

# Punk: an ethical project to resist mainstream society?

The origins of punk's core values and how punk and riot grrl live on in Belgium anno 2020

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## Abstract

This research gives updated academic insights about punk, by looking at its core values and how they are put into practice by Belgian punks. While the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' definition of punk as a youth subculture was accurate in the 70's UK, this definition is not accurate anymore anno 2020 in Belgium. For this research, 13 Belgian punks were interviewed and most of them are not young and do not belong to the working-class. Next to these interviews a literature study was done about punk's history in the UK, US and Belgium, combined with literature of case-studies of how punk is put into practice in countries abroad. The core values of punk are the following: anti-fascism, anti-capitalism, anarchism, DIY and ecology. However, how Belgian punks put these core values into practice illustrates that these values are difficult to fully put into practice. Belgian punks put anti-capitalism, anarchism and ecology into practice through DIY, but they are not able to be 100 percent DIY because they are embedded in the capitalist system. Theoretically, punk is also a space of moral and social freedom as opposed to mainstream society, but the presence of sexism and homophobia within the punk scene illustrates that punk does not differ as much from mainstream society as it claims to be. Riot grrl tries to fix sexism and homophobia in the punk scene and provides a safe space for women and LGBTQ+. Although punk does not live up to its promise of a space of moral and social freedom, it is guiding Belgian punks in their thinking and behaviour. Within these boundaries, punk fulfils its role as an ethical project to resist mainstream society.

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## 1. Introduction

“And you can be as much into punk, as in I listen from dusk till dawn to the Dead Kennedy’s... Actually, no I am punk, so I sleep during the day, so I listen to the Dead Kennedy’s from 6 PM till 6 AM the next morning... I only listen to bands who have songs of max. twenty seconds and who only made one EP. What I actually want to say is that you can listen to punk as much as you like, but that does not mean that you are a punk in society. People who listen to punk, but do not know anything about its values are just corporate punks.”(Simon, personal communication, 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2020)

When people hear the word ‘punk’ they often associate it with aggressive music. What Simon illustrates here is that people who listen to punk music are not necessarily aware of what punk’s values are. While outsiders often perceive punk as a musical genre that started off in the 70’s, but that now is outdated, the following thesis will illustrate how punk lives on anno 2020 in Belgium. How Belgian punks put anarchism, anti-capitalism, DIY and ecology into practice will be discussed. The idea that punk is a space of freedom within the capitalist system, due to these core values, is something that attracted people to punk. Some of my interviewees learned more about punk’s core values by getting involved in a certain punk scene, while others turned into punks, because they were looking for people who have similar values as them. Punk Kim said during her interview:

“I grew up in a stupid village in West-Flanders and I was the only vegetarian there. My boyfriend was involved in the KSA and they were all farmers. I was the only one who did not want to eat meat. And when I got into the punk scene, I really thought: “Wow, here there are so many people who also don’t want to eat meat.” In the scene there are also a lot of people who think the same about politics. Yes, punks are for sure left-wing, for me at least. Punk and politics are intrinsically connected.”(Kim, personal communication, 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2020)

My interviewees were also drawn to punk, because they always had the feeling they were weird and different. They were searching for other weirdo’s and found them in the punk community. Punk Zoë (personal communication, 23<sup>th</sup> of September) said it in the following way: “Punk is for the freaks.” Moreover, what punks means for my interviewees is going against current and being confrontational. This thesis will research if punk is indeed a space of freedom within the capitalist system and if punk is, in that sense, really different from mainstream society or not. By looking at how different Belgian punks really *do* punk, this thesis tries to overcome the idea that all punks are 100 percent the same. Moreover, the stereotypical image of punks, as people with mohawks and an alcohol problem, will be refuted by looking at the lived experiences of some Belgian punks.

For me personally punk has been life-changing. Two years ago, I came into contact with it when I was on exchange in Sweden. After my exchange, I got involved with the riot grrl collective Girls go boom in Ghent. I learned through punk that it is okay to be different and

weird and that anyone can express themselves creatively if they want too. But the following thesis is not about my personal story, it is the story of 13 other Belgian punks and how punk took off at the end of the 70's in the UK, US and Belgium.

## 1.1 Research question and relevance

The main research question is: **What is punk?**

The sub questions are:

- What are its core values and the origins of these values?
- How do Belgian punks put these core values into practice? What does this tell us about punk in theory versus punk in practice?
- Why and how does riot grrl illustrate that punk in practice is not the same as punk in theory?

The relevance of this research is that it sketches the Belgian context of punk in recent times. While research has been done in different countries on the lived experiences of punks in recent times, there has not been done one in Belgium. In this research, some theories that have been constructed after looking into the lived experiences of punks abroad are applied to the Belgian context. This research also combines a historical perspective on punk with what punk means for individuals nowadays. In other words, how some core values of punk came to be and how they live on today are discussed. This adds a new perspective on how we think about punk, since in the literature punk is often discussed either through a historical lens or through a contemporary lens. Since Belgian punk is not a much studied subject in academia I moreover contribute to filling the gap in the available scientific knowledge on punk. Researching punk is, moreover, socially relevant, because punk has often a negative connotation for most non-punks. This research counters this negative connotation by illustrating the actual beliefs and acts of some Belgian punks. This research is also socially relevant, because it talks about sexism and homophobia in the punk scene and the first step to fight sexism and homophobia in the punk scene can be to talk about it in academia.

## 1.2 Structure

In this thesis, first of all I introduce the topic and my research questions and the relevance of this research. This is followed by the methodology that I used for this research. Then, I discuss how punk gets defined in academia and I put forward that punk gets defined as an

ethical project in this research. This part is followed by a partial history of punk that discusses the early days of punk in the UK, US and Belgium. While introducing punk's core values, this historical part also compares how punk took off in the UK, US and Belgium. A partial history of riot grrl follows, which discusses how riot grrl emerged, two decades after punk, as a reaction to and next to punk. After this historical part, how punk's core values live on anno 2020 in Belgium will be discussed. This part is based on interviews with Belgian punks. How my interviewees put punk's core values into practice are discussed in two sections: 'Anarchism, anti-capitalism and ecology: DIY' and 'Aging punks'. This is followed by a section on sexism and homophobia in the mainstream punk scene and a section on riot grrl, which is a response to this sexism and homophobia. This thesis ends with answering the research questions that were put forward in the introduction and will also discuss if punk is an ethical project that resists mainstream society or not and how this is visible.

## 2. Methodology

For my research I first interviewed thirteen people. Eleven of them orally and two written. The two that were not oral, were due to time issues and technical issues. The oral interviews were semi-structured interviews with open questions. Depending on what interviewees answered, the conversation went deeper into certain topics, whether this was DIY, music or feminism. When it comes to the written interviews, the same questions were used as the oral ones, but without the chance to ask extra questions. The two written interviews were, moreover, the two interviews from Wallonia. These written interviews were different from the oral ones, because I did not get to know these participants in the same way as I did the ones who I interviewed orally. The oral interviews lasted from one hour to two hours and I mostly did them through Skype. Only Dave, who is a 63 year old punk fan, originally from the US, and Silke, a 29 year old punk, who is involved in Girls go boom, I could interview in real life.

Of the thirteen people I interviewed, five of them are involved with Girls go boom. Since I am, myself, involved in Girls go boom this could bias the results, because those interviews were more spontaneous and casual than the other ones I did. Girls go boomers also maybe answered in a different way than they would have if they did not know me at all. It is, moreover, certain that Girls go boom is a riot grrl collective that addresses the sexism in the punk scene. The answers of Girls go boomers can, in other words, not be generalized to the entire punk scene in Ghent.

I used the snowball method for this research. I started off with interviewing people from Girls go boom and I ended up interviewing mostly women. This was due to practical reasons, because it was the easiest to get access to women. I managed to interview ten women and three men. Two men out of the three I knew before interviewing them. They were, in other words, also easy to get access too. Simon is the first one, he is a 32 year old musician. The second one is Dave. I intentionally chose Dave because I wanted to hear the story of the original punk movement from someone who experienced it first-hand. For this reason, Dave is only integrated in the short part that compares the US history of punk with the one in the UK. His answers had mostly to do with how he experienced punk in San Francisco at the end of the 70's and the early 80's.

To build up my theory I used the inductive method, namely I departed from my interviews to construct a theory. The Grounded Theory Approach was used. I asked my participants open questions, so that they would give broad answers. After transcribing and coding my interviews I distilled the main themes that emerged from the interviews. The three themes of DIY, feminism and age were mostly present in all of my interviews. Other relevant themes that also emerged were anarchism, veganism, anti-capitalism and metal. DIY was something that my interviewees talked the most fluently about. Feminism came up because most of my interviewees were women. Age then came up because most of my interviewees are in their late twenties or in their early thirties. Anarchism, veganism and anti-capitalism came up as core punk values. Metal is a theme that emerged because half of my interviewees were first into metal, before they got into punk. After distilling the main themes I delved into the literature on those themes. Most research papers I found related to the themes were also based on the Grounded Theory Approach. In other words, the theory was based on interviews. It were, moreover, case-studies done in different countries. When it comes to gender, I delved deeper into literature on riot grrl, since riot grrl is considered to be the answer to sexism in the punk scene. When it comes to the metal theme, I applied the theory of 'Music as a technology of the self' by Tia Di Nora on my used-to-be metal respondents. After reading the literature around punk's core values I re-organized my main themes into new sections to construct the story: DIY, aging punks, sexism in the punk scene and riot grrl.

After focusing on what emerged from my interviews, I thought about which parts of punk history I should talk about. Since my interviews were done with punks who live in Belgium. I delved into the Belgian punk history. However, one cannot understand the Belgian punk history without knowing more about the history of punk in the UK. The Belgian punk history cannot be understood without framing it into a broader European context, and, in Europe punk namely took off in the UK. I mainly based myself on scholarly books for the historical part of my thesis. However there are not many scholarly resources on the history of punk.



So, therefore, I also made use of some YouTube video's to be able to write on the history of punk, specifically for the parts on Crass and Rock Against Racism.

After doing a historical research, I delved into how punk got framed in academia previously. I soon bumped into the concept of 'subculture'. In order for me to conceptualize punk, I, in other words, had to look into how punk is defined and seen in academia. This part of my research is the only part that was solely based on academic articles. The other parts are based on my interviews and books and articles that I found online that are mostly based on interviews done by other people, since most academics who worked on punk namely departed from reality on the ground.

Since I, myself, identify as well as a punk, I got easy access to other punks and to their lived experiences of what it means to be punk. I am not a distant researcher who did not know anything about punk before I started doing my research. In other words, I have an insider perspective on it. What I wanted to find out by doing this research is how other punks think about punk. I did pay attention to ask open questions and to not assume the answers of my participants. I was indeed very surprised with the wide variety of answers I got and the different life stories that I got to hear.

When it comes to ethics, I always asked my interviewees the permission to record their interviews. All the interviewees' names are their real names, only Zina's name is a pseudonym, since she did not want her real name to be mentioned in this dissertation.

### 3.Literature

#### 3.1 What is punk?

'What is punk?' is a very short and straightforward question, but the answers to this short question are very long and not so easy to grasp. Britannica gives somewhat of a broad definition of punk, namely: "Punk, also called punk rock, aggressive form of rock music that coalesced into an international (though predominantly Anglo-American) movement in 1975-80. Often politicized and full of vital energy beneath a sarcastic, hostile facade, punk spread as an ideology and an aesthetic approach, becoming an archetype of teen rebellion and alienation."(www.britannica.com). This is one of the many possibly definitions that one can give to punk. Bernie Sanders previously was a journalist and when he bumped into some teenagers with black clothes and edgy haircuts, he wanted to figure out what they were thinking and what they were trying to express with their clothing. The following fragment is part of an interview by Bernie Sanders (1988) in the US:

“Bernie : What does your dress mean? Does it mean anything?

Punk: It is just basically saying to heck with society, to heck with... It just basically means you can do whatever you want, it does not matter. I can be punk rock if you say. I don't like the way society is run. Everybody is plastic.

Bernie: Ok, let's talk about that. What are the aspects of society you don't like? How would you like to see a change?

Punk: People are not open-minded enough. They think that in order to be stable in society you have to have money, you have to live in the suburbs, you have to do the set things, such as having so many people over for dinner at night during the week or you are not socially acceptable, you got to dress in a certain way to be socially acceptable and I don't believe in to having to belong to anything to be a person. I can be and do basically whatever I want with my appearance, with my attitude and it doesn't matter.

Bernie: Thanks for your answer. Would you like to answer to that too?

Punk 2: Well about the dress, it shows the way you feel you know. Like people wear black because they are not feeling too good about what is going on around them. Like some of the stuff that is going on in society is basically bullshit and like people say the democracy is so truly free and I mean that is fine, but the way we are living in this democracy isn't a true democracy and everybody is always complaining about depression and such, but that is going to happen in a democracy, it is natural, because you have capitalists. They should not be complaining, because that is what they asked for, you know.”

Both the definition of Britannica and the fragment of the interview can give a sense of what punk can mean. But punk means something different for different people. In the past, researchers have tried to define it and they all came up with other definitions. They were fighting each other about what 'punk' exactly is. For some it is mainly about music, for others it is a political philosophy and for others it is more about a certain kind of dressing and behaving. The researchers themselves were mostly involved in a punk scene and they described their own personal view on what punk is. Alan O' Connor stated in 2016, that this way of thinking and writing about punk should be overcome. Trying to find an essence of what 'punk' is should be replaced by looking at the diversity of punk practices. In other words:” What does 'punk' mean to different people and how do they “do” punk in practice?” Not only was the punk movement, already from the start, really diverse, punk is still something that is defined and practiced in various ways today. Punk in this research will

also be looked at as an ethical project. Punk is, in other words, something that guides people in their lives to *act* ethically. While punk means something different for different people it does have an influence on how people act (O' Connor, 2016). This vision on punk as an ethical project is going against the more mainstream idea that punk is a youth subculture.

