

## **“What the heck: Eskorbuto for PM!” Eskorbuto’s punk music and anarchist ideology**

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**Abstract.** Eskorbuto were one of the most important Spanish-speaking punk bands and the most extreme among those belonging to the ‘Basque Radical Rock’ movement in the 1980s. This paper aims to analyze the ideological components of Eskorbuto’s discourse in relation to the political philosophy of anarchism. More specifically, the objective is to ascertain whether Eskorbuto’s music represents key anarchist values, and whether their discourse may be characterized as anarcho-punk. The study focuses on a context-sensitive discourse analysis of Eskorbuto’s lyrics. Results indicate that, through punk music, Eskorbuto’s discourse was linked to anarchism, to the extent that the Basque band was energized by punk’s anti-establishment attitude. However, results also reveal that the socially constructive values of anarchism – such as the belief in a natural order, or the vision of a self-managed collectivist economy – were not clearly conveyed in the band’s nihilistic lyrics. The scope and limits of Eskorbuto’s anarcho-punk characteristics are considered, before discussing the relationship of the band’s raw and confrontational message with the concept of punk-anarchism.

**Keywords.** Anarcho-Punk, Anarchism, Spanish Punk, Eskorbuto, Punk and Ideology, Popular Culture and Politics

## **Introduction**

Music is an outstanding vehicle for conveying ideological messages. Indeed, the political use of music has a long tradition, from Wagner to the punk music of the Sex Pistols, through Nazi rock and Christian folk. A country like Spain, with a very protracted musical tradition, offers many examples of such utilization, including the usage to which the Franco dictatorship put *copla* music (Prieto Borrego 2016) and the protest spirit characterizing the Nova Cançó during Francoism (García Soler 1976). On the other hand, ‘Basque radical rock’ (‘rock radical vasco’, hereinafter RRV) emerged in the Basque Country in the early 1980s, and epitomized a defiant and militant movement (Cerdán 2013), with punk bands including Kortatu, Hertzainak, Barricada and Zer-Bizio?. This scene also included a current represented by two important bands: La Polla Records and Cicatriz. Eskorbuto (‘Skurvy’), a third band associated with Cicatriz, made an original contribution to rock music with an anarchist message by becoming the movement’s dissenting voice (Zarata 1992). So, it could be claimed that Eskorbuto – active from 1980 to 1998 – was the most radical expression of a movement that was already radical.

Eskorbuto tend to occupy pride of place in the literature on RRV (Mota 2017a, 2017b) or Spanish punk rock (Moso 2013, Zarata 1992). Together with biographical-general interest approaches, like that of Corazón (2014), Mota has performed several studies focusing on Eskorbuto, either from a contextual or comparative perspective (Mota and Segura 2014, Mota 2018), or by analyzing the anti-establishment nature of the band’s lyrics (Mota 2016). However, there is no systematic analysis in the literature that highlights the scope and limits of a very specific aspect: the relationship between anarchism and Eskorbuto’s punk music. Accordingly, this paper attempts to fill this research gap by examining the ideological connotations of the band’s compositions by employing the ideologemes of anarchism as an analytical construct. Before doing so, it is necessary to frame the relationships between punk and anarchism.

## **Between anarcho-punk and punk-anarchism**

Although it is widely held that punk has been a vehicle of left-wing and anarchist politics since the 1970s (Willems 2014), the relationship between punk and political ideology is more complex. Punk is a heterogeneous, flexible and diverse conglomerate whose ideological connections can adopt many forms (Martin 2015), and in which only some elements ‘are politically engaged and on the left’ (Avery-Natale 2019: 328). For example, it has been observed that pioneering industrial noise punk band Throbbing Gristle tended to embrace ideas ‘from any political spectrum that defied mainstream acceptance’ (Cogan 2007: 85); moreover, there are also the neo-Fascist and neo-Nazi tendencies of some punk bands (Cogan 2007, Dunn 2012, Raposo and Bestley 2020).

On the other hand, it has been noted that punk is characterized more by a way of confronting specific issues than by a programmatic ideology (López Munuera 2015), whereas other segments of punk subculture are interested either in the ironic and satirical aspects of the entertainment world (Avery-Natale 2019, Bestley 2013), or a hedonism focusing on drugs and alcohol (Lohman and Worley 2018, Gololobov and Garifzyanova 2019).

