'There's a number of hip-hop artists who are highly talented but politically retrograde': Socio-political engagement and counter-hegemony in Dave's *Psychodrama*

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When discussing what my aim for this dissertation was with Sean Matthews, I talked about how I felt, and still feel, that *Psychodrama* is only the beginning for Dave; I was confused why I found no one talking about him academically. Sean said to me 'maybe you can be the person to do that for Dave' and that stuck with me throughout the whole process. Thank you for that.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the new millennium, a significant shift in UK hip-hop saw platforms consciously carve out a space for black music in the UK with the emergence of grime. While initially considered resistant and countercultural, the early 2000s saw a string of top ten grime singles, the Mercury Prize being awarded to Dizzee Rascal for his debut studio album *Boy In Da Corner* and the creation of BBC Radio 1xtra.[1] This mainstreaming of grime saw an increase in awareness of UK hip-hop as a whole across Britain, but more pertinently, among a white audience. Stuart Hall notes that the movement towards representation of black artistry is predicated by 'the degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration' that causes concern no longer for 'the absence or marginality' of black people, but rather for their 'simplification and...stereotypical character'.[2] In 2018, Wiley, often dubbed 'the godfather of Grime', was awarded an MBE for his services to music and, in reaction, The Daily Mail published the headline: 'Grime does pay! MBE for drug-dealer turned rapper'.[3] Publishing sensationalised details of Wiley's life and aligning crime directly with an underrepresented minority culture in a national newspaper, was problematic in the same way that Hall explains. It simultaneously attempted to invalidate a figurehead for a working-class, black artform's success whilst paralleling negative stereotypes of violence and crime with a black genre. Hence, this perfectly displays Herbert Marcuse's argument that while dominant culture can make space for social change and evolution, it ultimately surrenders to the demands of bourgeois society – as seen through grime's institutionalised cultural capital (the MBE) and subsequent institutionalised negative portrayal in national newspapers.[4]

Grime's popularisation of black, working-class culture meant that while black British people experienced an increase in representation within popular culture, they also faced the erasure of individual black experience in a new, and larger, forum. While Dave's artistry is not specifically characterised as grime, parallels can be made to the wider context of UK hip-hop due to the similarities of its cultural production. Lyrical representation of minority, working-class experience is not uncommon to see in UK hip-hop because it reflects the upbringing of many of the most successful artists. However, the process through with UK hip-hop has become relevant in dominant white aesthetic and cultural discourses is reflective of the consumerist culture that has allowed for its commodification and subsequent loss of political efficacy. bell hooks explains the danger for black music being popularised as that it 'risks losing its power to disrupt and engage with the specific locations from which it emerges via a process of commodification' through which 'the primacy of addressing the local is sacrificed to the desire to engage a wider audience of paying consumers'.[5] Hence, decades post-mainstreaming of UK hip-hop, the British rapper, singer and songwriter Dave has emerged onto an already established scene where political artistry is increasingly uncommon in favour of more profitable, apolitical music. As Cornel West notes, while hip-hop 'can be prophetic and progressive', this isn't reflected in the dominant forms and that 'there's a number of talented hip-hop artists who are talented but politically retrograde'.[6] While I will not concede that all UK hip-hop artists are pandering to a white, middle-class audience, I do believe that the mainstreaming of black, working-class culture has led to a degree of absorption into the dominant cultural hegemony, thus profiting the ruling class more than the cultural community

1 Richard Bramwell, 'Council estate of mind: the British rap tradition and London's hip-hop scene', in The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop, ed. by Justin A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 256-262.

2 Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in Critical dialogues in cultural studies ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 443.

3 Faye White, 'Grime Does Pay! MBE for drug-dealer turned rapper', The Daily Mail (3 March 2018)
<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/daily-mail/20180303/282389809981531> [3 May 2020].

4 Herbert Marcuse, 'The Affirmative Character of Culture', in Negotiations: Essays in Critical Theory, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Mayfly Books, 2009), pp. 65-98.
<http://mayflybooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/9781906948054Negations.pdf> [1 June 2020]

5 bell hooks, 'Performance Practice as a Site of Opposition', in Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance ed. by Catherine Ugwu (Seattle: Bay View Press, 1995), p. 215.

6 Cornel West in interview with Neal Conan, NPR, (29 October 2009), 'Living and Loving Out Loud',
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=114287606&t=1591357689629> [1 May 2020].

from which it emerges. For political artists like Dave, the question arises: 'how do you avoid becoming part of what you are protesting against?'.[7] Herein lies the crux of this dissertation; I will be exploring how Dave is consciously countering the hegemony through his art and reinvigorating socio-political discourse in the mainstream.

In 2019, Dave released his debut studio album *Psychodrama*.[8] The critical reception of this album is crucial in giving insight into where it falls on Raymond William's spectrum of dominant, emergent and residual.[9] The album reached number one on the UK Albums Chart, having the biggest week one streams for a British rap album, 'narrowly surpassing Stormzy's *Gang Signs and Prayer'*.[10] Dave went on to win the Mercury Prize and the BRIT Award for Album of the Year, clearly displaying a deep resonance and acceptance within the dominant culture. *Psychodrama* is a concept album, named after a type of therapy commonly used in prisons that sees offenders reflecting on their past in order to help with rehabilitation. Thus, this album marks a departure from Dave's earlier works in its deeply introspective portrayal of the intersection between mental illness, racial inequality and growing up in a working-class area of London, engaging more critically with socio-political factors that influenced him while he was growing up than ever before.

