

History is a punk

*The British 1970s through
the Punk Movement*

Ylenia Díaz Fernández



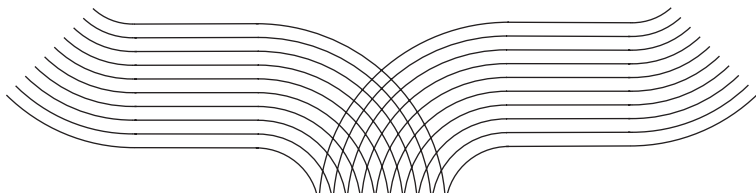
Ylenia Díaz Fernández



Ylenia Díaz has a degree in English Studies (2014-2018) from the University of Oviedo and a master's degree in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language. In 2024, she obtained her PhD with a thesis on punk music. She is now currently working at the University of Oviedo as a substitute teacher. On a personal note, Ylenia is an avid music fan, plays guitar and is a pop culture fan.

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HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

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A mis padres y a Lucky

*'Someday when you get where you're going,
you will look around and you will know that
it was you and the people who love you who
put you there, and that will be the greatest
feeling in the world'*

- Taylor Swift (2016)

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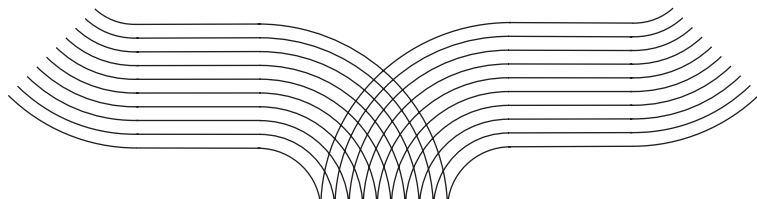
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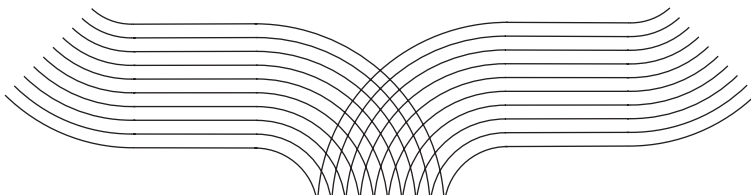
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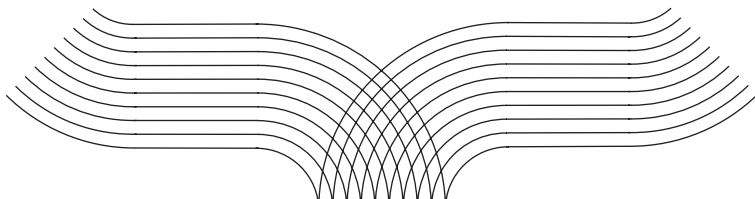
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Abbreviations

- ACMU:** Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
- ANL:** Anti-Nazi League
- BM:** British Movement
- CCCS:** Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
- CD:** Compact Disc
- CND:** Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- CURB:** Campaign on the Use and Restriction of Barbiturates
- DIY:** do-it-yourself
- EP:** Extended Play
- GSTQ:** God Save the Queen
- IMF:** International Monetary Fund
- IMG:** International Marxist Group
- IRA:** Irish Republican Army
- IS:** International Socialists
- MAD:** Mutual Assured Destruction
- MBE:** Member of the British Empire
- MP:** Member of Parliament
- MPLA:** Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
- NCB:** National Coal Board
- NF:** National Front

- 18
- NIRC:** National Industrial Relations Court
 - NME:** New Musical Express
 - NUM:** National Union of Mineworkers
 - OIRA:** Official Irish Republican Army
 - PIRA:** Provisional Irish Republican Army
 - RAC:** Rock Against Communism
 - RAR:** Rock Against Racism
 - RTW:** Right to Work movement
 - SHARP:** Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice
 - SW:** Socialist Worker
 - SWP:** Socialist Workers Party
 - TUC:** Trades Union Congress
 - UDA:** Ulster Defense Association
 - UK:** United Kingdom
 - USA:** United States of America
 - YNF:** Young National Front

Chapter 01

Introduction

The popularity of punk music has prompted a considerable amount of research on the genre, with theorists tackling the study of the punk subculture through different approaches and viewpoints. In this chapter, I will shortly review the bibliography and references dealing with punk music since its origins in the 1970s. In doing so, my aim is not only to identify the major and recurring topics that are addressed in those publications but also to point out some gaps and limitations in those analyses that I will attempt to fill in the present dissertation. It is worth noticing that, even though punk has been the subject of study by numerous academic researchers (Lentini, 2003; Dines, 2004; Worley, 2017a, to quote just a few), non-academic and informal explorations of punk, such as biographies or the writings of its oral history, are also key to understanding the genre (see Lydon, 1994 or McNeil & McCain, 1996).

Traditionally, most studies dealing with the history of British punk have tended to be non-academic and often share a similar structure: a brief introduction about the roots of punk in the American scene, followed by a discussion of its evolution and eventual boom in Great Britain, along with stories about the most relevant artists of the genre, to finally conclude with the decay of punk in the final years of the 1970s and early 1980s (Muniesa, 2007; Strongman, 2007; Pérez Ladaga & Izquierdo, 2018). Other authors have tackled the history of punk by providing a more in-depth research where oral testimonies and self-experiences are fundamental elements (Robb, 2006; Thompson, 2009). Through interviews, McNeil & McCain (1996) recount the beginnings of punk music in the USA and its spread to England in *Please Kill Me*. Jon Savage's (1992) *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* is an indispensable reading when wishing to inquire into the genre, and surely is the most widely known piece of writing on punk as well as the most complete chronicle of the band The Sex Pistols. Savage not only insightfully narrates how Malcolm McLaren started the most representative band of the British punk scene, but also digs into the evolution of the band and its members while depicting the punk scene and the artists that took part in it. Autobiographies and biographies of past active members and artists of the movement (Lydon, 1994; Paytress, 2003; Salewicz, 2006; Strummer, Jones, Simonon

& Headon, 2008; Jones, 2016) also serve as sources of information about the punk music and culture. However informative, these works tend to be quite author-centered and sometimes fail to provide a solid overview of the characteristics of the punk movement in England in the 1970s, or of the historical and socio-economic circumstances that gave rise to this influential cultural movement.

Therefore, although we can say that not many academic texts have been produced so far about the history of punk, yet we can find articles that have actually looked into the origins of punk music, such as Lentini (2003), who focused on the US- UK cultural interaction during the emergence of punk. In addition to this, most academic works tend to provide brief introductions about the origins of the genre despite it not being the main topic around which the core of the text revolves. Additionally, many authors have opted for giving a non-anglocentric perspective on the history of punk by recounting the origin and development of this musical genre in countries or cities not related to the USA or the UK (Walker, 2005; Philopat, 2006; Pascual, 2015; Lohman, 2017; Prasetyo 2017; Mohr, 2018; Guerra & del Val Ripollés, 2021; Rodríguez-Ulloa, Quijano & Greene, 2022). On the other hand, a good number of researchers have decided to dig into contemporary punk by analyzing the genre past its prime in the 1970s (Reynolds, 2006, 2010, 2012; Bernhard, 2019; Grecco, 2020; Grimes & Dimes, 2020; Wide, 2020; Bestley, Grimes, Dimes & Guerra, 2021).

In sum, it can be said that most of the texts produced to date dealing with the history of punk are non-academic ones (which, of course, does not mean they are not informative or interesting enough). Yet, we find more academic publications as we delve into specific topics inside the punk movement. The Do It Yourself (DIY) ethos, for example, is a recurring topic that has been addressed by many academics focusing on the political and social implications that the DIY philosophy entails (Buechele 2005; Moore & Roberts, 2009; Moran, 2010; Dale, 2012; Dunn, 2012), with authors discussing the relevance that the DIY movement has had as regards the phenomenon of resistance in different areas of the world. An example of this is Dunn's (2016) *Global Punk*, where the author analyzes DIY punk as a tool of empowerment and resistance through testimonies of punk artists all over the world, including members of the American, European, Asian, African and Oceanic scenes. His analysis also traces the history of the DIY movement from the beginning of the genre until the past decade, making connections between the DIY ethos and the politics of resistance, claiming that it has helped members of the punk movement to find a way to share the voices of minorities. It is precisely one of the goals of this dissertation to try to find traces of the repercussion of the DIY philosophy and the artifacts related to in the historical events of the era.

Resulting from the DIY movement, fanzines were crucial to the spread and development of punk. Therefore, the relevance of these popular publications has been often addressed in works such as Schmidt (2006), Guerra & Quintela (2014),

Worley (2015), or Piller & Rowland (2021). *Ripped, Torn, and Cut: Pop, Politics and Punk Fanzines from 1976* (2018), edited by The Subcultures Network, is probably one of the most complete and well-balanced studies about fanzines: a compilation of essays produced by academic researchers who approached the relevance of the genre from different perspectives. Baines, Credland & Pawson (2018), for instance, begin by focusing on the existence of fanzines before the punk movement. Blase (2018) analyzes the figure of women in punk fanzines while Vague (2018) tackles the development of punk fanzines after the thriving years of the movement. In the article "Zines and History: Zines as History" (2018), Lucy Robinson describes the way in which fanzines have lately gained prominence among those interested in history, since researchers have found in them interesting materials to obtain a better perspective on the history of punk music and punk bands and artists as well as the subculture itself. Through fanzines, we are also able to collect material and messages from those who belonged to the punk scene that let us know the first steps of punk artists or the opinions about the punk scene of those who participated in the production of the zine itself. As Robinson (2018: 40) notes, fanzines have the advantage of offering a feeling of authenticity, as the texts written in them did not pass any kind of filter. Yet, Robinson does not only settle for the idea of viewing fanzines as tools for reconstructing the history of punk artists in a chronological sense but treats zines as sources of historical events elements capable of generating history themselves, as cultural artifacts that added to the aesthetic turmoil of the punk era. Therefore, in the author's opinion, fanzines *are* history (in the sense of *making* history) as well as the result of history, and she highlights the importance of preserving them. Robinson's approach is, in this regard, very similar to the approach that I adopted in this dissertation: using punk as a depiction of history.

It is important to note, too, that in the past few years there has been an increasing number of publications focusing on the role of women in punk. Traditionally, punk has been regarded as a white-male genre. However, even though clearly not female-dominated, women took part in the punk scene of the Britain of the 1970s, either as members of bands or as followers of the subculture. Multiple texts have been published lately dealing with the presence of women in the punk scene (Leblanc, 2001; Reddington, 2004; Berkers, 2012; Stinson, 2012; Goldman, 2019), some dealing with punk women in England and others focusing on female punk women in other countries where the genre emerged. In *God Save the Queens: Pioneras del Punk*, Garrigós, Guerra & Triana (2019) put the spotlight on the role that seven women played in the booming years of punk music, such as Ana da Silva from The Raincoats or Palmolive from The Slits, who belonged to the English punk scene. Vivien Goldman (2019) deals with women's identity in punk music and with how female artists stood their ground in a masculine field. *Revenge of the She-Punks: A Feminist Punk History from Poly Styrene to Pussy Riot* explores the role of punk women from the 1970s until 2016 in different parts of the globe.

Regarding other academic writings, there exists in the literature a remarkable number of works focusing on the relationship between punk and politics, where researchers concentrate on how the genre has interacted with different political ideologies and how it eventually became political. Works such as Tillman (1980) or Worley (2012) deal with those topics, while Worley's (2017a) *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976–1984* is perhaps one of the best texts to analyze the links between punk and politics and the context in which punk emerged. The links between punk and anarchy is another popular topic that has attracted the attention of many scholars. Dines (2004), for instance, discusses the origin and development of anarcho-punk in England, while other authors, such as Jones (2002), Simonelli (2002), Cogan (2007), Glasper (2007), Cross (2010) or Nugraha (2018) put the emphasis of their research on how punk and the anarchist ideology were interconnected. Other academic texts have also tackled the connection between punk and left-wing ideologies such as Marxism or communism, and how political parties became involved in the punk scene (Laing, 1978; Smith, 2011; Tranmer, 2013; Worley, 2016, 2017b). The question of how the punk movement reacted towards the racism that was present in the England of the 1970s and the rise of far right-wing parties is a popular approach that has prompted the publication of several articles and monographs (Goodyer, 2003; Dawson, 2005; Barbee, 2013; Worley & Copsey, 2016; Renton, 2018, Díaz Fernández, 2020). Specifically, in *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*, Goodyer (2019) examines the involvement of RAR with left-wing organizations such as the Anti-Nazi League or the Socialist Workers Party.

The aesthetics of the punk culture is a fundamental part of the movement, constituting a powerful driving force for artists and followers alike. Whether we refer to clothing, art published in fanzines or album covers, these aesthetic manifestations have been consistently studied by academics and researchers who put punk visuals at the center of their work (Dines, 2004; Savage, 2012; Bestley & Ogg, 2014; Prinz, 2014; Bestley, 2020; Krivine, 2020; Turcotte, 2020). In this respect, Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* is one of the very first works that addressed the importance of aesthetic elements in the punk movement. Published in 1979, only a few years after the explosion of the movement in the UK and framed within the theoretical background of subculture studies created by academics such as Stuart Hall or Raymond Williams, Hebdige's text analyzes the way in which the style of subculture members (mods, punks, Teddy Boys...) acted as elements of resistance. In this same line, punk, which was a mainly youth-dominated genre, has also been targeted by researchers who studied the development and origin of punk as a subculture (Baron, 1989; Clark, 2003; Lewin & Williams, 2009). Tucker's (2008) outstanding dissertation offers a complete and thorough study of the way in which punk functions as a subculture, analyzing the practices of punks as resistance, and framing it within critical theory and cultural studies.

To conclude, the studies mentioned above constitute the great majority of the research that has been conducted on the punk culture and movement to the present day. Yet we still find writings that do not fit into any of the categories mentioned previously, such as studies on punk and religion (Stewart, 2019; Abraham, 2020), punk and cinema (Thompson, 2004), or the use of punk as a pedagogical tool (Smith, Dines & Parkinson, 2018; Stewart & Way, 2023).

After this short revision of the literature on the punk movement, my impression still is that none of those analyses actually provides a comprehensive and articulate account of the existing connection between the development of punk and the historical events that took place in England while the genre was emerging and evolving. Of all the works cited, the scholars who tackled the issue of punk and its involvement within the Rock Against Racism organization did indeed provide a fully detailed account of the historical background of those events, and Worley's *No Future* (2017a) clearly emphasizes the context in which punk emerged and developed, but his work is more genre-driven than history-driven, the latter being actually the goal of the present dissertation. On many occasions, we are told that punk was affected and prompted by the times of crisis that the Britain of the 1970s was undergoing. Nevertheless, these events are often underrated or simply overlooked in many current accounts of the rise and development of different aspects of the punk culture in Britain. In this book, I plan on paying greater attention to the historical framework and events that were one way or another responsible for providing punk artists with a context, characterized by economic and social hardships, that would serve them as inspiration for their contributions to the movement, while observing how those issues were reflected on artistic manifestations of punk. For example, the issue of unemployment during the 1970s in England is nearly always mentioned when talking about the decade itself or, in punk writings, it is briefly mentioned as background context in which the genre originated. However, the references mentioned often fail to show how punk artists actually reflected the discontent with the lack of job opportunities in their art. That is precisely what I intend to do in this dissertation: provide accurate historical grounding for certain cultural manifestations which were born in a decade of deep social and economic hardship marked by economic crisis and social unrest, and try to show how those gloomy historical events helped shape a very powerful artistic movement. To sum up, this dissertation is not about the history of punk; it is about history and punk.

Therefore, my primary goal in this work is to analyze the links between punk and the historical, social and economic events that took place in the England of the 1970s in order to measure the extent to which punk artists reflected the consequences of those episodes in their art (lyrics, clothing, music, videos etc.). In the following pages I will therefore closely examine the events in the history of Britain that had an impact on the development of the punk (sub)culture, and –at the same time– will try

to provide the most detailed possible account of the different artistic manifestations of the movement (musical, literary, aesthetic) inasmuch as they reflected the reality surrounding the punk scene at the time.

Chapter 02

Punk in cultural and working-class studies

25

As mentioned in the previous chapter, ever since the rise of the punk movement in the 1970s, there have been attempts to tackle it from an academic perspective (Laing, 1978; Worley, 2012). Our main goal in this section is to go over some of the basic concepts and theoretical approaches developed over the last few years against whose backdrop the punk movement can be studied, with a focus on cultural studies and more specifically on working-class culture studies.

2.1 Cultural studies

The field of cultural studies, within which different studies of punk are framed, began to develop mostly during the late 19th and 20th centuries. It was then when the most prominent names in the area (Matthew Arnold, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall or Theodor Adorno, among others) first made their appearance. Actually, finding a proper definition for the concept “culture” itself has proved a very problematical issue for most academics. As Williams (1976) pointed out: “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (p. 49). Yet, he did provide us with an extensive and detailed definition of what has been generally considered as culture from the 18th century onwards, concluding that the term “culture” embodies the three following categories of usage:

- (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development;
- (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general. But we have also to recognize
- (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. (1976: 52)

As Williams noted, there is no doubt that music, along with other arts, is to be considered as culture. Other scholars such as Matthew Arnold defined culture as “the

study of perfection" (1869: xvi). Edward B. Tylor, on his part, referred to culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871: 1). Fiske (1991) defined culture as "the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience, and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved" (p.1). The author also dealt with the process of creating culture:

Culture making (and culture is always in process, never achieved) is a social process: all meanings of self, of social relations, all the discourses and texts that play such important cultural roles can circulate only in relationship to the social system, in our case that of white, patriarchal capitalism. Any social system needs a cultural system of meanings that serves either to hold it in place or destabilize it, to make it more or less amenable to change. Culture (and its meanings and pleasures) is a constant succession of social practices; it is therefore inherently political, it is centrally involved in the distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power. Popular culture is made by various formations of subordinated or disempowered people out of the resources, both discursive and material. (p.1)

In his thesis, Tucker (2008) provides a definition which highlights the connection between culture and politics:

Culture is political, cultural studies as a whole is an attempt to describe the ways in which politics functions in culture as well as the ways in which culture functions in politics. (p. 38)

This relationship will be analyzed in some depth throughout this dissertation when we analyze punk and its effects on political beliefs.

One important additional aspect of the discussion about the nature of culture is that of the quality of the artifacts that emerge from it. In this regard, academics –especially in the mid 20th century– began to make a distinction between cultural elements, categorizing them as either belonging to "authentic culture" or "mass culture", the latter also known as culture of the masses, produced mainly by the working and lower classes. Authors such as Arnold, Adorno, Horkheimer or Leavis firmly believed in such division. For instance, Adorno distinguished between "authentic" and "mass" forms of culture (Walton, 2008: 55). Walton (2008: 56) summarized Adorno's ideas about the different types of culture the latter expressed in his essay "On Popular Music" (1941) (see table below):

<i>Great, authentic art or culture</i>	<i>Mass culture</i>
'Serious' music is organic where the detail expresses the complex whole and is not based on predictable formulas	It is predictable, formulaic and stereotypical – each song gives the illusion of being different but is only another version of the established pattern
It offers genuine aesthetic and intellectual fulfilment	It only provokes desire and false dreams (e.g. wealth, adventure, passionate love, power). It is sensationalist and sentimental
Utopian ideals are expressed in it opening up the possibility and promise of a better world	It is conservative and centres thinking on the immediate present rather than focus the mind on the future and on possibilities for improvement and change
It provokes imaginative responses and challenges the audience/reader and does not inspire escapism	It is escapist and requires no real effort (inspires passivity) – the socio-psychological function of popular music is psychological adjustment to the status quo – popular music is a kind of 'social cement' which denies or stifles the critical faculties

Table 1 Adorno's distinctions between different types of culture as summarized by Walton (2008: 56)

Adorno also saw mass culture and its creators as harmless beings without power. In the words of Walton (2008), paraphrasing Adorno:

(...) the masses are not to be feared because they may overturn the existing political system and social arrangements but quite the opposite! They are seen as the victims of a culture industry that renders its consumers politically and intellectually anaesthetized to the miserable conditions of their lives. (p. 57)

Other critics have also agreed with classifying culture in terms of quality and have been harsh on the working-classes, actually considering working-class culture as not worth studying. An example of this is F.R. Leavis and his wife Q.D. Leavis¹, who "were hardly sympathetic to the working-classes with regard to their general way of life or their struggles" (Walton 2008: 32).

¹ The followers of this dogmatic and elitist cultural and literary approach are pejoratively known as "Leavisites".

2.2 Mass culture and working-class culture

28 Despite the fact that some scholars in the field of cultural studies have downplayed the relevance of cultural artifacts originated within working-classes, as shown above, we find –on the other hand– authors who have well and truly advocated for the importance of working-class culture. This branch of cultural studies is very relevant for our study since it deals with cultural phenomena that resulted from a situation similar to that of the England of the 1970s, where the punk movement was born among its working-class.

Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, E. P. Thompson or Stuart Hall were precursors in giving prominence to the working-classes and their role within culture. Hoggart dealt extensively with culture and the working-class in his work *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), a text which discussed changes in the working-class culture of the time, and the role mass publications played in it. Hoggart was also the cofounder of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), along with Stuart Hall. The center is known for having played a key role in the development of cultural studies, including working-class culture. In his work, Hoggart mentions the defining features of the working-class: having studied in secondary modern school, sharing manners of speaking, earning similar wages, living in certain areas or wearing the same kind of clothes (Hoggart, 1957: 8-10). Not only did Hoggart contribute to investigating working-class culture; one of the most important aspects of his work is the fact that he was raised in a working-class family as he describes it in *The Uses of Literacy*. As stated by Hoggart: “where it is presenting background, this book is based to a large extent on personal experience” (Hoggart, 1957: preface). Many members of the punk scene belonged to the working-classes and wrote about the hardships of that lifestyle, somehow reproducing Hoggart’s experience. According to Walton (2008), Hoggart “linked cultural forms to historical change and mass industrial culture” (p. 86), which hinges on the relevance of history when it comes to emerging cultures, as historical events have a tremendous impact on the development of new and existing cultures. Walton goes on to comment on the role the working-classes have in creating culture: “the traditional working-classes take an active role in making, choosing, and adapting culture”, (2008: 86), which can be linked to the concept of “agency”, which will be discussed later. Moreover, the author argues that Hoggart contributed to the “rejection of the idea that the working-classes were passive victims of mass culture helped to challenge earlier views and introduce the idea of resistance” (p. 87).

E.P Thompson also contributed to the topic of mass culture with *The Making of the English Working-class* (1963), just as Raymond Williams did. Williams (1957) stated that

...since Arnold, there has been a widespread association of the word “culture” with such words as “precious” and “pretentious”, so that to speak of “working-class

culture” seems to some absurd: the working-class, being tough and practical, can have nothing to do with such a thing. (p. 29)

Williams (1957) goes on to review the traditional concept of working-class culture, advocating for not letting the working-class culture be degraded:

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For this definition of “working-class culture” carries, by implication, as its opposite, the classification of all work in the mainstream of art and learning as “bourgeois”. Such classification used regularly to be made, for political reasons, and on the basis of an inadequate general theory of culture. Yet one can see now that the classification is both false and dangerous. It is dangerous because it allows the bourgeoisie to claim as its pride and product a great cultural tradition which it can then easily contrast with the meagreness of what we offer as “working-class culture”. Many people concerned with the arts have been misled, politically, by the consequences of this. (p. 29)

In our work, punk will be treated as the mirror of the problems experienced by Great Britain in the turbulent 1970s. These issues were mostly endured by the members of the working-classes, to which most punks belonged. Consequently, they utilized music as a channel to express the frustration caused by the situation of the country.

2.3 Punk as a subculture

When studying punk, referring to the term “subculture” is almost mandatory but, what does “subculture” exactly mean? How does it differ from the term “culture”? In order to define what subculture is, it is necessary to bear in mind that for a subculture to exist there has to be an already existing dominant culture in the first place, a main culture within which subgroups can originate. As Hall et. al state in *Resistance Through Rituals* (1975):

In modern societies, the most fundamental groups are the social classes, and the major cultural configurations will be, in a fundamental though often mediated way, “class cultures”. Relative to these cultural-class configurations, sub-cultures are sub-sets – smaller, more localised and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks [...] Sub-cultures, then, must first be related to the “parent cultures” of which they are a sub-set. (p. 13)

The authors agree that subcultures can only be understood when they are framed within a dominant culture. As they put it:

...we must, first, see subcultures in terms of their relation to the wider class-cultural networks of which they form a distinctive part. When we examine this relationship between a sub-culture and the “culture” of which it is a part, we call the latter the “parent” culture. (Hall et. al 1975: 11)

Hebdige (1979) also defines subculture as the following: “Subcultures represent “noise” (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media” (p. 90). According to his definition, where subculture stands as noise, we infer that sound represents culture, the standard. As Hall et. al note “the singular term, “culture”, can only indicate, in the most general and abstract way, the large cultural configurations at play in a society at any historical moment” (1975: 13).

Focusing on the question of the study of subculture, we can say that it probably originated within the Chicago School, where sociologists watched the youth attentively through an academic lens². As noted by Lohman (2017: 24) “their work focuses on a variety of aspects of urban culture, most notably gang culture and deviancy”. Clearly, at that time the younger generations were increasingly receiving more attention and, as Lohman (2017) puts it:

whilst the Chicago School’s conceptualisation did not foreground a requirement of “youth” for membership of subcultures, the groups they focused on certainly were young [...] the “rise” of the teenager during the 1950s led to more acute concerns amongst wider society regarding the delinquency of these “youth subcultures”. (p. 24)

Finally, another institution which put the spotlight of their research on subculture was The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), which belonged to the University of Birmingham, as seen in the works of Stuart Hall or John Clarke, among others.

So the question is: Should punk be labeled as a subculture? Does the British punk movement of the 1970s fit within the concept of subculture? We could say so if we assume that British punk was deeply attached to the working class and –as Eriksen (1980) mentions– “the tendency is for cohesive subcultures to develop within the subordinate classes”, in opposition to counter-cultures, which are often created within the predominant culture. That is to say, cultural movements that emerge from the working- class are more likely to be considered as subcultures than those which originate within the middle or upper classes. Eriksen (1980) abides by this statement by comparing British and American punk:

The distinction between sub-cultures and countercultures is important for an analysis of punk rock because, while punk rock in England developed as part of a working-class sub-culture, it has always functioned in the U.S. as a counter-culture. (n.p.)

² The youth was gaining attention but not necessarily for a positive reason, as “there was great preoccupation, and consternation, with delinquency amongst the young” (Lohman, 2017: 24).

Moreover, the author indicates four major characteristics that are present in all subcultures: “dress, music, ritual and language (including specific slang, dialect, vocabulary and assigned meanings)” (Eriksen, 1980), all of which can be identified within the punk movement. We will attempt to address most of them in this work.

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2.4 Punk as a subculture of resistance

When studying punk as a subculture the question of cultural dominancy often arises. Whether it is framed within a given cultural, economic or social context, it is important to talk about resistance and why the rise of punk can, like other subcultures, be considered as an act of resistance towards the main culture and the *status quo*. As Duncombe (2007) puts it:

Cultural resistance is the practice of using meanings and symbols, that is, culture, to contest and combat a dominant power, often constructing a different vision of the world in the process. (p. 1)

Coming mostly from the working classes, punk artists were able to reflect on artistic experiences that may not be usually found in the mainstream culture, such as economic hardships. As Guerra (2018) points out, subculture and resistance are deeply connected:

... in subcultural studies, resistance is understood as a form of opposition to hegemonic formations and capitalist domination. It points to an ethos and practice of self-sufficiency outside the spectrum of systems of domination within a capitalist society. (p. 6)

The author also highlights how subculture academics, influenced by the CCCS, “tended to understand forms of resistance as the symbolic reactions of working-class youth to various structural oppressions” (Guerra, 2018: 6), and made some emphasis on “understanding whether the external reaction of subcultures was resistance to dominant values and hegemonic social structures” (p. 6). Yet, as mentioned by Guerra (2018), CCCS researchers did not really consider that “resistant qualities of this form of practice were mostly an illusion – a mechanism for escape from reality, not causing significant change in the dominant values and even, in some cases, reinforcing them” (p. 6).

All in all, studying punk means understanding the role of subcultures within societies, so one main aim of this book is to analyze how the working classes expressed their problems through the punk music and (sub)culture, bringing to light problems and issues that were not so present in the dominant culture.

Considering what has been mentioned so far, it should be of course noted that the punk movement and other subcultures have also been approached from perspectives

other than strictly sociological ones, such as Marxism. In this regard, Marx and Engels (1988) discussed the impact the dominant classes had on the dominant ideas in societies:

- 32 The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, -the ideas of its dominance. (p. 67)

Marx and Engels' arguments can easily be extrapolated to the study of culture, where the higher classes are responsible for judging and constructing what culture is and what cultural items are suitable to fit in. As seen above, economy and power play a crucial role in the hierarchy of culture and classes so that when new cultural artifacts arise within the non-dominant classes, these would be considered as deviations from the standard. This reinforces the idea of perceiving subcultures as belligerent, as Lohman (2017) notes: "subculture is viewed as a response to class oppression and the hegemonic cultural domination of the middle class" (p. 25).

Antonio Gramsci (1971 [1929-35]) dug deeper into the concept of hegemony at the beginning of the 20th century, commenting on the idea of dominance within societies where a specific social group exerts its power over the rest, just like the relationship stands between cultures and subcultures. In his own words "a social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to "liquidate", or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups" (p. 57). Tucker (2008) agrees with the existence of dominance within society and culture by stating that

culture is transmitted from capital to the subject, when subjects interact, they simply reiterate the relationship between capital and subject. There is a relationship of dominance, one can either resist it or capitulate to it. (p. 45)

Fiske (1991) also addresses the question of how dominant ideologies are conveyed nowadays:

the resources –television, records, clothes, video games, language– carry the interests of the economically and ideologically dominant; they have lines of force within them that are hegemonic and that work in favor of the status quo. (p. 2)

Additionally, the author establishes an interesting connection between hegemony and resistance by claiming that one cannot exist without the other:

But hegemonic power is necessary, or even possible, only because of resistance, so these resources must also carry contradictory lines of force that are taken up and activated differently by people situated differently within the social system. If the cultural commodities or texts do not contain resources out of which the people can make their own meanings of their social relations and identities, they will be rejected and will fail in the marketplace. They will not be made popular. (Fiske 1991: 2)

In this light, we could say that the punk movement in England in the 1970s would act as an embodiment of the opposition that many young individuals showed towards the standards of society in those days. The resistance displayed by punk artists would thus represent their wish to denounce the flaws of the system.

2.5 Agency

The idea of viewing subcultures as responses to class oppression, in addition to them acting as artifacts for marginalized voices to find their place, is related to the concept of agency. Agency is defined by Ashcroft et al. (2000) as

the ability to act or perform an action. In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed. (p. 6)

The term is used particularly in postcolonial studies insofar as it refers to “the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power” (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 6). Nevertheless, the term can also be applied to other fields of study, as we plan on presenting punk music and subculture as a way of achieving agency for individuals, enabling them to find a place where they can express their mind and amplify their voices, and where they can use music and culture as resistance towards the upper classes and dominant culture.

2.6 Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs, has been also applied when discussing the punk genre, its lyrics, fashion, sound, videos, and in general all its aesthetic features, inasmuch as they can be considered as signs that entail meanings relevant to its study and interpretation. One of the first theorists to apply semiotics to the study of subcultures was Dick Hebdige, in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), where he emphasized the importance of all artifacts found in cultures:

All aspects of culture possess a semiotic value, and the most taken-for-granted phenomena can function as signs: as elements in communication systems gover-

ned by semantic rules and codes which are not themselves directly apprehended in experience. (p. 13)

As noted by Lohman (2017), Hebdige

- 34 conducted a semiotic analysis of the clothing and behaviours of Teddy Boys, mods, punks, rastas and skins. In mundane everyday objects, he argues, members of subcultures seek to create their own identity; by appropriating and recontextualising artefacts through practices of bricolage, they seek to challenge the rest of society. (p. 26)

It must be noted that signs used in subcultures are closely linked to resistance and thus to class struggle. In all subcultures there are elements which can be considered signs, and which distinguish themselves from those found in the mainstream culture, such as fashion. As linguist Volosinov (1973) noted, these signs convey ideas:

Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs, there is no ideology [...] Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too. Everything ideological possesses a semiotic value. (pp. 9-10)

Volosinov brought innovative ideas to the field of semiotics with his work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973), establishing a connection between the use of language (verbal and non-verbal) and ideology, stating that signs and symbols are to be found in physical and non-physical entities and can be reflections of lifestyles, class features and ideas:

Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality. Every phenomenon functioning as an ideological sign has some kind of material embodiment, whether in sound, physical mass, color, movements of the body, or the like. (Volosinov, 1973: 11)

Following Volosinov's ideas on the nature of signs, we consider signs and symbols to be strongly linked with resistance or agency. For instance, punk's handmade fashion in the England of the 1970s, which was an example of the philosophy of the DIY (Do-It- Yourself), can be interpreted as resistance to capitalism. As Tucker (2008) mentions: "the production of resistant culture is a sort of reclamation of the means of production, in that one can labor in part of their lives as a species-being" (p. 40). Tucker (2008) presents us with the following example:

the leather jacket is a floating signifier; it is meaningless without its socially constructed place in a sign chain. In this case, the leather jacket adorned a certain way, in combination with other signals, can act as an interpellating call, seeking recognition from those within the subculture and rupture for those without. (p. 47)

This quote exemplifies how signs work within societies and shows us that any item may function as a sign/symbol, provided that they have a special characteristic within

a given social construct. The leather jacket is a sign if we think of a society where almost nobody wears that clothing item, thus becoming a sign/symbol of rebellion. This understanding of how signs work can be compared with the way subcultures only exist when in contact with other cultures:

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A sign is a phenomenon of the external world. Both the sign itself and all the effects it produces (all those actions, reactions, and new signs it elicits in the surrounding social milieu) occur in the outer experience. (Volosinov, 1973: 11)

Signs and subcultures exist because they are in contact with other signs and other cultures, that is, extratextually. Fiske (1991) remarks the importance of studying pieces of culture by placing them within a bigger framework where they interact with other cultural artifacts:

the meanings of popular culture exist only in their circulation, not in their texts; the texts, which are crucial in this process, need to be understood not for and by themselves but in their interrelationships with other texts and with social life, for that is how their circulation is ensured. (p. 4)

Moreover, Fiske (1991) sides with the idea that signs can be used to support the concept of resistance. As he puts it:

Semiotic resistance results from the desire of the subordinate to exert control over the meanings of their lives, a control that is typically denied them in their material social conditions. (p. 10)

Summarizing: when culture began to be studied academically, some scholars, such as Adorno categorized cultural artifacts according to subjective qualitative criteria, splitting them into high or lower standard ones. Usually, this division was based on whether cultural items were produced either by the higher or lower classes, with the latter being contemplated as inferior. However, other researchers such as Hoggart or Williams defended the culture that emerged from the working-classes, overcoming the prejudice that workers were essentially passive victims of such mass culture. As far as punk is concerned, it has been argued here that it can be studied as a subculture and, more precisely as a subculture of resistance. The punk movement broke away with the *status quo* and distanced itself from the social and cultural standards of the time. Those who belonged to the punk scene of the Britain of the 1970s epitomized the discontent with the system while finding new ways to express themselves. At the same time, the fact that these punk individuals were able to present a specific narrative of their lives and their environment entailed a sense of agency and power that was crucial for the authenticity of the genre. Lastly, the role of semiotics is certainly relevant to our study, as the punk subculture is constructed upon signs and symbols. Song lyrics, DIY clothing items or album art constitute signs and symbols of an era that need to be analyzed as they definitely helped shape the punk subculture.

Chapter 03

The making of punk

3.1 The origin of the word “punk”

The first known use of the word “punk” can be traced back to the England of the 16th century, circa 1575. The term is found in a song, “Old Simon the King”, in the line “Soe fellowes, if you be drunke, of ffrailtye itt is a sinne, as itt is to keepe a puncke”³, where the word means “prostitute”. The same meaning of “punk” is found in Shakespeare’s play *Measure for Measure*. Although its etymology is not completely clear, the Merriam Webster Dictionary suggests that the word “punk” may derive from an alteration of the term “spunk”. The Online Etymology Dictionary points out that it may be a derivation of the Algonquian word “ponk”, which means “dust, powder, ashes”, or from the Gaelic term “spong” meaning “tinder”, as punk also meant “rotten wood used as tinder”⁴. According to Robinson (2018) the term became an adjective in the 19th century, when it began to be used to describe something having “poor quality”. The definition in the Oxford English Dictionary reads: “punk (adj.) “inferior, bad” 1896, also as a noun, “something worthless”. Later, the word also acquired meanings related to male homosexuality. It is worth mentioning that the musical movement was named after the pejorative adjective, in line with the reputation that the genre would acquire soon after its emergence.

Digging into the early uses of the word “punk” applied to the music scene, we know that the first musical references to the term are found in some American newspapers⁵

3 “So, fellows, if you are drunk, that is a sin of frailty, as it is to keep a punk”.

4 These meanings are found in the territory of the USA and appeared in some American magazines “Fight like punk” is from the *Pennsylvania Packet* (February 18th, 1777). “Rotten as punk” was used in many newspapers, for example the *Vermont Phoenix* (March 24th, 1837).

5 *Los Angeles Times*, October 12th, 1907, “punk music by union men”; the *Nebraska State Journal*, May 21st, 1908, referred to a “Punk opera” and the *Buffalo Evening News*, August 15th, 1910, mentioned that “No sort of a combination, it seems to us, is the combination of a man violinist and his wife accompanist. If it’s in harmony listeners say ‘Huh! How different from their domestic life’ and if it isn’t in harmony it’s —well, it’s just punk music”.

(Robinson, 2018). In the same period, the word began to be used to describe people, especially younger men, as delinquents. As noted in the Cambridge Dictionary: “a young man who fights and is involved in criminal activities”. It can be inferred that this meaning, along with the references to having “poor quality”, is the one from which the term that refers to the current musical genre derives. This can be observed in McNeil’s opinions. McNeil, an American writer and founder of the fanzine *Punk*, answered the following when asked about why he had chosen the term punk as the title of his fanzine:

On TV, if you watched cop shows, *Kojak*, *Beretta*, when the cops finally catch the mass murderer, instead of saying, “You fucking asshole, I’ll kill you”, they’d say, “You dirty punk”. It was what your teachers would call you. It meant you were the lowest, that you’d never get anywhere. It also meant a complete failure. (qtd. in Savage, 2010: 125)

The use of the word punk applied to the musical genre that we know today is believed to date back to the very late 1969 and early 1970s. In April, 1969, journalist Lester Bangs described the band MC5 and singer Iggy Pop as “punks” in a *Rolling Stone* article. In March 22nd, 1970, Ed Sanders (poet and member of the band The Fugs) used for the first time the term “punk rock” in the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper (Stewart 2019: 18). In the December 1970 issue of *Creem*, an American music magazine, Lester Bangs employed the term to refer to Iggy Pop. In May 1971, music critic Dave Marsh used the term “punk rock” in an issue of *Creem* to describe the band ? & the Mysterians (Robinson, 2018). By the mid-1970s the term became widely spread: in 1976, the magazine *Punk* was launched, The Ramones named a song “Judy is a Punk” (1976), and music magazines were lousy with the term “punk” as well as with bands labeling themselves as punk. Also, the word became highly used in fields other than the strictly musical one, such as in references to graphic artists, clothing, hairstyle, general aesthetics and even just an attitude.

3.2 Protopunk and the birth of British punk

British punk did not emerge as an overnight phenomenon. To understand its origins, it is necessary to move back to the United States of the mid and late 1960s, more precisely to the New York and Detroit musical scenes, where we find certain musical styles that would later have an enormous impact on the sounds of future punk bands. MC5 (Detroit), The Stooges (Detroit), the New York Dolls (New York), The Velvet Underground (New York), The Dictators (New York) or the Patti Smith Group (New York) are considered by many punk researchers as precursors of the genre as we know it nowadays (Lentini, 2003; Prinz, 2014; Laing, 2015). Laing (2015) claims that the connection between all these artists was musical but not cultural: the common element linking these bands backwards to the mid-1960s post-Beatles

groups and forwards to the glitterati of the New York Dolls and others was not cultural but musical (p. 22). The musical element to which he refers has to do with one of the most characteristic aspects of punk music: “punk” meant an attitude towards musical performance which emphasized directness and repetition (to use more than three chords was self-indulgence) at the expense of technical virtuosity” (p. 22). Despite Laing’s position, which suggests that the connection between these artists was merely musical, it is true nonetheless that the evolution of any musical genre and its development into new genres is never detached from the cultural environment in which it originated. One of the fundamental pillars of the concept of punk lies thus in the desire of wanting to produce simpler music. This idea was already gestating in the 1960s with garage and protopunk bands: the wish to musically go “back to basics”, the desire to detach themselves from the musical complexity that rock was attaining by the end of the 1960s (and continuing in the following decade) with artists such as Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix was surely a catalysis for the birth of punk music. As Lentini (2003) corroborates:

most commentators underline that punk was, from the start, a musical rebellion that sought to return rock to its mythical amateurish roots. The performers sought to simplify rock, removing the emphasis on virtuosity that developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. (p. 154)

These new bands’ fundaments of going back to the roots of rock music cannot be considered to be simply a musical matter, as there is always a countercultural element, whether conscious or unconscious, in trying to create music that diverged from the current musical trends that were popular at the time in the United States (progressive rock, folk, blues etc.). This feeling was represented in a musical way but there was also an ideology lying behind. In this respect, it is to be noted that a well-known feature of the punk genre is that these garage bands were mainly formed by young musicians. Additionally, the predominant audience of these bands was the youth. Moreover, in this decade teenagers had become more involved with popular culture and became the target of cultural products. James Lull (1987) considers punk music to be “a reaction against mainstream forms of rock and roll music in England and the United States” (p. 235). Clinton Heylin (2005) also traces the roots of British punk to the American bands of the 1960s:

The origins of punk may be found initially in America’s post-*Pepper*⁶ underground. The main American precursors of punk were the Velvet Underground, the MC5, the Stooges, the Modern Lovers and the New York Dolls. (xi-xii)

6 The Beatles’ album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967).

Punk artists of the British movement support the idea that American bands were the blueprint of the genre. Nancy Spungen, a well-known participant of the scene, stated that punk had its origins in the United States, highlighting the musical simplicity of it:

- 40 Punk started in the sixties with garage bands like the Seeds and Question Mark and the Mysterians. Punk is just real good basic rock & roll, with really good riffs - it's not like boogie rock. It's not very embellished, intricate music -it's not with the synthesizers, it's just real basic fifties and early sixties rock. (qtd. in McNeil & McCain, 1996: 260)

When it comes to the transmission and adaptation of the new sounds of American bands, it has been argued that the development of British punk was a result of the contact between the American and British musical culture in the early stages of the genre (Lentini, 2003: 153). In his study, Lentini highlights the importance of American bands having toured the UK during 1976, as those concerts were a direct exposure of the emerging musical genre to the British audience. The Patti Smith Group was one of the very first protopunk bands of New York to perform in the British Isles, thus becoming a direct contact between American and British audiences. It is worth mentioning that among the audience of the show there were some listeners who would later become relevant figures in the British punk scene, such as Mick Jones and Paul Simonon, members of The Clash, or Chrissie Hynde⁷, who was in constant contact with future punk British artists, as she wanted to be a part of a band. Lentini (2003) mentions the relevance that the performance by the Patti Smith Group had had on women who were inspired by the female singer, such as The Slits, who felt encouraged to form a band after having attended a concert (p. 158). The Ramones, which were formed in 1974 and became one of the most famous punk American bands to ever exist, also exerted a great influence on the future English punk bands. The Ramones first toured the UK during July 1976. Danny Fields⁸ talked about how the first contact between The Ramones and the British public became a turning point for the latter:

Our first Ramones show in England was July 4, 1976, the weekend of the Bicentennial, which I thought was metaphorically appropriate, because here it was the two hundredth anniversary of our freedom from Great Britain, and we were bringing Great Britain this gift that was going to forever disrupt their sensibilities. (qtd. in McNeil & McCain, 1996: 230)

Additionally, Fields highlights the fact that The Ramones served as inspiration for many members of the audience that were attending the concert, such as Mick Jones

7 In 1978, Hynde would become the lead singer of the popular band The Pretenders.

8 Manager of Iggy and The Stooges, MC5 and The Ramones.

and Paul Simonon, who were encouraged by them⁹. The band also inspired Mark Perry to create the first British fanzine that dealt with punk music and the punk movement (*Sniffin' Glue*). Another major event that occurred in the beginnings of British punk and helped expand the movement was "The 100s Club Punk Special", a concert with a lineup of punk artists¹⁰. It took place at the 100 Club music venue in London on the 20th and 21st of September 1976. Around 600 persons attended the concert, most of them of a young age (Lentini, 2003: 161).

Malcolm McLaren was also a key figure in the emergence of the British punk scene. In 1971, McLaren and Vivienne Westwood opened a boutique in King's Road and named it Let It Rock¹¹. At the beginning, the clothes sold in the store were inspired by the Teddy Boy subculture, but later on the boutique played a central role in the creation of the Sex Pistols and it would become an ever-present referent in punk fashion henceforth. At the beginning of 1975, McLaren began to manage the New York Dolls, and even though his involvement with the band only lasted for a few months, as they disbanded in spring 1975, McLaren returned after that to England and began to work in a new musical project. Paul Cook and Steve Jones, who were habitual customers of the boutique, had formed a band called The Strand in 1973. The following year, Glen Matlock, who had been working in the shop as an assistant, joined the project too and so would Malcolm McLaren, who became the band manager of the band in 1975. John Lydon, soon to be known as Johnny Rotten, became the front man after doing an audition in the SEX boutique and the band was soon baptized as The Sex Pistols.

9 In the words of Danny field: "Mick Jones and Paul Simonon of the Clash were there [...] But Paul and Mick weren't in the Clash yet, but they were starting it. They were afraid to play until they saw the Ramones. I mean, Paul and Mick told The Ramones, 'Now that we've seen you, we're gonna be a band'. The Ramones said, 'You just gotta play, guys. You know, come out of your basement and play'. That's what we did" (qtd. in McNeil & McCain, 1996: 231).

10 The performing bands were The Clash, Sex Pistols, Subway Sect, Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Damned, Buzzcocks, Stinky Toys and Chris Spedding & The Vibrators.

11 The boutique was rebranded on several occasions: Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die in 1973, SEX in 1974, Seditonaries in 1976 and World's End in 1980.

Chapter 04

Britain in the 1960s and 1970s: The historical background of British punk

43

4.1 The 1960s

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the United Kingdom was left in a dreadful state. Around 450,000 citizens had lost their lives because of the war, and, despite the victory of the nation, the economic consequences of the conflict were in no way positive, with the war effort costing Britain “about one-quarter of its national wealth” (Donnelly, 2005: 15). In relation to trading, the proportion of exports reduced itself to one third of the prewar levels and the national debt tripled by 1945 making Britain “the world largest debtor nation” (Donnelly, 2015: 15). Nevertheless, just like many other Western nations, England began to benefit from the post-war economic boom in the following decades. According to Hobsbawm (1994), this economic boom came to an end in the 1970s:

Yet it was not until the great boom was over, in the disturbed seventies, waiting for the traumatic eighties, that observers –mainly, to begin with, economists– began to realize that the world, particularly the world of developed capitalism, had passed through an altogether exceptional phase of its history; perhaps a unique one. (pp. 257-258)

Therefore, the 1960s in England were part of the prosperous period referred to as the Golden Age. With England witnessing an era of economic prosperity came cultural and technological advances which were to transform the lives of millions, especially those who belonged to the working classes. A key factor which strongly affected the British economy of the 1960s was the rise of wages and the increasing income of workers. As indicated by Marwick (1988):

Average weekly earnings for industrial workers rose 34% between 1955 and 1960 and 130% between 1955 and 1969; average earnings of middle-class salaried employees rose 127% between 1955 and 1969. (p. 19)

English citizens did not only benefit from the increase in wages. The prices of many technological goods not only stabilized, but even decreased:

- 44 the prices of small cars, in relation to earning power, were falling, and many products of new technology such as television sets and washing machines were, despite inflation, actually costing less. (ibid.)

When it comes to unemployment, the percentages of unemployed people during this period were significantly low in comparison to the rates of the previous decades. As indicated by Hatton and Boyer (2005) "between 1947 and 1973 the unemployment rate in Britain averaged a mere 2.1 per cent. On this key indicator, UK labour market performance was dramatically better than ever before or since" (p. 35). Both authors attribute the lower rates of unemployment during the Golden Age to "an outward shift in the labour demand curve" (2005: 55). For comparison, the unemployment rate ascended to 10.1 between 1974 and 1999, while it had scored 10.9% from 1921 to 1938 (Hatton, Boyer, 2005: 38). Moreover, in this decade, the 1960s, most of the youth belonging to the working classes tended to drop out of school when they reached the age of 15, since there was a high demand for jobs which did not require high levels of education (Donnelly, 2005: 35). Inflation rates remained significantly low and stable during most of the 1960s, slightly beginning to increase during the final years as a result of the devaluation of the pound that took place in 1967.

The rise in wages and the low unemployment rates developed into "affluence" and "consumerism", considered as two fundamental factors of the economy of the 1960s in Britain (Marwick, 1988: 19). This shift also implied a significant change for working-class individuals, who were now able to acquire goods which in the past had been unaffordable for them. Furthermore, the 1960s brought years of technological advances, certainly encouraged by a society which was now able to purchase fancier goods. Televisions, for instance, were now indispensable elements in every English household. By 1961, around 75% of the British homes owned a television set, something exceptional in the 50s. This percentage jumped to 91% by 1971 (Marwick, 1988: 19). In 1967, color images were first broadcast by BBC2. Two years later, "BBC1 and ITV were regularly broadcasting in colour" (1966: BBC tunes in to colour, 1966). The same applied to car-owning. At that time, most UK families were able to purchase a vehicle, as a result of the decreasing car prices. As stated by Donnelly (2005):

In 1961 less than one-third of all households owned a car, but by 1966 this had risen to 49.2 per cent of English and Welsh households, with ownership among the professional and managerial classes as high as 75 per cent. (Donnelly, 2005: 31)

The number of car owners jumped "from 5,650,000 in 1960 to 11,802,000 in 1970" (Donnelly, 2005: 31). Households began to be filled with refrigerators, washing machines and other electrical gadgets. These items, which had been considered as luxuries in the past decade, were now affordable by most families. Additionally,

as pointed out by Elewmanu (2017), “the labour-saving domestic appliances like washing machines, telephones, record players and television sets means people become detached from others to enjoy some privacy and fuelled individualism” (pp. 17-18). These examples are indicators of how the standards of living of most of the English population rose during these golden years.

