"The Outcasts: Punk in Northern Ireland during the troubles."

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DruhJkZU4EI (Good Vibrations trailer)

Good Vibrations[1] is an independent movie that seeks to illustrate through the use of familiar tropes the importance of music as a transformative experience. The above trailer demonstrates the centrality of punk music as a means to change through relationships, do-it-yourself, and resistance. The movie is based on the life of Terri Hooley, specifically his role in the nascent punk scene in Belfast as something of an unlikely hero and ringmaster. In focusing on Hooley the movie serves up a number of points key to this chapter: the power of music to sidestep divisions and boundaries;[2] how much the troubles in Northern Ireland were a background part of everyday life for most people;[3] the ability within punk to cherry pick aspects and times and conveniently ignore or marginalise other equally important but less 'sellable' dimensions.[4]

This chapter will be structured to deal with each of these three areas as a means of demonstrating that Northern Ireland had[5] one of the most vital and vibrant punk scenes in the UK at the time of the troubles. Vital in that, it was often the only space for Catholics and Protestants to mix and interact.[6] Vibrant in that it was largely isolated from the drama and media wrangling of the mainland punk scenes and so had to form and inform itself.[7] The chapter is based on the auto-ethnography of the author and on a sociological and religious studies research project on punk during and after the troubles.[8]

Troubles as a backdrop

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[1] 2013, directed by Lisa Barros D'Sa and Glenn Leyburn, distributed by The Works

[2] David Cooper, *The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland and its Diaspora,* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009); Desmond Bell, *Acts of Union: Youth Culture and Sectarianism in Northern Ireland,* (Hampshire: MacMillian, 1990) p8; Sean O'Neill & Guy Trelford, *It Makes You Want To Spit,* (Dublin: Reekus Music, 2003)

[3] Marc Mullholland, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled History,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Martin Dillon, *The Shankill Butchers: A Case Study of Mass Murder,* (London: Arrow Books, 1990); Susan MacKay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People,* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2000)

[4] Martin McLoone, Punk Music in Northern Ireland: The Political Power of 'What Might Have Been', *Irish Studies Review, Vol.12, No. 1, 2004 pp29 – 38;* Andy Medhurst, *What Did I Get? Punk, Memory and Autobiography,* in Punk Rock: So What? Edited by Roger Sabin, (London: Routledge, 1999) pp219 -231; Daniel S. Traber, *L.A.'s "White Minority": Punk and the Contradictions of Self-Marginalization,* Cultural Critique, No. 48 (Spring 2001) pp30 - 64

[5] I would argue still has in some respects.

[6] O'Neill & Trelford, 2003, pV; McLoone, 2004, p35; Francis Stewart, *Alternative Ulster: Punk Rock as a Means of Overcoming Religious Divide in Northern Ireland*, in *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective* edited by John Wolffe (Hants: Palgrave MacMillian, Forthcoming April 2014)

[7] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7797071.stm (last accessed 30.07.2011); Ian Glasper, *Burning Britain: The History of UK Punk 1980 – 1984,* (London: Cherry Red Records, 2004) p346

[8] Used within this chapter are excerpts from 13 preliminary interviews and extended conversations. All interviewees were aged between 35 and 50 to ensure they had grown up and been involved with punk during the troubles. They were all from Belfast, or had spent a considerable period of their adult life living there. They were a mix of male and female and were, with two exceptions, working class both as children and as adults.

The first punk band I saw live was Stiff Little Fingers in Belfast in 1993. On the way to the venue I passed graffiti that read "Can you hack a pastie supper Bobby?",[9] "No surrender, remember 1690"[10] and "Ulster says No".[11] These were not phrases that caused me to consciously stop and think, instead they acted as a referent to what Neil Jarman describes as "social memory".[12] An *"understanding of past events that are remembered by individuals, but within a framework structured by the larger group."*[13]. Before I had left home I had checked news reports for bombs, bomb scares and so on as this would tell me where traffic disruption would be and whether buses and trains were running as timetabled. This was standard practise for any event you planned to attend, or even for simple everyday activities such as getting to and from school or work, doing the shopping and so on.

