

INTRODUCTION



Me: What is so punk about you?

Berndt: I say what I think!

The concert was in one of the three main punk clubs in Halle; it was a DIY (Do-It-Yourself; see below) event organized by people living in the same building in which the club is located. During the evening, two skinhead bands performed, drawing a big audience of punks and skins. The concert itself was a celebration of masculinity, typical of the tough street punk music style. The mosh pit mostly consisted of men, heavily tattooed and half-naked. The wild pogo also included hugging each other, a loud sing-along chorus and, at some point, even a fight. The musicians of the main band were older than the first band and were in their forties. They were dressed in typical skinhead style, with facial tattoos and heavy piercings. Most of their songs were narratives about their tough street life, being independent or 'staying skinhead forever'. When the concert ended, the promoter of the club moved to the DJ booth and started to play 'punk rock disco'. Most of the songs he played were of the *Neue Deutsche Welle*, German new wave music from the 1980s. The DJ chose mainly dark and existential tunes, experimental electronic songs about alienation and unhappiness. The people danced with passion and I took my time to observe the crowd. Most of the people were in their twenties or thirties, representing the low-paid or unemployed 'lower class'. In front of me stood a rather drunk young girl who was not able – despite all her efforts – to dance. She wore a T-shirt which announced 'Faulheit ist kein Verbrechen' (Laziness is not a crime!). Other badges, buttons or T-shirts of the people signalled their East German origin, musical preferences or leftist anti-state position. I recall that I was so impressed by the dark atmosphere of the event that immediately after returning from the club, I wrote an emotional review in my field diary:

By 3 o'clock in the night it became very grim. A dark empty room with a wet floor from spilled beer and covered with broken bottles. People dancing and singing resolutely along to very dark music. I had a flash: street punk is about being subversive, demonstratively questioning social norms. (Field diary, 25 September 2010)

Being part of a subculture is an emotional thing. In fact, being part of a sub-cultural group that radically manifests its identity and is radically different from what is considered to be normal could be considered irrational. Punk and especially skinheads are controversial, misunderstood and, more often than not, disliked subcultures. I remember that years ago, I was in Oxford in a restaurant for a conference dinner and next to me sat a law historian. When we were introduced, I told him briefly about my research in Halle and he looked at me with confusion. After a short silence, he asked me: 'But why do people do things like that?' The only suitable answer I had to mind was: 'But why do you not do such things?' Indeed, it is a difficult question to answer. I recall I put this question to Gavin Watson, a photographer renowned for his photos of the 1980s British skinheads and late 1980s ravers, scenes of which he was part. My question was why does one become a skinhead just to be disliked by everyone? His response was: 'There is no explanation, it's a mystery!'

This book is an attempt to offer one explanatory view to the question of why people adopt subversive subcultures. As there is no single reason as to why the youth join the ranks of ravers, hip-hoppers, punks or something else, there can also be no single clear explanation. One simplistic answer is, of course, identity. People need identity and the subculture gives them a satisfying identity, which the mainstream culture does not. The next question then is what is so special about the identity of an alternative underground group whose borders and content are guarded enviously by its members. In the late 1990s, when I lived in Berlin and was involved in the local skinhead scene, I discussed the meaning of subcultures, especially the more radical and unfavourable ones in the public eye, with my friend, who suddenly said: 'The minority derives its strength from being a minority!' (Die Minderheit bezieht seine Kraft daraus das sie eine Minderheit ist!). I strongly believe that there is a certain truth in the statement that one attraction to joining a subculture is belonging to a close-knit minority group. Broadly, this is a book about how such microcosms function and through which methods its boundaries are maintained.

As an anthropologist, I always felt an uneasiness with the major academic (and mainly sociologist) writing on youth and subcultures. I had the feeling that something was missing in many of these various analyses, but somehow could not understand what. A certain shift came when I read the book *Russia's Skinheads*, where the authors promised to turn the concept of skinhead 'inside out' (Pilkington et al., 2010) and they did. In this book,

the researchers demonstrated how Russian skinhead culture is rooted in the Russian proletarian worldview, combining an imported style with a peer group understanding of masculinity, race, nation and gender. Since I discovered the academic writing on youth cultures in my early twenties, I have had an interest in global subcultures in non-Western and non-European countries. There exists a wide range of brilliant publications that discuss these topics from the perspective of ‘glocalization’ or how subcultures are adapted into a non-Western environment. Take punk in Indonesia. There are some very good studies on how punk struggles to resist the conservative Muslim society. As it happens, Indonesian punks use the US-American and British template of punk culture, introduce it in their environment and lean on international global DIY but also commercial networks to maintain their sub-cultural identity and local national scene (for the Indonesian punk scene, see Baulch (2002); Dunn (2016); Hannerz (2015)). These struggles are depicted in a documentary about the Indonesian punk scene.¹ In the same documentary, some of the protagonists describe themselves as faithful Muslims who do not seek confrontation with the main spiritual values of their peer society. It is this aspect that disturbed me about many sociological studies of the phenomenon, as they tend to see a complete break or disconnect from the norms and values of the parent society. Studies on subcultures in non-Western societies tend to focus on problems and conflicts the youth have when they discover Anglo-American youth styles and adopt these. However, there is very little research on what young people take with them from their parent culture when they begin to follow punk, metal, hip-hop or other styles. Sometimes the academic literature makes it seem like subcultures subsist outside of the society in a continuous confrontation with it, or, as Gavin Watson said to me in his interview: ‘People think that skinheads live in a skinhead town, wear skinhead clothes, listen only to skinhead music and do their skinhead thing.’ The book *Russia’s Skinheads* was how I viewed the Russian heavy rock scene I came to know when doing research in the Russian Far East from 2000 (I have published on indigenous pop music, but during the research I also became acquainted with the local Russian rock scene; see Ventsel (2004, 2006, 2009)) – these guys were ordinary Russian proletarian thugs, in many respects not dissimilar to those Russian truck drivers, mine and shift workers, builders or even small town policemen I have met in more than two decades of carrying out research there. This was the reason I was able to understand their views on people of colour, factory work, local pride or the opposite sex. These skinheads were Russian proletarians as I knew them.