But the prosperity of the 60s was not only reflected in its economy. When talking about this decade, academics often refer to it as an era which brought a cultural revolution. To begin with, a great part of the “baby boomers”¹² came of age in this period, a generation that not only had not endured two world wars and an economic depression but did grow up during the golden years of economic expansion (Donnelly, 2005: 1). For Marwick (1998), the 1960s witnessed a cultural revolution in “material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships, and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people” (p. 15). In his article “The 1960s. Was There a ‘Cultural Revolution’?” (1988), Marwick enumerates certain key factors that contributed to this revolution. Some of these factors have already been mentioned, such as the importance of affluence and consumerism originated due to the economic prosperity or the visibility that the working class achieved in this period. It is important to mention, however, the relevance acquired by the youth in this decade, for the generation of teenagers and young adults which were coming of age were born free of armed conflicts. They not only did not have to deal with the tragedies of war but were also too young to notice the appalling state in which the country had been left in the aftermath of the Second World War. For Donnelly (2005) “Sixties Britain was obsessed with youth and the icons of youth culture” (p. 3). A first indicator of this youth revolution was the ending of the National Service in 1960, which meant that men from 18-21 would no longer have to abandon their lives to serve in the armed forces for 18 months, guaranteeing them more free time to participate in the cultural world. Labor demand and low unemployment rates allowed many teenagers to engage in the working life as many left schools at 15 and had no trouble in being hired for unskilled jobs (Donnelly, 2005: 35). Despite not involving themselves in mortgages or acquiring white goods, these young men and women did spend a great part of their wages on “leisure, luxury items and cultural markers” (ibid.). Thus, the culture industry began to target young audiences, knowing that they were now able to engage economically in it. Additionally, as Donnelly (2005) remarks, “not only were young people more wealthy [sic], there were simply more of them. The post-war baby boom of 1945–8 meant that a bulge of teenagers appeared in the population in the late fifties” (p. 35).

The young generation found in clothing, music and pop culture a way of expressing their identities. The fashion scene gained prominence during this decade, led by figures such as Mary Quant, André Courrèges or John Stephen, together with the

12 Referring to the Baby Boom generation, those who were born between 1946 and 1964.

“development of cheaper synthetic materials that could be mass-produced, dyed in different colours and turned into off-the-peg outfits made the latest designs more accessible” (Donnelly, 2005: 23). This would consequently allow the youth to acquire clothing more easily and turn it into a central element of their personal identities, as happened with the invention of the mini skirt, which was adopted by the female population as a symbol of the sexual liberation that took place in this decade.

As regards music, it became the pivotal element in the lives of many youngsters whose income allowed them to purchase their own record players, as well as singles and albums of their favorite musicians (Donnelly, 2005: 35). The radio and television made it easier for music to be spread all over the country with the creation of TV programs such as *Top of the Pops* (1964), a weekly show which included musical performances of the most successful musicians of the time, *Ready, Steady, Go!* (1963) or *The Beat Room* (1964). In radio, BBC Radio One began its broadcasting in 1967, becoming one of the most successful radio stations to broadcast pop music. In the music charts, pop and rock'n'roll music dominated the scene and, in opposition to the 1950s, most of the artists were from the UK. This decade also brought music diversity as “New Commonwealth immigration brought with it the sounds of Jamaican ska – a fusion of Jamaican and American R&B” (Donnelly, 2005: 46). The top-selling single artist of the decade was Cliff Richard, and “*She Loves You*” by The Beatles became the top-selling UK single between 1960 and 1969 (Donnelly, 2005: 43). Regarding the lyrics of these songs, a great majority of the most popular ones dealt with teen romance (Donnelly, 2005: 45). Additionally, the 1960s saw the birth of the British Invasion, a cultural phenomenon beginning in 1964¹³ in which British rock'n'roll music took over the charts and radios of the United States. Bands such as The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Pink Floyd or solo artists like David Bowie dominated both countries. Therefore, the UK was not only becoming a major economic power, but was also turning into a major culture-exporting country, which began to spread its art to the rest of the western world (Wells, 1987: 77). When studying the reasons that led to the British Invasion, Grossman indicates that “the consumer boom and cultural ferment in Britain and the fashionability of rock in a newly frivolous atmosphere contributed to the expansion” (qtd. in Wells, 1987: 66). Wells theorizes about Great Britain being a new culture center, “colonizing the rest of the world”, as the main cause for this musical phenomenon (1987: 67). As he also pointed out, this invasion “had a profound influence on American popular culture” and it caused British music to have a “relatively permanent presence in the popular music market” (1987: 65).

Following the youth revolution of the 1960s, it is fundamental to address the question of the rising popularity of subcultures, to which many young people began to adhere.

13 According to Bill Harry (2004) the British Invasion began “with the American release of ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand’, which topped the U.S. charts on January 25th 1964” (p. 13).

Subcultures in the UK began to emerge after the ending of the Second World War with the Teddy Boys in the 1950s, but within the next decade more subcultures were ready to take the stage. As noted by Donnelly (2005):

The other reason for society's obsession with youth was young people's growing predilection for forming highly visible subcultural groups. Youth, it appeared, had developed a rebellious autonomy by the early sixties which it expressed through leisure. (p. 1)

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Hippies, mods, rockers or skinheads were the most prominent subcultures that dominated the 1960s in Britain. Individuals belonging to any of these communities were characterized by sharing a similar appearance in clothing and hairstyles, which distinguished them from the *status quo*, such as the mods, who "favoured Church's hand-made brogues, silk ties and mohair suits" (Donnelly, 2005: 38). Most of the persons belonging to subcultural communities also had in common a certain belief system, such as the hippies and their strong anti-war sentiment.

Together with the youth revolution came also a "transformation in sexual attitudes and behaviour" (Marwick, 1988: 19). It has been mentioned previously how the mini skirt became a symbol of the liberation of women in the Britain of the 1960s, but we find further evidence in this decade of Britain being led to the so-called sexual revolution too. In 1961, the pill arrived in the UK, granting many women the opportunity to reduce the chances of unwanted pregnancy. Abortion was legalized in 1967 under certain conditions (in England, Wales and Scotland). Reforms were also applied to the divorce laws as an act was passed in 1969 where the "no fault" divorce was introduced, based on the concept of an "irretrievable breakdown", thus making it easier for couples to file for divorce (Donnelly, 2005: 121). A turning point also came in 1967, when the Sexual Offences Act was passed. This act decriminalized homosexuality, and homosexual acts carried out by men above 21 years old were legalized. Censorship also began to lose power in this decade. Theatre censorship was abolished in 1968 in the Theatres Act 1968 and "censorship of books, plays and films was liberalised, if not abandoned entirely"¹⁴ (Donnelly, 2005: 116).

Due to the epoch-making changes that took place in the 1960s mentioned before, the decade has been catalogued by many as an era of "permissiveness". Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher criticized the decade in a 1982 speech by stating that "We are reaping what was sown in the sixties... fashionable theories and permissive claptrap set the scene for a society in which the old virtues of discipline and restraint were denigrated" (Thatcher, 1982).

¹⁴ In 1960, the uncensored publication of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which contained sexual scenes and obscene words, brought about the so-called Trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover. The publishing house, Penguin Books, was taken to trial for going against the Obscene Publications Act 1959. However, the publishing house was eventually acquitted, and the second edition of the book was released the following year, placing British society one step ahead towards freedom of speech.

In sum, the 1960s were indeed a decade of change in most aspects of the British society. Economically, the country and a great part of its population flourished thanks to the postwar economic boom, which not only produced technological advances but also brought individuality and optimism. Just like all eras, the 60s also had their hard times, such as the devaluation of the pound in 1967 and the rising racism by the final years of the decade, but it was necessary for us to expose the bright side of the decade in order to have a better understanding of what came next, an era where the prosperity and optimism of the 1960s was about to die down and cause a wave of discontent in the 1970s.

4.2 The 1970s

Stagflation

The buoyant economic situation that the United Kingdom had been experiencing due to the postwar economic boom started to show signs of decline by the end of the 1960s, leading to the devaluation of the pound in 1967¹⁵. The country was, however, still in a reasonably stable economic situation, as noted by Morgan (2017):

Despite repeated balance of payments problems and the forced devaluation of the pound in 1967, the Labour government of the sixties kept things reasonably stable. Employment was high; inflation under control. Economic historians wrote of a “golden age” of the economy which lasted from 1945 to 1973. (p. 4)

Morgan agrees with Hobsbawm (1994) in cataloguing the year 1973 as a turning point in the history of British economy: “[...] the period of long-term crisis which was to characterize the two decades beginning in 1973 and reached a climax in the early 1980s” (p. 244). As expected, the UK was no exception to the global economic recession, so the decade was defined by concerning levels of inflation, high unemployment and the 1973 oil crisis, among other issues, which led to a situation of social unrest and discontent. This combination of unfavorable economic factors gave way to the “British Disease”, a term coined in the late 1970s to address a decaying Britain. As Brittan (1978) states, “the so-called British disease is thus a mixture of different maladies—slow growth, a severe recent attack of stagflation, and accompanying political strains” (p. 245).

When analyzing the British economy of the 1970s, it is not possible for economists and historians to successfully do so without alluding to the concept of “stagflation”¹⁶,

15 In 1967, the pound was devalued 14%. The main goal of this devaluation was to make imported goods more expensive and exported ones cheaper in order to increase the purchase of national product.

16 The term was first introduced by politician Iain MacLeod in 1965: “We now have the worst of both worlds—not just inflation on the one side or stagnation on the other, but both of them together. We have

the main term used to depict the economic scenario of this decade. The word is used to describe a financial situation where there is both high inflation and high levels on unemployment, added to a slowdown in economic growth.

Inflation

The inflation rate of the pound had begun to alarmingly increase by the beginning of the decade, soon after the devaluation of the pound in 1967. As Brittan (1978) states, between 1949 and 1967 “there was little out of the ordinary in the UK macroeconomic experience” (p. 248) since the levels of inflation in Britain did not differ much from the other twenty-four countries belonging then to the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). However, it was only after the devaluation of the sterling that the inflation rates started to alarmingly increase (Brittan, 1978: 248). The graph below shows how critical inflation rates were in Britain in the 1970s.

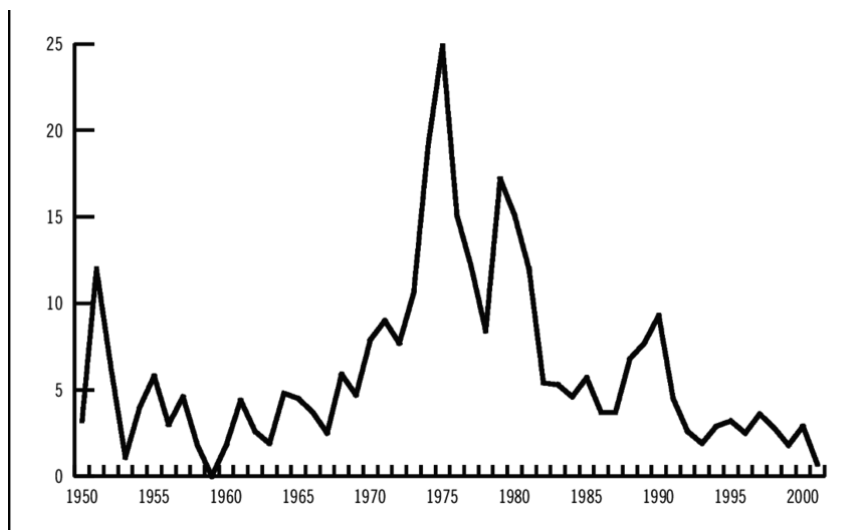


Figure 1: Inflation rates in Britain from the 1950s to the 2000s (Budd & Rodrik, 2002)

The Conservative Party stated in their 1970 election’s manifesto that “Britain now faces the worst inflation for twenty years. This is mainly the result of tax increases and devaluation” (Conservative Party, 1970). In the manifesto of the 1974 elections,

a sort of “stagflation” situation. And history, in modern terms, is indeed being made” (qtd. in Nelson & Nikolov, 2004: 8).

the Tory government paid much more attention to the issue of inflation, this time targeting wage increases as the main culprits, and paying special attention to the pay rises that had been achieved as a result of the pressure exerted by trade unions:

50 But we have also had to deal with the inflation which comes as a result of excessive wage increases here at home. For more than two years we tried strenuously to deal with this problem by voluntary means. In particular we asked trade unions and employers to join us in working out a voluntary scheme to prevent one group of workers using its industrial strength to steal a march over those working in other industries [...] The trade unions could not agree with us on a voluntary means of achieving them, and we had to ask Parliament for statutory powers over pay and prices to hold the line against inflation. (Conservative Party, 1974)

Anthony Barber, who was the British Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1970 to 1974, named the high interest rates as one of the causes for inflation (Nelson, 2004: 32). The financial situation only worsened as soon as the country was hit by the 1973 Oil Crisis, which heavily contributed to the rampant inflation that was to come in the following years, when inflation levels hit a peak of 25% in 1975. In 1976, the value of the pound fell below \$2 for the first time ever (Lynch, 2008: 103).

In order to curb inflation, the Conservative government (1970-1974) led by Edward Heath decided to impose a number of economic measures, such as boosting aggregate demand or assigning the control of inflation to other devices (Nelson, 2004: 32). By November 1972, the government tried to control inflation by indirectly regulating wages as well as the price of goods (Nelson, 2004: 32). Later, the Labour government, headed by Harold Wilson (1974-1976) and later by James Callaghan (1976-1979), followed the steps of the Tory government and continued to add regulations to stop inflation. Wilson stated in 1974 that the Government would try to curb inflation "by the rents freeze. By holding mortgages down. By food subsidies. By a much tighter control over food prices in the shops" (qtd. in Nelson, 2004: 33). Additionally, in 1978, Labour imposed a wage limit of 5%, which not only did not do much to lower inflation but had devastating consequences for the relations between the government and trade unions.

Despite all the efforts to curb inflation and the signs of a slight decrease in the inflation rates in 1978, the mid and final years of the decade were characterized again by alarming inflationary levels that had very negative in other areas of the British economy. The decade ended with an inflation rate of 20%.

Unemployment

One of the direst consequences of the inflation experienced in Britain in the decade 1970- 1980 was unemployment. In the words of Brittan (1978)

There is the simultaneous occurrence of high unemployment, high inflation, and incipient protectionism that has affected most Western countries in the 1970s, which is known by the ugly word "stagflation" and which has put a check to many hopes after a generation of postwar prosperity. (p. 245)

Hatton and Boyer (2005), who carried out some research focusing on the unemployment levels in the UK during and after the Golden Age, state that while this prosperous period was characterized for having the lowest levels of unemployment in Great Britain (averaging 2.1% between 1947 and 1973) what happened in the 1970s implied a complete rupture from the previous years (Hatton and Boyer, 2005: 51). As they note:

the turbulent decade of the 1970s is often seen as a watershed between the low unemployment era of the golden age and the return to high equilibrium unemployment more characteristic of the interwar period. (p. 51)

Bearing in mind the average rate of unemployment in the previous years (50s, 60s), the UK was experiencing for the first time in decades its highest number of unemployed people. By 1971, the total number of inactive citizens rose to 523,000. Yet, by January 1972, the UK had for the first time since the 1930s a total of 1,000,000 of jobless persons (Coates, 1982: 143). These alarming rates led to protests among citizens, with the International Socialists launching the Right to Work campaign, which gathered thousands of people in demonstrations expressing their discontent towards the high levels of unemployment. In 1974, unemployment levels fell to 545,000. This decrease did not last long, as "under the Labour government unemployment then rose steadily to reach 1,370,000 by September 1977, and remained at much that level through to 1979, before rising again (to over 2,500,000) by the middle of 1981" (Coates, 1982: 143).

Among the factors that had an impact on the rise of unemployment rates all over the UK, deindustrialization was a major one. According to Coates (1982), the number of workers in the manufacturing sector fell by 1,200,000 between 1961 and 1975 (p. 143). Consequently,

politicians in the late 1970s needed to organise the creation of an extra 1,300,000 jobs merely to achieve a relatively modest reduction in unemployment (to 800,000); and this in its turn required the achievement of a 5 per cent rate of growth in the economy as a whole between 1978 and 1981 that was literally beyond the capacities of governments of either party. (ibid)

To make things worse, the UK was undergoing the deindustrialization process at a quicker pace than the rest of the countries belonging to the OECD (ibid.). Martin and Rowthorn (1986) conclude that "since the late 1960s, and especially since the early 1970s, British manufacturing has become caught in a process of progressive

and accelerating contraction" (xv). The authors also attributed the dramatic fall in industrial employment to the sterling crisis of the late 1960s (p. 2). Hudson (1986), on his part, states that "by the later part of the 1970s, as the pace of de-industrialisation quickened and unemployment expanded, opposition to plant closures began to emerge" (p. 200). A serious problem that accompanied deindustrialization and the loss of jobs was that "the rising unemployment of these decades was not merely cyclical but structural. The jobs lost in bad times would not come back when times improved: they would never come back" (Hobsbawm, 1987: 413).

The IMF Crisis

The UK of the 1970s was sunk in an economic recession which flooded the country with such a pessimism that even Prime Minister, James Callaghan did not hesitate to share a discourse of despair:

We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting Government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists, and that insofar as it ever did exist, it only worked by injecting a bigger dose of inflation into the economy, followed by a higher level of unemployment at the next step. Higher inflation followed by higher unemployment. That is the history of the last twenty years. (qtd. in Buttonwood, 2013)

In the previous years, the national deficit was too high, and inflation had been lowering the value of the sterling. That is why, in 1976, Chancellor of Exchequer Denis Healey began negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to obtain a loan of 3 billion pounds. The loan was granted, but in exchange the country was compelled to reduce its public expenditure (Lynch, 2008: 103). Lynch (2008) states that "by 1979, the government, in line with the IMF demand, had reduced its spending program by £3 billion. This helped to stabilize the financial situation but at the cost of increased unemployment which reached 1.6 million in 1978" (p. 104). Brittan (1978) adds that "Although the lag in the British growth rate is historically deep-seated, the country's special troubles on the inflation and unemployment fronts are, by contrast, recent" (p. 247).

The Oil Crisis

In 1973, the UK and a great part of the western world were hit by what is known as the 1973 Oil Crisis. It was a turning point in the decade caused by an oil embargo carried out by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), and it had a massive impact on the British economy, contributing decisively to the end of

the Golden Age. The oil embargo emerged as a result of the Yom Kippur War¹⁷, the reason behind the oil embargo lying in the differences between the participants of the war and their respective supporters. The countries that belonged to the OAPEC¹⁸ supported Egypt in the conflict. As a consequence, the nations which sided with Israel were about to have their oil supplies cut down¹⁹ and it must be remembered that by 1973 around a 36% of the oil supplies came from the Middle East (Schumacher, 1985: 21). Carrying out an oil embargo at that time would imply a radical shift in the way those countries imported and administered their oil. As stated in the *Oil and Gas Journal* (December, 1973), the year 1973 became a “turning point in history for the lay man as well as for the oil man, for neither will experience the same energy lifestyle again” (qtd. in Schumacher, 1985: 21). The OAPEC initiated the embargo in late October, using oil as a “political weapon” (Schumacher, 1985: 25), and it ended in March 1974, lasting only 5 months. Despite its short duration, its consequences were long lasting and impactful.

The United Kingdom did not directly suffer the oil embargo, as it was regarded by the OAPEC as a friendly nation²⁰. Nevertheless, the fact that the OAPEC had excluded the UK from their actions was not sufficient for the country to not be affected. Actually, the Oil Crisis had devastating consequences for the UK and its economy due to the close relationship the country had with embargoed nations when it came to the importation of oil. For instance, the UK heavily depended on oil imported from the Netherlands, and the fact that this nation had its oil supplies cut down provoked a “domino effect” that would eventually damage the economy of the UK. In 1972, around 25% of the oil consumed by the European Economic Community came from the Netherlands (Zakariah, 2011: 97). Therefore, the embargo carried out on one of the UK’s major oil suppliers brought harmful consequences to its economy. In comparison to the 121 million tons of oil imported from the Netherlands in 1972, only 4 were to be

17 A conflict initiated on October 6th, 1973, in the Middle East involving Israel, Egypt and Syria, which culminated with the victory of Israel. Despite the fact that the war lasted only 19 days and the lack of direct participation of European states and other nations in the conflict, the Yom Kippur War implied a defining moment in the economy of those territories.

18 Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Syria, and United Arab Emirates.

19 The United States, the Netherlands, Portugal, and South Africa were among the countries to which this oil embargo was imposed.

20 The countries involved in the embargo were categorized in three different groups. In the first place, those which were friendly to OAPEC nations and supported them. Secondly, countries which were considered as neutral nations, for they did not side with any participant of the conflict (although “each Arab state had its own list of “neutral” countries which received a limited reduction, for example 5% cut to Italy, the FRG, Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and Luxemburg” (Zakariah, 2011: 96)). Lastly, countries labeled as pro-Israel such as the United States. These nations suffered a complete cut down on oil. The oil embargo would not apply to the UK, however, as the British government had maintained a friendly relationship with oil-producing nations. The president of the United Arab Emirates also claimed that “the decision to cut oil production was not directed against Britain and France who were friends to the Arab world” (Zakariah, 2011: 96). Additionally, the fact that Britain and some Arab regions had close relations because of the selling and the buying of arm supplies contributed to leaving the UK out of the embargo (Zakariah, 2011: 96).

exported to the UK during the crisis period. Prime Minister Edward Heath announced on December 3rd, 1973, that the UK had to focus on the current oil supplies and not to waste them. In addition, it was necessary to think about the future supplies in order to safeguard and save oil:

We are all of us thinking afresh about Europe's sources of energy in this critical situation. We have to make the best use of the supplies available at the present: and to plan for our future needs. Our policy is not selfish. We want to see a Western Europe less dependent for its prosperity and social progress on external sources of energy supplies, and we are prepared to work together with our partners to bring about the result. (qtd. in Zakariah, 2011: 98)

During mid-October 1973, while the war was still going on, the government decided to elaborate strategies to "protect its oil interests". These strategies were divided into short term and long-term strategies (Zakariah, 2011: 109). As regards the former:

the government re-activated a special committee called OIEC (Oil Industry Emergency Committee) on 15 October 1973. The OIEC's task was to study and prepare a report on the oil situation in Britain which would suggest action to be taken by the cabinet in the face of the oil threat from the Arabs. (Zakariah, 2011: 109)

Restrictions were imposed when it came to the use of electricity or fuel consumption, such as the Fuel and Electricity Act 1973. Speed limits or the banning of certain types of flights were among some of the measures that had to be followed to reduce oil consumption (Zakariah, 2011: 110).

The British government on its part aimed at establishing a cordial and friendly relationship with Arab countries which were oil suppliers. Most of the strategies dealt with political and diplomatic affairs between the nations and had the goal of improving their partnership, such as establishing economic links between the nations, promoting trade or providing technical assistance (Zakariah, 2011: 111). The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry stated in December, 1973 that "by creating a greater sense of partnership between the Arab world and the United Kingdom, it might help to secure oil supplies over the next few years and increase our influence with them (the Arabs)" (Zakariah, 2011: 113).

In any case, the economic consequences of the Oil Crisis were in no way favorable to the UK. The most noticeable effect of the crisis was that it contributed to the UK's falling into an economic recession and to bringing in high levels of inflation. It is no surprise that by 1974, even once the embargo had concluded, the cost of crude oil had multiplied by four (Schumacher, 1985: 25). Oil was a fundamental part of the British society, and its consumption had been increasing in the previous years. For instance, oil demand for vehicles boosted since car owning had increased drastically

during the 1960s²¹. Industrialization also contributed to oil demand. Covi (2015) mentions the low levels of oil consumption “oil consumption grew at a rate still lower, around 3.1 %, in comparison to 6.7% between 1960-1974” (p. 17). He also comments that, in just a period of three years (1972-1975), gas consumers “paid on average 57% more”, (2015: 17). Moreover, “Global economic growth slowed down to 4.0% annually till 1985, while between 1960 and 1973 it was 5.1%”. Furthermore, since oil is a substance upon which many industries depend, it was only natural that products manufactured by those industries would suffer an increase in their prices too. This was by no means positive for the British economy considering that “even though oil prices have risen dramatically, in real terms they have barely kept pace with the cost of living except for the crisis year of 1973” (Schumacher, 1985: 35).

The Golden Age was therefore certainly becoming a memory of the past. In the words of Covi (2015: 17): “the crisis brought the curtain down on the most extraordinary period of development ever recorded in advanced countries, opening the door to severe stagflation that hit the non-oil producing countries”. Schumacher (1985:35) also remarked that, after 1973, and especially after 1979, for the first time in the post- Keynesian history of the industrialized world, inflation was accompanied by recession and redundancy.

In addition to the 1973 Oil Crisis, the world was shaken by the end of the decade by the 1979 Oil Crisis that had its origins in the Iranian revolution. On this occasion, there was no embargo carried by the OAPEC nations, but the situation in Iran (one of the biggest oil exporters) provoked a decrease in the production of crude oil. Oil consumption thus declined in 7.4% within a year (Segal, 2007: 7) and, at the end of the day, the consequences of this oil crisis were similar to the ones of the 1973 crisis: inflation and a rise in prices.

In conclusion, the Oil Crisis was a critical event that contributed to the decaying and unstable situation of the economy of the UK in the 1970s, as the prosperity of the past decade faded. The recession caused by this crisis supposed a turning point in the Britain of the 70s and the inflation it brought along would serve too as background for the IMF Crisis of 1976.

Unions, Strikes and States of Emergency

The 1970s was a decade that witnessed a rough relationship between the British government and trade unions. From the very beginning of the 1970s until its final years, which were known as the Winter of Discontent, conflicts arose among the two

21 As Zakariah (2011) notes “the free world’s demand for energy increased in line with the rate of economic growth from about 1½ per cent per annum in the inter-war period to over 5 per cent per annum in the 1960s. The oil demand increased by about 7 percent per annum in 1973” (2011: 98).

parties, leading to waves of strikes, power cuts and chaos among the established governments²².

56

The beginning of the crisis

When Labour arrived in government under Harold Wilson's first term in 1964, the trade unions and Wilson's party shared wishes of cooperating together. Yet, during the final years of Wilson's first government (1964-1970), the attitude of trade unions towards the Labour Party began to shift. In January 1969, Barbara Castle, Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity at the time, proposed a white paper named "In Place of Strife: a Policy for Industrial Relations". The document had the purpose of regularizing trade union power²³. The white paper originated as a consequence of the great number of "wild-cat" strikes²⁴ that had taken place in the previous years, which had negatively affected productivity. Moreover, the Labour Party had begun to lose power as "in the period 1951 to 1964 the Conservatives had lost only 10 seats at by-elections, yet between July 1966 and November 1968 Labour lost 11 of the 17 seats it was defending" (Thorpe, 1999: 6) and "the May 1968 local elections proved disastrous: Labour, for example, lost control of Sheffield for only the second time since 1926" (ibid.). As noted by Thorpe (1999), "one way to avoid disaster might be for the government to take on, and beat, the unions, something on which the Conservative opposition under Edward Heath was now making the running" (p. 6). In the document:

its proposals were designed to reinforce the Employment Department's arbitration powers during a dispute, the capacity to impose a twenty-eight day conciliation period and to call a secret ballot vote in the event of a threat of official strike. Trade union organizations and their members were required to respect the prerogatives of the Employment Secretary under penalty of sanctions. (Gouiffès, 2007: 38)

The response of the trade unions towards the proposal was straightforward and by no means a positive one. As Morgan (1997) notes,

The first time since 1927, a government –a Labour Government– was proposing to interpose the force of the law into hitherto unfettered collective bargaining. For the TUC

22 Turner (2013) considers the industrial strife of the 1970s as one of the most memorable and infamous events that defined the decade "for there was one theme that dominated politics in the 1970s, and it was that of the untrammelled power, as it was seen in certain quarters, of the trade unions, and the terrible consequences that would surely result" (p. 77).

23 By 1964, 62.4% of the British population considered that trade unions had too much power. In 1970 73.1% thought the same (Gouiffès, 2007: 37).

24 Unofficial strikes.

. . . this was the ultimate heresy, a betrayal of hard-won union freedoms going back to the mythical heroism of the Tolpuddle martyrs. The fact that almost all the applause came from the rightwing press intensified their fury. (p. 333)

However, not only was the TUC (Trades Union Congress) heavily opposed to the white paper, but hostility also grew within members and cabinets of the Labour Party. James Callaghan, who would later become PM in 1976, was also against the implementation of the white paper. Eventually, the proposed act was never passed, yet the fight between the government and trade unions not only was nowhere near its end but it aggravated in the following years. 57

The new decade started off with the fall of the Labour Party from government. Edward Heath, leader of the Conservative Party, became the new head of the UK government. In the party's manifesto, *A Better Tomorrow*, the party claimed that they would "strengthen responsible trade unions and good management by establishing fair, up-to-date rules for industrial relations" (Conservative Party, 1970). Conservatives also addressed the high number of unofficial strikes:

We aim to strengthen the unions and their official leadership by providing some deter rent against irresponsible action by unofficial minorities. We seek to create conditions in which strikes become the means of last resort, not of first resort, as they now so often are. (ibid.)

and called for TUC's cooperation²⁵.

As noted in the manifesto, a new act which would concern trade unions was on the way. They claimed it would: "establish clear rights and obligations for unions and employers" (ibid.). And so, the 1971 Industrial Relations Act was passed, bringing major shifts in the already tricky relationship between government and unions:

Parliament would legislate on trade unions and strikes for the first time since 1927. The Heath government, extremely conscious of its comfortable parliamentary majority, despised trade union opposition even though they had caused the very serious 1969 crisis within the Labour Party. (Gouiffès, 2007: 44)

The act included measures that had already been raised in the text "In Place of Strife"²⁶, such as the regulation of unofficial strikes. Moreover, the Industrial Relations Act of 1971

25 "We welcome the TUC's willingness to take action through its own machinery against those who disrupt industrial peace by unconstitutional or unofficial action. Yet it is no substitute for the new set of fair and reasonable rules we will introduce" (Conservative Party, 1970).

26 "The text instituted administrative oversight of trade union organizations via their legal registration. It laid down immunities for union representatives and reinforced sanctions against any individual responsible for a wildcat strike, with the creation of a specific jurisdiction (National Industrial Relations Court, NIRC) with the power to impose criminal sanctions" (Gouiffès, 2007: 44).

enabled the state to intervene directly in important conflicts by imposing a sixty-day period of conciliation without strike (the cooling off period) or by calling a ballot on a proposal to terminate the conflict. (Gouiffès, 2007: 44)

- 58 It does not come as a surprise that these new measures would not sit well with the interests of the members of trade unions, who heavily opposed the act and were willing to fight against it. Even before the act was officially passed in August 1971, demonstrations against the Industrial Relations Act had been taking place since the intentions of launching an act that would regulate trade unions were revealed. On June 23rd, 1970, the newly elected party held its first meeting, which took place while dockers threatened with a strike (Gouiffès, 2007: 45). The strike, which had been organized to ask for a rise in wages, materialized just one month later, becoming “the first national dock strike since 1926 and involving around 47,000 dockworkers across the country” (1970: State of emergency called over dock strike, 1970). The strike led to the paralyzing of activities on British ports, forcing the Queen to declare the first state of emergency of the decade. In December 1970, another state of emergency had to be declared due to the electricians’ work-to-rule strike, which even caused “hospitals to work by candle during power strike” (Hospitals work by candle during power strike – archive, 1970, 2001). Tensions between the government and industrial entities were growing at an alarming pace, proof of which is that

Working days lost through strikes multiplied by nine between 1967 (2.8 million days lost) and 1972 (24 million). On average, more than 10 million working days were lost during his years in government, a level unknown since the end of the First World War. Four times more working days were lost because of strikes than in France or other continental Europe countries (Gouiffès, 2007: 45).

Unions were quick to react and mobilize in order to show their discontent towards the Industrial Relations Act. On March 1st, 1971, around 100,000 workers protested in London against the new act in a “kill the bill” campaign. Rallies against the bill also took place outside England, like the more than 10,000 workers who attended a march in Glasgow on March 7th, 1971.

Despite the commotion, the act was passed on August 1971 and trade unions were nowhere near ending their fight. Among the most resounding strikes of the 1970s, the two miner strikes of 1972 and 1974 had devastating consequences for the country and the coal industry. By 1971, the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) called for an increase in wages that was in line with the wage increase of the rest of industrial workers:

The NUM made its calculations and considered that it had a solid case with the accumulated arrears in miners wages purchasing power: according to NUM data, the cash wages of the miners increased by 164% from 1951 to 1971 compared with 218% in industry as a whole. Miners’ wages, 10% higher than the average ma-

nual worker's pay in 1960 were now 3% lower than the average. (Gouiffès, 2007: 48)

Consequently, in November 1971, the NUM decided to reduce coal production by 15% (Gouiffès, 2007: 49). The dispute between the NUM and the NCB (National Coal Board) intensified to the point that no possible agreement could be reached, the negotiations coming to an abrupt end on January 5th, 1972. Four days later, mineworkers launched their first national strike in 50 years, which was joined by around 280,000 workers. By then "no more than eight weeks supply for electricity production was in stock" (Gouiffès, 2007: 40), as a consequence of the reduction in coal production. 59

Miners protested by picketing and closing down all 289 mine pits in England and Wales and, within a week, the strike managed to have all movement of coal stopped (Gouiffès, 2007: 52). Moreover, the strike took place in the middle of winter, when cold temperatures raised the consumption of coal. Considering that most of the country's electricity had its origins in coal, its supplies being cut down had devastating consequences for the population. Consequently, just one month after the beginning of the strike, another state of emergency had to be declared, this time accompanied by power cuts which began the following day. These power cuts were first imposed on "industrial users" (Gouiffès, 2007: 53), forcing factories to close. From 16th February onwards, the general public had to face power cuts too "between 7am and midnight, by a rolling six or nine hours programme" (Gouiffès, 2007: 54). Mineworkers counted on the support of the public and "the miners were masters of the situation. The government had to accept almost unconditional surrender and compromise from a state of absolute weakness" (Gouiffès, 2007: 58). The pressure exerted by mineworkers had a successful effect and they reached an agreement in which they were granted a wage increase.

The Heath years did not get any rest from industrial strife, and by July 28th a national dockers strike began. It was supported by around 42,000 dockers and caused the government to declare another state of emergency, the fourth in just two years into Heath's term. The strike was held not only to protest about all the jobs that had been lost in the previous years and the ones that were going to be lost due to the containerization of ports (Turner, 2013: 80), but also because of the case of the "Pentonville Five"²⁷.

²⁷ The term alludes to five dockers who were jailed in the Pentonville prison as a consequence of their picketing. Their imprisonment caused a huge revolt among the dockers, who showed their unconditional support to the five workers until they were released from prison. The strike came to an end in August: "When the miners and the Pentonville Five had won broad support and sympathy, the sober realization began to dawn that there was a force in the land capable of inflicting serious policy defeats on democratically elected government of either colour. Henceforth union leaders were almost invariably referred to in the press as trade union barons, evoking images of medieval struggles between rival power bases..." (Turner, 2013: 80-81).

The Oil Crisis of 1973 did not only imply a turning point in Britain's economy, but also had a tremendous impact on the coal industry. Over the previous years, Britain had been relying less and less on coal as oil started becoming the main source of energy. Now that the oil income was shut down, mineworkers saw an opportunity in using the oil cut down for their benefit, as they realized that coal had again become fundamental in the lives of British people. As Gouiffès (2007) notes "the miners were more determined than ever to benefit from the circumstances favorable to energy to continue further up the hierarchy of the highest-paid workers" (p. 65). These dire economic straits were to affect negatively all the industrial sectors. The NUM demanded a salary increase, as inflation had affected the miners' purchasing power. A meeting took place on October 23rd between Heath and the NUM executive committee. However, no agreement could be reached, and the wage offer was rejected (Gouiffès, 2007: 65). This lack of accord among both parties culminated with the beginning of an overtime miner's strike on November 12th, followed by the proclamation of a state of emergency on the next day.

The Three-Day-Week

By December, the situation was reaching a breaking point. The country's position, which had already been badly affected by the oil crisis, was also aggravated by the miners' strike. On December 13th, 1973, Heath commented the following on the current energetic supplies:

The ban on overtime working by the coal miners has led to a sharp fall in coal supplies to the power stations which are now running at nearly 40 per cent below the expected level and are well below normal levels of consumption. Though the electricity supply industry started the winter with good stocks of coal, those stocks are now having to be run down at the rate of about 1 million tons a week at the present rate of electricity use, even after the restrictions already imposed. [...] To conserve coal stocks my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry instructed the oil companies, on 5th December, to increase supplies of fuel oil to the power stations. But fuel oil supplies are also under pressure, and a still larger allocation to the electricity industry could be only at the expense of severe further cuts to other users of fuel oil. (Heath, 1973)

The unsustainable situation the country was facing left the government with no option but to release a series of drastic measures. In the first place, the use of electric consumption was restricted "in homes, in industry and in commerce" (Heath, 1973). The Government asked, "all domestic consumers to restrict the use of electricity for space heating in the home to one room, and then only if the householder has no other form of heating available" (ibid.). From 31st December onwards, the country had to endure the Three-Day-Week, referring to the fact that electricity supplies would be limited thenceforth to three days per week.

Television broadcasting was also limited. As Heath indicated, *BBC Television* and other TV services had to stop their broadcasting at 10:30 pm, with the exception of Christmas and New Year's Eve (ibid.). Heath called for public responsibility by asking civilians to save as much electricity as possible

by keeping rooms at lower temperatures and heating them for shorter periods; by switching off lights and by not using electrical appliances unless absolutely necessary; by setting thermostats controlling water-heaters, refrigerators and deep-freezers at the most economical levels; by reducing lighting levels in theatres and other places of entertainment. (Heath, 1973)

On the very same day, Heath released the following statement on television warning about the distressing situation that was about to come:

As Prime Minister I want to speak to you simply and plainly about the grave emergency now facing our country. Jobs will be endangered and take-home pay will be less. We shall have to postpone some of the hopes and aims we have set ourselves for expansion and for our standard of living. (Heath, 1973)

The PM also declared that the upcoming holiday was about to be the "hardest Christmas than we have known since the War" (Heath, 1973).

Negotiations still continued between the TUC and the government, but no party succeeded. Due to the ongoing disagreement among both sides, the executive committee of the NUM arranged a voting to decide whether mineworkers should go on a full strike. Results were announced on February 4th, when a clear majority (81%) voted in favor of the strike (Gouiffès, 2007: 70). The strike began on February 10th and developed more peacefully than the previous one. Moreover, the miners still counted with more public support than the NCB (Gouiffès, 2007: 69). Additionally, the success of the 1972 strike had boosted the mineworkers' confidence in the chances of getting what they asked for.

Amidst the industrial strife, Edward Heath called for a general election on February 7th under the slogan "Who governs Britain". The election was set for February 28th despite the Conservative Party still having 18 months left in power. On a meeting, the Prime Minister warned the audience about the dangers of the industrial strife, targeting it as a threat to the future of the country:

Only one thing can threaten our future. This is our continued tragic record of industrial strife. We can't afford the luxury of tearing ourselves apart anymore. This time the strife has got to stop. Only you can stop it (qtd. in Shuster, 1974).

Both parties included in their manifestos a reference to their attitude towards the industrial issue and the measures that would help solve the problem. In *Firm Action for a Fair Britain*, the Conservative Party addressed the matter in a section named

“The Danger from Within” where the industrial strife was brought up by addressing the issue of inflation²⁸. The Conservatives recalled the past years and the prosperity the country had enjoyed in the previous decades, which faded away at the beginning of the 1970s:

Until the present crisis hit the country, the living standards of the British people, since we took office in 1970, had been rising more than twice as fast as they did during the period of the former Labour administration. (Conservative Party, 1974)

In *Let us work together – Labour's way out of the crisis*, the Labour Party condemned the Tories for their wage-control policy and expressed their wish for working on a social contract together with the TUC²⁹.

The 1974 election concluded with Labour obtaining 301 seats in opposition to the 297 earned by the Tories and a hung parliament, with no party achieving an absolute majority. On March 4th, Heath resigned after not having been able to form a coalition government with the Liberal Party, leaving his mandate of recurring states of emergency and several strikes behind. As a result, Harold Wilson became once again the Prime Minister. Yet, the hung parliament would remain until October of the same year.

The miners' strike ended on March 6th after having accepted the 35% pay rise offer presented by the Labour Party. Mineworkers “accepted weekly pay rises ranging from £6.71 to £16.31”, an offer which was worth “more than double the figure on offer under Edward Heath's government” (1974: Miners' strike comes to an end, 1974). The Three-Day-Week concluded on the following day, finally allowing life to return to normal again after weeks of power and energy cuts, the miners emerging victorious once more under the new Labour government.

Wilson's and Heath's parties confronted each other once again in the general elections of October 10th, 1974, after Wilson had called for a general election with

28 “The manifesto blamed the wage increases for the increase of inflation, but we have also had to deal with the inflation which comes as a result of excessive wage increases here at home [...]. For more than two years we tried strenuously to deal with this problem by voluntary means. In particular, we asked trade unions and employers to join us in working out a voluntary scheme to prevent one group of workers using its industrial strength to steal a march over those working in other industries”. (Conservative Party, 1974).

29 The party established a series of measures that they would impose if they were to govern:

- (i) Abolish the PAY BOARD apparatus set up by the Tories.
- (ii) Repeal the INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT as a matter of extreme urgency and then bring in an Employment Protection Act and an Industrial Democracy Act, as agreed in our discussions with the TUC, to increase the control of industry by the people.
- (iii) Establish a standing ROYAL COMMISSION to advise on income distribution, both earned and unearned, with particular reference to differentials and job evaluation.
- (iv) Establish a non-governmental CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION SERVICE, with the task of tackling industrial disputes at both national and local level (Labour Party, 1974).

the goal of obtaining a majority government. He later became Prime Minister again. The government's relationship with the trade unions under Wilson's term seemed to become peaceful for the first time in the new decade, and between 1975 and 1978 the number of strikes was not even close to the ones carried out under the Heath government (Gouiffès, 2007: 85). The 1971 Industrial Relations Act that had caused so much trouble was repealed when the Labour Party introduced the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act of 1974, as they had assured in their manifesto. A Social Contract was established between the government and the TUC. In February 1975, the miners accepted the 35% pay offer (1975: Miners set for 35 per cent pay rises, 1975).

Finally, during the mid and final years of the decade, trade union membership reached 13 million British workers. Unsurprisingly, 4 out of 5 British citizens considered that trade unions had too much power (Gouiffès, 2007: 85-86)³⁰.

The Winter of Discontent

In 1976 Harold Wilson resigned as Prime Minister and James Callaghan occupied his position in the British government. Conflict arose again because of the income policy that had been implemented in order to try to curb inflation. It was no surprise that trade unions were completely opposed to this plan. Nevertheless, Callaghan carried on with it.

Therefore, unions did not feel that they had to adhere by the incomes policy (Martin López, 2014: 61). These factors aggravated the industrial strife and served as background to the series of events that took place in the winter of 1978-79, which became known as the Winter of Discontent³¹. The term alludes to the large series of strikes that took over Britain during the coldest winter in 16 years. The turmoil began on September 22nd, when a strike broke at the Ford company³². The strike lasted 8 weeks and, despite the incomes policy, Ford workers were granted a 17% wage increase³³. The road haulage strike began soon after, in January 1979, with

30 On July 25th, 1977, *The Sun* stated in a headline: "Move over Jim, it's Jack Jones and his men who are really in charge" (Martin López, 2014: 80).

31 The term was coined by Larry Lamb, editor of *The Sun*, referencing Shakespeare's *Richard III* opening line.

32 The strike was supported by the Transport and General Workers' Union, with employees demanding a wage increase due to the high profits the company had obtained through the year. Their demands rejected the 5% established salary increase (Martin López, 2014: 75). This limit that was seen as reasonable by 66% of British people (Martin López, 2014: 81).

33 Callaghan would later think of the outcome as "the heaviest blow which did so much to determine the course of events in the winter of 1978" (Callaghan, 1987: 534). Strikes followed in many public sectors. As noted by Martin López (2014):

the success of the strike in November had profound implications for workers across Britain. Ford workers had shown themselves able to both defeat a multinational company *and* the national government on wage policy (p. 84).

lorry drivers asking for salary rises. This strike caused the press to publish alarming headlines, such as the *Daily Mail's* "Lorry Men threaten Food Supplies, New Strike Could Halt Britain" causing many to go panic-buying in fear of a lack of supplies (Martin López, 2014: 95-96). Amidst the turmoil, the Prime Minister was on the other side of the Atlantic, in Guadeloupe, where he had traveled to attend a political meeting. The press did not lose time in condemning the PM by contrasting Callaghan's presence in a Caribbean island with England's facing a wave of strikes in the coldest winter in years. *The Sun* wrote: "Britain could well be on the brink of a disaster that will make Ted's three-day-week seem like a golden age [...] Meanwhile Jim yawns lazily on his tropic isle" (qtd. in Turner, 2013: 264). The *Daily Mail* (January 8th, 1979) commented: "Britain under siege [...] but 4,000 miles away Callaghan enjoys the sun, dear Jim, we're glad to see you're having a good time, thought you'd like to know how we've been getting on over here" (qtd. in Martin López, 2014: 97). When the Prime Minister returned on January 10th, dozens of journalists had been waiting at Heathrow airport to learn the thoughts the PM had on the crisis. Callaghan commented: "I don't think other people in the world would share the view [that] there is mounting chaos".

Moreover, a press member asked the PM what he thought about the "mounting chaos" that was taking place in the country because of the strikes, to which Callaghan responded "Please don't run down your own country by talking about mounting chaos. If you look at it from outside, you can see that you are taking a rather parochial view. I do not feel that there is mounting chaos" (Martin López, 2014: 97-98). His words caused indignation among listeners leading to *The Sun's* famous headline "Crisis? What Crisis?: Rail, lorry, jobs chaos -and Jim blames the Press" (January 11th, 1979)³⁴. The conflict continued and strikes in other sectors broke out³⁵. Press headlines reflected the problematic situation of the country and portrayed images of streets filled up with trash³⁶.

January 22nd became a "Day of Action" amongst public sectors where "an estimated 1.5 million public sector workers took part in Britain's largest single day of industrial action since the General Strike of 1926" (Hay, 2009: 545). These workers protested against the 5% pay limit and the unions demanded "a £60 minimum wage for manual workers and a 35-hour week" claiming that "their pay was falling behind that of their private sector counterparts" (1979: Public sector strike paralyzes country, 1979). Negotiations between the government and unions began soon after and continued until February 14th, as both parties reached an agreement where inflation would be fought without any wage restraint. The Winter of Discontent ended with the loss of

34 It must be noted that the media exaggerated and extrapolated certain cases to the whole country (Martin López: 2014: 125-126).

35 Gravediggers, rubbish collectors, or National Health Service workers, among others, started strikes.

36 The *Daily Mail* published a headline following the gravediggers strike claiming that "They won't even let us bury our dead". (*Daily Mail*, February 1st, 1979).

29 million working days. Moreover, the event affected negatively the perception that the main public had towards unions and strikers, in opposition to the previous years, when most Britons supported them. Now, 81% of British citizens considered that unions were too powerful and even union members (69.4% of them) thought the same. Strikes were regarded as the main issue of the country by half of the British population (53%), and 61% of them considered that unofficial strikes should be punished by law, making them illegal (Gouiffès, 2007: 100-101).

The rise of Margaret Thatcher

After Edward Heath's resignation and defeat in the General Elections of 1974, the Conservative Party held a leadership election on February 1975. In the first ballot, Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher obtained most of the votes. Despite Thatcher's victory, a second ballot was required where Thatcher faced William Whitelaw and other candidates. She emerged victorious and Thatcher became the leader of the Conservative Party and leader of the opposition. Callaghan and Thatcher fought for the head of the UK government in the elections of May 1979, as Callaghan had asked the Queen to dissolve parliament due to a motion of no confidence. Thatcher emerged as the new Prime Minister. She would remain in office for eleven years. Regarding the industrial strife, her term is well-remembered for the turbulent relationship between the government and the trade unions.

In the *Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1979*, Thatcher's party devoted part of the document to addressing their views towards trade unions. The Conservative Party condemned the Labour Party for having allowed trade unions to achieve too much power

... by heaping privilege without responsibility on the trade unions, Labour have given a minority of extremists the power to abuse individual liberties and to thwart Britain's chances of success. One result is that the trade union movement, which sprang from a deep and genuine fellow-feeling for the brotherhood of man, is today more distrusted and feared than ever before [...] We cannot go on, year after year, tearing ourselves apart in increasingly bitter and calamitous industrial disputes. (Conservative Party: 1979)

At the same time, the party showed their wish to limit the agency of unions in order to bring economic prosperity back. One of the party's tasks was "to restore the health of our economic and social life, by controlling inflation and striking a fair balance between the rights and duties of the trade union movement" (ibid.). To achieve that end, the party proposed changes which would reduce strikes, call for responsible pay, bargaining or regulating picketing among other measures (ibid.). Moreover, the manifesto brought back the events of the Winter of Discontent, targeting Labour as the main cause for it:

The crippling industrial disruption which hit Britain last winter had several causes: years with no growth in production; rigid pay control; high marginal rates of taxation; and the extension of trade union power and privileges. Between 1974 and 1976, Labour enacted a “militants” charter” of trade union legislation. It tilted the balance of power in bargaining throughout industry away from responsible management and towards unions, and sometimes towards unofficial groups of workers acting in defiance of their official union leadership. (Conservative Party: 1979)

Thatcher’s party benefitted from these events, as Labour had now also experienced one of the major industrial strife problems of the decade and the public opinion towards trade unions was shifting to a more negative outlook. In 1985, Thatcher referred to that Labour term in the following way:

Do you remember the Labour Britain of 1979? It was a Britain – in which union leaders held their members and our country to ransom; – A Britain that still went to international conferences but was no longer taken seriously; – A Britain that was known as the sick man of Europe; – And which spoke the language of compassion but which suffered the Winter of Discontent. (qtd. in Martin López, 2014: 8)

Conservatives had previously planned on cutting down the power of trade unions with the Stepping Stones report, (1977) written in the aftermath of the Grunwick dispute³⁷ which, according to Dorey (2014),

intensified the growing hostility towards unions in the Conservative Party and provided a clear focal point for anti-union sentiment [...] it is no coincidence that it was from 1977 onwards that various groupings in the party were tasked with examining how the next Conservative government could or should deal with unions. (p. 90)

Evidence of this is mentioned in Stepping Stones: “The reality is that there is a rising tide of public feeling against the unions. Grunwick has helped this on its way. Other events will surely continue the process” (Hoskyns & Strauss, 1977: A-7). Dorey (2014) defines the purpose of this report as

both strategic and communicative, providing the Conservative Party with a framework within which to understand and publicize the nature and scale of the problems facing Britain, and thus the magnitude of the task that would confront the next Conservative government. (p. 98)

The report was well-received by Thatcher and other members of the party and, just like the manifesto of 1979, associated the problem of unions with the Labour Party: “To compete with Labour in seeking peaceful co-existence with an unchanged union

³⁷ Refers to a two-year strike (1976-1978) in the Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories.

movement will ensure continued economic decline" (Hoskyns & Strauss, 1977: S-1). For the Tories, their principal objective was "to persuade the electorate to reject Socialism, and also to reject its continued promotion by the trade union leadership, regardless of how the people have voted" (Hoskyns & Strauss, 1977: S-2) As mentioned, the aim was to get Labour voters to feel "A deep aversion to the Labour-trade union leadership link and its result, the "Sick Society"" (ibid.).

