consider hypermasculinity in this chapter, connecting mimesis as a nexus to this male performance. Chapter 3 shows the characteristics of the hypermasculine and satirical performance with which I will analyse *Crep Shop* (2019) and

Drilly Rucksack (2020) in Chapter 4. These songs illustrate the hypermasculine aesthetic in the current drill scene since they have recently been released. The latter especially shows the success of the satirical badman since the rapper Ocean Wisdom is new to the genre. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a conclusion and makes suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 A Definition of Satire

In his research, Robert Elliott describes satire as a ritualized performance often focussed on phallic and reproductive imagery (5). Satirical practices or rituals are frequently depicted in a dance or song and described as a performance. This ritualized performance eventually becomes an artform (Elliott 65). Strikingly, these ancient examples of phallic rituals provided in Elliott's research resemble the current badman trope in rap; the songs are a performance insinuating the virility of men (5), the badman is a ritualized form of masculinity with the encompassing message of pride, strength, and dominance (Oware 23). A satirical ritual is found in lyrics wherein an individual, or a gang, clarifies to opposing gangs, or "opps," that they should be respected. For instance, rap ensemble Harlem Spartans states to opps that they will "leave them chalky (Splash, splash)" (0:33-0:35) referencing the chalk outline of a dead body on a crime scene. The "splash" is a suggestion to the gushing of blood, as well as the act of stabbing, which is acted out in their videoclip. To further state their aptitude, the group says "Fuck the opps, scoreboard is great" (1:26-1:27) declaring that their committed acts amount to a grand record (Harlem Spartans). This proclamation of non-apologetic pride and dominance was ritualized by rappers in their performances. The origins stem from boxer Muhammed Ali, the first badman, who separated himself from the racist society that wanted him to succeed as a boxer yet would not accept him as a black man (Ogbar 10). His distanced attitude to the society that rejected him provided a behavioural outline for future black artists which is still imitated today: the badman trope. This involves patterned speech, walk and impression management, eventually mimicking the original and detaching the persona from what he initially stood for (Elliott 53). By taking the aspects that provided strength, British artists parody the badman in their own performances.

An important feature to the badman is mimicry, which, in the research by Homi K. Bhabha, comprises the racial aspect of colonizer and colonised. Herein the colonised is described as an "authorised version of otherness", mimicking the behaviour of the colonizer (Bhabha 88). In this authorisation, mimicry exists as a tool with which the white population sees the similarities of behaviour in the "Other" yet uses the differences to compare and assess themselves as superior. Linked to mimicry is mimesis, which is seen as the representation or imitation of something (Day 87). Mimesis is a primary function in performances and has been researched as being part of one's identity (Potolsky 136).

Similarly, according to Matthew Potolsky, mimesis is a social act in which an individual moulds himself into his environment (144). An individual mirrors its environment to gain acceptance into the group. This is evident within the context of gang life and rap music, since these require a stylistic consensus of the group. Jeffrey Ogbar states that this comprises a celebration of the “thug life:” praising the ghettoized pathology of selling drugs and wielding phallic guns (43). Other existing gangs must conform to this standard of affirmed “realness” or ridicule will ensue and in some cases retaliation. Consequently, this mimesis leads to the conformity and continuity of this contextual framework (Ogbar 43). As this thesis will show, these social norms also translate into lyrics.

Since mimesis is a way to conform to social norms, satire can be seen as a response to mimesis. Mimesis allows for acceptance; satire provides a way to mock this. Satire is a performance that comes from a feeling, which is often revenge or hate (Elliott VIII). In the past, it was used to express aggression, and ridicule opposing performers into suicide (75). Performers would often use satire as a weapon, parodying or “word slaying” their opponents (12). Remarkably, this is apparent in present-day quarrels or “beefs” performed by rappers in diss tracks. These disses are written out of hate or a desire for revenge and seen as a boastful attack; a weapon employed by a rapper protecting his image (Ogbar 15).

