

## **“Who am I? Where are We? Where do we go from here?”: Marxism, Voice, Representation, and Synthesis**

### **Abstract**

Recently Kim (2008) and Chua (1998) have warned critical accounting researchers of the dangers involved in oral history research in accounting involving a privileged researcher(s) and a cultural or racial “other”. The end result of this research often is that the researcher gets a promotion and a pay rise whilst the others remain in the same position that they were in before the research. These warnings are extremely important and should be the source of much personal reflection and even agonizing on the part of those researchers that do this type of research. However, I argue that Kim’s negative tone, whilst justified in a polemic, should not discourage researchers to the extent that they shy away from compassionate explorations of topics involving the other in favour of “safer” capital markets or other mainstream accounting research. Those researchers writing from a Marxist perspective will continue to see the primary source of exploitation as the capitalist production process and its extraction of surplus-value from the workers without payment. This does not mean that such researchers somehow “ignore race” although some types of racist acts Marxism finds hard to explain satisfactorily. To illustrate these arguments, I present a case study of the legendary 1970s punk musician and philosopher Joe Strummer of the Clash to suggest how a compassionate and authentic individual can meaningfully and boldly address issues of the other and the exploitation that they face within a Marxist framework. The maturation and increased sophistication of Strummer’s lyrics by 1978 suggest that young artists (and researchers) need to be permitted the opportunity to make mistakes and to grow as part of their own existentialist personal journeys.

**Keywords** Louis Althusser; The Clash; class struggle; dialectical materialism; existentialism; Marxism; punk rock; representation; Joe Strummer; voice.

## 1. Introduction and theoretical framework<sup>1</sup>

Writing from a broadly postcolonial feminist perspective, Kim (2008) and Chua (1998) have provided critical accounting researchers with a warning to be extremely careful when engaging in interpretative oral history research into the cultural and racial other. The argument is that, no matter how well intentioned the researcher(s) may be in her/his/their pursuit of emancipation and social justice, the very act and processes of the researching may inadvertently lead to further stereotyping, marginalization, exploitation, and patronizing of those other. According to Kim (2008) and Chua (1998), it is the researcher who holds the position of power in the relationship between researcher and interviewees in that the researcher chooses the research topic; the times and places in which the research will be conducted; the questions which will be asked; and how and which interviewee responses are presented in the finished work. Furthermore, Kim (2008) and Chua (1998) point out that the researcher(s) use the research to secure publications and career advancement for herself/himself/themselves whereas, by contrast, the interviewees will probably experience no improvement in their living and working conditions as a direct result of their participation in the study.

The very acts of researching and publication lead to further exploitation and marginalization of the other. The senior lecturer is promoted to reader (to use the UK terminology) and moves to a bigger house whilst the researched stay unemployed, etc. Another question can be posed: will researchers be *less interested* in the other for research purposes when they no longer exist as the other vis-à-vis the researcher(s)? For example, many study the sociology of working-class blacks in the USA but how many researchers study sociological issues pertaining to upwardly mobile professional blacks or to the

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<sup>1</sup> The quote in the paper's title is from the song "Who am I" by Australian singer Ross Ryan that appeared on his 1976 album *Smiling for the Camera*. This song is now overshadowed by Ryan's famous hit "I am Pegasus".

second- and third-generations of immigrant communities that move out beyond the ‘Chinatowns’?

These are all very important issues and critical researchers in accounting in oral history should duly reflect upon them. This is something which I have done as co-author of my own recent research. However, I also believe that the tone of Kim’s (2008) arguments may be overly negative although I appreciate that the article was written in the form of a polemic designed to bring an issue to people’s consciousness. As a polemic, it was never, like Marx’s polemical pieces, intended to provide a completely balanced view of the issues.

Kim and Chua maintain that critical researchers should fully allow the “other” to speak and that a minimum of pre-formed hypotheses and worldviews should be brought into the research project. The data should be allowed to speak with interpretation kept to a minimum. However, those critical researchers choosing to operate within the Marxist tradition, such as myself, will continue to hold on to the tenet that the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and Mao have correctly identified the source and agent of exploitation. The primary source of exploitation is the capitalist production process (Callinicos, 2006; Kenway, 2008), where surplus-value or, in other words, unpaid labour time (Bryer, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2006; Catchpowle et al., 2004, p. 1040; Marx, 1976, Chap. 7, pp. 284-306) is extracted by the capitalist business owner from the workers. In addition to direct exploitation from capitalist firms indirect exploitation is achieved by a whole network of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses that ultimately support the ruling class and the extant mode of production (Althusser, 2006a, 2008a; Callinicos, 2006; Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999, p. 734; Kenway, 2008). Contrary to Boggs (1997, p. 768, cited in Lehman, 2007, p. 655), I do not accept the premise that “Marxian fixations on class struggle, the primacy of capital-labour relations, and social totality has lost its rationale”. Instead I agree with Cooper (1997, p. 21) who writes that “Marxists ... believe that Marx’s theories are as

relevant today as at the time in which he was writing”. If we turn to Russia, the former centre of the Communist world, the Soviet Union may be long gone but the Russian Communist Party still attracts 20% of the vote in elections. Marxism and Communism may be minority worldviews, contemporary Russia, Eastern Europe, and China not excluded, but they refuse to die and their intellectual heritage remains impressive.<sup>2</sup>

The above does not mean, however, that Marxism is incapable of evolving, progressing, and adapting. Everything must adapt or it dies. A good early example is Mao Zedong’s extensions of the theory of dialectical materialism beyond that found in Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008, p. 185) points out that Mao must be given credit for extending this theory, indeed for pushing it to its limits. New and important ideas introduced by Mao (2007b, 2007c) include the distinctions between principal and non-principal contradictions and between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, Mao pointed out that the universal dimension is literally resident within the principal contradiction (Žižek, 2008, pp. 182-183).

Interview responses obtained by a Marxist author doing oral history research are used to provide detail so that the readers may observe exactly how exploitation, oppression and resistance operate or operated in *particular localized contexts*. Examples of integration of theory and practice by Marxist authors writing social history include Engels’ (1987) brilliant early work *The Condition of Working Class in England* (although, to a large extent, this book was written during the young Engels’ pre-theory stage with the theory being mostly

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<sup>2</sup> Minqi Li (2008) talks about the rise of the “New Left” in modern China which is an unusual alliance of young people disaffected with the regime and old-time Maoists who refuse to die or compromise. Central to the modern debate in China remains the ongoing status of Mao Zedong, a person whose legacy will always remain contested ground and subject to multiple interpretations. During the televising of one recent Chinese spectacular celebration, the most memorable and interesting character interviewed, from my perspective, was the serious old man who when asked “What would Mao say of China today?” replied candidly “Mao would say that those in power have taken the capitalist path”.

<sup>3</sup> I think that Žižek (2008, p. 189) is correct in saying that when Mao stated, in a mocking spirit, that victory by the Red Army over its enemies amounted to (dialectical) synthesis what is precisely wrong here is Mao’s mocking attitude. The Red Army is not above or outside history nor is it above or outside dialectics (Catchpole et al., 2004, p. 1047). A synthesis is a synthesis regardless of how unpretty it might look.

developed later)<sup>4</sup> and (2004) *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*; Marx's (1976) Chapter 10 on "The Working Day" in Volume 1 of *Capital*; Lenin's (2004) "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism" (cited in Cooper and Catchpowle, 2009, p. 720) and (1992) *The State and Revolution*; Stalin's (1965) *The Foundations of Leninism* (a, dare I say it, under-rated book); and Mao's (2007a, 2007b, 2007c) "On Practice", "On Contradiction", and "The Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People". More recently we can add Žižek's (2004) *Revolution at the Gates*, (2008) *In Defence of Lost Causes*, and (2009) *Violence*.