I moved to Germany as an MA student in 1994 and became affiliated with Berlin’s blossoming punk life. In my personal journey through the DIY and squatter scene, I somehow became part of the East Berlin left-wing skin-

head scene. Later on, I moved to Halle and discovered a completely different local punk – stylistically more mixed and diverse, centred around three or four clubs and bars. By moving back and forth between Estonia and Germany, and later also Russia, I understood how different the national scenes of the same subculture can be. This was not only because global styles were adopted differently, but also because local histories differed and the understandings of politics, rebellion, gender order and the economy – in short, everything ‘good’ and ‘bad’ – were dissimilar.

Punk (and subcultural life in general) is much more than keeping the DIY music scene alive and well, and this is unfortunately often omitted by research that focuses on subculturalists (cf. Dunn, 2016; Thompson, 2004; O’Connor, 2008). As I will show in this book, subculturalists remain subculturalist even when it comes to work, family life or territorial aspects of their being. Simultaneously, the way in which these people see the world and life is rooted in East German working-class culture. This is one of the main arguments of the book. It is a complicated and demanding task to show how class in East Germany is related to a subculture that in its own rhetoric positions itself outside of society and its hierarchies. The task is even more complicated due the long-lasting theoretical debate on the sociology of subcultures, where one dividing line is the discussion of whether the notion of class is important in analysing subcultures (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003; Bennett, 1999; Thornton, 1996; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Gelder, 1997, 2007; Sabin, 1999; Hall and Jefferson, 1986). Another argument advanced here is that subcultures offer a platform for self-expression to people who already have similar attitudes and views that they can combine with the subcultural ideology. The reason why someone chooses a particular style in the ‘supermarket of styles’ (Polhemus, 1997: 130–32; see also Muggleton, 2000: 198) is because the ethos of that concrete subculture overlaps with his or her personal views. In this way, subculture accommodates people who are attracted by the forms and values of identity (and rebellion) that they understand, accept and wish to follow. I will demonstrate throughout this book that subcultures centred around tough and robust behaviour linked to a fast and loud guitar music style like street punk, hardcore and skinheads are attractive to a certain segment of the working-class youth because they hold values they understand – not least the idealization of pride, loyalty, toughness, masculinity and many other attributes. The third and last but not least argument of this book is that in a wider context, a subculture can be transformed into a substitute society for alienated lower-class people. This is not a problem specific to German society. However, German punk is a space to build up an alternative group culture with structures that offer the individual a path to gain recognition and status, a validation he or she is deprived of in the dominant society. In Germany, this relates to the ‘lower class’ or ‘precariat’

as it was defined publicly in around 2010 (see Chapter 3). This process is interesting to observe because a subculture can take the value hierarchy of the dominant society, invert it and make it into its own identification system. As will be shown in this book, qualities that are generally condemned in German society – for example, heavy alcohol consumption, being unemployed and on social benefits, being heavily tattooed – are turned into a virtue because this is what provokes negative reactions in the mainstream society. Moreover, all this includes a healthy portion of irony, something that finds very scarce recognition in academic punk research.

METHODOLOGY AND FIELD SITE

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in two time periods. My acquaintance with Halle starts in 2000, when I became a Ph.D. student at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. In 2001, I discovered the local punk scene and became part of the group of people around the club GiG. The idea to do research on punk in Halle was suggested by one of the directors of the Legal Anthropology Department of the institute – Keebet von Benda-Beckman – in around 2004 and took the form of a project a few years later. In 2006 and 2007, I spent six months doing field research in Halle and Potsdam, mainly participant observation. This part of the research was supported and financed by the above-mentioned legal department. The research included interviewing people I knew already, but also getting to know people I only knew from seeing them around. I constantly commuted between Halle and Potsdam, toured with a hardcore band – The 4 Shivits – and visited several concerts and festivals. During the research, I discovered how little I knew the people who I had been in close contact for several previous years. The participant observation included going to work with my informants, attending garden parties, hanging out in pubs and participating in several public events like visiting an anti-fascist football match. Most of the results of this fieldwork were documented in my field diary, amassing an extensive collection of fanzines and taking hundreds of photographs. Most of the interviews I conducted during those six months were discussions in a café, pub or while driving to a concert. I often did not use a voice recorder, but noted our discussions down later when I had the time to do so.

