

## The Anarchist, the Punk Rocker and the Buddha walk into a bar(n) : Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma

### Abstract:

Punk rock is known for its frenetic energy. Its aggressive, anger driven, music is born from the seething cauldron of discontent. Anarchism is the 'ideology' that often underpins punk, but anarchism exists beyond punk in its drive to create a new social order fuelled by discontent at the current systems. On first glance, Buddhism, as an ancient practice of mindfulness intended to lead the individual into an awareness of the nature of being through calming activities such as meditation appears incongruous with anarchism and punk. However, a shift away from understanding Buddhism as a religion and an examination of the purposes behind Buddhism, punk and anarchy reveal a synchronicity. This has culminated in the creation of groups such as the Dharma Punx (USA) and the Rebel Dharma (UK). This article will demonstrate that the engagement with punk music, as an art form, is a key part of the acceptance of these syncretic groups as means of improving oneself and society. In other words, Dharma Punk and Rebel Dharma function as means of living out some of the key anarchistic principles that undergird punk.

### Introduction:

"No-one saves us but ourselves. No-one can and no-one may. We ourselves must walk the path."

Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

"No authority but ourselves"

Crass.<sup>2</sup>

"Nobody should be your authority, think for yourself, don't be satisfied with knowledge from so called 'famous authorities', never settle for others doing the work or thinking for you."

Barry (interviewee).<sup>3</sup>

Sōtō Zen Buddhist priest and anarcho-socialist activist Uchiyama Gudō explored the connections and constructed relations between the Buddha Dharma and radical political critique and activism.<sup>4</sup> He argued for the sangha to be considered as a living example of communal lifestyle not dependent upon land or property ownership. He also spoke out against the Meiji Emperor system and military force and action, with a strong emphasis on advancing democratic rights for all. Gudō was executed in January 1911 for supposed high treason.<sup>5</sup> Lala Har Dayal was an Indian nationalist revolutionary and activist who opposed British Imperialism, and later all forms of government viewing them as unnecessary and often repressive. He is perhaps most well known as secretary of the San Francisco branch of the Industrial Workers of the World and the founder of Bakunin Institute of California,

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<sup>1</sup> Dhammapada, Ch. 165, as translated in *The Dharma, or The Religion of Enlightenment; An Exposition of Buddhism* (1896) by Paul Carus

<sup>2</sup> *Yes Sir I will*, 1983

<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted online 16.02.15

<sup>4</sup> Rambelli Fabio, *Zen Anarchism: The Egalitarian Dharma of Uchiyama Gudo*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2013)

<sup>5</sup> Victoria, Brian, *Zen at War*, (New York: Weatherhill, 1998)

which he described as the “first monastery of anarchism.”<sup>6</sup> He argued for a considered approach to the rationality of every religion on an individual basis, and his work on the Bodhisattva Doctrines became a successful PhD thesis in 1932 and focused on the process and necessity of enlightenment for the welfare and liberation of all living creatures, human and non-human.<sup>7</sup>

Connections between Buddhism and anarchism in Western writings have been noted since the 1960s and form an intrinsic part of the Beat narrative. In 1961 Gary Snyder published “Buddhist Anarchism” in which he outlined what would later come to be called socially engaged Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> Within the short article he argues that the third of the three traditional aspects - morality (sila)<sup>9</sup> – should result in:

*“supporting any cultural and economic revolution that moves clearly toward a free, international, classless world. It means using such means as civil disobedience, outspoken criticism, protest, pacifism, voluntary poverty and even gentle violence if it comes to a matter of restraining some impetuous redneck. It means affirming the widest possible spectrum of non-harmful individual behavior — defending the right of individuals to smoke hemp, eat peyote, be polygynous, polyandrous or homosexual. Worlds of behavior and custom long banned by the Judaeo-Capitalist-Christian-Marxist West. It means respecting intelligence and learning, but not as greed or means to personal power. Working on one’s own responsibility, but willing to work with a group.”<sup>10</sup>*

A quick glance at most anarchist texts reveal the sympatico. Emma Goldman defines anarchism as; “[t]he philosophy of a new social order based on liberty, unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong, and harmful, as well as unnecessary. The new social order rests, of course, on the materialistic basis of life; but while all anarchists agree that the main evil today is an economic one, they maintain that the solution of that evil can be brought about only through the consideration of EVERY PHASE of life – individual, as well as the collective; the internal, as well as the external phases.”<sup>11</sup> Nathan Schneider expresses this in 21<sup>st</sup> century parlance in his description of anarchism as “Basic agreement about various ideologies and idioms – ableism [disability awareness in the UK], gender queerness, Zapatistas, black blocs, borders.”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed classic anarchist thinkers directly engaged with Buddhism, not just as seen above in the examples of Uchiyama Gudō and Lala Har Dayal but other more well-known authors such as Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. In his work Mutual Aid, Kropotkin noted that early Buddhist communities embodied the principle of mutual aid, meaning a voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit.<sup>13</sup> Whilst in Ethics he notes that “The principal point wherein Christianity and Buddhism differed from all preceding religions was in the fact that instead

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<sup>6</sup> Avrich, Paul, *Anarchist Portraits*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 30

<sup>7</sup> Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrines in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1970 reprint)

<sup>8</sup> In *The Journal for the Protection of All Beings* #1 (City Lights, 1961). A slightly revised version appeared in *Earth House Hold* (New Directions, 1969) under the title “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution.”

<sup>9</sup> Wisdom (prajna) and meditation (dhyana) being the other two.

<sup>10</sup> <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gary-snyder-buddhist-anarchism> [last accessed 13.01.15]

<sup>11</sup> Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and other essays*, (2014, publisher not listed), p29

<sup>12</sup> Nathan Schneider, ‘Introduction’ in Noam Chomsky, *On Anarchism*, (London: Penguin, 2013), p1

<sup>13</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, (Missouri: Dialectics, 2013)

*of the cruel, revengeful gods to whose will men had to submit, these two religions brought forward — as an example for men and not to intimidate them — an ideal man-god.”*<sup>14</sup> Though he later notes, in the same text, that both turned to the reliance upon an institutions or form of governance that directly went against the teachings of their respective Christ and Buddha. Likewise, Bakunin, who greatly influenced Har Dayal, acknowledged that Buddhism was something of an anomaly amongst religions in its lack of authority and deity.