Notwithstanding this plurality of functions, punk became a means for political expression and radical ideas (Lohman and Worley 2018). As Penny Rimbaud remarks about his pioneering anarcho-punk band, Crass, ‘I consider punk to have been essentially a revolutionary movement’ (cited in Donaghey 2013: 157). So, when punk is observed through the prism of radical politics, one philosophy stands out above the rest: anarchism – as O’Hara notes, ‘When it comes to choosing a political ideology, Punks are primarily anarchists’ (cited in Willems 2014: 411). Since Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols sang ‘I am an anarchist’ (cited in Donaghey 2013: 139), ‘this utterance placed “anarchy” firmly into the popular conception of punk’ (Donaghey 2013: 139). In any event, the posturing of the most popular groups meant that not all of them displayed the same degree of authenticity, bands like Crass and Throbbing Gristle being the authentic fathers ‘of radical politics and anarchy in the British punk movement’ (Cogan 2007: 77). The relationship between anarchism and punk is, furthermore, two-way, this being reflected by the influence of anarchism on the do-it-yourself (hereinafter DIY) practices, imagery, and lyrics of punk bands and, vice versa, that of punk on anarchism in relation to the politicization of individuals, the cultural bedrock that punk gave to the anarchist movement (Donaghey 2020). Nevertheless, the relationship between punk and anarchism is complex and nuanced, hence it is hard to generalize in this regard.

The fusion between punk and anarchism gave rise to ‘anarcho-punk’. Emerging at the end of the 1970s with Crass – the first band to demonstrate the real anarchist potential of punk – anarcho-punk is a punk rock subgenre whose proponents profess to be anarchists, as well as being involved in political projects and explicitly committed to anarchism (Avery-Natale 2019, Donaghey 2013, Dunn 2012). As Donaghey remarks, ‘the term “anarcho-punk” does not apply to all anarchist punk bands, but rather refers to a specific (though diverse) punk sub-genre’ (2013: 139-140, note 6) – to the point that it may be considered a dissident current within British punk (Cross 2010). Thanks to British bands like Crass and Poison Girls, the outlines of the anarchist-punk challenge to the punk mainstream were established (Cross 2014). This challenge has ideological aspects, insofar as anarcho-punk bands took the anarchist imperative seriously, rejecting the nihilism of mainstream punk and mocking ‘the key bands of the original first wave of punk for their fake acts of rebellion and sedition’ (Cross 2010: 5). Together with the concern for freeing individuals from social restrictions, the movement also pursued collective freedom ‘from the tyranny of the “war state” and the overthrow of the disfiguring and alienating capitalist system’ (Cross 2010: 1). Ideologically speaking, however, the ‘anarchical’ element in anarcho-

punk is a nuanced and problematic phenomenon. Some authors think that it goes beyond mere opposition to the government and shapes a radical and intersectional left-wing ideology which included feminist and anti-racist attitudes, as well as the rejection of capitalism (Avery-Natale 2019, Stewart 2016); nevertheless, individual bands in the early 1980s would often be more focused on specific issues, rather than adhering to an established and systematic political creed (Dines and Worley 2016; Reddington, 2016). Hence, anarcho-punk should not be considered a homogeneous movement, and needs to be framed within a wide context of political expressions, which includes the discussion of its revolutionary potential (Dale 2020) and its continual critique of punk orthodoxy (Grimes 2020).

When focusing specifically on the extent to which anarchist-leaning punk was faithful to the theoretical precepts of the left-libertarian tradition, Donaghey draws a useful distinction between anarcho-punk and what is known as ‘punk-anarchism’, namely, an intuitive anarchism differing from other currents, which could be identified with early punk, and which developed ‘*in absence of the anarchist political canon*’ (2013: 140, original emphasis). Predating anarcho-punk, the rhetoric of ‘punk-anarchism’ would be characterized by an ‘anarchist’ stance so as to project an image of danger, the influence of the hippie and avant-garde movements (continuing with 1960s counterculture’s anarchist tendencies), the DIY rationale versus mainstream industry, an intuitive anarchist politics in opposition to politics with a capital P – including extra-parliamentary political groups – and its reactive opposition to any type of oppression and hierarchical domination, implying that punk identified itself ‘as a threat to the state, the government, the police, the church, the monarchy, capitalism, and mainstream mass culture’ (Donaghey 2013: 159).