The perspective on punk as a youth subculture is false, because first of all older punks stay involved in the punk scene. This topic of aging punks will be discussed further on in this thesis in a separate section. What is mostly relevant here is how defining punk as a subculture is false. This is namely the case, because it overlooks the internal differences amongst punks. Like was stated above, not only does punk mean something different for different punks, they also apply punk in different ways in their lives. In order to understand better why defining punk as a subculture is problematic, let's have a short look at how the term 'subculture' emerged in academia.

It was the sociologist Emile Durkheim who introduced the term 'subculture', at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He considered people belonging to a subculture as deviant people. Deviant people are people who are not socially integrated and who don't follow social norms. This is the case because they experience anomie, which refers to a situation where people have unrealistic goals and expectations that do not match with what is possible in the society they are living in. This mismatch can cause feelings of meaninglessness and hopelessness for these people (Blackman, 2013; Thorlindson & Bernburg, 2004). Deviant people who take agency within the social constraints they experience belong to a subculture. Belonging to a subculture namely helps them to overcome their shared experiences of meaninglessness and hopelessness. This is the case, because within a subculture certain symbols and rituals that have a shared meaning for its participants create social cohesion. 'Subculture' started to get a negative connotation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Chicago School. This school perceived people belonging to a subculture as crazy (Blackman, 2013; Thorlindson & Bernburg, 2004). It was however the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) that started to define punk as a subculture. For them punks were all working-class people who were resisting their marginalization in mainstream society by turning themselves into punks (Barley, 1989; Blackman, 2013). This CCCS' perspective on punk got criticized because it sees punks as a coherent and static group that solely belongs to the working-class.

With the post-subcultural turn in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century new terms emerged to talk about punk, namely 'neo-tribe' and 'scene'. With the terms 'neo-tribe' and 'scene' they looked at what punk means for an individual and how punk occurs in different ways in practice. With these two concepts punks are looked at as different individuals instead of one coherent group. This thinking which focusses on the individual instead of the collective is in

line with our current postmodern society. People namely have become more flexible in constructing their own identities (Bennett, 2011; Blackman, 2013). So, what does a 'neo-tribe' and a 'scene' mean then? A neo-tribe refers to a state of mind or an ambience that is expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form. In a neo-tribal perspective on punk, people are drawn to punk, because they like it and because they have an affection for it. In other words, in the case of neo-tribal theory being involved in punk is a real choice, instead of something that people are forced into. Moreover, the idea of a neo-tribe sees punks as having a different appearance than non-punk. Being punk gets expressed through looks. The idea of scene, on the other hand, refers to a space where people can come together because they have a similar taste in music. It is easy to enter and leave a scene because your musical change can change fast. People that come from different social groups and places can be brought together by punk music. This coming together is not fixed forever in time. To summarize: the ideas of neo-tribe and scene are better equipped to talk about punk in our current postmodern society, because they entail that people actively chose themselves to be punk. Moreover if people want to leave the punk scene they are free to do so (Bennett, 2011). But why exactly are people then drawn to punk?

Sinker as a punk from the UK both explains why defining punk is in itself a contradiction and what the pulling factors of punk are for people. Sinker (1999) said:

“And all the while the full-on punky libertarianism arrived wrapped in more arcane rules and restrictions than any youth cult before or since—an endless miasma of codes, guides and forbidding’s. In the name of absolute moral and social freedom, don’t be such a fucking hippy....”

Here, he pin-pointed that once you start to define a list of rules on what punk should be or entails, you contradict the message of punk, namely moral and social freedom. To see punk as a set of defined ideas, and so an ideology, is really un-punky. Sinker continues by saying that punk means that you create your own rules and that these rules only apply to you. You take on the full responsibility for the rules that you made for yourself. Being punk, according to Sinker, also means tolerating differences between people. In other words, what pulls people to punk is that it is considered to be space of moral and social freedom. Sinker however addresses that punk can be as equally close-minded as the rest of society once people start to define what 'punk' should mean for someone else. 'Punk' in theory is only punk if you use it as a guidance for your own morals and behaviour, without imposing yours on someone else (Sinker, 1999).

Besides an ethical project, punk can also be used as a tool for self-identification. This idea of music as a tool for identity construction got developed by Tia Di Nora with her concept of

music as a technology of the self. According to Di Nora, music can namely help you to remember certain events, because once you hear a certain song you get thrown back into a specific period in your life. If you remember who you were in the past, you can gain a better understanding of who you are now. That music helps you to gain self-knowledge and to develop your own identity is also true in the case of punk. Most people start to listen to punk during their teenage years and during your teenage years you construct your own identity. In those years you get socialized into certain social beliefs, attitudes and values. This socialization process influences how people think about reality and as a consequence how they act in the world. In other words, listening to punk shapes people's personal values and how they act (Di Nora, 2000; Hansen & Hansen, 1991).

To conclude: While punk often gets defined as a musical genre or a subculture, in this research punk gets defined as an ethical project that guides individuals in both their thinking and acting. How individual punks *do* and *think* punk in their lives differs amongst them. This individuality is in line with the promise of punk: moral and social freedom. In other words, people are free to think and do what they want. At least that is the theory. Moreover that punk means something different for different punks, does not mean it does not have some core values. What these core values are and its origins will be discussed in the following section on punk's history.

### 3.2 A partial punk history

In this subsection a partial history of punk will be given. Before talking about what punk nowadays means for individuals, it is useful to look at the origins of punk, since it helps us to understand what punk means today (Wilkinson, Worley, & Street, 2017). What is known about punk history is mostly based on oral sources. Books that appeared on punk mostly contain personal accounts of punk. Authors interview people who were part of a punk scene and tell the story of punk through personal narratives. This subsection has not the ambition to give a complete history of punk, since punk is a diverse, wide and global phenomenon. Instead it is about the early punk period in the UK and about how the UK and the US early punk period differed. Finally, since in the second part of this research the lived experiences of Belgian punks is discussed, a short account of Belgian punk history is given. An important sidenote is that this section is very partial, because it has a Western focus. It should be taken into account by the reader that punk is also widespread in countries outside of Europe and the United States. Before talking about the political and economic context in which punk emerged, the musical background of punk will be discussed.

Punk rock as a genre of music did not come from nowhere. Before punk rock took off as a music genre bands like the Beatles, the Kinks and the Rolling Stones were already making

rebel music. Rebel music was, in other words, not born with the birth of punk rock. What punk rock did, however, is getting rid of the stardom that was being attached to rebel musicians like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The idea that was present in punk is that everyone could make rebel music (Price,2004). Punk rock was also inspired by glam rockers like Iggy Pop and the New York Dolls. Glam rockers were called glam rockers because they looked posh and glamorous when they were performing. Iggy Pop is called 'the godfather of punk' because he made glam rock with a nihilistic touch. Nihilism is something that is being associated with punk expressed by bands like the Sex Pistols (which will be elaborated upon later in this section). The New York Dolls were said to have inspired punks because of their looks, namely because they were guys wearing feminine clothes and make-up. Having a confronting look was also an essential aspect of punk rock. Right before the punk rock scene took off in the UK specifically, there was the so-called pub rock scene. This scene was full of weird rock 'n' roll music where a lot of experimentation was possible. This was the case because the hippie movement with its psychedelic music had died, while punk was not born yet. Before punk rock emerged as a music genre people were into a diverse arena of music genres. Jazz, reggae, ska, rock 'n' roll and psychedelic music were much loved genres. So, punk rockers for sure got inspired by different kinds of music genres that were present before punk rock kicked off (Robb, 2012).

### 3.2.1 A partial UK history of punk

To be able to tell a story about the early punk period of the UK, it is necessary to shortly sketch the economic and political context at the end of the 70's. Since it was this specific context that contributed to the birth of the punk movement. Then we will delve deeper into the Situationists and how they inspired one of the core values of punk: anti-capitalism. After situationism, the UK punk look in the 70's and the Sex Pistols are discussed. This is followed by a subsection on Rock Against Racism and how this organization introduced anti-fascism as one of punk core values. This section of UK punk history ends with a discussion on the declared death of punk in 1979 and how punk evolved throughout the 1980's when the band Crass put forward two other punk values: anarchism and vegetarianism. How Crass related itself to DIY also gets discussed at the end of this section.

At the end of 1973 the Bretton Woods system had collapsed and the oil crisis had led to a dramatic inflation. This inflation had a huge impact in the UK. For example, a Three-Day Week got introduced in 1974 ,which meant that electricity was only supplied for three days of the week. Schools and factories had to close for this reason. The problems with inflation continued over the course of the 70's. A huge amount of people were unemployed in the UK. This lack of employment possibilities made a lot of people believe that they had no

future anymore. It, in other words, made their lives seem meaningless (Hay, 2010; Matthews & Minford, 1996; Robb, 2012; White, 2013).

### 3.2.1.1 Situationism and anti-capitalism

Punk ideas did not come from nowhere. Malcolm McLaren, the manager of the Sex Pistols, and Bernard Rhodes, the manager of the Clash, were the ones who influenced punk musicians to learn about political and social issues. Someone who was involved in the early days of the punk movement in the UK said this in John Robb's book (2012): 'Punk rock: an oral history.': "Malcolm and Bernie were both of the same ilk. They had a knowledge of the counterculture- that's why these people are important. They could see the idea manifest itself before its musical expression. That's why you got all this thing with Malcolm and the Situationists- that's where he got a lot of his ideas and sloganeering. You can't just write those people off. They gave punk depth, a bit of bollocks. It wasn't just the rantings and ravings of angry youth. There was a method behind it and it manifested itself in different ways. Whoever said that thing, about the Pistols made you want to smash your head against the wall and the Clash gave you a reason for doing it, was so right".

Punk ideas are so said to be influenced by the Situationist movement. So what is the Situationist movement? It was a group of avant-garde artists and political theorists who were against capitalism and how it had influenced our way of living and culture. They, moreover, played an important role in the May 68 movement. They would have an influence on the ideas of the hippie movement, but also joined student-led protests and sid-ins (Morgan & Purje, 2016). When it comes to punk specifically it is the book 'La société du spectacle' of Guy Debord that is of most relevance (Robb, 2012). While Debord published his book in 1967 it can still be applied to today. Guy Debord criticized in this book how we are surrounded by images 24/7 in our society. Debord, moreover, said that we are always surrounded by advertisements, movies and celebrities. He referred to the late-capitalist society we are living in as 'La société du spectacle'. Debord meant by this that appearance and images have come to dominate our society. This is a bad thing because it distracts us, as humans, from actual reality and it makes us passive. The media creates a reality for us and in that way influences the way we think about stuff. This is especially clear in the case of advertisements, because they can make us desire things that we did not desire before we saw the advertisement. Since we are surrounded by images all the time, we have come to value how things and people appear more than what they actually are. This means that people work hard to buy expensive stuff, so that they will appear to be happy and successful to the outside world. *Having* things has, in other words, becomes of greater value than *being* things. We work to be able to live, but because we work so much, there is actually no life

anymore. In other words, people work so much in order to be able to buy the goods they crave, because they saw them in advertisements (Morgan & Purje, 2016).

People started to feel alienated in the capitalist society. This is the case because, in the Marxist' sense of the word, laborers have to sell their labour to capitalists because they don't own the means of production. In human language this means that people have to do wage labour, because they don't have enough money to own a company, an assembly line etc. These labourers have to accept the wage they get, because they don't have any other option. The next level form of alienation is when labourers are no longer able to sell their labour, because there are not enough jobs. This leads to even more unhappiness since they are no longer able to buy the goods they saw in advertisements. They have no wage anymore so they cannot buy anything. To be clear: this is of course a very simplified version of the complex reality. But the fact that punk emerged as a movement in the UK at a time when there were so many unemployed people is so not a coincidence. Since they no longer had a job, they could not buy anything. This made some of the unemployed get drawn to punk as an alternative to the capitalist route of buying things (Demoskratia.org, 2017).

Guy Debord talked about *détournement* as a technique to overcome alienation. This technique entails that you take other people's artwork and put it together in a different format. What Debord, in other words, believed in is the negation of preconceived categories through decontextualizing certain categories. A concrete example of *détournement* is when you cut a picture out of a magazine and put a line of a novel underneath it, so that the picture gets a completely different meaning than it initially had. This cut n' past philosophy is essential in the making of zine. "A zine is a magazine that is created by people who admire a certain band or genre of music with an audience that loves the same band or music genre" (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). Zines were a crucial part of the punk rock history, because they filled the gap that the mainstream media left. Especially in the beginning of the punk movement the media was not covering punk. Sniffin' Glue by Mark Perry was one of the most important punk fanzines in the UK punk rock history. Zines are a good example of the *détournement* technique being applied to punk, because a lot of punks started to make them (Siverton, 2016; Wray, 2019).

So what is exactly the goal of using the *détournement* technique? In summary, its goal is that art becomes part of everyday life. Moreover, people are protesting *The Société du spectacle* by being creative actors in everyday life instead of passive consumers. Instead of passively consuming images, they are actively creating something. An application of *détournement* on punk can be a zine or a punk song. Instead of just going to a punk show and going back home, zine-makers wrote reviews on the bands they saw and interviewed some punk



musicians in their scenes (Siverton, 2016; Wray, 2019). Also, punk performances were originally always about potentially changing the everyday life of people who attend them. The goal of a punk performance is not to just attend it and go home and continue with your life as before. The point of it is to let people participate with the performers and to take the performance's message(s) home and apply it to your everyday life. A punk performance is, in this context, an act of anti-capitalism (Isaacson, 2011; Morgan & Purje, 2016).