On a day to day basis the troubles were a backdrop, something that you had to bear in mind and be alert to, but also something that just was. That is not to, in any way, deny or denigrate the suffering that many individuals, families and communities endured. There was a sustained campaign by paramilitaries on both sides to disrupt life as much as possible. Marc Mulholland outlines some of the activities such as bombing – and cutting off – the water supply to Belfast, and the forced moving from one area to another through intimidation.[14] Edwards & McGratten remind us that *"there had already been over a hundred bombs planted that year [1978] before the firebombing of the La Mon Hotel in east Belfast in February 1978, where twelve Protestants were burned to death in the IRA attack so horrendously that their remains could only be identified forensically."*[15]

The scale of injury and loss of life during the troubles – over 3700 people died – is horrific, and the impact long reaching. However the very scale and length of the conflict resulted in those outside of it focusing on the violence and those who cause it / have power to speak on it (such as politicians and some church leaders). The voice and experience of the ordinary person *"do not carry sufficient authority, and often go unheeded."*[16] Consequently, or arguably concurrently, ordinary people simply deal with the violence and fear that

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[9] This is in reference to the death of the Republican hunger striker and MP Bobby Sands who died at the age of 24 in May 1981. He was on hunger strike as a protest against the removal by the British Government of the "political prisoner" status assigned to arrested members of paramilitary groups and the removal of the privileges that designation brought. A pastie supper is a popular meal which consists of pork, onion and potato combined, battered, deep fried and served with chips. The term 'hack' is a colloquialism that means undertake or successfully complete a challenge. The sentence is also the title and chorus of a popular loyalist song / jingle written after the death of Sands.

[10] 1690 refers to the Battle of the Boyne and is specifically remembered by Loyalists and Protestants as the date of King William of Orange's victory and thus the symbolic victory of Protestantism over Catholicism.

[11] A refrain often used by prominent Protestants such as Rev Ian Paisley, particularly at rallies and to the media. It grew in significant popularity after the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

[12] Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts,* (Oxford Berg: 1997) p4

[13] Jarman, 1997, p6

[14] Marc Muholland, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled History,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p69 -70

[15] Aaron Edwards & Cillian McGratten, *The Northern Ireland Conflict,* (Oxford: One World Press, 2010) p75

[16] Marie-Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey & Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Costs,* (London: Pluto Press, 1999) p2

surrounds them by doing what they can to maintain a semblance of normality in their everyday life. This approach is comparable with how ordinary citizens live and think in areas of intense civil war, as for example Israel / Palestine[17] or Libya[18].

In relation to the concerns of this chapter – punk music in Northern Ireland during the troubles – there was a very direct impact. Often bands would avoid Northern Ireland (some even the Republic of Ireland) on their tours. This was especially true after the brutal massacre of The Miami Showband in Buskhill (county Down) on the 31st July 1975. The popular cabaret band were returning to Dublin after a performance and were stopped by a bogus army checkpoint set up by the paramilitary group the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) who attempted to put explosives onto their van. It exploded prematurely, killing two. The remaining paramilitaries opened fire on the band killing three and injuring two.[19]

Tragedies such as this created a fear of touring into the country and many bands would not receive insurance cover if they did come. However October 20th 1977 marked a seminal moment for some in Northern Ireland. The Clash was due to play the Ulster hall. This was a first of its kind event, a leading English punk band playing in Northern Ireland – Belfast no less – at least it was until the council cancelled it[20] When the fans found out a near riot

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[17] Daniel Bar-Tal, *The Necessity of Observing Real Life Situations: Palestinian – Israeli violence as a laboratory for learning about social behaviour,* European Journal of Social Psychology, Volume 34, Issue 6, 2004, pp677 – 701; Julie Peteet, *Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifida: a cultural politics of violence,* American Ethnologist, Vol 21 No 1, (Feb 1994), p31 -49, pp35.
[18] Lindsey Hilsum, Sandstorm: Libya in the Time of Revolution, (London: Faber & Faber, 2012) pp1 -39
[19] http://www.themiamishowband.com/tag/the-miami-showband-massacre/ (last accessed 02.01.14); Stephen Travers & Neil Fetherstonhaugh, The Miami Showband Massacre: A Survivor's Search for the truth, (London: Hodder Headline Publishing, 2007)
[20] There are numerous rumours as to who was actually responsible for the cancelling of the gig – the council because of fear of noise or the army / police because of a fear of anti-social behaviour and a large gathering of

ensued and the army were brought in to disperse the angry crowd.[21] Although The Clash returned a number of times after that, an important lesson was indelibly etched into the psyche of young punks – the troubles meant they were on their own. They had to create their own scene in the midst of civil war. Brian Young, from the band Rudi, sums it up:

