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# Transnational Punk: The Growing Push for Global Change Through a Music-Based Subculture

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## Abstract

*Little media attention has been devoted to the burgeoning punk scene that has raised alarm abroad in areas such as Banda Aceh, Indonesia and Moscow, Russia. While the punk subculture has been analyzed in-depth by such notable theorists as Dick Hebdige and Stuart Hall, their work has been limited to examining the rise and apparent decline of the subculture in England, rendering any further investigations into punk as looking back at a nostalgic novelty of post-World War II British milieu. Furthermore, the commodification of punk music and style has relegated punk to the realm of an alternative culture in Britain and locally in the U.S. In these current international incarnations, however, a social space for this alternative culture is threatened by severe punishment including what Indonesian police officials have label “moral rehabilitation” and, in the case of Russian punks, imprisonment. Punk today is once more—or, for the first time, truly becoming—an oppositional culture as described by Raymond Williams, rather than a non-threatening alternative. The international punk scene has become deeply connected to other punks through the internet, creating a growing global community. Through musical and stylistic culture, punk offers its members much more: a voice that questions established values, that screams for change. In these nations where punks have little agency in political and social matters, a guitar and a microphone offer a means of speaking. The communal aspect of punk creates an arena for those involved to foster a culture of dialogue and dissent.*

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## From Subculture to Pop Culture

*Punk is Dead.*

In 1978, the anarchist punk band Crass released their debut album entitled *The Feeding of the 5000*. A standout track from the record was the song “Punk is Dead,” a scathing critique of the punk subculture a mere year after its explosion in the mainstream media, facilitated by the acrid antics and music of The Sex Pistols. Anticipating what would be the conclusion of Dick Hebdige’s seminal text, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, published one year later, the final verse of the song states:

I see the velvet zippies in their bondage gear,  
the social elite with safety-pins in their ear.  
I watch and understand that it don't mean a thing.  
The scorpions might attack, but the systems stole the sting ("Punk is Dead" 1978).

Ending the song is the repeated chant of "Punk is dead," by lead vocalist Steve Ignorant (real name Steve Williams) who is joined by the other members of the group until the last the strained utterance of the word "dead" that is sustained for several seconds before the song abruptly ends. Crass's anarchistic punk project was deeply rooted "direct action" by spray-painting stenciled graffiti messages around the London Underground system and on advertising billboards, coordinating squats, and organizing political action (Glasper, 25). Yet the band also viewed the punk movement as something that had a limited lifespan. From the outset, the band insisted that they would disband in 1984, the Orwellian overtones of government control and surveillance associated with that year no doubt playing into their choice. The catalog numbers for each release on their record label, Crass Records, attested to this certainty: the number being composed of the number of years to 1984 in the format of X21984, X amount of years to 1984. Indeed, the group disbanded in that very year, leaving behind an influential view of punk that was political and active. Still, punk became absorbed by the mainstream media and commodities market, as Dick Hebdige has noted:

Each subculture moves through a cycle of resistance and de-fusion and we have seen how this cycle is situated within the larger cultural and commercial matrices. Subcultural deviance is simultaneously rendered "explicable" and meaningless in the classrooms, courts and media at the same time as the "secret" objects of subcultural style are put on display in every high street record shop and chain-store boutique. Stripped of its unwholesome connotations, the style becomes fit for public consumption (*Subculture*, 130).

For Hebdige, Punk was unable to become a persistent subculture the moment it was rendered acceptable by the mainstream media and capitalist industry. Thus any examination of the idea of a punk subculture beyond England in 1979 must then study punk as a phenomenon that did not define itself and its resistance through this oblique style. As a result, punk has become seen as another merely another "alternative" group for youth to find a sort of acceptance that is easily accessible and mildly annoying to parents, but will eventually become eschewed as they "grow up." This image of punk has become the dominant one in many mainstream images of the scene in popular television and movies, such as the short-lived sitcom "That 80s Show" and the motion picture "SLC Punk." The latter's ending boldly proclaiming the place that punk typically holds for many youths: it is just an outlet for teenage rebellion that is aimless. The protagonist in the film, Steve-O, follows the typical bildungsroman associated with punks, eventually becoming a Harvard-educated lawyer, admitting at the film's conclusion: "I guess when all was said and done, I was nothing more than a God-damned, trendy-ass poser" (SLC Punk, 1998). The Sex Pistols' John Lydon—better known as Johnny Rotten—once the emblem of a subversive movement, now advertises Country Life butter in Britain (NME, 2010); the band Green Day, who has been equally embraced and repudiated by many fans of punk music, has produced a successful Broadway musical, "American Idiot." Thus, it seems the teleological end of punk music and its subsequent cultural manifestation was not some ultimate change in social or