Regarding racism and issues of black/white unity and co-operation, the following statement made by Trotskyite and current Professor of European Studies at King's College London Alexander Callinicos (2006, p. 1) is a good summation of the traditional Marxist/Communist<sup>5</sup> Trotskyite view on the issue<sup>6</sup> (see also Kenway, 2008, another article written by a Trotskyite):

Revolutionary Marxists ... regard racism as a product of capitalism which serves to reproduce this social system by dividing the working class; it can be abolished, therefore, only through a socialist revolution achieved by a united working class, one in which blacks and whites join together against their common [class] exploiter.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Leonid Brezhnev (2005, pp. 296-297), former General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), puts forward the Leninist view on the "nationalities question" within the Soviet Union as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> The book does, however, contain the first mention of the "reserve army of labour" theory, later fully expounded by Marx in Volume 1 of *Capital* (pp. 781-794), so it is wrong to regard this as an atheoretical book.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "Communist" here to refer to supporters of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) including both the reformist current which supported Khrushchev's speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of 1956 and the hardline Stalinist current which did not. A list of present day political parties under headings that include "Communist", "Anti-Reformist", "Left Communist", and "Trotskyist" appears on the Leftist Parties of the World website at <http://www.broadleft.org/index.htm> [accessed 6 January 2010].

<sup>6</sup> Callinicos was brought into the accounting literature, as far as I am aware, by Cooper (1997). Catchpowle and Cooper (1999) and Cooper and Catchpowle (2009) also cite him, the former paper extensively.

<sup>7</sup> I use the term "black" in this paper in the same way as does Callinicos (2006), i.e. "to refer to all those who are racially oppressed on the grounds of their colour. Blackness is thus a political rather than a biological or cultural concept" (Callinicos, 2006, p. 29, n. 2). "Afro-Caribbean" refers to both black West Indians and black Britons of West Indian descent, i.e. it remains a political concept.

The Party unites the foremost representatives of all the country's nations and nationalities. It is the most vivid embodiment of the Soviet working people's friendship and militant comradeship, the inviolable unity of the entire Soviet people. All Communists in this country, regardless of nationality, are members of the single Leninist Party. All of them enjoy equal rights, have equal duties, and bear equal responsibility for the country's destiny.

In this paper I explore, as an extended case study in support of Callinicos' Marxist position on race issues, the life of a famous revolutionary figure in punk music history, the Clash's now deceased Joe Strummer (real name John Graham Mellor, 1952-2002). Cooper (1997, pp. 15, 35) writes that the working-class has been excluded from the accounting literature. I aim to counter this trend; the first wave of English punk rock (1976 to 1978) was a working-class social movement. Like the mythical Millwall FC football hooligans, the 1970s London punk rockers were antithetical to global capital and an irritant to the skin of capitalist economy and bourgeois institutions. This remained the case even after the Clash signed to CBS! As Robson (2001, p. 74) writes about Millwall fans, and the same could be said for the original London punks, "[they] revel in the mystique and anti-charisma ... of many ... generations of a people historically situated as the obscure and implicitly counter-bourgeois 'other' of one of the great metropolises of liberal-individualistic modernity [i.e. London]".

In this paper I introduce and then evaluate the complete identification with the black other which is reflected in Strummer's personal life lived on the cosmopolitan streets of 1970s west London and in the lyrical stance of the Clash. I apply Kim's (2008) arguments to Strummer and the Clash and use the case of Strummer to highlight how the other *can be engaged with* in a reflexive, compassionate, authentic, and informed way by an individual who does not share the racial and cultural background of the researched other. Artists and researchers are not that different from one another as both aim to gain an understanding of at least some parts of the social totality and (for some artists and for critical researchers) may make normative statements about social, economic, and/or political issues. I study song

lyrics of two important Clash songs, “White Riot” (1977) and “White Man in Hammersmith Palais” (1978), and use them as a basis to contextualize my short case study.<sup>8</sup> I believe that there is room for optimism in both art and research that engages with a cultural other. This paper should be regarded as further exploration and fleshing out of Kim and Chua’s important ideas and absolutely not a criticism or negation of their work. The maturation and growth evident in Strummer’s 1978 lyrics, as compared to those of 1977, suggests that the artist (or researcher) must not perceive herself/himself as being the fountain of knowledge *that is unable to be changed by those with whom she/he comes into contact* (Chua, 1998; Kim, 2008). As Mao Zedong (2007a) writes, theory must be constantly tested, informed, and changed by practice.

We must also not lose sight of the important Marxist/ Communist value of personal growth and transformation through criticism and self-criticism (Althusser, 2008a, p. 49; Trotsky, 2004, p. 168). Young authors might be naïve and even foolish and insensitive (sometimes grossly so) in their researching and writings on the other. However, they should be expected to mature as individuals over time leading to an increased refinement and sophistication in their understandings and in their language. Criticism and self-criticism may help to create the necessary maturity in the individual artist or researcher’s thought and writings. The conference and peer review processes can be immensely helpful here. A young author should not be castigated too harshly for naïve writings. Existentially speaking life is a personal journey (Sartre, 2004, 2006) and one cannot be expected to be at a position of maturity at the commencement of the journey. This does not mean, of course, that obviously racist or neo-Nazi writings should ever escape severe criticism (Brown, 2009, p. 323). Everything has its limits including the degree of freedom of speech that should be

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<sup>8</sup> The song titles themselves might raise eyebrows for those unfamiliar with the work of the Clash. The reader will have to bear with me. The song titles will be discussed and if not exactly justified by me then at least explained in their historical contexts.

allowed in democracies. As is well known, total and complete freedom of speech was not a permitted right in the former Communist countries either.

Firstly it must be pointed out that Strummer's early Clash lyrics are "*racialized*" in a way that was more acceptable in 1977 than it is in the very-PC 2009. A former Clash road manager, Johnny Green (cited in Gilbert, 2004, p. 136), suggests that Strummer was not "Politically Correct" in the manner that Clash guitarist/ vocalist Mick Jones was. However, I suggest that Strummer used racial stereotypes skilfully on occasion in order to challenge and exhort people to reflexively examine their own values and actions in the light of these stereotypes (regardless of whether the stereotypes related to one's own ethnic group or to another group). We have no choice today but to admit that early Clash lyrics such as "Black people gotta lot a problems/ But they don't mind throwing a brick/ White people go to school/ where they teach you how to be thick" from 1977's "White Riot" seem woefully politically incorrect and offensive by today's standards. And yet wasn't that part of the point: the young Strummer gleefully used charged stereotypical language here to exhort whites to become more revolutionary and less compliant and to urge blacks to calm down and to adopt a more methodical and strategic approach in their systematic opposition to capitalism and injustice. We are urged to remember that, in Strummer's worldview, throwing a brick in anger was a virtue and not a vice, if done as part of a clear political cause and in response to unjust oppression. Whilst Strummer appreciated the sentiments underlying sporadic outbreaks of violence, he suggested, like Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, that a methodical and strategic approach to resistance is necessary in order to avoid slanderous accusations and to create meaningful long-term social change. An example of Engels' known opposition to mass riots by the working-class is his response to a riot in London on 8 February 1886, following an event organized by the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). On this occasion 400 to 1,000 rioters caused damage of £50,000, mostly

due to broken shop windows, and businesses duly filed 281 claims for riot compensation (Begg, 2005, pp. 165-170). Engels was not, of course, opposing the sentiments or motivations of the rioters here but simply opposing the methods. This same point is made extremely clearly by Strummer in the lyrics to “White Man in Hammersmith Palais”. As Kim (2008, p. 1355) states, the ultimate goal of critical research must be to “enable change” in the face of “systematic oppressions deeply rooted in the social structure”. On this point postcolonialist feminists, Marxists, and even left-wing Roman Catholics influenced by the “social teaching” of Pope John Paul II, would agree. In John Paul II’s (n/d) extremely influential encyclical, written in 1986, *Sollicitudo rei socialis [On Social Concern]*, John Paul II reaffirms the validity for Catholics of a concept promoted by the Latin American liberation theologians, namely the idea of “sinful structures” (see Sections 35 and 36 (pp. 65-69) of the encyclical).