Like it was previously mentioned, it were Malcolm McLaren and Bernard Rhodes who got inspired by Guy Debord and who tried to make his ideas come alive in the punk movement. Since Malcolm McLaren and Bernard Rhodes were not musicians themselves, they tried to let the situationist ideas come alive in the bands they managed, The Sex Pistols and the Clash respectively. Both the Sex Pistols and the Clash expressed the raw emotions of alienation. While the Sex Pistols represent the more nihilistic stance of punk, The Clash represent the more explicitly political current of punk. The song *No Fun* by the Sex Pistols (1977) is exemplary for their nihilistic stance. Underneath a fragment of this song.

“No fun, my babe no fun  
No fun, my babe no fun  
No fun to be alone  
Walking by myself  
No fun to be alone  
In love with nobody else”

The nihilism is referred to in these lyrics as ‘no fun’. Nihilism in the context of punk means that life has no meaning and that life is about suffering. These lyrics, moreover, really represent an era of desperation in the UK due to the massive unemployment. The Clash solely made very political songs. For example, the song *Revolution Rock* by the Clash (1979) is an anti-nationalist call to start a revolution. Underneath a fragment of the song:

“Everybody smash up your seats and rock to this  
Brand new beat  
This here music mash up the nation  
This here music cause a sensation”

So, to paraphrase the quote in the beginning: it were the Sex Pistols who said ‘fuck you’ to capitalism and expressed the anger people felt at the end of the 70’s in the UK, while it was the Clash who said ‘let’s riot against capitalism’ and came up with more rational arguments for why people should say ‘fuck you’ to capitalism. Both bands were inspired by Guy Debord and his ideas on *Le Spectacle* and *détournement*. These situationist ideas of Debord could

sprout due to the alienation that the capitalist system had created with its massive unemployment. The anti-capitalist core value of punk was, in other words, born in this context. The Clash, however, would later be criticized for selling-out to this anti-capitalist message, when they signed to the major record label CBS in the beginning of 1977 (Robb, 2020).

The idea of DIY is another core value of punk, that is also related to the idea of *détournement* by Guy Debord. DIY stands for do-it-yourself. It refers to not passively consuming music, movies, books etc. but making stuff yourself if you want to. This idea of DIY was already essential in the beginning of the punk movement, because it also had to do with doing stuff right now, even if you don't have the money for it. The lack of financial resources was a reality for a lot of the early punks. DIY was also essential because if you did not depend on anyone, you could sing, shout, write etc. about whatever you wanted. John Lydon, for example, implicitly formulated the DIY ethics at one concert: 'Anyone can do it, form a band, scream...' The whole point of punk was that anyone could express themselves creatively, whether you sucked or not was irrelevant. Punk, in other words, gave people a space to express themselves, a space that they did not have before. The idea of DIY was appealing to people because, for the first time, they saw themselves as potential musicians (Robb, 2020).

### *3.2.1.2 Punk's look*

This technique of *détournement* was also something that was present in punk's aesthetics. In this context it is Dick Hebdige and his book on subculture that is of highest relevance. At the end of the 70's he wrote a book on subculture in the UK and the chapter 'Subculture: the Meaning of Style' specifically addresses punk and its look. According to Hebdige, the punk look was a complex response of the youth to their socio-economic and cultural surroundings. With this he meant that people became punk, because of their working-class background and lack of employment possibilities, as much as because of which kind of art and media they consumed. The punk look symbolized feelings of aggression, frustration and anxiety. That the end of the 70's were a time of economic hardship, punks showed through their appropriation of household objects, that became integrated in their punk fashion. This is a clear example of how punk fashion used the *détournement* technique, because household objects were placed in another context than they normally would be in. Moreover, by using these household objects they also showed how they did not need to buy new clothes to be fashionable. In the beginning, the punk look was not a unified style but more of a personal statement. In other words, in the early days, the punk look was not fixed yet. It was only when the media started to report on punk and its look, that it became seen

as a unified and coherent thing. For example, the media put a lot of emphasis on the Mohawk hairstyle, while in reality not a lot of punks had a Mohawk at that time (Bennett, 2020).

The early UK punk rock look did not magically appear from nowhere. In this context Malcolm McLaren and his partner Vivienne Westwood are often mentioned as the people that defined the UK punk look in the mid-seventies. The story goes as follows. Malcolm McLaren was living in New York in the early seventies, when he saw Richard Hell performing with his band Richard Hell & the Voidoids. When McLaren saw Hell wearing an edgy t-shirt that stated: 'Please kill me', he got inspired to open his own clothing store. Once he came back to London he put this dream into practice and opened the SEX clothing store with Vivienne Westwood (Price, 2004). During these times, creative people hung out in clothing stores and sex shops in London. Since most creative young people were unemployed and were a bit bored, they started going to those places to meet like-minded people. In those stores creative ideas were, moreover, exchanged. Since creatives were hanging out in the SEX store they also started to wear what they could find there. At the SEX store you could find rubber gear, bondage stuff, T-shirts with sexual content on them and black leather jackets. This is why the UK 70's punk look got defined by bondage stuff, rubber gear and black leather jackets. Westwood and McLaren managed to have such a great influence on how punks looked, because they opened the shop at the exact right moment. They had felt it when the punk spirit was taking over London and the early punks had found their way to their store. An additional essential aspect of the punk look at that time was spikey hair. The whole point of punks was to shock people and to show off their feelings of anger and frustration. That non-punks in the streets of London were shocked because of their provocative looks is certain. However, in the beginning, when punk took off, people who were not involved in punk did not actually know what punk stood for. They were basically scared of punk rockers because they looked odd, but were not yet aware of what punk's values were. It was only when the Sex Pistols got widespread media attention that people knew what punk was about. Some non-punks started from that moment on to be hostile towards punks they saw in the streets, because they associated punk with the nihilism that the Sex Pistols expressed and they saw this as a treat to conservative values. In other words, to look like a punk had become potentially dangerous once the Sex Pistols got mainstream. The fact that the Sex Pistols got mainstream also had another effect: some people who did not live like punks started to look like punks. So, while the punk look in the early days symbolized a certain state of mind, it now had become part of the Spectacle society. From that moment on, the punk appearance and the punk lifestyle did not always collide (Price, 2004; Robb, 2012).

### 3.2.1.3 *The Sex Pistols*

While the Sex Pistols were already mentioned in previous subsections as a nihilistic band and as essential in defining the punk look in the UK, it is still worthwhile to sketch the Sex Pistols more broadly, since they were one of the most influential punk bands ever.

First major event that is worth mentioning is a concert that was held by the Sex Pistols on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1976. This concert was the first to get widespread media-attention and because the Sex Pistols were highly confrontational at gigs people became more aware of what the message of punk was. In the summer of 1976 The Sex Pistols played twice in Manchester and from that moment on both Manchester and London would become hotspots of the punk movement (Robb, 2012).

Two songs define the Sex Pistols in the collective memory. The first one is 'Anarchy in the UK' (1976). This song got released in November 1976 and it is often framed as the start of the punk movement in the UK. While this is an arbitrary distinction, it is a fact that due to this song the Sex Pistols appeared on the Bill Grundy show on national TV. It was this specific event that made punk go overground. Punk got a negative connotation because all band members were drunk at the show and were being rude to Bill Grundy. The second song that defines the Sex Pistols is 'God Save the Queen' (1977). This song got released in 1977 and it was considered blasphemy in the UK, since most people in the UK were big fans of the monarchy. Part of the lyrics underneath illustrate why it was controversial (Robb, 2012):

Song God Save The Queen:

"God save the queen  
She's not a human being  
and There's no future  
And England's dreaming

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 single got banned from record stores, TV and radio stations. John Lydon, the singer of the Sex Pistols, even got attacked twice on the street after the band had performed the song for the first time live. In January 1978 the Sex Pistols would already be over, due to internal conflicts (Robb, 2012).

#### *3.2.1.4 Rock Against Racism and anti-fascism*

The fact that punk got associated with anti-fascism can be linked to Rock Against Racism. Anti-fascism means to be against extreme-right and authoritarian leaders. Rock Against Racism was an organization that held hundred anti-fascist concerts and published fanzines between 1976 and 1982. The manifest of the movement was the following:

“We want rebel music, street music. Music that breaks down people’s fear of one another. Crisis music. Now music. Music that knows who the real enemy is. Rock Against Racism.”  
(Museum of London, 2020)

This organization emerged in a context of rising support for the fascist and racist party the National Front. The National Front mainly got a lot of support from the working-class. Since most UK punks at that time belonged to the working-class Rock Against Racism played an essential role in countering this trend. One specific event was particularly important in countering the support for the National Front. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April in 1978 a crowd of around 100 000 anti-fascists marched from Trafalgar Square seven miles to a Rock Against Racism concert in Victoria Park. This march went to a stronghold of the National Front and, because there was live music, a lot of young punks got socialized into anti-fascist ideas. In an easy way they learned about political ideas through the music. While most audience members were white punks, Rock Against Racism did make a previously unaware white audience aware of what the National Front actually stood for. This concert had united all people from the working-class across ethnicities, because different kinds of music were played there, like soul and psychedelia, performed by people of colour. So while most audience members were white, a lot of performers were people of colour (Goodyer, 2003; Haider, 2020; Museum of London, 2020).

#### *3.2.1.5 Punk is dead? DIY is dead?*

Punk got declared dead around 1979. The discussions within the punk movement about punk’s core values had already started off in 1977, because in that year several punk bands had signed to major labels. In other words, some punk bands had given up their DIY ethics. This had led to discussions, because according to some people a core value of punk was Do-It-Yourself. Otherwise punk lost its subversive and non-conformist message. Major labels started to be interested in punk, because they realized that the sound of punk music could potentially become commercially successful. Around 1978-1979 the punk sound got defined and it became more homogenous. While in the beginning of the punk movement different styles of music were labelled ‘punk’, at the end of the 70’s all punk bands started to sound the same. Together with the fact that some punk bands sold out their DIY ethics to major

labels, this lack of diversity in styles of music announced for some that punk was dead. According to some of the original punks, punk had become another product to sell and buy. It had, in other words, lost its anti-capitalist message once its sound got defined and it became part of the music industry. Because of this reason, some of the early punks started to make other kinds of music. They stayed true to the DIY spirit of the original punk movement, but started to create different scenes. The goth, new wave, post-rock, Oi and hardcore punk scene emerged, for example. In other words, around 1979 the punk spirit was expressed through different kinds of music and operated under different names than 'punk'. Punk so did not really die, but it took on different forms than previously (Robb, 2012).

#### *3.2.1.6 Crass, ecology, anarchism and the re-emergence of DIY*

After the original punk movement was declared 'dead', there was a lot of confusion. In the 80's it was Crass who became a very influential band in redefining what essential punk values are. Crass put anarchism and vegetarianism forward as essential punk values. Moreover, they showed that it was possible to stay true to the DIY ethics of punk, namely they really lived by the punk ideals. All the bandmembers of Crass were living together in a commune when they were a band. This commune was open to anyone and a lot of artists came by and created music, books, paintings etc. In other words, Crass was quite self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency is linked with DIY specifically and anarchism more broadly. Crass also created one of the most well-known anarcho-punk slogans: 'There is no authority but yourself'. This slogan refers to one of the core ideas that is present in the political philosophy of anarchism, namely that all forms of authority are unnecessary and undesirable. Instead of a society based on authority, anarchism advocates for a society based on voluntary cooperation and the free association of individuals and groups (Felix & Wolting, 2006; Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2020; Robb, 2012). Crass introduced the ideas of vegetarianism in punk, because they also linked anarchism to animal rights. If it was not acceptable that a human had the authority over another human, it was also not considered acceptable that a human could have the authority over an animal. In this vision, killing animals in order to eat them is not acceptable. Crass also linked the eating of animals to climate change. They, moreover, sung about climate change in several of their songs. Two examples of climate change songs are 'What the fuck' and 'Mother Earth' (Felix & Wolting, 2006; Robb, 2012).

Crass was like, the Clash, an explicit political band and they, in other words, backed the emotions that the Sex Pistols were expressing with rational arguments. But contrary to the Clash they never signed to a major music label and so stayed true to the DIY ethics of the original punk movement. In other words, the bandmembers of Crass did not only live a self-

sufficient life outside of their music, but also continued making music in a DIY way. Crass also did a lot of political actions. One example is that they painted anti-war messages over war movie posters. In general all their shows were free and if they were not free the money went to all kinds of different good causes or was intended for political actions. While all Crass' songs are very political, it was the song 'How does it feel?(To Be The Mother of a Thousand Dead)' that especially received a lot of attention. This song was released in 1982 and was protesting the Falkland wars. The Falklands war was a dispute between Britain and Argentina on the sovereignty of the Falkland islands. The war was highly controversial, because it was perceived as unnecessary. A war that was merely happening because both countries wanted to show off their power and patriotism. The mother that Crass are referring to in their song is Margaret Thatcher, who was the Prime Minister of Britain at the time (www.britannica.com, 2020; Crass, 1984). Underneath a fragment of the song 'To be The Mother of a Thousand Dead' (Crass, 1984)

"How does it feel?  
How does it feel to be the mother of a thousand death?  
Young boys rest now  
Cold graves in cold earth  
How does it feel to be the mother of a thousand death?  
Sunken eyes lost now  
Empty sockets in futile death"

As the lyrics of the song show, Crass were not in favour of the war and of Margaret Thatcher. The song even got discussed in the House of Commons. Labour used it as a tool to oppose the war.