> *Years of what have been euphemistically referred to as 'the troubles' had taken their toll. Town centres shut down at night and people just didn't mix outside of their own communities. The N.I. music industry was stone dead and no one half decent was brave or foolhardy enough to play here. Yet, paradoxically, this provided the perfect breeding ground for punk. A whole new generation of restless, bored, alienated and frustrated teens had grown up here, going nowhere fast, in what felt like the most fucked up and pitiful country on the planet – and punk was the perfect antidote! … Ulster punk evolved into a totally unique and resilient hybrid that punched way above it's weight and went on to confound and exceed even our wildest expectations. By necessity, Ulster punk was DIY all the way.[22]*

Brian's words bring us to the next section of this chapter, forming their own community within a deeply fractured and divided society necessitated finding something that could transcend those fissures and differences. For many of the young people into punk it was located in the music, in the ethics, in the attitude and the politics.

<u>Sidestepping division and boundary</u>

> *I suppose how I would describe it now is that, like, punk transcended religion so it did. You know like, like it was something else to focus on, something that we had in common. We were the outsiders so why make yourself even more on the outside by focusing on religion. Punk was far more important than that so it was. You get what I mean? Like by having this thing in common we could, I dunno, get past the religion thing, see the person behind it and they really weren't all that different from the rest of us so they weren't.* Colin 02.12.09

In the above section I mentioned going to see Stiff Little Fingers (SLF) as my first live punk experience. As everyone did I arrived with the baggage of the situation I grew up in, although I barely registered the graffiti I had walked past or the murals I had seen, I knew what they meant and the message behind them. I went to a school that was segregated on gender, education ability and religious identity, these divisions were all I knew. However, that night it all changed, the audience was mixed and willingly so. To my ever-lasting shame I have no memory of the supporting band at all because I was so busy making sure I knew where the exits where for when the inevitable fight broke out between the Catholics and

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belligerent people. No official documents exist to confirm either way, and it was likely a combination of both, however I have written council here as they had the power to officially revoke a playing licence.
[21] Johnny Green & Garry Barker, *A Riot of Our Own: Night & Day with The Clash,* (London: Orion Books, 1997) p23; http://www.theclashblog.com/the-clash-in-belfast-1977/ (last accessed 02.01.14)
[22] Brian Young quoted in O'Neil & Trelford, 2003, p262

Protestants, as I assumed it would. It never did and when SLF hit the stage and I was wrapped up in the wall of sound I didn't care about divisions and boundaries, the person dancing next to me was just that – a person. The song 'Alternative Ulster'[23] took on so many new meanings that night.

For me, the music and the lyrics were transformative and a number of other interviewees made similar comment.

> *The music, it was, is, amazing, there is just something about it. I play drums and every time I hit those skins its like I hit out another part of the shite I grew up with, you know what I mean? Kinda like it takes you to another place, shows that there is something else besides hatred and death and bombs and crap.* (Dylan 15 July 2010)

> *The music, it grabs you and doesn't let go. It makes it ok to be angry, to want change. Listen, its exhausting going round that pit, dancing like that but you have to, you want to, the music compels you. And even though you're knackered at the end of it you aren't the same person, you have changed somehow.* (Deb 2 November 2010)

> *You couldn't escape religion or politics and if you ignored them it could cost you your life, but for a few hours a night, playing that music, being with your mates, slamming in the pit, sitting in your room listening to tapes, the world came alive for a while. Like yeah, like I had for the first time ever something I could believe in, you know?* (Julie 28 July 2011)

Although expressed in different terms, and related specifically to their own context, the interviewees above reveal the ability of music to be transformative in ways analogous with the three means noted by music researcher and philosopher Jeanette Bicknell. Those three being; physical reactions "*a clear marker of strong experience … significant because they are clear indications that the music has overcome listeners and undermined their defences*"[24]; social feelings and connections; a feeling of or connection with the sublime or ineffable.[25]

This clip from the Good Vibrations movie demonstrates all three of these effects as Terri Hooley discovers Rudi playing their song "Big Time" and is captivated, transported and altered by the experience. For those unfamiliar with the movie or indeed the man, Hooley is the slightly older gentleman with the beard. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTGrGde7G68 It is worth noting here that the effects of the music on the individual, and indeed the group, can be long lasting – Hooley did indeed release 'Big Time' for Rudi (although he famously forgot to include the actual record when he initially sent the sleeves to radio stations) – or short lived. After Rudi leave, Hooley is approached by another band The Outcasts who ask