However, released as a single prior to the album, 'Black' faced huge criticism from listeners when it was debuted on BBC Radio 1 as Annie Mac's 'Hottest Record in the World'.[11] When listeners complained about the racially charged lyrics, radio DJ Annie Mac publicly defended the song on Twitter, noting: 'It's not just okay to talk about race. It is crucial. Listen to the song with open ears'.[12] Just as Annie Mac implores the (predominantly white) public to open their mind to Dave's music, critic Ciaran Thapar comments on how the audience 'missed its nuanced critique of language as a limiting construct on racial identity, expression, and diversity', highlighting the emergence of Dave's artistry.[13] It has been said that the most powerful art can hold up a mirror to society, so while the negative backlash might seem to be, as Annie Mac describes, 'depressing...[making] you realise...how much work needs to be done in this country for racial equality', in some ways, this backlash can be seen as a success for the progression of society.[14] Williams explains that 'the emergent is radically different...[and] alternative and oppositional to the dominant elements', which I have established is increasingly uncommon within UK hip-hop.[15] As such, I will argue that *Psychodrama* is consciously provoking the white, middle-class audience into reflection and bolstering the re-emergence of political artistry within the dominant culture of the UK. This dissertation will explore the site of ideological conflict that Dave's artistry represents within popular culture and how his engagement with black and working-class cultures facilitates a counter-hegemonic artistry.

7 Jon Savage, England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. xvi.

8 Dave, Psychodrama (UK: Warner Chappell Music, 2019).

9 Raymond Williams, 'Dominant, Residual and Emergent' in Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121-127.

10 Rob Copsey, 'Dave's Psychodrama debuts at Number 1 in incredibly close Official Albums Chart battle against Foals', Official Charts, (15 March 2019) <https://www.officialcharts.com/chart-news/dave-s-psychodrama-debuts-at-number-1-in-incredibly-close-official-albums-chart-battle-against-foals25810/> [15 March 2020]

11 Dave, 'Black' in Psychodrama.

12 Tweet by @AnnieMac, (26 February 2019) <https://twitter.com/AnnieMac/status/1100334274694254592> [17 November 2019].

13 Ciaran Thapar, 'Dave Psychodrama Album Review', Pitchfork, (15 March 2019) <https://ap-prod.pitchfork.com/preview/review/5c7feb997741b65a56c6c1dd/?status=draft&cb=354125> [17 November 2019].

14 Nick Reilly, '"People Are Scared of the Word 'Black'" – Annie Mac Defends Dave after New Single Faced Backlash on Radio 1', NME, (26 February 2019) <https://www.nme.com/news/music/people-are-scared-of-the-word-black-annie-mac-defends-dave-after-new-single-black-faces-backlash-on-radio-1-2454226> [26 October 2019].

15 Raymond Williams, p. 124.

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Part 1: 'Black ain't a single fuckin' colour...there's shades to it': Blackness in a White Culture

The third track in *Psychodrama*, 'Black' is an exemplar of explicit racial discourse. The title itself indexes the racial-political discussion that will unfold. Stuart Hall examines the history of the term 'black' as being 'coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain' which had its role in homogenising black experiences from different ethnic and cultural communities, birthing the hegemonic framework of 'the black experience' and positioning black people as 'the unspoken and invisible 'other' of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses'.[16] Hall writes this in 1999, a time when blackness was becoming increasingly represented in Britain's dominant cultural spheres (as outlined in the introduction). Released in 2019, *Psychodrama* is consumed within a culture that has now carved out a space for black artistry. However, while Dave presents *Psychodrama* in age with broadening definitions of cultural capital, he still chooses to critically engage with the hegemonic ideal of 'the black experience' explicitly and extrospectively, highlighting the enduring inequality for black people globally. One way that Dave does this is through presenting the disconnect that much of the black diaspora feel from their heritage:

> *Black is so much deeper than just African-American*
> *Our heritage been severed, you never got to experiment*
> *With family trees, 'cause they teach you 'bout famine and greed*
> *And show you pictures of our fam on their knees.*[17]

Here, Dave engages with the idea of misrepresentation when he discusses being taught about black people's 'famine' and 'greed' and being shown 'pictures of [black people] ...on their knees'. By highlighting the colonial stereotypes of black poverty and corruption as being imposed by an invisible 'they', Dave presents the idea of blackness as being tied to misrepresentation within a white culture, culminating in the feeling of black heritage as being 'severed' as a result of an inadequate education of black history in Britain. The othering of blackness is presented to the listener through reference to negative stereotypes of black people, but it is not an endorsement by Dave, rather, it is an accusation. Dave critiques the homogenisation of black culture and identity by direct references to loss of black culture and identity: '[y]ou wouldn't know the truth about your race 'cause they're erasin' it'. Here, Dave accuses the invisible 'they', that controls black cultural discourses and histories, not only of erasing black cultures, but of actively rewriting them: 'tell us we used to be barbaric, we had actual queens'.

