

# Introduction: The Last Insurrection? Youth, Revolts and Social Movements in the 1980s

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## **Youth Revolts in Europe, 1980–81**

On 12 December 1980, police officers in the West Berlin borough of Kreuzberg prevented squatters from occupying an empty house on Fränkeluferstrasse. The police intervention escalated an already tense situation and sparked spontaneous demonstrations and riots that lasted more than two days. The cover photo of this book shows a scene from that first night: two police officers had left their van, guns drawn, to keep a group of demonstrators in check, but other protesters subsequently moved in and knocked over the police van. The West Berlin squatters soon named the episode the 'Battle of Fränkelufer', and the riots became the starting point of the West Berlin squatters' movement. Before the 'battle' the city counted 18 squatted buildings; by June 1981 that number had risen to 165.<sup>1</sup>

The public, politicians and journalists were above all shocked by the militancy of the protesters, who were obviously willing and able to defend their spaces with force.<sup>2</sup> Referring to the events of 1968, newspapers soon spoke of a 'second youth revolt', in which theatrically articulated but unattainable demands went hand in hand with specific goals, and 'movements of withdrawal' merged with overtly political scenes.<sup>3</sup> Thus, protesters in Zurich demanded that 'Greenland' be 'freed of the icepack', while at the same time struggling for an autonomous youth centre. In this youth centre, alternative youths, punks and drug users met, and clashed, with radical activists. And as a conglomerate of scenes, groups and individuals merged, the authorities struggled to comprehend the dimensions and aims of the new youth movement and devise strategies to control it.

The character of the new youth movement, moreover, was explicitly international. The presence of Amsterdam squatters in Berlin on 12 December seemed to confirm that the militancy of local activists was, at least in part, influenced by international developments.<sup>4</sup> In February and March 1980, Amsterdam had witnessed impressive squatter riots, and in May that same year, the Zurich movement had taken off.<sup>5</sup> Activist slogans such as 'Bremen – Zürich – Amsterdam, jetzt ist auch Hannover dran' (Bremen – Zurich – Amsterdam, now it's Hannover's turn) seemed to confirm the international aspect of this movement, but also ironically referred to the 1960s, when radicals had chanted: 'Paris – Rome – Berlin, we will fight, we will win'.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the new slogan not only signified changes in perspective, from revolutionary ideals and 'winning', to revolting and resistance as a goal in itself. It also articulated a change in geographic focus.

Indeed, it has often been claimed that the 'second youth revolt' was localized in the welfare states of Northwest Europe, more specifically West Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark. Switzerland and Austria could be included in this list as well.<sup>7</sup> The characteristics of this youth revolt were a focus on occupations and militant defence of squatted places, dismissal of political parties and political organizations, a renewed focus on the subjective aspect of politics (amongst others articulated through humour) and a focus on locality (the borough, the city).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, however, there is ample evidence suggesting an exchange of ideas, repertoires and mentalities throughout Europe. Punk, for example, was remarkably successful in transferring oppositional ideas and mentalities of non-cooperation beyond the Iron Curtain. Thus, punk rock became a lively youth subculture in Poland and Slovenia. French anti-racist activists in their turn adapted the *Solidarność* logo and thus appropriated it for their own movement. Amsterdam squatters travelled to Barcelona in 1980 to inform sympathizers about how to organize a squatters' movement. One Barcelona activist remembers: 'The squatter event marked a break in time. Their approach to personal life, the alternative occupation of flats[;]... it was like water in the desert'.<sup>9</sup>

Is it possible to discern a shared attitude among protesting youths to the degree that one could even speak of a 'European Youth Revolt'? And, if so, how could this be characterized? How did ideas, mentalities and repertoires spread? These questions are central in this volume. To answer them, it is necessary to redirect our view to countries and cities that have previously received only little attention, and ask for the specific characteristics of revolt in these places. This volume therefore not only collects case studies from Germany and the Netherlands, but also from

Eastern Europe and Western European countries that are not commonly associated with the youth revolts of the early 1980s.

Initially, research on youth and youth revolts in the early 1980s was heavily influenced by sociological and political science approaches. On the one hand, social scientists aimed to understand the motives and dynamics of youth movements and their interactions with the state, while several governments initiated research projects that aimed instead to assess the extent to which these movements threatened public order and democratic structures.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the research focus has shifted to consumption patterns, emotions and mentalities.<sup>11</sup> In their recent volume, Hanno Balz and Jan-Henrik Friedrichs focused on protest cultures in Europe, as well as local contexts and developments.<sup>12</sup> To an extent, this present volume builds on that, but it focuses more on the politics of revolt, the interaction between politics and culture and how similar patterns and developments can be observed in different places throughout Europe. Taking youth and revolt as central analytical categories, it is based on local case studies, while at the same time asking for international contexts and interactions.