It must be admitted that in the beginning I encountered an unexpected wall of mistrust from my informants. I made clear that I wanted to study the punk economy or economic practices, legal and illegal. That did not go down well. The main problem was the illegal work (*Schwarzarbeit*) that all the informants wanted to keep hidden from state officials. I had to explain many times that no identities would be made public and very sensitive information

would not be published. In retrospect, I must say that it took a considerable effort to convince some of my research partners, to my surprise even people I had shared an apartment with and many beers in my pre-research years. On the other hand, some people took it all relatively well. As one of the informants said, 'Kein Name muss fallen!' (You should mention no names!) and agreed to tell and show me everything. When I had established a trusting relationship and people opened up to me, the scholars from the local university asked me to include their students as research assistants. I encountered a total block when I mentioned it to the punks. 'Sie wollen alles ausspionieren!' (They want to spy on everything!) was one remark that demonstrated a deep mistrust of any state institution and people of the educated middle class. In order not to make things more complicated, I dropped the whole idea.

From 2009, I was a research associate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick, on a project called 'Post-socialist Punk: The Double Irony of Self-Abasement', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Within this project, I continued my field research in 2010, which, including some breaks, lasted until the end of 2011. During this time, I conducted 22 semi-organized interviews with people of both sexes and from various age groups. The interviews were analysed in the software NVivo and were made available – alongside fieldnotes – for other participants in the project. In order to exchange and evaluate the fieldnotes of other project members, I – for the first time – wrote them down on the computer and in English. I admit that this effected a certain spontaneity and mobility. When I usually write fieldnotes, it is simultaneously in different languages. Now I had to consider and rephrase my thoughts to make them understandable to my colleagues. Taking notes on a computer also made me miss the spontaneity of writing with pen and paper. Now, I had to go home or to my office in order to formulate a full text from my thoughts. I also had to add clarifications on persons, words, bands or clubs for others, which I usually would not have done in my diary. In this phase of the research, I also made videos of concerts and private parties where I was able to attend with my camera. Several hundred photographs were, of course, a product of this research.

The second period of my research was more in-depth. In interviews I asked about music, style, subcultural careers, family life, attitudes, politics and so forth. I also included people I did not know personally, using the ordinary snowball method. Whereas in the first research period my informants were a relatively coherent age group, mostly between thirty-five and forty, in the second period I also interviewed people who were in their early twenties or late forties. Whereas in 2006–7 male construction workers dom-

inated among my research sample, in the second part of the research the occupational status varied significantly – from students and the unemployed to tattoo artists, a social worker and the odd professional musician.

Halle, the main location of the fieldwork, is a city in the southern part of the German state of Saxony-Anhalt with a population of slightly less than 240,000. Halle is located approximately 200 km south of Berlin and can be reached from Berlin via train in two hours. Halle proudly sports the name Händelstadt (the city of Händel) because the great German composer lived there for eighteen years. The city has the biggest Beatles museum outside of England and is the location of a university and several academic institutions. This is also the reason why the club and bar culture of Halle is very lively. The city attempts to market itself as an innovative location for culture, science and new economies. The city's old town is not very big, but picturesque and old nineteenth-century (or older) apartment buildings take up a large part of the inner city. In between older buildings are occasional socialist-era five-storey concrete apartment houses. There are several suburbs – such as Südstadt and Neustadt – that were built in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) era and are typical socialist concrete housing projects.

In the GDR, Halle was the capital of a district of the same name and was one of the centres for the national chemical industry, being home to the biggest chemistry enterprise of the country – VEB Leuna-Werke Walter Ulbricht. After the German reunification, the big plant was divided into smaller units and sold into private hands. Notwithstanding the fact that the chemical industry is still functioning at the former site, the process meant a loss of approximately 20,000 jobs. The unemployment rate – typical of a former East German industrial city – is high in Halle, being over 10,000 people in March 2019, with nearly 16,000 people in what is called *Unterbeschäftigung* (underemployment). The city of Halle today, according to its official website, attempts to attract start-ups, innovative industry sectors and research institutions to establish in the area² and reports relatively good success in this respect. Such a process, as is widely known, does not create employment for the city's working class and is unlikely to decrease the devastating unemployment. The cultural life of Halle is impressively vivid – it is a location for several theatres, clubs, concert venues and an opera house.

Very important for the musical life and subcultural activities is Halle's proximity to Leipzig, which is only a 30-minute train ride away. Leipzig, a big cultural centre of Germany, has a vivid alternative culture scene, including punk. Therefore, going to Leipzig to shop for records and clothes, and to attend concerts is very typical for the punks and skinheads of Halle. Leipzig houses one of the most important alternative music venues, Connie Island, and has always been famous for its active music life.