67

For Dorey (2014), the events of the Winter of Discontent only exacerbated the hostility of the Conservatives towards unions (p. 113). In this respect, Thatcher commented at the beginning of 1979 that she was "determined on one thing: the time had come to toughen our policy on union reform" (Thatcher, 1995: 423). The election of Margaret Thatcher clearly marked the beginning of a new era in the industrial relations.

Chapter 05

“Here comes the rain, another dole queue day”: Punk and unemployment

69

“We have the right to work, yes we do!” is what Gene October, leader of the band Chelsea, sang back in 1977 voicing the discontent of a generation towards the downturn in employment rates. If British punk was a result of the decaying atmosphere that Great Britain was experiencing in the 1970s, no wonder punk artists portrayed in their music and artistic expressions the discomfort caused by the high unemployment levels experienced by the British society of the time. As the punk movement was mainly made up by teenagers and young adults, for whom it was very common to leave education at sixteen and join the unemployment line (Bindas, 1993: 69), many of them were familiar with unemployment. The problem of unemployment was, therefore, a much hot and heated topic, discussed both in the lyrics of punk songs and also frequently addressed by musicians in their interviews. As stated in a *New York Times* article that looked into the origins of British punk: “Some see political content in punk rock. The fans, they say, are mostly unemployed working-class youngsters looking for something to do” (Reed, 1977: 2).

It also comes as no surprise that the title of Chelsea’s song matched the name of the campaign initiated by the International Socialists at the very beginning of the 70s, known as the “Right to Work” campaign. In Chelsea’s song, the lyrics depict the desperation of a man who addresses his right to have a job and a career opportunity, but in the end feels hopeless, not being able to figure out a future for himself: “Standing around just/For seven days a week/I won’t even get no signing on fee/I feel ripped off, yeah/Hey, what about you?/Where was I born/What are we gonna do?/But this I say/We have the right to work/We have the right to work/We have the right to work/We have the right to work/I don’t even know what tomorrow will bring/But let me tell you, having no future is a terrible thing/Standing around just waiting for a career”. In 2019, the band decided to clarify the meaning of the song in a Facebook post as there had been confusion regarding the topic of the tune. The band stated that “RIGHT TO

WORK was written about mass unemployment in the 70's, not about strikes or picket lines"³⁸.

70 Throughout the decade, participants in the "Right to Work" campaign organized marches in different cities of the country as acts of protest. In 1977, members of the punk movement joined some of these marches and offered their support to those who were campaigning.

We can see an example of this in a 1977 issue of the *Evening Post & Chronicle* which comments on the presence of around 50 punk rockers in marches demanding work in the city of Wigan³⁹. Likewise, the second issue of the fanzine *Guttersnipe* included a chronicle from the Right to Work campaign in Brighton):

This was the culmination of 5 days on the road for the RTW marches. Basically, the march was to remind the beaurocrats [sic] at the TUC that there were 1,600,000 people getting' bored n' angry on the dole and that they want something done about it NOW. (*Guttersnipe*, #2, p. 12)

Back to Chelsea's discography, the message of their song "High Rise Living" (1977) is clearly in line with the one expressed in "Right to Work": a pessimistic view of life reflecting the lack of job opportunities and a professional future: "I'm living on a high rise block/I've got no future/Got no job/Got no prospects". Similarly, the band Crass, addressed in "Fun Going On" (1979) the fact that the number of unemployed people in Britain had hit more than one million: "A million people are sitting out of work". In a similar vein, the punk band A.D. 1984 hinted at the process of deindustrialization in the vinyl sleeve of their single *Race to Nowhere* (1980), pointing out that human labor was

38 Stated by "Chelsea Punk band (Official)" on Facebook on 5th June, 2019 <https://www.facebook.com/ChelseaPunkbandOfficial/posts/right-to-work-was-written-about-mass-unemployment-in-the-70s-not-about-strikes-o/2461359290564913/>

39 Transcript of the *Evening Post & Chronicle* article: "MORE THAN 50 punk rockers led a 'Right to Work' march along the main roads of [illegible] today. In all nearly 500 angry campaigners brought traffic to a standstill as they made their way towards Wigan. Leaflets and hand outs were distributed to spectators and chants of 'We demand work' filled the air. Several open vans [illegible] accompanied the marchers carrying punk rockers and playing their music. The march stopped at [illegible] shopping concourse for dinner before moving on to Wigan tonight. [illegible] organizer Mr. Tommy [illegible] said: 'We expected about 750 [illegible] and we got a really great turnout'. At [illegible] tonight the campaigners will camp on playing fields in Montrose Avenue, Norley Hall, Wigan, before attending a punk rock concert at the Wigan Casino in the evening. One of the March organisers Mr. Ferrero [illegible] said: 'More than 100 unemployed have come up from London specially for the march. These include about 50 punk rockers who are helping us to raise cash for the campaign along the route'. It is estimated that today's march has cost more than £12,000 for the organisers. Most of the money has been raised by donations and sponsorship from over 400 trade union organisations. This afternoon [illegible] police reported that the march had gone off quietly with no problems so far".

being replaced by machines (“If robots really are going to replace us all by doing our jobs tomorrow, then, what does that make us today?”). There are also references in the single to the large unemployment figures and to those found in the dole queue: “The ranks of the unemployed swell to explosive proportions as startling new innovations in technology advance, throwing humanity into a void of redundancy [...] The once anonymous faces of the dole-queues turning into identifiable heros [sic] of LEISURE- CRIME”⁴⁰.

The term “dole queue” actually came up very often in punk rock songs of the time. The word even served as the inspiration for the name of a band which called themselves Dole Q, as some members of the band were unemployed. As stated by the guitar player of Dole Q, Frank Cornelli:

Our then lead singer Colin Ward was on the dole (Gerry and I were too young to sign on as we only just hit 15) but we used to sometimes wait in line with Colin when he signed on in Brixton, as it was on the way to the studio where we rehearsed. We also had a song called “On the Dole”⁴¹ that we used to open with at the Roxy”. (qtd. in The Skunks/Dole Q Interview 4.3.03, 2003)

Among the songs that refer to this term, we find 999’s “Chicane Destination” (1978): “Factions fight to take control/Of a million derogates on the dole”, Sham 69’s “I Don’t Wanna” (1977), where the band sings “And I don’t want no dole queue”, and “No Money” (1977) by The Boys, in which the singer faces the loss of his home due to him not having money or a job: “My landlady she says I gotta go/She says I gotta leave/I’m out a work and I’m outta the dole”. Other bands and songs which addressed the topic of unemployment and the dole queues were the band London with “Out on the Skids” (1978): “It’s pretty strange in the city/There’s a thousand ways/People spend their days/Some kids grab your pity/But’s there’s a thousand more/Who can’t find a door/So they join the queue/We’re all out, we’re all out, were all out/On the skids [...] But there are many more/Who disobey the law/So they join the queue [...] But the more you run, the less you hide/So you join the queue”, “Abusing the Rules” (1978) by Schoolgirl Bitch: “They sent me to work/But I didn’t like it/So I went home and I didn’t go back/I signed on the dole but they didn’t like it”, and Alternative TV’s “Life” (1979): “Life’s about as wonderful as a dole queue/I don’t like standing still with the tramps and layabouts/Life’s about as wonderful as a dole queue/Well I got no choice, that’s why I’m standing in a queue”. Other examples are the U.K Subs’ “B.I.C” (1979): “Here comes the rain/Another dole queue day [...] Don’t care about tomorrow/ One more dole queue day”, or The Clash’s “1977” (1977): “In 1977 I hope I go to heaven/cause I been too long on the dole”. The Clash also dealt with the issue of unemployment in their song “Career Opportunities” (1977), where Strummer sings

40 Referring to the song “Leisure Crime” (1980) also found in the vinyl.

41 The song cannot be found online or in physical copy.

about how people are told that they should accept any job opportunity that crosses their way just because it is what has to be done. The song was written because Joe Strummer had been on the dole queue for such a long time that "the Department of Employment wanted to send him to rehabilitation to give him back the confidence that they assumed the dole must have destroyed (Egan, 2018: 112). The lyrics read the following: "They offered me the office, offered me the shop/They said I'd better take anything they'd got/Do you wanna make tea at the BBC?/Do you wanna be, do you really wanna be a cop?/Career opportunities are the ones that never knock/Every job they offer you is to keep you out the dock⁴²/Career opportunities, the ones that never knock". Additionally, when the band was asked to enumerate which topics they addressed in their lyrics, The Clash's response was "career opportunities" (Church, 1976). Moreover, on some occasions, while performing live, the band would project images on the stage of the dole queue or pictures of "Right to Work" marches (Egan, 2018: 296). In an interview for *The Times* in 1976, the band confessed that "if there were jobs, we'd be singing about love and kisses". This just proves just how important the unemployment situation in England was for the origin and development of punk music, and how much it contributed to the evolution of the genre. As Strummer later explained in 1981,

I think too many songs have been written about love already, the subject's been covered. The news is new right so it's not boring, it's what's happening now and we like to play in to what's happening now. (qtd in Taysom, 2020)

Moreover, Bernard Rhodes, the band's manager, affirmed that unemployment was the essence of punk music:

I was listening to the radio in '75 and there was some expert blabbing about how if things go on as they are there'll be eight hundred thousand people unemployed by 1979... That was the root of punk. (qtd in. Bindas, 70, 1993)

The band also targeted the issue of how unemployed people are negatively viewed by society in an interview given to *Melody Maker* in 1976:

There's a social stigma attached to being unemployed. Like "Social Security Scroungers" every day in the Sun. I don't want to hear that. I cheer them. You go up north and the kids are ASHAMED that they can't get a job. (qtd in. Coon, 2012)

The Sex Pistols did not directly deal with the issue of unemployment in their songs, but they did reflect upon the situation in other contexts. In their 2000 documentary, *The Filth and the Fury* the band recalled the seventies as a time when "it was cold and miserable, no-one had any jobs, you couldn't get a job". Additionally, John Lydon, in a 2006 interview, stated that

⁴² By "the dock" we understand the place in a courtroom where someone is being tried, so the implicit idea could be that jobs are being offered to just keep people out of criminal activities.

The early seventies Britain was a very depressing place. It was completely run-down, there was trash on the streets, total unemployment [...] then you had no hope in hell and no career prospects at all. (qtd. in Robb, 2006: 97)

The allusions in punk lyrics to the labor situation in the 1970s Britain were so numerous that music critic Dave Marsh even labeled punk as (the) “Dole Queue Rock” in 1977. Singing and talking about the problems of being unemployed is one of the various facets of punk that lets us perceive the social realism of the genre. In this respect, we can appreciate a certain dichotomy in the way punk songs have targeted the topic of labor: as mentioned before, artists have dealt with the frustration of high unemployment rates and not being able to find a job, but on the other hand, punk musicians have also shown their rejection towards being employed. Many of them regarded having an ordinary job as being “victims of the system”, being subject to the *status quo* and feeling alienated. For many punk artists, not wanting to have a job was a way of showing their rejection to the establishment. In 1978 Poly Styrene, singer of the band X-Ray Spex, declared in an interview that 73

Kids don't want to just get a job in the system [...] pushed around in a factory for 20 years and get a gold watch – they've got more suss now ... Nothing much has changed since the days of serfdom except that you get paid a wage, but just enough to make you go back next week. (qtd. in Worley, 2017a: 100)

Styrene's message is pretty similar to the one conveyed in the lyrics of “I Don't Wanna” (1977) by Sham 69, where Jimmy Pursey sings “I don't wanna work in no factory [...] I don't wanna work to sixty-five/And I don't want no gold watch/And I don't want no pension book”. In “Who Gives a Damn” (1978), Sham 69 state that the only incentive to go to work is money, with the singer only being able to think about the weekend: “I don't want to go to work/But I've got to get my pay/The weekend's getting nearer/I won't go in on Monday/Anyway who gives a damn/I'm doing the best I can”. The band Crass (Essex, 1977) have also dealt with this issue in songs such as “Fun Going On” (1979), where there is also a reference to high unemployment numbers. The singer does not want to be employed, so he is viewed as someone who eludes responsibility: “A million people are sitting out of work/I never wanted in, so I'm treated as a shirk”. The message is repeated in “Reject of Society” (1978), where working in a factory is presented as something dull and alienating: “Not for me the factory floor, sweeping up from nine to four/Not for me the silly rat race/I don't see the point in any case/People ask me why I say what I do/I say to them, “Well wouldn't you?"/If you were fucked up just like me/A reject of society”. In “End Result” (1978), the song addresses those who work in factories like sheep and whose work prevents them from being able to think freely: “I hate the living dead and their work in factories/They go like sheep to their production lines/They live on illusions, don't face the realities, all they live for is that big blue sign, it says, it says.....I'M BORED, BORED, BORED, BORED”. In “I

Couldn't Be You" (1979) by the UK Subs, the lyrics address the stereotypes of life in society: getting married, getting a job and working until your 60s in order to get a pension. That programmed life does not appeal to the singer at all: "They said that you're a big boy now, it's time to set you free in the world/Don't forget that steady job, and don't forget that steady girl/They said you start at nine o'clock and then we let you out at five/And if you act very smart you get a pension when you're 65/I said I couldn't be you if you wanted me to/And you couldn't be me if I begged you to be". There are many other punk songs that can be labeled as "anti-employment", with artists rejecting the idea of having a job on account of its alienating nature. Many of these tracks pay special attention to the working routine (usually 9 to 5), which is not regarded positively. For example, Blietzkrieg Bop mention in "9 till 5" (1977) that "Working hard is just a trick" and the lyrics of 999's "I'm Alive" (1977) emphasize the maddening nature of work: "It's a sad affliction causing me restriction/This isn't what I wanted to do/I just can't believe it I would like to leave it/And get into something new/Just about to lose my mind/Working just drives me wild". Stiff Little Fingers' "Breakout" (1979) expresses the alienating nature of a routine job: "A boring job living from day to day/Do something different try to break away", and for the Cockney Rejects, working in a factory is not attractive at all as they sing "Don't wanna sing about a factory/I ain't something that appeals to me" ("The New Song", 1980). In "Someone Like You" (1980) Jeff Geggus states that he does not want to work and, as a consequence, he is called lazy: "Ain't been to work since I left school/Cos I don't wanna go/Get up at seven, get home at five [...] Most people say that I'm lazy/But I sure ain't no slob/I just wanna wait, gonna bide my time/Gonna wait for the perfect job". Skrewdriver's "I Don't Like You (1977) insists on the same topics: "Get out on the job in the morning/Time is draggin' by real slow [...] Boss is keepin' me on the go /Sick of that routine work now/Sortin's drivin' me insane/When I'm done doin' one thing/Boss says do it again/And I said... /(chorus)/I don't like you/I don't like you/I don't like you anymore /1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8! /It's time to get off work now/ Kick the boss right in the head/All the people givin' me orders/Tryin' to make me see red/I'm prayin' to break out free now/Playin' in a rock'n'roll band/Playin' that rock'n'roll music/Probably gonna get us banned". The alienating nature of humdrum jobs is also patent in Skrewdriver's "Nine till Five" (1977): "Another Monday morning, another day/Come Friday evening, when you collect your pay/(chorus)Like working from nine till five/Making a mess of my mind/I'm filing papers, in long gray drawers/And my brain's disintegrating, what a bore [...] Well I do think civil servants and bankers are real wankers /Well the boss is knockin' me, he said come on quick/Well my temper's rising, I said you make me sick". Finally, another example of punk's acid criticism towards strictly regulated job routines is found in "Solitary Confinement" (1978) by The Members: "I have got a good job/And I am working in the city/Get the tube train at 8 o'clock and 5/And a really don't know if I'm dead or alive/Living in a bedsit/ Travelling on a tube train/Working all day long/And you know no one/So you don't go out/And you eat out of tins".

As we have seen, most of these songs deal with the alienating nature of work routine and the dullness of working days that look all the same, week after week. Punk artists have also shared their views on this topic in interviews or other media, as is the case of lead singer of The Jam⁴³, Paul Weller, who mentioned in an interview that he started the band because he did not want to work: "You wake up one morning and you don't wanna go and work in a poxy factory" (qtd. in Doherty, 1979: 13). Similarly, Steve Diggle from the Buzzcocks revealed that –after having been in the music scene– he would never work again, just focus on doing artistic things (qtd. in Worley, 2017a: 97). Malcolm McLaren did not only say that unemployment should be embraced, but also compared having a job to being a slave, making an overt allusion to the "Right to Work" marches:

As far as I can see, work in its present form is nothing but slavery. There must be more to life than this. The myth that work brings purpose and meaning to your life is crap... who wants to spend fifty-or-so years of your life doing this... And to think people march for the right to do this... STAY FREE. (qtd. in Diboll, 1980: 18)

The lack of job opportunities for the youth and the persistent economic depression affected negatively the purchasing power of a great part of the British society. Naturally, punks also reflected the hardships of being broke in their lyrics. In "Government Action" (1977), Skrewdriver lamented how difficult it was for the younger generations to achieve proper living standards: "Things are changing for the British kids/Gotta be old to get money, yeah/Can't afford a drink so I gotta stay bored/Can't afford a bed, gotta sleep on the floor". The Adicts also produced some upsetting lyrics about the monotonous life and poor economic resources of Britain in the 1970s: "From day to day/We live our lives the same way/No money to hold in our hands/And no time to spend it" ("Easy Way Out", 1979)⁴⁴.

In conclusion, we can say that the issue of unemployment was central to the genesis and development of punk music and that it was one of the most recurrent topics to be found in the genre. With many punk artists being on the dole, bringing an aesthetic manifestation close to a painful reality was never so easy. Ironically, by involving themselves in the punk scene, some artists who sang about having no jobs and complained about unemployment, found themselves a job, with some even making a living out of their music. That does not take away, however, the social realism factor

43 Even though The Jam is not often considered a punk band, Paul Weller has talked about his links with the subculture and the influence that bands such as the Sex Pistols or The Clash had on his own band and career (Starkey, 2023).

44 Mentions of having no money often showed up in punk lyrics. The following songs all contain references to being penniless: "Me and My Desire" (999, 1978), "Subterfuge" (999, 1978), "Wild Youth" (Generation X, 1977) "Where's It Gonna End" (Skrewdriver, 1977), "Rip Off" (Sham 69, 1978), "Angels with Dirty Faces" (Sham 69, 1977) "Breakout" (Stiff Little Fingers, 1979), "No Money" (The Boys, 1977), "Bad Day" (The Boys, 1979), "Getting me Down" (The Rezillos, 1978), "Remote Control" (The Clash, 1977), "I Live in a Car" (UK Subs, 1979), "B.I.C." (UK Subs, 1979).

in punk: while some members of the punk scene were angry and hopeless about the employment situation, others did not shy away from protesting.

76 5.1 "If you can understand, go and join a band": The economic crisis and the DIY philosophy

As we saw in the previous chapter, the economic crisis, embodied in the 1973 Oil Crisis, inflation and tax increase, brought about higher costs of living and a reduced purchasing power for the British citizenry, representing a major blow for the economy of most households. This was reflected in numerous academic works and essays, as well as in a number of works of fiction. In 1973, for example, E. F. Schumacher published a book of essays entitled *Small Is Beautiful*, in which the effects of capitalism and mass production were discussed, coming to the conclusion that they would lead to an unsustainable economic situation. On the other hand, the BBC launched in 1975 a TV series, *The Good Life*, in which the two protagonists tried to escape the rat-race life in Britain had become for the poorer classes by becoming self-sufficient, which clearly reflected a prevailing idea in the 1970 of trying to reduce consumerism and other practices to save money. These hardships were mirrored in the punk genre by the "Do-It-Yourself" (DIY) philosophy, which predicated self-sufficiency and creativity to counterbalance the dependency on economic powers and monopolies. Most members of the punk scene were working-class kids who did not have many economic resources, and punk artists applied accordingly the DIY culture to most elements of their identity.

Punk and DIY

"This a chord, this is another, this is a third. Now form a band". This simple message appeared for the first time on the number one issue of the fanzine *Sideburns* (December, 1976). Tony Moon, who was responsible for creating an illustration about this simple concept for the fanzine captured the DIY spirit of punk and the approachability of the genre. Moon fervently encouraged readers to form a band by teaching them three major and easy chords that were, according to him, enough for a song to be created⁴⁵.

Punk was a genre that advocated for being accessible and welcoming to everybody who wanted to be a part of it. In punk music, long gone were the outstanding vocals and impossible guitar solos. From the beginning, the genre was meant to be a return

⁴⁵ Instructions on how to create a band on the basis of three guitar chords. From the fanzine *Sideburns*. https://64.media.tumblr.com/a1af2f6aa3da4642732dcc0fcde6c40e/tumblr_og2tyuX58D1qz6f4bo1_1280.jpg

to the roots of rock and roll by distancing itself from the progressive rock that was taking over the music scene with bands such as Pink Floyd or artists like Mike Oldfield.

The idea that “anyone can do it” manifested itself very early in the beginnings of the subculture with the initial public appearance of bands like the Sex Pistols, whose first concerts caught the attention of many and inspired listeners to form their own bands. Punk conveyed the impression that everybody could be part of it without many technical skills and sent a message of closeness to their audience. The fact that many songs resonated with anger and artists sang about problems that their audience shared also made it easy for the punk fans to connect with the genre and want to be a part of it.

On June 4th, 1976, the Sex Pistols played at the Lesser Free Trade Hall in Manchester with an audience of barely 40 people. In the audience there were future band members who would form their own bands after having attended the concert. Peter Hook, from Joy Division, stated that the Pistols made him believe that he was capable of doing music too: “If they can do it, we said, meaning the Pistols, then so can we. We decided to follow the rules of punk...Rule one: act like the Sex Pistols. Rule two: look like the Sex Pistols’ (qtd. in Twiss, 2022). Other bands like The Clash, Buzzcocks or The Fall were too inspired by the performance of the Pistols. Poly Styrene, from X-Ray Spex, also named the Sex Pistols as her inspiration to form the band after being in the audience during their performance in Hastings (Thompson, 2000: 730). The Raincoats, an all- female band, decided to start a band after having seen The Slits live. As Gina Birch, member of The Raincoats, mentioned:

It was as if suddenly I was given permission. It never occurred to me that I could be in a band. Girls didn’t do that. But when I saw the Slits doing it, I thought, “This is me. This is mine”. (qtd. in Thomas-Mason, 2019)

Concerts often took place in small venues, night clubs, or even street performances. In the same way, price tickets were affordable so that attending a punk concert was accessible for almost everybody. Moreover, during live performances, artists were very close to their audience, breaking the barriers between both.

Record labels

While some of the most popular punk bands had signed with huge record labels (Sex Pistols to EMI and Virgin or The Clash to CBS) other artists released their music with independent record labels in which the DIY ethos was present. Whether it was due to a lack of resources or the wish to detach themselves from big companies and their capitalist interests, many punk bands opted for having their vinyl pressed by smaller labels that followed the path of self-production. Several record labels had their origins in record shops too, as owners of record stores saw an opportunity to boost their

business. Founded in 1977 by Pete Stennett, Small Wonder Records (London) was a record label that came out of the homonym record store. The label was specialized in the punk genre and was responsible for releasing records for bands such as Crass, Cockney Rejects or the Angelic Upstarts, among others. The founder of the record store Rough Trade (London), Geoff Travis, kick-started his own record label in 1976. As Travis put it:

The model for a label was the knowledge of all the independent labels, and in particular our neighbours Chiswick Records and Stiff Records, who were already doing it in our backyard. Knowing the principles of these operations gave us the feeling we could do that as well. (qtd. in Marr, 2009)

Beggars Banquet Records (London, 1977), Zoom Records (Edinburgh, 1977) or Rondelet Records (Mansfield, 1980) were also independent record labels that originated in record shops

The DIY philosophy and its relationship with record companies was at its height when artists took a step further and bands themselves were the ones who founded their own labels and were in charge of releasing their vinyl. Crass, who had previously been on Small Wonder Records, decided to part ways with the label in 1979⁴⁶ and launched Crass Records. They did not only press their own music but also other artists'. The band was able to release their material without being questioned at all and being in total control of what they wanted to release. New Hormones record label, founded by the Buzzcocks (Manchester, 1976) and their manager Richard Boon, was also the result of punk musicians drawing onto the DIY spirit to release their music. Exploiting the DIY philosophy to the maximum, the band was able to release their EP, *Spiral Scratch* (1977), after having collected from friends and family the 500 pounds that the manufacture of the record cost. Similarly, Desperate Bicycles founded Refill Records in 1977. Step-Forward Records (London, 1977) was founded by Miles A. Copeland III (brother of Stewart Copeland from The Police) and Mark Perry (creator of the fanzine *Sniffin' Glue*).

The DIY ethos in the publishing of punk music was not something trivial. Punk music was meant to be accessible to everybody and bands spread the idea of pressing your own records among those who wanted to actively produce their music. Since not all punk bands were able to pay the costs of recording in professional studios, paying vinyl-pressing plants or hiring professional graphic designers, instructions on how to "do-it-yourself" proliferated. In 1980, the band Scritti Politti published a booklet called *How to Make a Record*, which provided exhaustive guidance on all the steps that musicians had to take in order to press and create their own vinyl records. Scritti

46 This took place because of a dispute between Small Wonder and Crass due to the lyrics of *Asylum* (1978).

Politti⁴⁷ covered all the aspects involved in the creation of a song, from recording to distributing it:

With the booklet, the band spread the DIY ethos, making record-production accessible and allowing artists or bands that wanted to take their first steps in the music industry to get freed from the tyranny of corporations and big companies. As they said:

For us D.I.Y. represents a way of becoming active and effective upon the conditions in which music is made, a way of widening the sorts of options available and entering a new set of "conversations" with a wider audience, other record makers, fanzines, the press etc. (Scritti Politti, 1980)

In 1980, the BBC produced a program named *Grapevine*. A part of one episode was dedicated to Scritti Politti, which were introduced as "one of the first groups in this country to actually make and sell a record of their own" (1980) and focused on most aspects of the aspects covered in the band's tutorial. Other bands, such as Desperate Bicycles, also featured in the program, talking about the process of creating your own vinyl record:

Well, we made a record independently basically to show that with a bit of money and some instruments and the facilities available that anybody could go ahead and make a record that didn't need the backing of a large record company or a contract or anything like that. Studios can be found in the music press price is varied depending upon what facilities they have but you can do it yourself at home on your own tape recorder. (*Grapevine*: 1980)

Desperate Bicycles often mentioned DIY practices in their art. In "Don't Back the Front" (1977), the band encouraged listeners to manufacture their own music: "No more time for spectating/Tune it, count it, let it blast/Cut it, press it, distribute it/Xerox music's here at last." In the back cover of their vinyl, they announced that

They'd [referring to themselves] really like to know why you haven't made your single yet. "It was easy, it was cheap. Go and do it (the complete cost of "Smokescreen" was £153) The medium may very well have been tedium but it's changing fast. So if you can understand, go and join a band. Now it's your turn..." (1977)

In "The Medium was Tedium" (1977) they again tell their audience to join the music scene: "If you can understand, go and join a band!/All I can say to you is this/It was easy, it was cheap/Go and do it!"

Other bands such as TV Personalities included all the details of the production costs of their single *Where's Bill Grundy Now?* (1978) in the sleeve of the vinyl in a clear attempt at disclosing the "secrets" of the industry to anyone interested in producing

⁴⁷ Even though they were not strictly a punk band, Scritti Politti followed the DIY ethos that was so characteristic of the genre.

their own works. Finally, groups like The Water Pistols also showed a remarkable awareness of the connection between the DIY movement and punk music, as is reflected in the lyrics of "Gimme That Punk Junk" (1977): "I've learned two chords/I sing out of tune/If punk rock lasts I'll make a fortune".

Fanzines

When talking about the British punk scene, fanzines⁴⁸ are a mandatory reference. These fan-made publications were a fundamental part of the spread of the genre and became a tool for punk followers to be actively involved in the scene. In opposition to official and professional music publications such as *New Musical Express*, *Sounds* or *Melody Maker*, punk fans published zines like *Sniffin' Glue*, *Ripped & Torn*, *London's Outrage* or *London's Burning*⁴⁹.

Fanzines offered an alternative coverage of the music scene of the time, talking about music genres and artists that were not widely known or did not receive much attention from the ordinary press. To do so, creators would usually produce their fanzines in A4 format and print them wherever possible. The do-it-yourself footprint of punk fanzines was perceptible on their graphic design too. Texts were commonly written with typewriters or markers, and headlines would often be made with newspaper cuttings lined together, something that would eventually become the trade mark of the punk aesthetic.

In July 1976, Mark Perry, published one of the first and best-known punk fanzines: *Sniffin' Glue*. Perry revealed that he had been inspired by The Ramones and fallen into the DIY movement inadvertently:

A kid like me would never have thought the music business was for them, but when you heard The Ramones, you thought: "I can do this". I wanted to be involved even though I wasn't a musician. [...] I had an old children's typewriter I had got for Christmas one year and used that. I crossed out in pen where I needed to and used felt tip for the headlines. It was very basic. Looking back, it looks like some kind of DIY statement but the aesthetic template for punk didn't exist at that point. I was just doing the best I could, with whatever was available. (qtd. in Wray, 2019)

Perry was able to print *Sniffin' Glue* using the Xerox machine that was available at his girlfriend's work office and the fanzine was distributed through the Rock On record stall located at the Soho Market. *Sniffin' Glue* became a quick success as Perry's initial printing of 50 copies eventually reached 10,000. After a thirteen-month run,

48 A fanzine is a makeshift publication that has been produced by fans of music, movies, literature, or other cultural artifacts.

49 *Thrills*, *Jolt*, *Anarchy in the UK*, *Vortex*, *City Fun*, *Rapid Eye Movement* or *Chainsaw* were some other fanzines that were part of the punk scene of the time.

Perry decided to put an end to the fanzine after having issued 12 numbers in August 1977.

Jon Savage, creator of the fanzine *London's Outrage*, claimed that he had been influenced by Perry's fanzine when he started his punk publication. The first issue of *London's Outrage*, in which punk fans were encouraged to create their own zines, came out in November 1976, in parallel with *Sniffin' Glue's* fifth issue: 81

All you kids out there who read "SG", don't be satisfied with what we write. Go out and start your own fanzines or send reviews to the established papers. Let's really get on their nerves, flood the market with punk writing! (Perry, 1976)

Savage also mentioned The Clash and the Sex Pistols as inspiration for his fanzine:

The aim was for me to put down my thoughts and feelings on experiencing punk rock for the first time that autumn. After seeing The Clash and the Sex Pistols I was so fired up that I felt I could do what I wanted to do, which was to write... The whole idea was to do whatever you wanted, to communicate in a totally pure form without any other meditation/editorial intervention. (qtd. in Dunn, 2016: 167)

Fanzines allowed young kids to exert agency and control. Most of them were working-class persons who found in fanzines a space in which they could choose the contents they liked and express their own opinions without any restraint. Punk zines also acted as items of resistance and anti-establishment expression. The publications were not subject to censorship as other pieces of media were. Pictures of naked bodies or swear words were not rare in the content of fanzines. Additionally, grammatical correctness was not a must, and the said lack of decorum offered a great a feeling of freedom of speech, subversion and self-empowering. Tony Moon's *Sideburns* also encouraged his audience to create their own zines: "I can't type, but I'm having a go so why don't you" (1976: 3).

When it comes to the contents of these publications, concert and music reviews were the main topics covered. Additionally, fanzine authors would have the opportunity to interview punk bands and artists. These interviews contributed to breaking the barriers between artists and fans, erasing the image of unattainable artists that had been going on with the huge super rock stars of the moment. Punk artists were approachable and gave the image of being like everyone else. That also contributed to the idea that "anyone can do it" with no need of being famous to do important things in the movement. Other than sharing opinions about what was going on in the punk scene of the time, there was also space to comment on the country and deal with political issues. In the fourth issue of *Sniffin' Glue*, Steve Mick commented that a fundamental element of the success of fanzines was that those who took part in their creation and development were experiencing the hardships of life caused by the poor economic situation of the country:

Punks have been telling us we've got the best mag around. Well, of course we have 'cause we're broke, on the dole and live at home in boring council flats, so obviously we know what's goin' on! (Mick, 1976)

- 82 After all, fanzines were non-musical punk artifacts that shared the same features of many punk songs, especially their social realism.

Finally, among the underground press, there were several zines which were highly involved with political issues, such as *Temporary Hoarding* –the fanzine of the Anti-Nazi League– or Crass' *International Anthem*.

Punk fashion

Punk fashion was a pivotal part of the subculture. Clothing became another way of expressing the self, and those who belonged to the scene saw in the clothes they wore an opportunity to make a statement. The defining aspect about punk aesthetics is that it was easily recognizable and immediately caught the attention of the spectator, as the looks broke away with every fashion movement that had been going on in the British society of the time. Once again, punks managed to walk away from the hegemonic standards with the way they looked.

Just as punks drew on "do-it-yourself" resources to make music or publish written media, punk fashion also went hand in hand with the DIY philosophy: most members of the scene customized their clothes by destroying fabrics, making holes in their shirts and jeans, adding patches, decorating their leather jackets with messages or adding studs to them. The social standards of beauty were not compatible with the punk aesthetics, not only when it came to clothing, but also make up, which was often overdone. Also, punks had their faces "mutilated" with piercings. As Hebdige (1979) pointed out: "Contrary to the advice of every woman's magazine, make-up for both boys and girls was worn to be seen. Faces became abstract portraits: sharply observed and meticulously executed studies in alienation" (p. 107).

The looks scandalized many for being considered too vulgar, explicit, or divergent. Jordan Mooney, a member of the scene who worked with Vivienne Westwood in the shop SEX, recalled how her looks would leave people in shock: "Some of the things I wore were quite near the knuckle. People were apoplectic with rage" (qtd. in Tierney, 2019). In the same way as some artists did not have the financial resources to record music in a professional manner, applying the DIY ethos to clothing was another way of saving money while being allowed to find one's style and expressing oneself. Thrifting and customizing cheaper clothes was, therefore, in line with the anti-consumerism feeling.

Punks also incorporated elements of the daily life into their looks, making them more unique and subversive. As noted by Hebdige (1979):

Objects borrowed from the most sordid of contexts found a place in the punks' ensembles: lavatory chains were draped in graceful arcs across chests encased in plastic bin-liners. Safety pins were taken out of their domestic "utility" context and worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek, ear or lip. "Cheap" trashy fabrics (PVC, plastic, lurex, etc.) in vulgar designs (e.g. mock leopard skin) and "nasty" colours, long discarded by the quality end of the fashion industry as obsolete kitsch, were salvaged by the punks and turned into garments (fly boy drainpipes, "common" miniskirts) which offered self-conscious commentaries on the notions of modernity and taste. Conventional ideas of prettiness were jettisoned along with the traditional feminine lore of cosmetics. (p. 107)

On top of that, punks also introduced items related to sexual topics into their fashion, which of course were utilized to shock older audiences.

A well-known example of fashion and the DIY ethic within the punk scene is the ripped Pink Floyd shirt that Johnny Rotten wore on several occasions, including his first meetings with McLaren. That t-shirt was customized by himself by writing "I Hate" with a marker so that the t-shirt read "I Hate Pink Floyd".

Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren also were key elements in the development of punk aesthetics with their clothing boutiques in King's Road (Let it Rock, Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die and Sex) and their implementation of DIY fashion items.

All in all, we can say that the introduction of the DIY philosophy into the punk scene coincided with times in which the British society experienced severe economic difficulties, with a diminished purchasing power due to the ongoing crisis. The DIY philosophy can be perceived in all aspects of the punk subculture: from music production to written media or fashion. It is also important to mention that the DIY ethos acted as a form of resistance, disaffection, and opposition to the establishment, even though on many occasions the DIY ethic in punk was not premeditated, but simply came out of necessity, as a way of finding cheaper alternatives to music-making or clothing.

Chapter 06

“Our figure head is no what she seems”: Punk, politics, and politicians

85

In July 1977, a reader of the journal *Challenge* sent a letter to the publication saying that he was thankful to punk artists because they had introduced “politics to thousands of young people, through their performances, songs and through interviews with fanzines” (p. 2). This is indicative of the way in which some political organizations in the 1970s spread their ideals⁵⁰, and reflects the fact that –in spite of their apparent contempt for the establishment– punk musicians were not indifferent to the political reality surrounding them.

6.1 Punk and Thatcherism

Political figures and parties were indeed subject to criticism from members of the punk scene. For instance, in 1983, Crass orchestrated what was called the “Thatchergate”: during the Falklands War, the band manipulated audios of conversations between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to create a hoax recording of a phone conversation where the two politicians talked about the war. Thatcher could be heard saying things that implied that the sinking of the British HMS Sheffield had done on purpose so that war could break. The faked conversation caught the attention of intelligence services, which attributed its distribution to the KGB. In the following year, it was reported that the band had been responsible for the creation and distribution of the fake audio.

Other allusions to the Prime Minister in Crass’ discography and their graphic art include the song “Powerless with a Guitar” (1985), which contained excerpts of the faked audio, and “Sucks” (1978), where Crass did not hesitate to show their dislike for the Prime Minister: “Do you really believe in Thatcher? Maggie sucks”. Finally, in

⁵⁰ For instance, in 1977 the Young Communist League sent an open letter to the Sex Pistols through the journal *Challenge* proposing an alliance between both sides (!). The Sex Pistols never answered the letter. .

their 1983 album *Yes Sir I Will*, the figure of Thatcher and her role in power and the Falklands War was addressed again. In the same line, The Notsensibles released "I'm in Love with Margaret Thatcher" in October 1979, a few months after Thatcher had become Prime Minister. The song included ironic lyrics that told the story of someone who loved the PM: "I'm in love with Margaret Thatcher/I'm in love with Maggie T/Oh Margaret Thatcher is so sexy/She's the girl for you and me/I go red when she's on the telly/Cos I think she fancies me". The band stated in the fifth issue of the fanzine *New Mania* that they had sent copies to the PM herself, yet they did not succeed in getting Thatcher to hear the song:

It sold quite well, but not as well as it should have done. Only Mike Read and John Peel used to play it, so it didn't really reach a wide audience. We sent copies to Margaret Thatcher and Norman St. John-Stevas⁵¹, among others. We heard she didn't get to hear it because a secretary had taken it home or something. All in all, we were very happy to have been able to make money out of Margaret Thatcher, because no-one else has. (qtd. in *New Mania*, 1981)

In 1982, the Newtown Neurotics released a song called "Kick Out the Tories!", whose lyrics sent a pretty straightforward message to the Conservative Party: "The rulers of this land/For they are the enemies/Of the British working man/And it shows, while that bastard is in unemployment grows/It shows, in the hospitals, factories and/The schools that they've closed/Evil will triumph, if good men say nothing".

Other politicians fell under the attack of punk musicians: In *The Filth and The Fury* (2000), Johnny Rotten can be heard dedicating the band's song "Liar" (1977) to Harold Wilson. Paul Weller from The Jam also threw some criticism to politicians when stating that: "Jim Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher are cunts. I don't trust any of them. All I said at the time was that I thought the Tories would do a less bad job" (qtd. in Worley, 2017a: 140). The Jam's song "Time for Truth" (1977) put the spotlight on PM James Callaghan: "I think it's time for truth/And the truth is you've lost Uncle Jimmy/Admit your failure and decline with honor/While you can".

6.2 Punk and the trade unions

The turbulent struggle between the government and the trade unions that took place in Britain in the 1970s was referenced only a few times in the punk scene. However, even though the trade union situation was not much addressed in punk, it is noticeable that most allusions to it were not fully supportive of unions and condemned their alleged lack of understanding with the working classes. Thus, the band UK Decay considered that trade unions had too much power, singing that "unions dictate your

51 Leader of the House of Commons from 1979 to 1981

future". "No Town Hall" (1978) by Crisis showed the criticism unions faced as some considered their actions to be a representation of greed: "On the radio every night "Greedy workers going on strike"/They just want a little more/A right to be proud/They don't want 70 million pounds". The second issue of the fanzine *Guttersnipe* featured some commentaries on the relation between trade unions and the government:

The trade union movement has the power to force the government and employers to create jobs and work for us all -by such steps as the 35hr week-remember there's 10 million in the TUC. As for the CPSSA, they are in almost the same dilemma as the unemployed

-being one of the worst payed [sic] sets of workers in the country

-they are lobbying against this 5% pay limit -which is no fucking good at all. (1978: 12)

The comments made on the actions of trade unions were often harsh, with the fanzine authors running down union representatives, and blaming them for not truly representing the working classes:

Why is it that most of so-called representatives of the working-classes in Britain look and behave like upper-class Tory landowners, sticking [sic] noses in the air not bothering to give a sympathetic ear to our protests, read our leaflets or even have a chat with us. Just shows how Socialist the TUC is (1978: 12).

Finally, another example of the involvement of punk musicians in the trade union controversy was the benefit concert that the Sex Pistols threw on Christmas Day, 1977, for the benefit of the families of the miners and firefighters who had been striking for wage increases.

6.3 Punk and the British monarchy

As shown in the preceding lines, the position of punk artists towards the British government was often one of discontent and disapproval, including what could be considered the biggest representation of the establishment: the monarchy.

The 1970s witnessed a significant event in the history of the British monarchy: the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. Despite the traditional appeal the crown had for the British citizenry, this moment was, however, now accompanied by a growing feeling of discontent with the institution as a result the dire social and economic situation the country was undergoing. According to a 1977 public poll, when asked "does Britain need a queen?", 16.4% of the British citizens who participated in the survey said "no". Though these figures may seem low, they considerably exceeded the 11% of the past years, evincing a clear rise in anti-monarchical feelings in times of the Jubilee (Lacey, 2003: 250). While royalists celebrated, opposition towards the

celebration was aired by some left-wing parties, especially the Socialist Workers Party and their "Stuff the Jubilee" campaign. Launched to coincide with the celebration of the Silver Jubilee, the campaign had the purpose of denouncing that too much money, resources and effort were being put into the celebration, while the country was suffering from high levels of unemployment and cuts on public expenditure. The *Socialist Worker* newspaper released an issue dealing with the anti-jubilee campaign in addition to the party deciding to produce badges and stickers against the event. The headline of the SW newspaper read the following:

Jubilee? What a load of rubbish! Arrogant, hypocritical rubbish in a year when living standards have been cut by 4 per cent, when hospitals are being closed for "lack of money", when our children are being taught in overcrowded classrooms "for lack of money". The royal family costs as much as a new hospital every year... they're costing millions more this jubilee year. Don't let them get away with it. Tell them to STUFF THE JUBILEE. (*Socialist Worker*, 1977: 1)

The co-author of the badge design, Sherrl Yanowitz, revealed that the campaign had been a success, not only in terms of selling merchandise, but also in terms of the mobilization of anti-monarchics:

I designed this badge with Neil McFarlane. It was my first badge design. When I ordered 4,000 badges from the Universal button company in Bethnal Green, they sort of laughed at me. The same company had the order for hundreds of thousands of pro-monarchy items. We advertised the badge mainly through a small advert in *Private Eye* and in *Socialist Worker*. The badge became a campaign. In the end we sold over 40,000 badges in less than three months. There were stickers too and Stuff the Jubilee parties in a number of cities. (Birchall, 2011)

Rock music has often crossed paths with the British royalty. In the 1960s, the four members of The Beatles received the MBE Order⁵², and the band included a hidden track in *Abbey Road* (1969) called "Her Majesty", where they revealed that "Her Majesty is a pretty nice girl/But she doesn't have a lot to say". In the 1970s, Freddie Mercury's Queen closed all their concerts from 1974 onwards with Brian May's impeccable rendition of the British anthem on guitar. The guitar cover of the anthem served as the closing track of their album *A Night at the Opera* (1975)⁵³. Thus, two of the most popular British bands of the times honored Elizabeth II one way or another. However, with the arrival of punk, bands were determined to give their honest opinions about the monarchy.

⁵² Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

⁵³ A crown can be seen in Queen's logo. Freddie Mercury confessed that "the concept of Queen is to be regal and majestic [...] We want to be a good British regal rock band" (qtd. in Reynolds, 2022).

Nothing represented the establishment more strongly in the UK than the monarchy, so the institution was an easy target for the punk bands that wished to send an anti-system message. A paradigmatic example of the brutal lampooning of the crown on the part of these bands was the Sex Pistols' "God Save The Queen" (1977), where lead singer Johnny Rotten claimed (literally) that the queen was no human being, and that Britain was under a fascist regime. With "God Save the Queen", the Sex Pistols not only put the flaws of the British monarchy under the spotlight but also managed to create a song that embodied the anger of a whole generation. "God Save the Queen" is undoubtedly one of the most representative tunes of British punk, and possibly one of the most controversial themes of all times.

Before releasing the song, the Sex Pistols had already carried out some acts of provocation towards the monarchy. For instance, on March 10th, 1977, the band signed their label contract with A&M in front of Buckingham Palace. By that time, "God Save the Queen", which was originally called "No Future" and had been recorded in late 1976, was ready to be launched. However, its release was delayed due to contractual problems with A&M, the contract actually lasting only one week⁵⁴. The 25,000 pressed copies of "God Save the Queen" were destroyed⁵⁵ due to the termination of the contract, and it was not until May 27th, 1977, under Virgin Records, that the band would finally release the single that would scandalize the British society.

While recalling the writing session of the song, Johnny Rotten described how bass player Glen Matlock, who left the band in February 1977, considered the lyrics to be too outrageous: "the tune was already worked out, and I just put those lyrics over it. It did not amuse Glen at all. He could not cope. He thought it was evil. "You can't do that! We'll get killed [Matlock's quote]" (Lydon, 1994: 114-115). In an interview, Rotten declared that the inspiration behind the song lay in the anger he felt when he was young and his opposition to the monarchy:

"God Save the Queen" was running around in my mind for months, long before joining the Sex Pistols; the idea of being angry, of the indifference of the Queen to the population and the aloofness and indifference to us as people. I had to work on building sites to get the money to go to college because I wanted to further my education and yet I was taxed to fuck. Why am I paying for that silly cow who couldn't give a shit about me? Along come the Pistols and just one morning over baked beans I wrote it down in one go on Mum and Dad's kitchen table. (qtd. in Rachel, 2014: 241)

In spite of that, Rotten expressed in *The Filth and the Fury* (2000) that the single came from a place of esteem and not hate for the British society: "you don't write "God Save

⁵⁴ The band was dropped by the record label after their inappropriate behavior at the A&M offices during the closing of the deal.

⁵⁵ The band was dropped by the record label after their inappropriate behavior at the A&M offices during the closing of the deal.

The Queen" because you hate the English race, you write a song like that because you love them; and you're fed up with them being mistreated" (Temple, 2000).

90 Once the song was officially released on May 27th, 1977, the cover art, the lyrics, and the release date became very controversial. Artist Jamie Reid⁵⁶ was responsible for designing the art of the single cover, promotional posters and images that would appear in Vivienne Westwood's clothing line. For the graphic art of the song, Reid used a royal portrait of Elizabeth II that had been taken by Peter Grudgeon for the Silver Jubilee⁵⁷. For the single cover, Reid reversed the image and incorporated the famous ransom typography covering the eyes and mouth of the monarch with the title of the song and the band's name⁵⁸.

Other promotional images decorated the portrait of the Queen with typical elements of the punk aesthetics such as safety pins, swastikas, or the Union Jack⁵⁹. Promotional images were plastered all over the walls of London during the release week⁶⁰.

By adopting the British National Anthem as the title of the song, the band borrowed a significant symbol of the United Kingdom and transformed it into a punk emblem, mirroring what Reid had done to the Queen's portrait in the single cover. The lyrics of the song were, of course, shocking, and scandalous by the time they were released. Quoting the lead article of the *Sunday Mirror* (June 12, 1977): "no pop song has ever contained verses like these before" (Wills, 1977). The heavy guitar riffs and energetic drumming of "GSTQ" create the perfect punk atmosphere and give way to Rotten's opening verse where he sings one of the most recognizable and controversial punk verses of all time: "God save the queen/The fascist regime/They made you a moron/Potential H- bomb/God save the queen/She ain't no human being/There is no future In England's dreaming". The chorus embodies the punk philosophy as Rotten calls for individualism and screams the "no future" motto: "Don't be told what you want/Don't be told what you need/There's no future, no future/No future for you". The lyrics continue to make reference to the queen and the monarchy, including an allusion to the celebrations of the Jubilee ("God save your mad parade"). The band also seem to imply that the monarchy is protected because it is a great source of money, just a product that has become a tourist attraction. "God save the queen/We mean it man/We love our queen God saves/God save the queen/Cause tourists are money/And our figurehead is not what she seems/Oh God save history/God save your mad parade/Oh Lord God have mercy/All crimes are paid/When there's no future/How can there

56 Jamie Reid is also known for creating the characteristic punk typography (the "ransom note") using different cutout letters from newspapers or magazines.

57 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kvasir79/6872042933>

58 https://www.sexpistolsofficial.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/571/files/gstq/gstq_sleeve_UK_77.jpg

59 <https://emmatrinidad.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/jamie-reid.jpg?w=422>

60 https://static.eldiario.es/clip/f72dc84c-4b9f-4213-83d5-bea29aec4980_16-9-discover-aspect-ratio-default_0.webp

be sin". As expected, the song was not well-received by the general public, especially by royalists. Marcus Lipton, a Labour MP, claimed that "if pop music is going to be used to destroy our established institutions, then it ought to be destroyed first" (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 365). Assaults on those who were involved in the creation of "GSTQ" began soon after its publication. Jamie Reid was assaulted and got his nose and leg broken. Johnny Rotten and some friends were also attacked as a consequence of the negative opinions towards the Queen expressed in the song. Rotten claimed that they were attacked while the assaulters told him "We love our Queen, you bastard!" (Savage, 1992: 365). As reported in the *Daily Mirror*:

The Pistols and Rotten, their lead singer, are seen as possible targets because of their anti-royal record, "God Save the Queen". It described the Queen as a moron. The attack on Rotten [...] was the second aimed at the group within days. A spokesman for Virgin Records who issued the controversial "Queen" disc said: "It looks as though punk rockers are in for a hard time. The attackers were not teenage thugs but men in their thirties [...] A lot of people were upset at the record about the Queen and that could be part of the problem. (Greig, 1977)

Even though the song was supposed to have been launched earlier, the final release during the year of the Silver Jubilee was the beginning of a scandal⁶¹. The celebrations of the Jubilee, which had already begun in February 1977, were about to culminate on June 7th, just a few days after the song was released. It immediately became a commercial success, managing to sell 150,000 units in just one day after its release. The high number of sales was expected to project the track straight to the number one position of the UK Singles Chart. However, the Sex Pistols settled at number two while Rod Stewart's "I Don't Want to Talk About It" (1975) took the number one. The charting of the song was surrounded by controversy as the sales of "GSTQ" would have placed the song in number one position precisely during the Silver Jubilee week. Ever since there have been accusations of a chart "fix" so that "GSTQ" was not the most popular song during the Jubilee week (Savage, 1992: 364-5). Also, censorship came along the release of the song, as many stores refused to sell the single, with the BBC banning its airplay along with many other radio stations (Wills, 1977).