### **Revolting Europe**

Four categories are central in this approach: Europe as a geographic unit; youth as a social and cultural concept; the notion of revolt; and the 1980s as a delimited era in European history. Starting with the geographical unit of focus and comparison, it is clear that Northwest Europe played a prominent role in the youth revolt of 1980–81, as is described above. But other countries in Western Europe also had to deal with unrest in these years. This was the case, for example, in postcolonial United Kingdom and France. There, it was mainly ‘migrant’ youths – the sons and daughters of workers from the former colonies, who had arrived in the 1950s and 1960s – who revolted against police brutality, discrimination and bleak social prospects. As such, these protests followed a different course. With fewer contacts and points of entry into institutionalized political bodies, these protests waned sooner – leaving behind a far more contested legacy than the squatters’ movements, which were soon incorporated into the collective memory of the 1980s. These countries could be seen as the second region, where youth unrest shocked society.<sup>13</sup>

In Southern European countries, such as Spain, Greece and Italy, social movements were still recovering, either from the transition from dictatorship towards parliamentary democracy, or from the heavy handed repression of radical movements of the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> As traditional political

cleavages remained resilient, many radical youths organized in comparatively strong communist and socialist youth organizations or engaged in fierce conflicts with them.<sup>15</sup> Hard-hit by the economic crisis, and with fewer welfare measures to fall back on, youth saw little opportunity to revolt in the same way as in Northwest Europe.

In Eastern Europe, communist dictatorships left oppositional youth with even fewer possibilities of movement. In response, many of them were drawn to subcultures, such as punk, which proved to be less controllable by the authorities, thus leaving youths with a possibility to cautiously carve out some level of cultural autonomy.<sup>16</sup> With authorities oscillating between tolerance and repression, the youths had to do this by their own means. This was all the more so, because they had few commercial outlets, whilst in Western Europe punk and other subcultures were facilitated by growing interest from the music industry. In this volume, Grzegorz Piotrowski refers to this scene as the 'third circulation', stating: 'The term referred to publishing circulations under communist regimes, with the first circulation being the official one and the second being organized by the dissident sector'. But as the dissident sector still had some inroads into the music industry and could occasionally perform and record, the third circulation was nearly completely excluded and thus had to produce its records and publications through a 'do-it-yourself' means of production. Although in Eastern Europe there were fewer indications of youth unrest, and much less of a youth revolt, there were significant cultural and political similarities and transfers worth exploring. Ironically enough, it were the subcultural scenes that would later become pillars of the larger oppositional movement in Eastern Europe of the late 1980s.

This bird's-eye overview of the early 1980s draws a kaleidoscopic and fragmented image of youth revolts in Europe. Many of these revolts seemingly had local, regional and national origins. But even in places that were 'untouched' by the revolts of 1980–81, the events did leave their mark. In Sweden, for example, a radical youth movement emerged only in the mid-1980s, but all the same drew its inspiration both from stories about 1980–81 in other places and from contemporary movements that had its origins there: for example the West Berlin squatter scene, as Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom point out in this volume.

### **Youth: the people our parents have always warned us about**

Were the protests, movements and revolts that are central to this volume mainly the work of 'youth'? And if so, how can this be established?

There exist no valid statistics as to the social composition or age of those involved in the protests discussed here. In the German Federal Republic, many students were involved, but still the protests cannot be categorized as student revolts since the universities themselves were neither the places, nor main topics, of protests. Furthermore, the movements also involved many high-school youths (a portion of whom dropped out of college) as well as (often unemployed) working-class youths. Even so, the associations between these groups remain contested, as there exist no reliable figures on their numbers or relationships. Furthermore, these protests and revolts never involved 'all' youths, but did involve the majority of the politically active parts of the young generation in the early 1980s.

Even so, there remain three reasons why the term youth does offer productive ways of analysing protests, revolts and social movements in the 1980s. First of all, radical movements and authorities explicitly referred to youth when they articulated their societal hopes, fears and demands.<sup>17</sup> Historically, 'youth' has always been an object of concern and of promise: Does 'youth' hold the promise for the future, or will it be responsible for society's downfall? Radical activists consciously tapped into these fears as they dubbed themselves 'the people our parents have always warned us about'.<sup>18</sup> Others used such fears strategically – for example in their demands for self-managed spaces. Calling them youth centres garnered support and opened up political opportunities: in Copenhagen, a central place of the radical movement was the Ungdomshuset (Youth House).<sup>19</sup> The state of youth was, furthermore, often evoked in the legitimization of radical actions. The economic crisis, unemployment and the fear of nuclear war were consciously stylized as phenomena that hit youth the hardest.

Secondly, contacts with older generations of activists often remained marginal. Because the new activists refrained from forming organizations, and showed only little interest in Marxist theory and labour struggles, they signified a generational break with the radical left of the 1970s. Typically, West Germany's Green Party, which in several ways was a project of the New Social Movements of the 1970s, only established a youth organization in 1994, 25 years after its foundation. Up to that point, the Green Party had seen itself as the parliamentary spokesperson of the radical movements of the 1970s and, thus, of radical youth itself.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, however, many protesters refused to be designated as 'youths', fearing that this term would depoliticize their causes and struggles. In countries such as Italy, the movement defined itself explicitly

as radical left, emphasizing intergenerational contacts and dialogues, and thus continuities with the movements of the 1970s. And although radical youths often claimed to be hit harder by societal tensions and crises, it was exactly these general issues that had very different effects in different parts of Europe. Although youth unemployment played an important role in the narratives and visions of northern youths, it was in the Southern European countries that youth unemployment was the highest, while the youth revolt seemingly did not take place there.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in this volume, Enrique Tudela and Claudio Cataneo cite an activist who remarked: 'For us it was impossible and unthinkable to get scholarships, or live on unemployment benefits. We joked, saying that the state was paying Northern European youths for doing the revolution, while we were more of a working-class culture'.