PUNKS, SKINHEADS, HARDCORE KIDS

Punk as a subculture is mainly associated with loud and fast music, leather jackets and coloured spiky hair. This is the stereotypical picture and the reality is, as usual, more complex. Punk has a double origin, starting in the mid-1970s simultaneously in the United Kingdom and the United States. It is still an unsolved debate as to ‘who was the first’ to start punk, but the culture spread rapidly and took different forms. As Kirsty Lohman (2017: 7) notes in her book, “‘Punk’ is notoriously difficult to pin down.’ And that is true. Currently we have dozens of different punk styles where musical output, ways of dressing and politics are, at first glance, extremely remote from each other. In contrast to easily recognizable punks in leather jackets, combat boots and coloured hair, today substyles exist where the dress code is not what Hebdige (1979) calls ‘spectacular’. Very often, modern punks are recognizable only by someone who has insider knowledge and can read the semiotics of band T-shirts, buttons and brands. All these different styles exist next to each other, often in peaceful coexistence, but sometimes in a competing race for the claim to be the embodiment of ‘real punk’. However, the cultural meaning and legacy of punk is difficult to underestimate. Punk invented very little, but by combining the existing elements of alternative culture, it created a symbiosis that has affected Western pop culture, giving a platform to a strong political protest culture (Marcus, 1989; Frith, 1983; Furness, 2012a; Ammann, 1987; Bennett, 2006: 219–35). The most important phenomenon that is associated with punk is Do-It-Yourself culture or DIY. In short, DIY means rejecting existing commercial structures and creating independent institutions of producing, spreading and consuming punk (Clark, 2003: 223–36; Dunn, 2016). DIY has a wide meaning for different activities and is in constant flux. In the 1970s and 1980s it meant recording at independent record labels, amateur music magazines or fanzines, but also independent poetry, theatre and cinema, and today it includes internet activism or releasing and making music available for free in the internet (Savage, 1991; O’Connor, 2004; Williams, 2006: 173–200). The politics of and in punk is another extremely complicated topic. Globally one can encounter right- and left-wing sympathies in punk, but the uniting element seems to be a certain ‘anti-’ stance to dominant institutions, structures and ideas. Traditionally, UK and US punk has aligned itself with left-wing ideas, but nevertheless has often rejected institutionalized party politics (Worley, 2012, 2013: 606–36, 2017; Bottà, 2014: 155–69). As I will show in this book, some punk practices can be ideologically justified as anti-politics, but by nature can be controversial and even opportunistic when looking at the rhetoric. Moreover, sometimes it is difficult to draw a sharp line between the two; in this way squatting, which is widespread in global punk, can be simultaneously an attempt to be

‘outside the system’ and a strategy to avoid paying rent. Notwithstanding all the controversy, punk has a history of being involved in left-wing political activism, for example, by participating in the British Rock Against Racism movement or more grassroots initiatives like Food Not Bombs (see, for example, the discussion of the anarcho-punk band Crass in Cross (2010: 1–20) and Lohman and Worley (2018)).

Unfortunately, punk’s impact on popular culture is often reduced to music; however, that impact has been significant. Punk’s DIY aesthetic and strategies have been adopted by other music scenes from independent rock to electronic music (cf. Bennet, 2001: 45–62; Luvaas, 2009: 246–79; Gilbert, 2009). Punk’s support for and popularization of black music, chiefly Jamaican sounds like roots and dub reggae and also ska, is well known, but punk has also certainly impacted on the development and popularization of hip-hop and soul³ (Gilroy, 2002; see also Marshall, 1990; Barrow and Dalton, 1997: 395). Interestingly, academic literature often neglects the certain division within punk that still exists and affects the ways in which punk functions today. This is the split between ‘street punk’ and what was called in the beginning ‘art school punk’. In the academic literature, this division has been recognized in punk since Hebdige’s seminal *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), but the focus has been on the latter in the literature. The former has always been dominantly related to the working-class culture through the glorification of football, violence, male aggression and drinking, while the latter is sometimes very experimental, existential and philosophical, and often finds an alternative output in cinema, art or poetry.⁴

Hardcore music is a further development of US punk (Ward, 1996: 155–84). It is faster and rawer than the punk of the 1970s, but is also more political on a lyrical level. While the beginnings of UK punk are popularly believed to be in a dominantly working-class youth rebellion, in punk-lore US punk is associated more with middle-class youngsters. The roots of hardcore are largely in a teenage protest against US suburban middle-class norms and lifestyle. Later hardcore evolved and split into several styles, some of them proponents of a militant veganism, but others romanticizing ‘street life’ as described in Chapter 7. This music style and associated fashion styles are, in underground circles, considered to be the American contribution to punk. Hardcore has influenced but also borrowed from heavy guitar music, especially metal. Today, globally, there exist several overlapping hardcore scenes with their own dress codes and specific music styles, some of them politically extreme, some not. Maybe one significant difference from punk is that hardcore is more strongly ideological, emphasizing in song texts resistance, brotherhood, localism and anti-bourgeois sentiments more explicitly than is the case with punk. Hardcore also tends to glorify masculinity, aggression and group solidarity. Therefore, the global hardcore culture tends to

be organized on a basis of groups of friends that are called ‘crews’, which in some hardcore subscenes could be extremely violent (Haefner, 2007; Büsser, 2007; Ward, 1996; Mullaney, 2007; Mader, 1999). This is also expressed in the look of the hardcore fans. Preferred is the so-called casual or street style like baggy trousers, trainers and oversized jackets, but elements of the Cholo style⁵ can also be very popular. Some subgroups like New York hardcore sport a somewhat criminal look, sometimes donning leather blazers and trilby hats that can be combined with military garments and boots. Interestingly, in the world of the underground, hardcore is often accused of elitism. Fans of hardcore are called ‘hardcore kids’ irrespective of their age by the scene insiders and outsiders.