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[23] 'Alternative Ulster', Stiff Little Fingers, Inflammable Material, 1979, Rough Trade
[24] Jeanette Bicknell, *Why Music Moves Us,* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillian, 2009) p48
[25] Bicknell, 2009, p48 - 60

him if he will also put them out, his response is "I'm not that pissed." The music hasn't affected him quite that much![26]

The impact of music on individuals in enabling them to shift their perspective, engage with and express emotions is of course important, however we also need to examine the use of music to build community. In a society as fractured and suspicious as Northern Ireland community was intensely important and protected. Desmond Bell writes, "*Young people in NI develop a sense of ethnic awareness in an ongoing situation of political mobalization and sectarian confrontation. Historically conditioned cultural divisions are reproduced in and through the education system. Increasing levels of segregation combined with the isolating effect of mass unemployment have led to further ghettoization of young people within their confessional communities.*"[27]

Bell continues to argue persuasively that the generation who formed the early punk scene in Northern Ireland were affected far more than their parent's generation. This is due to their birth coinciding with the onset of the troubles resulting in a lack of mobility in a physical sense as well as economic, thus hindering their recreational activities. However his quick dismissal of dissonant styles and subcultures such as punk (he also includes mods, rockers and skins) as being solely the product of commercial interest and media hard sell and thus a foreign import to be disregarded as 'un-Irish'[28] is to misunderstand and marginalise youth counter culture movements and their importance in areas such as Northern Ireland.

Ian Murdock, vocalist with The Defects explains the punk community at the time; "*All the punks got on really well. Both Protestants and Catholics, the only real religion was punk. There was never any rivalry between us and any of the other bands either; both The Outcasts and Rudi let us support them many times. We all hung about together, and musically we just wrote about what we saw and coming from Belfast we obviously saw different things than what you would see on the mainland.*"[29] (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imsth6bwqg0 – The Defects 'Brutality', containing their now infamous refrain SS RUC)

Many interviewees commented on a sense of togetherness and / or developing their own community within.

> *You had to work together, there was precious few of us and we seemed to be a target for every sod. You got the police at you for anti-social, your teachers and parents at you for being yourself and spides and skins that wanted to kick your head*

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[26] Although it should be noted that later Hooley did sign The Outcasts to his Good Vibrations label for three years 1978 – 1981. The Outcasts split in 1985 but played the Rebellion Festival in 2011 and sporadically in Belfast since. Ian Glasper features them in his book 'Burning Britain: The History of UK Punk 1980 -1984' p352 - 359

[27] Desmond Bell, *Acts of Union: youth sub-culture and ethnic identity amongst Protestants in Northern Ireland,* The British Journal of Sociology, Vol 38, No 2, June 1987 p158 – 183 pp158

[28] Ibed p159

[29] Ian Murdock quoted in Ian Glasper, *Burning Britain: The History of UK Punk 1980 – 1984,* (London: Cherry Red Records, 2004) p346

in everytime they saw you just cause of how you looked. So yeah you didn't go looking for yet more differences in those around you, you stuck together and over time that became its own community. (Nathan 3 May 2010)[30]

Allegiances that's how I would describe it really. You grew up on one side or the other, you got no say in that and it decided who your friends could be, what schools you went to and what have you. But then you could go see these bands play, and they were usually just your mates unless you got the big ones like Rudi or The Outcasts or the huge ones like Fingers – I never rated the Undertones so I never bothered with them and suddenly none of that mattered. You liked people simply because they liked the same music as you, they dressed like you, got hassled about it same as you did and would stick up for you in a fight. Suddenly you got to pick a side, you got to say this is who I am and my allegiances lie with punk and with the punks, they are my community you know. It's hard to get that across like in terms of how monumental that was, cause just no-one done it before that I knew of. (Patrick 13 July 2010)

Right ok well I'm trying dead hard here to get it into the right words, I know this is gonna be read by those not into punk and not from here and I really want them to understand just how important and radical it was to create a community that wasn't based on division or them and us but on a love for a style of music. It didn't divide, it united. It gave us something new, you know? (Phil 27 July 2011)

Both the importance of tradition and the close-knit community cannot be overstated. To be a punk was to stand out, to be noticed and therefore to become a target so strength in numbers is a means of protection, a form of security in an insecure environment. In addition to be a punk is to be different from the past. Punk, and its adherents, create and maintain significant behaviours and ideals; an anarchic do-it-yourself ethos, sneering dismissal of self-appointed authority and the desire to reject or refute tradition. For many mainland UK punks the latter of these was a rejection of rules and hierarchy of the music business, in Northern Ireland tradition has an entirely different meaning. Tradition is often a means of demarcating political, cultural and religious identity, allegiance and territory.