Finally, even if we cannot measure the age and social background of those who protested and revolted, those involved were all affected by the fact that youth became a far broader category in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. As educational careers became longer and entry into the workforce was moved forward, economic independence and the starting of a family were postponed. This development, often linked to the term post-adolescence, opened up possibilities for experimenting with alternative lifestyles and ways of living together, in which alternative or radical youths were at the forefront.<sup>22</sup> And while, especially in this respect, differences between European countries were immense, they grew more alike throughout the decade.

When we hold that youth still remains a valuable analytical category, we can build forth on the argument of Sebastian Haunss, who links the term to both 'a strong and a weak generational perspective': 'strong' when dealing with the differences and conflicts between generations, and 'weak' when youth is characterized as a phase of greater sensibility and openness to protest politics. These characterizations leave the question open as to why youth protests do not break out continuously, and in answering this question other factors come into play, such as political opportunities, transfer of action repertoires, political and economic developments. Youth revolts should therefore not be envisioned as generational conflicts, but as specific historical situations, which should, amongst other, be analysed through the lens of youth.

### **Revolt: drop out or rebel**

The concept of revolt features prominently in this volume, while other scholars have instead chosen to use more neutral terms such as youth

protest, movement or unrest. The term revolt, however, featured prominently in contemporary debates on youth protests and riots in 1980–81, especially in West Germany.<sup>23</sup> The term not only signalled the seemingly limited scope of youth's protests, as they voiced no revolutionary programs, but also the seemingly limited gains that they made. Thus, the Zurich Autonomous Youth Centre, acquired after months of fierce struggle, was only held on to for several months, while the 'nuclear freeze campaign', aimed at stopping the nuclear arms race, was ultimately defeated. In the eyes of many, the political perspectives for the activists had been bleak from the start. This view was shared by both protesters and observers alike. Thus, a central slogan of the German protesters was 'We've got no chance, but we'll take it anyway', while several observers stated that the revolting youths faced the non-choice of 'resignation or violence', 'drop-out or rebel'.<sup>24</sup>

But the term revolt also placed the youth movement in a larger frame of postwar radical youth movements.<sup>25</sup> The participants in the 'first youth movement' of 1968 had dubbed themselves, and were seen from the outside as, revolutionary. As the movement withered into an array of groups, parties and movements in the early 1970s, they were dominated by neo-Marxist theories, anti-imperialist internationalism and neo-Leninist attempts at building workers' parties.<sup>26</sup> Integrating into, and subsequently revolutionizing, the working class became a central goal of the latter groups, but by the mid-1970s, these currents had reached an impasse and lost most of their shine and attraction.<sup>27</sup> Within the radical and alternative youth scenes of the mid-1970s, the revolutionary student movement became a target for mockery and ridicule. The inner-movement conflicts were ultimately parodied in Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, released in 1979, in which the People's Front of Judea saw it as its primary goal to 'unmask' and defeat the Judean People's Front and other liberation movements. The focus of radical and alternative youths consequently shifted to a search for authenticity, small-scale, comprehensible spaces and scenes, experimental lifestyles and esotericism.<sup>28</sup> Subjectivity and a politics of emotion gained a central place in the movements.

Political and alternative youth thus moved away from workerist and anti-imperialist politics, became ever more sceptical of revolutionary organizations (especially parties) and of overly abstract theories. The focus on subjectivity not only went hand in hand with cynical parodies of the student leaders of 1968, but also with biting critiques of those who had moderated their political views, had grown to prominence and thus 'sold out'. This attitude was reflected in the lyrics of the Hamburg punk band, Slime, in their song *Linke Spiesser*: 'Always critical and political/

Marx and Lenin on the bedside table/But you've got something against clashes/And you happily make room for the police.... And when we become aggressive/You are all suddenly conservative'.<sup>29</sup>

The turn away from overly revolutionary and ideological narratives heralded a shift towards more pragmatism. This development seemingly effected all youth movements in Europe. To some extent, the shift was the result of movement learning processes. Many radical youths dismissed the focus on theory attributed to the protesters of 1968, especially when elaborate and abstract theorizing went hand in hand with ever more moderate politics. Opening up to alternative youth scenes and new social movements, radical youths came to focus on specific goals and issues. In their struggle against the construction of nuclear power plants, airport runways or urban redevelopment schemes, ideology mattered ever less, whilst the protest forms became ever more specific and practical.

Interestingly enough, a similar attitude was discerned by Padraic Kenney, when he researched rebelling youth in 1980s Poland. Using his contacts to get in touch with oppositional youths, his friends recommended several, who were called 'konkretny'. He later remembered: 'These were the kind of people I wanted to meet'.

Konkretny meant someone who knew how to organize a demonstration, or to use the media, and who could implement ideas effectively. The opposite [...] would be someone who enjoyed analyzing the communist system or the opposition and believed in the power of a devastating critique. [B]y the mid-1980s the time of the 'truth-tellers' had passed, giving way to what I call the konkretny generation.<sup>30</sup>

The term 'konkretny', however, not only refers to the importance of direct action and anti-statism, but also to the subversive element of 'anti-politics': humour and upsetting the rationale of state actors.<sup>31</sup> All these factors became central to the activities of rebellious youths throughout Europe in the 1980s. In this, militancy and (the threat of) violence always played a role, for example in a case in which militant protesters in Zurich saw their way blocked by riot police on a sunny day in 1980. Before engaging in confrontations with the police, a number of activists managed to convince their fellow activists to first have a group discussion on how to move forward. While the riot police were sweating in their riot gear, the debate dragged on for an hour or so, after which the protesters decided that it would be much more fun to go swimming in a nearby lake.<sup>32</sup> The protesters thus subverted the rationale of

state actors, but could only do so because there was a threat of violent confrontation.