The ritual of satire, I propose, is present in this performance and maintained through the response by opps with their own diss track, whilst keeping the stylistic authorised framework intact. Satire is employed as a tool of indirect criticism of status and society (Elliott 98). Since rappers have elevated their drill music into mainstream genres, they have been able to circumvent governmental restrictions yet continue to glorify gang life. Thus, rappers have found a way to ridicule the government and stay true to their badman image. Conclusively, satire is defined as attacking someone or something, thus rappers depend on prior trends to parody, ridicule, or reform (Alliker Rabb 568). Satire explores manners and morals in society (Steele 435). In this research, satire is characterized as a ritualized performance, attacking someone or something by using ridicule or parody. I argue that the act of ridiculing opps whilst proclaiming one’s own grandeur can be seen as a hypermasculine performance.

2.2 The Hypermasculine Performance

As mentioned before, the badman trope is a ritual of masculinity. It is typified by unapologetic pride, control over surroundings and admirable virility (Oware 23). The badman is in part created by classism and racist structures such as segregation laws like

Jim Crow and performances such as minstrel shows (Ogbar 10). Due to his non-conformity and disregard for established rules, norms, or laws of society, the badman is feared by whites and middleclass society (25). The etiquette of the badman was incorporated by rappers. It includes a propensity for violence to opps whilst rapping about power, credibility on the streets, and the labels they wear (Ogbar 23).

The lyrics of *That's Not Me* (2016) read “I don't wear no bait designer brands / I spit deep bars in my black top” (2:01-2:04) which parodies the premise that rappers need to assert their value with designer brands (Skept). Nonetheless, in the same song he declares “Boy Better Know I ain't coming to fight like Jet Li / Spray this 'til the clip is empty” (0:57-1:01) invalidating his distance from the fashion feature of the badman trope by underlining his proclivity for violence. Violence in British rap music reflects a stereotypical “black masculine aesthetic” which is described as “gangsta” (Oware 22). Rose additionally argues that the commodification of the rap genre as well as its “hyper-gangsta-ization” solidified the imagery of the common street icons: thug, hustler, gangster, and pimp. These classifications were the result of dumbing down the narrative of rap music and create a one-dimensional representation of black-ghetto life (3). Over time, the badman trope has become the ritualized performance in which British rappers solidify this gangster image in their lyrics on violence, gang life and selling drugs.

Interestingly, this badman personality and its accompanying image employed by rap musicians can be seen as a type of gender performance (Antoniak 116). Judith Butler states that “the body is a historical idea that gains its meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world” (521). Essentially, this means that the male gender has been created over time and in accordance with social norms. This is also evident in the personas created by British rappers, which is an imitation from other artists; earlier described as mimesis. In doing so, black males adapt and embrace patriarchal ideas to maintain their own dignity under degrading circumstances (Antoniak 116).

An example of these degrading circumstances is seen in the oppressive minstrel shows mentioned before. These shows portray black society, exclusively the males, as lazy and dumb caricatures through the eyes of white society. This ridicule stimulated the divide between white and black society, resulting in racial discriminatory practices as well as phantasies of white supremacy (Ogbar 12). Such caricatures are an artform that challenge the established order and those in power (Elliott 87). However, these minstrel shows do the opposite. They demean people of colour in disadvantaged positions and ensure their exclusion. Black rappers take this oppressive imagery and weaponize the authorised image

to critique those in power with *their* execution of the badman. By taking back this portrayal, these artists empower themselves in a ritualized and accepted badman performance.

Significantly, this performance stems from the comparison made between black and white males, and the role of males being the breadwinners, providers, and procreators. Since black males did not have the necessary resources to fulfil similar roles due to the limited opportunities they encounter in their daily lives (Oware 23), they adopted a hypermasculine image (Ogbar 75). Hypermasculinity has been described as “compulsive masculine self-identity matters and behaviours” (Antoniak 115). This links the term to dominance, violence, and compulsive heterosexuality. These traits manifest themselves in the lyrics of British rappers, and, eventually, became intertwined with rape culture, devaluation and objectification of women, violence, drugs, and homophobia (114-118). This is also evident in the badman trope which encompasses misogyny and homophobia (24). Nonetheless, rappers maintain a brotherly bond which is exemplified by relationships between rappers and gang members. This is evident in the praise given in songs to their “homies” or “brethren” as well as the support they proclaim to provide in their lyrics.

