

OUT OF THE BOX: PUNK AND THE CONCEPT OF 'COMMUNITY' IN IRELAND

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'Tell you another thing I hate, that word "communities". Whenever anybody in Northern Ireland says "community", what they're really saying is "side"' (Good Vibrations, 2012).

The concept of community has played and still plays an important role in the study of the Irish culture. In this article, I will first trace and question the use of this concept and the meanings given to it. I will do this specifically from an anthropological perspective. Secondly, I will illustrate the need to critically examine this concept through analyzing the experiences of people involved in the punk scene in Northern Ireland.

The following ethnography, undertaken during four months of the year 2014, draws on the claim made by some scholars about the necessity for a 'sceptical investigation' of the concept of community (Amit and Rapport 2002: 14). It will extend that criticism to what has been called the 'two communities' model that has been predominant in the analysis of Northern Irish society. By exploring the development of a punk scene in Belfast, I aim to challenge the assumptions made by some scholars about the homogeneity within a community, the unquestioned belonging of its members, the concept of community as a safe place, and the dualistic view of a society where people supposedly confront the 'other' group. I will also explore the particularities of the punk rock scene in Northern Ireland as a meeting space, and the contradictions and diversity within it. From the 1970s, punks called for the right to be 'out of the box', rejecting that identity model which 'pressurizes individuals to conform to a particular group culture' (Nic Craith 2002: 180). In carrying out this ethnography, I interviewed three people¹ (whose names have been anonymized) connected to the punk scene in Belfast, each one from a different generation: Bernie, who has been involved from the late 1970s; David, who joined punk and metal bands in the 1990s; and Martin, a younger member currently committed to the running of The Centre - a place where punk and non-punk people meet for concerts and other activities. In addition, participant observation was undertaken while volunteering in The Centre. Videos and documentaries made in the last thirty years about punk in Belfast have been used as supporting

¹ Unfortunately, I was not able to interview any woman during the time of my fieldwork. Although fewer in number than men, women have been present in the punk scene in Northern Ireland. Some of their voices are part of the videos analysed in this article. The intersection of gender with the challenges posed by the punk scene in this society remains an underexamined area of study.

documents.

‘Community’ as a questioned study method

The anthropological approach to the concept of community in Ireland finds its roots in the classic work of Arensberg and Kimball, who conducted field research on the western coast of Ireland in the 1930s. Their work established the ‘community’ as a study method, a ‘sample or unit of observation for the study of a culture or society’ (Arensberg 1961: 241), the locus where the culture is performed. In their first study, they looked for a representative community in rural Ireland, and examined kinship and social structure using the theoretical model of structural-functionalism (Wilson and Donnan 2006: 17-19). Their book *Family and Community in Ireland*, first published in 1968, was the main reference point for ethnographies carried out in Ireland up to the 1980s and remains a starting point for some researchers (e.g. Byrne and O’Mahony 2012; idem. 2013; French 2013). Thus, Arensberg and Kimball’s method influenced ethnographies throughout the island of Ireland.

During the 1970s and 1980s in Northern Ireland, anthropologists studied rural ‘communities’ with the same atemporal approach of the early structural-functionalist studies, but their work incorporated an analysis of the division of Northern Irish society (Wilson and Donnan 2006: 27-29). In those years, the division was exacerbated by what has been known as ‘the Troubles’, which refers to the armed conflict starting in 1969 when widespread political violence began (Bryan 2003: 251-252)². In the ethnographies of Harris (1972), Leyton (1974), Larsen (1982), Buckley (1982) and Bufwak (1982), the ‘community’ is divided in two units of analysis - two groups of the ‘same house’ (as the title of Larsen’s 1982 study suggests) - to attempt to understand the levels of tolerance and hostility between them. This approach to the society is dichotomized in what has been labelled as the ‘tribal conflict’ or ‘two communities’ model. Here, analysis is based on two ‘disputing clans’, which correspond with two populations identified by religion, ethnicity, national identities and political ideologies: Protestant, British, unionist and loyalist, on the one hand, and Catholic, Irish, nationalist and republican, on the other (Wilson and Donnan 2006: 27-30).