The fact that early punk lacked knowledge of the anarchist canon and a coherent ideology gave rise to a politics of shocking and offensive topics, which would shape a certain image of what anarchy meant for punk – an ‘anarchy’ closer to the abolition of social and state constraints (with its resulting apocalypses) than to the philosophical and political content of the term (Donaghey 2013). The tension between the politicised anarcho-punk and the rebellious nature of early punk, can be observed in the fact that, according to Bestley (2013: 132), by the late 1970s British punk had fragmented into different factions: ‘anarcho-punk centred on the notion of anarchist politics voiced during the first wave of UK punk (though, in their eyes, not followed through), while hardcore and real punk focused on the original punk ideals as they saw them, of independence and protest’. For authors like Cross (2010), however, anarcho-punk per se would lack the ideological baggage of the anarchist movement, and disregard key theoretical and historical issues – so that, in this connection, there would be not much difference between anarcho-punk and punk-anarchism. What is more, anarcho-punk and the rebellious punk anarchism overlapped sometimes: ‘The model of punk anarchism embodied by the increasingly dogmatic anarcho-punk groups, particularly from 1980 onwards, was not to completely overwrite

the more casual association between punk and ‘rebellion’ that had been cemented in previous years’ (Bestley 2016: 61). On the other hand, empirical evidence suggests that anarcho-punks have rarely digested the foremost theoreticians of anarchism, such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin (Dunn 2012, Dines and Worley 2016). Nevertheless, authors like Cogan (2007) observe that Crass did indeed possess a theoretical background and an anarchy-based communal lifestyle, unlike the majority of bands in the wider anarcho-punk scene.

The influence of the revolutionary political tradition and anarchist theory on punk is therefore an issue subject to debate. Even though punk rock may be ‘a sub-culturally established medium for radical anarchistic protest’ (Willems 2014: 412), it is necessary to determine the extent to which that protest was based on solid anarchist concepts. Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to analyze the discourse of Spanish punk band Eskorbuto in relation to the basic ideas of anarchism, in order to determine the extent to which this radical band from the Basque Country managed to convey concepts and concerns inherent to libertarian socialism. To this end, we first address the political and social context of the period during which the band composed their songs.

### **Basque radical rock as context**

Eskorbuto’s music should be understood in the context of RRV. It is no coincidence that the movement appeared in the Basque Country, which was, and continues to be, the

epitome of identity-related differences in Spain [...] with political connotations unequalled in the rest of the country, above all in the mid-1970s, when the Basques, in addition to coping with a dictatorship like the rest, also had to do so with the prohibition of their culture and language (Lechado 2013: 129).

This context would shape RRV, opposed to the bourgeois and pro-establishment attitude of the ‘Madrid scene’ in the country’s capital, accused of being uncommitted to struggles, and only interested in having fun (Sánchez Ekiza 2013; Ortega 2012a). RRV resulted from a combination of economic, political, and social factors: the young generation’s interest in politics in the 1970s, following the end of the Francoist regime (Moso 2013); the redeployment and reindustrialization which would lead to the dismantling of Bilbao’s heavy industry and shipyards (López Aguirre 2011); the budding democracy following the dictatorship with ‘demonstrations, repression, the proliferation of political parties and protest movements’ (Moso 2013: 108); and the coincidence with ‘the harshest years of violence. For years, ETA and the Spanish state’s armed forces and different police forces became embroiled in a dirty war that left a trail of death, suffering and fear’ (Lechado 2013: 129).

In these circumstances, bands proliferated in the Basque Country and Navarre. Indeed, La Polla Records, Barricada, Hertzainak, RIP, Cicatriz, Vomito, and Kortatu shared the stage and some more or less common values (Del Amo 2016: 67; Moso 2013). Free radio stations, fanzines, and *gaztetxes* collaborated with record companies and the media to create the movement – which was commercially labelled RRV, while leveraging leftist-nationalist group Herri Batasuna to engage the young (López Aguirre 2011, 1996), although not all the bands became involved in such an association (Saenz del Castillo Velasco 2016). In this respect, although RRV was the context most contemporary to Eskorbuto, the band were independent: ‘They never belonged to the host of bands enrolled in RRV because they continued to embrace their freedom and a dystopic and unaccommodating anarchism’ (Ladrero 2016: 607-608), adopting an anti-nationalist attitude in a markedly nationalist context – as the band’s members were wont to repeat in interviews: ‘Rock does not belong to any nation, not even the Basque nation.’ So, ‘Eskorbuto were also the black sheep of the emerging politicized radical rock movement’ (Piñago 1993: 33), while, additionally, there has been talk about the band’s ‘ideological independence from punk in comparison to the monopolistic and authoritarian attitudes attributed to the hegemonic bloc of the Basque left’ (Pascual 2015: 167).