Hypermasculinity is embedded in the British social and cultural context and almost exclusively defined in contrast to and power over femininity and homosexuality (Antoniak 116). Already in the 1980’s, John Fiske explored such hypermasculinity in his research on the commercialisation of the hypermasculine *A-Team*, wherein the male leads embody the desired male maturity: one of dominant nature (Fiske 202). An important symbol of such hypermasculinity is phallic imagery. The phallus is a cultural construction of masculinity and naturalizes the “physical sign of maleness” which is the penis (204). “Penile extenders,” according to Fiske, are an attempt to close the gap between the real (penis) and the imaginary (phallus) as a symbol to enter manhood. In rap videos, this is represented in the usage of guns, vehicles, or other machinery (213). This overt machismo and gratuitous usage of penile extenders shows a male dominance as a way to illustrate the hypermasculine aesthetic. Typical of rap music is the hyper-sexualisation and the expression of sexual desire using explicit as well as crude language (Morris 28). An example of this is *Bet* (2019) by Octavian, Michael Phantom and Skepta, in which the lines “I just made your girl a sket / She made my dick erect” (Octavian, Phantom and Skepta) show the explicit language used in British rap and the power over women. The word choice of ‘making’ a girl do something promiscuous illustrates this power hypermasculine rappers exert in their lyrics. Remarkably, this language and the penile extenders have been copied

throughout the videos of British rappers as evidence of hypermasculinity. This shows that the hypermasculine badman aesthetic has been mimicked by drill rappers and kept this stylistic framework intact.

In conclusion, British rappers assert their masculinity in a ritualized performance. Either a rapper states his wealth and flaunts this in lyrics or images, or a rapper is maintaining a beef with opps to ensure his status is upheld in gang society. These roles in rap's imagery and lyrics do not necessarily ensure empowerment (Rose 119). Nonetheless, these masculine portrayals have been solidified in society long ago and only became more prominent due to mainstream media. As exemplified in this theoretical framework, the commercialisation of British rap ensures the continuation of the hypermasculine ritual owing to mimesis. This is evident in the attacks of rappers to opposing gangs. Finally, this commodification of rap enabled the satirised performance of rappers and allows them to ridicule the government.

3. Methodology

As the theoretical framework indicated, the lyrical cases will be analysed with the characteristics of the badman trope and satire, which are stated in Figure 1.