Achille Mbembe describes the historical representation of blackness thus: 'Africa in general and Blackness in particular were presented as accomplished symbols of a vegetative, limited state. The Black Man... was the ideal example of this other-being'.[18] Mbembe discusses how 'The Black Man' operates within Western discourse, that blackness, a concept unaligned with the western subject, constitutes a dissimilarity or otherness that is typically presented as "less than" whiteness. This representation of blackness is inextricably linked to colonialism and is the result of the erasure of different black ethnic and cultural experiences during this period. Dave explicitly engages with both the colonial process and its aftermath throughout 'Black' but most notably when he says:

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16 Stuart Hall, p. 441.
17 Dave, 'Black' in Psychodrama.
18 Achille Mbembe, The Critique of Black Reason trans. by Laurent Dubois (United States: Duke University Press, 2017), p.11.

> *Black is people naming your countries on what they trade most*
> *Coast of Ivory, Gold Coast and the Grain Coast*
> *But most importantly to show how deep all this pain goes*
> *West Africa, Benin, they call it slave coast.*[19]

Engagement with colonial history, with reference to the renaming of African trade centres based 'on what they trade most', elucidates the historical commodification of African nations and resulting cultural erasure. Approximately 60 years post-independence of many British colonies in Africa, Dave gives us a purchase on the lingering pain of colonialism for the black diaspora in the final line: 'West Africa, Benin, they call it slave coast'. By directly comparing '[the] Coast of Ivory, [the] Gold Coast and the Grain Coast' to 'the slave coast' Dave grapples with a similar idea to Mbembe. He exposes the othering of blackness within white cultural discourses through the explicit parallel of commodified goods and commodified people. Hence, Dave's exploration of colonial history and its lingering pain for black people today can be seen as an example of a post-colonial engagement, just as 'the weight of antiquity continues to dominate cultural production in much of the post-colonial world'.[20] While perhaps not revolutionary within the context of the wider post-colonial writings, within UK hip-hop, the explicit tone which Dave uses to examine the cultural legacy of colonialism for the black diaspora, presents an emergent and alternative education of African history to a largely white British audience.

One way in which Dave examines this cultural legacy is through his critique of the term 'African-American' as being simplistic of black identity and experience: 'Black is more than African-American'. As Dave was born in the UK, this critique is interesting. It is a nod to the fact that UK rap has taken influence from American hip-hop but also parallels the black British experience with a larger African diaspora. This term has received much academic critique, notably from Williams who describes the use of such homogenised racial categories as 'blocking, rather than facilitating'.[21] In the US and the UK, black people are a minority group, thus, for prominent black figures like Dave, there is a 'burden of representation' whereby there is a 'problematic pressure...to 'speak for' the whole of that imagined community'.[22] This raises the question: if homogenisation of black experiences is an issue, then might Dave be considered problematic by referring to all black people as a monolith in 'Black'? Dave represents the idea of 'the black experience' through his use of direct address, using collective pronouns like 'you' and 'us' and references to shared identity, talking of 'our heritage' and 'our fam'. Without specific reference to any one black cultural or ethnic community, Dave unifies all black people through this collectivisation and discusses the common experiences of inequality that black people can face regularly.

However, when Dave dubs blackness as 'much deeper' than the racial term 'African-American' and comments on how: 'Black ain't a single fuckin' colour...there's shades to it', he is rejecting the tokenism of blackness within a white culture and highlighting the diversity of black experiences. In interview Dave has said: 'No matter what people can see, whether black African, black Jamaican, black British, black American people... they say it's just one thing'.[23] The awareness of black homogenisation within wider culture is evident in this statement and contests any criticisms that he is simply representing it. Rather, he is simultaneously representing it and deconstructing it. To deconstruct 'the black experience' is to uncover meaning that is not being explicitly said. For example, Dave's reference to cultural

19 Dave, 'Black' in Psychodrama.20 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 7.
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21 Richard Williams, 'Introduction: Challenges to the Homogenization of 'African American.' Sociological Forum, 10:4 (1995), 535-546 (p.543).
22 James Procter, 'General Introduction', in Writing black Britain 1948-1998: An interdisciplinary anthology ed. by James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.7.23 Miranda Sawyer, 'Dave: 'Black is confusing...where does the line start and stop?", The Guardian, (3 March 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/mar/03/dave-psychodrama-interview-black-is-confusing> [21st May 2020]
23 Miranda Sawyer, 'Dave: 'Black is confusing...where does the line start and stop?", The Guardian, (3 March 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/mar/03/dave-psychodrama-interview-black-is-confusing> [21st May 2020]

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appropriation: 'they take our features when they want and have their fun with it', present a reality that any black person might resonate with due to the global beauty standards that are reflective of the ruling white class. The power to select 'features when they want' is indicative of the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony whereby the ruling class can shift the status-quo of society whilst presenting it as beneficial for everyone, rather than what Dave is suggesting, that cultural appropriation only benefits this ruling class, 'hav[ing] their fun' to the detriment of black people.