Consequently, in Northern Ireland the desire to reject or refute tradition transmuted into a rejection of the entrenched partisan politics of their parent's generation and a rejection of the violent sectarian politics of paramilitary groups. Segregation was irrelevant; it was anathema to punk's ethos of all can do it. Catholics, Protestants and atheists co-mingled, interacted, danced and played together. At first it was a political statement just to gather together so when they were stopped by police checks or rounded up during a gig, it was

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[30] A spide is the Northern Irish colloquial term for a individual who is England would be known as a Chav [council housed and violent] and in Scotland as a NED [non-educated delinquent]. These are typically derogatory terms reserved for those who behave in loutish ways and dress to indicate their own self-emphasis on low class and low education.

often with a perverse delight that they revealed they were mixture of Catholic and Protestant, with a plethora of addresses proving it.

> *It was a political statement just to go to the Harp and pogo to some decent music back then. Political cause we all just mixed together and that wasn't encouraged wasn't allowed.* (Tommy, 7 April 2011)

> *There was no sense of religion amongst ourselves. No-one ever asked where you lived or came from. We didn't care about addresses or religions.* (Colin 2 February 2009)

> *This one time, we got stopped by the army. Random checks me arse! They checked us all and then wanted names and addresses. Shoulda seen their faces as we reamed them all off – Falls Road, Sydenham, Short Strand and the GlenBurn estate. It was class! One of the soldiers told us we should form our own political group!* (Gordon 1 December 2009)

> *Ah yeah (laughs) the p-stops, their faces when we used to reveal the places we lived. We'd crossed the divides, we didn't care so it was such a geg that they did.* (Deb 2 November 2011)

It cannot be over-emphasised the role that punk music itself played in this. It was the reason why these young people were coming together, were breaking with tradition and forging new bonds of friendship and loyalty. Musicologist Tia DeNora argues that this is because of music's ability to be utilised "*as a means of organizing potentially disparate individuals such that their actions may appear to be intersubjective, mutually orientated, co-ordinated, entrained and aligned.*"[31]

In effect, these punks were creating their own 'imagined community' that existed outside of, or parallel to, the divided and traumatised communities they lived in.[32] Imagined communities, according to Benedict Anderson, are so called "*because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.*"[33] In other words commonality is assumed rather than proven to such an extent that those assumptions become ingrained. Thus to claim a punk identity is to claim membership of that imagined community which leads other to presume that you agree with their understandings of ideas, actions and memories. I would argue that this results in a two-fold consequence; first, the strengthening of a small community in a dangerous environment, second the ability or reason why punk is so selective in how it is remembered. It is the latter that the final section will focus on before drawing some conclusions.

Cherry picking and rose tinted glasses

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[31] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p109
[32] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* (London: Verso, 1983)
[33] Ibid p6

Below is a scanned image from a Northern Irish fanzine – Alternative Ulster – which focused on the release of the one and only book written about the Northern Irish punk scene "It Makes You Want To Spit" by Sean O'Neil and Guy Trelford. In this interview piece Sean makes an important point that when people think of Northern Ireland in relation to punk they think of Stiff Little Fingers, The Undertones and maybe Good Vibrations and yet it was so much more than that.

There is a tendency within punk itself, as well as by the broader media and those who study popular culture, to cherry pick the more successful or sellable elements and remember them to such an extent that all else is lost. In addition in a scene as small a Northern Ireland there can be a proclivity towards assuming that the imagined community was one of harmony due to size and external pressure. These are the two issues this final section will engage with.

Ian Glasper's series of books[34] are a remarkable reminder of why the documenting of the variety and scope of punk bands in various era and cities the length and breadth of the UK is of paramount importance. They remind us that it is human nature to divide, to categorise, to pigeon hole. We do this because it enables us to understand, to control and to try to ensure that we keep the best for ourselves. Punk scenes are no different, despite what we

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[34] Burning Britain (mentioned above); The Day The Country Died (2006); Trapped in a Scene (2009); Armed with Anger (2012)

may like to tell ourselves, so a reminder of the variety is vital to help prevent complete co-option and ensure an honest and full history.

