PUNK ANARCHISM AND THE BRITISH SOCIETY

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Abstract

Society associates “Punk” with a music genre, backed with a very distinctive look, recognizable from the hair style, make-up and overall outfit. Other than their outward ‘fashion’ appearance, many also associate “Punk” with a group of young people who do not characteristically blend with their social surrounding. All of these factors tend to have them portrayed as an aggressive circle, and being associated with ‘anarchy’ has driven people to be weary of them. With a compact study through the history of “Punk” and the society in which it emerged, this journal will dig into Punk’s origins and unveil if society’s idea of Punk movement and society’s weariness against them is justified and fairly grounded. It will also attempt to uncover if Punk has any other social significance besides the aggressive genre of music that the public has known it to be.

Keywords: Punk, anarchy, aggressive, British society

Introduction

The early 70s was a difficult period for the European society after their success in rebuilding all aspects of life in the aftermath of World War II. At the time, nearly every country in Europe went through an economic crisis that had a major impact in the welfare of European society’s livelihood. The crisis was triggered by the soaring oil prices in the midst of active construction for infrastructure in the face of an increasingly modernized world.

If we go back 20 years, we encounter a period that was very historical for major countries in Western Europe relating to the influx number of immigrants entering countries like England, France, and the Netherlands. This happened due to the demands of rebuilding the country’s infrastructure previously ravaged by World War II and as one of the consequences of war towards a country that provided only a small number of young people to be categorized as a productive group. Another factor driving these countries - including the UK – was inviting workers from outside the country, suicidal in a sense, which lead to the diminishing perception of doing labour work, for example, working in construction, urban sanitation and other similar work.
From the brief historical explanation above, we can roughly find a common thread linking the economic crisis in Europe, especially in Britain, with social problems that took place in society. Strikes occurred everywhere, rampant poverty, and the most severe was the social envy that began to materialize, be it towards immigrants who obtained jobs and income, as well as that of immigrants towards British citizens who had already established a prosperous life. Conditions such as these were viewed by many groups of young people as a bad precedent of the capitalist system which at the time, had begun to dominate the Western Europe economy.

The Emergence of Punk in Britain

*Punk* was a name used by journalists in Britain during the early 70's, to refer to a new music genre that came up and was such a contrast to rock, which was considered main stream at the time. The *Punk*’s influence in European music during this period gradually became greater and greater as time went by. Within the next decade many genre of music emerged deriving from *Punk*.

The emergence of *Punk* that had originated in Britain however, was not a result of boredom from music lovers and activists towards the existing streams.
Punk surfaced in Britain as a form of reaction to the ideology of capitalism that had started to dominate all aspects of community life, especially in the economy.

Punk chose to express the ideology they represented through music because music was considered to be a media that was most universal in nature and through it, the ideas of Punk were engraved in the song lyrics that they created and sung by loud vocals (yelling) as an expression of a group that was marginalized by the system and ideology in power, as well as a symbol of how strong their views were in witness to the incidents that they saw, heard, felt, experienced, and shared amongst them.

![Image](https://streetartnews.net/2012/03/jamie-reid-ragged-kingdom-new-los.html)

**Figure 2**

Source: [https://streetartnews.net/2012/03/jamie-reid-ragged-kingdom-new-los.html](https://streetartnews.net/2012/03/jamie-reid-ragged-kingdom-new-los.html)

**The Anarchism of Punk**

According to the Major Indonesian Language Dictionary (KBBI), anarchism is a teaching (doctrine) that opposes to each state forces; a political theory of dislike towards the government and the legislation (KBBI online, http://kbbi.web.id/). Thus, through this paper, I would also like to clarify society’s general understanding, who often defines anarchism as a form of violence, destructive towards anything in hand. A form of violence which the public often perceives anarchism as vandalism, such assumptions include: 1. Actions damaging
and destroying works of art and other valuables (natural beauty, etc.); 2. Acts of destruction that is rough and malignant (KBBI online, http://kbbi.web.id/).