There is, of course, an element of apparent incompatibility that requires addressing. Many anarchism’s are strongly rooted in the concept of ‘no gods, no masters’, however Buddhism is often classified as a religion within academic fields, the media, public perception and even retail. The term religion implies, or is assumed to contain, an over-arching authority of some kind – be that divine or through institutions, leaders such as priests, rabbis, imams or hierarchies. In approaching Buddhism an argument can be made for such hierarchies – the role of iterations of Buddhism within the maintaining of the caste system in areas of India and Tibet, the teachings of the Buddha being considered doctrine, or the understanding of those who have taken monastic orders as being ‘higher’ than lay practitioners for instance. However, the conception of Buddhism as a definable entity or even a religion helps to reveal the problematic nature of the term ‘religion’ and the issues created by Western dominance and perspective. It is worth engaging with these issues before moving to focus on Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma.

#### Western conception and dominance of ‘religion’

During the 1999 American Academy of Religion Conference Stuart Lachs argued that Ch’an/Zen Buddhism had risen in popularity and awareness in the West during the past 50 years because it fits into the Western concept of religion and authority. While most of his paper focused on the problems this uncritical acceptance has caused for Zen Buddhism, he astutely noted:

*“Through the mechanisms of sectarian histories, ritual performance, a special language, and most importantly through the ideas of Dharma transmission and Zen lineage, the supposedly enlightened Zen Master/roshi is presented to the West as a person with superhuman qualities. This presentation, mostly idealistic, is meant to establish, maintain, and enhance the authority of the Zen Master. It is also meant to legitimate the Zen institutions and establish hierarchical structures within it.”*<sup>15</sup>

What Lachs is noting is the removal from Eastern spiritual practices and lifestyles the blended nature of that which we might term (for lack of a better one) spiritualism with the everyday. In the West we typically systemise and categorise - the very term ‘religions’ was an attempt to do so following the encounter with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.<sup>16</sup> Western society is based, not on syncretism but on compartmentalisation. Having such a structure enables the few to maintain power and furthermore, it leads to and promotes a specious understanding of the concept of ‘religion’, which is problematic in studies such as this.

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development*, (Colorado Springs: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2012), p101

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.darkzen.org/articles/meansofauthorization.htm> [last accessed 03.01.15]

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Padgen, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

Timothy Fitzgerald rightly argues that the concept of religion as a distinct, definable whole is a creation of rhetorical rather than empirical construct that enables a religious/secular binary to persist.<sup>17</sup> According to Fitzgerald these binaries are an “*astonishingly implausible idea [and] these binaries so deeply underpin the dominant modern imaginaire of liberal capitalism that they have acquired the status of universal truths, and have been virtually removed from systematic critique.*”<sup>18</sup> One of the serious consequences of this is that the dominant discourse frames religious violence as barbaric and based on the irrational and/or the unprovable. This further promotes the notion that violence by the state, (i.e. ‘secular’ Western states) is rational and only conducted for some ‘good’ such as the nebulous notions of ‘liberty’ and legitimates killing in the name of the state. William Cavanaugh refers to this as “the myth of religious violence.”<sup>19</sup> Cavanaugh argues that this myth of religious violence relies upon the conception “*that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from ‘secular’ features such as politics and economics, which has a dangerous inclination to promote violence. Religion must therefore be tamed by restricting its access to public power. The secular nation-state then appears as natural, corresponding to a universal and timeless truth about the inherent dangers of religion.*”<sup>20</sup>

This is in many ways the two sided coin against which anarchism rails – no gods, no masters. That is, a recognition that the state is as equally violent, corrupt and power seeking as any ‘religion’ might be. In regards to this article, the myth of religious violence when taken outside of the West creates a new form of Orientalism<sup>21</sup> in that it seeks to assert and continually reassert the superiority or ‘civilising nature’ of Western social orders. Consequently we see the reconfiguration of aspects of Eastern (and Middle Eastern) cultures to fit into this myth and discourse, such as the Zen masters noted above. I will return to this point in more detail momentarily.

The solution to the binaries and the myth offered by Fitzgerald and echoed by others such as Talal Asad and Naomi Goldenberg is the removal of ‘religion’ as a concept and a descriptor.<sup>22</sup> Fitzgerald asserts that this would prevent universities being used or acting as an ideological apparatus to create the legitimisation of the state. However this also creates a serious problem for two reasons. The first is that Fitzgerald offers nothing in place of the current myth or binary discourse, all he would create is a void that something else would seek to utilise for agenda or power. The second problem, more pertinent to this article, is that Fitzgerald’s solution is one that lauds the academic and the power bases over the individual. In calling for the removal of the category of ‘religion’ within academia, media and other powerful outlets he is privileging the discourse over the actual daily lives and everyday experiences of people for whom the term, concept or engagement with ‘religion’ (however they understand or interpret the word and concept) has real meaning and purpose for them. Consequently he is promoting the institution, the system and the discourse over the

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth*, (London: Continuum, 2011), p13

<sup>18</sup> Fitzgerald, 2011, p13

<sup>19</sup> William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p3

<sup>20</sup> Cavanaugh, 2009, p3

<sup>21</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 1977)

<sup>22</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003); Naomi Goldenberg, *The End of God*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982.); Naomi Goldenberg, "Queer Theory Meets Critical Religion: Are We Starting to Think Yet?" in *Theory/Religion/Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*, Richard King, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)

individual, the community and the empiric evidence. For those individuals interviewed for this paper and additional research by the author, including for a PhD thesis,<sup>23</sup> this solution of Fitzgerald's would be problematic and incompatible with their own experiences and identities. Therefore we must, rightly, keep Fitzgerald's critiques of the concept and usage of the term 'religion' in mind but seek to ensure the individuals' and communities' experiences and identities can be given as much credence and voice as those of powerful institutions and authorities (if not more). In conducting such a search we are compelled to engage with the concept of Orientalism.