Crass stopped in 1984, because they did not want to become too popular. If Crass would have become too popular it would have lost its anarchist message ,according to them. This would have been the case, because Crass would have become an institution in itself. By 1984 the bandmembers of Crass also were mentally drained, because of the constant threats they received from the authorities. They were watched all the time by state security and this had taken an emotional toll on them (Crass, 2011; Robb, 2012).

What became clear after reading about the UK punk rock history is that punk was from the beginning very political. The looks of punks express certain values. Later on different core values of punk started to get introduced: anti-capitalism, DIY, anti-fascism and vegetarianism.

### 3.2.1.7 US VS UK

Similar to the early UK punks, Dave talked about how US punk was very subversive in the beginning. There, the bondage stuff also was an aspect of the punk look. Punk in the US also was about breaking out of the social norms. Dave talked about how punk felt different and like an alien culture in the beginning. It was a true movement, according to him, because all early punks were really going against social norms. It were people who wanted to escape the boring suburban lifestyle. In this aspect, punk in the US ,and specifically San Francisco, differed from the one in the UK. While in the UK most of early punks were working-class people, the early punks in the US mostly had a middle-class background. Another difference is that, from the beginning, there were political punks bands. Examples are the Nuns, Crime, the Dead Kennedy's and the Avengers. These bands belonged to the San Francisco scene at the end of the 70's. "The Sex Pistols of the US" were however the New York based band the Ramones. The Ramones, in other words, expressed nihilism in their songs. And it was mostly the Ramones who inspired other people in the US to start their own punk bands (Boulware & Tudor, 2009; Mitchell, 2017).

Similar to the UK, the punk look got defined once the US media was reporting on the Sex Pistols. While the punk movement in the beginning contained a lot of different musical styles, these styles also soon got different scenes. While, in the beginning of the punk movement, people would see a reggae band before they saw a punk band, for example, this started to change when the hardcore punk scene emerged at the beginning of the 80's. With the arrival of hardcore punk bands ,like Black Flag and Minutemen, people started drifting towards different concerts. Similar to the UK, different scenes had emerged out of the original punk scene. Dave also elaborated upon how punks received a lot of hostility when they were walking down the streets. Punk got perceived overall negatively by non-punks.

### 3.2.2 A partial history of Belgian punk

Before going into my interview results, in the following section the most relevant aspects of the Belgian punk rock history will be given. This section makes clear how punk took off in the specific Belgian context and which impact it made. Moreover, in this section the differences of the Belgian context and the ones in the UK and the US will become clear. For this section the thesis by Yves Aerden (2008a): 'Between Anarchy and Hysteria. The punk movement in Belgium (1976-1981)' is used. This thesis is one of the only sources there is on the early years of the punk movement of Belgium and contains a lot of relevant insights. The second source that is used here is a chapter out of a book on music history in Ghent: '9000 toeren: 50 jaar muziek in Gent'. Both sources are not published in academic magazines, but since there are



not a lot of sources on Belgian punk history the ones stated above are useful to sketch Belgian punk history. So, first of all, in which musical context did punk emerge?

The musical context in Flanders in the 70's was a context that differed from the one in the US and the UK, because there was no presence of rebel rock 'n' roll music. Before punk arrived in Flanders there was some rebel music, but this music were slow hippie songs. In other words, they had nothing to do with rock 'n' roll. Other music that was popular in Flanders were Dutch easy-listening songs. This was the so-called Schlager music (Aerden, 2008a). The Belgian music press did, moreover, almost not write about punk. The first magazine that talked about punk was an alternative Wallonian magazine, More. In July 1976, they wrote something about the Ramones, which they referred to as 'the new punk rock hype'. In November 1976, they reported on some American and British punk rock bands. On the contrary, in the more mainstream musical magazines, like Humo and Télémoustique punk almost got no coverage. And when they did start to report on punk it got criticized (Aerden, 2008a). Humo for example wrote:

"Musically and textually speaking punk rock not only sucks if you compare it with the great ones of the past (Dylan, Lennon, Bowie, Van and Jim Morrison), but also if you compare it with bands who suck now( Mud, Sweet, Smokie), what they are doing is exactly too stupid to kill. Punk is not dangerous and maybe in small doses it can be potentially result in having a laugh." (Aerden, 2008a)

The mainstream press would, however, radically shift their opinion on punk in 1977. Punk suddenly was being taken seriously and it was acknowledged that punk was not a temporary phenomenon (Aerden,2008a).

While acknowledging that it is arbitrary to talk about the specific point that punk took off in Belgium, two punk bands that were essential for introducing punk in Belgium will be discussed here: The Kids and Chainsaw.

In 1976, the Kids started out. They are considered to be the first Belgian punk band ever. They were directly inspired by the UK punk scene, but also by the Ramones. Ludo Mariman, the future singer of the Kids, went to see the Ramones in London. He was curious what was going on there, after he had read something about UK punk in the press. Mariman got inspired in London to play in a punk band himself. After coming back to Belgium, he started the Kids together with the brothers Eddy and Danny Dehaes. That the Kids were similar to the UK punks is due to their nihilistic songs and their working-class background. Present themes in their songs were, for example, boredom, being excluded from society and unemployment. They were not explicitly political in their songs, with a few exceptions with

songs about the monarchy and the police. Since all the Kids members had a working-class background, their songs got perceived as autobiographical. Similar to the Sex Pistols and the Ramones, The Kids inspired other people to start their own punk bands. This was the case, because they could not play very well technically speaking. This lack of technical skills made it seem more realistic for other unskilled people to start making their own music (Aerden,2008a).

Chainsaw, founded in 1977, was the first punk band in Brussels and so also the first non-Flemish punk band. The singer of Chainsaw worked for the previously mentioned magazine More. Because of this reason, he immediately came across the newest trends of the international punk scene. This knowledge got incorporated in Chainsaw's music and performances. They, in other words, were inspired by American and British punk bands. But that Chainsaw could be founded had to do with the presence of the Rockin' club in Brussels. At this club the future bandmembers of Chainsaw had met each other and got inspired to play in a punk band themselves. However, The Rockin' club did not exist very long. After four months it had to close down because some of its infrastructure got destroyed during punk shows. Chainsaw was also known in Brussels for their confrontational and sometimes violent live performances. Examples of this are throwing flour over the audience or that during one performance someone got beaten up, because he had tried to sing into a microphone during a show. Similar to most early punks in the UK and the US, Chainsaw was not well-known for their musical skills, but because of their controversial live performances (Aerden, 2008a, p. 39).

Punk emerged in a different context here than it did in the UK and the US. Punk did not really make a big impact in Belgium, because of the Belgian institutional context at the end of the 70's. In Belgium, there were not enough record stores that promoted punk music and there were, most importantly, not enough venues and clubs where punk bands could play. That Belgians could not experience the energy of a punk rock concert in their near environment, had as a consequence that less people fell in love with punk. The live experience of punk was essential in getting inspired to pick up an instrument yourself. Since this was lacking, not a lot of Belgian punk bands were founded. Not only the lack of venues and clubs were a problem. That punk could not really take off in Belgium at the end of the 70's also had to do with an imposed noise limit of 90 db. This limit got imposed by the government and since this limit got far exceeded at punk shows, in practice it meant that punk shows got banned (Aerden,2008b). Another thing that hindered the spread of punk in Belgium was that no big Belgian record label wanted to sign punk rock artists. Big labels considered punk too radical and did not want to take any financial risks. This time era, Belgian record labels were mostly distributing well-known foreign artists. This was the case,

because supporting unknown local artists entailed more financial risks. This lack of support for punk bands by big record labels had as a side effect that DIY music labels emerged. These DIY labels then distributed punk music (Aerden, 2008a, p. 52).

Punk was less political in Belgium than it had been elsewhere. Most early punks were middle-class students in Flanders, The Kids were, as a working-class band, an exception. Most early punks were, economically speaking, quite well off. In Flanders punk was more a musical movement, than a movement that emerged as a response to a certain economical context. In this context, punk got criticized for being something that people would only do in the weekends. Punks would just play their music during the weekends and then do normal jobs during the week. The political flavour that was associated with punk in the UK and the US was, according to some, because of this reason, missing here. The content of Belgian punk songs also was often not explicitly political. Punk bands were mostly singing about individual freedom and other anarchist themes, like being against the state and the police. One could maybe think that these songs were political, but these were nihilistic songs in line with the Sex Pistols, because they did not urge for actual political changes. Some bands who did sing about political changes were Red Zebra and the Brassers, but these bands were exceptions (Brys, Cauveren & Van Driessche, 2015, p. 77).

While punks were, in general, less politically explicit than the punks elsewhere, they did come together to contest racism and fascism. Similar to the UK, nationalist and racist parties were on the rise in the early days of punk in Flanders. Volksunie and het Vlaams Blok were the Flemish equivalents of the National Front in the UK. Some punk bands performed at anti-fascist concerts of Rock Against Fascism, held in 1978. These were organized by five left-winged youth organizations. The goal was the same as what Rock Against Racism was trying to do in the UK, namely raising awareness about politics through music (Aerden, 2008a).

That there were not a lot of venues and clubs that wanted to programme punk bands also had to do with its negative reputations. Like in the UK and the US, punks had a reputation of causing trouble at concerts. After the closure of the Rockin' Club, punk got a bad name. Footage of the aggressive audience at Sex Pistols concerts in London also contributed to the negative image non-punks had of punks. But it was the festival Jazz Bilzen, that was held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1977, that made the negative perception of punk grow. Jazz Bilzen was the first Belgian festival that programmed punk bands. Precautions were taken by the organization of the festival to prevent anything bad from happening. Fences were, for example, set up around the stage. This turned out to be a bad idea, when the singer of the Damned, David Vanian, asked the crowd to put the fences down. His question resulted in a moment of chaos, because people were putting the fences down from opposite sides.

Moreover, some audience members got injured. The media widely covered this event. But it was the edition of 1978 that would really give punk a negative reputation. Similar to the edition of 1977, precautions were taken to prevent anything bad from happening. This time no fences were set up, but the precautions entailed that there was a lot of police presence. However, the presence of the police had the opposite effect: riots emerged. Two nights in a row punks started to fight with police officers and things were set on fire. A cow got killed with a knife and a liquor store in the neighbourhood got robbed. The police eventually used tear gas, but this led tensions to rise even higher. The end result was police officers ending up in hospital, punks ending up in jail and a negative reputation of punks in the eye of the Belgian non-punks. The edition of Jazz Bilzen of 1979 would be one where punk bands were no longer welcome (Aerden, 2008a, pp. 44-45; Brys, Cauveren & Van Driessche, 2015)

This negative reputation also led big venues, like the Bozar and the Ancienne Belgique, to ban punk bands (Aerden, p47, 2015a). However, this ban on punk in mainstream venues had a positive side effect. It led to the rise of DIY music venues and the start of youth centres. In the 80's, these places were important places for self-expression and inspiration for young people. Because these DIY spaces were independent, they made it possible that more diverse kinds of music could emerge. This was the case, because these spaces were not focused on commercial success. They mainly evolved around creativity. In other words, similar to the early punk movement in the UK, DIY was crucial in the early punk movement in Belgium. DIY spaces, moreover, had a long-lasting impact on the Belgian music scene that was not limited to punk, because they promoted different kinds of music and were an alternative to what was programmed by big venues (Aerden, 2008a, p. 48).

In March 1978, for the First Belgian Punk Contest, Kamagurka and the Dachau Dollies were created. They did not make actual music, but applied the spirit of punk and its DIY attitude to stand-up comedy. Kamagurka, who is now a well-known cartoonist, said he just used the energy of punk to be able to get on a stage and to do whatever he wanted. This project received both mainstream and alternative press attention, because stand-up comedy was something new at that time. Kamagurka had another band in the 80's that did make actual music: Kamagurka en De Vlaamse Primitieven. This music did not have the stereotypical punk sound, because it sounded quite calm and there was no shouting involved. What made this music punk were its lyrics, because they were in line with the philosophy of the situationists. The lyrics were surrealistic, because words were placed in random sequences, which gave the lyrics an absurd meaning. The goal of the songs was, moreover, to provoke people, which is also very much in line with punk values (Brys, Cauveren & Van Driessche, 2015). Underneath a fragment of a song by them that illustrates this.

Echte mannen by Kamagurka en De Vlaamse Primitieven (1994):

“Echte mannen dragen geen pleister, al is de wonde nog zo groot.

Echte mannen laten de wonde dood gewoon open en bloot.

Echte mannen praten met God tot hij bekend: ik ben zot.”

(translation: “Real man don’t cover up their wounds, even if the wound is really big. Real men let their wounds uncovered. Real men talk with God until he confesses: I am crazy.”)

In this song the idea of masculinity gets criticized and laughed at. The stupidity of not allowing yourself to be vulnerable, because you are a man, is symbolized by not taking care of physical wounds.

Vère and More Action were two other important punk bands at the turn of the 70’s to the 80’s. Vère was a band that combined playing punk music with performance art. During their performances they wanted to express absurdity and anarchy. Once at a concert, they were, for example, giving away chocolate to people in the audience, while they were laying wrapped up in sleeping bags. The most absurd and controversial thing they did is filling garbage bags full with hennep leaves and throwing them around the Sint-Pieters square in Ghent. While Vère mostly wanted to shock people, More Action was more an explicit political band (Brys, Cauveren & Van Driessche, 2015). Another band that is worthwhile mentioning is Basta. They only made two songs and because these songs are really political and in line with anarchist thinking, they are sometimes called ‘the Belgian Crass’. Both “Abortus vrij, de vrouw beslist” (translation: “Free abortion, the woman decides”) and “Kom op zusters” (translation: “Come on sisters”) got released in 1978. Underneath a fragment of the second song Kom op zusters by Basta (1978):

“Vrouwen wacht niet te lang of je gaat eraan kapot

Je wordt elke dag vernederd, bespot en verkracht door mannelijk geweld.