Anarchism is the basic ideology that was promoted by Punk in Britain in order to address the social and living conditions of people in the country during the global economic crisis that occurred in the 70s. They (the Punkers) chose anarchism as an ideology after deriving the meaning from the root word *anarkhia*, originating from the Greek word meaning without government or without a leader. Punk came to this concept after they interpreted the failure of the economic and political system in Britain as the failure of government/leaders that had led to the economic crisis and had badly effected British society. Later, Punk also came to view that the public would get a better life if they kept to themselves and took care of each other without being stunned by the lure of material riches and established wellbeing. In other words, Punk, that was given birth in England chose the way of anti-establishment and anti-authority, because in their view, establishment was a form of success by a factor of luck in the capitalist system, while the number of people who were suffering and living insufficiently to meet their basic needs existed in greater number.

The ongoing economic and political crisis that contained Britain in the 70s led to the birth of racism, particularly from the right wing who accused the immigrants as the main cause of the chaotic situation in Britain at the time. Then, Punk with their anarchism appeared to provide a response to the views of the Right Wing with the idea that every human being is equal and that the core of the chaotic situation was the failed system (capitalism and government/authority).

![Image of Punk band](http://www.spotifyclassical.com/2011/06/100-greatest-rock-debut-singles.html)

**Figure 3**

Influences of Punk’s Anarchism

The emergence of Punk with its ideology and views towards a way of life that is anti-establishment and authority has proved to be a considerable influence in Britain. Punk’s ideology that were voiced through the music and lyrics of their songs have managed to open the views of the wider community towards social life and society in the country. One example of this fact was the emergence of the Anarchist Federation in Britain and Ireland in 1986. The Federation made it possible to bridge the ideas of anarchism and its perspectives to the labourers in Britain and Ireland.

As a group that used music as the main media in voicing its ideology, Punk also provided an enormous influence in the realm of music, not only for music repertoire in Britain, but also in the whole world. Various streams of music that emerged and was influenced by Punk’s ideology were: Proto Punk, Punk Rock, New Wave, Hardcore Punk, Oi!, Ska Punk, D-beat, Pop Punk, Garage Rock, Street Punk, Horror Punk and Psychobilly. Sex Pistols and Rancid are two of the many British bands that carries the ideology of punk and are widely known by music lovers and activists around the world. This fact automatically brought the Sex Pistols and Punk Rancid to become Punk’s ambassadors for the music community in the world.

Not only in Europe, the United States’s musical repertoire were also infected with the Punk virus. This was indicated by the birth of Ramones (1974) in New York, that eventually became a band that successfully penetrated the international music market and also became known as a band that strongly expressed punk nuances in each of their works. In the early 2000s, many local bands in Indonesia emerged carrying the Ska-Punk’s music flow. Some of the more popular ones were the Type-X and the Jun Fan Gung Foo. So not only in Europe and America, finally the Asian continent were also touched by the British influence in the modern era through music.

Punk and The British Identity

Punk who started to surface by way of underground movement using music as its medium, has proven to grow and develop quite rapidly in Britain. Imperceptibly, among music lovers and activists, Punk became synonymous with Britain. Thus it can be concluded that Punk has become one of the identities of the British society.

The influence of the Punk phenomena in the realm of music were not only engaged in Britain, but Punk had also penetrated into the entire continent of Europe, America, and Asia. This fact reinforces the idea that Punk can be regarded as one of the identities of the country and the people of Britain in the 20th century.

Britain who had already established their identity through music by the Beatles, turned out to reinforce their cultural influence as one of the countries that made music a social characteristic of their people. Radio Head, Coldplay and the
Muse are some of the British bands that has many fans globally and contributes considerable influence on the development of the music all around the world. England’s existence that was fundamentally rooted into music gave birth to Britpop.

“Britpop is a British alternative rock movement that was in the 1990s, it was characterised by the appearance of bands who borrowed influences from 1960s and 1970s while creating big, catchy hooks, as well as the appeal of earlier pop stardom and the sense that they were creating the soundtrack to the lives of a new generation of British youth.” (http://www.britpopbootlegs.co.uk/britpop-history.asp).

Figure 4
Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/276338127108945538/

Conclusion

Punk, which was a movement of a group of people in Britain, who carried the ideology of anarchism as a form of reaction to the economic crisis and upheaval of social life in Britain in the early 70s has crystallized into a new identity for the state and the British people. Punk’s existence not only affected the life and perspective of society as a citizen and the social structures in Britain. Moreover, British Punk, in the end, has managed to conquer the world through music. Thus, it can be concluded that Punk is one of the historical markers in the development of the social life and culture of the people and state of Britain.
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