The critique towards the community-based model in the Republic and the analysis of the ‘two communities’ in Northern Ireland has addressed similar elements: the generalization, the lack of history, and the lack of diversity. If Arensberg and Kimball tried to find a representative community

² From that year until the signature of the peace agreement in 1998, 3,488 people were killed (calculation based on the Sutton database –Sutton 2002-) and 42,304 people injured (calculation based on Melaugh et al. 2014) in the territory of Northern Ireland, whose population is less than two million.

for the analysis of the Irish countryside, the ethnographies in Northern Ireland cited above have been criticized for extrapolating their research of relatively peaceful rural villages to the whole society (Jenkins 1992; McFarlane 1986; Wilson and Donnan 2006). Furthermore, their research has been characterized as unable to 'see the wood for the trees', narrowly focused on local levels of division in Northern Ireland and failing to consider factors from the wider environment, such as political and economic interests, and the distribution of power in society as a whole (Donnan and McFarlane 1986: 32-33).

The community-based model has also been referred to as too static, just as the analysis of the sectarian boundaries in rural areas has been described as fixing the fluidity of everyday life (McFarlane 1986), and as regarding Northern Irish societies as unchanging (Wilson and Donnan 2006: 28). Anthropologists such as Leyton (1974) analyze the values and symbols of each of the 'two communities', Catholic and Protestant, conceptualizing the 'community' as if it was a natural entity, which individuals belong to from birth and continue to do so throughout their lives. These anthropologists do not analyze what meanings people give to the community, and its boundary, which is essential to the understanding of the community in people's experience (Cohen 1985: 12-13). Thus, their use of the concept of community is also homogenizing. Arensberg and Kimball's methods and theory were criticized for not taking into account the 'behavioural variations and disparate social structural formations throughout the island' (Wilson and Donnan 2006: 23). The anthropological model of the 'two communities' in Northern Ireland similarly eliminates the diversity within each social group, and entails the danger of essentializing the conflict between 'Catholics' and 'Protestants', disregarding the different meanings placed upon the 'community' by its members, the lived experience of everyday life, the contradictions within and the influences of political forces in its fixed maintenance.

The danger of fixing a political creation

The concept of community has been used broadly, not only in the academic arena, but also in popular and political discourse, as well as in policy and legislation in Northern Ireland. In designating not just a 'set of locally based social relationships', but also a 'sense of belonging which connects it closely to identity' (Bryan 2006: 606), 'community' is a term which, if used as an analytical value, may prove problematic in academic approaches to the study of Irish culture. Each 'imagined community' needs a narrative to maintain the sense of belonging of its members. It can be the narrative developed in educational institutions, as Hobsbawm (1983), for example, indicates in the invention of tradition of the nascent French nation-state. Imagined social cohesion may also derive itself from an official

narrative of novels and newspapers, as Anderson (1983) analyzes when referring to the construction of the concept of 'the nation.' In this sense, following the 'two communities' model without questioning what it excludes and reinforces might be validating that imagined entity and related political discourse. The anthropologist Dominic Bryan (in the short film 'What is a community?' 2014) draws attention to the fact that the 'two communities' are political creations, manipulated by politicians to give a sense of belonging to people. He emphasizes the necessity of understanding the role that the idea of community plays 'in processes of political control at both macro and micro level in Northern Ireland' (Bryan 2006).