The promotion of the single concluded on June 7th, when the band took part in a boat trip in the middle of the celebration week. The trip was intended to be a publicity stunt but it actually became a direct provocation to the monarchy. Just a day after the bank holiday, the Sex Pistols sailed the Thames in the *Queen Elizabeth*, which had been

61 The band members admitted that the song was not supposed to have come out during the Silver Jubilee. However, they were pleased it coincided with the celebrations. In a 1977 interview, Paul Cook said the following: "We didn't even know it was coming. We didn't bring it out specially for this shit, but it's good it's come out now, 'cos the Jubilee is a load of bollocks, I think". John Lydon added: "The single is nothing personal against the Queen. It's what she stands for... a symbol" (qtd. in Stroinski, 2018).

rented by Malcolm McLaren. The boat carried a banner that read: "H.M.S QUEEN ELIZABETH WELCOMES SEX PISTOLS. THEIR SINGLE "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN" OUT NOW". The band, punk fans, Virgin employees and journalists all congregated in it, which sailed from 6:30 pm until night⁶². By nighttime, the Sex Pistols began their performance. However, the celebration of the single ended abruptly as the police circled the boat and boarded the ship to arrest the passengers. Eleven persons were arrested and accused of "obstructing a policeman", "using insulting words likely to provoke a breach of the peace", "assault" "obstruction" and "threatening behaviour" (Savage, 2012b). Among those arrested were Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood and Jamie Reid. Two days after the incident, Queen Elizabeth II followed the same path the punk boat had taken, sailing down the River Thames in the *Britannia*.

There is no denying that "God Save The Queen" became a very important event in British punk music. Jon Savage, who attended the Pistols' boat trip, claimed the band encapsulated the feeling of many teenagers of the time: "They gave voice to what a lot of us were feeling –that England was dreaming" (qtd. in Spencer, 2012). In his autobiography, Rotten looked back on how the song had become a landmark when it came to opposing the British monarchy:

It was worth the risk. Nobody had openly declared any anti-opinions of the royal family in ever such a long time in our ridiculous feudal Great Britain. I thought it was about time somebody stood up and said something—and I was more than pleased that it be me. I'd been thinking about it for a long time. (Lydon, 1994: 182-183)

Although the Sex Pistols put out the most representative and famous anti-monarchic song, other punk bands also showed criticized the crown. Amidst the Jubilee celebrations, punk bands took the opportunity to perform in parties or concerts that opposed the monarchic event. Darlex's (1977) guitar player, Kev Hunter, recalls playing in one of those anti-monarchy events that took place in Northampton:

That was so long ago around 1977! It was a punk band, and our only gig was playing in the street for an anti-Queens Jubilee party! I think the only song we wrote was entitled, "Sod the Jubilee"⁶³! I can't recall the names of the band members. (qtd. in "Darlex", n.d)

62 Virgin released a confidential info sheet about the itinerary of the boat trip. The ship was expected to leave from the Westminster Pier and sail to Tower Bridge, Westminster Bridge, Lambeth, Vauxhall, Chelsea, Albert Bridge, Putney Bridge, Hammersmith Bridge and then return to Westminster Bridge. It was also instructed to play the National Anthem under each bridge and then being followed by the Sex Pistols live performances. The sheet included a warning which said: "no advertising as the boat will be cancelled if wrong people informed" (Branson, 2016).

63 Unfortunately, neither the song nor the lyrics are available.

In the same year, The Clash showed their discontent towards the Jubilee in "1977", the B-Side of their single *White Riot* (1977): "In 1977/Sod the Jubilee", while Crisis linked the far-right party National Front with the Queen in the song "UK '79" (1979): "The NF are nice they love the Queen". The Xtraverts thought of the year 1984 as a period where the monarchy had ceased to exist: "No crowns on their stupid heads in '84" ("1984", 1981). In Crass' "Big A Little A" (1982), part of the lyrics are intended to be written from the Queen's perspective, whose ideals and behavior are presented as dictatorial: "Hello, hello, hello, now here's a message from your queen/As figurehead of the status quo I set the social scene/I'm most concerned about my people, I want to give them peace/So I'm making sure they stay in line with my army and police/My prisons and my mental homes have ever open doors/For those amongst my subjects who dare to ask for more/Unruliness and disrespect are things I can't allow/So I'll see the peasants grovel if they refuse to bow [...] Guarding national heritage no matter what or where/Palaces for kings and queens, mansions for the rich/Protection for the wealthy, defense of privilege". Additionally, the lyrics are sung by Steve Ignorant, mocking the Queen's voice.

We can say therefore, that, within the punk scene, the monarchy was an easy target for bands to tear down the foundations of the establishment. With the hardships of the decade, many of those bands were starting to question the usefulness of the monarchy, especially during the celebrations of the Silver Jubilee, in which so much money and resources were being invested when the economy of the country was in shambles. The Sex Pistols turned the punk scene upside down with their controversial release of "God Save the Queen", which was loved and hated equally by many, the theme eventually becoming an anti-monarchic anthem. Other punk bands joined the Pistols in denouncing the monarchy and attacking a fundamental part of the British *status quo*.

6.4 Punk and anarchy

The situation of anarchism in England during the 1970s was marked by a clear expansion of the ideology, especially among young people. Anarchist organizations and publications were responsible for promoting the movement among the masses, as the discontent with the establishment thrived, instilling a wish to find alternative political dogmas. Thus, the magazine *The Black Flag* (1971) –which dealt with all things anarchy– and organizations such as the Anarchist Workers Association (1975) or the Kate Sharpley Library (1979) – which published anarchist texts– were founded in this decade.

The decade also witnessed a controversy that arose concerning the proliferation of anarchy supporters. In 1978, five anarchists (later known as "Persons Unknown") were arrested, accused of terrorism and eventually brought to court. They were acquitted non-guilty on February 1980..

Since the beginnings of the British punk subculture, members of the scene established a link with the anarchist ideology, which would become another punk symbol. Thus, in 1977, the band Alternative TV sought to summarize the essence of punk in the song "How Much Longer" (1977), the lyrics tackling the connections punk had with extremist ideologies, the importance of the DIY ethic and anarchy: "How much longer will people wear/Nazi armbands and dye their hair?/Safety pins and spray their clothes/Talk about anarchy, fascism and boredom". "Anarchy in the UK" by the Sex Pistols (released in 1976) put the anarchist ideology in the spotlight. The Pistols were pioneers in introducing the idea of anarchy to the punk scene with a first single in which Johnny Rotten declared himself an anarchist and called for the implantation of anarchy in the United Kingdom. The opening lines of one of the very first British punk singles was certainly controversial: "I am an anti-Christ/I am an anarchist/Don't know what I want/But I know how to get it/I want to destroy the passerby/'cause I want to be anarchy/No dogs body/Anarchy for the UK [...] And I wanna be anarchy/Know what I mean/And I wanna be an anarchist/I get pissed, destroy"⁶⁴

Interestingly enough, the Pistols did not tackle the issue of anarchy any more throughout the rest of their career, nor did they express any support towards the ideology⁶⁵. Yet, "Anarchy in the UK" would mark the beginning of the interaction of punk with this political stance. How genuine was, anyhow, the connection between anarchy and punk? We could say that the case of punk and anarchy reproduced somewhat the way the punk scene adopted concepts and ideologies that would depart from the *status quo* of the British society in order to provide some shock value. Additionally, for some punks, anarchy was somehow an embodiment of punk ideals: a rejection of the establishment and authority that prioritized individualism. Punk songs and punks' attitudes often revolved around not being told what to do, wearing clothes that did not fit the social standards or breaking taboos without being concerned about the opinions of others. Therefore, it was only natural that anarchy would be seen by many punks as another way of airing rebelliousness and showing discontent towards the system. Soon after the release of "Anarchy in the UK", McLaren discussed in an interview what the song represented:

Writing a song like "Anarchy in the UK" is definitely a statement of intent – it's hard to say something constructive in rock these days. It's a call to arms to the kids

64 Whether intentional or not, the Sex Pistols' single Anarchy in the UK came inside a black sleeve, often associated with one of the anarchist flags https://i.discogs.com/rRSF4mkxQj6b4M-R56syYZ798iWo3K-QppqfA1suCf_c/rs:fit/g:sm/q:90/h:594/w:600/czM6Ly9kaXNjb2dz/LWRhdGFYXNILWlt/YWdlcy9SL-TElNjMx/MzItMTQxMDk0NTgz/OC0xMTk1LmpwZWc.jpeg (qtd. in McGrath, 2022). Steve Jones also admitted that he did not even know what anarchy meant when the Pistols recorded the song (Hiatt, 2022).

65 In Lydon's biography there are no references to anarchy and the word only appears when talking about the band's single. Moreover, in 2022, Lydon stated the following about anarchy: "Anarchy is a terrible idea. Let's get that clear. I'm not an anarchist. And I'm amazed that there are websites out there -.org anarchist sites- funded fully by the corporate hand and yet ranting on about being outside the shitstorm".

who believe very strongly that rock and roll was taken away from them. And now it's coming back. "Anarchy in the UK" is a statement of self-rule, of ultimate independence, of do-it-yourself, ultimately. (qtd. in Kent, 1976: 27)

McLaren's stance is a good expression of the circumstances that underlay the connection between anarchy and the genre: Some punks perceived anarchy as a depiction of individualism, and therefore, to incorporate it into their art would embody a representation of their values. 95

In the same interview, McLaren revealed that, for him, anarchy was a result of the deplorable state of the country, marked by the financial crisis:

I don't see it as a fad because it's such a simple attitude. It's the same attitude I think, that Eddie Cochran⁶⁶ probably had, that any real rock and roller had. I just see it as a reaction against the last five years of stagnation. (qtd. in Kent, 1976: 27)

The way McLaren talks about anarchy is clearly reminiscent of the nihilism often found in punk attitudes. The rejection of everything was manifested, on this occasion, through the desire to abolish all kinds of authority and hierarchy. It is also noticeable that, in a *Melody Maker* interview, Rotten referred to the concept of anarchy as *musical* anarchy (Worley, 2017a: 259), connecting it with the "do-it-yourself" ethos, which promoted the rejection of social standards through individualism. In musical terms, the unpolished instruments and vocals and the screaming voices that sharply detached themselves from the mainstream music of the time clearly contributed to that musical anarchy. Moreover, chaos and mayhem were also embraced by punk artists in live performances, where the differences between artist and fan were blurred.

Anarchy was mentioned on several occasions in punk songs, incorporating it as a conscious motif to the musical scene of the times. Bands would often refer to anarchism as being representative of the attitude of the younger generations, highlighting the links between music and this political standpoint. The Adverts did so in "Bombsite Boy" (There's a killer in your subway/An anarchist on your street, 1978), and also on "We Who Wait" (I'll hug the symbols of my apathy/And hog the taste of anarchy and animosity, 1977). More examples are found in The Boys' "Backstage Pass" (When you're bored with Anarchy/You will still be special to me, 1978), The Members' "Sounds of the Suburbs" (Youth Club group used to want to be free/Now they want Anarchy, 1979), The Damned's "Politics" (Give me fun not anarchy, 1977), The Killjoys' "Johnny Won't Get to Heaven" (You say you just wanna be free/I say bullshit anarchy, 1977) and The Epileptics' "Hitler's Still a Nazi/War Crimes" (But we don't want that/We want Anarchy, 1979).

66 American rock'n'roll singer of the 1950s.

There were bands which took the issue of anarchy more seriously, however, and which truly abode by anarchist doctrines. One of them is Crass, which could be presented as the epitome of the anarcho-punk scene. In 1979, the magazine *New Society* published an article that focused on the situation of anarchism in the UK, featuring a conversation with members of Crass. The article proceeded to highlight the importance punk had had in the spread of anarchy in the country:

Anarchy in the UK was a Top Ten hit for the Sex Pistols in 1977. It introduced the word "anarchy" to a new generation. It became fashionable again, for a time, to say you were an anarchist, to spit in the face of the normaloids. But most punk bands who attached themselves to anarchy were merely boarding the gravy train. That is why I went over to a cottage in Essex to talk to one punk band, Crass, who seemed to have thought more seriously about their anarchism. (Walker, 1979)

Crass members often collaborated with anarchist groups and supported anarchist causes. This is illustrated in Crass' and Poison Girls' *Bloody Revolutions / Persons Unknown* (1980), where the vinyl sleeve offered an insight about the "Persons Unknown" situation. Both bands included a statement in which their listeners learn that all the benefits produced by the release of the single would be donated to the creation of an anarchist center:

All the money made on this record will go towards the setting up of an anarchist centre in London. The aim is to get enough money together to get the lease on place that will not only give us all somewhere to go to drink a cuppa and meet people of possibly similar views, it is hoped that we can get enough to set up a gig facility, at the moment we're looking at an old factory as a possibility, so that bands that don't want to play the usual commercial circuit will have an alternative. It could mean that, at last, anarchist punks will have somewhere of their own to go. Southern studios/poison girls/crass & crass records have charged nothing for the production of this record and rough trade are distributing it at cost, which means that apart from the out that the record shops take, all the money will go to the centre. The aims of the centre are both political and social. The political aim is to make anarchist literature and ideas more easily available. The social aim is to offer a meeting place for the people interested in anarchy and its various outlets, music etc. etc. IT'S UP TO US ALL TO MAKE IT WORK. (1980)

Both bands' support for the anarchist cause did not stop there. Crass and Poison Girls also participated in benefit concerts, whose proceeds were destined to helping *Persons Unknown*. Penny Rimbaud commented on how the band's anarchist image was known outside the music sphere and how it had caught the attention of anarchist groups which, in a way, questioned Crass' commitment to anarchy:

Notwithstanding, our political bluff had been called during the recording of *Stations* when we received a mysterious phone call from a group called Persons Unknown. They wanted to know whether, as anarchists, we would support them. (qtd. in Dines, 2004: 144)

97

Moreover, Poison Girls had already been in contact with the anarchist scene, as members of the band were in charge of selling the anarchist publication *Freedom*.

Crass' lifestyle was also influenced by the anarchist ideology. Members of the band had established themselves in Dial House, a self-sustainable cottage situated in Essex, where Crass lived by the DIY ethics. Similarly, many punks practiced squatting⁶⁷, an act often associated with anarchism. For instance, members of The Slits lived in a squat in Shepherd's Bush, and Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious did the same in 1975⁶⁸. Crass was not only seriously committed to the anarchist ideology, but the band also aimed at targeting the alleged "fakeness" of other punks who, according to them, utilized anarchism as an accessory to build a rebellious and anti-system image rather than firmly believe in it. A good example of this can be seen in Crass' song "Punk is Dead" (1979), which criticized Steve Jones from the Pistols for its "fake activism". Crass denounced his apparent hypocrisy, as the Pistols called for anarchy in the UK while benefitting from mainstream audiences and earning big amounts of money after signing with a huge label: "Steve Jones started doing real harm/ Preaching revolution, anarchy and change/As he sucked from the system that had given him his name". This was not the first time Crass had criticized the punk stance towards anarchy. In "General Bacardi" (1979), Crass protested about how the ideas of revolution and anarchy were being downplayed by some bands: "They talk from the screen and T.V. tube/They talk revolution like it's processed food/They talk of anarchy from music hall stages". In other songs such as "Sucks" ("I believe in anarchy in the UK", 1979), "White Punks on Hope" ("Anarchy and freedom is what I want", 1979) or "Bloody Revolutions" ("Don't want your revolution, I want anarchy and peace", 1980) the band simply reflected upon their wish to live under an anarchist society.

Summarizing, we can say that the spread of the anarchist movement in the UK was quite faithfully mirrored by the punk movement, with artists addressing the topic in their songs, aesthetics and –sometimes– applying the anarchist philosophy to their way of life. Actually, when we examine the ways in which punk and anarchy interacted closely, we can observe that artists approached the issue with very different mindsets. On the one hand, many punks used anarchy just to shock their audiences and reaffirm their image of rebels towards society and the system, without fully complying with the ideological implications of the anarchist philosophy. On the other, bands such

67 Squatting refers to the act of inhabiting a property without permission of the owner.

68 For punks, squats did not only serve as places to live in but as places where they could create art and rehearse their music.

98 as Crass were not only strongly committed to anarchist ideals, fully supporting the cause, but also denounced other punks who seemed to address the topic vainly and frivolously. The anarchist ideals were also clearly linked to the DIY philosophy that was so present in the punk subculture. Overall, we can say that, for one reason or another, anarchism soon became an important part of the punk movement and that a complete understanding of the punk philosophy cannot be fully attained without referring to the anarchist atmosphere that pervaded the Britain of the 1970s.

Chapter 07

“They’ve hidden their swastika behind the Union Jack, you’d better watch out brothers, they’re heading for a comeback”: Racism in the UK

99

The economic hardships of England in the 1970s were not the only problems the country was facing. The English society was also going through a racial crisis, where xenophobia, white supremacy and the rising success of extreme right-wing political parties were indicators of the latent racism that was present in the nation.

Recent research (Krosch & Amodio, 2014) has established connections between the financial crisis in England and its effects on the perception of race. The study concluded that “scarcity may alter perceptions of race in ways that exacerbate discrimination” (Krosch & Amodio, 2014: 1), meaning that in times of economic crisis, the skin of non-white individuals (like mixed-race) is perceived darker and, thus, more likely to be discriminated against. As they point out:

Although prior explanations for this phenomenon have focused on institutional causes, our research reveals that perceived scarcity influences people’s visual representations of race in a way that may promote discrimination. (Krosch & Amodio, 2014: 1)

Patrick Taran and Lisa Wong (2011) also comment that “in times of economic insecurity migrants always seem to be among the first to be blamed” (p. 13). As they point out:

Ethnic minorities, like migrant workers, become more vulnerable to scapegoating during downturns, and are easy targets for the racist rhetoric of political extremists, which of course feeds into further discrimination. (p. 9)

Certainly, times of economic recession favor discrimination, and the England of the 1970s was no exception to it.

To examine how racism increased in Britain on this decade, it is necessary to analyze the consequences of the rising influx of immigration from the mid-20th century onwards, in addition to the socio-political consequences it entailed. During

this period, the political arena experienced an increment of far-right parties which, through their policies, sent a message to their followers that encouraged a feeling of rejection towards non-whites. Additionally, the apogee of the National Front party in the early-mid 1970s is also an example of the increasing popularity of this ideology.

7.1 Acts and Laws

The end of the Second World War was a turning point in migratory flows towards the United Kingdom, with an increase in the number of immigrants who arrived in the UK. Most of those immigrants were coming from Asian and Caribbean countries that belonged to the Commonwealth. This post-war wave of immigration was caused by the introduction of the British Nationality Act of 1948, which allowed those from the colonies to achieve the British nationality. As a consequence of this act, around 500,000 non-white individuals arrived in the United Kingdom between 1948 and 1962 (Hansen, 1999: 67).

The huge influx of migrants started to cause a negative backlash against immigration within the British society in the following years. Public opinion polls showed that "around 70 per cent of Britons wanted further controls" (Hampshire, 2005: 35). As a consequence of the highly noticeable number of newcomers, in 1962 the UK government decided to restrain immigration to the country by passing The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962⁶⁹. The Act of 1962 was followed by The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968 and The Immigration Act 1971, both of which tightened the restrictions for migrating to the UK in comparison to the former 1962 Act.

As immigration increased, so did discrimination towards the newcomers. Events such as the 1958 Notting Hill riots or the 1961 Middlesbrough race riot⁷⁰ are examples of strife where the tensions that had been building up between blacks and whites ended up in violent outbursts. During the course of these decades, several far-right organizations such as the White Defence League (1957) or the British National Party (1960) had joined the political scene putting forward racist discourses that stemmed from really extremist ideologies. Racial tensions grew to such an extent that in 1965 the UK passed the Race Relations Act, which prohibited racial discrimination⁷¹.

69 The Act seemed to work, as immigration from the Commonwealth nations descended from 60,000 in 1967 to 44,000 in 1969 (Taylor, 1982: 20).

70 In 1958, between August 30th and September 5th, members of the African-Caribbean community were attacked by groups of white supremacists.

71 The Act was amended by the Race Relations Act 1968 and the Race Relations Act 1976.

7.2 Political Parties

All the race-related acts being passed by the UK government in the 1970s can be seen as indicators of the racial conflict that was taking over England at the time, a decade when far-right policies were on the rise and numerous political parties advocated for a "White Britain". A great majority of these parties and organizations, which had their ideals rooted in racism and fascism, were created in the 1960s. Some of them were: The National Socialist Movement (1962), The Greater Britain Movement (1964) and The British Movement (1968).

Amongst these political factions, the National Front became the most prominent far-right party during the 1970s. Founded in 1967, the National Front emerged as the coalition of different far-right groups: the British National Party, the League of Empire Loyalists and the Racial Preservation Society. Despite not being an explicitly fascist party⁷², Barberis et al. (2000: 187) mention that the National Front "had a long history of involvement in neo-Nazi and fascist groups, including founding members A.K. Chesterton⁷³ and John Bean⁷⁴. Taking into account the far-right political background of the 1960s, the fact that the formation of the NF resulted of a coalition of several far-right organizations implied a turning point for the radical right in England. Richard Thurlow (1998) refers to the creation of the NF as

the most significant event on the radical right and fascist fringe of British politics since internment. It represented the culmination of a process whereby the various strands of revisionist neo-fascist and racial populist politics came together in an attempt to form a national mass party [...]. (p. 245)

The relationship between the National Front, racism and white supremacy existed ever since the creation of the party. This is most obvious if we take a look at the ideology of its most prominent members, such as John Tyndall, former chairman of the party⁷⁵, who had been closely linked to the Nazi movement in his youth and was also deputy of the National Socialist Movement, a neo-nazi group. Tyndall did not hide his anti-Semitic sentiments when he wrote the following statement about Jews in an article named "The Jew in Art":

If the European soul is to be recovered in our country and throughout Europe it can only be done by the elimination of this cancerous microbe in our midst. Let us

⁷² In the National Front's official website (<http://www.nationalfront.org/>), the party denies its alleged relation with fascism: "Another falsehood is that we are 'fascist' (fascism = rule by an elite.) whereas, in fact, we are a registered political party with the Electoral Commission that has the object of fighting elections in the democratic process". (*National Front*, n.d)

⁷³ Before joining the National Front, A.K Chesterton was part of The British Union of Fascists

⁷⁴ Bean was a member of the Union Movement, the League of Empire Loyalists and the British National Party.

⁷⁵ John Tyndall was chairman of the National Front between 1972-74 and 1975-80.

remember this eternal truth –that Culture is Race, Race is Culture and only by the purification of its culture can our race and nation arise to its highest ennoblement. (qtd. in Walker, 1971: 69)

- 102 As seen with Tyndall, the desire for the preservation of white individuals was a common goal amongst members of the National Front⁷⁶. The wish for a whiter nation could only be achieved by introducing discriminatory policies that went against the immigration of the non-whites. To achieve this, the National Front presented in 1974 a text entitled *For a New Britain: The Manifesto of the National Front*⁷⁷, where the party promised "a ban on all non-white immigration into Britain and repatriation of all coloured immigrants" (qtd. in Worley, & Copsey, 2016: 6). The party also aimed at a departure from the current Commonwealth, the reason being that many belonging countries were non-white. The creation of a new Commonwealth (according to the National Front) should only include countries where "the Anglo-Celtic race" predominated. These countries were Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa "if she wished to join" (Taylor, 1982: 76).

The National Front's fixation with immigration derived from the growing percentage of immigrants that the UK had been receiving and was to receive in the years following the creation of the party. Despite all the efforts intending to reduce the level of immigration, such as acts that hindered the arrival of newcomers⁷⁸, the mid-late 1960s and early 1970s in Britain were still times when the country was the destination for many migrants, which would only exacerbate the NF's hostile view towards immigration⁷⁹.

76 Martin Webster, National Activities Organizer of the National Front, declared the following when he had been asked whether he disapproved the murder and persecution of Jews:

Of course... We simply wish to preserve the British people and nation. It doesn't automatically follow, therefore, that because we wish to preserve our own people we wish to persecute or exterminate other peoples. There are only fifty-four million Britons. There are hundreds of millions of Africans and Asians of all sorts. We feel that the living-room pressure of Afro-Asia against the minority of white people throughout the world is such that unless the white peoples take steps to positively defend themselves they are going to disappear (qtd. in Taylor, 1982: 59).

77 This manifesto was created for the general election of October 1974.

78 The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962, the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968 and the Immigration Act 1971.

79 Among all the factors that exacerbated the anti-immigration feeling in Britain in the 1970s, a relevant aspect of it was the independence of Kenya in 1963. This caused the country to initiate a process of Africanization four years later, leading to a migratory wave towards Britain, as those who were not Kenyan natives were expected to abandon the country. In spite of the 1962 Immigration Act, there had been a previous process that allowed Europeans and Asians living in Kenya to remain British. As Taylor (1982) puts it:

When a Commonwealth country was granted independence, its population normally became citizens of the new country, and came under the terms of the 1962 Act. However, during the course of negotiations for the independence of Kenya, it was thought advisable to safeguard the rights of two minorities, the Europeans and the Asians, by allowing them to opt to remain UK citizens, or, if they accepted Kenyan citizenship, to revert within a specified period. A British Nationalities Act was introduced in 1964 which most observers thought had guaranteed this option. (p. 19)

According to Hampshire (2005: 35) "up to 150,000 Kenyan Asians were therefore able freely to enter the United Kingdom to the result of this". By February 1968, approximately 13,000 had arrived in Britain

The National Front and other radical-right organizations were not the only political institutions which boasted a racist discourse in the Britain of the late 60s and early 70s. Other political figures also contributed to the rejection of immigrants. A clear example of this is the case of Enoch Powell⁸⁰ who, in April 1968, pronounced what is known now as the *Rivers of Blood*⁸¹ speech, in which he tackled the issue of immigration by strongly criticizing it soon after the arrival of Kenyan Asians⁸². Powell started his speech claiming that “the supreme function of statesmanship is to provide against preventable evils” (qtd. in *Telegraph Reporter*, 2007). He does not explicitly specify to which kind of evils he is referring, but taking into account the tone of the whole speech it is presumable that Powell would be referring to the issue of immigration. He continues his speech by addressing a conversation he had had with a middle-class man, in which he expressed his desire to see his children leave the country because of the increasing presence of black immigrants as he fears that “in this country in 15 or 20 years’ time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man” (ibid.) Powell endorsed this discourse stating that

What he is saying, thousands and hundreds of thousands are saying and thinking - not throughout Great Britain, perhaps, but in the areas that are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history. In 15 or 20 years, on present trends, there will be in this country three and a half million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants. That is not my figure. That is the official figure given to parliament by the spokesman of the Registrar General’s Office. [...] As time goes on, the proportion of this total who are immigrant descendants, those born in England, who arrived here by exactly the same route as the rest of us, will rapidly increase. (ibid.)

It is noteworthy how Powell implicitly remarks that the influx of incomers to the UK posed a danger to the country, encouraging the rejection of immigrants. He continues his discourse, now explicitly criticizing the influx of immigrants:

It almost passes belief that at this moment 20 or 30 additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week –and that means 15 or 20 additional families a decade or two hence. (ibid.)

(Wilson 2008: 89). This Kenyan-Asian Crisis served as background for the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968, an act that restricted once more the inflow of immigration, and which was introduced by Home Secretary James Callaghan in a quick attempt to lessen the arrival of Kenyan Asians, claiming that it is both urgent and essential that immigration control should be extended to citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies who did not belong to this country in the sense of having any direct family connection with it or having been naturalised or adopted here. (qtd. in Hampshire, 2005: 35).

80 Enoch Powell was a Conservative MP.

81 An allusion to a line of the *Aeneid* which was quoted in Powell’s speech “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood” (qtd. in *Telegraph Reporter*, 2007).

82 By February 1968 more than 10,000 Kenyan Asians had settled down in the country. The speech took place on April 20th.

He tells his listeners that "we must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants" (ibid.) and continues by stating that the UK will not benefit from this situation for "it is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre" (ibid.).

The aftermath of Powell's speech prompted diverse reactions, most of which acclaimed Powell for his declarations. Contrarywise, Edward Heath, leader of the Conservative Party at that time, fired Enoch Powell from the Shadow Cabinet right after the speech declaring the following:

I have told Mr Powell that I consider the speech he made in Birmingham yesterday to be racist in tone, and liable to exacerbate racial tensions. This is unacceptable from one of the leaders of the Conservative Party and incompatible with the responsibility of a member of the Shadow Cabinet. (Aitken, 1968)

However, as mentioned before, *Rivers of Blood* was embraced by many. Clem Jones, former editor of the *Express and Star* newspaper commented on the positive feedback received after Powell's speech: "from the Tuesday through to the end of the week, I had 10, 15 to 20 bags full of readers' letters; 95% were pro-Enoch" (Greenslade, 2013). Additionally, Powell himself declared

I have received several hundred telegrams and the ticker tape at the House of Commons was on the go all day yesterday, mostly with messages of support for me, and today it is at it again. About 4,000 letters have been received already at my home – so far only six have been against. (qtd. in Heffer, 1999)

A Gallup poll from 1968 indicated that 76% of the British population agreed with Powell's statements (Taylor, 2015). Additionally, on April 23rd, around 1,000 dockers marched from the East End to Westminster in support of Powell, carrying banners that read "We back Enoch", "Don't knock Enoch" or "Back Britain, not Black Britain" (Heffer, 1999: 462).

Powell's speech was in line with the ideals of the far-right and it undoubtedly served as a boost for the progress of the National Front, as a former local organizer of the National Front bears witness to:

We held a march in Huddersfield in support of what Powell had said, and we signed eight people up as members of the branch that afternoon. Powell's speeches gave our membership and morale a tremendous boost. Before Powell spoke, we were getting only cranks and perverts. After his speeches we started to attract, in a secret sort of way, the right-wing members of the Tory organizations. (qtd. in Walker, 1971: 115)

Additionally, members of the Conservative Party that had agreed with Powell and had opposed his sacking left the party and joined the NF (Taylor, 1982: 21). The

National Front definitely benefited from this situation and kept on gaining support from a large part of the British population whose fear and rejection of immigration kept on increasing. Consequently, the party was about to experiment its highest electoral support during the mid-1970s: regarding the municipal elections of May 1969, Walker (1971) indicates that the 45 put up NF candidates received an average 8% of the votes, that percentage rising to 10% of the votes in the municipal elections of the following year (p. 90-91). The new decade brought better results to the party, significantly gaining popular support at the beginning of the 1970s when “an initial membership of 1,500 rose to a peak of 17,500 by 1972” (Barberis et al. 2000: 187).

Powell’s message would later on resonate in the allegations of Margaret Thatcher⁸³, who claimed on a television interview in 1978⁸⁴ about immigration numbers that

(...) if we went on as we are then by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture. (Thatcher, 1978)

This interview had a huge impact on the way NF followers perceived the Conservative Party, finding Thatcher as one more representative of their anti-immigratory policies.

The NF’s obsession with immigration was not only boosted by the Africanization of Kenya, but also by the Africanization of Uganda in 1972, as pointed out by Turner (2013: 215), who contends that the latter political event was decisive in the progress of the NF. Idi Amin Dada, who was the president of Uganda at the time, ordered the expulsion of the Asians who were living in the country and had British passports. As he declared:

I am going to ask Britain to take over responsibility for all Asians in Uganda who are holding British passports, because they are sabotaging the economy of the country. (Keatley, 1972)

As a consequence, around 80,000 Asians were expelled from Uganda, of which 28,000 of them arrived in Great Britain in 1972 (Turner, 2013: 215). The influx of Kenyan Asians had already fueled the racial conflict, leading to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968, along with the opposition to immigration by a large part of the population. Hence that the Africanization of Uganda could only worsen the situation. As most of the Asians in Uganda were in possession of a British passport, the government accepted them under the 1964 British Nationality Act⁸⁵, provoking a conflict amongst Conservative members and with Powell confronting his own party by opposing their

83 Margaret Thatcher was the leader of the Conservative Party at the time.

84 Interview for “World in Action” at Granada Television on 27th, January 1978.

85 The Act facilitated the “resumption or renunciation of citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies” (British Nationality Act 1964, 1964: 1).

arrival. However, Powell's motion was defeated and "an amendment proposed by the Young Conservatives congratulating the Government on its swift response to the Ugandan Asians crisis passed by a two to one majority" (Taylor, 1982: 24). These scenarios clearly favored the NF, as the party was the biggest political representative of the increasing number of citizens that stood against immigration.

The following quotation of a British woman who wrote to *The Times* exemplifies the fear of many English citizens who, in times of financial recession, saw newcomers as a threat to the unstable economic situation they were undergoing, and who considered that immigrants should not be welcomed until the current state of the English economy improved:

The Clydeside shipyard workers have fought extremely hard for their daily bread, the dockers are in a struggle for theirs, the transport workers are wondering what will happen to some of their jobs, at the Norwich shoe factory women staged a stop-in to save theirs. Not all these fights are successful in these times of much unemployment.

Mines have been shut down, and we hear of men in all walks of life offered redundancies in place of their work. White and black citizens of this country cannot buy or rent a house easily. Many young folk cannot get married because of the housing problem or if they do they live with in-laws and many marriages fail. Young school leavers, white and black, are on the streets with nothing to think about or do, they draw the dole! The future is bleak indeed.

This situation should not be aggravated by a large influx from any country. These people if allowed in must be housed, fed and found work. Schools must be found to take the children. If they are given national assistance they will strain the economy already at breaking point... Let the Government make it clear to these people from any country wanting to come to us, that the immigration quota remains and they must wait their turn when they will be more than welcome. (qtd. in Sandbrook, 2011: 146-147)

Another man, also a *Times* reader, sent a letter to the newspaper explaining the reason for his unconditional support of the National Front:

Why, because I don't want parts of my country to become no-go areas, where I feel I can't walk without the risk of being knifed or mugged. I don't want to be with black people. I don't want a multi-racial country. Why should I? I've got nothing in common with them ... why should I be forced to live with them? I want to be able to go into a pub, I want to be able to go to work without seeing a black face. The National Front is saying the sort of things I want to hear ... I want to be just with our own. I don't want to live in a system that falls over itself to favour blacks. If there's anything going in this country, I want it for myself. We've suffered enough in the

past, and now it's our turn. We've had one flabby government after another saying, "We've got to learn to live together". Well, why? They don't have to live with them, killing goats, wailing at dusk and fasting and being a nuisance. (qtd. in Sandbrook, 2011: 164)

Thurlow (1998) indicates that the votes received by the NF represented the disapproval of immigration on the part of a large sector of the British citizenry and "had little or nothing to do with any perceived or hidden fascist political programme" (Thurlow, 1998: 241). Hampshire (2005) supports the connection between the success of the NF and the Uganda issue by saying that it "gave a boost to the right-wing of the Party (notably the Monday Club), helped the growth of the National Front" (Hampshire, 2005: 42). Walker (1971) adds that the arrival of Ugandan Asians

brought so much new support that the character of the Front began to change. New members, new talent from other parties, established local politicians with experience of local issues and campaigning all welled into a party which was still dominated by the old neo-Nazis and cranks who had been scrabbling in the gutter of racist politics for a generation. (p. 9)

Regarding the electoral results after these events, the local elections of June 1973 granted the NF its best outcome in comparison to previous results, with 16% of the poll obtained (Walker, 1971: 142). The general election of October 1974, on its part, also implied a significant increase in the votes received by the NF:

The candidates in England won 112,000 votes, nine times the number won in 1970, and some 30,000 more than in February 1974. This was almost totally a consequence of the party's contesting more seats and gathering additional small votes in each. (Taylor, 1982: 36)

However, by the end of the 1970s, the party lost most of the power it had held in the mid- 1970s, as its membership fell down to less than 100 members (Alkiviadou, 2019: 22). Its clearest decline was "most demonstrably by the time of the May 1979 general election, when overt mass support for the far right in Britain had substantially declined" (Husbands, 1988: 65).

7.3 Racial attacks

The issue of racism in the England of the 1970s was not only portrayed in the ideals of political parties, the words of their representatives and the escalating electoral support of the far-right. The exacerbation of racial tensions and the repudiation of non-white individuals could only lead to racism being eventually manifested in the form of racial attacks, which would soon begin to occur on the streets.

One of the main race-related conflicts in Britain in the 1970s was caused by the troublesome relationship between non-whites and the police. The main cause for these confrontations lay in "over-policing" resulting from the "sus" law⁸⁶, a stop-and-search policy which allowed police officers to stop and arrest any person they considered suspicious of having committed a crime. The law is said to have been associated with racism, due to the disparity of the numbers of the people affected by it depending on their race. As Bowling et al. (2015) point out, "black people are six times more likely to be stopped and searched while Asian people are twice as likely to be in comparison to white people" (p. 8). The "sus" law served therefore as another weapon to be used against immigrants, considering, as Paul Gordon notes, that there is no way of physically differentiating an illegal immigrant from an illegal one, ergo police officers could simply misuse their capacity of stopping and searching suspected individuals to intercept those who appeared to be (illegal) immigrants (qtd. in Bowling et. al, 2015: 8). We could therefore conclude that "by the end of the 1970s, it was clear that black people, and minority ethnic communities more generally, were "over-policed but under-protected" (Bowling et. al, 2015: 8).

The Notting Hill Carnival riots of 1976 embody how the unsettling atmosphere caused by over-policing broke out into violence⁸⁷. The police presence, however, was considerably higher than in previous years, as reported by the BBC, which confirmed the attendance of 3,000 police officers, a number that exceeded ten times the amount of security forces in the previous years (Griffiths, 2006)⁸⁸. Police officers declared that, despite the presence of fascist gangs, the trouble began after a case of pickpocketing (ibid.) The riot resulted in more than 100 police officers having to be taken to hospital and "around 60 carnival-goers also needing hospital treatment after the clashes which led to the arrest of at least 66 people" (1976: Notting Hill Carnival ends in riot, 1976). The Carnival, as described by Chris Muller, one of the organizers, was always seen "by the state and the establishment as something that they wanted to stop, because they saw it for what it was: a form of cultural resistance" (qtd. in Griffiths, 2006). These declarations endorse the hypothesis that the trigger which detonated the riots was not vandalism, but the ongoing racial tension that was flooding the streets of England.

86 From "suspected person".

87 Just like every year since 1966, the streets of Notting Hill were ready for the celebrations carried out by members of the West Indian and Black community.

88 According to witnesses, a fight took place around 5pm and, right after chaos started, the police and those who attended the celebration engaged in fights which included policemen beating up participants and the latter attacking police officers throwing bricks and other objects.

Being an immigrant in Britain meant, on many occasions, that one would have trouble trying to access a job or finding a place to live. This scenario was clearly discriminatory at the time, since many immigrants found it difficult to buy or rent a house because of their origin. Despite the Race Relations Act 1968, which declared it illegal to deny housing and employment because of race, in 1971 the Nottingham's Fair Housing Group commented that

We regret to state that discrimination still continues to appear in various forms when an immigrant intends to purchase a house in one of the suburban areas of the city. The discrimination practiced in this field is so subtle that even the Race Relations Act has become powerless to prevent it. (Lawrence, 1974: 93)

Additionally, 7 out of 10 immigrants stated in a survey carried out in Nottingham that "they had suffered housing discrimination", while almost eight out of ten complained of employment discrimination too (Sandbrook, 2011: 152). Some declared that as soon as the job interviewer discovered that they were black, there was no chance of getting the job.

Sandbrook (2011) summarizes the general perception that many British citizens had about immigrants in the 1970s as being the main cause of the problems that the country was enduring at the time:

unemployment was explained as black workers taking British jobs; bad housing as blacks jumping the council house queue; clogged health and social services were the fault of diseased immigrants taking the place of deserving Britons; bad schools were the cause of illiterate black kids, and crime was their fault too. (Sandbrook, 2011: 164)

Therefore, bearing in mind the rising popularity of racist and fascist discourses in that decade, crimes towards immigrants or those who appeared to be were also to be expected. Unfortunately, specific numbers for these crimes cannot be provided, as the UK government does not offer statistics for crimes typified as "Racially or religiously aggravated less serious wounding" or "Racially or religiously aggravated harassment" prior to 1998. We can, however, interpret this lack of data as a sign of how little importance was attributed to racial problems at the time. Notwithstanding, we can still find testimonies of those who had suffered the consequences of racism in the 1970s, along with reports of violent attacks that on certain occasions ended up in murder. Several authors provide us with data about hate crimes that took place in the decade. For instance, Turner (2013) states that between 1976 and 1981 thirty-one non-whites were killed, all the murders attributed to hate crimes (Turner, 2013: 220) and 110 racist attacks took place only in autumn of 1977 (Sandbrook, 2011: 158).

Xenophobic remarks uttered by political figures were also far from being over: John Kingsley Read, former member of the Conservative Party and chairman of the NF

from 1974 to 1976, commented: "one down, a million to go" in a speech⁸⁹ when referring to Chaggar's⁹⁰ death. He talked about "niggers, wogs and coons" and made several comments which echoed the words uttered by Powell during his infamous speech "Goodness knows, we have one and a half million unemployed already and all immigrants are going to do is to occupy jobs that are needed by the local population". Read continued by saying "It will be said that immigrants will occupy homes which are needed by ordinary English folk in this country" (qtd in Turner, 2013: 216-7). Turner also points out the presence of a racial bias in judicial proceedings, reflected in the way in which the trial against Read was handled. Judge McKinnon stated that "in this England of ours at this moment we are allowed to have our own views still, thank goodness" (ibid.) and advised Read to use "moderate language" from that day on. The judge dismissed the case after considering that no offence had been made.

7.4 Anti-racist demonstrations

As the general elections of 1979 approached, political parties initiated their campaigns and so the National Front had a meeting arranged in the Southall Town Hall on April 23rd, 1979. The tragic death of the young Indian student Singh Chaggar three years before had not been forgotten and the presence of a party that constantly manifested its opposition to immigration was considered as an offence to the population of Southall, who decided to prevent the NF from holding their meeting. As the police report of April 24th, 1979, indicates

There was considerable opposition to this meeting, in particular by Indian Workers Association and the Southall Youth Movement, who considered that a meeting in this area by the National Front was particularly provocative. (New Scotland Yard, 1979: 1)

After non-successful attempts to curb the meeting, which was permitted by law and therefore could not be cancelled, protesters organized a march the day after, where 1,200 police officers showed up "because of the potential violence", resulting the event in the arrest of 19 protesters. But the biggest strife took place on the following day, when NF supporters and anti-racist protesters confronted each other because of the meeting. The Southhall riots, as they are known, were described by police officers as "the most violent they have handled in London" (1979: Teacher dies in Southall race riots, 1979), and the ensuing violence bouts on the streets led to the arrest of 300 people and cost the life of a 33-year-old teacher who had been campaigning against the National Front.

⁸⁹ Speech delivered on June 12th in Newham.

⁹⁰ Gurdip Singh Chaggar was an 18-year-old Sikh engineering student who was stabbed to death in Southall, West London on June 4th, 1976.

This was not the first time the National Front faced its detractors in confrontations that led to dreadful consequences. On June 15, 1974, the party organized a march in Red Lion Square which would later conclude in a meeting at Conway Hall. This coincided with a period of increasing popularity for the NF. Therefore, as the popularity of the party kept on growing, so did the number of opponents who were willing to face them. Consequently, there was a counter-march organized by a coalition of left organizations such as the International Socialists or the International Marxist Group.

Oddly enough, the National Front was not involved in the riot, as reports of the issue indicate that the confrontation was a result of a clash between the police and members of left-wing organizations (1974: Man dies in race rally clashes, 1974). As a result of this confrontation, a 22-year-old student attending the counter-march called Kevin Gately passed away. Gately's and Blair Peach's deaths were "the only people to have been killed while on political demonstrations in England since 1919" (Taylor, 1982: 164).

The fact that the NF did not participate in the riots had allowed them to be excluded from reports of the fatal event. This way, the left factions were presented as guilty and the "IMG and IS/SWP were condemned for using violence both in press comment at the time and in the later Scarman report on the circumstances surrounding Gately's death" (Taylor, 1982: 34). Another demonstration against the NF took place on August 13th, 1977, in the so-called "Battle of Lewisham", which resulted in the arrest of around 200 protesters and more than 100 people ending up injured. The NF's march was due to start at 14:15 and was preceded by a counter-march organized by the "All- Lewisham Coordinating Campaign Against Racism and Fascism" (Taylor, 1982: 132). Even if the march hadn't entailed disturbances "some members of the extreme left who had joined in were not content to let the matter rest at this point" (Taylor, 1982: 132). The conflict erupted when the NF's march, which was scheduled to start in New Cross and be headed towards Lewisham, initiated and clashed with the counter-march of anti-NF demonstrators, which caused the party to never reach their destination. Later, the conflict would move on to disturbances between the police and those who opposed the NF. The consequences of "The Battle of Lewisham" were quite contrary to those experienced by the far-right party after what had happened in Red Lion Square:

The official literature of the NF talks a lot about how Lewisham was very damaging to them. They turned up with what they thought was a force but were hugely outnumbered, then they were prevented from marching through Lewisham – plus press coverage did not paint them as victims but painted them as guilty as anybody else. They never really maintained their hold on the area. (qtd. in Townsend, 2017)

7.5 Skinheads

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The decade of the 1970s witnessed the peak of a youth subculture which would soon acquire a bad reputation, known as skinheads, who were on many occasions the perpetrators of racist attacks and far-right violence. Despite the popular association of skinheads with neo-Nazism, racism and white power, the movement was not only constituted by individuals who shared this ideology. In fact, if we dig into its origins, we will observe that the subculture was originally distant from those values. Additionally, during the development of the skinhead culture, the ideals of the members of the movement have varied considerably, to the extent that we can find skinheads who advocated for racism and others who opposed it.

The origin of the skinhead subculture is complex and still subject to discussion, making it difficult to offer an accurate view of when and where it started. In *Skinhead History, Identity, and Culture*, Borgeson and Valeri (2018) talk about traditional ("trads") skins when referring to those who "adhere to the original philosophy of the British movement in 1969" (Borgeson & Valeri, 2018: introduction), assuming that the skinhead subculture had its roots back in the later years of the 1960 decade. The authors state that the difference between racist and non-racist Skins stems from their own understanding of the beginning of the movement (Borgeson & Valeri, 2018: 2), the latter associating the birth of Skins with Jamaica and the musical scene there. In the words of one member of the skinhead movement:

If you really want to understand the skinhead scene you have to look back to the beginnings of reggae and ska in Jamaica to get a true picture of where the skins originated from. The whole rudeboy phenomena in England came from there and they aligned themselves with others who were fighting for working-class rights. (Borgeson & Valeri, 2018: 4).

On the contrary, George Marshall, writer of *Spirit of 69*, mentions that despite the fact that the term "skinhead" started to be frequently used in 1969 as a way of describing members of a specific subculture, boys could be seen wearing the typical skinhead attire back in 1964 (Marshall, 1994: 8). Additionally, another skin quoted by Borgeson and Valeri's declares the following in regards to the connections between the movement and Jamaica:

The history for those who call themselves a "trad" is not the real beginnings. Some will say that it began in Jamaica—that is total bullshit. Skinheads came over with the punk movement from Britain. For some it was just some kind of fashion statement. For others it meant a way of life—and that way of life was about the possible extinction of the white race. That is why it planted itself in America, the shit that was going on in Britain was the same as was happening here. Minorities moving in and losing our jobs to them. There is only so long you can stand for that shit. (qtd. in Borgeson & Valeri, 2018: 13)

Since its early stages, the skinhead subculture had been closely linked to the working-class, as can be observed when examining the external appearance of Skins. The look of a skinhead is characterized by a buzz cut⁹¹ (shaved head), which gave name to the movement, and the clothing of a skinhead has a working-class feeling: jeans, Doc Marten work boots, polo shirts, etc. As Borgeson and Valeri (2018) point out:

Clothing needed to be affordable, practical, and identifiable. The look of skins, with Levi's, t-shirts, short or shaved hair, and "braces" (suspenders) has changed little in the 50 plus years skins have been in existence. Even short hair was a statement in an era already used to longhaired hippies. (pp. 4-5)

As mentioned before in regard to the ideology of skinheads, racism was not a common attitude to be found in the first members of the subculture: "trads" stood up for other values, which differed from racial discrimination and other radical behavior. As one member of the skinhead community commented:

Trads embrace the original skinhead culture, pride, loyalty and heritage. It wasn't until the Nazi's came along that you started to see "heritage" change. For the Nazi's heritage meant white pride. Unity was whites should stick together and exclude all other races. If it wasn't for them the movement probably would have heritage as working-class; instead, you had heritage's meaning bastardized to mean race. (qtd. In Borgeson and Valeri, 2018: 7)

Roddy Moreno, founder of SHARP⁹² in the UK, added:

No true skinheads are racist. Without the Jamaican culture, skinheads would not exist. It was their culture mixed with British working-class culture that made skinhead what it is. –Roddy Moreno, founder of SHARP in the UK. (qtd. in Marshall, 1994:151).