The combination of threatening violence and subverting the logic of political conflict turned the protests into something seemingly 'limitless'. Activists were willing to risk their lives in defence of such mundane things as a house, and in doing so went way past what was considered radical in the late 1970s. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the mid-1980s in Western Europe were more violent, with radical movements taking recourse to means such as fire bombs and sabotage attacks.<sup>33</sup> But by then, some sort of habituation had set in. It was rather the riots of 1980 and 1981 that were considered truly shocking and drew attention. In disrupting authority's logic's and routine, violence played a role, but it was not solely or simply about that. Militancy and violence should not so much be conceived as central events, but rather as a cultural common ground. While riots always included only a small part of the movement, militant attitudes were widespread. Pictures, stories and comics of militant confrontations circulated widely within the movement. And militant images were related to attitudes of non-cooperation – widely supported by punk culture – which revolved around work refusal, occupying and claiming spaces and creating alternative and informal economic structures. Together, these became a topos of the movement.

### **The 1980s: between no future and 'neoliberal youth'**

As this volume focuses on the 1980s, the decade is remembered as an era of economic stagnation, political stability and protest. In Western Europe, deindustrialization and economic crisis caused a peak in (especially youth) unemployment, which went hand in hand with protests of a previously unseen scale – for example during protests against the NATO double-track decision, which mobilized up to half a million people in Bonn and The Hague in 1983. With the rise to power of conservative governments in the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands, the economic transition from heavy industry to service economy came along with fierce industrial conflicts and the emergence of neoliberalism. These changes were heavily contested, and the decade was thus rife with social and political conflict and protest. In *Dark Continent*, Mark Mazower described it as the period in which the social contract was in crisis, while in *Postwar* Tony Judt speaks of diminished expectations and a turn towards a 'new realism'.<sup>34</sup> In Eastern Europe, the cracks in the regime became ever more obvious, with an increasing economic crisis,

the rise to power of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and of Solidarność in Poland. The 1980s became the last decade of the Cold War.

The decade thus became a multifaceted one. In pop culture, the concept of 'no future' was obviously inspired by the intensification of social strife and renewed fear of nuclear war, but at the same time unleashed feverish creativity, amongst other things, through punk and postpunk.<sup>35</sup> Dystopian views thus triggered creativity, rather than despondency. The same goes for the image of European youth. Next to the impression of a youth revolt, the concept of 'neoliberal youth' gained prominence, and was embodied foremost in the new 'yuppies'. Portrayed as the 'winners' of the economic turn, these 'young urban professionals' seemingly uncritically internalized modern career paths and consumption patterns as they moved towards a hedonistic utopia.

This constructed divide between political and uncritical youth was the result of the differentiation and development of youth cultures in the 1980s. While conservative and liberal ideas gained momentum by mid-decade, radical urban movements in various countries became more alike, but also more isolated from wider society, even though they remained a prominent political force. Within subcultures such as punk, similar divisions could be seen, as a political wing grew ever further away from the more hedonist punk scenes.

### **Who was revolting?**

This volume does not give a complete or systematic overview of youth revolts, protests and movements in the 1980s. Rather, the various texts focus on different regions, actors and developments – all central to understanding these revolts and movements. In the remaining part of this introduction, we present a preliminary synthesis of the contributors' findings, focusing on the questions: Who was revolting? What did 'revolt' entail? What came after?

Turning to the first question, it is interesting to see that the concept of youth is discussed in various contributions. In his political science approach, Sebastian Haunss voices concerns about using the concept of youth: first of all because there are no reliable statistics on who was protesting in these years, and secondly because youth may not be the central category through which these protests can be understood. According to Haunss, the youth revolts should be analysed as 'social and thus relational phenomena', and be embedded in larger societal developments. Rather than envisioning these youth revolts as icebreakers of new societal tendencies, he calls on the work of Alberto Melucci and

proposes to look for the 'submerged networks' on which these revolts built and which changed everyday practices and values.

Jan-Henrik Friedrichs, too, is critical of the term youth revolt, and proposes to look at other categories as well. Youth is a contested term for Friedrichs, but he sees a heuristic advantage to it: 'As historians we need to take into account the manifold frictions and conflicts within this "revolt" and we need to take seriously those subjects, who did not necessarily speak through flyers or pamphlets to make themselves heard'. He thus proposes to, instead, take the concept of transgression as a point of departure, focusing on the relations between squatters and illicit drug scenes. The views and policies of squatters towards heroin users in Zurich and West Berlin differed drastically. While the former attempted to include them and supported demands for self-determination, the latter tried to exclude them, seeing them as a political threat.

In this respect it is interesting to note that these dynamics were also present in the Italian and Spanish youth scenes. Both Pierpaolo Mudu and Gianni Piazza, who write about Italy, and Enrique Tudela and Claudio Cataneo, who write about Spain, explicitly see heroin as a weapon used against the radical youth movement. Here, too, activists at first tried to eradicate drugs from their scenes, in Italy even going so far as to physically attack drug dealers. Eventually however, attempts were made at informing, including and politicizing drug users. Thus Tudela and Cataneo write: 'It took activists several years to become aware of the dangers of heroin and find ways to combat it. Activists started to spread information about the dangers of drug abuse by organizing campaigns, talks and spreading posters and graffiti messages'.