### Orientalism and New Orientalism

Edward Said's ground breaking, and now canonical, work on Orientalism argued that gross caricatures and stereotypes of Arab peoples, Asian and to a somewhat lesser extent Indian peoples were intended to provide a rationalisation for European colonialism based on a self-serving history in which "the West" constructed "the East" as extremely different and inferior, and therefore in need of Western intervention or "rescue". As Said puts it, "*the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.*"<sup>24</sup> To function as a contrast these cultures are depicted as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous. A comparison could be drawn with the current descriptors laid at the feet of religion within the religious/secular discourse. Orientalism has been occurring, especially in academia, since the European Enlightenment and is largely driven by self-serving imperialism. Since Said's book there have been concerted efforts to refrain or at least to draw attention to Orientalism in literature, art, film, media reporting and academic writing. In its place we find attempts to utilise the motifs and symbols from such cultures to critique Western modernity and post modernity. Increasingly this is focused on Islamic or Arabic cultures. Ian Almond argues that this approach of utilising the Islamic Orient to critique the West (as found in the work of writers such as Nietzsche, Derrida and Baudrillard) risks becoming an even more insidious form of Orientalism.<sup>25</sup> Although Almond readily admits that many of these writers acknowledge the multiple Islams and cultures that exist, he is at pains to point out that they are still holding Islam and Eastern cultures in the place of the unfamiliar and at the periphery. They provide a means to critique another value system but their own worth is neither noted nor celebrated. They remain 'other' and thus controlled.<sup>26</sup> This is an important point in regards to an examination of DP and RD as they must by necessity engage with the issue of Orientalism (consciously or not) as they are seen to be attempting to create a lifestyle that combines elements of the 'West' with the 'Orient' to create a whole - not an easy path to tread, and not one that they (or anyone) always succeed in. A group interview with three individuals involved in Dharma Punx<sup>27</sup> descended into squabbling over this issue. One of them, Victoria, mentioned the tribute to Adam Yauch (Beastie Boys) performed by four 'Buddhist monks' dressed in robes typically associated with Tibetan Buddhism, (by which Yauch was very influenced).<sup>28</sup> Their tribute consisted of performing

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Stewart, "*Punk Rock is my Religion*" *Straight Edge Punk as a surrogate for religion*, (University of Stirling, 2011)

<sup>24</sup> Said, 1977, p1

<sup>25</sup> Ian Almond, *The New Orientalists*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007)

<sup>26</sup> Almond, 2007, p195

<sup>27</sup> Hereafter DP will appear after any interviewees affiliated with the US based Dharma Punx and RD for the UK and Ireland based Rebel Dharma.

<sup>28</sup> Adam Yauch died of cancer in May 2012. His band The Beastie Boys had a number of tracks that dealt with Tibetan Buddhism and more specifically Tibetan independence. The tribute was performed two years after his death on the annual MCA day. MCA was Yauch's performance name. It was later revealed that it had been

break-dancing moves to a hip-hop song by the Beastie Boys.<sup>29</sup> The three interviewees – Victoria, Ellie and Stuart – argued about whether the monks should have participated in the stunt. Stuart vehemently argued that it was against the precepts, but Ellie and Victoria challenged him that the precepts merely discouraged it rather than forbade it and that it was a fitting tribute to Yauch who combined both in his own lifetime. Stuart responded by arguing that “[I]t is distasteful and disrespectful. People do this to Buddhism all the time and I’m sick of it. This clearly isn’t real Buddhism.” This provoked personal attacks on Stuart which I have not included here for reasons of privacy and respect, the remainder of the conversation is below.

Ellie: You can’t determine what is and isn’t Buddhism, who died and made you the Buddha?

Stuart: I’m not determining it, the precepts do. You can’t change a religion just because you move it from the East to the West, the basic fundamentals stay the same.

Ellie: Rubbish, anything that moves from the East to the West has to change, we have different systems here, we understand things differently. Change isn’t bad, it reveals the impermanence of things anyways. You just need to chill dude.

Victoria: Buddhism isn’t a religion anyway. It was just a tribute to someone, if they weren’t even monks what does it matter?

Stuart: Not a religion? Are you serious? Of course it is a religion, it has a recognised belief system, a way to understand the world and clear rules, that’s what a religion is.

Victoria: It’s a philosophy, a way of life maybe. It changes for people. Look at all the Hindus who are also Buddhist, or the people who combine Buddhism with Christianity or Judaism.

Ellie: Yeah I agree with Vicky and see nothing wrong in having monks dance if they want to. It’s just a tribute. There are loads of kinds or interpretations of Buddhism and that’s what makes it so awesome.

Stuart: I find it really offensive; you wouldn’t get something like that in Tibet, in the East. We all need to grow up and stop expecting everything to entertain us or conform to our standards. It’s disgusting how we take things and change them or mutilate them like this.

Ellie: How do you know what you get in the East? You even ever been?

Stuart: No, but...

Victoria: What?

Ellie: Seriously then, chill the fuck out.<sup>30</sup>

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orchestrated by a New York advertising firm KNARF to promote MCA day and the monks where in fact professional performers hired to dance and not connected to monastic Buddhism.

<sup>29</sup> <http://mic.com/articles/89077/the-story-behind-those-tibetan-monks-breakdancing-to-beastie-boys> [last accessed 12.12.14]

<sup>30</sup> Interview conducted 28.01.15. The interview was paused at this stage as people were getting upset and a few minutes break was suggested. After the break Stuart asked that the topic not be raised again, although he did agree it could remain within the transcript and be used in publications.