If punk is a phenomenon that is difficult to define comprehensively, then skinheads are even more controversial. Skinheads are popularly associated with violent right-wing neo-Nazi thugs and there is a certain element of truth in this. However, the whole phenomenon is more complicated and multilayered. Skinheads as a youth subculture appeared in England in around 1966–67 as descendants of hard mods. They were the UK’s first multi-racial subculture where mainly white working-class youngsters copied the style and music of Jamaican youth culture, the rude boys. The first wave of skinhead style was very heterogeneous; they wore military and Dr Martens boots and bleached jeans, but also suits, Crombie coats and loafers. Musically Jamaican music (ska, rocksteady and early reggae) and US soul were their favourites. Skinheads were notorious for their violence against Asian immigrants, for example, through so-called Paki-bashing, despite the fact that many skinhead gangs were of mixed race. The peak of the first wave is considered to be in 1969, which also witnessed a certain commercialization of the subculture.⁶ The subculture faded out in the early 1970s, only to come back in the late 1970s. The beginning of the second wave is directly related with the appearance of Two Tone British ska and a subgenre of punk to be widely known as street punk or Oi!

This was a time of stylistic but also political divisions of the skinhead scene. The traditional skinheads are more followers of the music and dress code of the 1960s and early 1970s, while the adherents of the Oi! music style adopted a more militant and uniformed appearance that is currently and stereotypically associated with the subculture – tight jeans, high boots, flight jackets and shaved heads. When the subculture arrived in the United States, American skinheads became followers of hardcore music and later adopted elements of the subcultural style, like trainers, baggy trousers and sportswear. Politically, the British radical right-wing movements, such as the British National Party or British Movement, infiltrated part of the skinhead scene and successfully initiated the emergence of neo-Nazi and right-wing skinheads. Simultaneously, some of the skinheads aligned themselves

with left-wing organizations to become left-wing skinheads or redskins. In between the two political groups, there still exist skinheads who call themselves apolitical or even anti-political. The skinhead attire of all subgroups is extremely fashion- and detail-conscious, and the 'right way' of dressing is a constant matter of discussion within the scene.

Punk moved over to Germany by the end of the 1970s and established itself quickly in West Germany. There are people who argue that the music was introduced to the GDR by the legendary BBC Radio 1 DJ John Peel, whose shows were also broadcast on the radio for the British troops in Germany (Sobe, 2008); others argue that West German radio stations were mainly responsible for the spreading of punk (Westhusen, 2005b). Later, punks from the 'East' or from the 'Zone'⁷ asked their Western relatives to send them records and clothing. Nevertheless, as was typical of all socialist countries, punk records were difficult to find in the GDR and they circulated among friends who taped them on either cassettes or reel-to-reel tapes. The particularity of punk in East Germany was that it existed very much under the roof of the Lutheran church due to the autonomy the church had at that time. For that reason, the church was a place where several dissident groups like environmentalists, hippies and oppositional intellectuals were able to meet, and punks quickly found their way there. The contact with such groups was the reason why many punks developed an interest in alternative poetry, art or theatre. Churches were also places where punks were able to organize their concerts. It seems that organizing concerts or being in a band could get one into legal trouble and several East German punks were indeed incarcerated for such activity (Westhusen, 2005a, 2005b; Galenza and Havemeister, 2005, Horschig, 2005; Kohtz et al., 2012; Mohr, 2018). Nevertheless, as the older Halle punks told me, the arrangement with the church was a marriage of convenience because there were no other autonomous institutions in the GDR where punks could go and avoid the watchful eye of the state security or Stasi. As soon as it was possible to establish their own space, punks left the church. This moment came with the collapse of the GDR and German reunification. It must be noted that unlike punk in the West, socialist punk – and not only in the GDR – applied a special kind of irony. One way to laugh at the state and the system was to wear badges and symbols of youth organizations or the army. Punk bands performed songs by communist youth organizations or wrote lyrics that praised building socialism, fulfilling economic five-year plans and so forth. East German bands, for example, often performed songs by the East German official youth organization FDJ. This was all done to mock the official rhetoric and ideology, but very often confused state officials (Simpson 2004).