To cite one of this paper’s anonymous reviewers, we can do little for the causes of social change purely by writing academic articles and only somewhat more by writing popular songs; to effect change we need to be attached to real social movements. *CPA* journal co-editor Christine Cooper achieves this with her recent co-authorship with Tommy Sheridan, the left-wing politician now with the Solidarity (Scotland) Party and the author of *A Time to Rage* about the Scottish anti-poll tax campaigns (see Cooper et al., forthcoming). With this in mind, the Clash’s involvement in the 1978 Rock Against Racism concert in east London, at which the band performed on a bill which included gay rights activist Tom Robinson and his Tom Robinson Band, is of particular importance. Musically, the Clash was the first band to address the issue of a multi-cultural Britain in its lyrics (Salewicz, 2006) and was the first “white band” to so openly introduce black musical styles such as funk, dub, reggae, and

later hip-hop into “white” rock and roll.<sup>9</sup> The Clash’s “The Guns of Brixton” (1979) and “The Magnificent Seven” (1980) were among the first ever hip-hop songs performed by “white” musicians.

The Clash’s compassion for the world’s most marginalized people, regardless of ethnicity, is clearly evident from the late-period Clash song “Straight to Hell” from 1982s *Combat Rock* album. In “Straight to Hell”, the Clash criticizes the strict and legalistic immigration laws of the USA. The song highlights how the mixed-race children of American soldiers in Vietnam were unwanted by the US Government and refused admission to the country. Strummer declares poignantly that the war children had been classified by the US Government, a totally Foucauldian normalizing institution obsessed with classifications and categorizations, as “not Coca-Cola, but rice”; in other words as totally and forever “foreign” *in essence* (Sartre, 2004, 2006). In reality, the children were, in this case literally, a synthesis of America and South East Asia. The one-line chorus of “Go to Straight to hell, boys” repeats itself, softly and sadly, mimicking the attitude of the US Government. However, despite and because of his best efforts to mimic the US Government’s official voices, Strummer’s voice is filled with moral indignation and compassion for the system’s vulnerable and completely disregarded victims. Heather Nova’s female vocals in the cover version of this song on the *Burning London* Clash tribute album (1999) are possibly even more powerful than those on the original song with the female, but still “white”, vocals changing the orientation and perspective of the narrator, giving the narrator some space from the events that occurred, and giving us additional insight into the issues. The US Government’s Foucauldian behaviour is contrasted with

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<sup>9</sup> I keep the term “white band” in quotation marks. Strummer had Scottish and Armenian ancestry whilst Mick Jones was of English and Jewish extraction. A more suitable term than “white” might be “unblack” in the same way that Jayson Sherlock, former drummer for the band Mortification, calls Christian black-metal music, as opposed to the original Satanic black-metal, “unblack” rather than “white”. In the case of rock and roll and black-metal, the “black” is the original form whilst the “unblack” is the derivative. Sherlock respects the creators of black-metal music by refusing to call his own derivative Christian black-metal “white” as opposed to “unblack”.

another scene at the beginning of the song which introduces the complicated post-modern dialectic of “Christmas coming in Ho Chi Minh City” where a Western Christian festival brings happiness and hope to the hearts of ordinary people on the streets of Ho Chi Minh’s Communist paradise. The people in Vietnam hope at Christmas time for many things including family reunions but that stern guardian of “Christian” morality, the US Government, refuses to recognize the special spirit of the season. The song leaves us with little doubt as to who the real Christians are. The Clash’s work, forged in the fire of working-class life in the west London housing estates, produces an authentic voice of identification with and compassion for a *global working-class* made up of people of all ethnic backgrounds. Cooper (1997, p. 28, emphasis original) points out that “[t]he consequence of the emergence of new manufacturing centres of capital accumulation [e.g. China’s coastal cities, Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan] has been the considerable *growth* of the industrial working class on a global scale”. The Clash was aware of this important sociological development as early as the mid-1970s. Rancid, American punk band of the 1990s and 2000s, would take up the Clash’s identification with the global working-class in its own generation, exploring lyrically themes such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide (“Rwanda”); the thoughts of a young Chinese dissident in a Communist Party prison cell after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 (“Arrested in Shanghai”); a homeless girl dying from cold outside the doors of the Walmart store in Los Angeles (“Stand Your Ground”); and people being afraid of their lives under authoritarian government on the Ivory Coast (“Ivory Coast”).<sup>10</sup>

However, I believe that, with the benefit of hindsight, it is also fair to say that Joe Strummer did not foresee how powerful politically and culturally the fascist National Front movement, whose early days he witnessed, would later become. With hindsight, I also wish

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<sup>10</sup> All of these songs appear on 2003s *Indestructible* album with the exception of “Rwanda” which appears on the self-titled album of 2000.

that Strummer had been less ambiguous at certain points and had less easily resorted to racial stereotyping (even positive stereotyping) of the black other. Strummer's expectation that the Jamaican reggae acts he saw perform live at the Hammersmith Palais music venue, immortalized in the 1978 song "White Man in Hammersmith Palais", would be true "roots-rocks rebels" (i.e. political left-wing rabble-rousers) was somewhat naïve, according to Afro-Caribbean London punk rocker Don Letts. Strummer should not have reasonably expected that all Afro-Caribbean reggae artists would want to pursue an overtly political approach simply because they hailed from the country of Bob Marley. Nor would all such artists see the ghetto life as glamorous (as Strummer did). Letts (2007, p. 87)<sup>11</sup> provides us with his current-day perspective (2007) of Strummer's position regarding the Hammersmith Palais reggae acts as follows:

He [Strummer] had gone down there to see this Roots Rockers Ghetto kind of show, not realising that the brothers back home were not revelling in a ghetto lifestyle. The ghetto is something that you get out of, not into, and Joe had a romanticised idea of what ghetto life was about.

Strummer and Jones visited Jamaica as tourists in 1977 and, as the story goes, barely escaped with their lives after walking down to the harbour in full punk regalia (Salewicz, 2006, pp. 197-198). The resulting song "Safe European Home", from the *Give 'Em Enough Rope* (1978) album, retells the account of their Jamaican experience and it is, predictably, written in racialized terms: "I went to the place where every white face is an invitation to robbery". Strummer does, however, admit to the limitations of his own cultural stereotyping: "I was there for two weeks, so how come I could never tell that that natty

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<sup>11</sup> Back in the London of 1976 Don Letts ran Acme Attractions in the King's Road (Chelsea, London), the rival clothing and fashion shop to the recently deceased Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's Sex, and later joined John Lydon in his post-Sex Pistols band, Public Image Limited. Letts has always been regarded as an important part of the 1970s west London punk rock scene and has always been its highest-profile black representative (with the possible exception of Poly Styrene, real name Marian Joan Elliott Said, the vocalist for X-Ray Spex). The 1970s London punk scene has been said to have had a "white" clique centred on Sex and a "multi-cultural" clique centred on Acme Attractions.