Mitchell and Feagin explain how a 'critical assessment of the dominant culture' is a convention of black cultural artforms.[24] However, Dave's emergence within hip-hop is shown by not solely representing the plight of blackness nor the criticism of whiteness in isolation. Rather, Dave positions blackness in direct opposition to whiteness and therein lies the socio-political power of his lyrics. An exemplar of this opposition is:

> *A kid dies, the blacker the killer, the sweeter the news*
> *And if he's white you give him a chance, he's ill and confused*
> *If he's black he's probably armed, you see him and shoot.* [25]

Dave compares blackness and whiteness through the lens of society and the media's reaction to a crime. Dave is representing a key aspect of 'the black experience' - institutional racial prejudice - through the description of the news as 'sweeter' when the killer is black, suggesting that the news will be more profitable to British institutions because confirms the lingering colonial stereotype of blackness as "lesser than" whiteness, thus maintaining the status-quo of racial hierarchy. Dave presents racial prejudice through the alignment of blackness and violence; the assumption that 'if he's black he's probably armed' and therefore retribution is justified: 'you see him and shoot'. The operative word being 'probably' which emphasises the prejudiced assumption of criminality that black people face. Dave deconstructs the idea of 'the black experience' through the creation of an oppositional 'white experience': 'if he's white you give him a chance, he's ill and confused', therein exposing institutional racism through a tangible contrastive example of white privilege. Cornel West's idea that 'without the presence of black people' there would not the oppositional label 'white' seems especially pertinent to Dave's engagement with racial inequality.[26] In essence, Dave's opposition of whiteness to blackness is not simply two examples of racial homogenisation, but rather an intentional reflection of British society through two diametrically opposed perspectives.

This produces some uncertainty of Dave's intended listener. While Dave does create a sense of comradery among black people through his use of collective pronouns, he also anticipates a plurality of publics, most notably, the implied white, middle-class audience. Paul Gilroy discusses the growing relevance of white audiences in the development of black British art and asserts that 'we must be prepared to assess the differential impact of white audiences on the mood and style of black cultural activism'.[27] Chanté Joseph accuses white fans of black music of cultural tourism, whereby they can consume 'the black British working-class experience...without actually having to acknowledge the struggles'.[28] The average white listener at home consuming 'Black' can very easily engage in Joseph's 'cultural tourism'; they hold the authority to select, pause or skip the track, and equally, they can passively listen if they so choose. As such, Miles White argues that 'commodity culture replaces people with

24 Bonnie Mitchell and Joe Feagin, 'America's Racial-Ethnic Cultures: Opposition Within a Mythical Melting Pot' in Toward the Multicultural University ed. by Benjamin Bowser, Terry Jones and Gale Auletta Young (Westport: Praeger, 1995), p. 73.
25 Dave, 'Black' in Psychodrama.
26 Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), pp. 107-108.
27 Paul Gilroy, 'Cruciality and the Frog's Perspective: An Agenda of Difficulties for the Black Arts Movement of Britain' in Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An interdisciplinary anthology, p.309.
28 Chanté Joseph, 'Should we be relieved that grime has gained recognition at the mercury prize nominations?', gal-dem (12 August 2016) quoted in Ruth Adams, '"Home sweet home, that's where I come from, where I got my knowledge of the road and the flow from": Grime music as an expression of identity in postcolonial London', Popular Music and Society, 42:4 (2019), 438-455 (p. 447).

objects and their histories with hegemonic narratives that obfuscate colonial oppression so that consumption becomes guiltless', thus diluting their political artistry.[29] The nature of Dave's popularity and mainstream acclaim means that he actively contributes to the dominant hegemonic culture. However, the message within 'Black' is not intended to be 'guiltless' nor to permit 'cultural tourism' amongst his white audience, rather to prompt them into reflection of racial inequality, creating a sense of multi-valence in his work. This shows the difficult, but powerful, position in which Dave finds himself as a successful black artist in a white culture – that he is constantly fighting the absorption of his political artistry into the dominant culture.

Dave's performance of 'Black' at the BRIT Awards 2020 demonstrates the power that different modes of communications have in creating meaning. Dave being platformed by the BRITs means that the white audience does not have the same autonomy to 'choose' to listen as they would listening at home. At the BRITS Dave performed a rendition of 'Black' with an additional verse (Appendix 1), using the large platform to make bold assertions about the current state of racism in the UK: 'It is racist, whether or not it feels racist. The truth is our prime minister's a real racist'. If the original version of 'Black' is to be considered explicit in its accusatory tone, the opening line of the additional verse makes it appear comparatively subtle. It has been said that 'rap never ignores its listeners...[rather] it aggressively asserts itself, often without invitation, upon our consciousness' and Dave is consciously harnessing the oppositional power of rap and the large BRITs platform to reach and 'aggressively assert' a wider, largely white, audience.[30] Dave uses a white forum to accuse the prime minister - the global representative for British people as a whole - as 'a real racist'. Here, Dave is consciously provoking discussions around racial politics and institutionalised racism, in a country where someone who has been called 'racist' can become prime minister.

In an age of limitless cultural consumption, the cultural aesthetics of Dave's performance at the BRITs are increasingly pertinent. The visual nature of Dave's performance is intrinsically tried to how he creates meaning. Appendix 2 shows an animation that was projected onto Dave's piano containing racialised headlines from British newspapers. Hence, the white viewer is forced to visually consume Dave's political artistry regarding the discourse on black British people from white cultural institutions. Appendix 3 shows the moment where Dave begins his additional verse. He steps away from the piano and addresses the camera directly, breaking the fourth wall and creating a sense of direct address to the predominately white audience. He implores the white viewer to confront their own prejudices and the prejudices that institutions uphold in 21st century Britain. White consumption of 'Black' can no longer be 'guiltless' or conflict-free in this mainstream forum. Dave deliberately harnesses the 'contradictory space...[and] site of strategic contestation' that black art in popular culture occupies to contest the absorption of his resistant art into the mainstream and maintain the political efficacy of his lyrics.[31] He disregards the relevance of the white audience in his larger success and platforming at the BRITs in favour of powerful political artistry. In essence, Dave is using the political power of his very presence as black man in white cultural sphere to reinvigorate the counter-hegemony of UK hip-hop and the Gramscian idea that popular culture is a site for ideological conflict.