The tendancy for Northern Irish punk to be focused on Stiff Little Fingers, the Undertones and Good Vibrations results in important areas such as the Warzone collective are not acknowledged. The risk then is that groups such as this are not supported by the community and so not around for the next generation of punks. Key to developing a strong sense of community and cohesion in a country rife with division was the creation of centres in which young people could gather and talk, hang out and be safe. The precursor to the Warzone was the short lived A centre or Anarchy centre in Belfast city centre in 1981. It was run by the Belfast Anarchist Collective and was responsible for providing such a space during afternoons – particularly a Saturday afternoon.

> *The Centre brought bands such as Crass, Dirt and Poison Girls to the province, and also provided a venue for local bands such as Rudi, The Defects, Dogmatic Element, and Stalag 17. They also showed films such as 'One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest', 'Monty Python's Life of Brian' and 'Rude Boy'.[35]*

The constant army and police raids forced the centre to close after 6 months. During that time they provided a clear link between ideas of having things done for you by co-operations to whom you are then beholding and do them yourself, the diy punk ethos. The Anarchy centre was an example of diy in action for many young punks. Sadly very few images from the time exist but below are a front cover from the fanzine they produced and a still from the movie they shot about the centre.

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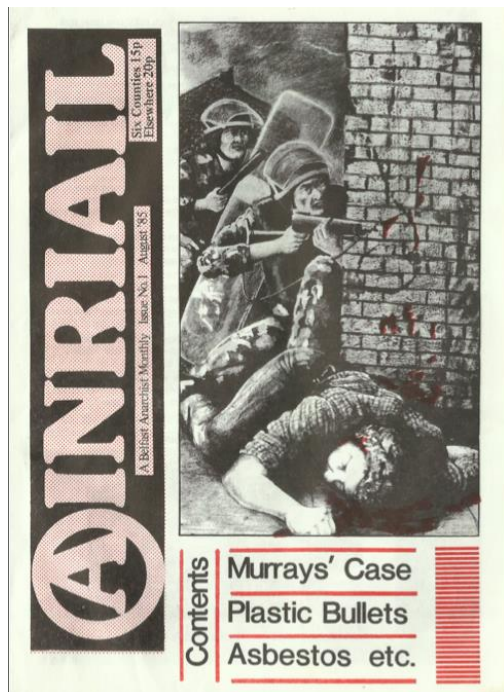
[35] O'Neil & Trelford, 2003, p2

In a similar vein to the Anarchy centre there is Giro's, now known as The Centre, which acts in a similar manner although it is not structured around Anarchy per se, but is more broadly interested in catering for a wide range of punk tastes such as hardcore / emo / straight edge and metalcore. In addition to hosting bands and providing a place for vegan food, the Centre in 2011 also opened itself up to providing a practice space and screen printing facilities. Below is the flyer from this event.

The centre is overseen and run as a collective on a volunteer basis by Warzone, who are an anarchy based organisation. Warzone began in 1984 on the dual basis of diy and beliefs should impact into our actions. As such then the principle of live and let live is shown through their commitment to creating and serving vegan food, providing a voice and information about animal rights issues and being involved in hunt sabotaging. For them, this is a key part of their anarchic principles and an important part of being a community. This

link will take readers to their website for further information and some copies of their fanzine which they continue to publish. http://warzonecollective.com/?page_id=2

However, as mentioned above, being a part of an imagined community not only motes togetherness and protection of a sorts, but also risks marginalising important voices and so not having a complete history. In addition, the presentation on community within this chapter could easily lead to the assumption that it was one solid community that stood alone against the varying forces – a living us versus them. Creating such an impression would be specious and again prevent the development of a complete history.

There were of course conflicts – between bands, between fans and participants, between musical ideas and between ideologies. For example, Stiff Little Fingers where criticised by the Undertones for glamorising the troubles, while Stiff Little Fingers countered with the accusation that the Undertones ignored the troubles.[36] It is worth noting that the Undertones "It's Going to Happen" is about the hunger strikes at the Maze prison and after the death of Bobby Sands, Damian wore a black armband to perform on Top of the Pops.[37] It is possible that it was actually sectarianism that drove the wedge between the bands, as Stiff Little Fingers were renowned for criticising both sides, while the republicanism of The O'Neil brothers continued to grow and be given expression (see in particular their post Undertones band 'That Petrol Emotion'[38]).