political change—or even a lasting cultural change, since the aesthetic and sartorial aspect of punk would simply become commodified and thus rendered harmless. However, punk music and the development of an punk ethos or ideology still continued to grow in a less spectacular form in underground and independent music scenes throughout the world.

### *Punk is Everywhere.*

Craig O'Hara, guitarist for the early 1990s punk band Filth from Berkley, California, described the legacy of the punk subculture as having one goal: punk is a way to “express rage in an original way...not only by looking and sounding different...but by questioning prevailing modes of thought” (*The Philosophy of Punk* 27-28). Here, there is a challenge to the pessimistic view of punk's potential by earlier critics like Hebdige and Stuart Hall, who saw punk merely in terms of semiotic disruption and noise of already existent in the cultural and social milieu of a post-WWII welfare state. The fact that punk music still continues on, though lacking the cultural valence and social cache it had in late 1970s Britain, reflects something deeper within the punk project. It is no longer just stylistic or musical rebellion, but creates a community dedicated to the cause of questioning prevailing modes of thought. It would be difficult to say that punk itself is a method or system for possible social change or challenge to oppression, but it serves as a catalyst for the creation of a consciousness and identity based around music that champions not only questioning the dominant system or ideology, but also questioning one's own place within this context. Following Guy DeBord's definition of spectacle in *Society of the Spectacle* as “something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible” (Thesis 12), punk seeks to challenge the spectacle as something elevated above the common everyday individual. Traditionally, the spectacle results in the Marxist sense of alienation of the working class from the modes of production: the performer on stage would be elevated from the audience, dictating the content and boundaries of the spectacle performance (Marcus 98-99). Punk did not continue this idea of the spectacle as something positive and inaccessible. It negated all values of the dominant culture and attempted to destroy the boundaries between performer and audience by speaking in this common language of disaffectedness and nihilism. Punk becomes a collective utterance of resistance that continues its existence through the active participation of its members by creating the music, circulating the music which results in the circulation of new ideas and new thoughts that the members of the punk community may have not previously had access.

### **We're Coming Back For You: New Scenes of Resistance.**

In the past few years, after a sort of hibernation period of punk in the mainstream media, there have been recent incidents in which members of the punk subculture have caused disruption and outcry across the globe. The stories concerned take in place in Indonesia, Russia and Iraq—thousands of miles and four decades after the “summer of '77” that introduced punk rock to mainstream culture. The people who pursue punk within these nations are subject to political and social circumstances that have lead to severe forms of oppression: imprisonment, what one regime calls “moral rehabilitation” and in some cases death. Whereas in the U.S. and Britain, punk has been simply relegated to being another form of subculture that has been incorporated into the dominant hegemonic order and repackaged as a sometimes annoying but essentially harmless alternative lifestyle, within these countries, punk has become an indelible marker of one's identity that marks one as part of a larger social group that poses a threat to the

established mode of society. Indeed, punk has once again (or perhaps, for the first time) an emergent, oppositional culture that was initially described by Raymond Williams. For Williams, the emergent culture brings with it “new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences” that are “continually being created” (41). A further distinction is to be found within these emergent cultures, namely, that they can either be alternative or oppositional. The alternative culture is the dominant view of punk comes to mind in the U.S.: the punk as an individual who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone. These recent events, however, reveal punk as being perceived as an oppositional subculture in that seeks for “a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light” (Williams 42). Furthermore, there is a distinctiveness associated with the new instances of punk seen in these areas of Asia and the near East. The dominant views of subcultures that were used to explain the rise of groups like punk were believed to all derive from a working-class parent culture (Hall et. al. 13). It invariably holds some things in common with its parent culture, not to be confused with the dominant culture. They therefore coexist within the parent culture. For those schooled in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), such as Hall and Hebdige, punk fit into this subcultural mode. Yet this view of the punk subculture no longer holds weight within these emerging instances that have evolved in a completely different milieu from which punk originally sprang. By first examining these new subcultural formations, punk’s relevance as a mechanism for expression and change can be unearthed, revitalizing the relevance of something that has been cast aside as nothing more than just noise.