In the contributions to this volume on Spain, Italy and Sweden, the youth movements are explicitly seen as left-libertarian movements. Although youth does play a role, the focus is foremost on their political rationales. In studies focusing on squatting in Germany and the Netherlands, on the other hand, the squatters are often envisioned as youths, but the political calibre is considered hard to measure. Rather, the squatters are seen as a conglomerate of various subcultural and political scenes.<sup>36</sup> It can, therefore, be interesting to focus on the places where these youths met. (This would not mean that youth becomes insignificant, but rather that it is related to other factors and analytical concepts, as Friedrichs had proposed.) In exploring this perspective, however, the focus should not only be on large urban centres. In his contribution, David Templin shows through many examples how the ideals of revolt spread to small towns and rural areas in West Germany, and how the urban revolts thus resonated with the ideas of youths in smaller places.

In our view, these findings do not so much supplement our knowledge, but offer a new perspective. They illustrate how demands for self-managed spaces and autonomy were translated to other regions and contexts, how visions and attitudes were transferred, and subsequently changed in the process.

But youth also played an important role in social movements that focused on issues that affected all, such as nuclear weapons, racism and disability. Here, too, youth should be taken as one of several analytical categories through which these movements are to be understood. Dario Fazzi for example shows not only how transatlantic ties influenced the anti-nuclear movement, but also how youths played a role in radicalizing the movement's repertoire: 'Anti-nuclear activists' militancy, their anti-conformism, and their tendency to break the rules that often resulted in the unauthorized occupation of public spaces and construction sites were considered legitimate reactions against unjust and unsafe national and international policies'. In this context, militancy did not so much refer to violence, but to civil disobedience.

The same goes for the activism of disabled people in the 1980s. Monika Baár asks for the links between their actions and the youth revolt unfolding in these years in West Germany. In doing so, she not only uncovers transnational networks, but also comments on the concept of revolt: 'According to mainstream definition, a revolt is an explosive, spontaneous spectacle with a dimension of violence and militant action with the aim of changing social structures. The activities of disabled people hardly ever relied on violence'. At the same time, they did disrupt and subvert political routines, for example when they disrupted the opening of the International Year of Disabled People in Germany, in January 1981, thus forcing federal President Karl Carstens to give his keynote from an alternative location. Baár goes on to see more similarities: 'The wish of disabled activists to exercise self-determination and to change existing social structures was just as paramount as in the case of the youth movement'.

But with broad movements focusing on one topic, the political calibre was sometimes hard to probe. This is, for example, clear in Didier Chabanet's analysis of SOS Racisme. After France had witnessed heavy riots in September 1981, community leaders responded with a peaceful March for Equality and Against Racism in 1983. Out of this grew the Beur movement, which focused on the empowerment of 'migrant' youths, and also inspired new cultural expressions in film, music and literature. From 1985 onwards, however, the Beur movement was marginalized by large free music festivals organized by SOS Racisme, funded by Mitterrand's

Socialist Party. Although these festivals attracted large crowds, they failed to stimulate the self-organization of migrant youths as the *Beur* movement had done previously. When SOS Racisme lost funding, the music festivals stopped, and no others were able to take over. The decade ended with renewed unrest in the suburbs of French metropolises.

### **Punk and (anti)politics**

Just as with the squatters' and other movements, the political calibre of punk, too, is often hard to measure. This is clear in the contribution from Matthew Worley on British punk. In fact, it is often even unclear what punk was, and Worley states: 'Defining "punk" – be it in a cultural or a political sense – is contentious and problematical. Depending on your preference or prejudice, punk could be read as a musical form, a fashion, an aesthetic, an attitude, a protest, a media-construed label, an anti-social gesture, a cultural moment or a lifestyle'. As a result, its political character remained contested: 'Politically, punk was claimed and denounced on the left and right before generating its own explicitly anarchist subculture. It also comprised many who rejected all and any political interpretation of its motives and substance'. Even so, attitudes of non-cooperation and the concept of 'antipolitics' featured prominently in the punk scene. Punk provided, so to say, the soundtrack of the revolt. Thus, Worley states: 'If the riots of 1980–81 remain resonant, then it is partly as a result of punk's ability to distil their essence in cultural form'.

As such, punk was received and adapted to local contexts all over Europe, even becoming a major point of reference for radical youths in Eastern Europe. This features prominently in the contributions of Oskar Mulej and Grzegorz Piotrowski. Oskar Mulej analyses punk scenes in Yugoslavia and focuses on the 'punk spring' of 1981, especially in Ljubljana. With a border open to Western Europe, the Yugoslav communist party was more relaxed on Western cultural influences than were other communist states, and the first punk groups defined themselves as a-political. Although they became more visible during 1981, meeting in public spaces and marking them with ironic graffiti, they refrained from political actions, demonstrations or squatting. But as the communist rulers expressed their 'ideological monopoly [...] above all through symbolic politics', punk's ironic citation of communist slogans and pranks caused irritations, and eventually provoked a wave of repression. Mulej acknowledges that punk contributed to weakening the position of the communist dictatorship, but notices a contradiction. The

punk scene namely focussed above all on ‘alternative cultural practices, striving for individual self-expression and “spontaneous subcultural socializing”’. According to Mulej, punk ‘may thusly be treated as an important subculture with great political significance, although its own “aims” and “motivations” were not political’.