Furthermore, there was often dissent and disagreement on who was actually considered inside the imagined community. For example, there was a vicarious rejection of the Boomtown Rats as punk in any way.[39] A number of interviewees described them as "plastic punks" or as having "fake anger with one eye firmly on the money" (Dylan 15 July 2010), most, however, reserved their ire for their name. A large number of interviewees raised this, but I have selected Phil's quote for illustration and succinctness.

> *Boomtown fucking Rats, I don't think so. Do you know what Boomtown meant?*
>
> *Interviewer: yeah Belfast*
>
> *Right, exactly, it was Belfast, cause of the all fucking bombs, you know [shouts] Boom, Boomtown and they took it as their name! Trying to claim the troubles as their own when it barely affected them. Hated them. Just using the name, it's like trying to say we are a part of you, we suffer alongside you, we are part of your community. No you're fucking not mate, piss right off.* (Phil 27July 2011)

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[36] O'Neil & Trelford, 2003, p217.

[37] Ibid p230

[38] There 1987 single 'Big Decision' (Polydor Records) contained text on the back sleeve decrying the use of plastic bullets by the RUC and the army, it does not fully acknowledge that they are the alternative to live rounds.

[39] http://starling.rinet.ru/music/temp/boomtownrats.html (last accessed 02.01.14) In the interests of balance this is a link to an extended interview with Bob Geldof in which he discusses his music in relation to the early punk scenes. http://www.amen.ie/articles/geldof.pdf

There is a duality to the Northern Irish punk community, which arises from its very nature as an imagined community within a society struggling over the issue of nationalism.[40] The dual nature is that it is open to all as befits the diy ethos, and yet it judges those who join and erects barriers to those it deems unsuitable or undesirable. In their attempt to create the community they want or need, they often present a closed or rigid appearance and boundary to those who are not a part of their imagined community. In other words, it was an evolving, mutating lived experience intertwined with a lived idea that continues to develop and engage new people whose experience of Northern Ireland will hopefully be very different from that of those featured in this chapter, and thus they will become responsible for a new punk community, which I look forward to seeing.

Concluding comments

The purpose of this chapter has not been to go through the bands that form, or formed, the Northern Irish punk scene, that has already been done expertly before by Glasper, O'Neil and Trelford. Indeed there are a number of websites continuing to fulfil this role such as http://nipunk.weebly.com/ and http://www.spitrecords.co.uk/bands.htm. Equally there are any number of personal and band based blogs one could turn to. Instead this chapter focused on demonstrating that within a fractured and unstable society at war with itself, punk was used as a means of bringing people together, enabling them to build up a community that was not based on division per se. However it was also important to acknowledge the division within the punk community, to realise its successes and its failure as no community is entirely one or the other.

Punks in Northern Ireland were the outsiders in many ways that punk on the mainland did not have to be, and could not conceive of being. They did not maintain the same divisions, the same entrenched partisan politics and ideologies as their parents, their communities and those in authority. Instead they willing wore the mantle of 'the other' in the hope of creating something new. It was not a great success, but sometimes a small step on the road can result in something unexpected and as I hope this chapter has demonstrated a great deal of fun can be had along the way.

> *And I'm running at the edge of their world*
> *They're criticising something they just can't understand*
> *Living on the edge of their town*

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[40] There is a further, and more involved issue of nationalism in relation to Irish identity that has not been dealt with in this chapter as it is too involved a topic and should be engaged with on its own merits and discussions elsewhere. This is the problems created by The Pogues lyrics for those who lived outside of Ireland (typically England or America) but considered themselves Irish through their ancestral links and looked to understand the conflict through that lens. The Pogues presented a very specific form of Irish nationalism and republicanism that was often misunderstood or misinterpreted or deliberately left vague by the songwriters, but often those listening did not even realise that Ireland and Northern Ireland are two different countries. Consequently they (the listeners) had little impact on the Northern Irish punk scene so I choose not to engage with that issue in this chapter.

And I won't be shot down.[41]

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[41] Stiff Little Fingers, *At The Edge, 1980,* No-body's Hero, Chrysalis Records