These three interviewees<sup>31</sup> raise questions of Orientalism, not in and of themselves but rather through their language and what it reveals. Stuart, Ellie and Victoria repeatedly talk of ‘The West’, ‘The East’ and ‘Tibet’ as homogenous, *sui generis*, block terms. They use these words as descriptors with the assumption of a shared meaning and common understanding, and in a way that ignores the multiplicity of lives, experiences, and cultures of each area. By continually using terms such as ‘East’ and ‘West’ as comparators they maintain the distance and thus the implicit superiority of one over the other – despite their own personal attempts in their everyday lives to ensure and promote hybridity and synchronicity. This is a more serious issue than academic nit picking over word choice, it is evidence of the creeping form of new Orientalism that Almond refers to. As Slavoj Žižek rightly reminds us, words are never just words. “Words matter because they define the contours of what we do.”<sup>32</sup> Some interviewees were attuned to this and expressed it with regard to their own approach. Chris (RD) spoke of, “*need[ing] to be aware of context and translation issues and not assum[ing] that just because we’ve translated it into English that we really understand it fully or even, I guess, that our words capture the right or full meaning.*”<sup>33</sup> Gaye (RD) spoke at length on what she described as her “soapbox topic of lack of finessing”, stating that “[n]ot knowing the specifics of a particular approach and making assumptions is not helpful. *Tibetan Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism are not mutually exclusive. Understanding one can help me appreciating the other. It is a lazy ass that just reads one book – even Noah’s*<sup>34</sup> – and thinks ‘right that’s it, I got it, I can sit, I’m all sorted’. Also seeing things as a bit of ‘Buddhist crap’ or ‘culturally alien’ language to work through implies that we can do it better in the West. It’s arrogance and ego and doesn’t work for a global community, east and west is a division made up by those in authority to remain in power. I reject that division.”<sup>35</sup>

Bearing all this in mind, we need to examine the Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma through a lens that enables the critique of the concept of religion as a Western colonial creation whilst acknowledging that certain beliefs, practices, rituals, and discussions (that an individual may wish to call ‘religion’) hold value and meaning. Given that we are dealing with a subculture that seeks to fuse elements from a multitude of sources into a coherent whole it is important that we continually draw upon the warning of Michael Marten in what he terms ‘the no true Scotsman fallacy’ in the question of identity.<sup>36</sup> Marten argues that instead of assuming that a ‘true’ version must exist we should instead look to view identity, especially in relation to ‘religion’, in terms of positions that continually shift in relation to others and to context. Furthermore our articulation of the position is also a movement through the repositioning of terms, ideas and language, especially in the interview situation. Therefore the remainder of the paper focuses on Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma groups and how they intertwine punk, anarchy and ‘religion’ from a perspective that does not reinforce Orientalism,

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<sup>31</sup> All from New York, as was Yauch, which may explain the heat of their responses to this event.

<sup>32</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*, (London: Verso, 2009), p109

<sup>33</sup> Interview conducted 26.01.2015

<sup>34</sup> Noah Levine, founder/creator of Dharma Punx following his own book *Dharma Punx: A Memoir*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004)

<sup>35</sup> Interview conducted 02.02.2015

<sup>36</sup> <http://criticalreligion.org/2014/12/08/the-no-true-scotsman-fallacy-and-the-problem-of-identity/> [last accessed 01.02.15]

encourage new Orientalism nor does it privilege the powerful over the individual or the community. Instead it seeks to determine the shifting positionality and its articulation.

### Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma

For the majority of interviewees the path to joining either Dharma Punx or Rebel Dharma (or in some cases both) was remarkably similar – punk rock participation, drug and/or alcohol addiction, mental health issues, numerous attempts to get sober, trying to combine recovery programmes with various ‘religious’ or spiritual activities/traditions, coming back into punk participation, discovering Noah’s books, choosing Dharma Punx or Rebel Dharma as a lifestyle. Interviewees were all in different stages of the path, although all had chosen Dharma Punx or Rebel Dharma as a personal practice at the time of the interview being conducted.<sup>37</sup>

Dharma Punx began in late 1999/early 2000 as the culmination of Noah Levine’s lifetime journey through rebellion, punk rock, substance abuse, incarnation, travel and spiritual undertakings. It has since spread through the USA, in particular the West and East Coasts, and into the UK, with some groups also emerging in Northern Europe. Dharma Punx focuses on sitting and teaching groups in various cities throughout the USA with people being invited to speak on aspects of Buddhism, typically the Vispanna tradition. In addition there are retreats run by Noah and other teachers which individuals can pay to attend. There are also private Facebook groups for support and resources on a daily basis. In the UK Rebel Dharma is slowly growing, being something of a recent phenomenon. It is largely focused around a private Facebook group but individuals are increasingly setting up local sangha groups in cities throughout the UK and Ireland. There is also a yearly retreat held at The Barn Retreat.<sup>38</sup> There is a significantly wider range of Buddhist traditions found within RD than DP, although Vispanna is still the most common with the majority of interviewees describing it as “seeing the world as it really is”.

The significance of the punk D-I-Y ethic cannot be underestimated in regards to the approaches to both a syncretic lifestyle of Buddhism, punk, and sometimes anarchism in regards to the appeal of Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma. Numerous interviewees described DIY as something of importance to them from an early age.<sup>39</sup> Former Minutemen bassist Mike Watt described it as:

*Punk was about more than just starting a band, it was about starting a label, it was about touring, it was about taking control. It was like songwriting; you just do it. You want a record, you*

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<sup>37</sup> Interviews were undertaken specifically for this paper in 2015, others were completed for a separate research project with those interviewees agreeing later that it could also be included in this article (2014) and a small number being interviewed for a PhD thesis (2009 – 2011). All interviews were conducted by the same researcher. Interviewees were given the option of having a pseudonym; most choose their own name wanting to take responsibility and ownership of their thoughts and ideas. Those who did choose to be anonymised are denoted through the use of ‘..’ at their own request. To ensure anonymity, whilst still respecting their desire to use their own name, ages and locations have been removed as potential identifiers. The only notable exception is that those marked DP are American while those marked RD are from or living in the UK. Interviews in the UK were all conducted via email or instant message on Facebook. Interviews in the USA were a combination of face to face interviews (2009 – 2011) and email or Facebook (2014).

<sup>38</sup> From which this paper takes its title.