29 Miles White, From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity (Urbana: The University of Illinois, 2011), p. 20.
30 Adam Bradley, Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop (New York: BasicCivitas, 2009), p. xiii.
31 Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', Social Justice, 20:1/2 (1993), 104¬114 (p. 108).

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Part 2: "I'm coming from the struggle I survived and I'm still here': 'Road' culture in UK hip-hop and Dave's emergence

'Road' culture, characterised by violence, petty crime, fraud and low-level drug dealing, is heavily represented within the lyrics of UK hip-hop. A large proportion of successful British hip-hop artists who reference local 'road' culture in their lyrics receive a mark of "realness" from their own community because their lyrics 'reflect the reality of the lives of many young working-class people, particularly boys and young men' in their area.[32] However, a common criticism of UK hip-hop is its glorification of crime, which, in my opinion, often lacks nuance. As Jonathon Ilan argues: 'it is important to view the genre as a product of its environment', as 'a form of cultural expression underpinned by the same systemic and structural problems of inequality, poverty, racism and exclusion which give rise to criminality'.[33] However, all forms of black British music provide 'a performative space for the expression of aesthetic tastes and relevant themes which speak to the marginalised communities which house both artists and audiences together', thus instilling UK hip-hop with a subcultural capital which, over time, permits it to reach the mainstream.[34] The idea that UK hip-hop's representation of 'road' culture might serve as a reference point for working-class adolescents is not revolutionary. Approximately 20 years after grime's mainstream success, rhetoric which focuses on representing the intersection of working-class areas and 'road' culture is a dominant trope of hip-hop, and due to its' mainstream success, arguably also in wider society. Now, Dave pursues an emergent representation of 'road' culture that has an awareness for the 'systemic and structural problems' that contribute to its existence.[35]

Dave does not represent 'road' culture in his lyrics to 'map the realities of (usually black) inner city life' in the same way as many other British rappers, which is usually from an insider perspective of these under-represented communities.[36] Rather, Dave positions himself as an outsider of his own community in order to critique political and social structures. In 'Environment' Dave makes a direct parallel between himself and his peers: 'N*ggas saw keys and went to trial for shottin' / I saw keys, learned to play, and made thousands from it'.[37]

Dave's success of 'making thousands [of pounds]' while his peers 'went to trial for shottin'' ('shottin'' meaning drug-dealing) positions Dave as an outlier to the norm. The double entendre of 'keys' to mean both drugs and piano keys suggests that Dave is specifically not creating a moral distinction between him and his peers. Both 'saw keys', yet their lives took drastically directions because of Dave's musical success; it is the '[piano] keys' that allowed Dave to break the cycle of poverty and avoid 'shottin''. This is compounded in 'Streatham':

> *Man are dead or in jail, that's useless*
> *Tell a yute, "If you've got a brain, then use it"*
> *Now I drive past man I went school with*
> *You was the cool kid, now you look clueless.* [38]

Here, Dave describes his peers from Streatham who have turned to crime as 'clueless' while he once considered them 'cool'. Dave is critiquing the systemic issues of growing up in Streatham that push young men to commit crime, ending up 'dead or in jail' as a result. In 'Psycho' Dave emphasises this link between poverty and crime: 'we were broke / hiding

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32 Ruth Adams, p. 444.
33 Jonathon Ilan, "The Industry's the New Road': Crime, Commodification and Street Cultural Tropes in UK Urban Music', Crime, Media and Culture, 8:1 (2012) 39-55 (p. 46).
34 Ibid, p. 41.
35 Ibid, p. 46.
36 Adam Krims, Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 70.
37 Dave, 'Environment' in Psychodrama.
38 Dave, 'Streatham' in Psychodrama.

crow in a Rubicon drink' ('crow' being a slang term for cannabis).[39] The casual reference to drugs being hidden in 'a Rubicon drink' depicts the normalisation of petty crime amongst Dave's peers and its' alignment with being 'broke' allows Dave to depict a reality that disproportionately affects young, and often black, working-class men. In other words, those still involved in crime 'look clueless' to Dave not because of the morality of their choices, but because there are only two end results for them: death or prison. He is stressing the 'useless[ness]' and the waste of lives for those stuck in the cycle of poverty.

An emergent perspective on criminals complexifies Dave's representation of 'road' culture. In 'Drama' Dave asks: 'Reason with a criminal that needs to eat a dinner / Is it survival of the fittest or is he a killer?'.[40] Here, Dave questions the true morality of crime and the societal judgment of criminals. Describing 'a criminal' as someone who 'needs to eat a dinner' suggests an awareness of the social and economic factors that lead to crime. When receiving the Mercury Prize Dave made the statement: 'I want to thank my brother Christopher...this is your story that we told', showing that this awareness is explored through the morality of his brother, who is in prison serving a life sentence for murder.[41] Hence, we can read this line as Dave asking if Christopher must solely be considered 'a killer' with no morals, or whether people can commit crimes for 'survival' if they are caught in a difficult circumstance without it defining them.