At the beginning of the 1970s the skinhead movement was notably growing to a point where it had "transformed from a style-conscious London scene into a national movement" (Turner, 2013: 63). By 1972 it was argued that they "constituted by far the biggest single group among this country's teenagers" (Turner, 2013: 63). And so, the greater the number of individuals joining the skinhead culture, the wider the range of policies and ideals to be found within the movement. Therefore, the risk of encountering violent and extremist members among its members was increasing significantly, and it comes as no surprise that some skinheads would adopt xenophobic attitudes, for these beliefs were thriving in the England of the 1970s. Immigrants were blamed for the economic hardships that most working-class individuals were going through because of the economic recession, as seen in the following declaration from a skin:

91 The term is thought to derive from the "buzz" sound of the electric clipper.

92 SHARP stands for "Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice".

We're being exploited, the working-class. It's hard for us to fight for our job and our house, but with them here as well, trying to get our houses, it's another opposition. I'll tell you another thing, when you stand next to these people that have just come over here, they fucking stink. (qtd. in Turner, 2013: 63)

Many of those racist skinheads were responsible for externalizing their repulse for non-whites by unleashing brutal attacks on them. Additionally, skinheads have been associated with "paki-bashing", a term used to describe physical or verbal violence towards Pakistanis⁹³. As explained by one skinhead, in the act of "paki-bashing"

You go up to them and bump into them, and then you nut [forehead bash] them right, and then you hit them, and as they go down you give them a kicking, bash them with an iron bar, and take their watches and rings and things like that. (Mahan & Griset, 2013: 299)

On 12th April 1969, the *Sunday Mirror* addressed racial violence amongst skinhead individuals:

Britain first became aware of the term paki-bashing last Wednesday. A group of skinheads boasted on TV that they beat up coloured immigrants in East London for the fun of it. (qtd. in Marshall, 1994: 131)

"Paki-bashing" had become common in the 1970s due to the increase of South Asian immigration in the country, being 43,000 the South Asians that were living in Britain in 1950, opposed to the 500,000 that had settled down two decades later (Puri, 2015). According to Mahan and Griset, "more than 50 such attacks were reported within a span of weeks in 1970, triggering street protests by British South Asians" (2013: 299)⁹⁴.

93 The word "paki" is a slur employed to refer to those who are or appear to be from Pakistan although the word is also used to pejoratively address South Asians in general.

94 On April 3rd 1970 two Asians were attacked by skinheads at their workplace at the London Chest Hospital. The incident was reported on the media and the issue of "paki-bashing" started to be regularly addressed in the daily press, as pointed out by Kershen (2004). For instance, the *Sunday Times* devoted an entire page to the racist persecution which was afflicting the 4,000 to 7,000 Pakistanis [...] The article revealed that in January and February of that year there had been regular attacks by skinheads on Pakistanis in Spitalfields. The writer of the article believed that the main reasons for "Paki-bashing" were theft or "just crude beatings up". Some young, white, teenage attackers were even being egged on by their parents. (qtd. in Kershen, 2004: 86)

Additionally, *The Observer* sent a distressful message to the Asian community when they stated that "any Asian careless enough to be walking the streets alone at night is a fool" (Kershen, 2004: 187) implying that they were at a high risk of being attacked. On April 14th, *The Times* published an article that treated the issue of "Skinheads and Race Relations". The column reports the recent increase of violence towards the Pakistani community and indicates that the attacks are "no doubt an expression of racial feeling. But another reason why so many Pakistanis are attacked is that they are known to be gentle, peaceful people who are easy victims" (Skinheads and Race Relations, 1970). Despite the concern of over-policing, the article revealed that "the Pakistanis of east London have unquestionably lost confidence in the police" (ibid.) and consider that police officers should prioritize these assaults.

Tosir Ali was one of the victims of the Skinhead practice of "paki-bashing". He was murdered by two of them in the same month than the previously mentioned assault. The murderers were 18 years old

All in all, far-right organizations saw in skinheads an opportunity to spread their ideology and attract more supporters. Thurlow (1998: 252) indicates that the British Movement mobilized “groups of young toughs and skinheads in inner city areas in direct action against the left and coloured immigrants in the 1970s”. The BM had influenced the National Front’s National Activities Organizer, Martin Webster, as he “saw skinheads and football hooligans as suitable material to engage in both defensive and offensive violence against antifascists and the British black community” (ibid.). The fact that the skinhead subculture had its roots in the working class was something far-right parties could take advantage of, as it was immigrants who were constantly blamed for the lack of job opportunities and economic issues in the Britain of the times. Since the working class had suffered the dire consequences of the economic recession, it would be easier to make them believe that immigrants were the main cause of the problem and that their expulsion from the country would be positive.

Skinheads are an example of how the youth had become a main target for the far-right in order to gain voters and sympathizers in the turbulent Britain of the 1970s. While these actions could be seen as an attempt to approach a youthful audience, it must be remembered that the NF already counted on the support of the young generation, as the average NF voter was described as “a young, urban working-class male” (qtd. in Billing & Cochrane, 1981: 9). Moreover, a survey carried out by Harrop et. al showed that

NF supporters tend to be younger than would be expected by chance: over 20 per cent of supporters were aged between 15 and 20 years, and a further 16 per cent were between 21 and 24 years. Specifically looking at young people in Hackney, Weir found higher rates of National Front support amongst the 16-18 year olds than amongst 19-20 year olds. (Harrop et. al, 1980: 276)

On September 1st, 1977, *The Times* published an interesting piece of writing named “National Front manifesto: effect on the young”, which shed some light on the reasons why there were so many adolescents that sided with the skinhead ideology among the followers of the NF. In the column, we get to see a testimony of a father from Middlesex who talks about his son and the reasons that made him support the party. This is a fragment of that passage:

My son, now 22, felt at the age of 16 and 17 that the NF was the only party holding out some hope for England and the English. He was disenchanted with the policies of the Left, who he felt soft-bedded those with no desire to work and the

and “were largely young men, dressed in a distinctive style: closely cropped hair, checked shirts, braces or sleeveless tank-top jumpers, dark jeans and steel-capped “bover” boots” (Rosenberg, 2020). Suresh Grover, whose experiences with racism have been previously mentioned, marks 1973 as the year of the peak presence of skinheads in Nelson, Lancashire, when a gang of skinheads stabbed him and broke his nephew’s jaw. After reporting the assault to the police “no incident report or statement was taken and the policeman never followed up the attack” (Puri, 2015).

coloured people-brought up to disagree with colour prejudice, working in close quarters with a certain section of the coloured community changed his outlook completely. The Conservatives

116 held no appeal as he felt they were ineffective, trying to please all voters. He desperately wanted to be proud of England and identify with a party that was 100 per cent for the English, he felt "The Front" could weld the English people together again and bring back law and order. Having fallen for some of the media propaganda, he considered that returning all coloureds home to their land of origin would ameliorate our economic and labour problems. (National Front manifesto: effect on the young, 1977)

He then comments that once he knew that his son wanted to join the party, he became alarmed and warned his son that the propaganda of the NF reminded him of the one that Nazis had displayed before the war. We consider that this testimony is a good example of the way a great number English citizens felt towards immigrants, and it quite faithfully reflects the reasons why many individuals cast their votes for the NF, leading to the prosperity of the far-right in this decade.

Just a month after the publication of the article in *The Times*, in October 1977, the National Front discussed in its annual meeting the possibility of creating a section aimed at young men and women. One of the goals of this new section would be the setting up of groups in clubs, schools and other places frequented by the youth. The proposal succeeded and the Young National Front was created as a department of the NF, led by Andrew Fountaine, the vice-chairman of the NF, allowing anyone between 14 and 25 years old to apply for membership. Among the members that joined the organization was Joe Pearce, a 16-year-old who would play a key role in the spread of the Front's ideology among the young for, in September 1977, he became the editor of *Bulldog*, a magazine which eventually turned into the official YFN paper. As it was aimed at young people, Pearce himself explained that *Bulldog* was being handed to students outside their high schools, which caused indignation among the media and the press, where he was labeled as "racist and neo-Nazi and a corrupter of the minds of innocent children" (Pearce, 2013: 61). While this outrage angered Pearce, he admitted that it was beneficial for the sales of *Bulldog*, since the coverage, despite being bad press, gave exposure to the YNF's publication causing that "by the beginning of 1978, the circulation of the magazine had increased ten-fold, from several hundred copies per issue to several thousand" as Pearce pointed out (Pearce, 2013: 62). Because of the good reception of the magazine and Pearce being "one of the most widely known members of the National Front" (ibid.), the party officially hired Pearce. It goes without saying that one of the main topics covered in

Bulldog was the issue of race, being in line with the rest of the NF policies. For instance, Pearce's publication was responsible for the creation of the "Racist League" which, in his own words

Encouraged football hooligans to send in reports of racist abuse and racist chants at soccer games. Fans of rival teams sought to outdo each other and become top of the league. Fans of Chelsea, Leeds, West Ham, and Newcastle were amongst the most racist. (Pearce, 2013: 63)

Pearce was also responsible for the "*Bulldog Black List*", an initiative addressed at students, which encouraged them to expose "red teachers" by publishing their addresses, phone numbers and names (ibid.). Additionally, in 1978 the YNF issued around 250,000 leaflets, also aimed at young students, entitled "How to Spot a Red Teacher" and "How to Combat a Red Teacher". These leaflets suggested that "teachers who promoted racial equality in the classroom, or denigrated nationalism in any way, were part of a Communist plot to take over the UK" (Trilling, 2012: 41). The beginning of the pamphlet read as follows:

COMMIES (they call themselves "Marxists" or even "Socialists" have infiltrated our schools. They are trying to indoctrinate you with Commie ideas. They sneer at our British race and nation, and everything that has made Britain great. Don't let them get away with it! Be proud to be British, and fight back against Commie brainwashing. (Taylor, 1982: 141)

The leaflet goes on by telling its readers that there is no such thing as racial equality:

Commie teachers will tell you that all races are "equal". They will tell you that intelligence is not inborn, but is produced by a "good environment". They will tell you that if all races were brought up in the same environment they would all be equal. (ibid.)

Students are even provided with responses to their "red teachers" in case they argue back:

Tell the Red teacher that top scientists like Jensen and Eysenck say this is rubbish. Scientists say that races are born different in all sorts of ways, especially in intelligence. "This is because we inherit our abilities genetically". (qtd. in H. Rose, S. Rose, 1978: 11)

Teachers therefore suffered the consequences of this "witch hunt", receiving "threatening phone calls and offensive materials in the mail and, on one occasion, being assaulted in the classroom" (Pearce, 2013: 63).

Despite the success Pearce experienced with his paper, the hatred-filled contents of the magazine did not prevent him from being involved in legal affairs. In July 1981, Pearce was accused of "publishing material likely to incite racial hatred" (Pearce, 2013: 5), which consequently sent him to trial in January 1982, prosecuted under the Race Relations Act of 1976. During the trial, Pearce was accused of having "clearly broken the law by carrying material in the newspaper which was

threatening, abusive or insulting to coloured or Asian people" (Pearce, 2013: 5). In spite of Pearce denying all the eight charges, he was sent to prison for six months. However, Pearce's imprisonment did not stop the YNF from releasing their official paper and the publication continued now referring to itself as "The paper they want to ban" (Buford, 1992: 32). 31 years later, Pearce himself recognized that "*Bulldog's* ultimate purpose was to incite racial hatred" (Pearce, 2013: 63) and explained the strategy followed in the paper: "We had to stir up enmity and hatred between black and white youths, thereby making multiracialism untenable and a race war inevitable" (ibid.). He continued by stating that the words he had published on the magazine had been written with the purpose of being "deliberatively provocative and offensive in the hope of provoking the government to prosecute me for a hate crime" (Pearce, 2013: 66). Pearce's goal, as he declared, was to be charged with offences under the Race Relations Act of 1976 by the Director of Public Prosecution in order to prove that the Race Relations Act of 1976 was a mere façade:

My stance was designed, therefore, as a Mexican stand-off. If the government refused to take the bait, however offensive, it indicated that the Race Act was effectively dead, if not buried, because of the unwillingness of the government to wield its power to enforce the act. On the other hand, if the Director of Public Prosecutions took the bait and brought charges against me, it was hoped that the action would prove as unpopular with the public as had the earlier prosecution of Robert Relf⁹⁵, thereby winning support for the National Front. (Pearce, 2013: 66-7)

The decline of the far-right

All these events considered, we can say that the decline of the far-right and the NF began at the end of the decade. Husbands (1988: 76) marks 1978 as the year when the popular support of the National Front began to stumble and attributes the party's decline to an internal conflict within the NF as well as to an external one. Firstly, Husbands states that the extreme-right party and its political credibility had been problematical: the party couldn't achieve an image of responsibility because of the bad reputation of its leaders, who had been linked to neo-Nazi groups, and, moreover, "it never had the aura of a party with a serious claim to taking power. There was a limit to the faith even of those individuals attracted by its proposals on race and immigrants" (Husbands, 1988: 76). In any case, the external factor that affected the political performance of the NF the most was the growing success of the Conservative Party in the general elections of 1979, which had succeeded at "maintaining a "hard" line on race-related matters" (ibid.), something we have already seen with the impact

⁹⁵ Robert Relf was prosecuted under the Race Relations Act 1976 for trying to sell a house "to an English family only" (Pearce, 2013: 24). He was later jailed for refusing to take it down after the court had told him to do so.

of Margaret Thatcher's words in 1978. The general election of 1979 showed clear signs of the upcoming weakening of the NF:

on election night in 1979 various experts were lined up to discuss what was expected to be a National Front breakthrough. They had fielded 303 candidates, up from 90 at the previous election: all lost their deposits and the NF collected a derisory 0.6 per cent of the vote. (Nelson, 2014)

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As *Husbands* (1988) points out, the National Front, following their most prosperous decade, was clearly on the downside and seriously decaying in the 1980s:

marked by numerous fissions and a progressive withdrawal from any serious claim to electoral participation, culminating in the current situation of almost total rejection of electoral politics in favour of alternative and often more paramilitarily influenced styles of political activism. (p. 65)

Therefore, we could say that the decline the National Front experienced by the end of the decade was caused in a way by Thatcherism and the way it implemented certain policies that were popular within the followers of the National Front, such as immigration ones.

Throughout this chapter we have insisted that the 1970s was a rough decade for immigration. During this period of time, immigrants became the scapegoat for the collapse of the English economy, which led to a great part of the English society thinking that the expulsion of immigrants, whether they were newcomers or long-time established migrants, would improve the situation of the nation. We have also observed that the immigration waves of the 50s and 60s gave way to the passing of numerous acts which were intended to regulate the influx of migrants. We consider the rise of far-right parties as a key point when examining the racism issues of the 1970s, as the policies of these political factions instigated racial prejudices, bigotry and promoted xenophobic discourses backed up by figures of importance, who were praised for it. The success of the National Front in that decade reflects the discontent English citizens had towards migrants. But not only was the decade of the 1970s notorious for racism in politics, but also for the way in which this racialism was materialized in violent attacks towards immigrants. Moreover, we find it revealing that there is not much data about the hate crimes committed in Britain in that decade, something which leads us to believe that these crimes were not taken perhaps so seriously as other crimes. Another interesting matter to reflect upon is how the youth gained prominence in politics, since they became a target for far-right propaganda as potential voters.

Nevertheless, the decade of the 1970s in Britain was also a time for raising awareness about the racial issue, an attitude embodied in the passing of the Race Relations Act 1976, which had the purpose of criminalizing discrimination. Additionally, several

protests were organized in the 1970s in Britain by detractors of the far-right to show their discomfort towards the rising success of these parties, and communities of immigrants joined together to fight for their rights in hope of a brighter future. That said, it is beyond doubt that the England of the 1970s was characterized, in addition to the economic crisis and discontent, by the success of the far-right and high levels of racism.

Punk and Racism

Amidst this racist and anti-immigration turmoil, music and musical movements in Britain could not remain oblivious, and in fact they played a very important role to keep racism and totalitarianism at bay, showing a striking level of commitment. It must be noted, however, that music in the 1970s in Britain was not exactly a safe place for non-white individuals and that the industry contained remarkable examples of racist and fascist attitudes. In this respect, the use of Nazi symbology by some members of the punk community, the praise of extremist ideologies in certain songs, and other examples of public display of racist attitudes in the music scene of the 1970s is a reality that cannot be overlooked.

Punk and Nazism

The punk movement imported, among other iconographic aspects, the symbology of extreme-right ideologies, such as swastikas and iron crosses, which were an integral part of the clothing of punk bands and fans. In the first appearances of the Sex Pistols on television (December 1st, 1976, at the *Today* show), one of the band's fans could be seen sporting a Nazi armband. Other relevant figures in the punk scene such as Sid Vicious, Siouxsie Sioux or Johnny Rotten could easily be seen wearing or displaying different elements of Nazi symbology⁹⁶. In musical terms, several songs alluded to Nazism without condemning it. "Belsen was a Gas"⁹⁷ (1979) by the Sex Pistols alluded to the atrocities perpetrated in the Holocaust in a humorous tone: "Belsen was a gas/I heard the other day/In the open graves where the jews all lay/Life is fun and I wish you were here/They wrote on postcards to those held dear/

96 Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen. 1978

<https://www.latercera.com/resizer/v2/25N2OXQMDRCZJMS652PTITYHSI.jpg?quality=80&smart=true&auth=b72b33fc8b24b6c92b5517db72590d59e70c365cdd0440badc57187cdf6236f1&width=790&height=1164>

Jenny Rate from Open Sore with a painted swastika on her cheek

https://www.boredteenagers.co.uk/images/opensoreImage28_DCE%20copy.JPG

A Nazi armband could be seen during the whole TV appearance of the Sex Pistols in the *Today* show, 1976

https://i2-prod.mirror.co.uk/incoming/article23803363.ecc/ALTERNATES/s1200e/3_The-Filth-and-the-Fury.jpg

97 The song title is intended to be a pun. First, alluding to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and its gas chambers and then using the word "gas" as an expression to indicate that something is funny.

Sergeant major's on the march/Wash their bodies in the starch/See them all die one by one/Guess it's dead, guess it's glad". The Vibrators released in 1978 "Nazi Baby", a love song that did not touch the issue of Nazism but most likely included the word for shocking purposes: "Well I been looking for a little girl/Well, I've been searching all around the world/And when I've found her/I'm gonna hold her tight/I said I'm gonna be your Nazi baby/Gonna make you feel alright, alright". The Models wrote a song called "I wanna Form My Own Nazi Party" and, though it was never released, it was played live on several occasions. Another example of intolerance is found in "Love in a Void" by Siouxsie and the Banshees, whose original lyrics contained the line "Too many Jews for my liking". The verse was dropped and was not released. The Spitfire Boys released a song called "Mein Kampf" (1977) while The Cortinas dropped "Fascist Dictator" (1977). Some band names were straight allusions to the ideology of the Third Reich, such as Martin and the Brownshirts (alluding to the *Sturmabteilung*), London SS or Nazis Against Fascism.

Despite these examples of the display of what could be considered Nazi propaganda, it is clear that the use of swastikas and other allusions to Nazism by many punk bands and punk fans of the time only had the goal of shocking audiences and showing criticism towards the British society, never to promote hateful ideals, as many punk artists made very clear. Steve Severine, from Siouxsie and the Banshees, for instance, confessed that swastikas and other Nazi symbology were so common within the scene that they could easily be purchased in King's Road, where McLaren's and Westwood's boutique was located. According to McLaren, punks only used these symbols to offend the older generations:

Even when you consider all the trappings, the swastikas, leather bondage, and chains, we never felt much intolerance. To us these weren't badges of intolerance, but symbols of provocation to an older generation that had to get out of the way to make room for the younger voices. To do so, we made use of any form possible. (qtd. in Lydon, 1994: 384-385)

Chrissie Hynde from The Pretenders agrees with Severine's stance:

When the punk kids walked around wearing swastikas and bondage gear, it was their two fingers up at the Establishment. They weren't buying into or in any way associating themselves with Nazism or the National Front or sadomasochism. These were teenagers who were just trying to say, "Fuck you!". (qtd. in Lydon, 1994: 160)

For many punks, their aim was not to support racist ideologies, but to denounce the similitude, according to their own thinking, of the situation of their own country with a fascist regime. The majority of those who belonged to the punk scene were suffering the consequences of an economic crisis which was leaving them with little future prospects and high levels of juvenile unemployment, a great contrast in comparison

with their parents' generation, which had enjoyed the benefits of the economic boom. Punks wanted to confront and offend adults by showing them that, in spite of the country's pride for having defeated the Nazis, the younger generations still wore their symbols as a representation of them having failed young kids. The punks' refusal to treat anything as a taboo (political or otherwise) can also be seen in other types of clothing they usually wore (see the DIY chapter "punk fashion"). As Marcus (1989) puts it, punks tried to prove that

fascism had won the Second World War: that contemporary Britain was a welfare-state parody of fascism, where people had no freedom to make their own lives —where, worse, no one had the desire. (p. 118)

Siouxsie Sioux was one of the most relevant figures of the punk scene and wore the swastika quite often. Sioux declared that, on one occasion, she was punched in the face because she had walked into a club unaware of the fact that she was wearing the Nazi armband during an anniversary of the Second World War. As she relates, wearing that kind of paraphernalia had nothing to do with Nazi ideals, emphasizing the fact that most punks were unaware of the implications of wearing those images. She also remarked how little most punks knew about the horrors of the Second World War and Nazism:

Well, wearing the swastika back then was certainly not meant to be a political statement. At the time, I was very much into mixing up various symbols: the crucifix, the swastika and, later on, the Star of David. I think everyone generally was pretty much ignorant of what the Holocaust and the war meant. It was really just a thing of the older generation, and the young people were always getting beaten up about the war. It was just a way to piss off the older generation. It was very much more high camp than death camp. (qtd. in Cost, 2007)

It is also interesting to bear in mind that some relevant punk figures of the time such as Nancy Spungen, who was often present when Vicious wore swastikas in his clothes, were actually Jewish. The same thing happened with Malcolm McLaren, who was also Jewish and who did not only support Vivienne Westwood's designs but also handed out Nazi armbands during live performances (Goldman, 2014).

Hebdige (1979) summarizes how the adoption of the swastika by the punk community was far from being a representation of antisemitic ideals. He notes that punks had the power of dissociating the swastika from its original meaning and context⁹⁸:

98 This is found in general in the way the subculture appropriated images and changed their meaning according to their interests (e.g. the queen's portrait in the cover of "God Save The Queen" or the Union Jack, which was often put on display by punks but also by the National Front, becoming a symbol for the far-right party as well).

The swastika was worn because it was guaranteed to shock [...] The signifier (swastika) had been willfully detached from the concept (Nazism) it conventionally signified, and although it had been re-positioned (as "Berlin") within an alternative subcultural context, its primary value and appeal derived precisely from its lack of meaning: from its potential for deceit. It was exploited as an empty effect. We are forced to the conclusion that the central value "held and reflected" in the swastika was the communicated absence of any such identifiable values. Ultimately, the symbol was as "dumb" as the rage it provoked. (pp. 116-117)

The band Joy Division (Manchester, 1978), whose name was an allusion to Nazism⁹⁹, illustrated their first EP *An Ideal for Living* (1978) with an image of a boy from the Hitler Youth. The illustration was made by the guitar player Bernard Summer, who signed as Bernard Albrecht¹⁰⁰.

In Peter Hook's *Unknown Pleasures: Inside Joy Division* (2012), the band member addressed how Joy Division's name, the EP cover and other attitudes gave the general audience the impression that the band supported Nazism:

Anyway, after the name change, of course, the Nazi shit hit the fan. Changing our name to Joy Division, calling the EP *An Ideal for Living* and having a picture of a Hitler Youth banging a drum on the front of it – well, looking at it now, I can see the problem. I mean, *An Ideal for Living*? It even sounds Nazi. Not to mention the way we dressed and Barney shouting out about Rudolf Hess on the *Short Circuit* record. Let's face it, there was quite a lot of evidence against us. (pp. 92-93)

All in all, even though Hook denies any real Nazi endorsement from the band, he supports the punk discourse of using these symbols for shock value:

Everybody was fixated on the war and punks, being punks, focused on the most unpalatable, shocking side of it. This started with the Pistols, who often had swastikas on their clothes. But it was about being shocking, not about ideology. We didn't have a political bone in our bodies – none of us did, not even Ian [Curtis]. Arty stuff was what he liked, not political. Yes, we were naïve and stupid and probably trying too hard to get up the noses of the older generation, but we weren't Nazis. Never have been and never will be. (pp. 92-93)

However, it was just a matter of time until Nazism and Fascism sympathizers thought of punk as a place where their ideals were welcome. Those who were not directly involved with the subculture were obviously unaware of the punks' tongue-in-cheek

99 Joy Division was the name of concentration camps wings where sexual slaves were located. The name appeared in *House of Dolls*, written by Ka-Tzetnik in 1953.

100 *An Ideal for Living* (1978) EP cover https://i.discogs.com/506c1Bd6b00yWOC559aT_tsi4gqpIldb-YZ-TZdfuk28/rs:fit/g:sm/q:90/h:600/w:579/czM6Ly9kaXNjb2dz/LWRhdGFYXNlLWlt/YWdlcy9SLT-Q5ODg1/NS0xMzA4MjU3Nzg3/LmpwZWc.jpeg

use of these symbols and other references to totalitarian ideologies. The damage was done, and far-right followers found punk as a co-religionist musical genre which shared their ideals. As Matthew Worley (2017a) notes:

- 124 (...) these confrontational symbols were often utilized to provoke a reaction and juxtaposed deliberately to avoid easy assimilation. In doing so, however, punk could not prevent political meanings being projected back onto the emergent culture. Just as members of the far right saw punk's swastikas and iron crosses as evidence of the white youth becoming aware of their racial identity, so some on the left saw in punk a formative expression of socialist protest (...) accusations of fascism soon led bands such as the Clash to better define their stance, presenting themselves as "anti-fascist, anti-violence, anti-racist, pro-creative". (p. 10)

Nonetheless, reactions against the problematical use of extremist motifs by the punk community began to arise within the scene itself. Lucy Toothpaste stated in the second issue of her fanzine *Jolt* (1977) that it was "stupid" for punks to wear swastikas even though they did not have the intention of conveying fascist messages¹⁰¹.

In the fanzine *Ripped and Torn*, Tony D released a statement in which he explained the reasons behind his decision for having stopped wearing Nazi symbology. In his message, he admitted his ignorance about the contents of the Nazi ideological program and showed his rejection towards the National Front. By the end of his statement, Tony D encouraged his audience to join him in stopping wearing extremist paraphernalia:

I first started wearing it in the form of an iron cross around my neck back in July 1976 because it looked so good and also it caused outrage and shocked people really well. Not because I hated Jews or anything like that. The only thing I liked about the nazi regime was their organization and determination.

I stopped wearing it when I realized I was becoming more interested in the pro-nazi implications than I wanted to. I stopped wearing them altogether, at that time it was a swastika around my neck, in January, and even then it wasn't a regular part of my apparel. As I said, I realized the disgusting side of the nazi regime (the mass extermination of anybody who spoke against them, and the enforcement of a dictatorship that meant no freedom to the individual, and also the stupid idea of creating a master race of blond youths by killing anybody who didn't conform to their standards) was starting to interest me, because I was starting to stand up for the insults people made about the nazi stuff, you know, people would say "Fucking Jew hater" and I'd stick up for Jew killing.

101 Excerpt from the fanzine *Jolt* <https://encrypted-tbn1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRRXoi-C5w-CmXqVf46FzpPeNjQSw0iwzPSj-yLgiTBLn8pD7KdT>

It probably happened to you if you wore that stuff, I hope you're not still wearing it, what with the National Front (and their extremist offshoot, the National Party) saying you're supporting them because we wore it. I still think the swastika looks impressive and is the best symbol anyone ever came up with, but I'll never wear one again. Will you?

Steve Severin was another of the punks who realized how dangerous it was to display such imagery, especially when the punk movement began gaining more relevance and having a larger audience:

However, the swastikas were dropped fairly quickly because we realized it wasn't the most clever way to get our point across. When it was still a small movement you could use symbols like that, but once the following got too big, you couldn't use symbols like swastikas and images of German decadence. On a broader scope, it would communicate the wrong meaning. (qtd. in Lydon, 1994: 384-385)

Rock Against Racism, Rock Against Communism and Punk Against Racism

Even though most punk artists had no intention of bringing racism into the music scene, it was inevitable that those who sympathized with the ideology behind the symbols took advantage of the situation and went on to try inserting and spreading their extremist ideologies within the punk subculture. Eddy Morrison, who was heavily involved with the National Front in the 1970s and had been the leader of the British National Party, created the *Punk Front* fanzine in 1978 in the city of Leeds, where the National Front had strong support¹⁰². Morrison saw punk as an opportunity to spread the beliefs of the party. As Forbes and Stampton (2015) note, Eddy Morrison recognized that punk rock, which was fast becoming the dominant youth cult, would be "a powerful weapon for anyone who could turn it politically" (p.10). According to Morrison, the *Punk Front* zine was quite a success as it brought National Front supporters into the punk scene. In his own words, he used punk as a vehicle to convey his ideals:

We either had to condemn Punk or use it. I chose the latter option and started a spoof fanzine called *Punk Front* which featured a NF logo with a safety pin in it. To my great surprise, *Punk Front* was a huge success and soon, especially in Leeds, NF members and supporters were going to the biggest Punk club around – the infamous F Club. I started to regularly go to the club and NF Punks were recruiting other punks. In a few months, the NF was the dominant political force on the big punk scene in Leeds. Music papers such as *Sounds* and the *New Musical Express*

102 Eddy Morrison was responsible for causing far-right violence, including the physical assault of John Carlton, a teacher of Leeds Polytechnic. A *Leeds Other Paper* article reported the following: "A teacher at Leeds Polytechnic, John Charlton, was knocked to the ground and kicked unconscious by a group of fascists recently. The attack was instigated, he alleges, by Eddy Morrison" (1977).

were taking an interest in us. Gary Bushell was sent up to look into the phenomenon. We had pro-NF letters published in many music papers and other punks started bringing out pro-NF fanzines. (qtd. in Forbes & Stampton, 2015: 10)

- 126 *Punk Front* ended up having a run of five issues. Bands like The Dentists, The Ventz, Crap or White Boss¹⁰³, labeled as Nazi punk, stood by far-right ideals. Some of them were even close with members of extremist right parties¹⁰⁴.

Just as Morrison and the NF did, other far-right parties tried to take advantage of punk's links with Nazi and fascist imagery. According to Worley and Copsey (2016), a 1977 article entitled "Rock and the Reich", issued by the *British Patriot*, a publication of the neo-Nazi organization British Movement, speculated about the use of iron crosses and swastikas by the punk community, suggesting that the members of the scene were supporters of racism and far-right nationalism (p. 35). In the same way, the NF tried to establish real connections between fascism and punk. As Sabin (1999) corroborates:

NF newspapers like *Bulldog* tried to put a fascist spin on punk songs and to claim leading figures— including the openly hostile Johnny Rotten—as their own, while NF shops began to sell punk clothing. Martin Webster¹⁰⁵ was similarly very happy to do interviews with the music papers—notably the "racism" issue of *Sounds* mentioned above—and made clear his aim to recruit what he called "robust young men" to the NF, chiefly for the impression they would make on marches. (p. 207)

To sum up, we could say that the far-right were happy to insert themselves into the punk scene, with some bands actually backing up extreme ideologies. In addition to this, the use of Nazi symbology and other far-right paraphernalia by some punks served to catch the attention of persons with extremist beliefs, thus making it easier for them to find their way into the scene.

Rock Against Racism (RAR)

The year 1976 became a turning point for the interaction of music and racial discrimination with the creation of the Rock Against Racism movement. It was not only that the punk scene had been toying with extremism, but the behavior of certain other popular artists also propelled music fans to create an organization that fought against discrimination. In 1974, David Bowie, who had already achieved a successful musical career in the UK, raised a strong controversy when in an interview for *Playboy* magazine compared Adolf Hitler to a celebrity:

103 There is barely any information about these bands, and no music recordings at all.

104 Mick Renshaw, lead singer of The Dentists, was close to Eddy Morrison.

105 Member of the National Front, the League of Empire Loyalists, the National Socialist Movement and the Greater Britain Movement.

Rock stars are fascists. Adolf Hitler was one of the first rock stars [...] He was no politician. He was a media artist. He used politics and theatrics and created this thing that governed and controlled the show for 12 years. The world will never see his like again. He staged a country. (qtd. in Sorene, 2014).

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Even though his claims could easily be put in line with punk's unrelenting wish to shock rather than representing Bowie's actual ideology, they were not well received and were even interpreted as the singer supporting Nazism. While he was in Stockholm, Bowie shared some thoughts on fascism and confessed that England should implement fascism into its political system: "As I see it, I am the only alternative for the premier in England. I believe Britain could benefit from a fascist leader. After all, fascism is really nationalism" (qtd. in Buckley 2005: 250). In 1976, the British music journal *New Musical Express* (*NME*) published an image of Bowie allegedly doing the Nazi salute in its cover, which was headlined with the words "Heil and Farewell"¹⁰⁶. In an issue of the Punk Front zine, Eddy Morrison praised Bowie for his statements and called for support from the far-right (Forbes & Stampton, 1999: 12). It was not, however, until Eric Clapton's polemical comments in 1976 that a major change occurred in the history of the relationship between music and racism in Britain, for they sparked the creation of the movement Rock Against Racism.

During one of his performances, Clapton addressed Enoch Powell's *Rivers of Blood* speech and encouraged the audience to vote for Powell after having made derogatory comments about immigrants "Vote for Enoch, he's our man, he's on our side, he'll look after us. I want all of you here to vote for Enoch, support him, he's on our side. Enoch for Prime Minister! Throw the wogs out! Keep Britain white!" (qtd. in Marzoni, 2019). Following Clapton's declarations, a letter was sent for its publication to *NME*, *Sounds* and *Melody Maker*, where Clapton's assertions were heavily criticized. With the letter came the first public mention of Rock Against Racism, calling for collaboration to fight racial discrimination:

When I read about Eric Clapton's Birmingham concert when he urged support for Enoch Powell, I nearly puked.

What's going on, Eric? You've got a touch of brain damage. So you're going to stand for MP and you think we're being colonised by black people. Come on... you've been taking too much of that Daily Express stuff, you know you can't handle it. Own up. Half your music is black. You're rock music's biggest colonist. You're a good musician but where would you be without the blues and R&B? You've got to fight the racist poison, otherwise you degenerate into the sewer with the rats and all the money men who ripped off rock culture with their chequebooks and plastic crap. Rock was and still can be a real progressive culture, not a package mail-or-

106 Tony Stewart, *New Musical Express*, May 8th, 1976.

der stick-on nightmare of mediocre garbage. Keep the faith, black and white unite and fight. We want to organise a rank- and-file movement against the racist poison in rock music –we urge support – all those interested please write to:

ROCK AGAINST RACISM,

Box M, 8 Cotton Gardens, London E2 8DN

P. S. 'Who shot the Sheriff', Eric?¹⁰⁷ It sure as hell wasn't you!

Signed: Peter Bruno, Angela Follett, Red Saunders, Jo Wreford, Dave Courts, Roger Huddle, Mike Stadler, etc. (qtd. in Rachel, 2016: 6)

This way, Rock Against Racism was created, its purpose being to organize concerts and carnivals that could bring together musicians and fans while raising awareness about the racial issue that was invading England. RAR's slogan, "reggae, soul, rock'n'roll, jazz, funk and punk", exemplifies the wide range of musical genres that were present in the lineup of its concerts, where the movement gathered a broad audience from different ages and backgrounds, but with the common desire of defeating the far-right¹⁰⁸. One of its creators, Syd Shelton, recalls how the economic recession had aggravated racism¹⁰⁹:

We were moving into the deepest recession since the Second World War then too, which meant there was a real opportunity for fascist and right-wing thinkers to start pointing the finger and blaming immigrants and black people. Conditions were absolutely rife for the normalisation of racism, which was quite terrifying. (qtd. in. Anderson, 2022)

The campaign went on from 1976 until 1981, organizing more than 300 concerts and 5 carnivals, and becoming a complete success. Rock Against Racism gained many adepts since its very beginning, including not only music fans but also political activists. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) played a fundamental role in the success of Rock Against Racism.

Regarding the SWP, it established strong links with the musical movement as some of its founding members belonged to the party. RAR was provided, as Goodyer (2019) puts it, with support by the SWP when it came to logistics, such as granting the musical organization with printing facilities (2019: 22).

107 Eric Clapton had covered Bob Marley's song "I Shot the Sheriff" (1973). These comments suggest that Clapton had previously taken advantage of black culture and then attacked those who had inspired him.

108 The movement was a complete success since more than 600 replies were sent to RAR within 14 days. (Goodyer, 2019: 11).

109 The crowd of the Carnival Against the Nazis rally carrying posters for equality, 1978 https://revsoc21.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/uk-rock-festivals.com_.jpg

The Anti-Nazi League was an organization closely linked to the SWP, which originated one year after the creation of RAR. This political group had the purpose of preventing far-right groups from expanding within the UK. The RAR and ANL connection gave way to one of the most successful RAR events to date. On 30th April 1978, both organizations set up the *Carnival Against the Nazis*, which managed to congregate a crowd of about 100,000 attendants. The carnival started in Trafalgar Square, where a large mass of people marched towards Victoria Park to culminate the event with a concert. During the rally, the crowd carried posters and banners claiming equality and condemning racism.

The gig was headlined by Tom Robinson Band, Steel Pulse, The Clash, X-Ray Spex and the punk poet Patrik Fitzgerald. RAR considered it vital to include bands of different genres with both black and white individuals. As Roger Huddle, one of the founders of RAR commented: "the concert was all about black and white unity, so it was important we had black and white people on stage together" (qtd. in Naylor et al. 2008). He also addressed the importance of having organized events like the carnival in times where the National Front was enjoying considerable public support:

We wanted to give people space to stand against the Nazis [...] we wanted to do something before the local elections of 1978 to push the National Front off the streets and off the electoral registers. We wanted to get rid of them. (qtd. in Naylor et al. 2008)

Rock Against Racism clearly achieved their goal of bringing to the public eye the issue of racism and the alarming increasing popularity of the National Front. In the words of John Street: "Rock Against Racism made it cool to be anti-racist" (qtd. in Manzoor, 2008). Gurinder Chadha, a filmmaker, remembers that during the Victoria Park concert

(...) was when I thought that something had changed in Britain for ever. Before RAR, there was no sense that it wasn't OK to be racist. But with RAR, we got to see that there were others willing to speak out against racism and talk about a different kind of Britain. (qtd. in Naylor et al. 2008)

When it comes to RAR's fight against the National Front, Jerry Dammers, from The Specials, said: "at this time, RAR knocked them as they were gaining votes, and played a huge part in defeating them" (qtd. in Naylor et al. 2008). Ian Goodyer also remarked the importance of RAR marching demonstrations confronting NF rallies:

before RAR, the NF had staged intimidatory marches in areas with large immigrant communities, but once RAR began to demonstrate that they could put thousands on the street in opposition to them, the NF were forced to retreat. (qtd. in Manzoor, 2008).

Additionally, the initial success of the NF was followed by a serious blow in the local elections of May 4, 1978, which happened to coincide with the aftermath of the *Carnival Against the Nazis*. The National Front was not able to get seats in the parliament and suffered a severe decline in support.

It is worth pointing out that many RAR concerts included interventions by punk bands which had previously been criticized for having shown fascist or racist attitudes. An example of this is seen in Jimmy Pursey's (singer of Sham 69) anti-racist speech given during the Carnival, as his band was characterized for attracting Front supporters. As corroborated by Syd Shelton:

He made this fantastic and impassioned, anti-racist speech disowning National Front supporters and declaring his support for Rock Against Racism, which was wonderful. And he was in tears. He turned around and looked at me and I got a shot of him where his face is absolutely distraught with angst, but it was fantastic. That really was one of those decisive moments - a decisive anti-racist moment, because he really had disowned those National Front fans. And it was incredibly brave of him to do that. In front of 150,000 people. (qtd. in Anderson, 2022).

RAR gave punk the opportunity to demonstrate to the public that the genre was not a lair of far-right supporters and that it supported racial equality.

Rock Against Racism also contributed to the fight against racial discrimination with the fanzine publication *Temporary Hoarding*. The first issue was launched in 1977 and 14 more were released. It addressed topics related to politics, including racial issues and sexism. At the same time, it provided information about the concerts and carnivals that were being organized by RAR.

The success of RAR, however, did not prevent the organization from being criticized. The band Crass released in 1979 the song "White Punks on Hope", whose lyrics labeled RAR's activism as futile and, at the same time, implied that the organization was exercising a "white savior complex". The lyrics also targeted The Clash and described their activism as opportunistic and calculated: "Well the name is Crass, not Clash./They can stuff their punk credentials/Cause it's them that take the cash/They won't change nothing with their fashionable talk/All their RAR badges and their protest walk/Thousands of white men standing in a park/Objecting to racism's like a candle in the dark/Black man's got his problems and his way to deal with it/So don't fool yourself you're helping with your white liberal shit/If you care to take a closer look at the way things really stand/You'd see we're all just niggers to the rulers of this land". For Crass, bands and activists used the fight for racial equality not only for lucrative purposes but also to take the spotlight from those who were really suffering the consequences of racism. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Burnel, singer of The Stranglers, considered RAR to be racist and their political activism to be a façade (Sabin, 1999: 207). In 1977, Mark Perry, singer of Alternative TV and creator of the

Sniffin' Glue fanzine, condemned RAR's involvement with left/far-left organizations and their ideology: "RAR preach against the NF but on their badge is the red star, which has caused as much trouble and animosity as the swastika. I don't need to be told by a commie organisation to love blacks...the SWP and NF are as bad as each other..." (qtd. in Sabin, 1999: 207).

Opposition towards RAR was not only restricted to criticism. In 1978, Eddy Morrison created what was supposed to be a counterpart to Rock Against Racism. The NF militant set up Rock Against Communism¹¹⁰, an organization that replicated RAR's system of organizing concerts, but this time the goal was to promote white supremacy and the party. The magazine *Searchlight* labeled RAC and NF's intentions as a way to try to "make fascism seem like fun" (qtd. in Forbes & Stampton, 2015: 21). The first RAC concert took place in Leeds, where the NF had great support, in March 1979, with performances of The Dentists and The Vents (aka Tragic Minds), which advocated for far-right ideals. RAC also had shows in London, the first held in Conway Hall on 18 August 1979.

Punk against racism

Although their militancy had often been overshadowed by swastikas and bad reputation, some punk bands had already been writing songs against racism since the beginning of the genre. This can be observed in the theme "White Riot" (1977) by The Clash, which was inspired by the Notting Hill riots, where Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon and manager Bernie Rhodes had been arrested (they represented themselves in this attitude in the cover of the single¹¹¹). The song calls for a revolution of white individuals after realizing that the black community had not been afraid of fighting for themselves during the riot. Nevertheless, the general public interpreted the song as a white supremacy hymn. As Simonon stated:

I remember there were a lot of places that wouldn't let us play, all over the country, universities, and that was probably something that they read that we have a song called "White Riot". They thought we were some sort of National Front group, whereas, really, the song was about white people getting up and doing it for themselves because their black neighbors were doing it for themselves, and so it was, the riots and whatever. So it was time for the white people to get on with their own situation, which I suppose was the beginning of the punk thing. (qtd. in Letts, 2005).

110 Despite what the name suggests, RAC did not tackle the economic system. The name probably had its origins in the close relationship of RAR with left-wing organizations.

111 The *White Riot* single cover, where members of The Clash represent their arrest during the Notting Hill Carnival riots of 1976
https://i.discogs.com/HiXe2Qo35cRzu7h4fIcaTWJwh2OXI6yuDLmftTc_qRs/rs:fit/g:sm/q:90/h:600/w:600/czM6Ly9kaXNjb2dz/LWRhdGFYXNlLWlt/YWdlcy9SLTM3MTcx/Ny0xMzE2ND-M2OTM2/LmpwZWc.jpeg

The lyrics, though, imply something very different: "White riot, I want to riot/White riot, a riot of our own/Black man gotta lotta problems/But they don't mind throwing a brick/White people go to school/Where they teach you how to be thick".

- 132 Punk bands were not afraid of speaking their mind about the racial issue and musicians often commented on the current situation. When being asked about the National Front in an interview with RAR's fanzine *Temporary Hoarding*, Johnny Rotten, expressed his rejection towards the far-right party:

I despise them. No one should have the right to tell anyone they can't live here because of the colour of their skin or their religion... How could anyone vote for something so ridiculously inhumane? (qtd. in Manzoor, 2008)

The National Front was also the target of several punk artists who wanted to show their disapproval and rejection towards the party. The message of The Pigs' "National Front" (1977) leaves no room for interpretation, as the NF is presented as a fascist and racist party, while the band sings in favor of racial equality: "The National Front are fascists/We don't hate the Black kids/The National Front are fascists/Ain't nothing wrong with the black kids, no way". Tom Robinson Band also drew on their song lyrics to warn about the increasing popularity of the NF. In "Ain't Gonna Take It" (1976), the band called for people to stand together in order to take down the party: "Prejudice poison/Polluting this land/I'm a middle-class kiddie/But I know where I stand/We got brothers in Brixton/Backs to the wall/Bigots on the backlash/Divided we fall [...] Sisters and brothers/What have we done/We're fighting each other/Instead of the Front/Better get it together/Big trouble to come/And the odds are against us/About twenty to one". In "The Winter of '79" (1978), the song sets us in the future, and we get to learn about what happened in the year 1979, which is presented as a dystopian year in British history. The narrator resents the memory of the vivid popularity of the NF while describing the racism that was rampant at the time: "The National Front was getting awful strong [...] And coloured kids was getting crucified/A few fought back and a few folks died/In the winter of '79". "Better Decide Which Side You're On" (1978) denounces the impassivity many showed towards the political situation of the nation and the threat the Front represented: "All you downtrodden people/Always bear the brunt/Just sit back on you fat backsides/Till you have to face the Front". Robinson also makes a statement claiming that nobody should remain indifferent to the heated political situation of the time, expressing his sympathy for the Left with the goal of raising awareness: "You better decide which side you're on/This ship goes down before too long/If Left is right then Right is Wrong/You better decide which side you're on". In "Power in the Darkness" (1978) Robinson calls for "Freedom for black and white". On their part, Crass did not hesitate to attack the NF directly in "Major General Despair" (1982): "Read it in the papers/About the National Front/They go out and they do it/They're such a bunch of cunts". In "Don't Back the Front" (1977) by The Desperate Bicycles, the band warned their listeners about the increasing presence

and strength of the National Front: "All you phony fascists/(Don't back the front)/And your trendy racial hate/Better learn some dialectic/(Dialectic)/Before it gets too late". In Crisis's "UK '79" (1979), the band ironically labels the National Front as nice and allude to the fatal incident that had taken place during the Red Lion Square disorders: "The NF are nice they love the Queen/They think they've got the right to be heard and seen/Kevin Gately was an accident, know what I mean?" Irony is palpable throughout the lyrics as is the denounce of latent racism on the part of the British society: "Black and white are treated the same/You never get picked on if you got a funny name/And you never get beat up in the tube trains/In the UK".

In those days, it was not rare to find punk bands releasing songs that carried anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-Nazi messages. The Clash's "Something About England" (1980) puts the spotlight on how immigrants were being blamed for all the problems that occurred in the country and the idea that the situation would improve without them: "They say immigrants steal the hubcaps/Of the respected gentlemen/They say it would be wine and roses/If England were for Englishmen again", with immigrants once again getting blamed for all the bad things that happened in the English society. "White Youth" (1979) by Crisis alluded and criticized the punk trend of wearing Nazi paraphernalia: "White youth/Your race and nation is casus creation/Mass murder sheep are now King's Road Nazi chic". The lyrics also sent a message of union between the black and white communities: "We are black, we are white/Together we are dynamite". More references to Nazism are found in The Clash's "White Man in Hammersmith Palais" (1978), Crisis's "Holocaust" (1978) and The Epileptics' "Hitler's Still a Nazi/War Crimes" (1979). The latter implies that Nazism has not disappeared and has actually consolidated within the British society. The band also links NF with extremist ideology: "Hitler's still a Nazi he's still going strong/His people take it out on our poor wogs/But we don't want that, we want Anarchy/But how do you tell the Front that they've got it all wrong?" The song contains revealing lyrics that show how the punk generation used to belittle the victory of the UK in the Second World War, a similar thing to the decision of some punks to pick the swastika as a subversive symbol towards the older age groups: "Hitler's still a Nazi your bullets never got him/Now his congregation go to church and sing hymns [...] And we don't owe you nothing 'cos you fought in the war/You only fought to save your own backsides/Now you're all snuffing it leaving us in this shit/Leaving us to die young when you've had half of it". The lyrics of The Epileptics express resentment towards those who fought in the war, considering that their victory was momentary and that it did not ensure a future for the young. For The Epileptics, the British society had not gotten rid of extremist ideologies, and the National Front was presented as an extension of the National Socialist party: "Are we supposed to say thanks for your glory in the war?/You never fought for our future/You fought to save old bores/And you never killed Hitler, he's still a fucking Nazi/Living somewhere off the National Front funds/So don't expect kind thoughts and words to come from me". "Holocaust", by Crisis, shares

The Epileptics' vision of how Nazism had been rising again in the British nation. The lyrics are meant to alert about this situation and not forgetting the past in order for it not to be repeated: "You've read in it in a book/Seen it on a TV screen/To you it's a nightmare/But to some it's a dream/They've hidden their swastika/Behind the Union Jack/You'd better watch out brothers/They're heading for a comeback/Remember Belsen, remember Auschwitz/They're trying to say they didn't exist/Don't let 'em put this country in chains/Don't let six million die in vain". In the light of these songs, it is remarkable how punks not only were aware of the rising extremism in the England of the late 1970s, but also how they condemned the permissiveness that the British society seemed to have towards radical and extremist ideologies. The Clash made that clear in "White Man in Hammersmith Palais", where they resented the fact that Hitler should have been treated as a celebrity if he had lived in the England of the 1970s: "All over people changing their votes/Along with their overcoats/If Adolf Hitler flew in today/They'd send a limousine anyway".

Punk, reggae and the fight against racism

It is also important to mention that, during this decade, there was a strong link between punk and reggae. Syd Shelton considered both genres to have been crucial elements in the development of RAR and the fight against racism:

[Reggae and punk] They were crucial to how racism was fought in this country. Without those two rebel genres of music appearing from the streets, Rock Against Racism would never really have happened. (qtd. in Anderson, 2022)

Sonically, several punk bands decided to incorporate reggae sounds and motifs into their music. An example is The Clash's "White Man in Hammersmith Palais", whose sound is clearly influenced by reggae and whose audiovisual montage is heavily influenced by reggae imagery, including images of Rastafari. The lyrics also mention the reggae culture and artists: "Midnight to six, man/For the first time from Jamaica/Dillinger and a'Leroy Smart/Delroy Wilson, your cool operator/Ken Boothe for UK pop reggae/With backin' bands sound systems/If they got anything to say/There's many black ears here to listen". The Clash included in their debut album a cover of the song "Police and Thieves" (1977), originally released by the reggae artist Junior Murvin in 1976. In the same way, Bob Marley referenced punk in his discography with the song "Punky Reggae Party" (1977), with allusions to The Clash or The Damned. Moreover, Marley sang that both punks and reggae were rejected by society: "It's a punky reggae party/And it's alright/ Oh no/Rejected by society (do re mi fa)/Treated with impunity". Alternative TV and The Slits incorporated as well musical reggae elements into their punk sound. It is noteworthy to see how these different genres crossed paths and how music scenes that represented both white and black communities came together during times of racial tension.