<sup>39</sup> D-I-Y are the initials for Do It Yourself. This is the ethos in punk that if you want something to happen, be created or change then you have to get on with it and make it happen. You should not wait around and expect it to be done for you. This translated into people forming bands, creating fanzines, record presses and labels, designing merchandise and organising tours, shows and protests.

pay the pressing plant. That's what it was all about.<sup>40</sup> Interviewees made similar reflections and comments:

*The most important message of punk? - D.I.Y. Think for yourself. Do your own thing in your own way.*

Merv (RD).<sup>41</sup>

*My involvement with punk is probably more accurately an involvement with DiY culture. My more obvious punk involvement stemmed from political activism (anarchist, within the anti-capitalist movement around things like J18, S26, N30, Maydays, Euromayday, RTS, etc) that grew from my late teens throughout my twenties, and the support financial and propaganda wise that punk bands gave activism, through mentions of causes on stage, to benefit gigs, to CD and zine distros, etc.*

Dan (RD).<sup>42</sup>

The concept of doing things for yourself (and others) without the permission or assistance of those in authority or control is based on a concern for taking responsibility for you own life (including bad decisions) and the society around you. It is also inherently connected with anarchism both in regards to questions of power and its negation, thus enabling autonomy and preventing division and domination. This was perhaps most famously articulated by what has become known as Anarcho-punk, which concerned itself (lyrically, visually and in action) with freedom from social conformity and the shackles of societal constraint, championing personal independence and the exercise of free will. Concurrent with that was a concern within anarcho-punk for the liberation of the planet (widely understood) from exploitation, the tyranny of the “war state” and the overthrow of the disfiguring and alienating capitalist system. “*Within Anarcho-punk, DIY activity was seen as indivisible from the political-cultural project by which the movement was enthused.*”<sup>43</sup> We find examples of this expressed throughout a plethora of anarcho-punk songs, for example:

Oi you for fucks sake, 'wake up',  
Righteous and the greedy  
It's big brother's biggest brother common panacea  
Spy satellites bugging device Building egos / budding stars  
Everything discovered  
From small acorns - world domination  
CCTV recording me  
Observing then controlling the  
Nation on location

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2001), p6. [Emphasis mine.]

<sup>41</sup> Interview conducted 08.02.2015

<sup>42</sup> Interview conducted 06.02.2015

<sup>43</sup> Rich Cross, “There is no authority but yourself: the individual and the collective in British Anarcho-Punk”, *Music & Politics*, 4, Number 2 (Summer 2010) p 1 -20 pp6 [extra ref here?]

World domination<sup>44</sup>

See the policemen running round

Driving culture underground

They get paid to put you away

Cos that's how the system works these days<sup>45</sup>

We're all conditioned to think ten tellies are better than one

And to blow this world up ten times is better than to blow it up once

Billions spent on destroying the world while millions starve, where did we go wrong?

Where did we go wrong? Maybe you don't think that this is wrong?

We as one are saying

Feed starving people

Fuck your bombs<sup>46</sup>

These expressions are comparable with the concept of perfect livelihood articulated within the noble eightfold path. Perfect or right livelihood being understood as the means by which the image of the ideal society becomes transformed into attempts at reality by focusing, not on the individual as such but rather on the collective life. As Sangharakshita describes it, *"you cannot live and work in a corrupt, basically unethical society without, to some extent, becoming besmirched by it. So even in the interests of one's own individual moral and spiritual life one has to make some effort to transform the society in which one lives."*<sup>47</sup>

In his section on The Revolutionary Manifesto, Dharma Punx founder Noah Levine expresses similar thoughts. *"Ignorance is not just Western or Eastern; it is human. For the awakened revolution to take root, the pervasive racist structure of society has to be dismantled.... Service is at the heart of the revolution ... Our human society is founded on confusion, ignorance, and lies. The legacy of violence and greed that our ancestors have left in their wake is the foundation on which we find ourselves standing today ... Serving the truth comes down to simply living life from the place of positive intentions. This may be counterintuitive; in fact it may be the most radical stance one can take."*<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "There's No Power", Conflict, *There's No Power Without Control*, 2003, Mortarhate

<sup>45</sup> "Society", *Subhumans, EP – LP*, 1986, 2010 edition, Bluurg

<sup>46</sup> "Some of us scream, some of us shout", Flux of Pink Indians, *Strive to Survive Causing the Least Possible Suffering*, 1982, 2013 re-issue, One Little Indian

<sup>47</sup> Sangharakshita, *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*, (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2007), p78

<sup>48</sup> Noah Levine, *Against the Stream*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2007), p119

Anarchist activists and anarcho-punks have sought ways to radically alter society. Some engaged in political interference or even running for political office<sup>49</sup>, others engaged in civil disobedience through actions such as hunt sabotages, protests, riots and civil disobedience. A growing number attempted in various ways to create an example of how their vision of society could function through squats and communes *OK so I don't know how long I can live here till the cops throw us out, but they're no different, they don't know when they will lose their precious house 'cause of someone else taking their job or foreclosure or whatever. Difference is I can see it, they can't.*" Rach (DP).<sup>50</sup>

While it is important to acknowledge the resistance to capitalist property relations inherent within squatting, it is equally important that the lifestyle of squatters is not over-romanticised.<sup>51</sup> Often interviewees recalled tales of living in deserted and dangerous shells of buildings, with vermin, no running water, inconsistent electricity and things such as mattresses scavenged from the street or skips. While the conditions may not be ideal, the purposes (for some) certainly align well with the Buddhist concept of right livelihood. Although with the caveat that the drug taking and harmful behaviours that occurred in some squats certainly do not align with said principle.

*It's the basic paradigm of our time: we shouldn't trust so much in the state. We shouldn't trust so much in big companies, we should take responsibility ourselves. It's like they say at the meetings, we are basically just counter culture idiots, rebels, freaks and oddities that are willing to look at what we are really doing and why in order to find a better or true path through the pain and confusion that comes with being human. I think it is Noah's book where it says something like, freedom is the future and it comes through wisdom, compassion, kindness and generosity. Those that cling to the notion of property ownership as a source of power cannot walk that path, because their actions are about power, protectionism, isolationism and giving up control.* Peter (DP).<sup>52</sup>

One interviewee, Jake (RD), wrote and published a book about his early experiences with anarcho-punk, revolutionary action and trying to achieve these goals in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>53</sup> However, in his interview Jake expressed his eventual frustration with anarcho-punks stating:

*My political views changed after my first contact with Asia, which pre-dated any meditation by a decade. The one size fits all solution of revolutionary anarchism just didn't not apply to the India I saw in the '80's. Many of the problems may be similar e.g. inequality, but different cultures need different solutions*<sup>54</sup>

This returns us to the question of Orientalism, the privileging of power and the connections with Buddhism. There is a tendency for those outside of the subculture to assume that punks and anarchists are not only synonymous with one another (a highly contestable presupposition) but that anarchism itself is homogenous. While a shared goal of a liberated humanity there is a multitude of understandings of these terms. Some follow an individualist anarchist as articulated by Max Stirner,