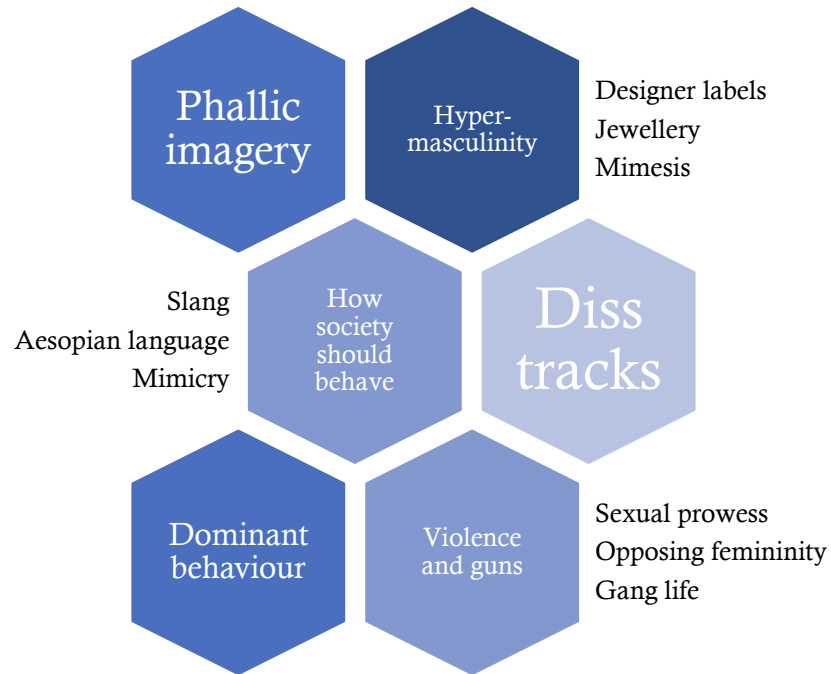


Figure 1. The Characteristics of Rap Songs

4. Lyrical Analysis

4.1 *Crep Shop* – RV

The first case to be analysed is *Crep Shop* by RV featuring Bandokay, Double Lz and SJ. The song was released in 2019 on the album “Savage” and the beat contains the infamous drilling sound. The title is a reference to wealth since “creps” are good looking, most likely expensive trainers. In the videoclip a store is shown selling expensive brand shoes, alternated with the rappers either wearing these trainers or trying them on thus further stating the connection to wealth. This show of hypermasculinity is emphasised by the jewellery the rappers are seen wearing as well as the branded clothes such as Love Moschino and Bathing APE. Moreover, hypermasculinity is supported in the phallic imagery of the big cars they are driving.

This case illustrates the badman trope of glorifying gang life in songs whilst maintaining the credibility of being a real gangsta, since the rapper SJ has been sentenced to life in prison in 2020 for killing opposing gang member Kamali Gabbidon-Lynck (BBC). Furthermore, the message of these lyrics is ripe with dominant behaviour towards opps, usage of slang and mention of guns.

4.1.1 Hypermasculinity in *Crep Shop*

Crep Shop is seen as a diss track since it incorporates a feud with rapper Russ on Twitter arguing about who was running the drill scene (LDN Drill Media). The conflict further escalated when Russ released *Keisha & Becky* featuring rapper Tion Wayne from a rival area of the rap ensemble OFB. The lyrics “Try Gun Lean and get shot from the back seat” (0:26-0:27) describes a dance popularised by Russ in 2018. According to these lines by SJ, anyone performing this dance will get executed which is indicated in the videoclip. The song demonstrates the hatred towards opps and the members’ proclivity for violence. The introductory lines “Out here in the concrete jungle / Gotta treat these opps like prey (Prey)” (0:02-0:06) show an almost primal connection to nature in describing the city as the working grounds. The use of “jungle” paired with “prey” shows that the status quo in London gang life adheres to animal law. The line “treat these opps like prey” (0:05) also illustrates that gang life in the UK is hunt or be hunted, showing hypermasculine dominant behaviour. Bandokay reiterates this animalistic connection later in the song with the line “I’m a bad breed” (1:11).

Gang life is described in the lines: “.31 goes bang / Grease it so the mash don't jam / Me and S in the ride, two loaded waps [...] Car doors pop and the opps get prang” (0:12-0:16). The .31 references a Glock which is a gun known for its precision and long shooting range (Glock.com). The choice for this weapon shows an experience regarding gun wielding, whilst the mention of weapons itself is a connection to the hypermasculine as described by Fiske (213). The usage of “waps” indicates two loaded weapons ready to be fired when the doors “pop” open, a term typically used in rap to describe the firing of a gun (genius). The mention of weapons is further exemplified in the lyrics by Bandokay “Get round there with Rambos and ballys (Ching) / Bando, man's trappy, slappy” (1:05-1:07). “Rambo”, “bally” and “bando” are all slang words created in the British rap scene (genius). “Rambo” is slang for a large knife similar to the one used in the film *Rambo* and references a hypermasculine as well as dominant character. A “bally” is shorthand for balaclava, a covering facemask often used during heists and seen in rapper’s videoclips. Also, “bando” is UK slang for an abandoned house which is often used to sell drugs. These lyrics establish the framework to which gang society should adhere: selling drugs and wielding weapons.