The 'tribal conflict' model dominated anthropological research on Northern Ireland up to the 1990s (Wilson and Donnan, 2006: 22), with some critiques rising from the decade before and important changes at the end of the century.³ Mainly after the Good Friday peace agreement of 1998, diverse anthropologists have questioned the concept of 'community' itself, suggesting the necessity of a critical analysis (Bryan 2006). Their analyses have broken with the idea of the 'homogenous senses of belonging and affiliation' to the community (Shirlow 2003), showing instead the mechanisms of control that are developed within particular 'communities' and the instrumental use of the concept by forces of power (see Jarman 2004; Curtis 2008). Some have raised the difficulties of ascribing one's sense of identity to just one of those communities -from children of mixed marriages (Donnan 1990) to the creation of different identity groups (McCall 2002). Following Nic Craith's work (2002), Whitaker (2005: 590-591) affirms that there are cultural and political diverse identities, and even different nationalist feelings, within those dichotomized 'communities', and also shared elements between them that 'often go unrecognized'. McFarlane (2011: 19) also refuses the idea of 'two monolithic communities' since he refers to the fact raised by Mulvihill and Ross (1999) and Southern (2007) that 'they are divided within themselves along attitudinal, class, and educational lines, while different experiences of the Troubles have shaped their needs today'. Other anthropologists have paid attention to those groups who have been excluded from the 'two tribes model' - like people from different origins living in Northern Ireland (Marranci 2006; idem. 2007; Liubinienė 2009; Delargy 2008).⁴ The work of these scholars may contribute to a change in the dualistic view of the culture of Northern Ireland and its 'communities', and to challenge the false perception that all the problems in

³ See the range and depth contributions of ethnographic investigation into public policy in Northern Ireland collected by Donnan and McFarlane (1997), and the compendium of interests in the Anthropology of Ireland developed during the last years of the twentieth century listed by Wilson and Donnan (2006: 35-40).

⁴ From the peace agreement in 1998, the number of people moving into Northern Ireland has been significant. From 2000 to 2010 an estimated 122,000 international immigrants moved to live in this territory, changing different aspects of the cultural and social life of the population. For further data see Russell 2012 and migration statistics at NISRA (www.nisra.gov.uk).

this Northern Irish society are related to the division between two cohesive groups.

It is important, as a researcher, to be aware of the discussion around and implications of the use of the word 'community.' First, one must question what the term is describing and in what context is used. Its meaning might be complex, multidimensional and expressed in a variety of ways (Somerville 2011: 1,9). It might refer to identity groups, ethnic groups, social groups, or it might be used as an expression of the 'sides' in a conflict (as the character of Terry Hooley stated in the film *Good Vibrations* -2012-, quoted at the beginning of this article). All of those uses require critical examinations. Second, the community is not a stable entity, but rather a process influenced by different forces, interests and practices of legitimation which all deserve to be analyzed. It is important also to pay attention to how boundaries between 'communities' are maintained, since the cognitive construction of the community needs a continual expression and validation (Barth 1969), a set of practices that are repeated to give a sense of continuity (Hobsbawn 1983), rituals and symbols which create mutual identification among members and delineate an 'other', outside group (Cohen 1985). Finally, it is crucial not to take for granted the cohesiveness of the group and look critically to the mechanisms of control and the diverse experiences of the people within and outside the group, considering what this concept excludes and what it silences. It is necessary to break with the idea of 'two communities' as homogenous entities, to raise the difficulties, contradictions and different experiences within them, to cast light on the multiple social groups and networks that exist in a diverse society, and to examine the different problems and concerns that are not limited to the division between those 'two communities', and that may be silenced by political priorities.

Punk and the breaking with homogeneity

'(T)he reality is of heterogeneity, process and change: of cultural communities as diverse symbolizations which exist by virtue of individuals' ongoing interpretations and interactions' (Amit and Rapport 2002: 8). In contrast to the description of the society of Northern Ireland as divided in two monolithic and static communities, attending to the experiences of people involved in the punk 'scene' (a term which is used to refer 'to the punk subculture taking place in a city' -Pomeroy 1987: 83-), the possibility of non-ascription to any of those communities arises.