#### *Anarchy in Aceh: Punks in Indonesia.*

This new thrust of punk into cultural relevance began on December 10, 2011, when a punk rock concert was scheduled to take place in Taman Bundaya park in Aceh, Indonesia, a province of that country that has its own police force pledged to maintain Muslim sharia law. Sharia, meaning "path" in Arabic, guides all aspects of Muslim life including daily routines, familial and religious obligations, and financial dealings (Johnson and Vriens, 2011). That is, it is more than a legal system but a moral code used to guide a structure of living for devout Muslim life. Upon arriving early to the concert, sixty-four of the attendees—who had travelled from all over the country—were arrested, and taken to a nearby detention center, eventually being later transported to a "remedial school" thirty-seven miles away. The concert was never performed, it being cancelled at the behest of deputy mayor Illiza Sa’aduddin Djamal on the premise that the organizers had “fooled the authorities into granting them a permit to hold the event” (Hasan, 2011). The revocation of the permit was based on Djamal’s claim that the concert was supposed to be a benefit for orphanages but that the punks had falsified this claim, though no proof was produced to support the idea of deception on the part of the punks. Djamal commented on the issue, saying: “The concert would have been an abomination to Islamic teaching, and they also committed a permit violation...this [punk] group threatens [Islamic] faith and deviates very widely from Islamic teachings, which is why we had to break up the concert” (Hasan, 2011). According to Fathun Karib, founder of Locos Indonesia, punk group promoting youth culture empowerment, the rise of punk in Indonesia follows a period opposition to the Suharto regime—which fell in 1998. That is not to say that the exposure to the music was completely absent from the nation until that period, but this is when the music began to crystallize around economic and political foundations (Kalim et. al., 2012). During the final years of the Suharto regime on its last legs punks tended to be left alone as most of the rebellion against the regime came in the form of

student movements of resistance, making concerns with punk negligible (Harris, 2012). Yet, with the rise of international interaction through internet media, punk began to proliferate within Indonesia. Concurrently, a peace deal came about by separatists of the Free Aceh Movement, known as Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), who sought to independence for the Aceh province from the Indonesian nation. Although there has continued to be some tensions between remnants of the Gam and the Indonesian state, the province has been granted free elections and relative autonomy (BBC, 2005). Without the elevated conflict between rebels and government, focus has turned towards punks as dissidents within the province. Karib has noted that “now the punks have access to international networks, so the issue became bigger than the local politicians expected” (Harris, 2012). While in the “rehabilitation camp,” the punks’ mohawks were forcibly removed, their punk clothing confiscated and they were subjected to being plunged into what Inspector General Iskandar Hasan called “washing pools” (*The Jakarta Globe*, 2011). Another police spokesperson commented that the group was being held so that they could “undergo a re-education, so their morals will match those of other Acehnese people” (Harris, 2012).