Moreover, in 'Screwface Capital' Dave expresses sorrow for his friends who have gone to prison: 'I shed tears when my n*ggas got sentenced / I spent years with my n*ggas in Streatham'.[42] The half-rhyme of 'sentenced' and 'Streatham' reinforces Dave's illustration of the high percentage of crime and conviction for people growing up in Streatham and other working-class areas of London. Dave's reaction to Christopher being sentenced is also explored in 'Drama': 'I remember when you got sentenced and I was throwing up', positioning the listener to see an alternative perspective of crime, not from the criminal, nor from the victim, but rather from family and friends who are witnessing the sentencing of a loved one.[43] Dave also includes Christopher's voice over a crackly prison line, comparing Dave to the youngest 'Son of Jesse' in the Bible: 'Rise and anoint him, he's the one'.[44] Here, the biblical parallel of Dave to the 'Son of Jesse' (David) illustrates Christopher's pride towards his younger brother and his perception of him as 'the one' who is 'gonna help bring [him] out of this shit'.

Christopher's inclusion in 'Drama' as well as Dave's tribute to him at the Mercury Prize awards received some negative media attention, with newspapers referring to Christopher as 'the killer' and 'murderer brother' in their titles as well as reporting that the mother of the victim criticised the track as 'disgusting'.[45] For national newspapers to publish this story under these headlines exemplifies a dominant societal attitude towards criminals as undeserving of reform or nuanced representation; a criminal must be represented solely as a criminal. While newspapers might hold Dave to this societal moral standard, it is important to recognise that it is impossible for Dave to only see Christopher in terms of his crimes because he is, firstly, his older brother. While it is impossible to know the complex feelings that Dave has towards his brother, through the raw depiction of how crime has impacted him and his family, Dave provides an emergent representation of criminality; criminals are more than just criminals and crime can affect more than those directly involved. The combination of a dramatic self-presentation and a political engagement relating to his upbringing and the aesthetics of 'road' culture inadvertently questions the pervasive societal judgement of criminals and bolsters a politically nuanced discussion around reform.

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39 Dave, 'Psycho' in Psychodrama.
40 Dave, 'Drama' in Psychodrama.
41 BBC Music, 'Dave's Psychodrama is the winner of the Hyundai Mercury Prize 2019', YouTube (19 September 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pIgqF4KBXM> [5 June 2020].
42 Dave, 'Screwface Capital' in Psychodrama.
43 Dave, 'Drama' in Psychodrama.
44 Dave, 'Drama' in Psychodrama.
45 Laura Armstrong, 'Crime Artist', The Sun (27 July 2019)

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The portrayal of mental illness is also heavily tied to Dave's political artistry regarding 'road' culture. In 'Psycho', Dave aligns his poor mental health with the adversity he faced growing up: 'Blame my environment, it made me a sicko'.[46] Similarly, in 'Streatham', Dave expresses frustration that the implied middle-class audience is not able to understand his pain: 'you wouldn't know that 'cause you don't live this', and in 'Psycho' Dave notes that he should bring his teacher, a representative of power and the establishment, 'down to Streatham and make her spend a day in a veil/Vale like a widow'.[47] These examples strengthen the parallel that Dave is making between his poor mental health and his experience of 'road' culture growing up in a working-class area of London. Streatham, sometimes referred to as Streatham Vale, can be found in the Borough of Lambeth, which experiences a 'significantly higher premature mortality...than London and England', partially influenced by gang violence.[48] Hence, Dave's use of the homonym 'veil' and 'Vale' in the context of this line consolidates the alignment of working-class areas like Streatham Vale with disproportionate premature death and trauma, compounded by Dave's reference of 'a widow'. This ultimately evokes sympathy for Dave, who blames this environment for '[making him] a sicko'.

The use of external voice throughout *Psychodrama*, in the form of recordings from therapy sessions, furthers Dave's dramatic self-presentation and the relationship between his mental state and his experiences growing up. 'Psycho' opens with:

> *I'm here with David*
> *This is our first session*
> *We're just gonna talk about your background*
> *Where you're from, any issues that you've been dealing with*
> *So, where should we start?*[49]

The therapist's voice immediately sets up the album as form of personal catharsis for Dave, provoking the listener to visualise the therapy session, in turn creating a mental image of Dave as 'David', the man behind the moniker who is going to share personal details of 'background' and the 'issues that [he's] been dealing with'. The use of this external voice permits Dave to present a multi-dimensional depiction of his psyche and an emergent representation within popular culture of a black, working-class man talking explicitly about his struggles with mental illness. The therapist's voice could also be seen to represent 'the establishment' due to his position of authority over Dave. The album opening up with 'the establishment' inviting Dave to speak is reminiscent of the dominant hegemony's role in Dave's ability to operate as a black, working-class artist in a white, middle-class space. This evokes a strong sense of Dave's self-awareness regarding the power dynamics within popular culture which he uses to his advantage to create deeper meaning in his intersectional discourse around mental health.