Laat je niks bevelen. Laat je niet denigreren. Laat je niet bepraten door partijen en syndicaten.

Hou van elkaar en dat word je kracht.

Zusters kom op, voer je eigen strijd!

Zusters kom op, voer je eigen strijd!”

(translation: “Women don’t wait too long or you will get destroyed because of it. Each day you get humiliated, laughed at and raped by masculine violence. Don’t let yourself be commanded. Don’t let yourself be put down. Don’t believe what the political parties and trade unions are telling you. Love each other and that will be your force. Sisters come on, fight your own fight! Sisters come on, fight your own fight!”)

That this song is anarchist is visible, because it talks about people taking their own agency without depending on political parties and trade unions. So, Basta was next to the Brassers and Red Zebra one of the few punk bands who made explicitly political music at that time (Brys, Cauveren & Van Driessche, 2015).

In the 80's the punk scene in Belgium stayed small. While punk bands with the classical punk sound kept existing, similar to the UK and the US, other scenes would emerge, with the post-punk scene as the most important one (Bergans, 2015).

### 3.2.3 A partial history of riot grrl

While the punk scene promised to be a space of anarchism and freedom, its reality was less rosy. In the summer of 1985, some female punks started to address that, within the punk scene, sexism was also present. It was, however, only in 1991 that a separate feminist punk scene emerged in Washington DC, Olympia and Seattle. This scene had the name riot grrl. What contributed to the sprout of the riot grrl scene in Olympia was the arrival of a lot of progressives and creatives, due to a special programme at Evergreen College. In this programme students could compile their own programme and attracted, because of this reason, some soon-to-be-riot grrls. Differently from Washington DC and Olympia, the riot grrl scene in Seattle did not emerge from punk, but from grunge (Downes, 2007).

What riot grrl , in other words, started off with is female punks addressing the hypocrisy of the punk scene. The early riot grrls firstly expressed their anger through zines and only later through music. Moreover, weekly meetings were held ,where cis men were not allowed. During these meetings feminist topics were discussed. One of the first zines is Chainsaw by Donna Dresh. In the underneath passage, a fragment out of one of the first Chainsaw zines, is presented in which Donna Dresh addresses what punk rock should be really about, according to her (Downes, 2007).

“Right now, maybe CHAINSAW is about Frustration. Frustration in music. Frustration in living, in being a girl, in being a homo, in being a misfit of any sort. In being a dork, you know, the last kid to get picked for the stupid kickball team in grade school. Which is where this whole punk rock thing came from in the first place. NOT from the Sex Pistols or LA But from the GEEKS who decided or realised (or something) to —turn the tables|| so to speak, and take control of their (our) lives and form a real underground. Which is ALSO where the whole heart of CHAINSAW comes from. I feel completely out of the realm of everything that is so important to me. And I know this is partly because punk rock is for and by boys mostly and partly because punk rock of this generation is coming of age in a time of mindless career goals” (Downes, 2007, p. 10).

What Dresh addresses here is how the DIY ethic of punk rock got lost and how punk rock was still mainly 'for the boys'. The term 'riot grrl' was invented by bandmembers of Bratmobile: Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe. 'Riot grrl' contains the word 'girl' for several reasons. The first one is that teenage girls were encouraged to share their experiences. The second reason is that 'riot grrl' wanted to go against the idea that adult women should be stable. If you talk about 'girl' instead of 'woman', more room is given to self-discovery, personal growth and continuous changes (Downes, 2007; Farrington, 2020; Rosenberg & Garafola, 1998). While riot grrl as a term kicked off with Bratmobile, it was the band Bikini Kill who created a manifest for the riot grrl philosophy. This manifest got published in 1991 (Rosenberg & Garafola, 1998). Underneath the content of the manifest of riot grrl will be paraphrased (Rosenberg & Garafola, 1998):

So what is riot grrl? It is supporting others in their art and musical projects. It is anti-capitalist. It is going against the dominant ideas in society that people have about women and girls. It is going against the sexism that exists in some punk scenes. It is about creating a community of like-minded people. It is about non-hierarchical ways of creating music and art. It is about boosting your self-esteem. It is about doing the things you want to do, despite the circumstances you are finding yourself in. Riot grrl is about a revolution within oneself. It is about changing your own life.

Similar to punk, the idea of *détournement* by Guy Debord, plays a central role in riot grrl. Riot grrl wanted to go against the media framing of girls in capitalist society. That is why they controlled their own media in the form of zines. In zines they talked about things from the female perspective, to contest the male perspective that was often dominant in mainstream media. Topics like rape, sexual harassment, female desire and sexual pleasure could be freely discussed in riot grrl zines. Also, during riot grrl performances, the *détournement* technique was used. Things that some men shouted at women, like 'slut' and 'whore', were, for example, written down on the arms and legs of riot grrl performers. The thread here is that riot grrl transformed the dominant idea that women and girls are passive agents into one where they are active agents (Strong, 2011).

Riot grrl got a negative connotation once it received attention from the LA Weekly in July 1992. From that moment on, riot grrl got a lot of criticism. Riot grrl was, for example, criticized as being anti-men. It was, moreover, framed as being an elitist movement for girls from white, middle-class and a well-educated background. It was actually not even considered to be a real movement to begin with. Riot grrl was seen as the hysterical self-expression of some privileged girls and women, who just took life way too seriously (Downes, 2007). Once riot grrl got overground, because of this media attention, its message

got commodified. Women and girls who had never heard of riot grrl before, they read about it in the mainstream press, started to copy the fashion style of riot grrls. That people were *looking* like riot grrls without actually *being* them is similar to what had happened to punk once it received media attention (Downes, 2007). Once riot grrl became overground, the original movement started to disperse. Some original riot grrl bands had signed to major labels and in that way sold out their DIY ethics. Another reason why the original movement dispersed is because riot grrl of colour started to address that riot grrl was indeed a very white and middle-class orientated movement (Downes, 2007).

#### 4. Interview results

Before going into my interview results, in this subsection the people I interviewed will be discussed. The short overview of the people I interviewed shows the diversity of the punk movement in Belgium. It shows, in other words, how punks are not one coherent group of people, as the CCCS perspective on punk would claim. The different characteristics of some of my participants illustrate that punk is not a youth subculture. Belgian punks do have things in common. So who are the people I interviewed? What do they have in common? How do they differ?

First of all, four of my interviewees did not label themselves as 'punk'. This was the case, because they considered it too restricting to label themselves as anything. Sienie is a bit a deviant case in my sample, since she does not identify herself with punk, nor does she know a lot about it. However since this research is on punks in Belgium all the interviewees, including Sienie, are involved in punk in some ways. Almost all of my interviewees are specifically involved in the Flemish punk scene. Moreover, Hemanuella and Dave were previously involved in punk scenes in Brazil and the US respectively.

Half of my interviewees see punk as something political. Anti-fascism, anarchism, anti-capitalism, ecology and DIY are values that most of my interviewees associate with punk. However, the extent to which they live by these values differs and which values they consider more important than others also differs. In the context of anarchism, for example, Cristina is the only one who lives in a squat and who has no actual job. In other words, she incorporates the punk values of anarchism and anti-capitalism for 100 percent in her own life. The punk value that all my participants talked a lot about is DIY. While some of my interviewees did not explicitly state that punk is intrinsically something political, it was only Wendy who explicitly mentioned that for her punk is not necessarily political. She identifies herself as a progressive person, but she does not associate this with her punk identity,



because she knows some punks who are apolitical. So, for her, being punk and supporting certain political values doesn't necessary coincide.

What all my interviewees share, is that they are creative people. While half of them are working in the creative or cultural sector, the ones who don't do creative jobs do creative things outside their jobs. Hemanuella, for example, has to combine different jobs in order to support herself as an all-around artist. She is a visual artist, a musician and a poet. Seven of my interviewees are in a punk or riot grrl band. All the women that are in a band are specifically in a riot grrl band, with Cristina as the exception. Zina is the only one of my interviewees who also makes zines. Half of my interviewees also organize concerts and, for some of them, the only concerts they have organized so far are DIY concerts.

Five of my interviewees are not straight and/or gender non-conforming. For Simon, punk helped him to accept that he is more feminine than the average man. Watching the New York Dolls and the Stooges made him more comfortable with who he is and made him able to express himself fully. Those bands inspired him, because they had feminine guys who felt comfortable in their own skin. Wendy talked about how the riot grrl community made her not feel like a loner anymore, because there are a lot of LGBTQ+ people involved in the riot grrl scene.

Most of my interviewees are in their late twenties-early thirties and talked about how their punk identity has changed over the years. How they put their punk values into practice changed as they got older. Four of my interviewees have (experimented with) colourful hair. According to them, this symbolizes their non-conformity and rebellion. Most of my participants talked about the relevance of a certain look for a punk identity. For Zoë, for example, looking punk in her teenage years was crucial. She said: "By looking different and sometimes really ugly, I was saying 'fuck you' to society through my looks. Rebellion and puberty, you know." However, for all my participants, having alternative looks is not considered enough to be a punk. Mathieu, for example, talked about how there were some teenagers in his scene in Liège who looked like punks, but who disrespected the DIY venues by not paying at the entrance. Mathieu called these disrespectful people 'fake punks'. Silke had a different opinion about the importance of certain aesthetics in relationship to punk. According to her, the fact that a lot of punks have similar looks is not something that happens intentionally. The fact that a lot of punks have Dr. Martens, are wearing a jeans and a band shirt underneath a jacket with buttons and patches is, according to her, because punks have similar interests. Moreover, for her, you don't have to look a certain way to be considered punk. Only a few of my interviewees actually fulfilled the stereotypical punk look with a lot of tattoos, colourful hair and band shirts.

Like mentioned in the methodology section, the Grounded Theory Approach is used. Based on what the interviewees said, subthemes were distilled. In the following sections it will become clearer how punk is an ethical project and not a youth subculture. How some of punk's core values 'happen' in reality and how some of these values are, in practice, quite difficult to uphold will also be discussed. The struggles/issues that the interviewees experience in their daily lives to uphold their punk values will be discussed too.

#### 4.1 Anarchism, anti-capitalism and ecology: DIY

That only half of my interviewees explicitly said that anarchism and anti-capitalism are essential punk values, does not mean that the other half is not living by these values. This is because do-it-yourself, as another essential punk value, is putting anarchist and/or anti-capitalist ideas into practice. Ecology is also linked with DIY. So, how do my interviews apply DIY in their lives? And how are anarchism, anti-capitalism and ecology related to DIY?

As was explained in the section on punk history, DIY has always been something that is highly associated with punk. Doing the things you want to do, creating things for yourself and creating a space for yourself have, in other words, always been 'punk'. Most of my interviewees started doing things in a DIY way out of necessity and not to be intentionally anti-capitalist or anarchist. They wanted to do certain things, even if the circumstances were difficult. They had to, for example, learn a musical instrument by themselves, because they could not go to music academy. Another example is distributing their own music, because they don't have a record label supporting them. While they started doing it out of necessity, they realized, in line with anarchist thinking, that not depending on anyone to make or organize something gives them more creative freedom. Moreover, just making art for the sake of art leads to more diverse artworks. If art is not about making profit and you don't need to consider that you are liked by a mainstream audience, art can be made in a more free way. This is why in DIY spaces weird and very experimental art are allowed. The reason that DIY has also always been highly associated with punk is, because it allows punks to share their political views in their art. In the case of zines, for example, the *détournement* technique of Guy Debord is essential. If zines were not cheap and it would not be possible to publish them yourselves, zines would probably contain less political themes (Holtzman, Hughes & Van Meter, 2007). Some concrete examples of creative things that my interviewees did in a DIY way are the following: Anne-Sophie started to organize concerts without having any financial resources for it, Zoë made her own clothes and recently started making a blog on vegan cooking, Hemanuella taught herself how to drum and Simon distributed his own music.

To better understand what my interviewees said on DIY the theory of Paulla Guerra is useful (Guerra, 2018). Paula Guerra's research was done in 2018 in Portugal, where she interviewed 200 punks. Her research was specifically about punk and DIY in Portugal. Her theory entails that there are three levels of DIY. 1) A macro-level. 2) A meso-level and 3) A micro-level. The macro-level of do-it-yourself is about going against the dominant norms in society or capitalism. This level, in other words, refers to DIY as being a way of thinking and acting that is related to anarchism and anti-capitalism. The meso-level is about doing things you want to do without having the immediate resources available to you. In practice, this means that resources are distributed in another way than they normally would be. The micro-level is about applying DIY in your everyday life. It entails, for example, organizing shows, sharing skills with others, helping others etc. What the theory of Guerra, in other words, shows is how the DIY actions of Belgian punks in their daily life are related to going against the dominant norms in society. Even if some of my interviewees are not aware of this relationship between resistance to dominant norms and DIY, with their DIY ethics and behaviour they are still resisting these norms (Guerra, 2018).

So, let's now delve deeper into the question why exactly DIY is a way to resist capitalism. In the capitalist system products are just there to be consumed and the people who consume it are not involved in the making of the product. DIY is resisting capitalism because the hierarchy between producer and consumer disappears, since the line between who the producer and who the consumer is, becomes blurry. Instead of focusing on the exchange value (as is often done in the capitalist system) the focus shifts to the use value. The exchange value is about how much something costs and the use value is about how valuable it is for the one using the product. Whether the product is material does not matter in this context. What DIY is doing is creating values that are operating outside of the capitalist system. Values that have nothing to do with money. To explain the above in easier and more accessible terms: DIY is related to anti-capitalism, because it is about becoming as little money-dependent as possible (Holtzman, Hughes & Van Meter, 2007).