Behind these oppressive acts lies questions of the “proper” and “true” way to live within this province highly committed to Muslim law. The exertion of power over the Banda Aceh punks in the name of “truth” recalls Foucault’s views on the relationship between truth and power. “Truth,” Foucault stated, “is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A ‘regime’ of truth” (74). The punks, whose dress and music posed a possible alternative to this truth, due to the nature of sharia law, cannot possibly be incorporated or codified by it. Producing social practices and identifying markers that resist absorption by the dominant hegemony, thus the hegemonic order of Banda Aceh itself has to transform this alternative subculture—which threatened to reveal an aporia of the complete, unquestionable truth of sharia law—into an oppositional subculture as described by Raymond Williams. It is unsurprising, then given Foucault’s view of the power/truth/knowledge axiom, that in the case of Banda Aceh the mechanism for controlling the emerging group of punks is to focus on the body. Rather than simply decrying punks as immoral blasphemers, fostering a moral panic by showing how vastly different and deviant punks are, as was the case in Britain, according to Hebdige, the police force there enforced their so-called “moral re-education” that also involved a changing of the body. By the shaving of heads, the physical removal of clothing and of forced submersion in a pool of water, there is clearly the exercise of a “policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviors” (Foucault 182). The punk subculture’s expression and identity is clearly very centered in bodily presentation and interaction. Style comes immediately to mind when speaking of a punk body: the mohawk, bondage pants and so forth. The removal of these articles vastly reduces the immediate image and connection to the subculture, reducing the individual to be immediately associated with the dominant group through a stylistic transformation that presents them as part of that group. Susan Bordo has called the body a “medium of culture” onto which “the central rules, hierarchies and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced” (165). The punk body then becomes a rejection of these hierarchies and rules, as its presentation is of a different possibility of conceiving the body. The body becomes the site of subcultural practice that the hegemonic order must turn into a Foucauldian docile body so that order and power are maintained.

The interactions of bodies is also of crucial importance examining the crackdown on punks in Indonesia. The arrests, or “detainments,” of these punks began with the cancellation of a concert, an important activity within the punk community. Greil Marcus’ study of the rise of

punk in Britain placed the impetus of punk as being the transformation of the spectacle, disrupting the divide between the performer and audience to lift the veil of ideology (98-99). Wendy Fonarow has also examined the concert as a crucial aspect of punk subcultural, especially in how space and spatial organization affect the interaction between people and bodies at a concert. The independent music concert, especially punk shows, “present rather uncommon bodily conditions for social interaction...intimate physical contact with strangers” (Fonarow, 362). The participants in these events, in the wake of continuous physical interaction, are enthusiastically supportive rather than being uncooperative. Punk concerts then become a space for the gathering of many people from different places, backgrounds and ideas who are joined together through this physical interaction of concert-going, whether the contact is through dancing or “moshing” purposefully or simply being present in the physical space of other people. Žižek, following Lacan, refers to this unification of these free-floating, open identities that exist in space as the *point de capiton*, or the “quilting-point.” This point stops meaning from sliding about inside the ideological space, anchoring it in order to create identity. The ideological field then transforms an abstract, arbitrary concept into something which has a concrete existence. It creates boundaries that also allow for any variation of the whole without undermining the structure of the whole (Žižek, 95-97). The punk rock concert can then act as the “quilting-point” of a punk identity that become unified and expresses itself concretely through the bodily action of the performer and audience. As has been noted in Griel Marcus’ work, for the punk subculture, being a part of the audience is as much an involvement in the production of a performance as the band, since this division between actor and observer is obliterated in the punk performance. The Banda Aceh sharia police force’s attempts at rehabilitation obviously seek to overturn these effects, initially by preventing the concert to even occur then by their substitution of a “ritual cleansing” of the punks which has required them to bow themselves once again before sharia law. Law and power have then been lifted above those who must observe it, rebuilding the divide that punk has sought to sever.

These actions of the Banda Aceh government have not gone unnoticed in the wider punk community. Although not receiving any significant mass media attention on television, these actions caused a strong stir of anger within the punk community. In response, many London punks staged a solidarity protest outside of the Indonesian embassy; another similar march took place at the Indonesian Consulate in San Francisco. These events were organized around connections with punks through internet sites such as Facebook, organizing the punk collective through social media. Moreover, to help financially support the punk scene, the website PUNK AID was established ([www.punkaid.org](http://www.punkaid.org)) where fellow punks can donate, purchase a benefit compilation consisting of bands from across the globe, expressing their support for the oppression and abuse of the rights of the Banda Aceh punks. Sites and events such as these reflect the decline of the insularity that punk has traditionally harbored, especially with the notion of local “scenes” that punks bands once were associated with and embraced. Being a punk from southern California versus a punk from Boston or London each had their own specific attributes: different takes on the punk musical style, different sartorial styles, and many times different political or social views. The spread of punk into nations besides the hotbeds of the U.S. or England is nothing new, but the transnational support and affiliation between these groups is something which is a recent phenomenon resulting from easier connection to other punks through message boards, accessibility to music from bands that may have never been heard in other nations without its easy accessibility online.