While many studies have detailed the disproportionate experience of mental health issues amongst working class and black communities in the UK, hip-hop culture as a whole, which embodies the representation of both these demographics, tends to 'invite black males to adopt a cool pose, to front and fake it, to mask true feelings', contributing to a cultural norm of silence both within these communities and in a wider culture.[50] Dave's raw portrayal of his mental health counteracts this norm. The depiction of Dave's poor mental state can be seen most clearly in 'Psycho', notably when he uses the idiom: 'thought I had a screw loose but I

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46 Dave, 'Psycho' in Psychodrama.
47 Dave, 'Psycho' and 'Streatham' in Psychodrama.
48 Lambeth Council, 'Lambeth Life Expectancy factsheet', Lambeth.gov.uk
<https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ssh-lambeth-life-expectancy-2015.pdf> [2 June 2020].
49 Dave, 'Psycho' in Psychodrama.
50 bell hooks, We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 148.

lost one' suggesting that, theoretically, if he had a 'screw loose' he could tighten it and solve the issue, but he's 'lost one' meaning that he believes he can't get better.[51] The tangible point of reference provided for Dave's mental state: 'probably battlin' with manic depression / Man, I think I'm going mad again / It's like I'm happy for a second then I'm sad again' confronts the listener with his experience. There is no hiding behind metaphors nor allusions – Dave says it straight. The repetition of 'again' in reference to 'going mad' and being 'sad', sandwiched around a feeling of being 'happy for a second' provides a visceral depiction of Dave's 'manic depression', that ebbs and flows in the lyrics.

Contrasting the personal depiction of mental health, Dave critiques 'road' culture aesthetics by highlighting the role that bravado plays in masking struggle and poor mental health for not only those currently living in working-class areas, but also the rappers who have left them in lieu of success:

> *You see our gold chains and our flashy cars*
> *I see a lack of self-worth and I see battle scars*
> *He has to be with twenty man when he wears jewellery*
> *And you see it as gangster, I see it as insecurity.* [52]

Here, Dave contrasts the archetypal elements of hip-hop culture: 'gold chains', 'flashy cars' and a large entourage of 'twenty man' with 'a lack of self-worth' and 'insecurity', suggesting that culture of bravado is a smokescreen for poor mental health within the hip-hop community. Dave compounds this when he says: 'Where I'm from, everybody wants to make it out', exploring the negative aspects of growing up in working-class communities in-so-far that 'everybody' wants to leave, 'everybody' also including a large proportion of UK rappers who come from these communities.[53]

While hip-hop is a historically resistant artform, Dave is providing an even more resistant and politically nuanced argument to his listeners through his evaluation of hip-hop culture. He is combining a critique of the political and societal structures which lead to disproportionate rates of poor mental health within minority, working-class communities with a self-reflective critique of hip-hop culture. Ultimately, Dave is expressing disdain for the environment, the 'road' culture and the experience of watching family and friends go to prison which have culminated in his mental health struggles. Moreover, he is expressing frustration for fellow hip-hop artists who hide these issues behind a stoic appearance, while very often, despite their success, equally suffering as a result of their similar upbringings.

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51 Dave, 'Psycho' in Psychodrama.
52 Dave, 'Environment' in Psychodrama.
53 Ibid.

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Conclusion

While hip-hop maintains its status as counter-cultural in many ways, the nature of popular culture means that it is constantly absorbing emergent ideas. Unfortunately, hip-hop is not exempt from this commodification and absorption if the music is being created for the mainstream. While sects of hip-hop still remain loyal to its grassroots activism and political artistry, its mainstream counterparts, in many ways, have been subjected to the same fate that most underground-to-mainstream artists inevitably fare; a loss of political efficacy. My analysis has shown that, for Dave, this is not the case. Rather, he is reinvigorating the genre as counter-cultural through his political artistry and meta-awareness of popular culture.

Psychodrama exhibits counter-hegemony, critiquing the institutionalised racism that black people experience and how the intersections of race and class play in both disproportionate exposure to criminality and experience of mental illness in the UK. However, *Psychodrama* does more than represent a marginalised voice or experience. The explicit racial discourse of this album, specifically found in 'Black', confronts the social inequalities faced by black people. It intentionally engages with the colonial process to work the implied white audience into reflection, and in turn, provide an alternative education of colonialism and its' lingering effect for the black diaspora. Moreover, Dave's nuanced representation of 'road' culture, with emergent depictions of criminality and intersections with male mental health issues, takes into account social and political factors that are not typically considered in mainstream discourse on minority, working-class people, areas or culture. *Psychodrama* signifies an emergent artform within both wider society and hip-hop because it attempts to dismantle hegemonic power through its' discussion of the complexities of race and class within the popular culture. This is combined with an astute awareness of different modes of consumption and spheres of reception, creating a multi-dimensional socio-political discourse.

With growing success within the UK, Dave has capitalised on the inherent commodification and consumerism of popular culture for a socio-political goal. The awareness that *Psychodrama* would likely be, not only be played by the individual in their home, but also on national radio, reviewed by national institutions and (unbeknownst to Dave at the time) performed at the BRIT awards, has shaped Dave's political artistry and is inextricably linked to how he generates meaning. With no intended offence to Dave, *Psychodrama* isn't difficult for the average consumer to understand; there are few subtleties to this album. Instead, my analysis has shown that his explicit lyricism has meaning rooted in a political reality.