Some participants of my research also linked DIY to being ecologically friendly. Acting in an eco-friendly way is also related to anti-capitalism as the following examples of my interviewees will illustrate. Some Belgian punks don't immediately buy something new, when something is broken. Instead they try to fix it first themselves, because they know that overconsumption is bad for the environment. Concrete examples are sewing a hole in their pants or fixing their broke bike themselves. In other words, DIY, thinking and acting in an eco-friendly way and anti-capitalism are all linked. This is the case, because punks slow down and reflect on whether they really need to buy something or not. By doing this, the end result is that they consume only what they really need.

And what does DIY exactly have to do with anarchism? One example that illustrates that DIY is related to anarchism is the ability to learn new skills without depending on institutions like universities. The idea in mainstream society is often that you need a university degree to achieve and learn new things. That Belgian punks learn new skills outside of university illustrates that institutions are not always necessary. Another example of how DIY is related to anarchism is the distribution of free food to people, who would otherwise not be able to eat. This is not only about distributing resources in a different way than they would normally be distributed, it is also an act of anarchism, because by distributing free food to people it becomes visible that the state is not working properly or is simply not needed. Distributing free food is, moreover, also an act of anti-capitalism, because giving away free food brings to the front the use value of food instead of its exchange value. Since there is no money involved in the free food distribution, it is simply about the nutrition that food brings (Holtzman, Hughes & Van Meter, 2007). DIY is, to be short, about being self-sufficient and resisting the capitalist system and the state.

That DIY is about both anti-capitalism and anarchism, some of my interviewees illustrated with the example of touring bands. For example, Silke and Kim talked about how touring punk bands often sleep over at other punks' places, because they don't have any money to sleep in a hotel. These sleepovers have as a side-effect that a DIY community is created. Since DIY is about self-sufficiency the lack of money in practice means that other people have to support you before you are able to do what you want to do. In this specific case, it is about touring with your band. That this is both about anti-capitalism and anarchism has to do with the fact that people can participate in creative activities that they would not be able to do in other places. This is the case, because often people need money to be able to make music, for example. This difference between people who have money and who don't have money is a hierarchy and, in this sense, has to do with anarchism as well, since anarchism is about destroying all hierarchies (Holtzman, Hughes & Van Meter, 2007).

DIY is, however, not always that easy to uphold in practice. This has to do with the fact that mainstream society is still capitalist. Punks who try to do things in a DIY way, in other words, face a lot of obstacles. However, it is still the case that every DIY act can be perceived as an act of anti-capitalism and anarchism. Doing things that differ from the capitalist norm are now still difficult. The following quote summarizes it nicely:

“Attempts to create ‘post-capitalist’ worlds are always going to be ‘contradictory, interstitial and in the making’ as participants attempt to negotiate priorities in ethics, praxis and opportunity.” (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010, p. 488).

That DIY is not always very easy to uphold in practice can be illustrated with a discussion on government subsidies that came up during the interviews. Another example of how punks cannot always be 100 percent DIY and anti-capitalist is illustrated by the fact that a lot of the interviewees have regular jobs.

The discussion about government subsidies is one that is related to both anti-capitalism and anarchism. It is related to how self-sufficient and, so, DIY you can be in the current capitalist system. The issue with being dependent on subsidies is that you can potentially lose the control over which art you can make. This is especially the case when it comes to making DIY punk music, since this music is often political. If you depend on the government it can be difficult to make it as political as you would like. The story of Wendy for example illustrates this. Wendy does not depend on subsidies to play in her band, but for one event she needed the permission of the city council in Aarschot to perform. This was the case, because of the corona measures at that time. She was sure she would not get this permission, because one of the songs of her band is about the mayor of Aarschot; Gwendolyn Rutten. To be clear: It is not a positive song. Lindsi and Silke on the other hand both elaborated on the continuing need of government subsidies in current society. Since they are both part of Girls go boom it is not a surprise that they share more or less the same opinion. For both of them subsidies are still crucial in current day society to make culture possible. As long as we live in a capitalist system, people who create art and music will need an income and, right now, getting money from the state is often the only income they get. But it is not only about artists being able to survive. Silke stated that if you want to create fundamental change, you need to reach a large audience. If you want to reach a large audience, you need to organize yourself in a proper way. Decent organization means, according to Silke, that you need money and if that money can only flow in through subsidies, that is accepted. This compromising of DIY values is, however, only accepted if you stay true to DIY values within your own community. In other words, for Silke, if necessary, compromising on DIY on a meso-level is accepted, while compromising on DIY on a micro-level is never acceptable. Lindsi shared Silke's point of view, but she also addressed the vulnerability that lays within this dependency. Recently, it also became clear why this dependency can be dangerous, when Jan Jambon, the Flemish Minister of Culture, massively cut cultural subsidies. According to Lindsi, this policy shift made visible that Jan Jambon is a conservative. He knew that the opposing voices are mainly present in the arts and he wanted to silence them by cutting their subsidies. While acknowledging this vulnerable situation, Lindsi was not sure whether the government should simply function in a more proper way or the cultural sector should not depend on subsidies at all. In other words, the debate on subsidies is one about if you want to create change from within the system (getting subsidies) or outside the system

(not getting subsidies). Lindsy is, in other words, not a full-blown anarchist, as stereotypical images of punks would maybe assume. There is no concrete answer to this debate yet. Kim and Hemanuella, for example, shared that both activism within and outside the system are useful.

The second illustration of how DIY is difficult to uphold in practice is not about the meso-level, as is the case for subsidies. It is about the micro-level, because it is about how people integrate DIY in their daily lives. The stories of my interviewees make clear that DIY in practice is a spectrum. How do they exactly incorporate their DIY values into their daily lives and/or jobs? First of all the research of Guerra found that some people who are doing/ did DIY things get employed easier. This is contradictory to what has been discussed so far in this section, since DIY is supposed to be about anti-capitalism. Sienie is an example of someone who could benefit from DIY to build her own career and, so, to grow in status in a capitalist sense. She said that organizing DIY concerts as a student later on gave her more changes to build a career in the music industry. She could get an internship with a music label more easily, because she already had some experience in organizing concerts. Guerra found another relationship between DIY and capitalism, namely that people who have DIY values often pursue jobs that are more or less in line with DIY ideas. Also Haenfler (2018) found that punks often pursue jobs that are more or less in line with DIY ideas. Zoë, for example, works as a graphic designer and has to make video's for commercial firms. While she is aware this is a capitalist firm, she still supports it, because this company values ecology and sustainability. Kim, as a second example in this context, wants to incorporate her DIY ideas in teaching high school children to think critically and independently. Thinking independently is crucial if you want to do things independently (Guerra, 2018). However, most of my interviewees kind of have a double life, where they combine a regular job with DIY activities in their free time. So, DIY is not something that they left behind in their youth, but neither is something that is incorporated in their day-to-day job. Guerra formulated it in the following way:

“As individuals internalize the DIY ethos, they seek to create a cognitive balance by remaining true to such beliefs, thereby performing the desired authenticity. Individuals are driven to create meaningful practice for themselves and their peers. However, many of them will also be caught in a liminal stage, where they try to translate their creative output into a way of living that does not always agree with DIY authenticity.” (Guerra,2018, p. 13)

The reason why most of my respondents have a regular job is to get a stable income. This shows how Belgian punks are still embedded in the capitalist system. They are, however, simultaneously resisting the capitalist system with DIY acts in their free time. What also was

addressed by some of my interviewees is that being creative outside of their jobs was an intentional choice. Anne-Sophie, for example, firstly had a boring job to have a financial buffer, so she is now able to focus on making DIY music videos for bands she likes. Zina works at a library four days a week, where she does not have too much stress and responsibilities. This allows her to focus on making zines and music in her free time. She also likes the fact that making zines and playing music is not her actual job, because she has the freedom to do what she wants. In other words, what the examples of the interviewees illustrate is that you have to leave some of your DIY values behind out of financial necessity. Only Cristina leads a 100 percent DIY life, since she does not have a regular job. Although even she, the most radical of my respondents, admitted that you cannot be a 100 percent DIY. For example, at her squat there is only concrete so she cannot do permaculture and has to buy some stuff sometimes (Threadgold, 2017).

A research done in Australia by Steven Threadgold makes it even more clear why being 100 percent DIY is very difficult. By doing interviews in DIY punk scenes in Melbourne, he found that people who are involved in DIY culture basically choose a life of poverty. They choose this kind of life because they want to be creative. Choosing a life of creativity often means to choose to have less money at the end of the month. People prefer to live a meaningful life full of creativity and without financial security, than the opposite. So, the fact that my interviewees choose to have some financial security has as consequence that they are less able to live a 100 percent DIY life. Threadgold's research, in other words, makes clear that being DIY all the time means choosing to be poor in the current capitalist system (Threadgold, 2017).

Being full-time DIY is not only for financial reasons, but also for emotional and practical reasons very difficult. Zoë, for example, stated that she dropped out of the punk scene because you always had to support other punks, which took an emotional toll on her. She also wanted to continue studying, but within her scene this was not accepted, since other punks were talking about 'not wanting to be part of the rat race'. Studying would immediately lead to having a regular job and so becoming part of the rat race. Her personal aspiration clashed with what her punk environment thought. Eventually, this led her to leave the punk scene (Griffin, 2017). Silke then addressed some more practical issues with DIY, namely time. If you want to have a new bed, for example, you will have to get it at IKEA, since no one has the time to collect fire wood first to construct bed parts with and then to set up the entire bed. This was of course a sarcastic and exaggerated comment, but it makes the practical issues with DIY very clear.

To conclude this section we could say that DIY can be a way of thinking and behaving that makes anarchist and anti-capitalist ideas come to life. What practice shows, however, is that being 100 percent DIY both on a meso-level and micro-level is difficult in the current capitalist system. DIY is still an important value for Belgian punks that guides them in their thinking and behaviour.

## 4.2 Aging punks

Since a lot of my interviewees are in their thirties, a theme that came up is how their punk identity changed as they aged. How this process happened for some of my interviewees will be discussed here. Moreover, that most of my interviewees are not considered to be young anymore refutes the common idea that punk is a youth subculture. The stereotypical image that punks are always confrontational will also be refuted in this section. The stories of some aging Belgian punks will illustrate how being confrontational is not that easy to maintain. In this context, the misconception that all punks have a confrontational look will also be discussed underneath.

With their research, both Andy Bennett and Laura Way criticized the common idea that punk is a youth subculture. In 2006, Bennett did a research about what punk rock means for older punk rockers. He wanted to find the continuous meaning of punk for people who are no longer considered young (Bennett, 2006). He wrote: "The fact that an individual becomes a follower of a style of music as a young person matters far less than what that music continues to mean to them as they grow older" (Bennett, 2006, p. 1). This idea of ongoing relevance of the music you listened to as a teenager resonates with the idea of music as a technology of the self (Di Nora, 2000). Most Belgian punks I interviewed also started listening to punk in their teenage years, but still identify as punks now. Laura Way's research is also useful in the context of this research, because it published more recently, in 2020. Moreover, she interviewed 22 older punk women in the UK. So, the demographics of her sample are very similar to the ones that were present in this research, since most of my interviewees are also women in their late-twenties or early-thirties. Specifically, what Way found is that punks often go through a transition from being confrontational to less confrontational. She also found that while young punks often express their punk identity through their looks, older punks don't do that anymore. Since they have internalized their punk values, people stay 'punk' as they age. Since aging punks still consider themselves punks, they don't feel the need anymore to throw their *punkiness* into people's faces with a confrontational look. Way's findings resonate with what came up during my interviews (Way, 2020).



Hemanuella, for example, explained, in the context of the transition to being less confrontational, that punk for her used to be about destroying stuff, while now it is about creating stuff. For Hemanuella, punk now is about taking care of other people and creating a nice atmosphere within the punk community. She, in other words, expresses her punk identity in a different and less confrontational way than she used to. Silke also addressed how she now values more the idea of a nice atmosphere within the community, than being confrontational towards non-punks. In other words, for Hemanuella and Silke, punk can also be a community, without being confrontational towards people outside of the community. When it comes to moving away from confrontational looks, Zoë and Hemanuella talked about how they had crazy hair colours in their teenage years- early twenties, while nowadays they both have a normal hair colour. The fact that both of them do not have a crazy hair colour any more does not mean that they left behind their punk values. Zoë is involved with the DIY community of Girls go boom and Hemanuella still does a lot of things in a DIY way.

The question that still needs to be answered is why this shift from confrontational to less confrontational exactly occurs. Zoë, Hemanuella, Silke and Kim all blamed it on how exhausting it was to be confrontational. Moreover, they also realized that being confrontational does not always lead to the desired outcomes. If you want to change people's mind, expressing your opinion in a loud and aggressive way is not the best strategy. People tend to not listen to you when you express yourself in an aggressive way. In this context, Silke talked about how people even are less likely to listen to you if you align yourself with punk. People associate punk, and related with it 'anarchism' and sometimes 'feminism', with negativity. People that do not know anything about punk assume often, according to her, that you are only against a lot of things. In other words, people think you are only against the state and sexism, but you don't actually do anything to make society better. Because of this reason, Silke does not express her punk identity loudly when she is surrounded with strangers. Instead she is defending her punk values in a more subtle and positive way. This through throwing her ideas around in conversations in a non-aggressive way. She believes this is a more effective strategy to change people's minds. Silke noticed that, when she applied this strategy, some people did change their own behaviour on the long-term. Kim also talked about this negative outsider perception of punk. She, as a vegan, used to get angry at people who eat meat, but she realized that this did not convince anyone to eat less meat. That is why she opts for a different strategy now. Kim now cooks vegan meals once a month at a squat restaurant. By doing this, she hopes to actually convince people to eat less meat, because they realize that vegan food can also be tasty. To

summarize: being less confrontational is according to some interviewees a more effective strategy to change's people's mind than to be confrontational.