*Weapons of Mass Oppression: Violence in Iraq.*

Regulation of the punk body is seen in more extreme form in recent reports from Iraq concerning the murder by stoning of nearly eighty punk, emo and gay youth since February. In these violent instances, the attacks have been focused on homosexual men and kids who dress “emo.” The term emo—a shortened form of the original term, emotional hardcore—has its roots in the Washington D.C. hardcore punk scene of the early 1980s. Springing forth as a reaction against the violence within that particular scene, emo embraced a focus on the individual and personal politics and sought to break the rigid boundaries that had come to encompass hardcore punk to foster emotional expression and foster an expansion of creativity in the musically and lyrically stagnant punk scene (Greenwald, 12-14). More recently, it has become more associated with a stylistic subculture that usually includes tight jeans, dyed hair with long bangs and band t-shirts, adopting some of the influence of the punk sartorial mode. The targets have nearly all been male; a chilling warning publicly announced to any others who are gay or dress in emo garb: “We warn in the strongest terms to every male and female debauchee. If you do not stop this dirty act within four days, then the punishment of God will fall on you at the hands of Mujahideen” (Jakes, 2012). Furthermore, many of those killed have had their bodies dismembered or burned alive (Zurutuza, 2012). What is crucial in these instances has been the conflation between punk or emo subculture and homosexuality. Despite further pushes in Iraq for human rights and freedom of expression, a crucial crossroads occurs in the nation as Ashwaq Jaf, a senator for the Kurdish Alliance, stated: “The heart of the problem...is that we have two penal codes: the Iraqi Constitution, but also sharia law. Contradictions between the two often lead to ambiguous and dangerous legal vacuums” (Zurutuza, 2012).

Being homosexual is against sharia law, which is in effect in Iraq. By presenting this subculture as an inherently homosexual and, in the eyes of sharia law, immoral one, a new relationship between the subculture and parent culture is opened up. For Stuart Hall, the subculture was able to exist within its parent culture because it shared some of the same values as that parent culture, but rejected that culture so as to reshape or reform its past or legacy. Therefore any instance of apparent protest or resistance between the two groups did not lead to any significant social or structural changes. However, by situating the punk/emo/goth subcultures of Iraq as an inherently queer subculture, this coexistence becomes rendered impossible, since it does not appear to share, at least to the parent and dominant cultures, any views or values of the older generation. Rather than a sort of oedipal relationship that seeks to fight the parent culture but ultimately shares its views, a queer subculture is “not located in any easy relation to the parent culture” (Halberstam, 160). A subculture that already appears alien or other within the dominant and parent cultures is rendered even more extremely different when it is (or is associated with) a queer subculture. With this connection between these subcultural groups being drawn, the body’s potential for subversion or expression then becomes a reiteration of the dominant power (Bordo, 167). By dressing as a punk or as an emo youth, seen as an expression of control over individuality becomes a social marker for an illusory deviance or abnormality which, in the case of Iraq, leads some members of that nation to see its destruction as the only way to maintain the dominant order. If the body cannot be rendered docile, it must be destroyed and this act is being passed along to others so that they are left with the choice to surrender their body to control or risk lives. The body becomes not a vehicle for performance but

a living discourse that can be burned if it threatens the dominant discourse, much like book burnings seen in some repressive states.