Manhood is illustrated in the lyrics “These dumb little opp boys can't at me” (0:24-0:25). They indicate that opposing gang members are boys compared to rapper SJ. He thereby defines himself as the badman of the UK drug scene, providing himself with a superior status while simultaneously dissing his opps. This masculinity is also seen in the first verse where RV raps “Bro was itching to get down my man / But I told him, ‘Leave him for me’ (Leave him) / That boy is mine like Monica and Brandy” (0:28-0:32). Since the badman trope demands respect, this also translates into the targets of gangstas. In this case, RV states that his homie wished to harm a rival, yet RV wishes to get him himself. By referencing the song *That Boy is Mine*, RV plays with the relational meaning behind “mine”, in this case meaning a target. “Bad B wanna come to the Nizz and off them panties” (0:51-0:52) indicates sexual prowess. RV raps that bad bitches wish to come to his area N17 (Nizz), which is the postcode of OFB and “off them panties.” This is a play on words since it signifies sexual relations, yet “offing” someone also means to kill someone. This suggests that the sexual relations with RV will destroy her panties and parodies his sexual prowess. These lyrics exemplify the presence of hypermasculinity by the overt mention of virility and strength over opps, which shows the performance of the badman trope in the song.

4.1.2 Satire in *Crep Shop*

The following lyrics maintain the badman trope, but also incorporate slang to circumvent censorship whilst word slaying opps. Firstly, RV raps “I called the new wap Patrick / Cah I roll with the Star like Sandy (Ah)” (0:35-0:37). These lyrics state that RV’s gun, a Star 9mm pistol, is named after the character Patrick Star from the animated children’s show *SpongeBob SquarePants*. He expands this imagery by showing that his relationship with his gun is as comfortable and close as that of Patrick Star and Sandy Cheeks. Moreover, RV uses self-censorship in the lines “Shh got shh, held one in his leg / And now he can't walk like Bambi (Pissed)” (0:38-0:41). In doing so, he hides who he hurt and in what way. However, the “held one in his leg” indicates that the target has been shot in the leg which is why he is walking “like Bambi”. In the film, Bambi learns to walk and repeatedly stumbles when attempting this. In using a children’s animation, the weight of the words is simplified and mocks the severity of the violence. In this way, the rappers satirise the brutality in the song.

“I don't feel them yutes, so I spilled man's juice / Shank game on cranberry (Ching)” (0:48-0:50) illustrates the bloodshed of young people. When RV does not care for someone or might feel disrespected, he “spills man’s juice” by killing him, most likely with a knife since he states, “shank game”. Moreover, the usage of “game” also illustrates that life and death are not big issues, but a game to play. To reiterate that the gang life is a game to play, RV used football terminology in his lines “Red card, get him sent off / Ching man's head, now he's looking like Lescott (Ching)” (1:17-1:30). He referenced someone getting hurt and taken off the gangs’ playing field. The “ching” is another way of saying ‘stabbed’ which is illustrated by the reference to Joleon Lescott, a footballer with a severe scar on his forehead (Daly). By providing this image of the footballer, RV parodies the harm he has done and the damage he has left in the shape of a scar.

Satire is present in the slang used by Double Lz in the third verse, where he raps “Catch me an opp, man cheffing that straight / Shave man, dip him up and then skate” (1:50-1:52). He states what he will do when an opposing gang member is found, “shaving” and “dipping” both indicate stabbing in this semantic context. “Skate” means to leave as fast as possible after the assault. These expressions describe the M.O. (*modus operandi*) of the rapper, imitated by his gang members, and show a ritualized way of threatening opps whilst using non-threatening words. The irony of these seemingly harmless slang words indicates satire in the lyrics.