What Silke and Hemanuella also talked about is that they don't feel the need anymore to change everyone's mind right away. Not only because it is exhausting, but also because they realized it is simply not possible to change everyone's mind. Another reason why some of my participants became less confrontational is their mental health. Zoë and Hemanuella both crashed after being involved for some time in the anarcho-punk scene. After their crash, they both distanced themselves from radical politics. Zoë went into detail about what exactly caused her crash. She stated that she experienced a lot of peer pressure in the punk scene to not go studying and to squat. Punks in her scene said that studying entailed becoming part of the rat race that the capitalist system is. Zoë really wanted to study graphic design and did not want to live the insecure lifestyle that squatting entails. Squatting leads to insecurity, because you can get kicked out of your house at any time. This internal conflict between what the punks in her environment wanted and what she wanted eventually led her to leave the scene and go studying.

To conclude this section: instead of being confrontational and rebel, some of my interviewees started to opt for an activism with a soft touch. Instead of trying to operate as much as possible outside of the capitalist system and being against it, they are now trying to subvert the system or , in other words, they are now trying to change it from within. They are still punks, but express their punk identity in a different way than in the past (Way, 2020; WikiDiff, 2020).

#### 4.3 Sexism and homophobia in the punk scene

Similar to the past, while the punk scene promises to be a space of anti-fascism and of moral and social freedom, its reality is not that rosy. One thing that specifically shows why punk does not live up to its promises is the ongoing presence of sexism in the punk scene. Since most of my interviewees are women, this theme came up. They talked about what it is like to be a woman in the punk scene and the difficulties this can bring. But why exactly is it still relevant to discuss sexism in the punk scene, since society as a whole is latently sexist? This is the case, because punk in theory is about going against social norms, so also against sexism. To talk about sexism in the punk scene, in other words, clarifies how punk in reality is not as punk as punk is in theory.

Cristina gave a concrete example that illustrates how female punks can still not fully be themselves in the punk scene: some women in the punk scene do not want to sing feminist songs, because they don't want to offend their male punk friends in the scene. This concrete

example illustrates the presence of sexism in the punk scene. Lindsi also talked about the presence of homophobia in the punk scene. So, next to sexism, homophobia is still a problem in the scene. Lindsi experienced first-hand that the normal punk scene is homophobic when a friend of her received a lot of negative comments at a punk festival about a queer T-shirt he was wearing. However, that the punk scene is sexist and homophobic is most of all clear, because the scene is dominated by cis, straight men. Kim and Zoë only became part of the punk scene after they started dating their punk boyfriends. They were already going to punk gigs, but it was only after they started dating some anarcho-punk men, that they really became part of the scene.

That some people have the image of punk as a space of moral and social freedom, is illustrated by some stories of my interviewees. Half of my interviewees were first into metal before they were into punk. They turned to punk because they believed that punk is less sexist than metal. Wendy, Anne-Sophie and Cristina talked about the lack of female representation in the metal scene. There were no women performing on stage. The fact that they did not see themselves represented on stage meant for Wendy and Anne-Sophie that they never considered playing in a metal band themselves. Cristina on the other hand did play in a metal band, but had to endure sexist comments. She was, for example, often told she had to sing more “like a girl”. The lack of female representation in the metal scene was confirmed by Savigny’s research that was done in the UK. Her research is useful to get some quantitative data that complements what my participants said about sexism in the metal scene. She found that ,out of a sample of 994 metal performers, only 16 performers were female (Savigny & Sleight, 2015).

The idea of some used-to-be metalheads that the punk scene is not sexist turned out to be false. A lot of other female interviewees talked about how there was also no female representation on stage within the punk scene. This had as a consequence that they never considered to play in a punk band themselves. According to Kim, that was “because that was something that only guys did”. Lindsi said that when she was a teenager, her highest ambition was to be the girlfriend of someone who plays in a punk band. Zoë talked about how when she was going to punk shows, she always had the feeling that something was wrong. It was only later in her life that she realized this feeling had to do with the lack of female punk performers. The story of Wendy illustrates what happens if women do take the leap and dare to play music in a band. She came into contact with a lot of sexism. One specific event is very telling. One time, there was a guy who was flashing his dick at her, while she was on stage. Wendy spoke about double standards in this context, because if a woman would show her tits during a concert everyone would consider her a slut. According to her, if a guy shows his dick, on the other hand, most people think it is cool and funny.

Besides this event of overt sexism, she is also used to receiving negative comments after shows. These comments are based on her gender and the one of her bandmates. People assume because Wendy's band is an all-female band that they cannot play technically well. Wendy added that her band mostly gets programmed for riot grrl and not punk festivals. This shows, according to her, that a band that solely consists of female members is not considered to be a normal thing in the punk scene.

Another aspect of sexism in the punk scene is the different concert experience women, trans- and non-binary people<sup>1</sup> have, compared to cis men. Specifically sexual harassment and too violent mosh pits at punk shows illustrate the presence of sexism in the scene. Mathieu, for example, talked about how a close female friend of him keeps getting grabbed at punk shows. Zoë talked about how she experienced punk shows in Antwerp in the past. According to her, it was not safe to go to punk shows as a woman. Women could not let themselves go entirely at punk concerts, because if they, for example, danced too much, they got judged by other men. Women, in other words, could get objectified by men. An ethnographic research done by Lucy Hill with the UK city Leeds as a case-study confirms that women, trans and non-binary people indeed experience sexual violence at concerts. Besides punk concerts, her research also included indie, rock and funk concerts. Hill is relevant to name here, because she elaborated on the effects that sexual violence can have on the people who experience it. These effects illustrate why talking about sexual harassment in the punk scene is relevant. Firstly she found that people who have experienced sexual violence at a concert will be more likely to not go to concerts anymore. This is the case, because they no longer feel comfortable going. Besides this effect, it also potentially can have bad effects on people's mental health, since every time they do go to a concert they can feel anxious. In that case, what people sometimes use as a coping mechanism is to change the way they dress. Instead of wearing a skirt, they start to wear a jeans, for example. In other words, they start to change their own behaviour, while they are not the ones who committed sexual violence (Hill, Hesmondhalgh & Megson, 2019).

All my female interviewees also talked about how mosh pits are dangerous spaces for women and queers. A mosh pit is a kind of dance at a punk show where people are bumping into each other. Kim talked about how she sometimes simply has to leave the mosh pit, because she is afraid she will break her nose. Zoë and Zina also talked about how the mosh pit can be really dangerous. Zoë, for example, still experiences claustrophobia due to experiences she had in mosh pits during her punk years. She often had the feeling she could

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of a more fluent language in this thesis the word 'queer' is used to refer to everyone who is not straight and/or non-binary and trans. While being aware that some LGTBQ+ do not like the word 'queer', the word is used to make it easier to read the text.

not breath, because everyone was standing so close to each other. Anne-Sophie, on the other hand, stated that she does not join a mosh pit to begin with. It feels too unsafe for her when all the cis men are dancing really violently in front of the stage. Anne-Sophie only joins the mosh pit at safe space parties (more about the idea of safe spaces in the next section) (Savigny & Sleight, 2015).

While all the experiences that are stated above are valid, it is important to nuance the conclusion that could be made based on these experiences, namely that '*the* punk scene is sexist'. If you refer to it as 'the' it seems to insinuate that the entire punk scene is sexist and this is not the case. Cristina and Mathieu, who are both active in the Liège punk scene, said, for example, that in Brussels and Wallonia more women and people with other genders than cis men are present. Mathieu stated that in every DIY collective in Liège there are women involved. Cristina also talked about the overall presence of women in the electro noise punk scene in Brussels. In Flanders, on the other hand, the punk scene still mainly consists of cis men. While there are no statistics on male vs. female presence in the Belgian punk scene, the perceptions of Cristina and Mathieu can still give us some ideas on the differences when it comes to sexism between different punk scenes in Belgium. Zina can give us more insights on the internal diversity in the Flemish punk scene. Her story illustrates that there is an internal diversity in the level of sexism in the Flemish punk scene. At the end of her teenage years, she was active in the punk scene in Maasmechelen, but she stopped going there because it was really macho and because she was the only girl there. When she started going to the punk scene in Leuven, Zina experienced that scene as a lot more mixed and less macho. In other words, it depends on the specific scene that people are part of, if they experience sexism or not and to which extent they experience sexism. Another nuance that should be made is that more women are present in the punk scene than a couple of years ago. According to Silke and Zoë, this is the case in Flanders, where more women are finding their way to the punk scene, in comparison to a couple of years ago.

To conclude this section we could say that the ongoing presence of sexism in the punk scene is illustrated by 1) the lack of female punk performers 2) the sexual harassment and 3) violent mosh pits at punk concerts. There are women and queers who do play in punk bands, but they face a lot of obstacles and have to endure sexist comments and behaviour. However, to state that *the* punk scene is sexist is wrong, since it depends on the specific scene. What the stories of my interviewees about sexism show is that the punk scene is not 100 percent the space of moral and social freedom that it claims to be.

#### 4.4 Riot grrl

While it is not explicitly stated in the mainstream punk scene that women and queers are not welcome or cannot play in a band, the reality of my interviewees shows that women and queers are currently more drawn to separate feminist scenes. Since sexism and homophobia are still present in the mainstream punk scene, riot grrl or separate feminist scenes are still necessary. Anne-Sophie, Wendy and Zina talked about how they needed riot grrl to regard themselves as players in a band. In other words, they needed a separate feminist scene to be able to express themselves musically. Hemanuella spoke, in more general terms, about separate feminist scenes. According to her, if separate feminist scenes still exists, it is because they are still needed. Some personal stories of participants underneath will illustrate in greater detail why riot grrl is still necessary in 2020.

Kim and Lindsy talked about how, according to them, cis men in general are more self-confident than others. Cis men are this way, because they don't have to question the fact that they play music, since a lot of other men are doing it in their environment. What a space without cis men can do is boost the self-esteem of women, trans-and-non-binary people. Without the presence of cis men they feel more comfortable to experiment with new things and are, moreover, more likely to talk about their insecurities. Since everyone feels more comfortable in a riot grrl space, it allows their self-confidence to grow. Lindsy and Kim said that this bigger self-confidence will eventually result in more women and queers coming outside their riot grrl space with their music and/or other creative projects.

The second reason why riot grrl is still necessary is because it provides a safe space. Concretely a safe space entails a space where no cis men are allowed. This implies that the world outside a safe space, with its presence of cis men, is understood to be an unsafe space for women, trans and non-binary people. An example of this unsafety was mentioned in the previous section: sexual harassment of women and queers at punk concerts. Prevention of sexual harassment at concerts is, however, not the only role of a safe space. In the 70's, the Women's Liberation Movement defined safe spaces as spaces where activists could relax and organize themselves for the next action. Nowadays, the 70's radical feminist definition of safe spaces could be translated as a space where people(cis men excluded) can grow together, both emotionally and intellectually (Hill, Hesmondhalgh & Megson, 2019). Both perspectives on safe spaces are present at Girls go boom. They signed the Safer Space Manifesto that was created by Tilke Wouters. Wouters is a freelance journalist who wanted to do something about the unsafe feelings that the queer community continues to experience in society. In the manifest not only the prevention of sexual harassment is incorporated, also the idea of a safe space as a space that encourages respect, openness and

the willingness to learn from others is present. Moreover, all kinds of discrimination and exclusion are not tolerated in a safe space, according to Wouters' manifest. Homophobia, transphobia, racism and ageism are, for example, not tolerated. That Girls go boom signed this manifest, means that they are not only fighting sexism, but also all other forms of discrimination and exclusion. This manifest does not define safe spaces as spaces where no cis men are allowed. It depends on the context if cis men are allowed or not in a safe space in Wouters' reading. By signing this manifest they, moreover, made an agreement to create guidelines for what the organization would do if their space is no longer safe. A concrete example is asking someone to leave a room if they make a racist comment. In other words, Girls go boom made actual commitments to guarantee that their space is safe (Wouters, 2020, p. 1).

Zina also elaborated on how riot grrl provides as a safe space for her. For Zina it is specifically the riot grrl zine-community that gives her a safe space, since zines are only read and distributed by people who are already a bit aware of its content. This is the case, because riot grrl zines are even more underground than riot grrl music. In other words, it is a very specific group that belongs to the zine-community. They are closed off from mainstream society. That Zina considers the zine-community to be a safe space, is visible in the topics she writes about in her zines. She dares to write about very personal topics. Zina wrote, for example, about giving consent, being tired, self-care and mental health. For her, writing about these topics is therapeutic both for herself and for others. She believes that with her zines she is potentially helping her readers to feel less alone in what they are struggling with. That for Zina the zine-community is a closed-off safe space, is illustrated by the fact that no one in her near environment knows that she makes zines. She would feel uncomfortable to let, for example, one of her colleagues read her zines.

Simon shared Lindsay and Zina's opinion on the continuing need of safe spaces, but he addressed that safe spaces are difficult to uphold in practice. He gave the example of a safe space festival, where there is one rapist present. Even if the festival officially has a safe space policy and does everything to guarantee a nice and welcoming atmosphere, there only needs to be one bad guy to ruin the safe space.

