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Special issue of *Popular Music*

Prosecuting and policing rap

Contributions are invited to a special issue of *Popular Music* on the complex interface between rap music (taken in its broadest sense to include mainstream rap, gangsta rap, grime, drill, activist rap, etc.) and criminal justice systems around the world.

Rap music is an international youth-cultural powerhouse and, while its spread has been celebrated, it has also been attended by mounting criminalisation. This special issue asks researchers to explore the policing and prosecuting of rap and how this has been framed in media reporting. It also considers what might make rap susceptible to such state criminalisation and how rappers, communities, civil liberties groups, defence lawyers and scholars have come to challenge 'prosecuting rap'.

The growing use of rap music in criminal and civil proceedings has emerged as a well-documented debate and issue of public concern in the US – dubbed 'Rap on Trial' (as per the title of Erik Nielson and Andrea Dennis' recent book). However, outside the US, it is much less understood and there is a pressing need for more scrutiny and critique. This special issue is particularly interested in work that addresses case studies and trends in the global South and in Britain and other non-US parts of the global North, and in comparative work on the US in relation to other countries.

We welcome contributions from a range of disciplines (law, popular music, media studies, sociology, criminology, cultural studies, linguistics, socio-psychology, etc.). We are keen on approaches that open outwards from concrete discourses, poetics, policies and practices to expose broader social trends, institutional processes and critical concepts that lay bare state violence (racism, economic injustice, overpolicing, etc.) and that offer radical critiques. We are also keen on applied work, and contributions that engage with rappers, communities, activists and criminal justice professionals.

Rap music is policed by the state in a range of national contexts. In the UK, for instance, rappers have had injunctions imposed on their music, while rap is increasingly used as evidence in criminal trials, replayed in courtrooms to confirm stereotypes about the violent and criminal propensities of young black men. Rap music can be used to sweep groups of young black and brown men into a single serious-violence charge through gang narratives and controversial 'joint enterprise' law. How might rap feed into racist and class-based disparities in criminal-justice monitoring, regulating, data-gathering, policing, charging, convicting, sentencing and media-framing in different countries? How might prosecuting rap open a window into wider racial inequalities in criminal justice systems?

These questions about institutional racism in criminal justice systems and the weaponisation of black youth culture have been injected with urgency by the international antiracism protests that have swept 2020.

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Contributions should actively position themselves in relation to what has already been said in the small but growing literature to generate new insights and approaches.

Topics to be addressed may include:

- the use of rap music and black youth culture in criminal proceedings in various national contexts;
- state regulation of rap recording, circulation and performance;
- rap evidence and gang narratives in joint-enterprise and conspiracy cases;
- informal policing (behaviour orders, public space protection orders, risk assessment forms, etc.);
- police databases, rap and the surveillance state;
- rap and racism (institutional, cultural, overt) in criminal justice systems;
- digital musical culture and rap evidence;
- prosecuting rap as constraint on human capabilities/rights;
- rap and laws of evidence;
- the news-media framing of rap in criminal proceedings;
- rap as anti-carceral 'defunding' culture;
- community, musician and inter-generational responses to prosecuting rap;
- youth, rap and criminal justice;
- geographies of prosecuting rap and comparative perspectives;
- prosecuting rap, capitalism and the cultural industries;
- rap distinctions (genre labels, amateur *vs.* professional) and racial bias in the courtroom;
- challenging prosecuting rap.

Call for abstracts

Please send abstracts (300 words max) + bio (150 words max) to the three co-editors of the special issue by **1 October 2020** (commissioning of articles scheduled for October 2020, with completion of commissioned articles by 1 July 2021):

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