People in the punk scene in Northern Ireland recognize the pressure of homogeneity - but they cry out to be different, and to reject imposed identities. One of the first and most famous punk songs from Northern Ireland underlines this idea: 'They say they're part of you / But that's not true' ('Alternative Ulster', Stiff Little Fingers 1978a). Born against musical commercialism and cultural conformism,

the punk scene started in the early 1970s in New York, spread around the United States, developed in Australia and took different shapes in the context of socio-economic decline in England. Later on, it expanded to many other contexts. Punk 'provided a voice of protest in relation to unemployment, police harassment and youth alienation' (Rolston 2001: 58). Punk involved values of rebellion, non-conformity, and an anti-establishment attitude and philosophy. It was more than music; it was also a lifestyle that included the 'Do It Yourself' (DIY) ethos that encouraged people to be able to organize and create by themselves, experimenting an alternative to mainstream culture. In Belfast, during the late 1970s, some young people were drawn into the movement. They had met coincidentally by attending the same concerts - one of the most infamous the cancelled The Clash show of October 1977 at Ulster Hall.⁵ Many of these young people realized that others were listening to the same music: 'I realized then that there was not just the four of us', explained Jake Burns, the singer of Stiff Little Fingers (BBC 2014).

In different areas of Belfast, these 'punks' were breaking with the uniformity of their neighbourhoods with their own bodies. As raised by Foucault (1977), bodies might be both the site of the exercise of the disciplinary power and the site of resistance. Body activities and appearance are subjected to processes of control, but they may also express the opposition to disciplinary practices. As the 'ordinary' people described by De Certeau (1984) using 'tactics' to challenge in their everyday practices the impositions of the structures of power, these young people showed in their daily walks in the city their opposition to 'taking part in the process of cultural reproduction of the communities they belonged to' (Heron 2015: 9). Having the same skin colour as their neighbours, the same accent, and being born in the same place - their most explicit rebellion against homogeneity was their appearance, by dressing in an alternative way. 'It was not that I wanted to be different by being a punk, but there was something about the idea of just being an individual in an area where everyone is the same', said Bernie when referring to the moment he decided to dress 'punk' after listening to 'God Save the Queen' by the Sex Pistols.

It was like nothing I'd heard before. There was an element of rebelliousness, and there was also a connection with me because of my politics then. I grew up as a republican, and this was a band from England singing a song against monarchy. (Interview with Bernie, April 2014)

Punk could have attached him further to his republican community, with its similar frustrations and

⁵ The protest on the streets after the last minute cancellation of that show has been known as the 'Bedford Street riots'. This gave visibility to punks in the media, and the event became a starting point of many narratives of the history of punk in Belfast.

anti-monarchy ideology. However, his decision to look different alienated him from that community. It caused him to experience first-hand the ‘intolerance of any difference’, and the abuse directed at him or other punks. Being punk was for Bernie ‘like an identity, it was distinct from everyone else.’ This feeling led him to attend punk shows at the Harp bar and buying records in the shop Good Vibrations. ‘The Harp’, along with others like ‘The Pound’ in Belfast or the ‘Trident’ in Bangor, ‘became spaces where young people could meet and socialize without having to worry about their religion, class, age’ (Heron 2015: 6). The Good Vibrations small record store opened at the end of 1976 and was a reference point for young punks. Its owner, Terri Hooley, was one of the recognized promoters of punk music in Northern Ireland through an independent record label.⁶ Bands like Rudi, Undertones, The Outcasts and Ruefrefx were part of this label.