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<sup>49</sup> Jello Baifria for example

<sup>50</sup> Interview conducted 31.08.2014

<sup>51</sup> The propensity of punk in particular to look back on itself through rose tinted glasses, as it were, has been explored in detail in "The Outcasts: punk and the Troubles" in *Tales from the Punk Side*, Greg Bull & Mike Dines (ed), (London: Itchy Monkey Press, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Interview conducted 03.09.2014

<sup>53</sup> Jake Saltiel, *The Joys of Work*, (Amazon UK, 1991)

<sup>54</sup> Interview conducted 11.03.2015

in which the individual is the agent of revolution through extending their own freedoms.<sup>55</sup> Whilst for the collectivists, the agents of social change are those who suffer the most through various forms of exploitation.<sup>56</sup> However, as Jake was pointing too in his interview, oppression within one state does not equate to oppression within another. Solidarity cannot be a given without fuller understandings of such nuances. Many of the anarcho-punks and other punks in the UK, for example, were able to draw unemployment benefit to ensure they could at least feed themselves - no such safety net necessarily exists for those who are unemployed in other countries. Assuming communal suffering or understanding is itself a form of Orientalism as well as a form of oppression as it may lead to the action of speaking for and about other individuals, groups and countries. Thus perpetuating a perhaps unconscious Eurocentricism and re-enacting/mimicking the very powers they are fighting against. Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" engages with this in regards to the processes whereby postcolonial studies ironically reinscribe, co-opt, and rehearse neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure.<sup>57</sup> Said writes: *the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either. ... Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.*<sup>58</sup>

Said goes on to argue that ideas, cultures and histories cannot be understood without their unique and multi-layered configurations of power forming a significant scaffold around their study and examination - and that is what we are seeing in the above interview extracts. Dan (RD) spoke of requiring this in his own search through and exploration of Buddhism as a potential path for him, stating:

*I see it as more in line with Chellis Glendinning and her book "My Name Is Chellis, and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilisation"... What is so significant for me about this book is that it described Buddhist techniques for analysis but it critiqued the more well-known Buddhist activists such as Thich Nhat Hanh. In one fabulous section Chellis talks through one of TNH's exercises about looking at a piece of paper and seeing the plants and sun that gave it birth, Chellis says that's fine but we must also see the industrial processes that created it and the toxic chemicals used to whiten the paper, i.e., that in the simple and mundane we can see all of our creation and not just the "nice" as many Buddhist teachers are wont to focus upon.*<sup>59</sup>

The presence of Orientalism, a one size fits all approach within Anarcho-punk (and other versions of anarchism and punk rock), along with a propensity within aspects of Buddhism to focus on what Dan referred to as "nice", can be understood through Benedict Anderson's conception of nationalism, which he terms "Imagined Communities."<sup>60</sup> Anderson argues that a nation is a socially constructed community imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. The same theory can be applied to communities and subcultures, not just to nations. Within this imagining of a community there is a strict delineation – who is in and who is out and why. Anderson argues that the

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<sup>55</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, (London: Rebel Press, 1993)

<sup>56</sup> Cross, 2010, p8

<sup>57</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (ed), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988)

<sup>58</sup> Said, 1977, p5

<sup>59</sup> Interview conducted 10.02.2015. Book referenced is listed in the bibliography

<sup>60</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 2006 edition)

problem is not only exclusivity but one of presumption. That is, all members of a community, subculture or nation cannot possibly meet each other and so they imagine or presume that all other members agree, hold to, and pursue the same concept of the community (and criteria for who is in and who is out) as they do and so proceed to build up their conception on that fallacy. This not only limits what a community can be or can create but it lends itself to the worst kind of nationalistic fervour, Orientalism, and an inability to expand when met with those who also consider themselves members but do not confirm one's imagined boundaries.

### The Imagined Community of Dharma Punx / Rebel Dharma

In joining the groups and in committing to a transformative practice such as Dharma Punx or Rebel Dharma, members typically meet online, although there are groups organised for guidance, meditation and retreat purposes. There are significantly more of these in the USA than in UK and Ireland. Issues of Imagined Community have arisen in a number of ways and identity renegotiations have had to take place. In the USA there has arisen a significant issue over costing, especially of retreats. Although most local meetings are based on *dana*<sup>61</sup> members have raised concerns and complained that those of lower incomes, working class status, mothers and for some those of colour have been marginalised or pushed out.

*I have three small children, I'm a single mom and am currently living on food stamps and welfare because of my PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. I can't afford child care to go to meetings, and ok yes maybe I could take them with me, but then I wouldn't really be focussing and meditating. I would be so afraid of them interrupting or disturbing others that I wouldn't get, its, wouldn't make sense.*

Susie (DP).<sup>62</sup>

In a group interview, Shanna, Raul and Annie (all DP) talked amongst themselves about the cost of retreats:

*Shanna: It really annoys the crap outta me how expensive those retreats are. I know they have costs attached to them but really all they do is exclude anyone who isn't white and middle class.*

*Annie: I agree, don't get me wrong. I love that Noah started this and I've learnt loads and stuff but I find it so, like, frustrating that there is never any acknowledgement of how much that was only possible because of the wealth of his father. I can't go off to retreats for 4 or 500 dollars at a go. Not only would I have to take it as my holiday time from work, but my holiday pay wouldn't even cover the cost, I'd come back broke.*

*Raul: I don't go to the meetings or anything. I went a couple of times and it was all white, I felt really uncomfortable and out of place. It's supposed to be a place for the misfits, the kids that don't fit in, but it's only the misfits whose faces fit, you know? I'm Mexican, I'm brown, my face don't fit.<sup>63</sup>*

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<sup>61</sup> Donation on the basis of what you can afford to give, rather than a prescribed or expected amount. French punks call it 'Prix Libre' (Free price), and I've seen it just called 'Pay What You Can' in the UK.