The lyrics: “It’s straight opp boys, no innocent shit / My yute run, you don’t wanna get hit / That yute’s broke, but I made him drip” (2:08-2:12) state the compulsive heterosexuality of gang life whilst describing the damning behaviour of gang life. Double Lz states a warning to his opps to run in order to stay safe. The last line is a play on words since “drip” is often used to describe wealthy and labelled clothes, yet in the violent semantic context the usage of “drip” indicates that the rapper made the young man drip with blood by being stabbed. Again, this shows the satirical way with which these artists describe their harmful crimes yet parody the message. This satire is also seen in the following lyrics where RV walks the line between descriptive language and truth: “Just got new boots, I copped me a 9” (1:31-1:32). It illustrates that RV has purchased what would mean a pair of boots in a man’s size 9, but in this semantic context describes a 9mm gun. This is further underlined with the lyrics “But I never went to a crep shop” (1:33) which reiterates that he did not buy shoes in a shoe store, thus providing a satirical message.

In the final verse, SJ’s lines show how he chose the gang life over his chance to play football professionally: “I could’ve been on the pitch doing rainbow flicks / But instead I’m in the trap with this Rambo (In the bando)” (2:12-2:16). He was a skilled football player able to do complicated tricks, but he ended up in the “trap”. Although “trap” is often used to describe drug-dealing, in this context this indicates the pitfall of an impoverished life which ends in dealing drugs. This is reiterated by SJ in the lyrics “I didn’t choose this life; this life chose me” (2:16-2:17). Even though he glorifies gang life in the lines “This life is peak” (2:19) thus glorifying gang life, SJ later raps “But don’t start judging / I’m just telling you about this shitty little life that I’m stuck in (Shit life) / My friends in jail, my opps in hell / And the verbal abuse keeps coming (Dead up, dead up)” (2:32-2:38). In these final lines SJ asks the critics to postpone their judgment since he simply uses the music to provide him with an outlet to speak of his life. Drill rap allows SJ to vent his experiences and provides a way out of the trap life. However, he states that his friends are incarcerated, and his rivals are dead, providing a bleak image of the current situation. The final lyrics indicate that in his way of life, there will be no rest from opps, taunting him into retaliation. SJ eloquently and ironically described the gang life by stating the grandeur of it whilst simultaneously providing the grim background to this badman life. He maintains the ritualized performance that is evident in the badman lifestyle since he attacked an opp and knows they will respond. Furthermore, *Crep Shop* parodies the street life by using harmless slang words to describe gruesome acts, which validates that satire is evident in this drill song.

4.2 *Drilly Rucksack* – Ocean Wisdom

This song is analysed since it exemplifies the ritualized badman performance whilst simultaneously satirizing drill rap. Ocean Wisdom is a relatively new rapper in the drill scene yet has created a reputation for himself by being one of the fastest rappers alive (Wry). Although new to drill, Ocean Wisdom imitates the badman trope in his unapologetic attitude and adheres to the lyrical stylistic framework supplied by his peers. *Drilly Rucksack* (2020) is an explicit reference to the scene and maintains the hypermasculine message in its lyrics by illustrating weaponry in text and its accompanying videoclip. However, the song satirises the drilling sound by having a laid-back tune. The song's heavy lyrics are juxtaposed to this tune and thus circumvented the initial implications that drill songs have. Ocean Wisdom himself has stated he satirises drill:

A 'drilly rucksack' is essentially a gun in a bag. Even when you say 'drill', that comes with certain connotations. But add a Y at the end and suddenly it's very playful. I wanted to talk about something intense and fucked up but in a tongue-in-cheek and happy way. So, you can lift the content of this track—put it over a drill beat, say it in a different tone, and then it would be violent. It's kinda like trolling and I like doing it. (genius.com)

The artist supports my claim that he satirises the genre whilst using the platform to convey his message. Moreover, this case represents the way rappers wish society would behave by attacking the governmental institutions in place. This is exemplified in his attack on the Conservative Party (the Tories) and the illustrations of police officers as pigs.