### **Eskorbuto, punk, and politics**

Besides the musical context, the harshness of the political, social, and economic milieu that Eskorbuto experienced in Spain during the 1980s, should be taken into account when analyzing their discourse: ‘It isn’t easy to be poor and with a family struggling daily to survive,’ are some of the lyrics of their song ‘No es fácil’ (‘It isn’t easy’) (1988). In this connection, punk music can be understood as a reflection and, at the same time, a means of escape.

According to music journalist and friend of the band Roberto Moso – who should be credited with the name ‘Eskorbuto’ – ‘the band’s creation coincided with the expansion of punk and served as a continuous source of inspiration for them’ (2003: 56). The obligatory comparison is the Sex Pistols, the germ of punk in the British Isles, although the musical tastes of the members of Eskorbuto were as varied as the Who, Motörhead and the New York Dolls. In any case, the current of British punk of 1977, represented by bands such as Buzzcocks and the Damned – which emerged as a reaction to hippie romanticism and conformity (Shuker 2005), as well as later bands like GBH and UK Subs, had the strongest influence on the Basque group. Similarly, they shared slogans like ‘There’s no future’, as an expression of their rejection of post-Fordist society which deprived the young of a future (Glasper 2014), which is consistent with the disenchantment of many of the country’s youngsters, especially those belonging to the working classes (Shuker 2015). Against this backdrop, the first punk scenes in Spain developed in specific regions – Madrid, Catalonia, and the Basque Country (González Lezama 2016) – at the beginning of the 1980s. Ramoncín y WC? and Kaka De Luxe came from Madrid, while Catalonia produced

seminal bands like la Banda Trapera del Río, and Oi! punk rock bands like Decibelios. All considered, the Basque Country produced the largest number of punk bands. Spain spawned even anarcho-punk groups, including hard-core band Sin Dios, which was very influential in Europe and Latin America (Dunn 2012), plus techno-punk group Aviador Dro, formed in 1979 (Fernández Gómez and Pineda 2018).

Eskorbuto was formed in 1980 in the municipality of Santurce, specifically in a poor neighborhood of Greater Bilbao. Since its formation, the band had different members, until its official and most long-lasting composition, with Jesús María Expósito López, ‘Josu’ (guitar and vocals), Juan Manuel Suárez Fernández, ‘Jualma’ (bass and vocals), and Francisco Galán Portillo, ‘Paco’ (drums). Their discography was markedly irregular and intermittent, with very prolific periods alternating with long silences. Their uncompromising attitude earned them a bad reputation and very few friends; Zarata described them as ‘the most extreme, blunt, and “authentically” punk of Basque and state rock’ (1993: 62). This attitude was expressed in a very low number of live concerts, a little over 100 in 10 years (Cerdán 2013). After recording several demos of ‘accelerated music and frankly hard-core, committed lyrics’ (Ortega 2012a: 83), their first single, ‘Mucha policía poca diversión’ (‘Lots of coppers, little fun’) (1983), became the watchword of the period. A year later, the band appeared in the mini-LP *Zona Especial Norte* (Spansuls, 1984) – an allusion to the government’s anti-terrorist strategy – together with their colleagues from Gipuzkoa RIP.



Image 1. Eskorbuto (promotional photography).

Eskorbuto's first LP *Eskizofrenia (Schizophrenia)* (1985) contained many belligerent and anti-establishments songs, such as 'Ratas rabiosas' ('Rabid rats'), 'Mierda, mierda, mierda' ('Shit, shit, shit') and 'Nadie es inocente' ('Nobody's innocent'). This was followed by the band's most successful record, *Anti-todo (Anti-everything)* (1986), which has been described as 'a nihilistic mission statement' (Pascual 2015: 226). In addition to being Eskorbuto's best-selling album, it was a manifesto whose popular song 'Cerebros destruidos' ('Destroyed brains') was, in the words of singer Josu, their 'most complete song because of its content' (2009: 49). In 1986, they recorded the six songs of the cassette 'Ya no quedan más cojones, Eskorbuto a las elecciones' ('What the heck: Eskorbuto for PM!'), including 'Maldito país' ('Damn country'), 'Escupe a la bandera' ('Spit on the flag') and 'Abajo la ley' ('Down with the law'). Also in 1986, DRO – the independent record label belonging to Servando Carballar, leader of aforementioned techno-anarchists Aviador DRO – edited the live compilation album *Impuesto revolucionario (Revolutionary tax)*. In 1988, Eskorbuto recorded the first punk opera, *Los demenciales chicos acelerados (The hyper-crazy lads)*, a more leisurely and even occasionally melodic record, but which maintained the protest spirit with songs like 'Trabajo sucio' ('Dirty work') and 'Hipócritas' ('Hypocrites'). Under their own record label (Butoeskor), they released *Las más macabras de las vidas (The most macabre of lives)* (1988), whose first song was their popular 'Rock y violencia' ('Rock and violence'), before doing so, as an epitaph, with *Demasiados enemigos (Too many enemies)* (Matraka Diskak) in 1991, a record that yet again highlighted the complex reality surrounding the band. It was Eskorbuto's swansong because Josu and Jualma – who were the band's heart and soul – died of heroin overdoses within six months of each other in 1992. Thenceforth, in an irregular fashion Paco, the drummer, released several less relevant records, such as *Dekadencia (Decadence)* (1988), *Aquí no keda ni dios (There's nobody left here)* (1994) and *Kalaña (Ilk)* (1996), with other musicians but still using the name of the band.