<sup>62</sup> Interview conducted 20.03.2014

<sup>63</sup> Interview conducted 12.10.2014

These interview extracts reveal the issue of Imagined Communities in relation to access, perceived acceptability and belonging. Boundaries have been laid down with the assumption that all in the group will agree, as well as comply. Whether those boundaries are a matter of reality or perception, in some ways does not matter for those who feel they are left on the outside yet identify as belonging.<sup>64</sup> These same issues arose amongst another group I was involved with in the Bay Area during PhD fieldwork in 2009. This group were having to deal with their success in attracting the attention of local university students who were attending in greater numbers. Some members encouraged it and catered for it in regards to the range of speakers they invited along. Other members really struggled with it, claiming that it altered their identity and curtailed the punk element, which for them was as important as the Dharma element. They argued and complained that in accommodating these students they could no longer attend punk shows after sittings as a group, which had been an integral part of the experience for them. Although a number mentioned them only two interviewees, Mike and 'John', spoke of their desire for the removal or banning of the students.

*To be honest I'm considering leaving the group, have been on and off the last few months. And yes, if I'm honest, it's down to these students. They are only doing it for the cool points, like looking wacky and cool 'cause they hang out with punks. Thing is they aren't hanging out with us, they are seeing us in a safe environment, they don't actually have any interest in punk at all. They don't wanna go to shows or like the music or the politics, they just wanna do a bit of meditation, hippy trippy stuff and then go and tell their friends how cool and wacky they are.*

Mike (DP).<sup>65</sup>

*These fucking students are just ruining it, this is stupid. Why do we have to have them, like, they aren't cool with it all. Everything is already set up in society for them and now the one thing we have they are taking as well. No, just fucking no. I'm thinking of talking to [anonymised] about banning them or splitting the group or something. 'John' (DP)<sup>66</sup>*

This particular Bay Area group were also struggling to reconcile the types of speakers that would be appropriate giving their divergent audiences. The wider range of speakers demonstrated the issues that can arise both in regards to identity when we imagine that belonging to a particular group carries certain markers, and the mutation and adaption of teachings as they move from one context to another. Christopher Partridge argues:

*It is also important to understand that Eastern spirituality is not parachuted into Western culture – it is inhistorized, inculturated, contextualized. It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that the spirituality taught by Western gurus and masters is distinct from that taught by their Eastern*

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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that to date the same issues have not arisen within the UK RD groups in regards to race or gender, and although there has been some discussion about the cost of retreats on Facebook, no-one has mentioned it being prohibitive to their attendance as yet. The greatest issue for attendance appears to be distance and lack of access due to being limited to public transport.

<sup>65</sup> Interview conducted 13.11.2009

<sup>66</sup> Interview conducted 06.11.2009

counterparts... because Eastern thought is being processed in Western minds, shaped as they are by a late modern context, an eclectic, bricolage approach to religion and neo-Romanticism.<sup>67</sup>

To a great extent, although the history of Noah<sup>68</sup> is known and somewhat acknowledged, DP and RD are a hybrid group and so creating boundaries, especially imagined ones, is both inevitable and impossible at the same time. Many members cannot afford to continually travel and study under a range of teachers and practices – they are limited to books, internet resources and the group. This is perhaps most obvious in the final question this article will explore, that of whether the punks consider what they are doing as a form of religion, engagement with religion or something else and how that combines, or not, with their punk identity.

### Conclusion - The question of religion

The introduction to this article engaged with Fitzgerald's argument, taken up by critical religion, that the concept of religion is a Western, colonial one intended to push an agenda of rationality, secularism and Christianity. It was a means of categorising and understanding (and ultimately attempting to control) the known and expanding world. The question of religion, spirituality and its conceptual understanding in connection with punk and anarchism is one that DP and RD has had to engage with, furthermore it is one that has increasingly become important in the study of punk in general. As Brian Peterson puts it:

*The inclusion of various forms of spirituality in hardcore instilled an even stronger passion for defining one's place in the world, regardless of one's spiritual beliefs ... The divide over spirituality was often immense, but the formulation of a position on such issues allowed people to better pursue their own ideas and interests.*<sup>69</sup>

Peterson is referring to the debate that emerged and intensified throughout the 1990s with the emergence of Krishnacore and Christian punk. Individuals did have to think about where they stood on the issue of religion and spirituality and, more importantly, why. Dharma Punx in many ways has continued that debate, but does not carry the same incompatibility with the anarchistic core of punk because it does not demand the obedience towards a divine being. Furthermore, Buddhism stresses the importance of one's own inner journey towards a realised self rather than relying on dogma or leaders for answers or deferring to an unseen deity for explanations to the essentially inexplicable.

However it is important to consider whether the members' views on religion and of DP or RD as a religion is influenced, by or contributes to, the dual problems of Orientalism and Imagined Community. All interviewees were asked if they considered DP or RD to be a religion with "however you define that" included immediately following the use of the word religion. The immediate response of all interviewees was to say no, but to then begin to clarify, justify and think it through with a range of interesting responses and ideas.

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<sup>67</sup> Christopher Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West Vol 1*, (London: T & T Clark, 2004), p106

<sup>68</sup> Noah's father is Steven Levine who, along with Jack Kornfield, is credited with making Theravada Buddhism more widely available, accessible and understandable to Western (specifically American) minds. Ram Das, a friend of Steven's, and a Jewish convert to Hinduism, was also a teacher of Noah's. In his book, *Dharma Punx*, Noah explains a number of the monasteries in India, and various places within Asia, and teachers he has encountered and sat under, and what impact they have had on him and his teachings.

<sup>69</sup> Brian Peterson, *Burning Fight*, (Huntington Beach: Revolution Records, 2009), p132

*I really began to take an interest in religion and to reconsider my own religious heritage that I had for the most part discarded as I'd become "politically conscious". My religious heritage was Church of England, but actively so not just nominally in the way a lot of people are... [Dan went through a period of serious mental health issues and personal traumas – not outlined here for purposes of privacy] In looking for recovery, and desperately trying to avoid falling back on drink, I began to look again at religious ideas. Rejecting Christianity, I came across meditation through my work in cultural heritage and the preservation of a (if I recall correctly) Vietnamese Buddhist temple and the discussion surrounding the syncretic nature of Buddhist practice and how this meshed with understanding the intangible nature of what was being preserved (I suspect I maybe the only person in Rebel Dharma to have found the Dharma through that route!!). Anyway that led me down the rabbit hole of Buddhist writings and quickly to the book dharma punx. Later I started sitting with a local Dharma Punx group and really liked their approach and organisation... peer-to-peer, and everyone being able to lead, and their openness, and similarities of interests to mine... I think it's quite amusing that the punk tradition is the one that's following what could be conceived as the "fundamentalist" or "literalist" position! But for me personally what the Buddhist practices have opened up is Engaged Buddhist practices and ways of being in the world.*