David started listening to punk bands ten years later than Bernie while growing up in a mixed housing estate and in a mixed home with a Protestant father and a Catholic mother.⁷ He also felt the disaffection with binary identities: ‘I didn’t feel from one side or the other’, he explained, remembering his childhood when he was called offensive terms like ‘fenian or taig’ in reference to his Catholic education. He stated that he ‘didn’t want to be in a box’. David joined different punk and metal bands, and he said he never experienced sectarianism in what he called the ‘music scene’: ‘When people play guitars, they don’t listen to the religion,’ he affirmed. Neither does the youngest interviewee, Martin, identify with either ‘side.’ When I told Martin about the punk scene in the Basque Country and in the Mapuche territory in Argentina where punk is connected to the claim of an identity (Kasmir 2002; Ferrari 2005), he said that punk in Northern Ireland is definitively different: ‘During the Troubles, the issue of identity was exacerbated in working-class areas. Catholic or Protestant: that was what identity was. Anyone outside of that was “rocking the boat” and people didn’t accept it.’ For Martin, punk goes against strict identities, those identities connected with religion and politics which entailed ‘people from working class areas killing each other’ - as he stated. Despite the republican background of his family, he rejected the murdering committed by republicans, and he repudiated any nationalism and any kind of flag. Punk was explained by Martin as ‘a channel for people to have a different identity outside from those two’. For Martin, David and Bernie, punk provides a space for diversity and a safe environment for feeling, looking and performing differently.

⁶ The film ‘Good Vibrations’ (2012) narrates the history of Terry Hooley and the beginnings and development of punk music in Northern Ireland.

⁷ A ‘mixed’ housing estate meant ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ families were living in the same area.

A different place of safety

The concept of community has been characterized in the modern world as a place of safety (Delanty 2003 and Bauman 2001 in Bryan 2006: 606). In Northern Ireland, Bryan states that ‘we seemed to have identity politics masquerading as community, offering the possibility of security whereas it actually forms a mechanism of control’ (Bryan 2006: 614). In analyzing the idea of community in the 1970s in Belfast, Curtis highlights the networks of support and solidarity developed within, but also the contradictions inherent in it: ‘community’ was as a place ‘of both safety and terror,’ where the ‘sanctions for non-conformity’ showed ‘the ugly side of “solidarity”’ (Curtis 2008: 420, 413). Standing out as different in another neighbourhood might be dangerous, but also looking different in your own area could be a risk. For example, David described how he was chased and verbally and physically assaulted because he ‘didn’t conform’. However, Bernie explained that he felt ‘comfortable enough’ to go to Protestant areas because ‘you were with someone who you trusted, they were punk.’ David considered The Centre, where punks met, as ‘a safe place.’

In the interview, Bernie affirmed that the polarization in Belfast kept people in their own areas because of fear. In this city, the population movement due to the violent conflict was, up until the Balkan conflicts, ‘the most significant shift of people attributed to violence within Europe since the conclusion of World War II’ (Shirlow 2003: 79). Catholic and Protestant areas were surrounded by ‘interfaces’ or boundaries that influenced spatial patterns of movement and the mental maps of its inhabitants (Lysaght and Basten 2003). The topography of the city has been described as ‘a grouping of settlements that spread in patches along the trench and its sides, separated from one another by rivers and woods and water-meadows, and now by motorways’ (Brett 2004 in Bairner 2006: 124). The mono-religion areas were considered ‘sanctuaries’ (Feldman 1991). They ‘functioned as safe and unsafe mental maps’ that were intensified ‘through the telling of fear, victimhood, and risk’ (Shirlow 2003: 79, 81). These ‘no-go areas’ ceased to ‘fully protect or insulate the community’ when killings happened at the front door of people’s houses (Feldman 1991: 41). Leisure places were usually constrained to the relationships established in those areas. In addition, pubs and social centres were not safe places, as murders also happen there –which led these to become fortresses with security measures such as ‘cages’, cameras, and buzzers installed at the doors in order to identify people before entering the bar.