dread drinks at the Sheraton Hotel?” The visit was clearly a learning curve for Strummer, still only 25 years of age at the time. Things were not as he expected, nor were they necessarily what they seemed (just as in Strummer’s own complicated England). We need to give Strummer and others (both artists and researchers) the right to learn, to make mistakes, and to grow up. The black other remains “they” for Strummer in “Safe European Home” but here the writing seems playful and tongue in cheek. Only with “White Man in Hammersmith Palais” (1978) does Strummer appear to bring the black community into the “we”. Generally speaking, Strummer was a person who admitted his own faults and contradictions, and, unlike the 1970s arena-rock idols that had preceded punk, he refused to allow himself or his band to be worshipped or idolized (i.e. *essentialized*) from afar (see Clash lyrics to “London Calling” (1979) and “Gates of the West” (1979)). One of punk rock’s existentialist tenets, which remains in place until the present day within the punk rock scene, is that observations on life and people, especially those that invoke some sort of moral position, must be validated through real-life personal experiences. Mao Zedong (1971, 2007a) said the same thing back in the 1930s in his seminal essays “Oppose Book Worship” (a fantastic title for an essay written by a former librarian at the University of Beijing!) and “On Practice”. The Clash lyrics for “Safe European Home” cited above seem, despite the racialized stereotyping, to meet one of Kim’s (2008, p. 1356) acid tests: “the researchers [or artists] ... [should] put themselves back into the research and writing as part of the experience”. Researchers should do this and in a co-authored article of mine, to appear in another critical accounting journal shortly, I talk of how one interviewee in a focus group walked angrily out of the group meeting room halfway through due to his unhappiness with the supposed co-operation of the researchers with representatives of another body who were also present (as joint facilitators) at the focus group. He had felt that the research, and his participation in it, was compromised by the co-operation and

friendliness exhibited by representatives of the two different bodies towards each other. He felt that he was being used as a “guinea pig” to state views that would meet the approval of the representatives of the two bodies. We told this story in the article, warts and all, because this is what actually happened and because this person’s perceptions of events, even though we might not have agreed with him, have some explanatory value. His action was an honest expression at the time of his perceptions and feelings and so we should be wary to discount him and I believe that we were right not to edit the aforementioned event out of our finished published product.

## **2. Lyrics study**

### 2.1 “*White Riot*” (1977)

White riot - I wanna riot  
White riot - a riot of my own  
White riot - I wanna riot  
White riot - a riot of my own

Black people gotta lot of problems  
But they don't mind throwing a brick  
White people go to school  
Where they teach you how to be thick

An' everybody's doing  
Just what they're told to  
An' nobody wants  
To go to jail!

All the power's in the hands  
Of people rich enough to buy it  
While we walk the street  
Too chicken to even try it

Everybody's doing  
Just what they're told to  
Nobody wants  
To go to jail!

Are you taking over  
or are you taking orders?  
Are you going backwards

Or are you going forwards?

[extracted from [www.plyrics.com](http://www.plyrics.com)]

These lyrics to one of the Clash's most important and well-known early songs, appearing on the self-titled debut album of 1977, are very easy to misinterpret if the immediate context of the members of the Clash's (at that time Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, and Tory Crimes aka Terry Chimes)' west London is removed from consciousness. "White Riot", the song title, to a reader who takes things literally, sounds horrendously offensive and neo-Nazi. However, after we consider the immediate context, it is clearly apparent that nothing could be further from the reality. Nevertheless, Salewicz (2006, p. 24) writes that "White Riot" remains "one of the most contentious songs in the Clash's canon of work".

This song was written as an immediate and direct response to a particular historical event, the mass riot that followed the August 1976 Notting Hill Festival<sup>12</sup> in west London, where 500 black youths ended up in street warfare with the police.<sup>13</sup> For the politically-conscious Strummer, violence is generally preferred (at least where it emerges out of a maintained and authentic left-wing political position) and cowardice is always absolutely shunned. It is the rioting "blacks" and not the passive, obedient, and conforming "whites" who Strummer clearly sides with in this particular song.

After attending the traditional annual Caribbean carnival in west London in August 1976 (it was still fairly small scale at that time), the official version of the story, as recounted in various places including Gilbert (2004), Letts (2007), Salewicz (2006), and Savage (2005, 2006), is that Strummer and Simonon returned to their "squat"<sup>14</sup> and recounted the growing

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<sup>12</sup> By 1976 the Notting Hill Festival had become an Afro-Caribbean carnival (Letts, 2007, p. 76).

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the riot after the August 1976 Notting Hill Festival see Gilbert (2004, pp. 99–103, 134–136); Salewicz (2006, pp. 160-161); Savage (2005, pp. 233–234, 2006, pp. 94, 96). Salewicz (2006, p. 19) states that Savage's *England's Dreaming* (2005) is "the definitive account of the punk era".

<sup>14</sup> "Squats" were vacated premises scheduled for demolition and occupied illegally by students, the unemployed, and the homeless (Gilbert, 2004; Heylin, 2007; Lydon et al., 1994; Salewicz, 2006; Savage, 2005). There were many such dwellings in London in the 1960s and 1970s and squatting was an extremely common practice and possibly even a rite of passage in some circles. During the first half of 1975 Strummer lived in a squat at 101 Waltham Road in Maida Vale (a house that has since been demolished) hence the name

ugliness of the mood on the streets to their squat mates, which included later member of the Sex Pistols Sid Vicious aka John Beverly aka Simon Ritchie. Rioting black youth were standing off against the police. Rocco Macauley has captured on camera a shot of the first police baton charge at the Ladbroke Grove riot and this photo appears on the original back cover of the Clash's self-titled debut album of 1977 (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 99-103, 134-136; James, 2009; Savage, 2006, pp. 94, 96). Our protagonists wanted to return to the fray to participate more fully in the riot, siding with the blacks in their protest against the institutionalized racism of the police force. They were warned by black women who shouted at them from the second floors of the residences: "Don't go down there, boys, you will be killed". Official versions of events suggest that Strummer and Simonon played minor roles in the riot, allegedly trying to set a vehicle alight (Salewicz, 2006, p. 161). As an extremely deep and reflective thinker (Don Williams, in conversation with Chris Salewicz, cited in Salewicz, 2006, p. 176), Strummer read a great deal into the meaning of this riot: he perceived the day of the festival as the one day in the year when black youths could avenge themselves for past atrocities and injustices committed against them by the, in that era nearly completely white and highly conservative, police force.

Strummer realized that everyone had gone home except for in his words, "the hardcore of the hardcore". He also is said to have realized at some point that "*this was not our riot*", meaning that white people had *no legitimate claim to moral ownership of this riot* since the west London blacks were aiming to avenge themselves for past injustices committed against them for primarily racial reasons. Strummer seems very close in spirit to Kim (2008) and Chua (1998) here in terms of his concern not to tread insensitively into a moral realm rightfully belonging to someone else. However, working-class whites were clearly also oppressed by the capitalist system and its dominant ideology and so Strummer calls for "a

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of his pre-Clash band the 101'ers (see Salewicz, 2006, pp. 108-129 and the photo of the original house at p. 110 (it should have been on p. 101 of course)).

white riot, a riot of our own". Strummer's desire here to depict rioting and rioters in stark white/black terms clearly does not spring from racism but from his great respect for the rights and dignity of the black rioters. Strummer does not want to steal "ownership" of the riot from the black community; hence he argues the case for a "white riot", a "*riot of our own*".<sup>15</sup> The use of the adjective "our" here is problematic but can be explained in terms of the majority of the audience for punk rock at the time being white. Only in 1978 would Strummer explicitly conceptualize blacks and whites as part of a new synthesized "we", bound together in tight dialectical unity, that he hoped would become an emergent force for good and for equality on the housing estates.