On the GDR map of punk, Halle was in the premier league. Halle and the surrounding region were the birthplace of several important GDR-era punk bands like Müllstation, Menschenschock and KVD (Westhusen, 2005a) and

the scene was very large for the time (the Stasi or the state security of the GDR had counted approximately 150 punks; see Westhusen, 2005a: 85). Moreover, Jana Schlosser, the singer of the one of the most popular GDR punk bands *Namenlos*, originally came from Halle. She moved to Berlin in the early 1980s and formed the band (Mohr, 2018: Part II; Westhusen, 2005a). Travelling to other cities for punk concerts or just visiting friends was usual for GDR punks and due the proximity to Leipzig, Halle was well known on the punk roadmap (Mareth and Schneider, 1999). This was probably also the reason why the Stasi became very suspicious of such ‘degenerate’ youth, put them under surveillance and had several informants among local punks (Mohr, 2018: 208–12). On Saturday 30 April 1983, the first ever punk festival in socialist Germany took place in Halle’s *Christuskirche* (‘Christ Church’ in English) featuring bands like *Größenwahn*, *Namenlos*, *Wutanfall*, *Reststand* and *Planlos*.⁸ What happened in the GDR was a typical reaction to punk in different socialist countries, although punk musicians were not incarcerated everywhere (for the repressions of punks by the Stasi, see Kohtz et al. (2012)). One of the reasons for the institutional alarm seems to be the interpretation of punk in the media and among officials in socialist countries; since punk was a protest movement, they argued, and in socialism there was no need to protest against anything, punk was truly misplaced in these societies. Indeed, band names like *Größenwahn* (idea fix), *Namenlos* (nameless), *Wutanfall* (rampage), *Reststand* (leftovers) or *Planlos* (aimless) sounded too nihilistic to fit into the socialist concept of culture.

On 22 October 1983, another event occurred that irritated socialist officials: a punk meeting that unexpectedly drew approximately 600 guests from all over East Germany. A remarkable number of skinheads (Westhusen, 2005a), who were mostly punks who shaved their hair, participated in this event. At the beginning, the GDR skinheads did not differ particularly from punks; they were ‘one floor deeper’ (ibid.: 39) or in a deeper underground or less known and more closed group than punks, but were not particularly political, as they would infamously become years later. Punks had their problems instead with football hooligans (ibid.: 53) and the antipathy was mutual (Farin, 1996). While in East Berlin the right-wing sympathies of the skinheads slowly increased (see Hasselbach, 2001), in Halle skinheads were often ex-punks who maintained their links to the punk scene despite having changed their look. In fact, the skinheads’ right-wing views and punks’ views on skinheads as neo-Nazis seems to be an import from Berlin (Westhusen, 2005a: 56–59). The radicalization of skinheads is very well described by Ingo Hasselbach (2001), a once-infamous neo-Nazi leader from East Berlin. This process culminated with an attack by West and East Berlin neo-Nazi skinheads on a punk concert on 17 October 1987 in East Berlin’s *Zionskirche* (Hasselbach, 2001: 70).

Most East German punk bands did not record more than basement tapes that circulated among their adherents; the most infamous example is the West German release of the Schleim-Keim (given on the record as Sau-Kerle) and Zwitcher-Maschine split record *DDR von unten (GDR from Below)* on the West Berlin label Aggressive Rock in 1983. The Stasi for some reason overreacted to the release of the record and punished several musicians (Mohr, 2018: Chapter 21). Only a few punk bands – Die Skeptiker, Feeling B, Die Art and Sandow – made compromises with the GDR state record company Amiga and were able to release their records officially (Sobe, 2008; Westhusen, 2005a; Simpson, 2004). Therefore, these bands were often seen as not ‘real’, as were their fans (Westhusen, 2005a: 85).

In the early 1990s Halle had several punk squats that regularly organized concerts. This was also a time for conflicts and skirmishes with the emerging right-wing scene. Several of my punk informants were part of a group called the Red Bombers, a militant group of left-wing skinheads known for their red flight jackets. After the German reunification, many of the Red Bombers switched their allegiance to hardcore music and became the first hardcore fans in Halle.

This was a time when people in Halle established a large alternative scene, which was very active when I arrived in 2000. Apart from squats and clubs, the city had several record stores for underground music and shops for punk, skinhead, skater and psychobilly clothing, and had a history of being the home of at least two important local punk record labels.

At the time of my fieldwork, Halle had at least four centres for local punk and skinhead life. A group of punks usually hung out in one of the city’s central squares – the Händel square. These people, usually called Händel punks, were in their early twenties and were pretty much looked down on by others because they were infamous for begging for money from passers-by. It was not known where Händel punks spent their time during the winter and bad weather, but they were sometimes seen at punk concerts. A home for the older generation of Halle punks was the VL club-bar. These people were politically active and they ran an information centre and a Volksküche⁹ in VL. VL also existed as a concert venue, hosting concerts covering a range of musical styles, from reggae to punk. The youngest generation of punks were regulars of the club Reil 78, or Reilstrasse 78. This club was not very far away from GiG, my main field site, and hosted more DIY hardcore bands than any other local alternative club. The fourth important club during my stay in Halle was La Bim, a club with a cinema venue. Since La Bim was neither a squat nor had a regularly open bar, it did not have regulars as the other venues did. Nevertheless, there was a certain group of people around the La Bim, mainly those who worked at the bar, organized concerts and ran the venue. Activists who ran these clubs knew each other and were generally on

good terms. There existed a serious coordination of organizing musical and political events among these clubs. I was told many times that people in VL had a book where all clubs noted down their planned concerts. The purpose of this notebook was to avoid two or more concerts from the same genre on the same day so that clubs would not compete with each other for an audience. For political rallies or solidarity concerts, activists from all these clubs often organized and promoted events together. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the clubs having a separate identity from each other, so that most punks in Halle were associated with a particular location.