In these instances where punk is seen as a threat to the order, especially one founded on religious principles and laws, punk's potential power and appeal becomes something which becomes realized in different locales. As Frank Cartledge's article on the punk's initial emergence, "Distress to Impress?" argues, urban environments that produced punk divorced it from any threat. Therefore, places such as London, New York and other hotbeds of the emergence of punk scenes, the cosmopolitanism of these areas "act as a buffer against violent conformism in a way impossible in the provinces" (171). Thus being a punk in London was not as subversive as being a punk in a small town where traditions and values were more deeply rooted. Indeed, within these locales, the subjugation is not merely of a culture and subculture, but the active violence and oppression seeks to turn punk from subculture to a subaltern. On subalternity, Spivak argued that, "The assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization" (295). While Spivak's view of the subaltern was itself centered on the specific victims of the widow-burning phenomenon in India, her notion of the suppression of one's voice or subjectivity, especially in culture's that seek to retain dominance over small social groups that hold little political or cultural currency, is relevant in these instances of oppression of punks. With these groups, the violence is not only epistemic but also physical. Moreover, the dominant codes are not only political or economical but also religious in nature, religion being an important epistemological tool of these regions. Outward signs of identity, however, require more than manipulation of the language of knowledge; bodily violence and force is required to silence them. The denial of a sartorial semiotics to express ideas hinders the punks. They also cannot speak since their identification does not allow them access to the linguistic and religious discourse which allows the dominant power to exert itself over them. By turning to international connections through the internet's worldwide integration and communication, a new ideology and community can be established which does not need to rely on dominant discourse or clothing to pass along the punk subculture's message and subversion.

### *Rocket to Russia: Pussy Riot and Direct Action*

The most explicit instance of direct punk rebellion—and the one which has gathered the most coverage by the U.S. and other European media—is the Russian all-female punk band called Pussy Riot. The coverage and scrutiny comes from the direct action of three of its members who were arrested in February after they took over the pulpit in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral to recite a "punk prayer" written in opposition to Vladimir Putin. The group cried out in unison, "Black cassock, golden epaulettes; all believers crawl and prostrate" and chanted repeatedly, "Mother of God, Blessed Virgin, drive out Putin!" (Parfitt 2012). Subsequently, these members of the collective were sentenced to two years in a prison colony after being found guilty of "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" (Elder 2012). This recent act, too, has added to the revitalization of punk as a subversive, oppositional form. Whereas the events of Indonesia have shown an oppression of a punk subculture that did not engage in any real direct rebellion or attack on authority, Pussy Riot's project is explicitly political and active. The fears of the dominant Indonesian culture that suppressed the punks reached its manifestation by the actions of Pussy Riot. Members of the group perform in identity-concealing balaclavas while the

band itself has a free-floating membership that can number up to 15 people to create “a pulsating and growing body,” according to band member Garadzha Matveyeva (Harris, 2012). The group has built its foundation on the Riot Grrrl movement, a feminist vision of the punk subculture beginning in the early 1990’s that incorporated music, art and political activism expressing the frustration and experience of being a young woman in a patriarchal society (Jackson, 261). On the influence of Riot Grrrl ethos on Pussy Riot, Matveyeva remarked that:

We [Pussy Riot] somehow developed what [those groups] did in the 1990s, although in an absolutely different context and with an exaggerated political stance which leads to all of our performances being illegal...we'll never give a gig in a club or in any special musical space. That's an important principle for us (Harris, 2012).

Key to Matveyeva’s remark is the idea of progression of the punk subculture. The band’s views and tactics are indebted to a historical moment in the history of punk while its applicability transcends its contextual and historical moment. Also crucial is the location of content of the act that resulted in arrest. Their “punk prayer” is in a sense really a prayer in that we see an invocation a spiritual entity to help those who are suffering. Yet, their prayer was not executed in the bodily position of kneeling or prostration but at the altar of a Russian Orthodox church, an area usually reserved for the priest. By taking over this space in the church but not occupying the position in the church hierarchy to do so, the audience (worshippers) then becomes the performer (priest). Their beckoning was not to God but to Mary, a feminine symbol, not for strength to endure the pain or subjection that Christian prayer usually entails but for a forceful action of driving Putin out. They speak through the medium of religious worship, much like punk has spoken through the words of music. Utterances that subvert norms then are in part bodily and in part performative. Whereas performance may not be subversive in some locales, it is at the heart of rebellion in those nations where punk is being oppressed. Location and context then allows punk, as just kids dressing up in Western culture, to become something empowering and subversive in nations that do not have a long punk history that has been usurped and rebranded as fashion or merely entertainment. Yet, the acceptability of punk in the U.S., Britain and other nations has acted as a useful means of support for the group, especially given the dubiousness of their trial and sentence. Another member of the group, Nadezhda “Nadya” Tolokonnikova, in a prison interview saw the importance of punks in these culturally and economically nations: “The amount of Western support that we got is a miracle. I believe that if Russia had independent national media, our performance would be better understood at home as well. Right now we're in hell here” (Idov, 2012). Here, the connection of punks across the globe shows its importance, especially with the rise of internet connectivity and accessibility to news from across the globe. This performance does not need to rely on the clothing worn or the venue: it must become an open form of identity that allows for a performance of a wide array of actions and productions which challenge the dominant codes.