To conclude this section, we can say that the 1970s in Britain was a decade that witnessed white supremacy and racism, sometimes encouraged by the political forces of the time. These problems also surfaced in the music industry, and punk was no exception. The appropriation of the swastika by the punk community and other problematic associations with fascism and Nazism caused the subculture to be perceived as being supportive of the far-right ideology, while the behavior of other musicians when it came to racial anti-tolerance (notably David Bowie and Eric Clapton) led to the creation of movements such as Rock Against Racism. We consider that RAR played a key role in England's fight against the emerging fascist forces and the racist standards of the late 1970s, as the concerts and carnivals organized by the organization proved to the National Front that music was a powerful weapon that could bring together large masses of people ready to confront them. The impact of RAR is still remembered nowadays and is reflected in the words of the ones who lived its creation back in 1976 until the dissolution of the organization six years later. RAR also gave punk music the opportunity to mitigate their right-wing reputation and to address and raise awareness about the problems non-white individuals were facing in the England of the 1970s. Many punk bands and their lyrics sent out straightforward messages against the radical right who had been trying to use punk for their own benefit (e.g. the creation of RAC or the *Punk Front* zine). All in all, we can say that the music industry of the 1970s was able to recognize how the racial issue that was threatening the English society had also started to pervade the music scene. Their reaction against these unacceptable attitudes represents a milestone in the recent history of Britain and an example of how art (and music in particular) may have the capacity, not only to actively speak on behalf of those who cannot be heard, but to change attitudes and raise awareness on very serious social problems.

Chapter 08

“No more freedom no more hope, I’ll slit my wrists and that’s no joke”: Social unrest, drugs and mental health in the 1970s”

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It was only natural that the decay in the economic situation that the country had been enduring throughout the decade was to be socially transferred and mirrored, its negative consequences having an immediate impact on the well-being of citizens¹¹². In particular, working-class youths on lower incomes suffered the impact of hard times in the 1970s in a very special way. Their generation was coming of age in times of crisis, surrounded by despair in all areas and a lack of future opportunities, and their situation radically differed from their parents’, who had benefitted from the joys of the postwar economic boom while growing up¹¹³. The youth was badly affected when it came to job opportunities. Eichengreen (1987) states that even though the unemployment rates of the UK reached double-digits in 1981 (for the first time since the 1930s), “youth unemployment rates had already reached double-digit levels in 1977 and by 1981 had risen to nearly twice adult rates” (p. 13).

Regarding mental health, Marcus and Gavrilovic (2010) report that economic crises, whether short or long

... increase the levels of clinically diagnosed mental health problems, such as depression and acute anxiety [...] and increased fear and stress among youth and their parents concerning the loss of future opportunities. (p. 36)

112 According to Edstrom (1999), those who lose their jobs during economic slumps will encounter many difficulties to find a new one, the acquisitive power citizens being badly affected as wages decrease while taxes increase. Inflation elevates the costs of basic products and education, health, security and other public services are harmed due to tax cuts. Moreover, vulnerable individuals, such as those belonging to the low classes and the youth, are heavily affected by crises (p. 1-2). Ötler-Robe and Podpiera (2013) mention the following when it comes to the consequences of economic crises:

Costly coping strategies by individuals can limit the quantity and quality of food intake, increase working hours at jobs with limited benefits, result in engagement in crime or violence, sale of productive assets, or pulling children out of school –all with long-term development consequences (p. 25).

113 Marcus and Gavrilovic (2010) in their study on the impact that financial crises have on the youth, mention that “crises –particularly acute or protracted ones– can have severe effects on young people’s employment opportunities, health, and social wellbeing, as well as on crime and social cohesion more broadly” (p. 5).

According to the authors, the deterioration of mental health increases suicide rates by and large among the younger generations, and substance abuse also tends to become a more common problem during periods of economic hardship (Marcus and Gavrilovic 2010: 37)¹¹⁴. In their own terms, stress caused by economic crisis and unemployment is strictly connected with the young individuals using drugs (p. 37).

In the UK, the use of drugs was widely spread in the 1970s. According to the magazine *Druglink* (Hartnoll, 1986), the sudden contrast between the prosperity of the past decade and the decay surrounding the following one contributed decisively to an increase of drug consumption among the youth in a time when

...optimism has been replaced by cynicism, despair and anger, particularly among the young, unemployed working-class and minority groups [...] it does provide part of the background against which some groups and individuals start or continue to use drugs. (p. 12)

The research carried out by the magazine presented information about the trends concerning drug use in the Britain of the 1970s, pointing out that the consumption of cannabis, which dramatically increased at the beginning of the 1970s, became stabilized during the mid-decade, and then went up again. Similarly, cocaine use increased since the mid-1970s, coinciding with a clear increase in its popularity as a recreational drug. As regards barbiturates and tranquilizers, the authors of the report indicate that "their use by heroin addicts and young multi-drug users aroused particular concern" (p. 12). Finally, the results of the research confirmed that there had been an increase by ten-fold in opiate consumption since 1970, especially heroin (p. 13). The alarmingly growing figures of drug use in Britain led to the introduction of the Misuse of Drugs Act in 1973, with the aim of creating the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). The aim of that council initiative was to control drug use and to toughen penalties for trafficking (Shapiro & Monaghan, 2014: 4). Additionally, the ACMD launched the so-called Campaign on the Use and Restriction of Barbiturates (CURB) in 1975 (Shapiro & Monaghan, 2014: 5). Three years later, City Roads was opened in London as the first crisis intervention centre "set up to deal with the revolving door of barbiturate users going in and out of A&E"¹¹⁵ (Shapiro & Monaghan, 2014: 5).

The extent of drug use in the Britain of the 1970s is reflected in Stevens (1978), a study which confirmed that 138 individuals died due to drug addiction in London

114 This conclusion is drawn from the results of a field study carried out by the authors in Bosnia Herzegovina in 2000, where it was reported that "young people both drank alcohol and took drugs in order to escape the difficulties they faced –high rates of unemployment, the legacy of conflict and marginalization in civil society" (Marcus and Gavrilovic 2010: 37).

115 A&E stands for Attendances and Emergency, in hospitals.

between January 1970 and December 1974¹¹⁶. As stated by the author (p. 126), the year 1972 marked the highest number of deaths caused by drug consumption¹¹⁷. Most fatal overdoses were attributed to the consumption of barbiturates (88%), which meant they could only have been obtained by medical prescription (Chambers, 1976: 15). Addiction to prescription drugs had become a problem in the late years of the 1960s and beginnings of the 1970s, when the consumption of barbiturates and anxiolytics was increasing alarmingly. This is reflected in the deaths of 12,354 people between 1965 and 1970 caused by barbiturates (Lopez, Ucha & Alamo 2005). Only in 1968, 24.7 million barbiturates were prescribed in the UK (ibid.) and by 1979 there were around 30 million prescriptions of benzodiazepines (Garfield, 2003). An example of this is the use of Valium, which had arrived in the UK in 1963 and became “mother’s little helper”¹¹⁸, as it was commonly prescribed to middle-aged women who suffered from anxiety and nervous breakdowns. Such problems led to the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, a treaty signed by the United Nations in Vienna, in order to control the consumption of psychoactive drugs¹¹⁹. Moreover, the UK issued an Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs: the Working Group on Barbiturates, which had the purpose of providing doctors with more information about the use of barbiturates. In any case, from 1975 onwards, the rates of suicide in Britain among men aged 25-54 increased (McClure, 1987: 309). The author attributes part of this rise in suicide rates to the mounting levels of unemployment and violence¹²⁰.

Regarding the British youth in the 1970s, not being able to find a job, economic instability, the constant states of emergency, inflation and other such issues led them to feel uncertain and pessimistic about the future, and to a general lack of hope, which led in some cases to drug consumption and mental health problems. In view of these obstacles, the young ones were inclined to express rejection towards the society they lived in, as they felt they were being left out and marginalized, living in a nation that did not care for their wellbeing. This was worsened by the general impression that they would not be able to have the same standards of living that the older generations had when they were their age. These concerns happen to be recurring topics in the punk scene and punk lyrics.

116 Aged between 15 and 50 years old, 107 of the subjects were male and 31 female.

117 The subjects used for this study were “primarily on native-born, working-class Caucasians who often had difficulties in forming lasting relationships” (Stevens, 1978: 136).

118 The Rolling Stones released a song in 1966 named “Mother’s Little Helper” which narrates the life of a housewife who needs Valium to get through the day.

119 Psychoactive drugs are drugs which produce changes in the nervous system.

120 We have previously mentioned how economic recessions affect mental health, especially for the younger generations.

8.1 Punk, suicide and mental health

140 The social realism of the genre and the rejection of taboos that was so characteristic of punk led artists to address the issues discussed in the previous section and to write lyrics that depicted explicit images of suicide and self-harm without any restraint. The band The Adicts talk in "Easy Way Out" (1979) about self-harming and suicide as being a quick solution to the problems of having no money and the dullness of routine: "From day to day/We live our lives the same way/No money to hold in our hands/And no time to spend it/So I chose the easy way out/To do my body some harm/Cut my throat and slashed my wrist/I even tried electricity/I cut my throat/I slashed my wrist/It was the easy way out". A similar message is seen in The Tights' "Cracked" (1978), where having "no future" drives the singer to kill himself: "Heard them call it Age of Reason/No more freedom no more hope/I'll slit my wrists and that's no joke". Again, the image of slashing one's wrist is repeated in "Cranked Up Really High" (1977) by Slaughter and the Dogs: "Had a million thoughts yeah to slit my wrists/Hallucination in my dream/I gotta leave gotta leave this scene". The protagonist of "They Don't Understand" (1978) by Sham 69 expresses his desire to end his life after he has been arrested "When you smash a phone box/Or you break into a shop/They take you down the station/And they nick you for the lot/Everyone keeps telling me I'm gonna be free/We all know we'll never be free/When I take a razor and I wanna take my life/I wanna take a knife and I wanna take my life". UK Subs' "Emotional Blackmail II" (1980) is another example of a song that mentions self-harm: "Standing on the stair/I turn and walk the other way/there's nothing for me there/And now I can't go home/To razor cuts on bone/Rooms splashed with blood/Needles dipped in mud and/Emotional blackmail". The crude lyrics of UK Subs' "Left for Dead" (1980) describe the image of a man who has hung himself on a tree: "I'm hanging on a limbo tree/All the birds they shit on me/Somebody get a knife/Cut me down don't leave me here for dead". In "Suicide" (1979), by The Damned, we are told about a man who has attempted to kill himself and blames an unknown person for his struggle: "It's too much confusion for a young man to take/Look at my eyes that ain't easy to fake/I got no spirit left to break/I'll slash my wrists ain't no mistake/Help me oh help me/Help me oh help me/Suicide suicide it's happenin' again/Suicide suicide I'm losin' my brain/Suicide suicide what can I do?/Gonna kill myself because of you/I've lost track, of logical thinking/I'm sitting in a room, not even blinking/Into the darkness I am sinking/About to hear the angels singing/Help me, oh help me [...] The scripts been read and there's no disaster/I was in with a chance but I'm a bastard/I'm lying awake in a hospital plaster". Other punk artists have talked about specific types of mental illness in their songs.

In "Voices" (1979), by Sham 69, the lyrics tell about a person who suffers from schizophrenia, and who is tormented by the voices that he hears in his head: "Voices in my head shouting their pain/While everyone around me is taking the blame/I hear their crying, I shed their tears/I've been rolling the dice for so many years/Voices,

what do you want of me/Voices, which way do I turn/Voices, nightmares and mind games/Put down on paper for rock and roll puppets to laugh at". Finally, in "This Angry Silence" (1981), by TV Personalities, the band alludes to eating disorders and heavy drinking: "And my brother's anorexic/But no one seems to care about the state he's in/And my sister's in the tub, she's a barmaid in a pub/And my mother's full of gin".

8.2 Punk, alcohol, and drug (ab)use

The decade of the 1970s witnessed an increase in the rates of alcoholism in Britain. Just in 1970, around 175,000 Britons were suffering from chronic alcoholism (1970. Britain's alcoholism explosion, 1970). Another problem that contributed to the spread of this illness was the fact that many did not consider heavy drinking to be a disease, and therefore did not ask for help (ibid.).

The relationship between music and drugs has a long-standing tradition, and the presence of drugs in the music scene can be observed virtually in all genres (pop, rock, rap etc.). In a recent study, Chertoff and Urbine (2018) conclude that musicians are most likely to suffer and die from addiction (drugs and alcohol) than non-musicians, and other studies such as Bellis et al. (2007), Wolkewitz et al. (2011) or Oksanen (2013) also coincide in observing that music artists are prone to undergo substance dependence which is likely to result in death. In "Musicians & Substance Abuse" (2019), Saintilan establishes two major sets of factors that may push artists to fall into addiction: "pre-existing issues", which include genetics, family history and early trauma, personality and mental health issues, etc. and "pressures", which have to do with creative strains, performance anxiety, emotional turbulence from life experience, social, cultural and workplace pressures, identity, subcultural identity, fame and celebrity (p.4).

The punk subculture and musicians were no exception to this, so punk rapidly became involved in the drug scene. Shapiro (1999) describes the punk of the 1970s as an "amphetamine-based dance culture" and emphasizes the importance that clubs had in the widespread use of drugs (p. 21). Since the punk subculture was mostly experienced in communities, live music events were an essential element for the genre and its spread. Concerts would usually take place in music clubs and small venues (The Roxy, 100 Club, The Marquee, The Vortex, etc.), where punk fans congregated, and the use of recreational drugs and drinking in those places became a popular activity that would turn into yet another element of the punk identity. The recreational consumption of drugs was also associated with "boredom", a characteristic feature of the punk generation, as the youth tried to discover new ways of entertainment¹²¹. Moreover, using drugs such as cocaine or heroin, forbidden by

121 The Health Care Resource Centers (2019) lists boredom as one factor that could lead to drug use.

law, could be interpreted as an act of rebelling against the system and confronting authority, so characteristic of the punk scene.

142 Additionally, aesthetics and fashion also contributed to the acceptance and positive reception of drugs within the punk scene, and many punk musicians adopted an "amphetamine" appearance as a trendy look. Punks would use blood as a cosmetic in order to simulate the effects of excessive drug snorting:

The look of amphetamine psychosis became desirable when the mass of new wave disciples fell in love with their mirror-image innovators the Sex Pistols (amphetamine cognoscenti long before their early celebration of the drug in "Seventeen"), making it necessary for the less adventurous at least to simulate the appearance of sulphate-snorters; cold, piercing stares, exaggerated black and white doe-eyes, blanched make-up, rapid speech and an aura of a capacity for ultra-violent aggression. (Burchill & Parsons, 1987: 36)

As noted by the authors, famous punk artists influenced their followers and held certain power over them when it came to making decisions such as replicating their looks or wanting to form a band. In a certain way, the fact that many punk artists dealt so openly with drugs send the message to the younger audience that in order to imitate their favorite artists they would have to use drugs too.

Finally, a key factor that undoubtedly affected the spread of drugs within the punk scene was the socio-economic context of the country. With the increase of unemployment, economic recession and other social issues, the younger working-class generation had but little future expectations. Consequently, for many punks drugs became an escape route and refuge from the hardships of their everyday lives, which ultimately made them more vulnerable and prone to falling into addiction. These issues would help shape an essential element of the philosophy of the punk subculture: no future. Drug consumption in the punk scene was, therefore, a combination of identity issues, the search for entertainment and the young adults' conscious attempt to evade their everyday problems. All these factors happened to coincide with a remarkable increase in drug production and affordability in the UK, making drugs extremely accessible for everyone, especially the young ones.

For what is known, the drug scene in the beginnings of punk music was quite tame until The Heartbreakers¹²² (New York, 1975) introduced heroin into the music stage. Lee Black Childers, manager of the band, confessed that "they brought heroin to the Punk scene in England. When we arrived, it was a very innocent scene, drugwise, and it changed extremely fast"¹²³ (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 302). Equally important is the fact

122 Also known as Johnny Thunders's Heartbreakers or Johnny Thunders and The Heartbreakers.

123 The band most likely brought heroin to the British punk scene in the late 1976, as they joined the Sex Pistols' Anarchy in the UK Tour, which had started in November 1976.

that the 1970s was a turning decade for drug consumption, as in its final years hard drugs became more accessible due to the Iran war or the arrival of smokable heroin from the Middle East in 1979. By 1977, drugs such as LSD and amphetamines were quickly spreading through the country and dozens of factories were producing these substances (Savage, 1992: 192). As noted by the author, the period 1978-9 (when the popularity of punk was soaring) was pivotal to the consumption of heroin in Great Britain:

Political events in Iran contributed to a substantial increase in supply on the British market. This increase in availability led to a fall in price, which, combined with a decline in existing subcultural taboos against heroin use, filled existing demand and seemed to encourage experimentation. (Savage, 1992: 494)

The mitigation of drug taboos mentioned by Savage emerged in the 1960s, with subcultures such as hippies, mods or the Northern Soul, which had incorporated drug consumption into their lifestyle (Savage, 1992: 191). In the words of John Ingham, a music journalist who witnessed the development of the punk scene in the front line, speed (amphetamine sulphate) was characterized for being cheap and for producing a long-lasting effect of stamina: "it had all the advantages of being very cheap, you don't take much, it lasts a long time, and it's great to have that energy feel" (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 192). Similarly, graphic designer Arturo Vega¹²⁴ insisted on how easy it was to obtain drugs in those days, recollecting a conversation with Nancy Spungen¹²⁵:

I ran into Nancy in London. I was just walking around the King's Road and I bumped into her. She started telling me how easy it was to be a drug addict in England because the government would give you all the drugs and how great it was. (qtd. in McNeil & McCain, 1996: 262-263)

One of the most resounding examples of drug abuse in the punk scene was the case of Simon John Ritchie, known as Sid Vicious, former bassist of the Sex Pistols. Vicious joined the band in early 1977, replacing Glen Matlock as the bass player. He developed a strong heroin addiction from a young age, following his mother's footsteps, who also suffered from drug addiction¹²⁶. In 1977, Vicious contracted hepatitis, caused by all the drugs he had consumed. In the same year, he met Nancy Spungen, with whom he engaged in a romantic and turbulent relationship that was defined by habitual consumption of drugs, especially heroin. Despite their efforts to quit the addiction, the couple failed to do so and kept on using drugs until the day they died. In October 1978, Spungen died from a stab wound after having spent a night with Vi-

124 Arturo Vega was responsible for designing the iconic Ramones logo.

125 Nancy Spungen was an American girl who traveled to England in the 1970s and became a prominent member of the punk scene from her relationship with the Sex Pistols' bass player, Sid Vicious.

126 John Lydon recalled Vicious' mother giving his son heroin and other narcotics for his birthday (Veitch, 2021). Lydon also recalls Vicious selling speed when they were 15 years old (Lydon, 1994: 118).

icious. It is still unclear whether he was the one who stabbed his girlfriend or if it was self-inflicted. Vicious was accused of killing his girlfriend and was arrested. He died from heroin overdose on February 1st, 1978, after he was released from prison, in a party that was thrown as a celebration for his release.

In the documentary *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), released years after the death of Vicious, the former Pistol talked about his negative experience with drugs and expressed his wish not to be an addict anymore:

The others just didn't understand, you know, they thought, "Oh, you can handle it!" But dope sickness isn't like that, it's not just something you can just blow away. Dope sickness is the worst sickness you can ever imagine: You can't get comfortable and you sweat. You're boiling hot and you pour with sweat. Then, all of a sudden you get the colds and the sweat turns to fucking ice on you. You just can't win. You lie down, that's not comfortable. You sit up and that's not comfortable, it drives you insane. I don't want to be a junkie for the rest of my life. I don't want to be a junkie at all.

Sid Vicious was not the only Pistol who had been in contact with drugs. Lead singer John Lydon was arrested and charged in January 1977 for possessing speed. For Lydon, taking the amphetamine was a very common thing:

I loved the stuff. I'm normally a very slow person and it made me more intense. I'm naturally paranoid and it made me feel better. But you get bored with these things, the thrill wears off. (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 191)

The drug was even referenced in the Pistols' song "Seventeen" (1977), where Lydon sings that he does not need anything but speed: "Oh I don't work, I just speed/That's all I need". Moreover, Lydon corroborated how easy and cheap it was to buy drugs in those years. The accessibility of drugs was indeed a problem, only to be aggravated by the misinformation surrounding the dangers of these fairly new substances. In Lydon's words, amphetamines were barely seen as drugs:

But then we never viewed speed, amphetamines, as a drug at all. It was so easy to get, you could buy them anywhere. If you wanted to stay up and not miss anything, that's what speed was for. It was a mod drug. I got it by spending my dole money, all of it. You could get a gram for ten quid and that would last you a whole weekend, easily. Speed had no high, no hallucinogenic effect. It kept you awake so that you could do other things. That was fine. I liked that. That meant I could drink more. I could go see all those bloody films all night long if I wanted to. I could go to any club. I could do all of it in the same twenty-four hours. Very nice. Unfortunately, speed absolutely tears you apart. That's why I stopped doing it. (Lydon, 1994: 169)

Steve Jones, former Sex Pistols guitar player, confessed that he started taking heroin regularly after the split of the band. Jones recalls having tried the drug while he was in the group yet was not fond of it: “the strange thing was, I’d done heroin a couple of times while I was in the Pistols and not liked it either time” (Jones, 2016: 250). However, he returned to it and admitted that heroin was a tool for him to avoid facing the real world: “For the moment, heroin was just another medicine –like stealing and sex had been– which could stop me having to deal with reality” (Jones, 2016: 251). Jones insisted on how the drug acted as a way to both cope with and escape reality:

Then heroin comes along after that [Sex Pistols] ended, and it was perfect. I think heroin would have come regardless. Whatever the circumstances were, it was the next step for me. I tried alcohol, blow, all the rest of it. For someone like me who’s constantly got a hole inside them that I’m trying to fill [...] there’s always this hole I’m trying to fix with whatever. That’s where I go to. It’s almost like not wanting to deal with reality. Heroin was the perfect antidote to not dealing with reality. (ibid.)

Moreover, Jones remembers how Vicious’ death did not stop him from taking heroin: “Heroin was the perfect drug at that point. I didn’t think, ‘Oh, I better not do this, because look what happened to Sid, because I just don’t think like that’” (qtd. in Grow, 2017). In his memoirs (*Lonely Boy: Tales from A Sex Pistol*, 2016) the former Pistol member also shared his experience with other drugs that he also used, like cocaine, speed or LSD.

Other punk artists have also talked openly about their experience with drugs. One of them is Tessa Pollitt from The Slits, who admitted to having suffered from heroin addiction. Pollitt, however, considered that the rising drug-consumption rates in Britain in the late 70s was due to a conscious governmental plan in order to shut down a specific part of the population:

I had a problem with heroin, and I have theories about it: it seems to me that London was flooded with heroin around the time punk was losing direction, and it seems to me to be too much of a coincidence. It almost felt to me as if there was a conspiracy to sedate people. London was just flooded with it, and a lot of us were affected by it. I’ve said this before, and I’ll say it again. It’s just something that I feel. The tail end of punk saw the market swamped. Governments have done it in the past to quiet things down. Shove a load of drugs in, shut people up. I noticed so many people affected by it. Sid Vicious was affected by it, he died because of it. (qtd. in “The Slits – Tessa Pollitt 4”, n.d)

Pollitt’s statement suggests that, in times when the young population began to rebel against the system –a fundamental element of the punk ideology– drugs were

introduced to shut them up. She also condemns the problem of romanticizing drugs and the artists who were addicts¹²⁷:

146 You have to be careful talking about heroin and the punk era. People romanticise it. There is nothing whatsoever that is romantic about heroin: it is medicine for those suffering a painful death. It has a history of sedative control in warfare too. A later manifestation of that government control would be the acid and ecstasy scene in the 80's which left me cold, spooked me out, gave me a chill, and it was around that time that I lost interest in what was going on in London musically. (qtd. in "The Slits – Tessa Pollitt 4", n.d)

Nicky "Topper" Headon, drummer of The Clash was another victim of hard drugs. Headon developed a heroin addiction that would eventually cost him his position as drummer in the band, being expelled by the rest of the members in 1982. Bass player, Mick Jones, however, publicly stated that buying drugs was a mistake and a useless act: "But you learn by mistakes. The Rolling Stones made mistakes. But I want to do something useful. I'm not going to spend all my money on drugs" (qtd. in Coon, 2012). Yet, in an interview from December 1978, Jones admitted having taken drugs later and recalls ingesting so many amphetamines that they prevented him from remembering the process of the creation of The Clash's first record:

Two years ago, we did the band's first interview. On Janet Street-Porter's London Weekend Programme, it was, and me being all young and naive, I blamed bands taking too many drugs for the great mid-70s drought in rock. I recall saying it really well. And a year or so later, I found myself doing just as many drugs as them! Y' know, taking drugs as a way of life, to feel good in the morning, to get through the day. And it's still something I'm getting over right now. (qtd. in Egan, 2018: 204).

Drugs and alcohol were therefore consistently referred to as a means to escape reality in many of the lyrics of the punk bands of the time. An example of this is Chelsea's "Right to Work" (1977), with direct references to the anxiety caused by the lack of future prospects: "I don't even know what tomorrow will bring/Having no future is a terrible thing/Standing around just waiting for a career/I take lives and drugs/And I'm pissed up yeah/Cause I'm a nutter". Similarly, the lyrics of Sham 69's "Human Zoo" (1980) display the duality between the real world and an imaginary world: "reality is slow but a dream is speed/Everybody's on their own/Staring eyes try to gun me down/In tears of laughter I nearly drown/Living everyday on a valium bash/Before the dive I hear the crash/We're living in a human zoo". In these verses, the polysemy of the word "speed" is employed to counterpose reality and non-reality, where real life is slow paced, while the dream induced by the drug is lively and stimulating, the lyrics pointing thus at the

127 Glamorizing drugs, death, or mental illnesses is a recurring topic, especially among young people. For more information about this issue see Duterte, M., Hemphill, K., Murphy, T., & Murphy, S. (2003). "Tragic Beauties: Heroin Images and Heroin Users". *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 30(3), 595–617.

dullness of reality opposed to the dreamy feeling that is brought by the amphetamine. Additionally, the lyrics hint at a valium addiction, bringing into the spotlight the problem of addiction to prescriptive drugs mentioned a few lines before. These medicines are also mentioned in The Clash's "The Right Profile" (1979): "Nembutol numbs it all/ But I prefer alcohol [...] /He said go out and get me my old movie stills/Go out and get me another roll of pills/There I go again shaking, but I ain't got the chills". The Fall's (Manchester, 1977) "Rowche Rumble" (1979) references Hoffmann-La Roche, a famous Swiss pharmaceuticals company which commercializes benzodiazepines. The song exposes the problem of mass Valium prescriptions and how many women took these drugs to cope with their daily lives: "Rowche Rumble/It's valium/Valium/Valium/Roche Rumble/That's rumble/For thousands of wives around the world/Are given out by doctors, to feed their little girls/The doctors need prescriptions/The wives need their pills/So Rowche Rumble/Menopause wives are hard to handle/No culture or love, no gamble/The dope addicts are especially smashed/On Rowche Rumble/Rowche Rumble/Physician, heal thyself/Our government's built an expense account/Once in, never out/A step to Rowche/A force feeding/What are the people around you taking?/Rowche Rumble/Now I've tried crazy things/Abusing my body to a great end/But I'll never never never never do it again/I said I'll never never never never do it again/Rowche Rumble/Physician, heal thyself/Musician, heal thyself/Hey mister, heal thyself". As we can observe, the song points directly at the hypocrisy of those who criticize the use of amphetamines and weed but are addicted to prescription drugs such as Valium: "And loads of people across the land/Who do a prescribed death dance/While condemning speed and grass/They got an addiction like a hole in the ass/Rowche Rumble/Rowche Rumble/I send 70 pounds instead of 70 p to/The lorry arrived the next day/Swiss gnomes dealing out potions/Lend a hand/What is the fear for?/Whose do you think your body is?/Rowche Rumble/It's valium/That's rumble". Ease-to-acquire prescription drugs are also mentioned by the band in "Industrial Estate" (1979): "And if you get a bit of depression/Ask the doctor for some Valium".

In The Wasps' "Teenage Treats" (1977) Jesse Lynn-Dean sings the following: "Teenage treats, take them when you find them/Teenage treats, take them when you're down/Easy meats, take them and you grind them/Oh, teenage treats, I gotta tell you about teenage treats/I'm going to sell you some teenage treats, they'll get you unwound". While the lyrics are ambiguous about revealing what these treats are, we are told that taking them will help you loosen yourself. In another part of the song, the lyrics hint at snorting these treats: "It's time you gave your nose a treat /Up and down to a Vortex band/Peroxide charms from a debut man/Pogo powder, perfect bliss/Put me down for some of this", which leaves little room for interpreting those "teenage treats" as anything but drugs.

Some artists incorporated drugs into the creative process of making music. One such case is The Damned, whose lead singer, Captain Sensible, stated that they recorded

their album while being on drugs: "We did that purely on cider and speed" (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 246). Similarly, the lyrics of "I Believe" (1980) by the Buzzcocks, hint to the creativity that derives from using drugs: "When I poison my system, I take thoughts and twist them into shapes". Other songs refer only to the different kind of drugs that are consumed or to the act of taking drugs. This is seen, for example, in Slaughter and the Dogs' "Cranked Up Really High" (1977): "Getting high, on glue and cocaine/Jabbing things into my vein/A lucifer lord, a holding my hand/Pushing pills to a rock and roll band" or in the lyrics of "We Don't Care" (1978), where the band alludes to hallucinogenic drugs: "Stop your acid and your L.S.D./Stop and try to think of me". Other examples are The Damned's "Problem Child" (1977), where the experience of a troubled person who often steals, gets bad grades and shares drugs with a family member is narrated: "I gave a dose to my sister", or the UK Subs's "Emotional Blackmail" (1980), whose lyrics describe a scenery where the singer is surrounded by "Needles, knives and bottles". "London Girl" (1977) by The Jam mentions a girl who smuggles drugs: "But you're learning fast all the time/How to cadge cigarettes and pills" and the lyrics of "Nicotine Stain" (1978) by Siouxsie and the Banshees depict the singer's addiction to nicotine. Siouxsie sings about the effects cigarettes have on her: "It's just a habit/When I reach to the packet/For my last cigarette/Until the day breaks/And then my hand shakes/But, but, but-but-but-but-but it's just driving me insane/When the smoke gets in my brain, I can't resist it/Wallow in that ash bath/Soaking up the fumes/And see the nicotine stain/Start to spread". As the song goes on, we are told about all the harm that smoking does to the body, yet we learn that the harmful effects are not enough to stop the addiction, which leads to Siouxsie feeling guilty and remorseful: "I'm so congested/Cos north, south, east and west/Catarrh rests on my chest/Congeaed and twisted/Cough up and shift it/But I can feel my lungs collapse/Sinking deep into my lap, I'm so useless". By the end of the song, the singer reveals that her addiction has turned her into a violent person, so what was a problem at first is now practical for scaring people away: "I'm so useful/If you don't want to fight/Just give your foe a fright/Say you'll drop me/On every country/See, see-see-see all will be stone dead/When the nicotine stain spreads, just light me".

The issue of the perception of addicts by the rest of society is also a relevant topic which appears intermittently in the lyrics of the punk bands of the age, as is the case with The Clash's "Drug-Stabbing Time" (1978). In the song, addicts are described as undesirable persons: "Drug-stabbin' time/Is from nine to nine/Nobody wants a user/Nobody needs a loser/So kick him out that door/Don't answer it no more", the lyrics resonating with Topper's removal from the band. Even though it would be easy to detect an anti-drug message in these lyrics, condemning addition, the song also puts the focus on the paranoid state which drugs can induce in anyone who consumes them. This is reflected in the way the protagonist of the song imagines he is being spied on: "Drug- stabbin' time/Yeah, it's a Greenwich Mean Time/Your friends all hate each other/You think you've got another/But who's at the door?/Don't answer

it no more [...] Drug- stabbin' time/In a bedroom cryin'/There's a tape recordin' on a telephone line/And it's ringin' from the floor/So don't answer it no more". The song concludes with the protagonist confessing that he has been using drugs for a great part of the day and shows his fears of getting caught: "Now I was lying in my room/It was raining drugs all afternoon/I hear this car pull up outside/Comes to a stop like, skreeee/Someone's in a hurry/'N someone better worry/'Cos these four guys all had on their feet/A pair of black shoes shining and neat/I thinks/Black shoes on/No that's bad news/Here they come charging up the stairs alright/Sonny just tell us where". Just four months before "Drug Stabbin' Time" was released, Joe Strummer talked about drugs in an *NME* interview, where he labeled cocaine as "complete muck". He later said that "if you snort coke you're in on your own. You don't want anybody and you don't need anybody. Which is a horrible place to be" (qtd. in Salewicz, 1978).

"Newtown" (1979) by The Slits presents an unusual but interesting comparison between the life in the suburbs and drug addiction. In the lyrics, the band turn common actions of the mundane life, such as watching television, into drugs: "Newtown, where everybody goes around sniffing televisena/Or taking footballina". That life is described as an enslaving routine, where even such a simple action as reading the newspaper will bring addiction: "Newtown/Gimme another fix/Oh, gimme another fix/If not I'll go sick/If not I'll go sick/I'll be sick/Morning papers will bring you something flash!/Make your bones shake/Keep busy your mind/Newtown/Gimme another fix/I I I need another fix/If not I'll go sick/If not I'll go sick/I'll be sick sick sick". Through the rest of the song, we are introduced to an everyman who is too busy by making phonecalls and his work: "Morning in the city, Mr. Simpson is a speedin' freak/Taking huncholyna/Or sniffing phoncallina/Newtown/Down town/Drop down/Stick around/Feeling down/Might be some coming out/Football colors all around/Dropping PC late at night/Waiting for a fight/Newtown/Newtown where everybody goes around sniffing televisena/Or taking footballina/Newtown/Oh gimme another fix/I I I need another fix/If not I'll go sick/If not I'll go sick/I'll be sick/Newtown". In "Instant Hit" (1979), from the same band, we get a glimpse of a central aspect of the punk subculture: the desire for destruction, either understood as a wish for the eradication of the establishment or society, or as the destruction of the self which goes hand in hand with drug use. The lyrics show a clear example of this in the following lines: "He is a boy/He's very thin/Until tomorrow/Took heroin/Don't like himself very much/'cause he has set to self-destruct".

The punk scene was, therefore, fully aware of the presence of drugs in the British society, especially among the younger generation, considering that many were involved in it and suffered from drug addiction. Yet, one of the most faithful portrayals of the country's drug scene is found in the song "Julie's Been Working for the Drug Squad" by The Clash. The band documented in their 1978 song one of the most significant events having to do with LSD trafficking in the UK during the 1970s. The procedure

received the name of Operation Julie and was responsible for the dismantling of two drug rings that produced and trafficked with the psychedelic substance. The song talks about a woman named Julie, whose friends have no idea about her involvement with the drug squad: "It's "Lucy in the Sky"¹²⁸ and all kinds of apple pie/She giggled at the screen 'cause it looks so green/There's carpets on the pavements/And feathers in her eye/But sooner or later her new friends will realise/That Julie's been working for the Drug Squad/That Julie's been working for the Drug Squad/She will even look you in the eye!". As the song unfolds, we learn that all the business and money that was obtained through trafficking is soon to be taken down by the drug squad, which will also be responsible for sending to jail all those involved in the ring: "Well it seemed like a dream, too good to be true/Stash it in the bank while the tablets grow high in their millions/And everybody's high-igh-igh (Hi, man!)/But someone looking down from that mountainside/Cause Julie's been working for the Drug Squad/Cause Julie's been working for the Drug Squad". In the operation, the team of undercover police agents knocked down the ring by raiding more than 80 homes of those involved. The operation concluded with more than 100 suspects arrested, including the detention of 15 ring leaders, who were sentenced to jail. The song makes reference to this chain of events in the last verses of the song: "Come on!/10 years for you/19 for you/And you can get out in 25/That is if you're.../Alive/Oh, alive/Don't get a life/Oh, alive/Oh/And then there came the night of the greatest ever raid/They arrested every drug that had ever been made/They took 82 laws/Through 82 doors/And they didn't halt the pull till the cells were all full/Cause Julie was working for the Drug Squad/Cause Julie was working for the Drug Squad/They put him in a cell, they said: You wait here/And you got the time to count all of your hair/You got 15 years/A mighty long time!You could have been a physicist but now your name is on the mailbag list![...]Ten years for you/Nineteen for you/And you can get out in twenty-five/That is if you're still.../Alive/Oh oh, alive".

The Clash also referred to drug use or drug consumption in other songs such as "Janie Jones" (1977), where the act of taking drugs appears to be linked with music in a similar tone to the "Sex, Drugs and Rock'n'Roll" popular slogan: "He's in love with rock'n'roll, whoa/He's in love with getting stoned, whoa". In the song "Cheat" (1977) there is another reference to drug use: "I get violent when I'm fucked up/I get silent when I'm drugged up". Similarly, in UK Subs' "I.O.D." (1979) (the title of the song standing for "I overdosed"), the lyrics describe a narrator who is hospitalized for having taken too many drugs: "One for you/Two for me/Three for you/I.O.D.". While he describes his stay at the hospital as a nightmare, the protagonist finds relief in getting drugs for free: "I been ill/Now I'm thought I'm out of control/Somebody strap me to a

128 In the beginning of the song, the band mentions The Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" (1967), which has always been associated with LSD, as the acronym of the song matches the name of the drug.

bed/I got electrodes in my head/It's a job for you/But it's agony for me/Shoot me up with morphine/Now I get my drugs for free/A shot in the morning/A shot at tea/Now all I need/Is a shot to sleep/Nurse-nurse, come and see/What this stuff has done to me/I can't eat, I can't sleep/It looks like it's the end". Another reference to overdosing is that of "World War" (1979) by the same band: "Tomorrow I may just may not be around/So who cares if I O.D".

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References to drugs and drug addiction are not only found within the confines of song lyrics: some bands decided to refer to drugs directly in their names: The Users, The Drug Addix or The Adicts. The latter encouraged falling into addiction in their song "Get Addicted" (1981): "Get addicted cuz it ain't no crime/Get addicted while we still got time/Get addicted get out of line/Get a get get a get a get addicted".

It is evident that the popularity and spread of drugs and alcohol in the Britain of the 1970s was mirrored in the punk subculture. Many punk musicians were involved in drug consumption and addressed the issue in songs or interviews. Additionally, the use of drugs in the punk scene contributed to the "anti-system" attitude and was often regarded as entertainment. Punk songs tackled the topic of the drugs that were currently consumed (e.g. Slaughter and the Dogs' "Cranked Up Really High") or provided a glimpse of how the drug scene developed (e.g. The Clash's "Julies Been Working for The Drug Squad"). Some of the lyrics addressed the problem of the harmful effects of drugs on users (e.g. The Clash's "Drug-Stabbing Time", Siouxsie and the Banshees' "Nicotine Stain") while others revealed how many individuals found in these substances an escape from a dreary reality (Sham 69's "Human Zoo"). The issue of prescription drugs has also often been brought up in punk songs (The Fall's "Rowche Rumble"), establishing a link with the topic of mental health. Punk musicians did not hesitate to talk about suicide either (The Adicts' "Easy Way Out", The Tights' "Cracked"), raising awareness about an issue that was not commonly talked about in Britain in the 1970s.

Chapter 09

“I don’t even know what tomorrow will bring, but let me tell you having no future is a terrible thing”: Punk and the No Future Philosophy

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When thinking about the British punk of the 1970s, the phrase “no future” often comes up as the essence of the genre. The core of the punk attitude can be found in the economic and social crisis that was drowning the country then and in the lack of opportunities for the youth that caused punks to have a negative view of their future. Their prospects faded away as unemployment rates went up. The country that was being consumed by stagnation and dissatisfaction triggered the birth of a subculture that would take inspiration from the issues of its nation to create art. Thus, the feeling of having “no future” was very much extended within the genre, and punk artists constantly referenced it in their art.

Hugh Cornwell from The Stranglers considered that punk was the result of the difficult situation the country was enduring at the time: “This is a time of trouble and strife in Britain. That’s why angry music is being produced here. People feel numbed and purposeless. That’s what’s behind urban music like ours” (qtd. in Reed, 1977: 2). Cornwell’s statement clearly portrays the frustration of a generation which endured too many hardships and that turned their feelings of anger into music.

The Sex Pistols created what probably is the best-known reference to the phrase “no future”, with their single “God Save the Queen” (1977). The Pistols sang straightforwardly to their audience that there was, actually, no future: “Don’t be told what you want/Don’t be told what you need/There’s no future/No future/No future for you [...] Oh when there’s no future/How can there be sin”. By the end of the song, Rotten seems to be using a mocking voice when he says to the listener that no future awaits anybody. The band Chelsea expressed, on several occasions, their frustration for the fact that they were left with no opportunities. In the lyrics of “Right to Work” (1977) they say: “I don’t even know what tomorrow will bring/But let me tell you, having no future is a terrible thing” and later in “High Rise Living” (1977): “I’m living on a high rise block/I’ve got no future”. Screwdriver addressed the situation too in “Backstreet Kids” (1977): “Backstreet kids, no future in sight/Backstreet kids, can’t see no light”.

Bernard Rhodes' vision of the situation of the country was so pessimistic that he did not consider that the circumstances could ever improve. For Rhodes, the situation was directly mirrored in the development of punk:

- 154 There's no way Britain can take a turn for the better, and that's the information we're passing on, in everything we do —clothing, concert backdrops, attitudes. They're a million and a half people off work now. They're always going to be off work. They're kids who want to be truck drivers but they don't know how to drive. They don't just lack jobs, they lack skills. All they're fit for is rubbish jobs and they know it. They've got lot of things to give and nothing to give it to. (qtd. in Reed, 1977: 2)

It did not take long for the press to become aware of the connection between the punk subculture and the bleak future expectations of those who belonged to it. The *Daily Mirror* published in a 1977 editorial that the genre was the place for adolescents who had lost hope in a bright future: "Punk rock is tailor-made for youngsters who feel they only have a punk future. Is it any wonder they turn to anarchistic heroes like Johnny Rotten? A brave new generation of talent and purpose is turning sour before our eyes" (Punk Future, 1977). Caroline Coon (*Melody Maker*) and John Ingham (*Sounds*) both agreed on the fact that punk was "a movement that could only occur in a deteriorating economic environment" (Christgau, 1978). Johnny Rotten often addressed the issues that the "programmed" life the youth had to face brought along. His opinions were never short on criticism towards how the establishment seemed to erase any trace of "uniqueness": "They try to ruin you from the start. They take away your soul. They destroy you. "Be a bank clerk" or "join the army" is what they give you at school... you have no future, nothing, you are made to feel unequal" (qtd. in Worley 2017a: 133). Cock Sparrer is another band that insisted on the "no future" situation: "For another generation and another street fight/Got no future, sure got a right I got a right to live" ("Runnin' Riot", 1977). Crass did the same in "Chairman of the Bored" (1979): "Vacant pages offer no breath/Of hope, future, possibility". The Buzzcocks stated that their future was not what it used to be ("Boredom", 1977). Similarly, The Clash in "All the Young Punks" (1978) confessed that the idea of having a hopeful future was slowly disappearing: "Face front you got the future shining/Like a piece of gold/But I swear as we get closer/It look more like a lump of coal".

As a result of all that frustration, punks targeted the establishment as the enemy responsible for their hardships. Yet, despite the despair that was brought by the concern on their poor prospects, silently accepting the "no future" condition without any resistance was never an option for punks. On the contrary, the rebellious nature of the genre and its participants was clearly reflected in the art they produced. The mere existence of the punk subculture itself was already an embodiment of the opposition towards all society standards. The lyrics that addressed what they considered to be the flaws in the system were a verbalization of what the punk movement stood for. For instance, in "Questions and Answers" (1979), Sham 69 lamented that, from the

very beginning of their lives, they had to follow the rules set by the establishment without any room for individual thinking: "As soon as we are born/We're told what to say and do". This could often be seen in punk songs such as The Ruts' "Society" (1979): "You've been programmed, it's far too late/The first time that you open your eyes/They plug you into all their lies" or UK Subs' "I Couldn't Be You" (1977): "First of all they come along and say "there, put your baby in school"/But I was taught to win this game you must obey each golden rule". Johnny Rotten spoke too about his negative perception of the tightly controlled lifestyle that the youth were supposed to follow:

You start off in school and they take your soul away. They take your brains away; you're not allowed to have an opinion that differs from theirs. You've got to think what they tell you to think. So when you leave school, your only future is getting married. And by the time you're about 29, and you've got two kids, you just want to commit suicide. (qtd. in Worley, 2017a: 133)

Punks also showed resistance towards their parental figures' *modus vivendi*, which they considered another portrayal of the *status quo*. The Damned's "Don't Cry Wolf" (1977) presented the rebelliousness against the rules imposed by the older generations: "You don't have to listen/To what your parents say/They don't understand us/Their laws we don't obey". The Damned also remarked the importance of being true to oneself: "You can wear what you want/There ain't no uniform/Go where you want to go/Don't stay locked at home".

Punks often emphasized the importance of the youth and their punk identity, including clothing, as it was a clearly distinctive element that was often frowned upon. Yet, punks embraced their aesthetics without worrying much about criticism, as it was part of their quintessential identity. Examples of this are found in 999s' "Pick It Up" (1978): "I wanna wear clothes that I care about/The shirts that I choose" or The Damned's "Smash It Up" (1979): "People call me villain oh it's such a shame/Maybe it's my clothes must be to blame/I don't even care if I look a mess/Don't wanna be a sucker like all the rest". The idea of the importance of youth and the defiance of the norms imposed by the elderly was often repeated in punk lyrics. The Buzzcocks believed in the "elixir of the youth" while London criticized the attitude of adults towards the younger generation in "Us Kids Cold" (1978). Staying true to the self was crucial for punks and their song lyrics encouraged that idea, as in Angelic Upstarts' "I'm an Upstart" (1979): "I'm an upstart/Listen I'm talking to you/Seek out an identity/You alienate society" or Sham 69's "Run Wild Run Free" (1980): "So be yourself before it's too late/Life is much too short/To throw it all away".

Still on the subject of "no future", it is not coincidental that George Orwell's dystopic novel *1984* was referenced several times in the punk music. The way punks perceived the situation of the country made them think that, if there was a future, it would

definitely not be ideal. The dystopian representation of a future civilization that Orwell had presented in his novel seemed to suit the way in which young punks regarded their surroundings and future prospects. Punk music presented the establishment as a figure of power that had to be defeated, so it does not come as a surprise that punks would identify the system with Orwell's "Big Brother", a "superior figure in power" that controlled everything and everyone without leaving any room for individualism, evolution, or uniqueness. Faz Farrow from The Now, commented that Orwell's novel was a really important book for the youth in the decade of the 1970s, stating the following when talking about the band's song "Into the 80s" (1979):

The context is that the song was written in 1977 (how long ago!) and that our generation was very influenced by a popular book called *1984* in which Room 101 was the place where political dissidents faced their worst torture. We are saying (in the spirit of punk) don't behave passively or apathetically as we approach the new decade, don't give in to political control; there's a future out there for the taking. But whatever, you're going to have to deal with it. (Fazthenow, 2018)

Sham 69 mentioned the Big Brother in "Spray It on The Wall" (1980), and so did Tom Robinson Band in "Power in the Darkness" (1978). The year is mentioned in songs such as "Borstal Breakout" (1978) by Sham 69 or The Clash's "1977", whose lyrics introduced a countdown to the year 1984 by the end of the song: "In 1978/In 1979/Stayed in bed/In 1980/In 1981/The toilet don't work/In 1982/In 1983/Here come the police/In 1984". The Xtraverts sang in "1984" (1981) about a British future that was in shambles. The catalogue numbers that appeared on Crass' records all ended with the number 1984 starting at 521984 in 1979 and finishing with a countdown (421984 in 1980, 321984 in 1981...) until "1984", in the same year, which coincided with the time when Crass disbanded. References to the novel showed up too in band names such as A.D 1984, Combat 84 or Condemned 84.

The despair that inundated the lives of punks caused by high unemployment rates, low purchasing power, and a long list of issues that entailed "no future", brought an inevitable sense of decay that flooded the punk subculture in all its ways. Pessimistic lyrics about cities, routines and lifestyles embodied the social unrest that was so present after the downturn in the British prosperity. In A.D. 1984's "Clockwork Generation" (1981), B. Howard, member of the band, included a text in the vinyl sleeve in which he reflected upon the decaying atmosphere that surrounded the country:

In the humdrum suburbs of the city where the streets and the people ain't so pretty there's a tension hanging thick upon the air sounds like murder being done, no silence there. Along the sidewalks in the shadows of the smoke where neon-lights like angry eyes stare and provoke glazed expressions mask the people and their schemes watched by staring windows full of dreams. Snarling boisterous traffic drones its way "till awesome nighttime noises have their say restless litter cavorts

upon grey breeze across the rooftops stalks a cat, but no one sees We people sail through moments lost and found in the city where the world is not so round making statements that cement our lives to walls graffiti daubed by man... "O.K. who rules". (Howard, 1981)

In the *Race to Nowhere* vinyl (1980), the band discussed the dissatisfaction with the future ahead:

TOMORROW BELONGS TO THE YOUTH OF TODAY! Yet, the view from any city window looks out upon a world covered in "company concrete grey" that offers nothing in the way of comfort, or hope for the future. (1980)

The Art Attacks went on to describe decay in "Rat City"¹²⁹ (1979), portraying a depressing viewpoint of the city life, where everything is unexciting and surrounded by violence. The Clash talked about London in their songs, and they often did with a sense of pessimism and gloom. "London Calling" (1979) and "London's Burning" (1977) both presented a city surrounded by chaos, alienation, monotony and whose future was hopeless, or even non-existent. For 999, their street and the whole world "stank", and they clearly showed that hatred for their city and their inhabitants' narrow-mindedness in "My Street Stinks" (1978). The band UK Decay released in 1979 a song with the same title, whose lyrics described the deteriorating state of the United Kingdom: "Battered Britain just take a look/Your future hangs on a butcher's hook/Your Union Jack no longer rules the skies/It lies in shit surrounded only by flies/You're watching it waste away/In the UK Decay/Who wants to stay today/And see the UK Decay". The song went on to enumerate other issues that were damaging the stability of the country, such as inflation, unemployment and union conflicts: "Inflation rise, your dole queue grows/Unions dictate your fate nobody knows/The country's stalled to melt a pay freeze/See the government it can only grove on its knees/And watch it waste away/In the UK decay/Who wants to stay today/See the UK Decay". The discontent with the political and economic situation of the country triggered feelings of frustration as seen in London's "Everyone is a Winner" (1977): "The man in the bottom flat/Is crying out and shouting out/Something about/The country going down the drain". Frustration was embedded in the nature of punk, the anger caused by the decaying environment contributing to the dissatisfaction which was an integral part of the punk attitude. The Angelic Upstarts sang about the continuous anger felt by adolescents: "No satisfaction it's all frustrations/The times are changing when you're/13, 14/ It's a teenage warning/15, 16 but nobody's listening/17, 18 who takes the blame/19, 20 the twentieth century" ("Teenage Warning", 1979).