Creating a space of encounter that might be considered safe by their users was a challenge during the violent conflict. In a city that became a ghost town after 6pm (Stewart 2012: 4; BBC 2014), punk took the city centre and initiated the youth culture in Belfast ‘providing a meeting place where

overwhelmingly working-class punks could get together outside the sectarian pressures of their home housing estates' (McLoone 2004: 35). It was a real alternative to hostility, violence and division that were part of the daily life in Northern Ireland. Bernie explained that punks first congregated in the city centre around Fountain Street and Cornmarket, but it was the inclusion of punks in The Anarchist Centre, opened in 1981, which first gave him his political convictions. 'That was this thing about being-out-of-the-box element of the punk, which anarchism developed,' he affirmed. After that, he and others informally started the 'Warzone Gig Collective'. They promoted punk gigs in different venues and became more organized when taking the responsibility of running the café of the Just Books building around 1984. The building was home to the Belfast Anarchist Collective and housed a bookshop, café and print workshop. People from Belfast and outside gathered there. In 1986, they were at the core of setting up a self-ran DIY place called Giro's because of the name of the vegetarian café they run there (Mittens XVX 2014; Glasper, 2014: 425-426). Animal rights, anarchist, lesbian and gay collectives and other diverse groups met and organized events. It was a place for bands to practice, for concerts, for borrowing books and creating fanzines, for meeting people from different backgrounds, including class and occupation. Bernie remembered office workers and solicitors eating at the cafe in the centre of Belfast. He referred to that time as 'really inclusive':

Punk is a very important thing and it's where we all came from, and it's still important because of our ideals and politics, but there is other music. The place was not necessarily punk. It wasn't purist.' (Interview with Bernie, April 2014).

People who ran the social centre were proud of organizing themselves, following the anarchist punk DIY ethos. In a documentary from that time (Sledgehammer/Warzone Collective, n.d.), some of them claimed that the place affirmed their anarchist ideas about sharing, cooperation and taking care of other people. Louanne, a singer in one of the punk bands that often practiced there, also explained in that documentary what made her feel different from the 'norm': not in terms of appearance, but what she chose to consume, the absence of a paid job, her lack of desire for a house, a car or getting married. Bernie was involved in Giro's for 17 years. The social awareness that he got there, the exchange of experiences when inviting bands to the centre and being on tour with his own bands to different squatted centres in Europe, the realization of punk being 'about people, about respect', and the creation of a collective alternative to commercialism, all were elements that he affirmed changed his life and others'. David started volunteering in 1994 until it was closed in 2002, and from 2012 to 2013. He stated that in Giro's 'people saw different ways of living their lives' and could 'express themselves'. The centre was not just another venue for gigs, it was a place where people were taken care so they can 'get home safe'. In a society of control and hierarchical structures, punk put into

practice the anarchist rejection of authority and hierarchies, and also commercialism.

If you want to come here and think you are the boss, you are in the wrong place, or if you want to come here and make money you are in the wrong place. But if you come and genuinely try to help us, to get involved, you are in the right place. (Interview with Bernie, April 2014).

The Centre reopened in 2011 and it is better known as 'Warzone' because of the 'Warzone Gig Collective' that is still in charge of organizing the concerts, although their members have changed through the years. The current Warzone website highlights the idea of this space as 'a focal point of alternative culture in the city' (Warzone, n.d.). Examining the interviews collected in the documentary *Shellshock Rock* (1979), McLoone (2004: 35) states that punk in Northern Ireland was 'a positive social and cultural force' that was deemed by the punks as 'an alternative to both the parent culture and the culture of dissent that was represented by republican and loyalist paramilitaries'. The experiences of punks show how the connection of community and safety is not always true for those who do not conform. However, some of their discourses establish that link of community and safety when they conceptualized the network of caring created by the punk 'community' (as Martin expressed to me in informal conversations, and also Kate Wimpres in Giro's 2010), moving the concept of community from the imposed to the chosen.