4.2.1 Hypermasculinity in *Drilly Rucksack*

In the introductory lines, Ocean Wisdom states that he is part of gang life by confessing he “just robbed like four 'n a bit” (0:22). These lyrics state his crimes to the audience and convey his realness. “My niggas walk with a stick, police just caught him with it” (0:23-0:25). A stick is often used to describe a gun, but in the clip, he is seen with a walking stick, reiterating his playful way of describing weapons. Moreover, a walking stick has a strong connotation to pimps. With this, the rapper solidifies his street imagery in a commodified role of the badman whilst simultaneously circumventing the mention of weapons. Ocean Wisdom continues this performance of masculinity by stating: “just made a milly off rap / All of my city love that, I had to gi' the love back” (0:32-0:35). In these lines, the rapper states he owes his wealth to his rap-career, yet ridicules this by calling the amount a “milly”

instead of a million. The indifference to this amount is also portrayed in the videoclip since the animation of the rapper throws banknotes in the air. In this way, the rapper most likely returned his wealth to the place that provided him with the inspiration for his lyrics. However, since Ocean Wisdom comes from an environment of gang life, he iterates that it has shown him hard times by saying: “Uh-oh, trust me, I've seen a lot, aight” (0:37). This indicates a connection to the ritualized performance of gang-on-gang violence presented by the hypermasculine rappers. This is evident in the refrain to the song which repeats his connection to gang life and the relation he maintains with his gang members by calling them “brethren”:

Drilly rucksack, run to my bredrins

For WD-40, for weapons

Let's get 'em, let's get 'em

[...]

Hula hoop holes in his body

[...]

No need to worry

I put some holes in his body

Especially if he's a Tory. (1:01-1:18)

With his backpack filled with weapons, the artist goes to support his homies and in a return of support also gets assistance from them. This support is provided by the suggestion of WD-40, a product that provides grease to ensure the smooth working of weapons. In this way, the rapper is already satirising the gruesome message by playing with the meaning of words. The claim to “get them”, shows the incitement of violence often seen in these machismo gangs. By describing the size of “hula hoop” holes in his victims’ body, the rapper exaggerates the harm he can do to opps, again satirising his lyrics. This is supported with the imagery of multiple chalk outlines in the videoclip. Ocean Wisdom ridicules the Tories by mentioning that he will “especially” harm them. In doing so, the rapper transforms his playful song into a political attack which is a ritualized performance previously described as satire.

The second verse states the commitment Ocean Wisdom has made to being a badman. He raps: “It's just an obligation / I done preceded my reputation / Undefeated against the pagan” (1:4-1:44). He implies that his rap-career is connected to gang life by calling it an “obligation”. The rapper made himself known by being able to rap faster than Eminem, the preceding record holder, and has used this reputation to gain traction for his rap career (Wray). The final lines are accompanied with the visuals of the animated rapper, boxing against opps or in this case “pagan[s]”. This describes someone who is fake, a liar or a betrayer. The boxing is a reference to Muhammed Ali, who is seen as the original badman in Oware’s research (26). This imagery exemplifies the mimesis of the badman trope presented in drill rap.

4.2.2 Satire in *Drilly Rucksack*

The following lyrics show a dominance over women and an explicitly stated desire of the rapper:

I really don't wanna speak to enemies
I want a woman, the weed, the Hennessey
I'm undercover with lovers
We loving each other
She covered in bubbles
She tuggin'
And she wanna suck my dick
Then kiss my upper lip
I am not Ronald
And I am not lovin' it. (2:20-2:26)

These lyrics show that the rapper is “undercover” with his paramours, suggesting that he can drop the hypermasculine performance and be himself. This is supported by the use of “loving”, something that parodies the explicit sexual relationships as seen in *Crep Shop*. Ocean Wisdom remains playful in these lines by expressing he is not representing the mascot of McDonald’s (Ronald), since he is not “lovin’ it”. In this way, the rapper parodies the meanings behind the phrase and ridicules the commercialisation of rappers by linking

it to one of the biggest fast-food chains in the world. Furthermore, the rapper ridicules his peers by following his lyrics on virility with the imagery of the clown, satirising their message of sexual prowess by describing them as fools.