Dan (RD).<sup>70</sup>

*[Following a mental breakdown Merv] did lots of therapy groups most of which included relaxation exercises. I liked 'em. One of my fellow nutters said "if you like relaxation exercises you should try meditation". He took me to a NKT group. That was the start. I don't take Buddhism as religion. The religious aspects don't interest me. I don't normally call myself a Buddhist. I'm a dharma practitioner.*

Merv (RD).<sup>71</sup>

*Jake referred to his practice as 'transformational' : Transformational practices are ways of altering how the mind works. In the east they have been incorporated or co-opted, depending on your view, into the religions there. But the actual practices have very little to with beliefs, worship, gods, mystics etc. Religion is just a big word for superstition. I am not a religious person, or maybe even a spiritual person. I have little clue what that actually means. Many in the west are actually trying to fill the gap that their own local religion has failed to fill. That's why the NKT and Hare Krishna's are so popular. But these type of groups are scripture based. The practices come later. And in my view are just brainwashing. Really, I'm just not interested in that so for me I identify what I'm doing in a secular psychological way. Did Buddha have a shrine of himself? No. Is his story historical fact? No. Did Jesus walk on the water? No. Religion is the natural human need to find meaning in the unknown. Gods, devils deities, ascribing power to them which is somehow outside of ourselves, as I said it's superstition. 'The logic of children' my better half calls it. For me it's just nonsense. I get why for many its valid but for me, I'm just not like that. Buddha found a set of tools and a path. The path, or at least some of it, was formed in a temporal constraint, i.e. of his times. He was also a good teacher so people listened. Or maybe 'cause he was a prince? Who knows. The tools, the core of what we are doing are tools for an enhanced psychology.*

Jake (RD).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Interview conducted 10.02.2015

<sup>71</sup> Interview conducted 08.02.2015

*OK so here's the thing, I looked you [researcher] up, so I know you do the whole challenge the category of religion – which is fine and all, though I don't fully understand it – but for me, religion, well it just doesn't work. Religion is basically, well it's just bullshit to be honest. It's taking a good idea, making it a narrow approach and then forcing it on other people to make them agree with you or feel bad or guilty for disagreeing. It's all just one big fucked up power struggle. Was it supposed to be like that? I don't know. But do I think Dharma Punx is religion? I can see why some might, it has some of the outside appearances of it – rituals, expected practice and shit. But really, no, I don't think about it like that. It's personal, it's individual but also its punk and I don't think we can forget that part of it, for me that stops any bullshit religion taking over it.*

Chris (DP).<sup>73</sup>

*Religion? Seriously? Fuck sake, no I hate them and wouldn't be involved with the kinda shit they do, they are institutions of power. Do I see Dharma Punx as religion, never really thought about it, but OK, well no actually I don't. It is, has no power, only that which I give it. I guess some would call it religion and think that it is that, but I don't fucking care what you call it, it works for me as it is. Calling it a religion doesn't change it, same as calling the government "friends" or something wouldn't change my opinion of them and what they do. They are just words, the only meaning they have is what we give to them and how we use them.*

Kristen (DP).<sup>74</sup>

Although this can only be a selection of the myriad of responses it serves to highlight the range of ideas that exists about the concept or 'religion' within DP and RD. Overwhelmingly interviewees resisted the notion that their practices were religious but a significant number didn't object to others thinking that they were.

While none of the interviewees openly stated that they themselves were religious, a very small minority (6 interviewees in total, 5 from the USA and 1 originally from the UK now living in the USA) were happy to admit adherence to a range of religious institutions. Interestingly none of them identified with the punk elements as strongly as other interviewees and all of them denied any involvement with anarchy. All were, or identified as, women and none were willing to engage with or discuss anything in relation to Orientalism or translation of ideas. An interesting contrast to those who did not consider it religious but were trying to grapple with – in varying degrees – the same ideas. There is perhaps a link between dogmatism and Western neo-liberal conception of progress in relation to American articulations of religion / faith working through the response of these 6 interviewees. Charles Taylor describes it as *"A way that Americans can understand their fitting together in a society although of different faiths, is through these faiths themselves being seen as in this consensual relation to the common civil religion."*<sup>75</sup>

The willingness of interviewees, and of those who post on the Facebook forums, to engage with the concept of what religion is, and think about it in terms of what they are doing and creating together, is not simply a reaction to a new way of expressing it. Rather it is tied intrinsically to their

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<sup>72</sup> Interview conducted 11.03.2015

<sup>73</sup> Interview conducted 28.10.2009

<sup>74</sup> Interview conducted 02.12.2014

<sup>75</sup> Taylor Charles, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2007) p524

experiences within punk, within anarchist networks and especially within anarcho-punk and the negotiations that such affiliations require. “*The dilemmas that accompany and increase in the currency of their ideas: how to prevent the inspiration advocacy of self-activity and collective self-reliance become its antithesis: how to stop the catalyst evolving (unintentionally) into a control mechanism that nullifies the creative efforts of others.*”<sup>76</sup>In other words we have to stop assuming an understanding of what religion is and why it does or does not matter and move beyond the argument of who should control the debate. We must consider the creative ways in which individuals and communities are combining a variety of resources together to create a coherent whole, to move a fragmented sense of identity and belonging into one of wholeness. Of course there will be problems and they should be critiqued, but their critique must also include a sustained critique of the wider issues such as the use and understanding of words such as ‘religion’, ‘secular’, ‘East’, ‘West’ and ‘Middle East’ based around Marten’s articulation of the ‘no true Scotsman’ fallacy.

The purpose of this article has been to demonstrate how Dharma Punx and Rebel Dharma individuals and communities are working through common issues of identity, meaningfulness and their own encounters with Orientalism and Imagined Community whilst continually holding the principle of tell me how to change things for the better not what I simply what I have to do without reason.

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<sup>76</sup> Cross, 2010, p12

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