ROTER FADEN

The German expression *Roter Faden* is translated in English as ‘red thread’ or ‘red yarn’. As far as I know, it has no equivalent meaning in English, especially when it is translated directly. The meaning of the expression in German is simple: a *roter Faden* is a topic, question, argument or position that goes through the whole text and is a certain conceptual backbone of a book or article. There are two such threads in this book. One is East German identity and the other is East German class. Why are these topics especially relevant to understanding the punk and skinhead lives in an East German town? Tricia Rose notes as follows on black hip-hop culture:

Without historical contextualization, aesthetics are naturalized, and certain cultural practices are made to appear essential to a given group of people. On the other hand, without aesthetic considerations, Black cultural practices are reduced to extensions of sociohistorical circumstances. (Rose, 1992: 223–27)

I believe this statement is also relevant in the framework of this book. In order to understand what is going on in the East German punk scene, I will put it into a wider context, including a historical one. The topic of East German identity will be covered in two chapters and therefore I will not go deeper into this here. However, it must be stressed that the East–West German differences cannot be completely eradicated and, as I will show in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, keep popping up regularly. There are people who foresee the demise of East German identity, but it simply does not vanish.¹⁰

After the German reunification or *Mauerfall* (fall of the Berlin Wall), or *Wende* (the turn) as it is popularly known in Germany, the enthusiasm transformed relatively quickly into social pessimism regarding the merging of East and West Germans, and East and West Germany. In the beginning, there was a remarkable economic and lifestyle difference between West Germans and their former socialist fellow citizens. The economic disparities remained and the lifestyle differences did not fade out completely. Despite all

the media images, a decade after reunification, 55 per cent of West Germans and 67 per cent of East Germans thought that there were psychological and cultural differences between East and West Germans. Two-thirds of East Germans saw themselves as neglected by society and 25 per cent thought that they were ‘second rate citizens’ (Dennis, 2000: 87–105). In the early 1990s it was very popular in Germany to speak about the ‘wall in the head’ (*Mauer im Kopf*), indicating that the physical Berlin Wall has vanished, but that it persists as an imaginary wall in people’s minds. I have not heard this expression for a long time, but the East German identity seems to be like the secret knowledge of the Saramaka people from Surinam. Saramaka call it First Time and it is an orally transmitted historical narrative that is fundamental to their identity. This is a knowledge that is only transmitted orally in order to prevent non-Saramaka from learning more about the secrets that are important for the Saramaka identity and organization (see Price, 2002). The East German identity narrative and the counternarrative is constantly reproduced and for many East Germans, it is often like a secret knowledge that West Germans will never understand. This is the experience of the socialist era and it is transmitted to the next generations orally. This oral narrative very often differed from how the GDR and life there was and is depicted in writing or on TV. The counternarrative seems to be that West Germans often (and notwithstanding the public denial that any essential differences between West and East Germans still exist) draw the line between the East-erners and Westerners. I recall reading one report about the private life of then-Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014. One thing struck me and is still on my mind – namely, when the journalist wrote that in the morning Merkel makes a simple coffee for her and her partner by pouring boiling water on a mug in the coffee powder lies, he added ‘this is how you make coffee in the East [Germany]’. East Germany as a certain category lives, and this can be much more than just ‘another’ regional identity, as will be demonstrated throughout this book.

When one studies former GDR-era industrial towns, the local proletarian atmosphere and colouring is impossible not to notice. In the academic literature, the nostalgia for the GDR, or *Ostalgie*, is well studied from different angles (Dennis, 2000; Berdahl, 1999: xiii, 294; Berdahl, 2011; Berdahl et al., 2000: vi, 252; Castillo, 2008; Rethmann, 2009: 21–23). It is assumed that apart from economic inequality, the social meaning attached to being unemployed in the East has led to a growth in dissatisfaction among former East Germans. The socialist enterprise was a ‘total social institution’ (Clarke, 1992), providing not only employment but also leisure activities and social care for its workers. Consequently, East German workers identified themselves very strongly with production and enterprise. Moreover, work was a ‘duty’ and ‘honour’, a person’s main purpose and the essence of life (Ber-

dahl, 2011; Eidson, 2003; Eidson and Milligan, 2003). As a rule, in socialist countries unemployment did not exist and it was extremely difficult to be unemployed: nonworking was punishable by law in most socialist countries, while dismissing someone was very complicated for the enterprise. As such, it seems that people miss the security of the socialist political economy. My argument is different – namely, that the lack of prospects and stability makes people manifest their East German origin as a sign of protest and resistance. The punks and skins I studied were too young to be raised in the spirit of the socialist cult of proletarianism. The reason why they were embarrassed, angry or critical was because the ideology of self-sufficiency is something that belongs to the working-class ethos. In short, they found being unemployed or underpaid shameful because that runs against what they could be proud of and against the values they grew up with.