Another central issue in the case of Pussy Riot is punk and gender, specifically since punk music has a common association with males and masculinity, especially within the U.S. with the development of the very violent and angst-filled “hardcore” punk scene that found its nexus in the Washington D.C. area of the early 1980s. Lauraine Leblanc’s central text on punk and feminism, *Pretty in Punk*, helped to develop a growing investigation on the relationship between gender and punk. For women, Leblanc argues, the construction of identity and affiliation to punk is not simply relegated to style; “to gain acceptance in the group, they must

learn, espouse, and exhibit punk beliefs, attitudes, and ‘mentality’” (220). Yet, entering into punk subculture, for Leblanc, forces women distance themselves from other females, adopting a punk identity to construct femininity they can inhabit. Punk creates a space for those females who chose to identify it, but can be an isolating act, creating an individualized sense of resistance rather than a collective one that puts a woman in the larger context of a punk culture or identity (Leblanc 148). Given the place of women in Russian society, where the Gunda Werner Institute for Feminism and Democracy states that “To this day, the scope for free choice of occupation or type of work is still restricted for women in the Russia Federation” (2012), the importance of the a female punk group being the progenitors of a resistance movement in the nation speaks to the place of punk in creating a sense of agency and subjectivity. Through their actions, Pussy Riot have at once gained an important step in establishing a new voice for the women’s struggle in Russia while also revitalizing the activism of the punk subculture, moving it away from strictly being based on simple musical performance, while at the same time re-establishing the goals of the early activist punk bands who did not rely solely on music as a mechanism for initiating the change they desired.

### **The Shape of Punk to Come: Resist to Exist.**

Stacy Thompson’s *Punk Productions* has argued for punk itself to be a field of contradiction between aesthetics and economics where the ultimate goal of the subculture is the push for change. Specifically, for Thompson, it is a change of the capitalistic mode of production which will lead to a change in culture and dominant ideology (2). The do-it-yourself culture of punk that developed as young people attempted to insulate themselves from the culture industry and consumer lifestyles in their search for expressive sincerity and anti-commercial purity transformed media and consumer identities into independent networks of cultural production that allowed spectators to become participants, and created a space for public debate and dissent. (Moore 323) In the contradictory space of consumer and producer, aesthetics and economics, punk then can function as the active “man-in-mass” that Gramsci has described. This person, as Gramsci argued, caught between two hegemonic forces. Here punk and the dominant hegemony and a sense of contradiction between these two can lead one to passivity, but creating such a struggle as to allow one to reach a point of a political consciousness where theory and practice can become one (333). Thompson’s conception of a “punk commodity” that is a “good” commodity nonetheless renders it part of the hegemonic economic mode of production. Thompson sees punk as a contradiction that can be resolved through theory but in practice it ends up replicating the contradiction no matter how one looks at it. The contradiction can be useful as Gramsci has shown: “Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political “hegemonies” and of opposing directions” (333). That is to say, the contradictions seen in punk since its inception, between aesthetic subversion and political subversion, performative and authentic identity needs to be embraced and pushed through to its logical conclusion: a punk hegemony. By trying to specifically locate punk in a specific socio-historical context, it becomes stagnant. This is not the case, as the proliferation of punk worldwide is evident through these examples of oppressive measures and actions taken to quell it. The Indonesian punks, the emo kids in Iraq and Pussy Riot all represent different punk ideologies and views but none of them veers drastically from an overall hegemonic view of what punk is: a challenge to the domination and oppression.