Strummer depicts blacks as being very eager to riot and as a powder keg waiting to explode. Although this may work to reinforce standard racialized stereotypes about temperament, clearly Strummer is urging blacks to regroup, to calm down, and to plan strategically and carefully their next assault so that their protests against the capitalist system, the government, and the ruling class can yield more long-lasting results. For Strummer "they don't mind throwing a brick" is clearly a commendation.

Clearly in the song Strummer is more highly critical of white people than of black. Strummer's lyrics here are in complete agreement with his real-life actions in joining forces with the black rioters after the Notting Hill Festival. White people, according to Strummer, are too docile, passive, and subservient, and freely accept any negative treatment that is handed out to them without opposing the powers that be in the slightest. "Thick" here means failing to be aware of one's own exploitation (what the Frankfurt School has called "false

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly Letts (2007, pp. 76-77) today does *not* view the 1976 Notting Hill Festival riot in racial terms. He sees it in the simple *class terms* of "[w]orking class people being harassed by the police" (p. 77) and for him "it was not a black or white thing" (p. 76). How does such a view differ from Strummer's? Not very much as Strummer was himself a Marxist and was certainly not denying the class basis of the riot. However Letts' comment here seems to contradict his other comment, cited later in this paper, that fighting the system "for the punks ... was a choice. We were black and had no choice" (Letts, 2007, p. 87). Possibly the contradiction can be explained by Letts having an understanding of the Stalinist idea that the "objective meaning" (Žižek, 2008) of the police actions against the blacks was reactionary (i.e. it served the cause of the reactionary forces in the class struggle against the progressive forces) but in terms of *experiences* blacks experienced worse and more frequent oppression than did whites.

consciousness”; Adorno, 1994b; James, 2009; McPhail, 1999) and a complete willingness to naively accept bourgeois views of the world which “interpellate”, in the words of Althusserian theory (see, for example, Althusser, 2008a, p. 48), members of the working-class into a marginalized position within the dominant ideology. This is consistent with Christian theologian and philosopher G. K. Chesterton’s (2007) viewpoint, expressed in his 1905 book *Heretics*, that the English working-class unashamedly and sentimentally worships the English upper-class. For Strummer, blacks “got problems” (which means externally imposed difficulties) whereas whites, in complete contrast, are “thick”, meaning that their shortcomings exist in the crucial areas of worldview and character. In other words, their shortcomings are internal ones.

As a young politically conscious man living in west London, Strummer understands only too well the stratified nature of English society. He is struggling to free himself from false consciousness: “All the power’s in the hands/ of people rich enough to buy it/ While we walk the street/ too chicken to even try it”. Strummer’s rationale for violence is clearly articulated here: it is a direct act of class struggle and emerges in response to the stratified nature of English society or, in other words, the concentration of power in the hands of the wealthy. Strummer’s view was clearly strongly influenced by a 1972 incident in Harlesden (London) where policemen, in response to a request and a bribe from the landlord, forcibly evicted a previously homeless black man from Strummer’s rental flat (Gilbert, 2004, p. 20; Salewicz, 2006, pp. 93-94; Savage, 2006, p. 91).<sup>16</sup> The song lines cited above depict a very Marxian view of the world with shades of the mid-period Foucault: Strummer uses that favourite word of Foucault, “power”, and is especially interested in where it can be said to be concentrated. However, his analysis is also completely Marxian and Althusserian: for Strummer the economic base has primacy over the superstructure in the last instance. It is

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<sup>16</sup> This event is located somewhere in time between “the beginning of 1972” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 19) and “the spring of 1973” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 22).

the wealthy who buy power rather than power which gives people access to wealth (although the latter meaning is not excluded).

Both blacks and whites are encouraged by Strummer to reflexively examine their own maintained positions, worldviews, and actions. Letts (2007, p. 77), an Afro-Caribbean, today agrees with this interpretation of the song's intent: "The Clash were saying, 'look our black brethren have had enough and they have done something about it'. The song was misunderstood by some as being a right-wing song". Strummer takes on the role of social prophet here and bridger of the racial divide. He is clearly very able to skilfully read the social totality and this reading was one informed both by Marxian theory (with a clear Althusserian slant) and his own personal experiences.

Whilst blacks are other racially for Strummer, it is clear that *in a class sense* he sides with them in the class struggle. For Strummer, *the world is defined predominantly by class and not by race* although much bourgeois ideology would try to convince us otherwise. Strummer clearly is a supporter, in actions and in words, of a joint alliance across ethnic lines in the class struggle. As such his views are consistent with those expressed recently by the Trotskyite authors Callinicos (2006) and Kenway (2008) and earlier by the Marxist/Communist authors Lenin (cited in Brezhnev, 1975) and Brezhnev (1975). Strummer's elder brother David Mellor, in his late teens, had developed an obsession with fascism and with the occult and had joined the fascist National Front (Salewicz, 2006, pp. 67-74). Shortly after this, at age 18 in July of 1970, he committed suicide, with his body being found on a bench on an island in a lake in London's Regent's Park (Salewicz, 2006, p. 68). Strummer's left-wing and anti-racist ethos can be partly attributed to David's young death and to Strummer's desire to distance himself from the fascist neo-Nazi worldview that probably contributed to it (Salewicz, 2006, p. 73). Strummer was later to say that, whilst his brother had chosen death, he had chosen life (Joe Strummer, personal conversation with Paloma

Romero, cited in Salewicz, 2006, p. 125). The National Front, which was only beginning to grow in its level of public support in 1977, is a clear example of working-class whites completely buying into the ideological lie that their true enemies are their racialized other. Such a view, as Žižek (2008, pp. 261-262) points out, assumes that society is a unified whole infected by some outside dirt matter. In fact society is always, and has always been, divided along class lines. “The class struggle is the motor of history” (Althusser, 2008b, p. 82) or “the driving force of history” (Cooper, 1997, p. 27). “Never forget the class struggle” (Mao, cited in Althusser, 2008b, p. 83). Althusser (2008b, pp. 80-83) explains that the class struggle is not like a football match, marked by a beginning, periods of rest, and an ending. This is the reformist view that “[e]ach class exists in its own camp, lives according to its [own] particular conditions of existence” (Althusser, 2008b, p. 81). For a reformist one class might on occasion exploit another class, but this is not the same as the Marxist understanding of class struggle. There is no “*before*” the class struggle where the two classes exist separately from each other, at peace, and in their own camps. The National Front supporters and the supporters of the British National Party (BNP) today naively assume that members of the ruling class will let them share in their power and privilege. The Howard-Costello Government in Australia subtly encouraged this same worldview among working- and middle-class whites during the late-1990s and early-2000s by increasing the emphases placed upon national sporting and war heroes (who were nearly all white) and by the subtle disparagement of immigrants who were re-defined within the dominant discourse as being “outside the cultural mainstream”.<sup>17</sup> This cultural mainstream was now being

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<sup>17</sup> During the Howard era in Australia (1996 to 2007), “Howard’s battlers” (white working-class and middle-class families living in the outer suburbs of the cities and in rural areas) were “the mainstream”. By contrast, immigrants especially Muslims; gays and lesbians; latte-sipping leftie inner-city intellectuals (labelled the “chattering classes” in Howard era discourses); and trade union officials were not parts of the “mainstream”. Therefore, it was permissible to openly vilify them and brand all of their views and members as “extremist”. One of Howard’s greatest achievements, in the eyes of Liberal Party supporters, was to win at the 1996 election many working-class outer-suburban seats which had never before been lost by the Labor Party. However, he did so by encouraging the “mainstream” white Christian people living in these areas to practice

nearly exclusively defined in white Anglo-Australian terms (Ferguson, 2007; James, 2009; Stratton, 1998). As Callinicos (2006, p. 17) writes:

It is, moreover, an objective fact about capitalism that racism helps keep capitalism going by dividing and therefore weakening the working class. The adage, ‘Divide and rule’, is an ancient piece of ruling class wisdom, coined by Roman Emperor Tiberius in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Those working-class English monarchists who physically attacked punk rocker John Lydon aka Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols back in the day because of his band’s 1977 “God Save the Queen” single (see Lydon et al., 1994, pp. 191-193), and people of this ilk, should actively consider whether the aristocracy and monarchy that they offer allegiance to will really reward them when the chips are down. It seems to be a case of having one’s ladder leaning up against the wrong wall. As Chesterton (2007, p. 111) argues, the strength of English society is not based upon the cruelty of the rich to the poor or even upon the kindness of the rich to the poor. Instead it is based upon and relies upon the “perennial and unfailing kindness of the poor to the rich” (Chesterton, 2007, p. 111). It is important to note that these words were written by a (very perceptive) Christian rather than by a Marxist.