Class in Germany is a very interesting and contested term. In fact, the word ‘Klasse’ or class is seldom used in German, as I will argue in Chapter 4; the preferred term is *Schicht*, a social layer, which is a softer term. Moreover, class in Germany is understood purely in economic terms and is measured in income. According to German sociologists, the middle class starts from an income that is 70 per cent higher than the average salary in Germany, while the limit between the middle and upper classes is an income that is 150 per cent higher than the average salary.¹¹ In the British approach, the definition of class is less strict and more realistic. The distinction between the ‘class as culture’ and ‘class as economic role’ (Lawrence, 2000) helps us to approach the latent antagonism between different social groups. Cultural practices can be heavily class-based (Bourdieu, 1984) and in certain situations this is crucial for mutual sympathies or glass ceilings (cf. Friedman and Laurison, 2019). In Chapter 3, I will show how a gap exists in Germany between the ‘state’ or ‘objective’ class and the ‘self-ascribed’ class (ibid.: 313, 316). My research shows that people who are officially classified as ‘lower class’ or ‘precariat’ stick with their self-identification with the *Arbeiter* – the worker or working class. In my analysis of East German punk and its wider context, I lean on a Weberian reading of class, where the status of a group is defined through three components: wealth, prestige and power. This triad offers a perfect framework to speak about the substitute society of a subculture.

NOTES

1. The documentary is called *Punk Rock vs Sharia Law* and was made by Noisey, the music channel of *Vice* magazine. This is about the punk scene in Aceh, Indonesia’s only Sharia law province. The documentary is available on Noisey’s YouTube website as Episode 5 in a series of ‘Music World’ – see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Sbne-qCNzU> (retrieved 28 February 2020).

2. <http://www.halle.de/en/Home> (retrieved 28 February 2020).
3. Both US and UK 1970s punk bands like Blondie, Bad Brains, The Trousers, Generation X, The Meat Puppets, Wire, The Clash, Pere Ubu and The Ruts merged reggae into their music, and this trend continues today. Reggae was in this era seen as a rebellious and largely underground music that made it attractive to punks (see Letts, 2008; Lydon, 1993; Needs, 2005). Many older reggae DJs I met in Berlin in the 1990s became interested in reggae by listening to white punk and reggae bands. The Clash covered several original and already-forgotten roots reggae songs like 'Two Seven Clash' and 'Armageddon Time' and gave them a second life. At the end of the 1970s, the Two Tone movement merged musically punk and Jamaican ska. The Clash also experimented with hip-hop elements and bands like Redskins or Dexys Midnight Runners played their own fast and raw versions of 1960s northern soul music.
4. It is not the topic of the book, but in the punk scene, working-class street punk is believed to have its roots in the British football-infected lad culture, therefore musically street punk relies on early lad rock and pub rock combining it with football terrace chants. This was the background of Sham 69 and Cock Sparrer, followed by Angelic Upstarts and later a whole wave of bands too numerous to list here. Art-school punk has its origins in the art schools, as several members of The Sex Pistols, The Clash, etc. studied art. It should be noted that the definition of who is on which side is very much *post factum* in punk lore, as the dividing line is continuously created and maintained even now, through band interviews and nonacademic books.
5. Cholo is a US-Mexican criminal gang subculture, which is especially widespread in the southern states. For a good overview of the Cholo style, see Mendoza-Denton (2008).
6. In the UK, skinhead clothing shops and the popular young adult pulp novels of Richard Allen targeted the new skinhead (i.e. skinhead reggae) market.
7. 'Zone' (in English 'the zone') is still a tongue-in-cheek colloquial term for East Germany in the German punk scene. It derives from the name of the pre-GDR 'Ostzone' or 'eastern zone' that marked Soviet-occupied territory after the Second World War.
8. I was unable to track any study or autobiographical work that had the full list of bands that performed in the first punk festival of the GDR. Apart from the bands mentioned here, Wikipedia also lists HAU and Unerwünscht. See http://www.parocktikum.de/wiki/index.php/1.Punkfestival_der_DDR (retrieved 28 February 2020).
9. In Germany, 'Volksküche' or people's kitchen is usually a left-wing charity initiative that cooks and provides free or very cheap food to people in need.
10. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-eastern-german-identity-has-disappeared-a-919110.html> (retrieved 28 February 2020). The article in the *Foreign Policy* journal about the state elections in the autumn of 2019 proved to be illuminating. The analysts argued that the political setting in Eastern Germany is very different from that in Western Germany, where voters' preferences are more 'traditional'. The article also speaks about the political 'normalisation' in the country's east, indicating that the states that were part of the GDR still belong to a twilight zone: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/11/when-communists-lie-down-with-christian-democrats-germany/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11803&utm_term=Editor
11. https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/oben-mitte-unten-sozialwissenschaftler-vermessen-die.1148.de.html?dram:article_id=329444 (retrieved 28 February 2020).

On the other hand, confusion exists in Germany about how to define the upper class. For one part of the group, the well-paid academic from a wealthy background, some researchers use the term 'Ultra-Elite'. See <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/exzellente-oberschicht-die-ultra-elite-stammt-aus-bestem-hause/12067856.html> (retrieved 28 February 2020).