Grzegorz Piotrowski witnesses a similar pattern in Poland, focusing on punk, the Jarocin festival and the rise of dissident youth movements. During the 1980s, the Jarocin festival attracted thousands of alternative youths and thus became a space of distribution of ideas and subcultural practices, rather than revolt. Dissident youths attended as well, but according to Piotrowski, ‘the youth revolt at Jarocin was not explicitly political: it was more against the social system and their lack of prospects’. Even so, this attitude helped to delegitimize the communist system, and parts of the alternative scene soon merged with more overtly dissident youth groups and movements.

### **Synchronization and international networks**

Three contributions in this volume focus on countries that, for various reasons, did not experience a youth revolt around 1980–81. Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom focus on Sweden and, comparing the situation to Northwest Europe and especially Denmark ask: ‘Why did it not happen here’. Focusing on societal factors, they emphasize not only the corporatist state model, social democratic hegemony and consensus-based political structures, but also the fact that the government initially aimed at ‘investing its way out of the crisis’. With crisis symptoms thus weakened, even activists ‘felt that they did not have the same reasons to employ confrontational and militant strategies as activists in other parts of Europe did’. When the economy started to stagnate in the mid-1980s and politics made a conservative turn, however, a radical movement did emerge and soon grew similar to the autonomist movements in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.

In their contribution on Italy, Pierpaolo Mudu and Gianni Piazza emphasize the extent of repression after 1977 as a main reason why Italy did not face large youth mobilizations in 1980–81. At the same time, they suggest that the *Autonomia* movement of 1977 may well have been a pioneer for the youth movements that emerged later in Northern Europe, as the themes, ways of organizing and action repertoires were very similar. Even so, they do not envision the late 1970s as an end point. Rather, they argue that this ‘ebb’ in radical activism – referred to as *riflusso* in Italy – ‘should be reconsidered as a transitional phase from

the radical movements of the 1970s to new movements that sprang up later, such as the anti-nuclear and the anti-militarist movements, radical environmentalism and “post-autonomous” mobilizations’. Here too, these movements soon grew similar to the squatter/autonomist movements in other countries.

Claudio Cattaneo and Enrique Tudela witness a similar development in their analysis of the Spanish youth movement. Here, too, the movement had to process heavy setbacks experienced in the late 1970s, after the end of Franco’s dictatorship in 1975 had at first given way to massive mobilizations at workshops and neighbourhoods. After this first phase, the situation stabilized, however, and the transition from dictatorship to a parliamentary system took solid shape. As a result, radical movements waned, and instead of revolutionary perspectives, radical youths in the late 1970s had to deal with widespread disenchantment (in Spanish: *desencanto*). Even so, they also see the years 1980–81 mainly as a ‘transition phase’ for the movement, which regained momentum in the mid-1980s. By that time, the radical movement had grown more similar to the squatter/autonomist movement in Northwest Europe – a development that is witnessed in all three contributions.

In the mid-1980s, a part of the youth movement ‘synchronized’ internationally. Local scenes and movements grew more alike and international contacts intensified. This process went hand in hand with a new protest wave, which was provoked by the Chernobyl accident.<sup>37</sup> This synchronization was furthered through activist travel and travel networks, organizational connections and the media. Linus Owens analyses the travels of the Amsterdam squatters in the early 1980s, and shows how they became popular guests all over Western Europe. In most cases, the Amsterdam squatters were invited to speak about their experiences and tactics, and show movies. In other cases, they would provide more practical help, as Owens stated: ‘While mass media rapidly distributes news and information far and wide, it rarely carries the politics and practices of radical movements effectively. A movement based so strongly in tacit knowledge – of how to squat a building to how to defend it – required other ways of sharing information, namely physical travel between activist cities’.

In the contributions on Sweden, Spain and Italy, the effects of these travels feature prominently. Thus, Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom state: ‘Swedish anarchists established closer personal contacts to activists in similar movements in other parts of Europe, for instance in Denmark and Germany, travelling across borders to aid in each other’s causes. The

international contacts led to the diffusion of political ideas and repertoires of action'. At the same time, transfer was not always a smooth or self-evident process. Enrique Tudela and Claudio Cataneo quote an activist who stated: 'We soon realized that activists in the rest of Europe knew much more than we did. [...] They did things we could not do, but we were also doing things that they could not do'. The concept of no future could lead to similar reactions, for example when Piotrowski quotes a Polish punk saying: 'In Britain, they sing "no future" [...] But I'd like to be on welfare payments there! If you want to know what "no future" means, come to Poland!'

The establishment too, was very aware of international influences. Thus, Vienna's authorities in 1980 were so convinced of the idea that riots were alien to their city that they initially saw the riots of 1 March as instigated by four youths from West Germany. Quickly coming back from this, the city then decided to significantly alter its urban and cultural policies, to avoid 'Zurich situations' in their capital, as Robert Foltin shows in his contribution. In a sense, the authorities' interpretation of, and response to, youth revolts in other countries 'prevented' escalation in Vienna in the early 1980s, even though here, too, an autonomist squatter movement emerged.