Challenging dualisms and expectations

By creating a different place to express themselves, punks challenged the notion of Northern Ireland as a dualistic society. In doing so, they also challenged the extended idea in Northern Ireland that 'you get on better with your own' - referring to those who are on the same side of the ethnic/religious/political boundary (McFarlane 1986: 92). Punk has broken with the notion of homogeneity within the community and the implicit opposition to the 'other' community. It has also challenged the expectations of what being a punk should be, in the creation of a space that is far from homogeneous itself.

There were no 'others' to defeat in the punk encounters. In Northern Ireland, where communication is mediated by the affiliation's of one side or the other, where people 'draw upon a variety of cues in an attempt to ascertain each other's religio-political identity' (Finlay 1999), and 'the boundary is constantly reaffirmed in the smallest interactions' (Donnan and McFarlane 1986: 26) in what has been

called as the practice of ‘telling’⁸, a break with the status quo might be simply to refuse to affirm that division. ‘There were no questions. [...] You were into punk and that was it’, stated Bernie. He lived in a small working-class neighbourhood in the North of Belfast and going to the punk spots of the Harp Bar – opened in 1978 – and the Good Vibrations record shop ‘was the first experience of meeting Protestants’. In his experience, ‘punk was something that united people’.

Nowadays, The Centre is composed of volunteers of different backgrounds. I came to volunteer for the first time during my fieldwork, at a monthly reggae night. The place is situated in the first floor of a building located in a dark alley with one simple sign bearing the legend: ‘The Centre’. Posters of past punk shows and in solidarity with international anarchist struggles welcome the visitor. Sitting at a table, two or three people sold tickets that night. They dressed mainly in black colours, jackets with patches; some had long hair, others shaved heads; most of them wore military boots. That day volunteers were only young men. People of different ages and appearances danced and chatted in a colorful room warmly decorated for the reggae event. A DJ played music on the stage. There were about two other volunteers taking care of the safety of the people inside. My main activity consisted of trying to find change in shops nearby when we ran out of coins, and having conversations with other volunteers. John comes from a ‘Protestant’ background and that prevented him from learning Irish, although he affirmed he would like to be able to speak that language. Sitting close to him, the guy who was introduced to me with the ironic label of ‘West Belfast Godfather’ explained to me the origin of that joke, because when his friends went to his Catholic area he was the only one who could stop a taxi for them. Martin affirmed that ‘people’s religion doesn’t matter, you don’t ask about that’. McLoone (2004: 35) highlights that one of the political messages of punks in the late 1970s was their rejection of ‘the sectarian nature of their parents’ culture’ and of ‘the designation by society of religious labels and the consequent division of young people into opposing religious camps’. From his ethnographic work about punks in Belfast, Stewart (2012: 4) states: ‘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’.

Bernie pointed out the issue that the punk scene in Belfast was not formed solely by working-class people. Many musicians and volunteers in Giro’s were middle-class people in some way isolated from the Troubles, so ‘they felt the sectarianism but not as brutally’ as the working-class people - Bernie

⁸ ‘Telling’ was explained by Burton as ‘the pattern of signs and cues by which religious ascription is arrived at in the everyday interactions of Protestants and Catholics’ (Burton 1978 in Aretxaga 1997: 35). Feldman (1991: 56) adds that in Northern Ireland ‘(t)elling fuels the daily maintenance of a dualistic social order through a system of “common sense” that is in effect an ideological fiction’.

explained. He recognized that these people created an environment where there were no 'sectarian arguments or religion into it'. Martin affirmed that currently The Centre is formed by a mix of middle-class and working-class people: 'It doesn't matter if you like the music and having good relationships'. That diversity is also found in the lyrics of the bands. Stiff Little Fingers were one of the few bands explicitly addressing the violent conflict and the division in Northern Ireland. Others raised political problems that went beyond the Troubles. Bernie commented that in some of the bands he played they criticized intolerant attitudes, like racism and sexism, which happened to be not just in the society in general, but also 'within the punk movement'. Bands like Undertones focused their lyrics on themes like love, desire, rejection and other adolescent themes (Heron 2015: 12), breaking with expectations of the political message they had to convey living in the middle of a war zone.