Indeed, as Kristiansen et.al. have argued in *Screaming for Change*, punk must no longer be analyzed as style or music, rather it must be approached as an ideology, what they call a “unifying philosophy of deviance” that allows that is, punk as a mechanism that allows for one to engage in dissent: to listen to what they want, wear what they want, and state their dissatisfaction with the status quo (144-147). I wish to take it further and stress that punk ideology is not enough: a punk hegemony that functions as a counter-hegemony to the “spontaneous,” passive consent that Antonio Gramsci articulated as the function of hegemony to maintain the status quo and class relations (12-13). A punk ideology allows the individual a sense of their individual power through a collective affiliation and action; hegemony allows for the accommodation of many different ideologies without disrupting the overall structure of ideas that define and designate the hegemonic group. Furthermore, hegemony is in constant flux and subject to adopting new practices, as Raymond Williams has argued. The key to a punk hegemony is to embrace contradictions within the ideology and to shift the hegemony based on the consent of those within the subculture. Thus, with the increased connection between punks through the internet and the adoption of a hegemonic punk view, the subculture can then function much like the conception of an imagined community espoused by Benedict Anderson, embracing and promoting the notion of a horizontal comradeship within that community as a real possibility rather than merely an illusory ideal (7). Moreover, this would be a community that is not limited by national boundaries which dictate its shape and existence; it would be a fluid, dynamic community which connects those who are disillusioned by the state of the globalized world. There need not be simply the local communities of gathered around specific punk scenes or nations, but bring together all punks from varying cultures, nations, genders and economic situations. Hebdige argued that signs and rhythms conveyed through music allowed for forging of affective alliances, creating a “diasporan” identity amongst the African-American urban dispossessed. This identity transcended geographical distances and localisms creating a congregation of peoples around this identity that builds community as well as providing support for particular and local struggles for the members of this group (*Hiding in the Light*, 214-215). Although there is not a diaspora component to the international network of the punk subculture, there is still a connection of people who face struggle that have formed this affective alliance through the sartorial signs and musical rhythms of punk. With this connection, deeper ideological constructs can be developed that allows for carry over of punk ideals from one geographic location to another while an internationally based community can lend support as the world in more interconnected. Furthermore, typical views of authenticity that plague punk, trying to construct a strict view of punk, whether in the sound of the music, type of clothing etc. Adorno has remarked how speaking of authenticity leads to views that are “just as standardized as the world that it officially negates” (6). When the question of authenticity is no longer rendered necessary, the political dimension of the subculture can be realized, just as Walter Benjamin argued considering authenticity and art (1056). A punk hegemony allows typical analyses of punk as simple British/American youth subcultures to be expanded into an international network, not defined by age or authenticity as far as style. Therefore, it remains relevant as the negation of dominion and oppression without constricting punk to set, specific concepts, expanding its revolutionary potential. As Indonesia, Iraq and Russia experience a proliferation of the subversiveness inherent in punk, perhaps this will reanimate its antagonistic core in this country, rescuing punk from the doldrums of alternative subculture to an oppositional culture founded on more than just music: social and political change for those who have no power. With this view, perhaps this subculture will be able to not only speak but shout. Crass

were obviously wrong: Punk is not dead, but constantly evolving. A punk ethos or ideology surpasses simply the music or style: it becomes a powerful new tool that allows people under repressive government regimes to find a voice, to scream out their oppression. Before, punks were simply just a bunch of kids rebelling against their parents' culture which they would eventually emulate. Now, with the incidents in Banda Aceh, Iraq and Moscow, the punk subculture is a tool for catalyzing revolution and rebellion in a fashion that is quite new and unique in these parts of the globe. With them, there is a need for a complete reversal of domination and ideological repression and the establishment of a culture that will not accept what is given but question these injustices and, moreover, push for a direct action that seeks to cause real world change. Pussy Riot sums up the movement of agency and subjectivity ushered in by the revitalization of punk in their song "Putin Got Scared" where the simple phrase "We Exist!" reveals the importance of taking punk seriously as a tool for mobilization and social change ([www.freepussyriot.org](http://www.freepussyriot.org)).

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