These modes of consumption, especially the institutions of national radio or the BRITs, are intrinsically tied to whiteness in the UK, both historically and in terms of current predominate viewership. Martinez cites Adorno's argument that popular music is 'a pacifier that no longer moves that masses to question the relations of production', yet Dave deliberately harnesses these modes of communication to confront these 'relations of production' and provide 'the masses' with a socio-political message.[54] One year post-release, *Psychodrama* still has had a deep political resonance in the UK. In the wake of increased public discourse around racial inequality and the Black Lives Matter movement, *Psychodrama* is being re-circulated widely. Appendix 4 shows Tiffany Calver inviting her listeners on Radio 1xtra to revisit Dave's 'Black', 'really learn something from it from it and...pass it on'. Among others from *Psychodrama* (which also featured on the radio show), Calver's final statement highlights the relevance of the track for the current political climate: 'Black lives matter, always have mattered and always will. This is 'Black' by Dave'. As a white person, there are concerns about '"speaking for" black people' when discussing black music and equally when discussing the working-class relations of hip-hop.[55] However, if 2020 has taught the white UK population anything,

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54 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to the Sociology of Music trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) cited in Theresa Martinez, 'Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance', Sociological Perspectives, 4:2 (1997) 265-286 (p. 270).
55 David Brackett, Interpreting Popular Music (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000) p. xiii.

it's that being silent about inequality must change. If we consume and commodify hip-hop within popular culture, we cannot ignore race and class inequalities within society. Therefore, the hope is that this dissertation creates another way in which *Psychodrama* can confront a white, middle-class audience, moving them to call for change in society.

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Appendices

Appendix 1-3 are courtesy of Santan Dave (Dave) on YouTube. This video is of Dave's live performance of 'Black' from *Psychodrama* at the BRIT Awards 2020.

This can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXLS2IzZSdg> Appendix 4

is courtesy of Tiffany Calver on BBC Radio 1Xtra's Rap Show. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000jwdm>

Appendix 1

A transcription of the additional verse of 'Black' which starts at 3:30 in the video.

It is racist,
whether or not it feels racist.
The truth is our prime minister's a real racist.
They say you should be grateful we're the least racist.
I say the least racist -
is still racist.
And if somebody hasn't said it,
equality is a right,
it doesn't deserve credit.
Now if you don't wanna get it -
then you're never gonna get it.
How the news treats Kate,
versus how they treat Meghan.
Rest in peace Jack Merritt,
you're my brother in arms.
There's tears in our eyes -
and love in our hearts.
We never had the same background,
culture, colour or past -
but you devoted your life -
to giving others a chance.
And for that,
I'm so taken aback -
because you gave us all a voice,
I have to say it for Jack.
As a young black man that's seen paper and crack,
given tougher sentences,
it's just paper and cracks.
All he would want is unity,
funding for communities,
equal opportunities,
people under scrutiny,
no more immunity,
way less hatred,
more conservation,
less deforestation.
We want rehabilitation –
and that would be amazing –
but Grenfell victims still need accommodation.
And we still need support for the Windrush generation.
Reparations for the time our people spent on plantations.
I'm done.

<u>Appendix 2</u>

A still image of the video at 1:04.

<u>Appendix 3</u>

A still image of the video at 3:43.

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Appendix 4

A transcription of Tiffany Calver's final link of the show, leading into the song: 'Black' by Dave. This starts at 1:53:53 in the show.

This is Tiffany Calver on BBC Radio 1 and 1xtra. Tonight, we went on a massive journey for two hours together and I want to say thank you for listening. I want to ask you now, more than ever, to keep listening. If you love the show, the music and the black artists that make them, you must love their lives too. My life. Keep listening to the music. Really listen. Learn something from it and pass it on. I want to dedicate tonight's show to:

Sarah Reed

Mark Duggan

Shekhu Bayoh

Christopher Alder

Smiley Culture

Jimmy Mubenga

Michael Powell

Leon Briggs

Ricky Bishop

Brian Douglas

Joy Gardner

Sean Rigg

Leon Patterson

Cynthia Jarrett

Cherry Groce

Derek Bennett

Kingsley Burrell

Roger Sylvester

Azelle Rodney

Habib Ullah

Faruk Ali

Adrian Thompson

Jean Charles de Menezes

Demeter Fraser

Aston McLean

Seni Lewis

Anthony Grainger

Rocky Bennett

Alton Manning

Some of the names we do know. And I also want to dedicate tonight's show the names that we unfortunately don't. Although for many of us racism is not new, for some of you, it is. Here is your opportunity to create change. Here is your opportunity to educate yourself with the information that is right in front of your eyes, on your screens, your radios, your TVs, right now. What is happening right now on British soil and across the world is unacceptable. We must do better. We must treat each other better. We cannot let another person die because of the colour of their skin. Innocent. Unarmed. At work. We have to change and that starts by listening, learning and sharing the knowledge. That being said, I would like to publicly ask all of my peers on both Radio 1 and 1xtra to continue to share and educate the people that we have the opportunity to teach.

I want to invite all of you, every single show, to play this song. All of you at home listening in right now, play this song. Play it to your families, share it with your friends, really listen, really learn something from it and really, please, pass it on.

Rest in peace George Floyd.

Rest in Peace Belly Mujinga.

Rest in peace Breonna Taylor.

Black lives matter, always have mattered and always will. This is 'Black' by Dave.