However, this development of movements increasingly growing alike, also went hand in hand with increasing isolation. This was especially true for the squatter and autonomist movements, which evolved into a truly European subculture movement, but also lost many aspects that were characteristic of the youth revolt of the early 1980s. As the squatters and autonomists movements became more politically outspoken, their social and political composition narrowed. Their action repertoires grew more fixed and, to a large extent, lost their subversive characters. And as the movements' meeting places grew ever more similar internationally, their local ties grew weaker.

### **Making sense of the revolt**

The establishment in different countries responded differently to the youth revolts in their respective countries. But in Western Europe, the reactions were not so much driven by a moral panic. Rather, research commissions – installed by various governments to assess the characteristics and threat level of the renewed youth protests – aimed at understanding the youth revolts and interpreting them as stimuli for policy change. This was very clear in the Swiss case that Jan Hansen analyses in this volume. Focusing on the Swiss Youth Commission and its

programmatic 'Theses on the Youth Revolt', he shows that the commission concentrated not so much on the actions of the protesting youths, but on perceived structural faults in society. Jan Hansen therefore modifies the traditional dichotomy between youth and politics and analyses how, rather, the establishment was divided on the issue. The analysis and narrative of the West German parliamentary commission of inquiry and of the British Scarman commission were very similar, and the latter went so far as to propose policies to alleviate social tensions – proposals that went mostly unnoticed.

Jake Smith, on the other hand, focuses on how the media analysed and portrayed the youth revolt. Focusing on West Germany, he witnesses a far less-understanding attitude. Rather, the newspapers, and especially the tabloids, viewed the revolting youths as anti-modern, violent and irrational actors who aimed at forcefully undermining the social order. In particular, the conservative right 'tended to point to the nefarious character of the youth revolts, to underlying "structures of violence" and "lawless zones", which endangered the very foundations of the democratic state'. At the same time, Smith notices that the differing interpretations by different authorities shared a similar structure: 'Whether it was a psychologist pointing to shifts in the adolescent experience, a novelist writing about terrorist networks, or a police officer lamenting the fact that the milieu is "not easily manageable", experts, officials and the media understood the youth movement as a concrete instantiation of a larger network, which was both irrational and awe-inspiring'.

When analysing the debates on the riots in Britain, Almuth Ebke, too, focuses on newspapers. But her argument focuses not so much on how journalists and experts visualized youths in revolt, but what it said about British society and where it was headed. Thus, the public debate soon zoomed in on issues relating to identity and belonging, on economic and political perspectives and feelings of social disintegration and decline. And she concludes: 'The 1981 riots thus constitute a landmark for the history of these processes of societal self-definition: existing discussions about belonging were effectively popularized in a framework of perceived economic capabilities, contested imperial legacies and the changing structure of society'.

Both in Northwest Europe and France, governments responded to revolts with attempts at integration. Tragically, these attempts were least successful when the riots involved 'migrant' youths, and these subsequently became a recurring phenomenon in both the United Kingdom and France.

## Conclusion

The years 1980–81 witnessed impressive revolts of youths in several European countries. The youth movement made headway, not so much because of its militancy, but because it combined militancy with an ability to subvert political routines. As such, large parts of the establishment felt challenged, even threatened. In the years that followed, the revolting youths withered in different currents and scenes, such as punk and the squatters'/autonomist movement. Of course, youth had never been a monolithic entity, but from the mid-1980s processes of differentiation grew ever stronger. As a result, youth cultures such as punk became less political, while political movements such as the autonomist movement revolved ever less around youth. As these groups and scenes became more well defined, they became more exclusive and more embedded in international networks, while at the same time becoming less closely related to specific local contexts.

In the early 1980s, political contention, violence and subversion had been explicitly linked to youth. Throughout the decade, this vision became less pronounced. Not only did youth lose its ability to disrupt and subvert political routines in the same way, but the different movements and scenes were less associated with youth. The squatters became one political subculture amongst many, and were no longer seen as the embodiment of radical youth. New (youth) cultures, such as hip-hop and techno, drew a more age-diffuse audience, while other currents like punk and rock grew older. At the same time all of them lost much of their potential for political subversion.

When in the 1990s, the alter-globalization movement grew to prominence, it mobilized many youths, but it was no longer defined as a youth movement. In that sense, the years 1980–81 may have been Europe's last youth revolt: not so much because youths revolted, and much less because they revolted as a whole, but because it was the last time that explosive instances of protest and revolt were seen, both by actors and observers, as a youth phenomenon.

## Notes

1. For the squatters' movement in Berlin, see F. Anders (2010) 'Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand. Die Formierung der Autonomen in den Konflikten um Hausbesetzungen Anfang der achtziger Jahre', in D. Siegfried and S. Reichardt (eds) *Das Alternative Milieu. Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa, 1968–1983* (Berlin: Wallstein), pp. 473–98; Geronimo (2002) *Feuer und Flamme. Zur Geschichte der Autonomen*