¹²⁹ The figure of the rat became an interesting element of the British culture of the 1970s as, in the Western world, rats are seen as a symbol of decay. Some examples are found in *The Rats* (1974) by James Herbert, a horror book that depicts a city of London that has been invaded by rats. In television, "Tomorrow, the Rat" (1970) from the series *Doomwatch* or "During Barty's Party" (1976) from *Beasts* are examples where rats are the center of these TV episodes.

9.1 Life in the suburbs

The lifestyle of many working-class families, a life in the suburbs accompanied by a monotonous routine, was also the target of many punks' anger and frustration. Many of them thought of the suburbs as an extension and embodiment of the decadence that surrounded a generation tormented with routine and dullness. The British suburbs had become a synonym for boredom and failure. Steve Ignorant, from Crass, spoke of his suburban life with animosity as he recalled how tedious and vacant his routine felt:

As with most things in the suburbs it was sterile. Mind- numbingly sterile...Boredom and monotony. Monotony and boredom. Day after day after sodding drawn-out day... I couldn't go out because I didn't have a front door key, so I'd wander through the flat. Lost and aimless. Kitchen, living room, bedroom. Kitchen, living room, bedroom. Kitchen, living-room, bedroom. Hour after hour. Or I'd stand and stare out of the window... watching the streetlights come on and the streets empty... I'd stand there in an empty flat looking at empty streets in an empty estate. (Ignorant, 2010: 31)

Steve Ignorant's comments on the isolation and the sense of non-belonginess caused by monotony matched Siouxsie Sioux's resentful view of suburbia:

I suppose that the suburbs inspired intense hatred. And I think that the lure of London was always there. I remember my sister taking me to Biba on Kensington High Street; I bought a coat, and used to gravitate towards going there on my own later. But the suburbs were a yardstick for measuring how much you didn't fit in, as well. (qtd. in Robb, 2006: 55)

Sioux professed her hatred towards the mundane life of the suburbs on several occasions as she openly discussed her dislike for the suburbs with Jon Savage: "I always gravitated to the city. I hated suburbia" (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 146). Sioux pointed out that one of the reasons that made her think so was the narrow-mindedness that characterized the suburbs: "The only thing that was looked down on was suburbia. I hated Bromley: I thought it was small and narrow-minded" (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 183). Similarly, Simon Baker, member of the Bromley Contingent, compared the differences in lifestyle between the peripheral areas and London, where everything had a new and exciting vibe:

You'd walk down the King's Road and see it, then come back to Bromley. Living in the suburbs gives you a bigger and better perspective on things. If you go to London and see people wearing flares, you'll come home and you'll want your mum to sew triangles in your trousers and stuff: then you're more fashionable than anyone else in Bromley. (qtd. in Savage, 1992: 145)

Siouxsie and The Banshees transformed the discontent towards suburbs into the song “Suburban Relapse” (1978), in which she narrates how the frustration of everyday life at the suburbs came to surface and tormented the protagonist of the song: “I was washing up the dishes /Minding my own business /When my string snapped /I had a relapse/A suburban relapse [...]I think I must be crazy /But my string snapped /I had a relapse/A suburban relapse”. Other songs brought up the issue of the monotony of suburban life too, such as 999’s “Tulse Hill Night” (1978), whose lyrics deal with the boringness of the south London suburb, Tulse Hill: “What’s happening/What’s going on/Every day is just the same/You sit around/Or hang around/Your best friend’s the telly/You gotta get out [...] It’s another Tulse Hill night for you”. The Sex Pistols’ “Satellite” (1977) also makes an allusion to suburbia: “Suburban kid, you got no name/ Too dumb, baby and you got no brain/I bet you’re all so happy in suburban dreams/ But I’m only laughin’ ‘cause you ain’t in my scheme[...] You know I don’t like where you come from/It’s just a satellite of London”. The Slits’ “Newtown” (1979) compared life at the suburbs with drug use, as that lifestyle would make you numb and addicted to the ordinariness of suburban life. The title of the song can be an allusion to the New Town Acts that took place from the 1940s onwards. These acts had the aim of expanding the living areas around the country, contributing to the creation of suburbs. The Clash presented suburban life as lonely and marginalized in “Lost in the Supermarket” (1979): “I wasn’t born so much as I fell out/Nobody seemed to notice me/We had a hedge back home in the suburbs/Over which I never could see/I heard the people who lived on the ceiling/Scream and fight most scarily/Hearing that noise was my first ever feeling/That’s how it’s been all around me”. In “Clash City Rockers” (1978), Strummer sang about wanting to destroy the suburbs: “I want to liquefy everybody gone dry/Or plug into the aerials that poke up in the sky/Or burn down the suburbs with the half-closed eyes/You won’t succeed unless you try”. The Members also put the spotlight on the periphery areas with the song “Sound of the Suburbs” (1979). The band confessed to having found inspiration for the song in all the teenagers who attended their concerts and lived in the outskirts of town. As stated by J.C. Carroll: “once we started doing gigs we saw all these kids from small towns who weren’t part of the metropolitan elite and wanted to be part of it. I thought: “These people need a song” [...] We were kids from Surrey, so we knew all about being seen as oiks from the suburbs” (qtd. in Simpson, 2021). The lyrics depicted a stereotypical family life: “Same old boring Sunday morning, old men out washing their cars/Mum’s in the kitchen cooking Sunday dinner/Herbert’s still moaning for food”. Sticking out from the rest of the neighborhood, we learn about a character named Johnny, who is a punk rocker “And Johnny’s upstairs in his bedroom sitting in the dark/Annoying the neighbours with his punk rock electric guitar/This is the sound/This is the sound of the suburbs”.

Prior to working with the Sex Pistols, Jamie Reid had participated in the creation of the publication *Suburban Press*, which focused on the area of Croydon and dealt with

political, cultural and social issues. In the third issue of the publication (n.d), Reid pointed out his frustration about the solitude and marginalization that surrounded life at the suburbs:

160 We feel isolated. Our isolation is reflected in both the physical and mental environments in which we live. The destruction of the city is almost complete. The exploitation and redevelopment of the city to make way for more offices, expensive flats and yachting marinas, has brought a gradual erosion of urban/communal life. This in turn has created a major shift of population to outer suburbs, thus alienating people from their traditional city relationship. The oral traditions of language and communication have been substituted by new media languages.

In *England's Dreaming* (1992), Jon Savage published an excerpt of his diary, written in the 1970s, which dreadfully described the atmosphere of living in the suburbs of London:

London suburbia: sterility - cynicism - boredom ready to spill into violence; incipient right-wing backlash. Fuck London for its dullness, the English people for their pusillanimity and the weather for its coldness and darkness. (p. 151)

On his part, Johnny Rotten heavily criticized the lives of those that lived in the suburbs, who, according to him, were enslaved by the monotony of the suburban lifestyle:

All these bores who have crawled out of their little Surbiton huts. The only constructive thing left for them to do is kill themselves. You've met one. You've met them all. Their personality is governed by what they do... and they do nothing worth talking about. They don't like people to have notions because they accept how they live. (qtd. in Worley, 2017a: 133)

It is evident that, for punks, suburbia was a synonym for what they considered to be the embodiment of all aspects of society they stood against: The suburbs were presented as helpless areas that shattered the dreams and hopes of the young generations. At the same time, punk became a shelter and a departure from such monotony.

9.2 Boredom

The monotonous life in the suburbs was accompanied by a feeling of boredom that was very infuriating to punks. References to boredom and indifference flooded their song lyrics, and often became a cry for help and a desperate call for a way out of that monotonous life. The issue of feeling "bored" led on many occasions to the use of drugs or to falling into a crime life, as some lyrics imply. Punk music was, thus, full of references to boredom. For instance, Buzzcocks' "Boredom" (1978): "You know me/I'm acting dumb/You know the scene, very humdrum/Boredom, boredom, boredom".

Howard Devoto, former singer of the band, described Buzzcocks' EP *Spiral Scratch* when it came out as "the trials and tribulations of boredom, waiting and nascent enlightenment" (1977). Moreover, Devoto left the band after the release of the EP and later attributed his decision to having become bored from his participation in the band: "I get bored very easily, and that boredom can act as a catalyst for me to suddenly conceive and execute a new vocation" (qtd. in Reynolds, 2006: 17-18). Devoto's stance resonates with the lines sung in The Slits' "Spend Spend Spend" (1979): "I have a tendency to get bored too quickly/Recently my dull life seems to have no meaning". The Clash confessed that London was burning with boredom and that they were also bored with the USA. Boredom led to frustration in The Prats' "Nothing" (1980): "Nothing to do/Nothing, because of you/You cause so much boredom [...] Nothing to do/Sit here and be bored/Dismal, the day's a waste/I hate you/And all your boring tastes", and to delinquency in The Cockney Rejects' "I'm Not a Fool" (1979): "Gonna break into a store/I'm so bored that I don't care anymore". Crass claimed to be the "Chairman of the Bored", while Slaughter and the Dogs thought that everybody was a bore. For The Damned, school was a bore ("Politics", 1977) and so was life for The Slits ("A Boring Life", 1980), while The Mistakes sang that boredom was all around ("Boredom", 2022)¹³⁰. The Adverts' "Bored Teenagers" (1977) expressed the frustration of adolescents who were anxious about the apathy caused by the feeling of being misunderstood: "We're talking into corners/Finding ways to fill the vacuum/And though our mouths are dry/We talk in hope to hit on something new/Tied to the railway track/It's one way to revive but no way to relax/We're just bored teenagers". Wattie Buchan from The Exploited blamed figures in power for being guilty of not understanding the younger generations. Moreover, he considered that punk was an escape and safe place for those who were tired of abiding by the rules: "The government creates boredom and there's no way you can protest about it... They never bother until something actually happens... Punk today is the backlash of reality" (qtd. in Bohn, 1981: 32-33). The Sex Pistols expressed the discontent of their generation in the song "Pretty Vacant": "Don't ask us to attend, 'cause we're not all there/Oh don't pretend 'cause I don't care/I don't believe illusions 'cause too much is real/So stop your cheap comment, 'cause we know what we feel/Oh we're so pretty/Oh so pretty/We're vacant". Those lyrics represented the apathy and reject that was so common among the young punks, and the realization that they felt out of place and did not fit in.

Jamie Reid considered that punk should "turn and utilize violence from frustration and boredom, make it positive and directional to destroy the environment, packaged culture, make it more interesting" (qtd. in Worley, 2017a: 114). Reid's view of the relationship between punk and boredom encouraged the capitalization of the latter

¹³⁰ Even though the song was first published in 2022, it was written between 1977 and 1982 as indicated in the compilation album in which it is included: *Bored Teenagers Vol.13: 16 Great British Punk Originals 77-82*.

to use it as an inspiration to art and the process of creation. Even though punks protested against boredom, the genre was fueled by it, and it almost felt necessary to its development. Punk needed boredom as much as other social issues that had established the grounds for the subculture, and the critique of boredom was an implicit critique of the establishment, ordinary life and routine.

If we were to describe the heart of punk, the "no future" motto would probably be enough. It portrayed an attitude and a frame of mind which pervaded a genre that was born from the collapse of a nation that had experienced prosperity for decades until it began to crumble down in the 1970s. Punks felt hopeless about their future as they found themselves engulfed by a society whose economy was falling to pieces. The disconnection punks felt towards the world that surrounded them translated into boredom, which contributed to the perception of having no future. Their feelings were put into music and the songs that came out from those experiences became the heralds of the angry and the disappointed.

Chapter 10

“Who’ll press the button? Who’ll start the war?”: Punk, anti-nuclear movements, and the Cold War

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Hopes for a brighter future faded during the 1970s as every aspect of society seemed to be falling apart and distancing itself from the good old times. Indications of social unrest manifested themselves in all different types of media (movies, television series, books, and –of course– music), while authors of the time reflected the shared feeling of discontent and their perception of a decaying Britain in their works. Examples of this are Richard L. Clutterbuck’s *Britain in Agony* (1978), Robert Moss’ *The Collapse of Democracy* (1975) or Stephen Haseler’s *The Death of British Democracy* (1976). Another recurring topic commonly manifested in the publications of the 70s was the concern for the environment and consumerism. According to Turner (2013), when environmentalists talked of crisis, it was not simply a return to mass unemployment that they predicted, but the destruction of humanity itself (p. 51). Some of the more pessimistic titles of the decade that dealt with the consequences of nature deterioration included *Can Britain Survive?* by Edward Goldsmith (1971), *A Blueprint for Survival* by Edward Goldsmith and Robert Allen (1972), John Loraine’s *The Death of Tomorrow* (1972) and *Small is Beautiful* by E. F. Schumacher (1975).

In this atmosphere, the long-lasting conflict between the Western and Eastern blocks, the Cold War, and the unease associated with it, was undoubtedly one of the major causes for the feeling of unrest surrounding the 1970s in Britain.

One of the main concerns resulting from the war was the fear of nuclear attacks. The UK was no exception to these dreads so, by the mid-1970s, the government created *Protect and Survive*, which was the title of a series of booklets and a Public Information Film series produced by the British government during the late 1970s and early 1980s dealing with emergency planning in case of a nuclear war. *Protect and Survive* had the purpose of informing British citizens about how to act in case of an imminent nuclear attack. Short films and leaflets were produced and ready to be distributed among the population if necessary. The booklets for *Protect and Survive* were released to the public in 1980. Even though they had been “previously

only distributed to journalists and emergency planners, it had remained a badly kept secret until 1980, when *The Times* ran a campaign challenging Britain's preparedness should the cold war turn hot" (Cain, 2019). Moreover, in 2008 the National Archives declassified a series of documents where it was revealed that the UK government had admitted its incapability of facing a nuclear war.

As a result of all this, a great part of the British population supported the anti-nuclear movement. Even though it gained more prominence in the 1980s, the 1970s were marked by fear and uncertainty about nuclear attacks, and it was in that decade when the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), a British organization which had been created in 1957 to promote the elimination of nuclear weapons, increased the extent of its protests against the nuclear threat. Even though the Cold War was undergoing its *détente* phase by the early 1970s, the conflict gained prominence again by the final years of the decade and continued throughout the 1980s due to events such as Russia's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 or Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher's focus on limiting the power of the Soviet Union.

The punk generation did not have the chance to grow up without the threat of nuclear weapons, so coming of age in the Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) period was a really difficult task for the British youth. With the birth of British punk, whose peak years practically coincided with a new phase of the Cold War, a new and very relevant sociocultural factor added to the development of the movement.

When talking about the concern and involvement of punk with the anti-nuclear movement, it is necessary to mention the band Crass and their engagement with the cause. Crass was one of the musical groups that was most heavily involved in anti-nuclear activism. Their advocacy for peace was not only reflected in their songs, as the band actively showed their support to the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). Penny Rimbaud (drummer and cofounder of Crass) confessed that he had been a CND supporter for a long time and wanted to bring the campaign to the public eye again, since the popularity that the CND had experienced in the 50s and 60s was quietly fading off in the 70s¹³¹ (Kerr, 2021). Gee Vaucher, who was responsible for designing Crass' graphic art, considered CND to be part of her "political awakening" (Berger, 2009: 19). Crass' support for the CND could be seen in their concerts, as the band incorporated CND banners and symbols to the stage of their shows.

131 In an interview with Paul Kerr, Rimbaud recalled visiting the CND offices along with Crass singer, Eve Libertine, and being surprised by the company's lack of resources (Kerr, 2021). The band decided to offer their help, yet organizers from CND were reluctant to accept their offer. As Rimbaud stated: "CND felt that our presence at a rally would merely create trouble. They had a point, but nonetheless, it was one that we found galling" (qtd. in Kerr, 2021). The opinion of the campaign organizers about the involvement of Crass in it did not hinder the band's activism and collaboration with the organization.

Visuals were a fundamental part of Crass' live performances, and it was common for the band to introduce footage of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A concert review published in the magazine *Sounds* (1981) described the shocking atmosphere that the band created during their shows:

The musical side is superbly and disturbingly illustrated with a graphic bombardment of cutting room floor, film montage bludgeoned into your senses with a cruel yet perceptive wit [...] A taste of the full-blown horror of nuclear war hell is provided with footage showing the treating of victims during the aftermath of the sickening atrocities committed at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, its deathly cold soundtrack is that of "Nagasaki Nightmare" announced with the cry of "200,000 people were killed in Nagasaki, now that's what I call OBSCENE" [...] Equally chilling is the tape-recorded selection of "count down" talk overs calmly and mechanically played out and lacking any feeling. All these effects are fitted together to form a terrifying portrait of what could happen tomorrow should the right madman get it into his head that today's the day. (Pouncy, 1981)

Crass' support for the cause was not only symbolic but also economic. After having achieved considerable success with record sales, the band decided to put their money to good use and donated thousands of pounds to the CND and Greenpeace (Capper, 2010). In 1998, Penny Rimbaud discussed the importance Crass had had in relation to the "revival" of the CND from the late 1970s onwards. Rimbaud (1998) considers the band's commitment to have been crucial to the spread of the campaign:

Hundreds of people would travel to join us in scout-huts, church halls and sports centres to celebrate our mutual sense of freedom. We shared our music, films, literature, conversation, food and tea. And when the gig was over, we firstly paid the organiser's expenses, and then, where possible, used the profits to finance local activities. Our efforts on the road slowly brought CND back to life. We were responsible for introducing it to thousands of people who would later become the backbone of its revival. (p. 126)

Crass' fixation with the nuclear threat frequently showed up in their discography, with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki being referenced in "Asylum" (1978), "Reality Asylum" (1979) and "Nagasaki Nightmare" (1980). The first two tracks pointed to the Enola Gay, the airplane bomber that dropped the atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The singer, Eve Libertine, recites the following passage: "You carry the standard of your oppression/Enola is your gaiety/The bodies of Hiroshima are your delight, the nails are your only trinity/Hold them in your corpsey gracelessness/The image I have had to suffer" ("Asylum"). Similar allusions are found in "Reality Asylum": "Enola is your gaiety/Suffer little children to come unto me/Suffer in that horror/Hirohorror/Hirrohiro/Hiroshimmer/Shimmerhiro/Hiroshima". "Nagasaki Nightmare" (1980) commences with Eve Libertine reading a report of the

nuclear attack, in which she talks about the consequences of the bombing to those who were affected by it. During the first half of the track, we hear Asian sounds¹³² until the band disrupts the peaceful tone of the song with their heavy guitars and loud drumming. The anti-nuclear message is seen both in the art found in the vinyl sleeve and the lyrics. The starting lines of the song convey a slightly paranoid sentiment about the possibility of upcoming nuclear attacks, a feeling that in any minute nuclear weapons might fall from the sky: "They're always there high in the skies/Nagasaki nightmare/Pretty as a picture in the generals' eyes/Nagasaki nightmare/They've done it once, they'll do it again/They'll shower us all in their deadly rain/Nagasaki nightmare". The track continues with descriptions of the consequences of the attack with nuclear weapons: "Flash, blinding flash, then there's nothing to see/Nagasaki nightmare/Dying they're still dying, one by one/Nagasaki nightmare/Darkness in the land of the rising sun/Nagasaki nightmare". There is also criticism regarding the treatment that was, and still today is, given to the victims of the bombing, who seem to have been forgotten. The lyrics indicate that acknowledging those who suffered the attacks would be a constant reminder of the nuclear menace: "Lesson, learnt the lesson? No, 'cause no one really cares/It's so easy to be silent just to cover up your fears/Nagasaki nightmare/So they die in the nightmare/And live with the nightmare/Will you stand by and let it happen again?/Nightmare death in the deadly rain/Nagasaki nightmare/Live with the nightmare/And die in the nightmare/Nightmare comes in deadly rain/Manmade power, manmade pain, Nagasaki nightmare/Deadly rain, deadly rain, Nagasaki nightmare". The song ends with a partial repetition of the opening verses, claiming that a new nuclear attack is on the way: "They'll do it again, shower us in rain/Deadly, deadly, deadly rain/Nagasaki nightmare". The vinyl included a folded poster designed by Gee Vaucher that contained song lyrics, credits, pictures, and a manifesto in which the band extensively delve into the nuclear issue. As an example, the band encapsulated how big a concern the nuclear issue was for the youth, how it changed the lives of the old, and the impact it had on art.

No future. Did there used to be a future? Who took it away from us? No-one much under fifty remembers what it was like before there was the Bomb. But it changed them too. Who can say how much it changed all of us, our music, our lovemaking, our art, our taste and smell? In the world of Things, the Bomb is everywhere. (*Nagasaki Nightmare*, 1980)

Crass paid special attention to the role that prominent political figures of the time played in the development of nuclear tensions and in the instilling of fear among citizens. "Banned from the Roxy" (1978), "Contamination Power" (1979) and "They've Got a Bomb" (1979) deal with such issues. The lyrics of "Banned from The Roxy" are

132 Gong sounds, a shamisen and flutes accompany the song playing notes on the pentatonic scale create and Asian atmosphere.

a direct attack to the *si vis pacem, para bellum* policies carried out by governments, in which preparation for war was considered to be a defensive strategy: "They've got the fucking nerve to call it defence/Seems their defence is just the threat of strength [...] Defence? Shit, it's nothing less than war/And no-one but the government knows what the fuck it's for". Crass viewed the display of atomic weaponry as strategies that governments utilized to remain in control, their staying in power depending crucially on people's fear of possible nuclear outbreaks: "They keep their fucking power 'cause their finger's on the button/They've got control and won't let it be forgotten". Once again, we come across a reference to the bombing of Hiroshima "Oh yes they say it's defence, they say it's decency/Mai Lai¹³³, Hiroshima, know what I mean?". "Contamination Power" is another example of how Crass denounced government policies and their tactics: "Atomic power is just another of their ploys/To build their firepower and defend the nation/Atomic power is just another of their ploys/To blow you right away". The lyrics of "They've Got a Bomb" are harsh criticism of those who are in possession of nuclear weapons, who always have the upper hand, implanting fear into people: "They won't destroy the world, no, they're not that crazy/You're dealing with the town hall/They're not that crazy/No political solution so why should we bother?/Well whose fucking head do you think they're holding over?/FOUR. THREE. TWO. ONE. FIRE. /They can't wait to use it/They can't wait to use it [...] They've got a bomb and they can't wait to use it on me". The song then stops abruptly for one minute, a moment of silence that was strategically placed by the band so they could include a video of an atomic explosion while performing live (Worley, 2011: 72). Crass also paid attention to the impact that nuclear threats had on the population: those who live in times of nuclear menace seem to spend their whole lives fearing the moment the bomb is dropped: "Twenty odd years now waiting for the flash.../Twenty odd years now waiting for the flash/All of the oddballs thinking we'll be ash/Well the four-minute warning has run on into years/Are we waiting for them to confirm our fears?/FOUR THREE TWO ONE FIRE/They can't wait to use it/ They can't wait to try it out/ They can't wait to use it/ They've got a bomb and they can't wait to use it on me/ They can build them small, call it tactical/Stop the fallout, make it practical to smash the misfits who foul up their scene with the practical, tactical, killing machine". In the previously mentioned nuclear manifesto, Crass focused on how powerful the threat of nuclear bombings was and how the constant fear instilled in people's minds led to a nihilist mindset:

H-bombs are mind-control. They kill people a little bit everyday, "What's the point of living if they're going to drop it on us?" "Life is so shit-awful anyway, why struggle to stay alive?" "Why fight the Bomb if we're not really living?" "Why fight to be

133 The My Lai massacre was a war crime that took place in 1968 during the Vietnam War, where American troops killed more than 300 unarmed South Vietnamese civilians.

alive if the Bomb could end it?" Round and round and down and we've heard it all before. (*Nagasaki Nightmare*, 1980)

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It is noticeable that punks were affected by the nuclear tensions in such a way that their future hopes were crashed, and a feeling of futility surrounded their will to live under the threat. The nihilism prompted by nuclear tensions showed up in the crude and hopeless lyrics of Special Duties' "CND (Campaign for Nuclear Destruction)" (1982). The verses reflect the band's anxiety about the outbreak of the war, assuming the Eastern bloc would eventually drop the bomb, but also fatalism and hopelessness, a characteristic of the punk nihilist attitude: "What's the point of marching for the CND/If Russia drops the bomb it won't save me/I don't wanna die but can't you see/If there's gonna be a war then let it be". The lyrics also dismissively address the efforts carried out by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, running them down. This band's rejection of anti-nuclear activism emerged from an absolute lack of trust in politicians: "If there's gonna be a war your views won't count/So what's the point of marching if what you say just don't count/The politicians and leaders will be the first to know/While we'll be queuing for a nuclear death row/CND it don't fool me/I don't wanna live in a weak country/CND don't fool me/I don't wanna fight for a weak country". The band Conflict wondered whether anti-war protests would make any difference: "The protest signs are spread across the earth/But will the protests pay their worth?". For them, it was just a matter of time until humanity was set to destruction: "Who'll press the button?/Who'll start the war?/Who'll survive the slaughter? Who'll perish on the floor? [...] The times up now, no protest crowd/Just have you got your final shroud?/It's coming now. Now! Now! Now!" ("One Nation Under the Bomb", 1983). Another remembrance of Crass' manifesto appears in The Insane's "Nuclear War" (1982), where the band claims that nothing matters because a nuclear attack is imminent: "Why bother anyway, there's gonna be nuclear war".

Special Duties were not the only ones who blamed the Russians for potentially dropping the bomb. In 1979, A.D. 1984 released "The Russians are Coming", a title track that was a reminder of the Red Scare, so characteristic of the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and McCarthyism. The fear of Russians was caused by Russia's possession of destructive nuclear weapons. The storytelling of the song focuses on the outcome of an hypothetical nuclear bomb dropped by the Russians, who they consider to be the enemy: "Look-out through your windows and into the sky/The Russians coming are we all gonna die?/Suddenly the sun sinks in the shadows of doom/Suddenly the sun sinks in the shadows of doom/The enemy is coming, the enemy is coming/The enemy is coming, The Russians are coming!/Is it real, no dream...?/Our downfall is their scheme/Is it real, no dream.../Our downfall is their scheme/Skrill the sound of rockets fill the air". A.D. 1984 describe the apocalyptic state in which cities are left after the bomb, with no trace of civilization: "The metropolis crumbles, cities barren and bare/And where are the people who once lived

there/They're under the ashes of a nuclear-war/They're under the ashes of a nuclear-war/The enemy is coming, the enemy is coming/The enemy is coming/The Russians are coming!/Soon the light will recede/So fast it'll overtake speed/Soon the light will recede/So fast it'll overtake speed/Our apathy rewarded, our day turned into nights/ We didn't take notice of the threat of their might/Surrender is so futile the West cannot be slaved/And the people innocent just cannot be saved/And the people innocent just cannot be saved/The enemy is coming, the enemy is coming/The enemy is coming/The Russians are coming!/So mighty was the Bomb/Now all life has gone/Almighty was the Bomb/Now all life has gone/Burned to a cinder, charred to blackened waste/ Our planet is dying, atomic war scarred its life/We didn't do damned thing to stop the arms race/Now it's much too late the Earth has gone without trace/Now it's much too late the Earth has gone without trace". By the end of the song the band refers to the Nuclear Arms Race ("We didn't do damned thing to stop the arms race"), a competition between the Eastern Bloc and the Western Bloc, who fought to have the nuclear weapons dominance. The band also describe a nuclear fallout in "Whitehot-Meltdown" (1979)¹³⁴.

Amidst the paranoia caused by nuclear tension, on March 28th, 1979, a nuclear reactor located on Three Mile Island (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) went through a meltdown that ended up in disaster, fueling anti-nuclear protests. The Clash acknowledged the Three Mile Island accident in two songs from their 1979 album *London Calling*. In "Clampdown" (1979), Strummer stated that the reactor disaster inspired him to write the song: "the nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island got me started" (qtd. in Sadowski, 2016) and the band mention the city of Harrisburg, where Three Mile Island is located: "Yeah, I'm working hard in Harrisburg [...] Begging to be melted down". The "begging to be melted down" line clearly referring to the nuclear accident. Another reference to the nuclear catastrophe is found in the band's track "London Calling", where Strummer sings about a "nuclear error"¹³⁵, which might be another reference to the Three Mile Accident, as the song was released in December 1979, nine months after the fiasco: "The sun's zoomin' in/Meltdown expected/The wheat is growin' thin". When talking about the inspiration behind the song, Strummer brought up the tensions and paranoia caused by the fear of the Cold War: "There was a lot of Cold War nonsense going on" (qtd. in Beviglia, 2015). Yet, another reference to nuclear events appears in Gang of Four's "I Found That Essence Rare" (1979). The lyrics allude to the nuclear testing that took place at the Bikini Atoll between the 1940s and 1950, when the United States government continuedly dropped nuclear weapons all over the island. In the lyrics, the singer Joe King compares the piece of clothing that was named after the atoll with the nuclear events that had taken place

134 A.D 1984's song "Whitehot-Meltdown" seems to never have been released to the public. Yet, the lyrics found in the vinyl sleeve allow us to recognize it as another song that deals with the nuclear issue.

135 "A nuclear error, but I have no fear".

in that location: "Aim for the body rare, you'll see it on TV/The worst thing in 1954 was the bikini/See the girl on the TV dressed in a bikini/She doesn't think so, but she's dressed for the H-bomb/For the H-bomb"¹³⁶.

- 170 References to a bomb that would destroy humanity showed up frequently in punk songs. The first band to refer to the nuclear issue in British punk were the Sex Pistols. A hydrogen bomb is mentioned in "God Save The Queen" (1977): "It made you a moron/A potential H bomb". The Xtraverts' theme "1984" (1981), presents the listener with an apocalyptic atmosphere, as the band take 1984 as the year in which humanity will come to an end: "All the nations blown to bits in '84". The dystopian year was marked as the time when the atomic bomb would be dropped: "No more peace, it's all destroyed/And we all lie dead in '84/1984/He's a scruffy brat in a council flat/And he's dead on the floor and he ain't no more/Atomic war blew you away/And the war and the blood is here to stay". In Tom Robinson Band's "I'm Alright Jack" (1978) the lyrics describe the situation of a man who has sheltered in a bunker after a nuclear weapon has been used: "Don't you worry, I'm alright, Jack/We've never had it so good"¹³⁷/House in Hampstead, fallout bunker/Done everything we could/Fitted the Rolls with a shatterproof windscreen/Soon as we heard the news". The Epileptics complain in "Hitler's Still a Nazi/War Crimes" (1979) about the future they will have to endure: "You're leaving us with problems like pollution and the bomb". The Damned simply mention a nuclear bomb in "Melody Lee"¹³⁸ (1979), while 999 talked about bomb tests¹³⁹ in "English Wipeout" (1980). "Neutron Bomb" by the Art Attacks concludes with the sound of an explosion, just as The Ruts did in "It Was Cold" (1979) after the two protagonists of the song describe the approach of a bomb, completely unaware of it: "You said "be careful" some lights were shining/They came much closer, we started hiding/Then it was silent, I heard you breathing/But far away, someone was screaming".

As previously mentioned, the UK government had initiated the *Protect and Survive* campaign with the goal of informing the population about the risks of a nuclear war and how to act in case of emergency. The campaign, which started in the late 1970s, would later be referenced in a 1982 song by Discharge, "Protest and Survive". Despite the song having little lyrics, these send a straightforward message, which calls for protests: "Protest and Survive/The savage mutilation of the human race is set on course/Protest and survive/Protest and survive /It is up to us to change that course

136 The consequences of the nuclear tests were devastating, and the atoll became unsuitable for living. It stills contains high levels of radiation to the present day.

137 The lyrics "We've never had it so good" can be interpreted as a reference to the phrase popularized by the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, in 1957.

138 "Your life was cruel they called it art/Melody Lee, you need a nuke to set you free".

139 "It doesn't matter where you go to/North South East or West/It looks as though there's been another A bomb test".

/Protest and survive /Protest and survive". The band's discography continued to include references to the terrors caused by nuclear weapons in their songs, record graphic art and pamphlets given at concert¹⁴⁰

Tony Roberts, member of the band, referred to the nuclear menace as one of the most important things in their lives (Worley, 2017a: 241). His band mate, Kelvin Morris, labeled the "I want to grow up, not blow up" phrase as the band's slogan (idem.). The band showed their commitment to the spread of anti-nuclear messages with tracks such as "A Look at Tomorrow" (1981), the lyrics being produced from the point of view of someone who is watching Enola Gay dropping the bomb, or "The Possibility of Life Destruction" (1982). At the beginning of the latter, Discharge incorporated an excerpt from the 1966 fake-documentary *The War Game*. The passage of the film, which deals with the aftermath of a nuclear war, starts with a narrator describing the outcome of a nuclear explosion, accompanied by screams of terror and alarm sounds in the background:

At seven tenths of a millisecond after the explosion, and at a distance of 60 miles, the light from the fireball of a single megaton thermonuclear device is 30 times brighter than the midday sun. This little boy has received severe retinal burns from an explosion 27 miles away. The blast wave from a thermonuclear explosion has been likened to an enormous door slamming in the depths of hell. (Watkins, 1966)

After the fragment from the movie, the track is followed by a rapid instrumental section and the screaming of the lyrics: "Napalm tumbles from the sky/Cries of help, cries of pain/Skin looking like bloody hardened meat/Cries of help, cries of pain".

It was very common for punk bands, especially from the early 1980s onwards, to release songs that resonated with anti-war sentiment, even though The Clash complained already in 1977 that "hate and war are the only things we get today" ("Hate and War") and The Rezillos agreed stating that "Cold wars are here to stay" ("Cold Wars, 1979). The lyricism of "War's no Fairytale" (1980) by Discharge entails a very strong anti-war message, as the band tries to depict the crude reality of wars. At the same time, Discharge put the spotlight on relevant governmental figures, condemning the way in which they wished to hide the terrors of the war from the public eye: "Government and queen are your only enemies/Don't be fooled by their plastic smiles/War's no fairytale/Guns and bombs aren't fucking toys/They don't

140 "I want to grow up not blow up". Anti-Nuclear slogan in a badge from the 1960s in the USA, Canada and Great Britain. https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSZ2H_4-c0vUL08mjfqBL-ZdwENoKxXcjUrWcg&s The same slogan is displayed in the upper right corner of the sleeve from the EP *Fight Back* (1980) https://img21.shop-pro.jp/PA01475/980/product/169523809_o1.jpg?cmsp_timestamp=20220723152350

Pamphlets given to those who attended Discharge's concerts. Circa 1980. https://i.discogs.com/eCDRHg_PgCh44OFo7ihXMST6w4OQiZ34RWaKdJoB8Mw/rs:fit/g:sm/q:90/h:450/w:600/czM6Ly9kaXNjb2dz/LWRhdGFhYXNlLWlt/YWdlcy9SLTE0ODA3/NjQ3LTE2ND-MwNTQ1/MTQtNzE3OS5qcGVn.jpeg

wanna know your views of war/They never stop to think about you/War's no fairytale/
Guns and bombs aren't fucking toys/They want you kept in the darkness of the
realities of war/War's no fairytale/Guns and bombs aren't fucking toys/Meat flung
yards apart from bodies/Are typical sights of war/War's no fairytale/Guns and bombs
aren't fucking toys". The same message is repeated in two songs from the band's EP
The Realities of War (1980): "Realities of War"¹⁴¹ and "They Declare It"¹⁴². "They're the
ones to declare the war/We're the ones die for the cause" is what The Varukers sang
in 1983, in line with the previous songs. Crass' popular slogan "Fight War, not Wars"
originated from their self-titled song (1978) "Fight War, not Wars", where the lyrics
consist of repetition of the title. The Subhumans and Chron Gen both feared for the
outbreak of the Third World War in "Who's Gonna Fight in the Third World War" (1981)
and "Puppets of War" (1982)¹⁴³.

In such a politically-driven genre as punk, it was inevitable for the members of the
movement not to react to the Cold War and the nuclear menace. The standpoint
of punk towards the conflict was certainly anti-war and anti-nuclear. Long gone
were the folky protest songs of the 1950s and 1960s. Now, heavy instruments and
screamed lyrics encapsulate the rage and fear that the young and older generations
were experimenting in the years when the slogan "no future" referred to something
substantially more tangible and terrifying than having no jobs or suffering the
hardships of an economic bump. Punks were firmly convinced that there was a real
possibility of the humanity being annihilated by nuclear weapons ("One Nation Under
the Bomb", "1984"). A literal "no future" could be around the corner, and punk bands
did not hesitate to speak up on the issue. As Crass stated: "we rebel with marches
and music" (*Nagasaki Nightmare* vinyl, 1980). Therefore, bands were determined
to use their music and platforms as consciousness-raising tools to spread anti-
nuclear and anti-war activism. For instance, Crass' preoccupation to bring the
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament back to life or Discharge's appropriation of
the "I want to grow up, not blow up" slogan and the informative pamphlets given
at their shows. The songs released by punk artists showed that they would not be
held back from pointing fingers: some blamed the Eastern Bloc (A.D 1984, Special
Duties) while others aimed at those in power, regardless of their country of origin
("Banned from The Roxy", "They've Got a Bomb", "War's no Fairytale"). Describing the
horrors caused by wars was also common practice in order to send antimilitarist

141 "But they don't hear cries of fear/War is a black hole to avoid/Mutilated corpses, charcoaled flesh/
Litter the battlefield/But their dead bodies/Are not to be found".

142 "Why should I fight in their fuckin' wars? /When they don't consult my views of war/They declare it!"

143 The following songs also included anti-war sentiments in their lyrics: "Warhead" (1980) and "Public
Servant" (1980) by the UK Subs, "No Doves Fly Here" (1983) by The Mob, "Never Again" (1979) by An-
gelic Upstarts, and "Visions of War" (1981) "Why" (1981) "Maimed and Slaughtered" (1981) "Mania for
Conquest" (1981) "Is This To Be" (1981) "Massacre of Innocence (Air Attack)" (1981), all by Discharge.

messages: ("Nagasaki Nightmare", "Realities of War"). However, other members of the punk community responded cynically to the nuclear situation, wondering whether protesting would actually be any help ("Nuclear War", "CND (Campaign for Nuclear Destruction)"), those songs being a representation of the nihilist side of punk. There is no denying, in any case, that the nuclear conflict and the tensions derived from the Cold War had a very strong impact on the punk scene of the times, to which punk artists responded mostly spreading pacifistic messages and encouraging activism among their audience.

Chapter 11

“Punks are alright when you want to fight”: Punk and violence

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In the article “Britain in the Seventies – Our Unfinest Hour?”, Morgan (2017) believes the 1970s in Britain to have been characterized by several main issues, one of them being “a flight to extremism in political life and a rise in public and domestic violence”¹⁴⁴ (p. 2). These two factors went hand in hand with the political extremism of the decade, which on many occasions led to violent acts. The rise of the far right in the polls and its anti-immigrant policy also gave way to racist attacks, as we have seen in the preceding sections. Moreover, we find an increase of street violence in this decade, marked by IRA’s terror attacks.

The Office for National Statistics provides a record of crime statistics for England and Wales from 1898 to 2002 which can be used to verify whether violence increased in the 1970s in comparison to the previous decade. The sheet includes all types of crimes and is divided into different categories. The first one mentioned is a record of crimes that are considered to be “violence against the person” (Government UK, 2012). It includes homicide, attempted murder, wounding, assault etc. The lowest number of these crimes during the 1960s is found in the year 1960, with a total of 15,759, whereas the highest rate of violence against the person crimes was in 1969, with 37,818 crimes (ibid.). Analyzing the same data in the 1970s, we observe a substantial increase of violent acts, considering that crimes went from 41,088 in 1970 to 94,960 by 1979 (ibid.). “Sexual offence” crimes hit their peak in 1969, with 23,526 and their low in 1964, with 19,903 (ibid.). In the following decade, the lowest rate of criminality is found in 1977 with 21,313 and the highest is 25,736 in 1973 (ibid.). The figures for “robbery” go from 2,014 in 1960 and 1969 in 6,041 to 6,273 in 1970 and 13,730 in 1977 (ibid.). To sum up, the total figures for recorded crime in

144 He first mentions the “conflict and class war in industry”, illustrated in the constant conflicts among trade unions and the government. Secondly, “a sharp downturn in the economy”, characterized by the oil crisis, stagflation and deindustrialization, which clashed with the boom of the previous decades (p. 2). (See Chapter 3 *supra*).

England and Wales during the 1960s was the highest in 1969, with a total 1,488,638 crimes. The highest number of crimes in the next decade nearly doubled that figure in 1978 with 2,561,499. On a similar note, Morgan remarks that "the police recorded a rising toll of cases of domestic violence – 89,599 in 1974 alone, including a growing tally of rape and wife-battering cases" (2017: 10).

In addition to this, an alarming increase of juvenile crime rates was discussed in Parliament in December 1974, with politician Roger Sims bringing up for discussion the unsettling amount of youth crime incidents that had been taking place over the last few years:

Of all the crimes of violence that occurred in 1970, just under 12 per cent were perpetrated by young persons under the age of 17. In 1973 the figure rose to 15½ per cent. In 1970 just under 38 per cent. Of all burglary offences were committed by juveniles; last year the figure was 43 per cent. In 1970, 28 per cent. Of all robbery offences were committed by juveniles; last year the figure rose to over 40 per cent. (House of Commons, 1974)

It was reported by the Metropolitan Police that arrests among the youth had increased for different types of crimes¹⁴⁵ and those figures were considered "frightening and serious" (House of Commons, 1974). During the debate, moreover, a direct connection between youth crime and poverty was established: With the economic crisis of the 1970s and its aggravation as the years passed, poverty figures increased. Consequently, juvenile crime rates did too.

Punk lyrics never showed any kind of restraint when addressing controversial topics, and violence was no exception. Finding songs and descriptive lyrics that dealt with physical attacks or murder was not at all rare in the genre. Fighting was recurrently addressed in punk songs and was often talked about as a leisure activity. The Cockney Rejects did so in "Fighting in the Street" (1980), a song that affirms that the kids fight because they find it entertaining: "You're walking along quietly/There's the sound of running feet/You turn around the corner/There's fighting on the street/ See all the kids they wanna good time/They all wanna get stuck in/Don't know, don't care/If they're fighting for a cause/As long as they get one in/Go/We're fighting in the streets". Similarly, Colin McFaull, from Cock Sparrer, wanted to put an end to his boredom by causing an uproar in "Runnin' Riot" (1977): "I can't stand the peace and

145 "The Metropolitan Police report that their arrests for indictable offences overall in the period 1969–73 increased by 18 per cent.; the number of arrests of juveniles for indictable offences rose by 40 per cent. Last year of all the arrests for burglary, in the Metropolitan Police district 52.5 per cent. were by juveniles; for robbery and theft, 39 per cent. were by juveniles; for wounding and assaults, 14 per cent. were by juveniles; as to offences involving motor vehicles, 41 per cent. were committed by juveniles. Similar figures can be quoted for areas such as Liverpool and Birmingham. Unhappily, there is no sign of the situation improving this year. The Metropolitan Police figures indicate that in the first six months of this year there was a 25 per cent. increase in juvenile offences" (House of Commons, 1974).

quiet/All I want is a running a riot". Punk lyrics mirrored the risks of real life. While 999 sang in "Nasty Nasty" (1979) that they walked the streets at night looking for a fight¹⁴⁶, TV Personalities confessed in "This Angry Silence" (1981) that it was unsafe to walk in the streets at night¹⁴⁷. Moreover, considering the distinctive narrative of personal experiences in the lyrics of punk, some lead singers sang from the perspective of the aggressor and described their violent actions. An example of this is found in Sham 69's "We Got a Fight" (1977), as Jimmy Pursey recalls how violent his Saturday night turned out: "I got in a bleedin' fight/All the lads came down with me/I ended up in the bleedin' gutter". He employs similar lyrics in "Sunday Morning Nightmare" (1978): "I've been drinking too many pints of lager/I've been getting into too many bleedin' fights/I came home with sick all down me trousers". Slaughter and the Dogs fueled the violent reputation of punk with the lyrics of "I'm Mad" (1978), claiming that "Punks are alright when you want to fight". The rest of the lyrics also describe how the frontman knocked "some bastard off his feet" and wanted to "put a bottle in your face"¹⁴⁸.

Murder was another prototypical topic that punk songs revolved around. For instance, 999's "Crime Parts 1 & 2" (1978), where the protagonist of the song has had her best friend killed, or Blitz's (Derbyshire, 1980) "Someone's Gonna Die" (1981), which describes the scene of a murder in detail: "This is where the good times went/With his brains lying on the pavement/With a broken bottle in his hand/And another in his back".

Some songs also dealt with police abuse, such as The Adicts' "Straight Jacket" (1979). The song narrates how the singer has been arrested several times without having done anything wrong. Moreover, the main character of the song claims that young kids are unfairly targeted by the police: "They're only picking on my generation/They don't need any provocation". "Killer" (1979) by the UK Subs, "UK '79" (1979) by Crisis, The Clash's "Know Your Rights" (1982), UK Subs "Young Criminals" (1979) or Angelic Upstarts' "Police Oppression" (1978) also include lyrics that condemn police abuse. Tom Robinson Band, Dave Goodman and Friends and the Angelic Upstarts all denounced in their discography the death of Liddle Towers, a man who was arrested and whose death, in 1976, was attributed to police action. Dave Goodman and Friends released in 1978 "Justifiable Homicide" wondering about "Who killed Liddle?". "Blue Murder" (1979), by Tom Robinson Band, described how Towers was attacked by the police: "Well they kicked him far and they kicked him wide/He was kicked outdoors, he was kicked inside/Kicked in the front and the back and the side/It really was a hell of

146 "Nasty nasty walk the streets at night/Nasty nasty looking for a fight".

147 "And I'm scared to go out at night/It's not safe on the streets".

148 Mentions of violence acts also appear in the following songs: The Boys' "Tonight" (1977); The Clash's "Cheat" (1977); Skrewdriver's "Too Much Confusion" (1977); Generation X's "Kiss Me Deadly" (1978); 999's "Feeling Alright with The Crew" (1978); Slaughter and the Dogs' "Where Have All the Boot Boys Gone" (1978); Sham 69's "Evil Way" (1978) and Buzzcocks' "Paradise" (1979).

a fight/He screamed blue murder in the cell that night/But he must have been wrong cos they all deny it/Gateshead station police and quiet". The Angelic Upstarts did something similar in "The Murder of Liddle Towers" (1979): "Who killed Liddle?/Police killed Liddle Towers/Why did he die, or did they lie?/I think he's dead, so a doctor said/He was beaten black/He was beaten blue/But don't be alarmed, it was the right thing to do/The police have the power/Police have the right/To kill a man to take away his life/Drunk and disorderly was his crime/I think at worst he should be doing time/But he's dead".

References to other types of offences are also often found in punk lyrics: "Shoplifter" (1979) by The Slits offers a detailed description of how the band steals groceries, and Sham 69's "Borstal Breakout" alludes to the detention centers that could be found all over the UK, named "Borstal schools"¹⁴⁹. The lyrics talk about a man who has been put there unjustly and is planning his escape. With "Organised Crime" (1980), the UK Subs put on "anti-establishment" lyrics, the song talking about a man who is described as the biggest "thief", while, as the song unfolds, we learn that that the person who is stealing repeatedly is a government official.

With the increase of crime rates in Britain came a feeling of insecurity and violence all over the country, mirrored in songs such as "Rat City" (1979), by the Art Attacks ("Razor blade in the palm of your hand/A bomb goes off on the underground in Rat City/it ain't pretty it's pretty shitty/Rat City pretty shitty/Snipers on the Post Office Tower/Just waiting for their final hour") or "In The Street Today" (1977), by The Jam ("In the street today/Murder on the terraces/And fools in high places/It's all so sickening/And we're so satisfied/In the street tonight/Hate on every pavement/Paranoia on shop doorways").

Another important issue regarding violence that was addressed in punk music was domestic violence. Crass' official fanzine, *International Anthem* (1979), devoted its second issue to "domestic violence". In it, the band published collages and fictional stories that tackled the problem. In their discography, Crass also wrote some lyrics that addressed the issue: "Big Man Big M.A.N" (1979), tackled the problem of domestic abuse while criticizing the stereotype of abusive men: "You can treat the wife like shit, own a car, a telly set/Slip off in the evenings for a little on the sly/And if the wife complains, fuck her first, then black her eye". In "Heard Too Much About" (1979), the topic is also mentioned: "Fear, guilt, abuse, love and moral truth/War in your bedroom, bodies in your fridge/Domestic violence, the tomb you dig". Sham 69's "That's Life" (1978) describes the physical abuse from father to his son: "And my dad'll beat me black and blue/They're saying that's life/But I'm taking the blame" just like The Clash's "What's My Name" (1977): "Dad got pissed so I got clocked". Finally, TV Personalities refer to marital arguments in "This Angry Silence" (1981): "Hear my father shouting

149 These centers were allocated for the youth and were abolished in 1982.

at my mother/In the room next door/He's always threatening to pack his bags/Cause he can't take anymore". It is important to note that these songs are all sung from a first-person perspective. Considering how little focus had been put into these issues from the mass media or the administration, singing about domestic violence from a personal perspective was the punk artists' way of making people aware of such problems.

Also, within the punk scene, some bands chose names that resonated with violent acts. Moors Murderers¹⁵⁰, The Delinquents, Menace, Raped, or The Stranglers are examples of this.

The punk subculture soon became notorious for being violent, and the reputation of punk went downhill early from its beginning: The looks of punks were too scandalous and deliberately made to offend and shock the older generations. Ripped clothes, aggressive attitudes or the fact that many punks wore swastikas for aesthetics and to shock the observers did not precisely help their public reception.

From the point of view of its sound, punk was a certainly aggressive genre that strongly clashed with the popular music of the time. Heavy guitars, distortion, strong drumming and rapid tempo were often accompanied by angry, jarring lyrics that aimed at all aspects of the British society which were controversial, questioning the establishment, and often causing the general public to react against the genre. This encapsulated anger was frequently delivered by singers screaming their vocals.

When it comes to violence within the subculture, for many punks being violent and committing criminal acts was another way of showing a rebellious attitude towards the *status quo*. As Vivienne Westwood stated: "There is nothing wrong with being nasty and rude. It provokes reactions from other people, it leads to release" (qtd. in "Grundy banned", 1976). The nihilist and anarchist mindset that was so present in the punk community contributed therefore to lawlessness and a riotous behavior. If there is no authority but yourself, as Crass proclaimed, punks questioned the point of acting in accordance with the law. Violent acts were also a way of fighting boredom or canalizing the anger and frustration the younger generations were experimenting. Moreover, it contributed to a sense of belonging with other members of the subculture, for whom violent attitudes were treated as one more ludic activity.