The following lines of the refrain read:

Babe, if he's a tory

And selfish with his money

I'll be there with the army

Shanking his tummy

For oppressing my pappy

And degrading my mummy. (1:20-1:29)

Ocean Wisdom calls out his contempt for the Conservative Party, also known as the Tories. This Party is known for its aristocratic view and classicism. Furthermore, the Tories wished to reduce immigration from Caribbean countries and invoked a “hostile environment policy” to do so (Stenhouse). Being from Jamaican descent, Ocean Wisdom states that he his parental lineage has been treated differently exemplified in the lyrics “oppressing my pappy” and “degrading my mummy.” He calls them out on this behaviour using his song as a weapon, which is the ritual of satire. He claims that he will take on the Tories with his homies which support the feeling of revenge which is part of satirical performance. In these lyrics Ocean Wisdom enacts social satire by responding to the degrading and oppressive behaviour of the Tories to non-whites.

The final lines of the verse read: “Don't know what's wrong with them / What's wrong with them? / Nuttin' wrong with us” (2:29-2:34). Ocean Wisdom turns his social critique around by pondering what is wrong with the Tories (them). In asking this question, the rapper provides a clear example of satire, whilst urging his audience to ask a similar question to the institutions in place. Equally, Ocean Wisdom clarifies that there is nothing “wrong” with his social environment and this keeps the gang life and badman trope intact. *Drilly Rucksack* is a clear example of satire as a weapon to those in power, playing with words and their meanings. The song supports my statement that satire is present in the drill genre.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this research, songs have been provided which exemplify the existence of the badman trope and the imitation of this trope UK rap. These examples show that the stylistic framework of the hypermasculine remains intact throughout various songs. The hypermasculine performance is apparent in the description of violence to opps and society. My research has shown that new rappers gain recognition by adhering to the framework of the unapologetic and confident badman. Ocean Wisdom illustrates the imminent success that a rapper can have by conforming to this badman trope. By dethroning Eminem as fastest rapper, Ocean Wisdom has established the 'realness' component to which these artists must adhere. The incarceration of rapper SJ also supports the realness of his badman status, but simultaneously shows that the drill scene is not an escape out of the impoverished situation. Similarly, the rappers of *Crep Shop* exemplify the ridicule of pagan rappers and implications of violence to which another rapper is subjected when not conforming to the ghetto pathology. Also seen in *Crep Shop* is the hypermasculine feature of wealth by wearing designer labels and the title of the aptly named song. This song, as well as *Drilly Rucksack*, imply phallic imagery with the mention and show of weapons in their videos and lyrics. This supports the ritualized component of the badman in British drill rap.

Satire is performed in both songs. *Crep Shop* ridicules their opps into submission to the gangsta ethos and shows an understanding of the lyrical framework by incorporating Multicultural London English in the excessive use of slang. In doing so, the rappers assert their distance from the oppressive white society and their affirmation to the drill scene. Ocean Wisdom similarly satirizes the current institutions in place by opposing the Tories in his lyrics. The rapper calls out for an evaluation of these institutions in his lines while simultaneously conforming to the stylistic badman framework. These cases exemplify the argument that mimesis and satire have enabled rappers to allow their message of non-apologetic black pride be broadcast and provide a creative outlet to their impoverished lives.

However, due to the limited number of cases analysed in this research, this conclusion is not definitive. More extensive research has to be conducted on more songs in this genre. Suggestions for artists with similar messages are Potter Payper, Ghetts and J Hus. This will expand the genre of drill to those of conscious and commercial rap. Another interesting branch of research is to analyse the drill lyrics of female rapper Stefflon Don. This will

provide more insight to mimesis and hypermasculinity as opposed to hyper femininity in the genre. Another limitation to this research has been the word count. Due to the limited space available, only selected parts of the songs have been analysed whilst an in-depth study into the origin of slang would have provided more definitive conclusions. The field of rap music maintains scarcely researched and provides multiple possibilities to further research.

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