- (Berlin: ID-Archiv); A.G. Grauwascke (2003) *Autonome in Bewegung. Aus den ersten 23 Jahren* (Berlin: Association A).
2. This was reflected in both journalist accounts and government reports. See for example H.J.A. Hofland (1981) *De stadsoorlog. Amsterdam '80* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthof); Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid [WRR] (1980) *Democratie en geweld. Probleemanalyse naar aanleiding van de gebeurtenissen in Amsterdam op 30 april 1980* (Den Haag: Staatsuitgeverij); L.G. Scarman (1986) *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10–12 April 1981*, reprinted edn. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books).
  3. 'Nichts zu verlieren außer der Angst' *Die Zeit*, no. 8, 13 February 1981; 'Da packt dich irgendwann ne Wut', *Der Spiegel*, no. 52, 22 December 1980, 22–31.
  4. L. Adriaenssen (1996) *Een dwarse buurt. Het herscheppingsverhaal van de Staatsliedenbuurt en Frederik Hendrikbuurt, 1971–1996* (Amsterdam: Wijkcentrum Staatslieden-Hugo de Grootburt), p. 71; E. Duivenvoorden (2000) *Een Voet Tussen de Deur: Geschiedenis van de Kraakbeweging 1964–1999* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers).
  5. For Amsterdam: Duivenvoorden, *Een Voet Tussen de Deur*; Adilkno (1994) *Cracking the Movement. Squatting Beyond the Media* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia); L. Owens (2009) *Cracking under Pressure. Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press). J. Uitermark (2004) 'Framing urban injustices. The case of the Amsterdam squatter movement' *Space and Polity*, vol. 8, no. 2, 227–44. For contemporary observations on Zürich, see G. Amendt (1980) 'Leichte Krawallerie' *Konkret*, no. 8 (August), 17–21; R. Häny (1981) *Zürich Anfang September* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp). For historical accounts: H. Nigg (2001) *Wir wollen alles, und zwar subito! Die achtziger Jugendunruhen in der Schweiz und ihr Folgen* (Zurich: Limmat); H.P. Kriesi (1984) *Die Zürcher Bewegung. Bilder, Interaktionen, Zusammenhänge* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus).
  6. 'Grün und Gloria' *Der Spiegel*, no. 47, 17 November 1980, 21–24; T. Ali (2005) *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London and New York: Verso).
  7. Kriesi et al. took this as point of departure in their research of social movements in the 1970s and 1980s in Western Europe: H.P. Kriesi et al. (1995) *New Social Movements in Western Europe. A Comparative Analysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). For the development of welfare regimes in the West, see G. Esping-Andersen (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
  8. This latter aspect is amongst others emphasized in the volume: S. Aust and S. Rosenblatt (1981) *Hausbesetzer. Wofür sie kämpfen, wie sie leben und wie sie leben wollen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe). For the former aspect, see J. Smith and J. Haebleren (2014) 'Struggling for Feelings. The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left in West-Germany, c. 1968–1984' *Contemporary European History*, vol. 23, no. 4, 615–37.
  9. L. Owens et al. (2013) 'At home in the movement: constructing an oppositional identity through activist travel across European squats', in C. Flesher Fominaya and L. Cox (eds) *Understanding European Movements. New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-austerity Protest* (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 172–86, p. 176.

10. For the first, see among others: Kriesi, *Die Zürcher Bewegung*; *ibid.*, *New Social Movements*; R. Koopmans (1995) *Democracy from Below: New social movements and the political system in West Germany* (Boulder: Westview Press). For the latter, for example: WRR, *Democratie en geweld*.
11. Smith and Haerberlen, 'Struggling for Feelings'; Sedlmaier (2015) *Consumption and Violence. Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).
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14. For Italy, see G. Katsiaficas (1997) *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press); D. della Porta (1995) *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State. A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); S. Tarrow (1989) *Democracy and Disorder. Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965–1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
15. For Greece see N. Papadogiannis (2015) *Militant Around the Clock? Youth Politics, Leisure and Sexuality in Post-dictatorship Greece, 1974–1981* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn).
16. S. Häder (2005) 'Selbstbehauptungen wider Partei und Staat: westlicher Einfluss und östliche Eigenständigkeit in den Jugendkulturen jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 45, 449–74.
17. For this, see for example J. Bacia and K.J. Scherer (1981) *Passt bloss auf! Was will die neue Jugendbewegung?* (Berlin: Olle and Wolter).
18. Koopmans, *Democracy from Below*.
19. P. Birke and C. Holmsted Larsen (eds) (2007) *Besetze deine Stadt! BZ din By! Häuserkämpfe und Stadtentwicklung in Kopenhagen* (Berlin: Assoziation A).
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21. For a contemporary survey: H.C. Harten (1983) *Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in der EG* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus).
22. H. Kaelble (2007) *Sozialgeschichte Europas 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck), pp. 35–56; Michael Mitterauer (1993) *A History of Youth. Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times* (Oxford: Blackwell).
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27. (1977) *Wir warn die stärkste der Parteien....Erfahrungsberichte aus der Welt der K-Gruppen* (Berlin: Rotbuch).
28. Reichardt and Siegfried, *Das Alternative Milieu*.
29. The song appeared on their album *Alle gegen Alle* (1983). In German, the lyrics are: 'Immer kritisch und politisch/Marx und Lenin auf dem Nachttisch/ Doch ihr habt was gegen Rabatz/Und macht den Bullen gerne Platz [...] Und werden wir mal aggressiv/Seid ihr auf einmal konservativ'. See also: B. van der Steen et al. (2014) 'Introduction: Squatting and Autonomous Action in Europe, 1980–2012', in *ibid.* (eds) *The City is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe, 1980–2014* (Oakland: PM Press), pp. 1–19.
30. P. Kenney (2002) *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 13.
31. Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*.
32. Kriesi, *Die Zürcher Bewegung*, p. 66.
33. Koopmans, quoted in D. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State*, p. 53.
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36. Anders, 'Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand', pp. 479ff.
37. Kriesi, *New Social Movements*.