The third reason why riot grrl is still relevant is its contribution to the fight against sexism in the normal punk scene. Zoë, Lindsay and Silke said that Girls go boom could contribute to fix the presence of sexism in the Flemish punk scene. It is no surprise that these Girls go boom members believe that Girls go boom is relevant. However, Kim, who is not a member of Girls go boom, also thinks that Girls go boom can help to fix the sexism in the Flemish punk scene. This is, according to her, the case, because other women will see women playing in punk

bands, which will lead to more girls picking up an instrument and playing in a band. Lindsy talked about how Girls go boom does not only want to fix the sexism in the punk scene by getting more women in punk bands. She also wants to communicate directly with the normal punk scene about its sexism. In other words, Girls go boom does not stay in a riot grrl bubble. Lindsy went to give a speech about how the mainstream punk scene is not a safe space for women and how it is still too much dominated by cis white men at Ieperfest. Ieperfest is a hardcore punk festival and part of the mainstream punk scene. That Lindsy both talked about 'cis' and 'white' men illustrates that Girls go boom believes that, next to sexism, racism is also a problem in the mainstream punk scene. Cristina explicitly talked about how riot grrl scenes should only exist if their end goal is to create a more mixed mainstream punk scene. What she meant by that is that, in the future, more women, trans-and-non-binary people should be part of the mainstream punk scene. In that way, the mainstream punk scene would become more diverse and no longer dominated by cis men.

How the outside world is responding to riot grrl got quoted by my interviewees as the last reason why it is still necessary. Girls go boom got a lot of online hate comments after a VRT NWS article got published about them. The negative comments came from both non-punks and punks. The VRT NWS article talked about how Girls go boom wants to provide a creative space for women and girls and wants to fight sexism in the punk scene. The fact that Girls go boom considers the punk scene sexist, resulted in some punks commenting that the normal punk scene is not sexist at all. This reaction had to do with the fact that some punks felt personally attacked by the article. If the punk scene as a whole is sexist, then an individual punk can have the feeling he is personally a sexist (Eeckhout & Schouppe, 2020).

To conclude this section: as long as the mainstream punk scene is sexist and homophobic riot grrl scenes will be relevant. On the short-term separate feminist scenes are relevant to boost the confidence of women and queers and to provide a safe space. On the long-term riot grrl is useful to help fix the dominance of cis white men in the mainstream punk scene. In other words, the long-term goal of riot grrl is that punk would actually become more a space of moral and social freedom than it currently is.



## 5. Conclusions

By defining punk as an ethical project, this research overcomes the mainstream idea that sees punk as a musical genre. In other words, punk in this research gets defined as something that guides individuals in how they should think and act in an ethical way. When it comes to music, non-punks often associate punk with heavy guitars and shouting, while in reality punk music is not limited to this specific sound. Already at the end of the 70's the punk sound was really diverse. From the beginning, punk was about self-expression and about constructing a different reality through art. This punk art has never been limited to music or to music with a specific sound. The example of Kamagurka and the Dachau Dollies who did stand-up comedy and considered this punk is an illustration that punk art is not limited to music. It was only when the mainstream media started to report on punk that its sound got defined. In the mainstream media punk got associated with the Sex Pistols and since they shouted and used heavy guitars this is how the punk sound got defined. Once the punk sound got defined, a lot of original punks went to different genres to be able to express themselves more freely. So, punk is not a certain sound or a musical genre.

When it comes to academia, punk often got defined as a youth subculture. This research, next to a growing body of literature, tried to overcome this definition. The definition of punk as a youth subculture by the Centre of Contemporary Studies was correct in the early days of punk in the UK. The CCCS referred to punk as a way of the working-class youth to resist capitalism. Since there was a lot of youth unemployment in the UK when punk emerged, punk was indeed a youth subculture in its early days. The working-class youth in the UK tried to overcome its alienation by making art. However, this definition of punk by the CCCS, cannot be applied to the early days of punk in the US and in Belgium. In the early days of punk, Belgian and US punks were mostly middle-class people. Moreover, in Belgium at the end of the 70's and the early 80's most Belgian punks were not explicitly political. In the Belgian context, punk was not a reaction to massive unemployment, like it was in the UK, it was more a musical movement because punk bands played very different music than what was previously popular in Belgium. So, already in the early days of Belgian punk, punk could not be defined as a youth subculture.

What the stories of my interviewees showed is that there is diversity within the Belgian punk population. Moreover, they are not unemployed and forced into punk as a way of surviving in the capitalist system, like the early British punks were. They chose themselves to become punk, both because they have an affection for it and because they like the music. My interviewees were attracted to punk, because it is a space for misfits and weirdo's. In other

words, what pulled them towards punk is that they felt different from people in their environment. Another reason why they chose to become part of the punk scene is because they were looking for a space of like-minded people and a space to express themselves creatively, within a community. This idea of creative self-expression is something that has always been present in punk. The fact that being punk is a choice and that there are differences between punks in their thinking and behaviour is in line with the idea that punk is an ethical project that individuals can use as they please. In the current postmodern society the individual has surpassed the collective and this is also the case for punk. However, this does not mean that punks do not share some core values, since otherwise 'punk' would not mean anything. The fact that punk has some core values is why the title of this thesis refers to punk as an ethical project, and not an *individual* ethical project. The core values of punk that my interviewees identified are: anti-fascism, anti-capitalism, anarchism, DIY and ecology. Although they got socialized into these values during their teenage years, they are still applying them now in their lives. The fact that most of my interviewees are in their late twenties or early thirties illustrates that punk cannot be defined as solely for the youth. Moreover, the fact that some of my interviewees became less confrontational as they aged refutes the stereotypical idea that punks are violent and aggressive people.

Of course punk's core values have origins. These origins are related to a specific political and economic context. While acknowledging that naming certain people, events and/or bands as *the* origins of punk's core values is arbitrary, identifying certain turning points in punk history can help to better understand some of punk's core values. Especially the value of anti-capitalism is related to the context in which punk emerged, since most early UK punks were unemployed and felt alienated because of this reason. It were Malcolm McLaren and Bernard Rhodes who introduced situationist thinking in the punk movement and, by doing that, punk became intrinsically linked with DIY. DIY was inspired by the situationists, because it meant doing things yourself, without having the financial resources for it. It meant expressing yourself in a creative way instead of passively consuming and by doing that being an anti-capitalist. How DIY is an intrinsic aspect of punk was illustrated by the fact that punk was declared dead in 1979, when some punk bands signed to major record labels and, in other words, sold out their DIY ethics. After the declared dead of punk, it was Crass who re-introduced DIY as a punk core value. They made DIY music and were also living their lives in a DIY way, since all Crass members lived together in a commune and were in that sense self-sufficient. Besides putting DIY back to the front as a core value of punk, Crass introduced anarchism and ecology as essential punk values. They were making music and art about getting rid of all forms of authority and the importance to not eat meat both for animal

rights and for the climate. Punk got associated with anti-fascism, since the punk organization Rock Against Racism tried to fight the rise of the National Front in the UK by organizing anti-fascist concerts. Although my interviewees named anti-fascism as one of punk's core values, they did not talk about how they put anti-fascism into practice in their own lives.

As opposed to the early UK punks, the Belgian punks I interviewed are not taking a nihilistic stance, since they use some of punk's core values to guide them in their thinking and behaviour. For most of my interviewees, punk is a way to resist the system we are living in. By creating art and music in a DIY community, instead of passively consuming, they decided that for them *being* is of greater value than *having* certain things. However, what reality shows is that it is difficult for punks to completely live outside the capitalist system and mainstream society. Contrary to the early UK punks who had no job opportunities and no possibility to be embedded in the capitalist system, now, Belgian punks do have jobs and are, in other words, integrated in the capitalist system. What Belgian punks do to put punk's core values into practice is trying to integrate DIY ethics into their lives. DIY is putting three core values of punk into practice: anarchism, anti-capitalism and ecology. DIY is about anarchism, because DIY is about learning new skills without depending on institutions like university. DIY is anti-capitalist, because instead of just consuming you try to create new things without depending on (a lot of) money. DIY is also linked to ecology, because punks try to fix things themselves before they buy something new. Consuming less is better for the environment and ecology and anti-capitalism are, in other words, linked.

While in theory punks should be 100 percent self-sufficient or DIY, this is not the case in practice. Most of my interviewees only live a DIY life outside their jobs. The concrete examples they gave about DIY activities were mostly linked to creativity like, for example, making music and zines. Fully integrating DIY in their lives is not only impossible, because of financial reasons, it is also emotionally exhausting to try to operate as much as possible outside of the capitalist system. Moreover, the confrontation punks have to face with non-punks if they contest the system is also exhausting. What is more: trying to change the system solely by being confrontational does not always lead to actual changes in mainstream society. Non-punks often associate punk with negativity and are tended not to listen to what punks are saying. Finally, DIY is difficult to fully integrate into your life, because it takes a lot of time. So, contrary to punk in theory, most Belgian punks are embedded in the capitalist system and are trying to change it from within. This changing from within was illustrated with the example of the DIY collective Girls go boom that gets subsidies from the government. Moreover, while in theory punk is an ethical project that can be used in the

ways an individual punk pleases, the story of Zoë about peer pressure in the punk scene illustrated that some punks do impose their own ethics on other punks. This is also fascist, because it implies that some punks do not tolerate internal differences within the punk scene. In other words, how Belgian punks put punk's core values into practice illustrates that punk in theory is not the same as punk in practice. Punks cannot operate 100 percent outside of the system. However, every DIY act is still an act of resistance against the capitalist system and mainstream society, because it entails thinking and acting in a different way than what is the norm in the Spectacle society we are living in.

The fact that riot grrl scenes exist next to punk scenes also illustrates that punk in practice is not the same as punk in theory. Most of my female interviewees are involved in riot grrl scenes and not punk scenes. Moreover, some of them said that they needed riot grrl to regard themselves as players in a band. While the punk scene does not explicitly state that women and queers are not allowed to become part of the scene, the reality is that some punk scenes are still dominated by cis men. There is not only a lack of female and queer representation within the punk scene, also sexual harassment and too violent mosh pits are illustrations of the homophobia and sexism in the punk scene. In the case of Belgium, it is specifically the Flemish scene that is dominated by cis men. Theoretically, punk is a space of moral and social freedom within the system we are all living in. The fact that women and queers are now more drawn to riot grrl, instead of punk, illustrates that punk does not differ as much from mainstream society as it claims to be. Since punk is still sexist and homophobic, riot grrl scenes will exist next to punk scenes. While riot grrl now provides a safe space for women and queers that the punk scene does not provide, the long-term goal of riot grrl is that the punk scene would become less sexist and homophobic.

To answer to the title of this thesis: Is punk an ethical project to resist mainstream society? Yes, it is, but it has its limits, since Belgian punks are not 100 percent able to put punk's core values into practice. Moreover, punk does not differ as much from mainstream society as it claims to be, since it does not live up to its promise of a space of moral and social freedom within the capitalist system. However, punk is still an ethical project that individual punks use to guide them in resisting mainstream society as much as they are able to.

In further research on Belgian punk, more cis men in the Belgian punk scene should be interviewed. Since most of my interviewees were cis women it is possible that the results are gender-biased. Doing more interviews with male punks could lead to more generalized conclusions about Belgian punks. Moreover, doing interviews with cis men could lead to

more insights in how cis men look at the sexism and homophobia in the punk scene. In further research, more people from Wallonia and Brussels should be interviewed to get a more representative sample of the Belgian punk scene. In this research we mostly gained insights in the thinking and actions of Flemish punks. Since Cristina was overall more radical than my other interviewees, it could be interesting to research how and if the Walloon punk scene is in general more radical than the Flemish scene. When it comes to collecting data, it would be interesting for future research to combine interviews with ethnographic fieldwork. Since this thesis did not only talk about punk in theory but also punk practices, ethnographic fieldwork could give insights in how punks really *do* punk. Observing punks in their actual environments complements how they talk in interviews about what punk means to them and what they do in their daily lives that puts their punk values into practice.

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## Attachments

### Attachment 1: Interview questions

General prepared interview questions:

- 1) Could you shortly say what you do in your daily life. Also your age, gender, where you live etc.
- 2) What does punk mean to you? Would you describe yourself as a punk or not?
- 3) Did punk music change your view on things or do you just listen for fun? Did punk music introduce you to ideas that you did not know before?
- 4) Which kind of music did you like to listen to as a teenager? Which kind of music are you listening to now? What pulled you towards that?
- 5) How does the punk community look like according to you in Wallonia/ Flanders/Brussels and in Belgium? When it comes to demographics? How did that change over time?
- 6) Is it necessary that women organize themselves separately within the punk scene? What do women according to you miss in the 'normal' punk scene
- 7) What is riot grrl according to you? What does it stand for? And what do you think about it?
- 8) Did riot grrl change over time or not? How do you notice/see that?
- 9) What is according to you the difference between riot grrl and more mainstream like feminism? Is riot grrl still relevant anno 2020?
- 10) What does DIY mean to you? How do you live by it yourself?
- 11) Do you apply DIY on different aspects in your life? Or how should I look at it?
- 12) Would you ever consider working for a venue, record label or anything that has to do with art or music that is not DIY?
- 13) Do you remember when you got into contact with punk and DIY? When did you become active yourself within the community? How did that process go?
- 14) What got you into punk music? What attracted you? What did your environment at the time think about it?
- 15) How was your life before you were involved in the punk community? Did your life look different or not?

- 16) Could you summarize which impact punk has had on your life?
- 17) What do you think about the relationship between underground music and mainstream media? If a band suddenly wants commercial success or gets it? What is your opinion in this?
- 18) Which creative things are you doing now? And which things did you do in the past?
- 19) Which themes come to the front in that?
- 20) Which role does art and music has in society according to you?