From the very beginning, punk made things clear. Paul Cook, from the Sex Pistols, stated in a 1976 interview that "We're not into music – we're into chaos!" (qtd. in Spencer, 1976: 31). The turning point for punk and its public reception occurred during the broadcast of the band's tv interview in *Today with Bill Grundy* on December

150 The name was a reference to the Moors murders. Myra Hindley and Ian Brady killed and sexually assaulted five children in Manchester between 1963 and 1965. The band chose this name knowing it would shock the audience.

1st, 1976. Their TV appearance was the first major exposure of punk to the general public and older audiences. The interview, which only lasted about two and a half minutes, was enough for punk to gain its infamous reputation. In the interview, the Pistols were accompanied by some members of the Bromley Contingent¹⁵¹. During the live broadcast, the band and their followers were seen smoking, drinking and cursing. In it, Steve Jones called Grundy "dirty old man", "dirty fucker" and "fucking rotter" following Grundy's comments towards Siouxsie Sioux¹⁵², while Simon Barker, member of the Contingent, wore a swastika armband. As expected, the interview was a complete scandal. While Grundy was suspended for two weeks for "inexcusable sloppy journalism" and the interview was labeled as "a gross error of judgment" (Grundy banned, 1976), the BBC received hundreds of phone calls complaining about what had just been broadcast at a time when swearing on live television was unacceptable. That was a before and after in the history of punk, the subculture suddenly becoming a public enemy¹⁵³. Nils Stevenson, manager of Siouxsie and the Banshees, declared that the interview with Bill Grundy made punk greatly unpopular:

Amazing response from the national press: the story's on every front page and news bulletin. We're no longer enigmatic freaks, we're suddenly despised "Punks". People used to get out of the way, but now they barge me off the pavement. (Stevenson, 1999)

Malcolm McLaren recalls thinking that the Pistols' appearance in the show would mark a turning point in the reception of the genre:

I knew the Bill Grundy show was going to create a huge scandal. I genuinely believed it would be history in the making and in many regards it was, because that night was the real beginning—from the media's and from the general public's point of view—of what became known as "punk rock". (qtd. in McNeil & McCain, 1996: 258)

Violent acts within the punk scene were mostly bound to happen in concerts, and music venues were the main place for fights to happen. According to Gareth Holder, from *The Shapes* (1977), the violence that took place during live performances was "one of the things that killed off the old punk" (qtd. in "The Shapes - Brian Helicopter interview", n.d). He stated that The Roxy "could get wild" (ibid.), yet he defined The Vortex as the venue where violence took its toll. Holder also brought attention to the

151 A group of followers of the Sex Pistols. Among the members were Siouxsie Sioux and Billy Idol.

152 Grundy made some suggestive comments to Sioux. The exchange that caused Steve Jones to insult the interviewer went like this:

GRUNDY: (*To Sioux*) Are you worried, or are you just enjoying yourself? SIOUX: Enjoying myself.

GRUNDY: Are you? SIOUX: Yeah.

GRUNDY: Ah, that's what I thought you were doing. SIOUX: I always wanted to meet you.

GRUNDY: Did you really? SIOUX: Yeah.

GRUNDY: We'll meet afterwards, shall we? (Transcript: Sex Pistols v Bill Grundy, 2004).

153 TV Personalities released a song in 1978 called "Where's Bill Grundy Now?". The lyrics talk about the aftermath of the interview.

fighting that often occurred during the Sex Pistols concerts, caused by mods, teds or skinheads who attended the gigs just to fight punks. In addition to this, the singer of The Shapes blamed certain punk bands for their passiveness when it came to denouncing violence within the punk scene:

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Of course, thanks to the likes of Sham 69 and Co not making a stand against violence and right wing involvement until it was way too late, there was a time when going to any gig could result in violence [...] [referring to Sham 69's singer Jimmy Pursey] He'd be singing "If the Kids are United" and the whole fucking place would be a war zone while he was doing it (qtd. in The Shapes - Brian Helicopter interview, n.d).

Holder recalls refusing to continue performing on stage because of the crowd turning extremely violent and talked about the dangers of being a punk in his hometown, where just because of one's appearance you could end up being physically assaulted. He also alluded once more to the confrontations between different subcultures:

What was passable in London, was downright dangerous in Leamington Spa. Ben was cornered in a Chinese takeaway by a bunch of drunks, and damn near killed. He was in hospital for quite a time. I got beat up and lost teeth as well. In those days, you really did take your life in your hands being the first in your town. That was time of the Teds vs Punks nonsense too (qtd. in The Shapes - Brian Helicopter interview, n.d).

The fact that some punk bands embraced football teams was just another problematic aspect that did not help punk get rid of its violent connotations. The Cockney Rejects often proclaimed their support for the West Ham United FC by carrying flags onstage, covering the anthem of the football team or releasing songs that were direct provocations to other football teams and encouraged violence: "We meet in the Boyleyn every Saturday/Talk about the team that/We're gonna do today/Steel cap Dr. Martens and iron bars/Smash their coaches or do'em/In their cars" ("West Side Boys", 1980). On June 6th, 1980, The Rejects performed in The Cedar Club in Birmingham and the venue soon became a war zone, as Birmingham city fans showed up in the gig. Glasses began to be thrown onto the stage and Jeff Geggus, lead singer, confronted the crowd and triggered more violence. Chaos flooded the venue and members of the band and audience had to be taken to hospital. The concert was an absolute disaster. As mentioned by Jeff Geggus:

It was a terrible gig, it was terrible, ultra-violence like you've never seen before. I'd seen quite a bit on the terraces or outside football grounds, but this was carnage [...] There was a lot of people cut and hurt, I got cut, my brother [Rejects' guitarist Micky Geggus] really got done bad, with an ashtray, the gear was decimated, there was people lying around on the floor. Carnage. (qtd. in Petridis, 2010)

Members of bands also had a history of getting personally involved in fights and other brutal acts. On December 23rd, 1977, Sid Vicious smashed his bass guitar on the head of a fan who was at a Sex Pistols concert. The Pistols were playing in Newport and, according to fan Simon Roberts, who attended the concert, it was common for the audience to spit on the floor during performances. As he recalls it:

At some point in the middle of the show Johnny Rotten was lying on the stage on his back in tartan trousers with his mic going through God Save the Queen and all their repertoire and this one guy continued to spit. In mid-song Sid Vicious unhooked his big bass guitar from his shoulders and smashed it over this guy's head, splattering blood everywhere. The guy's head split open like a watermelon. Sid Vicious casually strapped his guitar back on his shoulder and carried on playing. (qtd. in Neal, 2020)

Sid Vicious' acts of violence were not a one-off event. During the 100 Club Punk Festival, in 1976, he threw a glass during The Damned's performance, leaving a girl partially blind. According to Simonelli (2002)

The incident was highly publicised, and turned most of the public that was paying attention against punk. Punk became immediately identified as violent, an unfair association but one that lone individuals like Sid Vicious would keep alive through the period of punk's popularity in the seventies. (p. 130)

In 1977, he attacked an *NME* reporter, Nick Kent, with a bicycle chain. Vicious was also a victim of attacks himself. While performing in Dallas in January 1978, a member of the audience punched him and broke his nose after hearing Vicious say that "you cowboys are all a bunch of fucking faggots!". Yet, he continued with the show and kept on performing while covered in blood¹⁵⁴. Additionally, Vicious self-harmed in different ways. One of them consisted of inflicting cuts on his chest that could be seen when performing live.

Being a punk could cause you many problems, especially if you were a girl. As Ari Up, lead singer of The Slits, remembers:

It was hard enough for the boys, but for the girls it was a witch hunt. People saw us walking down the street, and if they could have put us on the stake they would have done it. (qtd. in Mar, 2005)

The frontwoman was actually stabbed in 1976. According to Up, her looks were the cause of having been assaulted: "I was stabbed for looking the way we looked" (qtd. in Reddington, 2007: 113). Moreover, she denounced that punks could not even trust the police, as "there's no way we could go to the police, are you kidding me? Do you

¹⁵⁴ Sid Vicious performing with a broken nose <https://condenadofanzine.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/sid-vicious-dallas.jpg?w=206>

think people like us could go to the police at the time? We were harassed by the police as well" (qtd. in Reddington, 2007: 113). Her denouncement resonates with what The Adicts sang on "Straight Jacket" ("They're only picking on my generation/ They don't need any provocation"). Similarly, The Stranglers were arrested for inciting a riot during a performance in Nice, and also encouraged the audience to destroy The Marquee while performing at the venue. Another display of aggressive behavior, carried out by a member of The Clash, became one of the most iconic moments in punk history: Paul Simonon, bass player, smashed his instrument at the end of a performance in New York on September 20th, 1979. Simonon later revealed that he smashed the bass because the security of the concert would not let the audience stand up during the show. Photographer Penni Smith captured the moment, and the band used it as the cover of *London Calling* (1979)¹⁵⁵

The violence within the punk scene was particularly covered by the media, which fueled the bad reputation of the genre. A 1977 article from *The New York Times* ("Punk Rock, Britain's Latest Fad, Leaves Trail of Violence in Wake") echoed the altercations that were taking place within the British musical scene. The article informed about the violent behavior that often occurred at punk gigs: "the brawls are reported weekly across Britain, sometimes between listeners and band members and sometimes between punk fans and other young people" (Reed, 1977: 2). The article reported that in less than two weeks, members of four different bands had been attacked. Moreover, violent acts that arose in the Sex Pistols concerts affected the band negatively when it came to performing live. As reported in *The New York Times*: "the Pistols have not played a concert for several weeks because, they say, they cannot find a hall or a pub that will book them, considering their reputation for inspiring violence" (Reed, 1977: 2). The banning of the Pistols from music venues caused the band to tour the UK under different pseudonyms during the S.P.O.T.S (Sex Pistols on Tour Secretly). The tour began on August 19th, 1977, with just five shows. Nick Kent, who had been attacked by Sid, brought up the issue of violence in an interview with Malcolm McLaren. Kent (1976) stated the following:

The band's corporate reputation for directly causing ugly scenes. Actually, the Pistol's position when actual incidents of violence have occurred makes for something of a moot point. Certainly, it's become apparent in the past that certain members of the Pistols's immediate entourage have been directly responsible for causing some pretty unpleasant incidents. Vivien, McLaren's old lady, sparked off one particularly brutal beating at the Nashville, for example, while Sid Vicious, apparently, Johnny Rotten's best mate, has lived up past to his name on several occasions attacking virtual innocents with a rusty bike chain at Pistols's gigs. (p. 27)

155 Cover of the Clash's album *London Calling* (1979) <https://i.discogs.com/T7wMC50rMiH2QW-Vaozi2rvDXSme7ZU3Lww2R9OLox7w/rs:fit/g:sm/q:90/h:600/w:594/czM6Ly9kaXNjb2dz/LWRhdGFi-YXNlLWlt/YWdlcy9SLTM3ODY5/OC0xNDA3MTU4ODA5/LTI2MDguanBlZw.jpeg>

McLaren replied by claiming that violence was naturally connected to rock and roll, and that those who are involved in the genre used it as a way of canalizing their resentment:

- 184 Well, it's bound to happen, innit? I mean, rock and roll is a violent music. It's about pent-up frustrations and pressured, about young kids who are often naturally oriented towards violence anyway...but... I don't think violence has ever got out of hand at Pistols concert. (qtd. in Kent, 1976: 27)

This was not the first time that McLaren had justified the violence that occurred within the punk scene. In an interview for the *Daily Mirror* he said: "there will very likely be violence at some of the gigs because it is violent music. We don't necessarily think violence is a bad thing because you have to destroy to create" (qtd. in, Greig, McCarthy, Peacock, 1976). Thus, for punks, violence might even be an aspect of their creativity, making virtue out of necessity.

In conclusion, we can say that the increase of crime rates in Britain in the 1970s was faithfully reflected in punk songs, with different acts of violence such physical assault or murder being often portrayed in their lyrics. Within the punk scene, the violence that broke out among members of the subculture was a combination of several factors: many punks used violence to show their discomfort towards the establishment, sometimes just to fight boredom, and fights also originated simply as the result of antagonism with members of other subcultures. The most common place for violent acts to happen was during concerts and performances. There, both members of the audience and members of bands were responsible for causing riots. Eventually, the trouble and turmoil that often surrounded the punk music scene did nothing but contribute to the public persecution and bad reputation of the genre.

Chapter 12

“And when you see those tanks go past, you hide your bomb and run from the blast”: Punk and the troubles in Northern Ireland

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England was not only tormented by inner conflicts in the decade of the 1970s, as the turbulent relationship between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom was dangerously aggravating. The Troubles was a conflict that took place between 1968 and 1998 and which revolved around the independence of Northern Ireland. On the one hand we have the loyalists and unionists, who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, and on the other the nationalists, who fought for the independence of the region. The most widely known part of the conflict was the role played by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and its derivations, the PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army) and the OIRA (Official Irish Republican Army), who sided with the republicans and carried out terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland and other territories.

In the 1970s, the IRA took a step further and their violent actions extended to England and the rest of the United Kingdom. The fact that the Troubles were not a local issue anymore supposed a great change to the nations that had not been directly affected by the attacks of IRA, as Martin Dillon (1996) comments:

it is understandable that by the early 1970s the British public, never well educated about the Irish problem, felt battered by daily coverage of killings that did not affect them directly. Only when IRA outrages occurred in England was the spotlight focused on Ireland. (xxviii)

Formerly, there had already been conflict between the British and the Northern Irish, such as the Falls Curfew (1970)¹⁵⁶ or the Bloody Sunday (1972)¹⁵⁷, but these events had not taken place in England. The outcome of the Bloody Sunday was a major

156 In 1970, from the 3rd to the 5th of July, the British Army carried out an operation in Belfast where the soldiers would search for weapons. It resulted in confrontations between civilians and the army.

157 “Bloody Sunday” refers to the killing of 26 Irish civilians in Derry on January 30th, 1972. British soldiers were responsible for the murders.

blow for the British government, and "reactions in Ireland and throughout the world to Bloody Sunday focused condemnation on both the army and the British government. In Dublin feelings of outrage led to a protest by 30,000 people and the burning of the British Embassy" (Dillon, 1996: 144). From this moment onwards England became the objective of dozens of IRA bombings. As Morgan (2017) states, this change brought nothing but discomfort and violence to the United Kingdom:

The consequences both in Northern Ireland and parts of mainland Britain were horrifying. There was a rising tide of violence, assassinations, bombings and casual shootings, over the next few years. Relations between the occupying British army and the resident Nationalists amounted to a state of war. (p. 9)

On March 8th, 1973, the IRA planted two bomb cars near the Old Bailey (Central Criminal Court of England and Wales) in London, which resulted in more than 200 people being injured. The attacks took place on the same day as the Northern Ireland border poll, where a referendum was held in order to decide whether the nation should join the Republic of Ireland or remain part of the United Kingdom, the latter option resulting victorious. On September 10th, 1973, two bombs left by the IRA exploded at the train stations of King's Cross and Euston with no casualties, but leaving a dozen injured. Other representative buildings of the British government were also targeted, such as the House of Parliament, which was badly damaged by a bomb on June 17th, 1974, and the Tower of London on July 14th, 1974, where one person died and 41 people were injured. The IRA was also responsible for the killing of Lord Mountbatten, a representative member of the royal family and the Royal Navy. Following the IRA's rampage, a wave of attacks took place from late 1974 to 1975 in the south of England, whose perpetrators were known as the Balcombe Street Gang, four men belonging to the PIRA, who were responsible for carrying out more than 40 attacks including bombings and shootings. Terrorist attacks carried by the IRA followed throughout the decade and continued until the ceasefires in the 1990s and 2000s. The conflict of Northern Ireland and the constant attacks on English soil contributed to a feeling of unsafety and discomfort among the British citizens.

The first allusion to the Troubles in punk music appeared in the Sex Pistols' first single "Anarchy in the UK" (1976). The song mentions different political organizations that were present in the British society of the 1970s, known for exercising violence and causing conflicts: "Is this the MPLA/Or is this the UDA/Or is this the IRA/I thought it was the UK". The MPLA referred to the "People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola"¹⁵⁸ and the UDA and IRA referred to the Northern Ireland conflict¹⁵⁹. Rotten

158 The MPLA is a political party founded in 1958. In 1975, it became the governing one in Angola after having fought the Portuguese army in the Angolan War of Independence.

159 UDA stands for the Ulster Defense Association, a paramilitary loyalist group. IRA stands for the Irish Republican Army.

mentions the opposing sides that were confronted during the Troubles, which bears witness to the political awareness that punks had about the political turmoil going on at the time, but the song does not really go deep into the conflict.

The band Crass, however, treated the issue in quite some more depth. The band's position towards the Troubles is easily perceptible in their lyrics. Crass denounced the English military presence in Northern Ireland and the violence that was being exercised against the Northern Irish population in several songs. The song "Angels" (1979) describes the British military presence in Northern Ireland: "The army have sent a mission to Ireland, just to see to it [...] The army say they seek peace in Ireland, and they'll see to it/That they keep in line". As the song proceeds, the lyrics take a turn and reveal that the military presence is not precisely peaceful: "The army are on the news report/Real wars/Bullets/Death/They're beating fuck out of someone they caught just to see to it". A similar message can be observed in the lyrics of "Banned from The Roxy" (1979), which describes the striking British military presence in Northern Ireland and how the British government justified it as "defense": "They've got control and won't let it be forgotten/The truth of their reality is at the wrong end of a gun/The proof of that is Belfast and that's no fucking fun/Seeing the squaddy lying in the front yard/Seeing the machine guns resting on the fence/Finding the entrance to your own front door is barred/And they've got the fucking nerve to call it defence". Beside that, Crass criticized the indifference of the public opinion towards the conflict. The band lashed out at those who condemned the violent actions carried out during the Troubles but did nothing to really stop the conflict: "Who's the fool in the Irish joke/ When the say you've got is your stupid vote/It's all very comfy while they keep the war vocal/But the bombs in Belfast are coming down your local/I wanna know how much you can take/Cos you've taken it all, and that's just great" ("Fun Going On", 1979). From their songs we can infer that Crass considered the Troubles as something close to a civil war. We can observe that in "Big Little A" (1980): "They've learnt the ropes in Ireland, engaged in civil war/Fighting for the ruling classes in their battle against the poor/So Ireland's just an island? It's an island of the mind", the song putting the blame on the upper classes for causing conflicts in order to take economic advantage of them.

The Spitfire Boys (Merseyside, 1977), on their part, decided to focus on the stories of anonymous victims of the conflict. "British Refugee" (1977) narrates the life of a man who has abandoned Northern Ireland because of the Troubles: "He came from Northern Ireland with hate in his heart/He just lost his family in a gelignite fire¹⁶⁰/ The neighbours sympathetic but that's all he's got/He knew that they weren't in time to stop the rot". As the song continues, the lyrics bring up the fact that it is innocent people that will really suffer the consequences of the actions of the government. The

160 Gelignite was an explosive commonly used by the PIRA and IRA.

song reflects the despair ordinary people felt, as they could not prevent violence from happening: "What can a man do about the madness of his government?/Why is it nothing ain't ever been solved?". Moreover, one part of the song is directed at English citizens, asking them to acknowledge the Northern Irish situation and sympathize with those who are enduring the presence of the military: "He landed at Poole, his world in his case/First he talked to people, they just laughed in his face/People in England they need to wake up/No soldiers here to search through your gear".

Other songs were more neutral when it came to taking sides in the conflict. In Gang of Four's "Armalite Rifle"¹⁶¹ (1978), both factions of the conflict, republicans and loyalists, are blamed for using weapons: "Armalite rifle police and IRA/Armalite rifle use it everyday [...] Armalite rifle police and UDA/Armalite rifle use it everyday". The lyrics also hint at religion, a key element in the origin and development of the strife: "Armalite rifle and the holy trinity/It's used against you for Irish jokes on the BBC". Instead of taking sides, the band chose to condemn the violent actions of all parts involved. "Ulster" (1977) by Sham 69 showed the band's take on the conflict: "There ain't no winners". However, the lyrics encouraged the people from Ulster to keep fighting against the military occupation: "Ulster Boy/You know it's gonna last a few more years/So when you throw them bricks/Don't you cry no tears/And when you see those tanks go past/You hide your bomb and you run from the blast". As the song goes on, defeat takes over the previous feeling and we learn that those who had rebelled about the army had a fatal outcome: "And now you're lyin' in your hospital bed/You can still hear the bullets rushing past your head/No more fun for you ain't no more/You've ended like the rest and now you're dead". The song closes with multiple sounds of gunfire.

In the Northern Irish punk scene, Stiff Little Fingers became one of the most popular bands. It was only natural that a Belfast band was to be influenced by the Troubles, so their first single, "Suspect Device" (1978), condemned the violence that had been caused by the PIRA's bombing attacks, the lyrics grieving for peaceful times: "Inflammable material, planted in my head/It's a suspect device that's left two thousand dead/Their solutions are our problems/They put up the wall/On each side, time and prime us/Make sure we get fuck all/They play their games of power/They cut and mark the pack/They deal us to the bottom/But what do they put back?". The band considered the actions of the PIRA very damaging and unhelpful to the peace process. Another reference to the conflict is found in the allusion to "peace lines" ("They put up the wall"). These "peace lines" were walls that separated Northern Irish territories to avoid conflict between loyalists and republicans in Belfast. The mournful songwriting reveals a wish to free from all conflict while rejecting the establishment, putting those

161 The rifle that is mentioned in the song alludes to a weapon that was often used by the IRA. It is also mentioned in "My Little Armalite", a popular song created by Irish Republicans that praised the use of this weapon against the British.

who are in power in the spotlight: "They take away our freedom/In the name of liberty/ Why can't they all just clear off/Why can't they let us be/They make us feel indebted/ For saving us from hell/And then they put us through it/It's time the bastards fell". The band's involvement with the Troubles was not only a way of channeling their personal experiences but was also meant to raise awareness about the problems at home. Henry Cluney, guitar player, was asked in the fanzine *Barricade* (1980) whether he thought the band "had had any affect on people's views on Ulster and other social problems?". His answer revealed the band's hope to put the struggle that was taking place in their home country in the foreground and stir some consciences: "I hope so but it is impossible to change things by making records. We can only say what we think and hope people listen and think" (p. 9). Stiff Little Fingers focused too on the question of fighting for one's country and becoming a soldier. The internal conflict of the nation went hand in hand with the increasing number of civilians joining armies and participating actively in warfare activities. A couple of songs found in the band's discography show rejection towards being part of military and paramilitary groups. An example of this is "Wasted Life" (1979), whose lyrics displayed an anti-paramilitary message. The song criticized the propaganda formed around what it meant to be a soldier and brought up the horrors of being involved in such activities: "I could be a soldier/Go out there and fight to save this land/Be a people's soldier/Paramilitary gun in hand/I won't be a soldier/I won't take no orders from no-one/Stuff their fucking armies/Killing isn't my idea of fun/And they want to waste my life/They want to waste my time/They want to waste my life/And they've stolen it away". The lyrics not only conclude that becoming a soldier equals wasting one's life, but they also allude to the loyalism and republicanism that was dividing the land: "I could be a hero/Live and die for their important cause/A united nation/Or an independent state with laws/And rules and regulations/That merely cause disturbances and wars/And that's what I have got now/All thanks to the freedom-seeking hordes". The vocalist, Jake Burns, denounced that the different factions of the conflict that tried to recruit people ended up being the same, labeling all of them as fascists: "Still they come up to me/With a different name but the same old face/I can see the connection/With another time and a different place/Now, they ain't blonde-haired or blue-eyed/But they think that they're a master race/They're nothing but blind fascists/Brought up to hate and given lives to waste". "Tin Soldiers" (1980) is another song with a similar message, stating that when you sign to become a soldier you "sign away your life".

Other bands like The Skids released songs that talked about the tragic consequences of the Troubles. "The Saints are Coming" (1978) was written after a friend of Richard Jonson, the lead singer, was killed in the Northern Ireland conflict while serving for the British Army. The Adicts claimed that they "didn't want to die for England" and how they "hated this war" ("England", 1981).

The conflictive situation of Northern Ireland prevented non-local punk bands from performing in the territory. In July 1975, three members of The Miami Showband¹⁶² were killed in a bombing caused by the Ulster Volunteer Force. This event plus the continuous terror attacks that were taking place in the region were responsible for making Northern Ireland an unsafe land for touring during the 1970s.

This way, although several English punk bands addressed the issue in their music, touring Northern Ireland was normally not in their schedule except for The Clash. In October 1977, The Clash made history when they visited Belfast for a concert that never happened in The Ulster Hall. The performance was canceled just a few hours before the starting time. The band's presence in the city did not go unnoticed and entailed trouble, which led the Belfast City Council to cancel the concert. As soon as the band arrived, punk fans began to show up in the city, which displayed heavy military presence, with soldiers and tanks occupying the streets. Once the news of the cancellation of the concert broke out, a riot started. Angry punk fans began protesting and throwing rocks, to the point that the army had to intervene to stop the riot. After that, a new venue in Queens University was available for The Clash to perform. However, the concert was canceled once again for fear of violence occurring during the performance. The Clash's stopover in Belfast was reported by the music press. An article from *Sounds* magazine narrated the band's experience in the city and mentioned how lead singer Joe Strummer was hesitant to be seen near the troops as well as their lack of knowledge about the Troubles:

At first The Clash were reluctant to have their picture taken anywhere near the soldiers. "They'll think we're here to entertain the troops" said Strummer. They all felt they didn't know enough about the political situation. They learned fast. (Coon, 1977)

The Clash returned to Belfast a second time in December the same year and were able to perform at the McMordie Hall. During the performance the band chose to sing "Belfast's Burning" instead of "London's Burning" and "Police and Thieves" became "Police and Priests", alluding to the current situation of the territory. A review in the Northern Irish *Private World Fanzine* praised the band for having travelled and performed in Northern Ireland, implying that, unlike other bands, they truly understood the situation of the land. The fanzine concluded the review with the following remark: "FUCK THE PISTOLS THE CLASH ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CARE" (Greer, 1977). In 1979,

The Clash and The Damned were both to perform in Derry after they had been invited by The Undertones (Derry, 1975) to an event organized by the Northern Irish band. However, Strummer received a letter by an Ulster paramilitary loyalist group, The Red Hand Commando, which threatened him with murder if he went there. According to

162 The Miami Showband was a very popular Irish band that was formed in Dublin in 1962.

Mickey Bradley, bass player of The Undertones, the threat that prevented the concert from taking place might have originated because of an *NME* article:

[After the election of Thatcher] They ran this [spoof] article about Joe Strummer will stand for election and this is his manifesto and in his manifesto was a withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland because – Joe Strummer, you know, obviously that's what he would think. (qtd in Minihan & McClements, 2022)

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One of the interesting factors about punk in Northern Ireland is that it united confronted factions and people with different beliefs. The Clash's first Belfast visit is an example of this. As one fan stated in an article in *Sounds* when asked if there would be both Protestants and Catholics at the concert: "Oh yes. We all mix and we get on. Everybody's bored with the fighting. Only a minority are fighting. It's music we want to hear, not religion" (qtd. in Coon, 1977). Similarly, "Alternative Ulster" (1978) by Stiff Little Fingers, whose band members were both Catholic and Protestant, is a song that resonates with the idea of music acting as a link between diverse people and a way of evading reality. "Alternative Ulster" (1978) was a protest song for those who did not want to choose sides and were tired of the current situation. The first verses of the song denounce that Belfast had become a boring place, with nothing worthy of interest for the youth: "Seven more hours in Belfast/The Pound's¹⁶³ so old that's a pity/Ok, so there's the Trident in Bangor¹⁶⁴/And then you walk back to the city/We ain't got nothin' but they don't really care/They don't even know you know/They just want money". Stiff Little Fingers called for some action to turn the land into something new and worth living in: "We can take it or leave it/What we need/Is an Alternative Ulster/Grab it and change it, it's yours/Get an Alternative Ulster/Ignore the bores and their laws/Get an Alternative Ulster/Be an anti- security force/Alter your native Ulster/Alter your native land". Later on, the song described how the streets of Northern Ireland were fully occupied by British military and the Royal Ulster Constabulary¹⁶⁵. The band expressed some wishes to change things: "Take a look where you're livin'/You got the Army on the street/And the RUC dog of repression/Is barking at your feet/Is this the kind of place you wanna live?/Is this where you wanna be?/Is this the only life we're gonna have?". At the end, the lyrics turn against the propaganda of those that tried to convert the youth into republicans or loyalists: "And they say they're a part of you/And that's not true you know/ They say they've got control of you/And that's a lie you know/They say you will never be free". The lead singer of The Defects, Ian Murdock, claimed that religion did not actually interfere between punk fans: "All the punks got on really well. Both Protestants and Catholics, the only real religion was punk" (qtd. in Stewart, 2014: 6). Martin Cowan from The Outcasts corroborates Murdock's stance:

163 Reference to The Pound Club, located in Belfast.

164 The Trident was another bar in Belfast where Ulster punk scene was born.

165 Police force in Northern Ireland from 1922 to 2001.

Back then people were segregated and lived in their own communities. The centre of Belfast at night was a ghost town ringed with an iron wall with barbed wire. When bands like us and Rudi started to play The Harp kids from different communities came and starting mixing together. More and more kids came and it became a movement united together because a lot of people hated us. (qtd. in Cartwright, 2020)

Joe Zero, from The Androids, recalls how punk marked a before and after for music followers of different religious backgrounds:

At rock gigs before punk in the early 1970s Protestant and Catholic rock fans would attend such gigs but, afterwards, each would head back to their own areas, not really mixing together. With the new punk scene, kids would go to the gigs, mix together, meet the next day, socialise, etc., with no one caring about. (qtd. in Cartwright, 2020)

Naturally, the punk scene of Northern Ireland was not as big and dominant as the London scene. Yet, it witnessed the birth of significant bands such as Stiff Little Fingers, Rudi, The Defects or The Outcasts, who offered in their songs a first-person perspective of the life in Northern Ireland during the conflict. Fanzines such as *Alternative Ulster*, *No Fun in Belfast* or *When in Derry* helped the consolidation of a Northern Irish punk scene. Moreover, Northern Irish bands such as Stiff Little Fingers or The Undertones toured in England or Scotland, and English fanzines also talked about their careers.

Interestingly enough, even though the 1970s were a time where England was heavily attacked by the IRA, it is rare to find English bands whose lyrics were openly anti-IRA. On the contrary, many songs condemned the attitude of the English government and its military presence in the Northern Irish territories (Crass' songs for instance). Others attacked both sides equally ("Armalite Rifle" by Gang of Four, 1978). We could say, in any case, that most punks rejected England's intervention in the Northern Irish territory. Finally, though the dangerous situation in the territory prevented punk bands from the mainland from traveling and performing in Belfast and its surroundings, the punk scene still flourished and offered a breath of fresh air to the younger generations. Punk was not only a way to canalize the anger and problems of the youth, but it also became a safe place for young people to enjoy music regardless of their political background. Punk and its wish to detach itself from the establishment and hierarchy allowed young persons to become a part of a group who simply enjoyed music, no matter what their political beliefs were.

Chapter 13

Summary and conclusions

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In the first chapter of this book, our emphasis was placed on analyzing the ways in which punk had been approached in recent research. Traditionally, punk has often been tackled from a non-academic perspective, where biographies of musicians and oral stories focusing on the history of the punk scene predominate. When it comes to academic research, authors have tended to place the spotlight on specific topics related to the punk subculture, such as the aesthetics of punk, its close relationship with the Do-It-Yourself philosophy or the connections between punk and politics. Considering this, we could say that there is a dearth of academic writings that examine in detail the history of the United Kingdom and the implications it had on the origins and evolution of the punk scene.

In Chapter 2 we took into consideration some theoretical approaches within which the study of punk can be framed. In this respect, the cultural studies and working-class culture studies that developed mainly during the 19th and 20th centuries served to provide a backdrop against which to analyze the cultural manifestations of the punk scene in the Britain of the 1970s. Unlike some of their predecessors, scholars such as Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams or Richard Hoggart considered cultural items born from the working-classes –like most of the products stemming from the British punk subculture– to be worth studying. Due to the nature of punk and its strong ties with the working classes, punk is often studied as a subculture that does not belong to genuinely mainstream cultural manifestations but is at the same time considered as a subculture of resistance that allows participants to have agency. The field of semiotics is also important when dealing, as we did in this book, with different artistic manifestations. The song's lyrics, the disruptive images employed by punk artists, the artist's outfits etc. gave us the opportunity to explore the implications of the messages created by punk and its connections with the context in which they were produced.

Chapter 3 provides some insight into the origin of the term “punk”, supplying data about the use of the word and its first appearance within the music scene, and also discussing the earliest manifestations of the genre (“protopunk”). The genesis of British punk had its roots in the New York and Detroit music scenes of the late 60s, where young musicians had the goal of making music that recalled the initial sounds of rock’n’roll: simpler compositions without the complexity of other subgenres such as progressive rock.

The British scene welcomed some of these North American bands in concerts and performances, setting a precedent for new sounds in the UK. Equally important was the figure of Malcolm McLaren who, having previously worked with the New York Dolls, wanted to form a band that would definitely agitate the British music scene. His goal was achieved in 1975 with the formation of the band The Sex Pistols.

The fourth chapter of this work is focused on the historical background of the punk scene of the 1970s, providing a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and political situation of Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Split in two parts, the first one is an overview of the Swinging Sixties, during which a general sense of optimism flooded the nation. The latter deals with the economic problems that characterized the decade of the 1970s in Britain. As can be observed, the 1960s were years where the economy of the country was still enjoying the postwar economic boom. Unemployment rates were low and the decade was also accompanied by cultural and technological advances that contributed to the well-being of the greater part of the British society, which thrived with optimism. The 1970s, however, were marked by a generalized decay in most aspects of the British economic system. Inflation rates rose alarmingly as well as unemployment, especially among the youth. The economic system also suffered the consequences of the IMF crisis and the 1973 Oil Crisis, while the Three-Day-Week, the Winter of Discontent and the constant union strife scourged the population.

Chapter 5 is a detailed analysis of the way in which these issues contributed to framing a new cultural and musical genre called punk, and the way in which punk artists dealt with the hardships that were present at the time, representing and integrating them in the art they created. As an example concerning unemployment, it is noteworthy that a great number of the adolescents and young adults that were part of the punk scene at the time had no jobs and were fully conscious of the difficult situation of the country at that time, having experienced themselves the difficulties of getting a job, as youth employment was especially hit by the crisis. It was therefore easy for punk artists to bring the issue of unemployment into the musical and artistic scene, their personal experiences influencing their art and inspiring them to explore and deal with the issue through their songs. Most of the lyrics in the punk songs of the time that talked about the hardships of being unemployed resonate with a sense of hopelessness towards the future. On the other hand, some punk artists had no interest in complaining about the lack of job opportunities and focused on presenting

the idea of having a job as something that was strictly connected with being a victim of the system. Having a job was seen as a form of slavery that made all people the same and erased any trace of free thinking and uniqueness. As a result of the crisis and the punk subculture members' close relationship with the working-class, most punks were not able to rely on economic prosperity to create and spread their art. The "do-it-yourself" philosophy thus thrived and had an impact on all areas of the genre. Independent record labels granted artists the opportunity to produce records at a cheaper price, and self-made publications, such as fanzines, allowed punks to talk about whatever they wanted without any kind of censorship. In the same way, DIY was mostly visible through punk fashion, which was subversive and differed from the fashion standards of the time. Moreover, the implementation of the DIY philosophy acted as a form of resistance towards the *status quo*: punks did not abide by the norms when it came to the cultural artifacts they created (music, fashion etc.) and, whether it was intentional or came out of necessity, punks followed their own path and used whatever sources they had to evolve.

The union strife of the 1970s in Britain were quietly addressed by punk artists, with just a few references to them. Most of them condemned the actions of strikers and unions, claiming they were not truly supporting the working classes. Even though most punk bands of the 1970s did not survive into the 80s, groups such as Crass lasted long enough to address Margaret Thatcher's time in office and criticize her actions in their music.

In politics, the British monarchy was the perfect representation of the establishment and, therefore, an obvious target for punk artists to launch their attacks upon. The Silver Jubilee, which happened to coincide with the peak of the popularity of British punk, was followed by the scandalous release of the Sex Pistols' song "God Save the Queen" (1977), which was perceived as a harsh attack on the monarchy and was indeed a remarkable event for British punk. The number of bands that mentioned the monarchy in their art typically showed their rejection towards the political system of the nation. Also, the rejection of hierarchy, order and power that characterized the punk subculture was perceptible in punk's attraction to anarchy. The discontent with the system fueled the expansion of the anarchist ideology, mirrored in the punk scene too. Anarchist motifs were included into the aesthetics of punk, and song lyrics mentioned anarchist ideas fairly often. When examining the connections between punk and anarchy, we identify, on the one hand, artists whose anarchist attitude served essentially as a façade to provoke and display a rebellious attitude (i.e., the Sex Pistols and their song "Anarchy in the UK"), and, on the other, bands such as Crass or Poison Girls, who were truly committed to the anarchist cause and supported anarchist groups and organizations.

The decade of the 1970s across Europe was also characterized by a spread in the use of drugs. Studies reveal that the deterioration of mental health and use of drugs

reflected the impact of the economic difficulties the working-classes were enduring at that time, with the youth being the prototypical target of those threats and their harmful consequences. The United Kingdom was no exception to this, and, as a consequence of the high levels of juvenile unemployment, the youth suffered quite systematically from mental health issues, some derived from drug (ab)use. As is shown in this chapter, punk artists often openly addressed topics such as suicide, self-harm or substance abuse, thus reflecting the bleak reality surrounding them. At the same time, while drugs were regarded as a problem in few punk songs, they became an integral part of the punk scene, as they began to be seen as a symbol of rebellion and disobedience. Drugs also acted as a means to alleviate boredom, being used as way of escaping from the tough reality surrounding many punks. In addition to this, it is striking to note that there was little awareness of the negative effects of drugs in most manifestations of the punk culture.

The 1970s also witnessed an increase of racism in the United Kingdom. After the arrival of numerous foreign citizens to the British Isles in the 50s and 60s, the economic crisis impacted negatively on the perception of immigrants. For many UK citizens, foreigners were considered guilty of aggravating the economic recession. The rise of extremist parties, such as the National Front, and the increase in racial attacks led to several acts being passed to condemn racial discrimination. The racism present in the British society affected the evolution of punk music and caused divisions within the genre as well as the ideology of the artists and fans that belonged to the musical scene. Thus, in the beginnings of British punk, it was very common to find artists that often displayed extremist symbols (e.g. swastikas) as fashion accessories, and references to Nazism appeared commonly in their songs. Yet, we learn that the incorporation of these symbols and references often had no other intention but to offend and shock the general public: since punks considered that society had failed them, they would not bother to present themselves as a “failed” youth that did not condemn the extremist ideologies that had been fought by the British nation during and after World War II. Nevertheless, these acts of subversiveness caught the attention of extremist sympathizers who, unaware of the discourse of punk, considered that the genre actually supported these ideologies. As a result of this, the musical scene promptly reacted against extremism, and organizations such as Rock Against Racism were created with the purpose of using music to fight for equality and trying to stop the growing success of extremist political parties. Punk bands and artists also began to share anti-racist discourses, and many stopped wearing extremist symbols to show their rejection towards Nazism or fascism while trying to erase the reputation of punk for being an extreme-right subculture.

The combination of the adversities the youth faced in the Britain of the 1970s seemed to crush all dreams and erase hope from their minds. The concept of having “no future” became thus the motto of the punk subculture and turned into a common topic to be

addressed in songs. The nihilism of the punk attitude was clearly influenced by the pessimism and frustration that was fueled by the thoughts of having no prospects in life. In the same way, the suburbs, in which many punks lived, were targeted as another representation of the establishment that filled their lives with isolation and monotony. The lifestyle adopted in suburbia was perceived as an embodiment of everything punk despised. The complaints often went hand in hand with the issue of "boredom" that accompanied the feeling of having "no future". Punks considered that the monotonous lifestyle they were complaining about was too attached to the system and the establishment. The attachment to generic and conventional attitudes caused punks to be "bored" by routine. Boredom, of course, was not only seen as the lack of entertainment but as a notion that symbolized the consequences of living within the *status quo*.

Among the many factors that contributed to the sense of "no future", nihilism and decay in the Britain of the 1970s, the nuclear threat did not make things easy for those living in the MAD period. The Cold War did in fact cause a strong reaction within the punk movement, which displayed a clear anti-war attitude. Songs addressed issues such as the war horrors, pointing fingers at the ones who kept the nuclear threat alive, while others surrendered to nihilism and wondered whether protesting would actually make any difference at all. On this occasion, the "no future" mindset did not just metaphorically refer to the lack of prospects but to a real possibility and fear of the world being destroyed by the deployment of nuclear weapons.

In the Britain of the 1970s there was also an increase in violent acts. All data related to criminal acts committed in those years (e.g. robbery, domestic violence, homicides) show a clear increase. Additionally, it is worth noting that youth crime rates also experienced a considerable rise in those days, as is to be expected from the dire economic situation the UK was enduring at the time, since numerous studies conclude that there is a direct link between poverty and juvenile crime. Such climate of violence was clearly mirrored in the punk subculture. It was displayed in the disposition of punk to reflect the misery of the British society, but also because violence and chaos were intrinsically embedded in the nature of the genre. The rejection of punk towards the system required an attitude that entailed certain levels of violence as a way to break away from the established norm. Sonically, punk was aggressive, with harsh instruments and screamed vocals. In addition to that, lyrics described all kinds of violent acts. Fights would often break out in concerts and punk's aesthetics often relied on taboos that tackled issues related to violence. The genre was indeed a way to canalize the rage the youth felt. Violence was present in Northern Ireland too when, in the decade of the 1970s, the Troubles took a new direction and attacks stopped being confined to Irish territory and began to take place on British soil as well, which contributed to a feeling of insecurity and uneasiness among the population. Punk artists picked up on the issue of terrorism and chose

sides in the conflict, condemning the actions of the British government and rejecting the presence of military intervention in Ireland. Artists addressed the situation in song lyrics and offered their support to the Irish population. The Troubles affected the music scene in other ways too. While touring, some bands encountered difficulties to perform in Ireland (i.e. The Clash visit to Belfast in 1977). It is also important to note that the Irish punk scene that emerged soon after it had boomed in the mainland was a revolutionary space where the youth could express their art without confrontation or being conditioned by political beliefs.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that British punk would not have emerged or survived in prosperous times. The social and economic decay that surrounded the United Kingdom in the 1970s, especially the lives of those who were part of the working and lower classes, and the pessimism that was embedded in the minds of the youth created a perfect environment for the emergence of a genre that was filled with frustration.

It cannot be denied that anger resides at the heart of punk and, at first glance, punk is perceived as a genre that exudes violence. However, as we dig into the lyrics or statements of punk artists, we can observe that British punk showed greater complexity than appeared above the surface. Under the brutal looks, aggressive sounds and provocative lyrics, punk was a desperate cry for help from a youth that was flooded by economic and social despair and overwhelmed by their circumstances. The nihilism that is present in the lyrics and attitude of many punks is nothing but a reaction to the loss of every shred of hope they held for the future.

Even though punk seemed to represent the dark side of the British society, the subculture also became a space for young individuals to express themselves. Punk became a platform where many could express their identity freely and relate to the issues addressed in songs while finding others who shared their same problems.

As shown in the previous pages, the punk movement of the 1970s in Britain dealt with nearly all of the issues of the decade, whether economic, social or political, through their music, looks or even attitude, effectively becoming chronicler of an era. Punks were not restrained at all when it came to talking about controversial issues or taboos, addressing any topic they wanted without any self-imposed censorship. The actual representation of the lives of the working classes brought a breath of fresh air to the music scene, offering new perspectives and bringing up issues that were not being dealt with in other genres. Punk also became a very relatable genre thanks to the implementation of the “do-it-yourself” ethos: the feeling that anyone could form a band and release music put the spotlight on young individuals and offered them the opportunity to spread their art and their perception of life, which was very different to the one offered by a rockstar. There is no denying that the history of the British 1970s can be effectively analyzed through the punk movement and punk can only be

fully explained and understood by referring to the history of Britain in the 1970s. Punk needed decay as much as decay needed punk in order to awake a generation that had been silent and silenced until then. That generation felt things needed to change and their way of doing so was, consciously or unconsciously, by doing punk.

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Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Songs and records cited (by artist/band)¹⁶⁷

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¹⁶⁷ The entries below are referenced as follows: name of band, songwriter(s), year of publication, song name, album name and record label. When the name of the songwriter(s) is not specified in the record, the name of the band is provided. For entries corresponding to the same band, they are arranged 1) by year of publication of the song 2) within the same year of publication: alphabetically by composer(s) 3) within the same year and composer(s): alphabetically by name of song.

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APPENDIX 2: Bands and artists cited¹⁶⁸

1. A.D. 1984 (Surrey, 1977)
2. Alternative TV (London, 1977)
3. Angelic Upstarts (South Shields, 1977)
4. Art Attacks (London, 1977)
5. Blietzkrieg Bop (Teesside, 1977)
6. Blitz (New Mills, 1980)
7. Bob Marley & The Wailers (Kingston, 1974)
8. Buzzcocks (Bolton, 1976)
9. Chelsea (London, 1976)
10. Chron Gen (Letchworth, 1978)
11. Cliff Richard (Lucknow, 1940)
12. Cock Sparrer (London, 1972)
13. Cockney Rejects (London, 1978)
14. Combat 84 (Chelsea, 1981)
15. Condemned 1984 (Suffolk, 1981)
16. Conflict (Eltham, 1981)
17. Crap
18. Crass (Epping, 1977)
19. Crisis (Guilford, 1977)
20. Darlex (Essex, 1977)
21. Dave Goodman and Friends (London, 1977)
22. David Bowie (Brixton, 1947)
23. Desperate Bicycles (London, 1977)
24. Discharge (Stoke-on-Trent, 1977)
25. Dole Q (London, 1977)

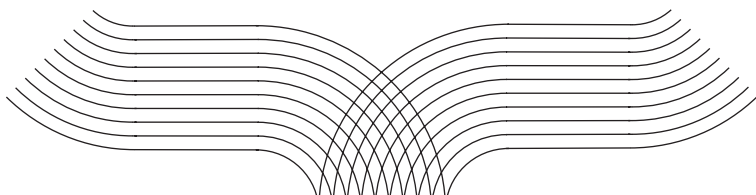
¹⁶⁸ When possible, information about the year and place in which the bands were formed is provided. For individual artists, we include the year and place in which they were born.

26. Eddie Cochran (Minnesota, 1938)
27. Eric Clapton (Ripley, 1945)
28. Flux of Pink Indians (Hertfordshire, 1980)
29. Gang of Four (Leeds, 1976)
30. Generation X (Chelsea, 1977)
31. Iggy Pop (Michigan, 1947)
32. Jimi Hendrix (Seattle, 1942)
33. Joy Division (Salford, 1976)
34. Junior Murvin (1964)
35. Killing Joke (London, 1978)
36. Led Zeppelin (London, 1968)
37. London (London, 1976)
38. London SS (London, 1975)
39. Martin and The Brownshirts (Chester, 1977)
40. MC5 (Detroit, 1964)
41. Menace (London, 1976)
42. Mike Oldfield (Reading, 1953)
43. Nazis Against Fascism
44. New York Dolls (New York, 1971)
45. Newtown Neurotics (Harlow, 1979)
46. Open Sore (Slough, 1977)
47. Patti Smith Group (New York, 1974)
48. Pink Floyd (London, 1964)
49. Poison Girls (Brighton, 1976)
50. Queen (London, 1970)
51. Raped (London, 1976)
52. Rudi (Belfast, 1975)
53. Schoolgirl Bitch (Accrington, 1977)

54. Scritti Politti (Leeds, 1977)
55. Sex Pistols (London, 1975)
56. Sham 69 (Hersham, 1976)
57. Siouxsie and the Banshees (London 1976)
58. Skrewdriver (Lancashire, 1976)
59. Slaughter and the Dogs (Wythenshawe, 1975)
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64. Stinky Toys (Paris, 1976)
65. Subway Sect (London, 1976)
66. The Adicts (Ipswich, 1977)
67. The Adverts (London, 1976)
68. The Androids (Belfast, 1977)
69. The Beatles (Liverpool, 1960)
70. The Boys (London, 1976)
71. The Cheetahs (Edinburg)
72. The Clash (London, 1976)
73. The Cortinas (Bristol, 1976)
74. The Damned (London, 1976)
75. The Defects (Belfast, 1978)
76. The Delinquents (London, 1975)
77. The Dentists (Leeds, 1978)
78. The Dictators (New York, 1973)
79. The Drug Addix (London, 1977)
80. The Epileptics (Hertfordshire, 1978)
81. The Exploited (Edinburgh, 1979)

82. The Fall (Prestwich, 1976)
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88. The Members (Surrey, 1976)
89. The Miami Showband (Dublin, 1962)
90. The Mistakes (Bromley, 1977)
91. The Mob (Yeovil, 1979)
92. The Models (Harron, 1977)
93. The Modern Lovers (Massachusetts, 1980)
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103. The Raincoats (London, 1977)
104. The Ramones (New York, 1974)
105. The Rezillos (Edinburgh, 1976)
106. The Rolling Stones (London, 1962)
107. The Ruts (London, 1977)
108. The Seeds (Los Angeles, 1960)
109. The Shapes (Warwickshire, 1976)

110. The Skids (Dunfermline, 1977)
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122. The Venz
123. The Vibrators (London, 1976)
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127. The Xtraverts (London, 1976)
128. Tom Robinson Band (London, 1976)
129. TV Personalities (London, 1977)
130. UK Decay (Luton, 1978)
131. UK Subs (London, 1976)
132. White Boss (Coventry)
133. X-Ray Spex (London, 1976)
134. ? & the Mysterians (Michigan, 1962)
135. 999 (London, 1977)



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History is a punk

The British 1970s through the Punk Movement

The aim of this book is to study the links between the origins and evolution of British Punk in the 1970s and the historical, economic, and social events of the England in that decade, in order to analyze how punk artists reflected those events in their art. This book will narrate how British punk would not have arisen or thrived during times of economic prosperity as the decline in social and economic conditions in the United Kingdom during the 1970s, paved the way

for the rise of a music genre driven by frustration. To do so, this book will survey the discographies of more than 100 punk bands, paying special attention to their lyrics, aesthetics, and other artifacts of the genre. Additionally, we will demonstrate how punk also became a platform for young people to showcase their voices and individuality and how it provided a space for young individuals to openly showcase their identity and share their personal experiences.