Punks in Northern Ireland challenge both the expectations associated to growing up in this territory, and also the expectations associated to being punk. As 'punk elsewhere, [...] Belfast punks articulate a general anti-establishment philosophy' (McLoone 2004: 35), but the opposition to the status quo had to deal with the persistent binary identities and those who promoted and defended it. Punk in Belfast has had a clear opposition - as punk in other places - to the police and army, but also to the paramilitaries: 'We hate them. Punk is separate from the violence that caused so many deaths', affirmed Martin. In this sense,

For many young people who had grown up during the violent conflict in Northern Ireland, those who advocated, perpetrated and supported violence were as much a part of the establishment as the Thatcherite state was for British punks. (Rolston 2001: 59).

Lyrics of punk bands explicitly reject violence. The song of Stiff Little Fingers 'Wasted Life' (1978b) repudiates 'Live and die for their "important" cause / A united nation / Or an independent state with laws' and calls the paramilitaries 'nothing but blind fascists'. The young band '1000 Drunken Nights' (2009) also rejects in their lyrics the violence in the streets, describing fights and killings at the interface areas as 'injustice'. In contrast to the English punk scene, 'punk in Northern Ireland offered a confrontational style that in the end seemed to endorse the old hippie dream of peace, love and understanding' (McLoone 2004: 33). However, that 'hippie' image does not fit with the punks that are currently in The Centre. As Martin affirmed, they do not identify as 'pacifists', but 'just reject the sectarian and nationalist violence that occurred during the Troubles and still occurs today'.

What has been called as a 'third space' (McLoone 2004: 38), a 'third tradition' or 'an alternative community' (McDonald 2002) is not homogeneous in itself. David considered that the running of

Irish classes weekly at The Centre was not a good idea because it could be seen as ‘they are aligning themselves with one side, they may perceive you as Catholic’. On the other hand, Martin affirmed he likes learning the Irish language and he also frequently joins Irish dancing classes, activities which he deemed as ‘enjoying the culture’ and not as ‘part of the state, not violent nationalism’. He was aware that punks may be afraid of the connections between Irish culture and republicanism, but he believed it is positive ‘to like your tradition and your culture’. For Martin that did not contradict his idea of punk, which he described as ‘going against the mainstream, and not caring about what other people think’.

Conclusions

This article has intended to critically analyze the use of the concept of community in Ireland. Paying attention to its use in anthropological studies, it has been revealed that how this concept is managed not just within academia but also in other political discourses may affect everyday life in Ireland and, particularly, Northern Ireland. This article has also shown that in the study of Irish culture, it is vital to understand the meanings which people attach to the concept of community, how people experience it, and the processes of negotiation and attachment.

The diversity that some ethnographers failed to see when analyzing Northern Irish society through the ‘two communities’ model appears evident when examining the experiences and understandings of those involved in the punk scene in Belfast. They question the ‘sufficiency of the dichotomy’ (Whitaker 2005: 592). They make explicit the need of attending to the difference: through their bodies, their attitudes, their daily choices, their relationships, and the lyrics of their bands. They create an alternative narrative to the hegemonic one that maintains the idea of the two cohesive communities in Northern Ireland, a model of analysis which contributes to exclude and silence many people’s experiences, which may ‘justify the manoeuvres of various historical political leaders and to deny the full variety of cultures’ (Nic Craith 2002: 178). In its opposition to the mainstream culture, punk is a call in the field of Irish studies to attend different viewpoints, to remain suspicious of the main narratives, to shake any frame used to analyze a culture. The analysis of the punk scene in Belfast not only challenges the ubiquitous ‘two communities’ model, but it is also a reminder of the need to question any given cultural concept, and to draw upon the company of different people’s voices.

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