## 2.2 “*White Man in Hammersmith Palais*” (1978)

Midnight to six man  
For the first time from Jamaica  
Dillinger and Leroy Smart  
Delroy Wilson, your cool operator

Ken Boothe for U.K. pop reggae  
With backing bands sound systems  
And if they've got anything to say  
There's many black ears here to listen

But it was Four Tops all night with encores from stage right

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“downwards envy” and express bitterness over the welfare payments being received by low-income earners and immigrants who were a “drain on the nation”.

Charging from the bass knives to the treble  
But onstage they ain't got no roots rock rebel  
Onstage they ain't got no...roots rock rebel

Dress back jump back this is a bluebeat attack  
'Cos it won't get you anywhere  
Fooling with your guns  
The British Army is waiting out there  
An' it weighs fifteen hundred tons

White youth, black youth  
Better find another solution  
Why not phone up Robin Hood  
And ask him for some wealth distribution

Punk rockers in the U.K.  
They won't notice anyway  
They're all too busy fighting  
For a good place under the lighting

The new groups are not concerned  
With what there is to be learned  
They got Burton suits, ha you think it's funny  
Turning rebellion into money

All over people changing their votes  
Along with their overcoats  
If Adolf Hitler flew in today  
They'd send a limousine anyway

I'm the all night drug-prowling wolf  
Who looks so sick in the sun  
I'm the white man in the Palais  
Just lookin' for fun

I'm only  
Looking for fun

[extracted from [www.plyrics.com](http://www.plyrics.com)]

As one of The Clash's "most complex" (Gilbert, 2004, p. 187) and most enduring lyrics, "White Man in Hammersmith Palais" demonstrates lyricist Joe Strummer's rapidly increasing maturity and perceptiveness circa 1978 (Gilbert, 2004, p. 187).<sup>18</sup> The song is

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<sup>18</sup> This song was released as a single in the UK on 16 June 1978 b/w "The Prisoner" (Gilbert, 2004, p. 373), appears on the US version of the self-titled debut album (released in that market on 23 July 1979) (Gilbert, 2004, p. 382) and appears on 2003's *The Essential Clash* compilation. The song is discussed and critiqued by

Strummer's own personal favourite of all those that he wrote during the Clash years (Salewicz, 2006, p. 204). Strummer continued to frequently perform the song live on stage right up until his death in December of 2002; the song was a live favourite of Strummer's last band Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros. It is a clear statement of identification with and empathy towards west London's immigrant black community, as well as a clear anti-fascist statement. The Clash's appearance at the free Rock Against Racism gig (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 187-191), organized by the Anti-Nazi League and held at Victoria Park, Hackney, east London on 30 April 1978, in front of 70,000 fans (Gilbert, 2004, p. 188), demonstrated the band members' political values (Gilbert, 2004, p. 189 writes that it "nailed their anti-fascist colours to the mast"), and exposed their music and positive message to a wider audience.<sup>19</sup>

Turning to the song lyrics, the opening lines "Midnight to six man/ for the first time from Jamaica" set the scene at a London music venue where reggae is played and the audience is mostly black Londoners of Afro-Caribbean descent. The song title and setting were inspired by another real-life historical event, Strummer's attendance at a reggae all-nighter held on 5 June 1977 at the Hammersmith Palais (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 157, 187). Dillinger (born Lester Bullock in 1953), Leroy Smart, and Delroy Wilson were leading Jamaican reggae artists<sup>20</sup> but had been spending time playing to foreign tourists in Jamaica and were nowhere near as politically radical as the young Strummer had been hoping for. As noted earlier, Don Letts (2007) regards Strummer's views here as somewhat naïve: why should black musicians be exactly identical when white musicians are not? That the audience is mostly black is indicated, a little too bluntly for most contemporary people's tastes, by the line "there's many black ears here to listen". Gilbert (2004, p. 136) argues that racialized references to "Kebab Greek" in "Hate & War" and to "many black ears" in

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many authors on punk rock within the popular (non-academic) literature including Gilbert (2004, pp. 157, 187, 200, 217, 371) and Heylin (2007, pp. 295, 390-391, 447, 521).

<sup>19</sup> Other bands to play at the Rock Against Racism gig were Patrik Fitzgerald, X-Ray Spex, Steel Pulse, and The Tom Robinson Band (Gilbert, 2004, p. 188).

<sup>20</sup> All three artists have a page devoted to them on the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia [as at 6 January 2010].

“White Man in Hammersmith Palais” reflect a street-inspired honesty that is a charm of the Clash rather than evidence of any racist legacy. In Gilbert’s (2004, p. 136) words:

But political correctness, as it came to be called, was never his [Strummer’s] strong point. His phrases and images were those of the beat poet reflecting the language of the street, like the ‘kebab Greeks’ and ‘wops’ of ‘Hate and War’ and the ‘Hey, Chi man!’ line several years later in ‘Lightning Strikes’. He saw nothing amiss in stating ‘a black knife never slips’ in ‘The Last Gang in Town’. He referred to Japanese as ‘Nips’. It was this unsentimental, unguarded street-talk which would give The Clash’s material an uncomfortable truthfulness.

In the terminology of contemporary philosophical writings on racism, Strummer would be labelled a “racialist” since he tended to view people and groups in racial terms (Pataki, 2004, pp. 9, 15). However, he would not be described by this literature as a “racist” because he bore no “ill-will” towards or “disregard” for the well-being of members of other racial groups. Such an understanding derives much from the theorizations of a leading contemporary philosopher on race issues, J. L. A. Garcia (2004), a virtue-ethics proponent, who presents racism as a vice, a negative virtue, or a “sin of the heart” (in the Christian sense). For Garcia where this “sin of the heart” attitude is not present there is no racism although there might well be gross insensitivity.<sup>21</sup> Johnny Green, the Clash’s one-time road manager, suggested to Pat Gilbert that Strummer used direct, racialized language on occasion as a deliberate strategy of “calculated provocation” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 136). As Green comments (cited in Gilbert, 2004, p. 136):

Joe [Strummer] wasn’t scared of using those kind of [non-PC] words. Mick [Jones] was far more what you’d now call PC. He didn’t like that stuff. But Joe wanted to challenge people, he wanted to force people to think. He wasn’t scared of getting people to confront [societal issues and maintained worldviews], however uncomfortable it would make them feel. He wanted people to work it out for themselves.

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<sup>21</sup> Critics of Garcia might point out that this test for racism is very difficult to implement since, in most cases, people’s “heart attitudes” are known only to themselves.

In lines #3 to #5 of the song, the Clash name-checks “Dillinger and Leroy Smart” and “Delroy Wilson”. To name-check one black reggae artist might be viewed as carelessness but to name-check three and so early in the song must be seen as an obvious display of respect, identification, and bonding over shared delights. The name-checking clearly removes the possibility, at least for me, that this is a racist song. The name-checking is Strummer’s calling-card, his means to establish authenticity and legitimacy as a fan of what is now frequently termed “world music”. However, the song also expresses the disappointment that Strummer, the romantic radical, felt about the all-reggae night show at the Hammersmith Palais; it lacked revolutionary content and it was mostly toned-down and homogenized “UK pop reggae” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 187).

The lines: “Dress back jump back this is a bluebeat attack/ 'Cos it won't get you anywhere/ Fooling with your guns/ The British Army is waiting out there/ An' it weighs fifteen hundred tons” immediately put the song in its wider economic, political, and social context; for all the joy and bonhomie evident at the Hammersmith Palais this is still conservative and grey Britain. The revellers at the Palais are reminded that *the political context won't go away and needs to be addressed*. “The bluebeat attack” of course refers to the police force. However, reference to “the British Army” seems a little overdone and melodramatic although it does bring to mind one of the last remaining outposts of the British Empire, Northern Ireland.<sup>22</sup> Surely the Palais revellers will not literally be required to deal face-to-face with the British Army? Possibly Strummer here is linking the various Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (Althusser, 2006a, 2008a) of the British Welfare State together to suggest that they are ultimately united, not divided. Whether you literally clash with the police or with the Army, it is the same State

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<sup>22</sup> Why don't all the postcolonial researchers complain about British rule in Northern Ireland? Are they colour-obsessed also?

power wielded by the same Government that ultimately opposes you (Althusser, 2006a). As a result, while the British Army does not oppose you literally, in essence it certainly does.

In the face of the imminent “bluebeat attack” and “British Army”, the song’s most famous and powerful lines urge its hearers: “White youth, black youth/ Better find another solution”. “Another solution” here means that violence will ultimately be met with more violence, legally administered by the Welfare State and clearly unbeatable (Althusser, 2006a). As compared to the excesses championed on “White Riot”, a more strategic and careful approach is now recommended. The “white youth, black youth” refrain, by mentioning both groups in one line, argues for their unity; the song’s compassionate, inclusive spirit implores both groups to work together toward a solution (Brown, 2009; Gilbert, 2004, p. 187). The problem that a solution is needed for is not racial division but the hegemony (Althusser, 2006a, pp. 138-150, 2006b, pp. 286-288; Boyce, 2008; Ezzamel et al., 2007; James, 2009, McGregor, 2001, pp. 63, 288-289, 301; Waters and Crook, 1993, pp. 191-192, 200, 346-347) and coercion of the Welfare State which oppresses both white *and* black youth alike. The call for unity is a practical one: since the State oppresses both groups (Althusser, 2006a, 2008a; Callinicos, 2003), they must work together to develop a joint strategic approach. However, as Letts (2007, p. 87) points out, fighting the system “for the punks ... was a choice. We were black and had no choice”. On occasion the English police would definitely target blacks because of their race. Although a Stalinist might theorize that the “objective meaning” (see Žižek, 2008) of the acts of the police was politically reactionary (in that the acts worked to serve the reactionary forces rather than the progressive forces in the class struggle) such theorizing would provide the blacks involved with scant comfort. Marxism finds it difficult to explain the “added” oppression that

working-class blacks experience compared to working-class whites.<sup>23</sup> All Marxism can do is call the oppression by working-class whites of working-class blacks a form of false consciousness, i.e. displacement of the (real) class enemy on to an (imagined) race enemy (Žižek, 2008, p. 261). As Catchpowle et al. (2004, p. 1041) write, “ideology consistent with capitalism ... serves to mystify class relations”. The “added” oppression faced by the blacks at the hands of members of the ruling class is not so easy to explain. We can possibly point to blacks as a visual signifier of working-class oppositional “otherness” (as with the case of south-east London-based Millwall FC football hooligans) but this fails to completely convince.

Informed commentators (see, for example, Gilbert, 2004, p. 187) have suggested that Strummer’s own proposed solution to ruling class hegemony and income inequality (“why not phone up Robin Hood/ and ask him for some wealth distribution”) is flippant and weak. However, these commentators including Pat Gilbert are missing something. On the one hand, Strummer mocks both white and black youth’s materialistic tendencies and their recourse to simplistic envy-based positions. On the other hand, at a deeper level, there is no flippancy in Strummer’s solution at all: many white and black youth *are* suffering from material deprivation and sub-standard living conditions, and the longing for “wealth redistribution” is completely natural and justified. In Herbert Marcuse’s (1966) Freudian-Marxist terms, the longing is *instinctual*. Similarly, dissident politician and Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) Dr Chee Soon Juan (n/d, p. 5) writes that “[f]reedom from colonialism was not given but won; the rebellion was instinctual”. The “longing for Robin Hood” reflects an unrealistic socialist utopian vision to be sure but

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<sup>23</sup> In the same way Marxism struggles to explain the fall of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989-1991. The Trotskyite theory that these states “were not really Marxist anyway” is appealing but fails to recognize that millions of sincere Communists devoted their lives to these regimes over many years and that the ideal and the real will always be separated by a vast chasm. Possibly, in many people’s minds in 1989-1991, democracy was perceived as being stapled to capitalism and totalitarianism to Communism. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe it is likely that more people in 1989-1991 were seeking “democracy” than were seeking “capitalism”.

Strummer, being ultimately a romantic street poet, could not resist utilizing such vivid imagery. Whilst the Robin Hood hopes are unrealistic, Strummer refuses to deny the validity of the sentiment. As such, Strummer skilfully both affirms the validity of the ideal as well as the reality of the real (James, 2009; Žižek, 2008, 2009). This dialectic suggests that Strummer's suggestion is neither flippant nor weak. It acknowledges that the instinctual longing for wealth redistribution is a genuine longing, which cannot be repressed, whilst simultaneously reminding the hearers ("white youth, black youth") of the social and political reality. The Palais revellers are encouraged by Strummer, as Engels encouraged the London rioters of 1886, to re-channel their energies into a strategy which is more likely to lead to their long-run material, as well as their moral and spiritual, emancipation.

The next eight lines: "Punk rockers in the U.K./They won't notice anyway They're all too busy fighting/For a good place under the lighting/ The new groups are not concerned/ With what there is to be learned/ They got Burton suits, ha you think it's funny/ Turning rebellion into money" lament the shallowness, materialism, and hypocrisy of most of the punk movement, especially that centred around London's Roxy Club. By 1978 or even by mid-1977 Strummer and the Sex Pistols' John Lydon had both begun to disassociate themselves with the Roxy Club scene due to its increasingly conservative and reactionary nature (Heylin, 2007, pp. 207, 216, 311-312, 351, 480; Lydon et al., 1994; Savage, 2005). "They won't notice anyway" deplores most of the Roxy Club scene's lack of awareness and interest in social and political conditions and the emancipation of the oppressed. Strummer heaps scorn upon those punk rockers only interested in fun, fame, money, and clothing ("Burton suits" is a reference to the Jam; Gilbert, 2004, p. 187) rather than using their positions of influence to mobilize the working-class and address social injustice. I expect that Kim (2008) would agree with Strummer's sentiments here. The next two lines move on from addressing punk rockers to addressing the general public: "All over

people changing their votes/ Along with their overcoats”. These lines pick up on social trends addressed early on by Marcuse (1964, 1969) and which have only accelerated since the 1970s: swinging voters voting for the party that offers them the most immediate financial rewards in a manner totally devoid of social conscience. As a committed left-wing radical, it is clear that Strummer’s vote would never have gone to the Tories!

All this while the song’s musical backing has been working itself up from a muted start into a noisy crescendo and Strummer is growing angrier and more strident. The crescendo peaks with the defiant line: “If Adolf Hitler flew in today/ they’d send a limousine anyway”. “Black and white youth” are urged to join forces to fight the forces of fascism and the forces of indifference (that are ultimately in agreement). Here, as Marcuse was wont to do in his 1930s essays published in *Negations*, and Adorno highlighted in his seminal essay “The Stars down to Earth” (Adorno, 1994), Strummer clearly presents his view that the differences between Nazism and consumer capitalism are differences of degree only, not of kind (Catchpowle and Cooper, 1999; James, 2009). Catchpowle and Cooper (1999, p. 719) write that, citing African National Congress literature, “apartheid, inequality and capitalism were integrally related” in apartheid-era South Africa. The UK punks and the swinging voters are both identified in the song as tacit supporters of fascism: a charismatic and decisive leader who promises financial security and “elimination” of society’s different and marginalized would be completely consistent with the true spirit of 1980s Britain. Strummer has provided us with a powerful and compelling set of street-inspired ethics (“emotive proletarian spirit” in Myers’ (2006) words although these words were originally applied to 1990s East Bay punks Rancid) and has exposed the rotten inner core of contemporary capitalism. Marx took it upon himself to expose the rotten core of the unchallenged, seemingly innocent ideologies and behaviours of his generation’s producers and consumers.

While Derrida recently expounded upon the spectres of Marx<sup>24</sup>, maybe one reason why Marx's spectres are so hard to extinguish is that Marx's critique of capitalism as an exploitative mode of production continues to resonate today, 140 years after the publication of *Capital* Volume 1. When exchange value is unmasked, we discover social relations between human beings (Bauman, 1976; James and Tolliday, 2009; Marx, 1975, 1976). However, this fact does not make the "magic and necromancy" (Marx, 1976, p. 169) of capitalist commodities any less seducing or any less powerful (Žižek, 2008). We do not have *only* social relations among human beings under capitalism.

Strummer is now exhausted and has said all that needs to be said. The volume, pace, and intensity of the song drop off abruptly, and Strummer reveals another dialectic: He, the great social commentator, is "...the all night drug-prowling wolf/ who looks so sick in the sun". He is "the white man in the Palais/ just lookin' for fun". Salewicz (2006, Chapter 1, p. 7, Chapters 20-22, pp. 391-454) depicts Strummer in his post-Clash days in the late-1980s as a sad and dejected figure who one would often encounter on the streets and in the bars of the Ladbroke Grove/ Notting Hill area of west London. The Clash had split up but Thatcherism showed no signs of slowing down with the trade union movement and British manufacturing decimated. As with most notably "Hate & War", on the self-titled debut album, the song "White Man in Hammersmith Palais" ends on an anti-climax: Strummer reveals his true identity as just the "all-night drug prowling wolf" and, by doing so, he rejects the behaviours of the politicians and religious leaders who vigorously denounce others, whilst continuing to portray an image of their own perfection.<sup>25</sup> The song's title is not a proud statement of superiority, but an admission of defeat, alienation, and exhaustion

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<sup>24</sup> Derrida's "spectres" reference is to the opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism" (Marx and Engels, 1994, p. 158).

<sup>25</sup> Jesus Christ of course held similar views to Strummer about hypocrite higher-ground moralists (see Chapter 23 of *St. Matthew's Gospel*). Eagleton (2007) claims that Christ was both "more and less" a revolutionary than Lenin and Trotsky since although he did not advocate violent overthrow of the political order (some of his twelve disciples may have advocated this), he too was waiting for a coming regime fully characterized by peace, freedom, happiness, and justice.

caused by a rapidly-changing society, and continual oppression at the hands of the institutional agents of social control. Although he has no worthy outward credentials, Strummer departs us, happy to know that he has openly denounced fascism and exposed the rotten fascist core of contemporary society. He has pleaded on “white youth, black youth” to join forces and insists on addressing them as “we”, meaning a synthesis of working-class allies. The meaning of the song’s title “White Man in Hammersmith Palais” only now becomes clear: Strummer is the “white man” (actually of Scottish and Armenian descent) but the rest of the song’s title line is equally important: *the context is Hammersmith*, i.e. contemporary suburban London – simultaneously (the dialectic again) both rich and heartless, on the one hand, and multi-cultural, exploited, and rebellious on the other.<sup>26</sup>

### **3. Conclusions**

We are left with a complicated dialectic: the Clash as genuine supporters of a compassionate, multi-cultural, inclusive Britain but a band whose principal songwriter could not help but see the world in racialized terms and where stereotyped expectations about the black other were still an ingrained feature of his worldview. As we have seen Strummer “permitted” blacks to play “roots-rock rebel” but not “UK pop reggae”. Mao (2007b) urged us to recognize and study fully both aspects (sides) of every contradiction so as to gain a more complete and balanced view of any situation. Does the positive aspect of the Clash dialectic outweigh the negative aspect? I think so but opinions may well differ here. It remains a value judgement. Overall the story of Joe Strummer and the Clash recounted in this paper suggests that a genuine, authentic, and compassionate individual can, in existentialist terms, create her/his own essence by her/his actions (Nietzsche, 1973, 1990; Sartre, 2004, 2006). She/he can address issues of the other and issues that the other faces in

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<sup>26</sup> Scottish punk band the Exploited’s name could not have been more apt. Lead vocalist “Wattie” Buchan’s time spent as a soldier under Thatcher completely attuned him to the realities of neo-liberal imperialism.

compassionate terms that add insight, exhort the timid, and point towards possible solutions. A person's writings and actions are held together in tight dialectical unity and one can be used to more fully inform the other. An authentic person is a synthesis of her/his words and actions. People know where she/he stands and can rely upon her/him although she/he may not remain politically correct at all times. Kim's (2008) and Chua's (1998) papers remind us of dangers involved in research that involves a cultural and racial other. My view is that the case study of Strummer and the Clash presented in this paper suggest that a compassionate and authentic individual, artist or researcher, should not timidly refrain from writing and researching on the other but should work towards removing the false consciousness of all concerned in the research drama (other and not-other). This false consciousness, like all false consciousness, maintains that the primary source of exploitation in modern society lies somewhere else than the capitalist production process and its associated dominant ideology. As Žižek (2008, p. 174) writes, "And does the same not go even for the so-called 'excesses' of political correctness? Do they also not display the retreat from disturbing the effective (economic and other) causes of racism and sexism?"

However, despite the above, we should expect an artist or a researcher to grow in maturity and sophistication in their understandings of and writings on cultural and racial difference (and class and gender difference) as time passes. Growth and maturity should never be seen as optional extras. Obvious racism and neo-Nazism, coming out of a clear heart attitude of ill-will towards people of a different racial group from oneself (Garcia, 2004), should be subjected to severe criticism and sanction (Brown, 2009, p. 323).<sup>27</sup> Lastly let me say that Strummer's call for unity on the housing estates and his rejections of fascism remain

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<sup>27</sup> In the world of popular culture, it is extremely pleasing to this author to see highly regarded UK extreme-metal magazine *Terrorizer* rigorously policing its pages to ensure that black-metal bands and fans expressing neo-Nazi positions are challenged strongly and made to feel thoroughly "small", "out of line", and "disapproved of". It is up to each sub-cultural community to actively police its own boundaries, in a (sub)culturally appropriate way, in relation to these matters.

extremely relevant in a Britain today that is paying increased attention to the saccharine voices of the British National Party. As Cooper et al. (forthcoming) conclude, and Strummer would have agreed completely, “[f]rom a class perspective [freedom] ... is something that is won, frequently against massive odds, and with great will and determination”.

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## Discography

Note: ASIN number refers to the number of the most recently released version of the product (as at 13 June 2007) available for purchase at Amazon.com. Date listed is date of first release of the original version.

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