In addition to becoming immersed in punk, Eskorbuto was a politicized band. Josu and Jualma 'had flirted with politics in small communist cells' (Moso 2013: 118), and their interest in politics appeared in both their records and statements: 'Politics is very important, but not party politics' (Josu in Ortega 2012a: 79). As Cabeza remarks, 'Their political commitment was limitless, their opposition to the system at least attempted to be as far-reaching as this was to them.' Further on, he remarks, 'Eskorbuto only knows how to sing-tell by counterattacking, musically interpreting the dark side of life. Political punk rock' (in Ortega 2012a: 196-197). The clearest indication of this provocative interest was the band's attempt to run for the 1986 Spanish general election with the slogan 'What the heck: Eskorbuto for PM!'. On the other hand, in 'Criaturas al poder' ('Power for creatures') there is reference to Sergey Gennadiyevich Nechayev, a Russian revolutionary associated with nihilism and extreme anarchism. Several critics and researchers have understood the band's postulates in that vein: 'Authoritarian criteria that border on the nihilist profoundness of the most radical anarchist ideological approaches (anti-statism,



anti-monarchism, anti-militarism, anticlericalism, anti-capitalism) and which revolve around the denial of everything established as power' (Pascual 2015: 170); 'the band always maintained their anarchist and independent line, confronting everything and everybody' (Portero 2009: 64); and 'their anarchy did not have a political price' (Nando and Goio 2009: 18). This uncompromising attitude is illustrated by their relationship with the Basque independence movement. Eskorbuto was arrested by the police in Madrid as a result of the content of some of the group's lyrics (Segurola 2009), and after the lack of support from the left-nationalist Gestoras Pro-Amnistía (Commissions for Amnesty), the band abandoned the Basque Radical Rock label, and attacked the nationalist left with songs like "A la mierda el País Vasco" ("Fuck off the Basque Country").

### **Research aims and method**

After describing the context and stances of the band and taking into account the theoretical framework on punk and anarchism, the main objective of this paper is to perform a qualitative analysis of Eskorbuto's discourse, to shed light on the scope and limits of the libertarianism permeating their music. To meet this aim, it is necessary to develop an analytical construct that allows a precise inquiry into the presence of anarchism in the band's message. This analytical construct is based on the core theoretical concepts defining anarchism, which can be called 'ideologemes'. According to Bakhtin (1989: 150), 'The speaker in a novel is always, in one way or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. A special language in a novel is always a special point of view of the world, a point of view that intends to have a social significance.' Ideologemes are analytically useful for being key values that evince the way in which the world is viewed from a specific position. Since popular culture texts can also express 'a point of view that intends to have a social significance', it seems relevant to use this concept for studying punk music.

At any rate, it is likely that there is no political ideology with ideologemes more difficult to define than anarchism, given its polymorphic character – as Perlin notes, 'there are as many anarchisms as there are anarchists' (cited in Donaghey 2013: 142). However, it is possible to establish a number of key tendencies. 'Anarchist ideology', Heywood writes, 'is defined by the central belief that political authority in all its forms, and especially in the form of the state, is both evil and unnecessary' (2007: 175). The rejection of authority is not only expressed in the need to abolish governments, but also in the critique of the capitalist economy or organized religion. Therefore, anti-authoritarianism stands as the central concept of anarchism. As Bakunin (1970) wrote in *God and the State*, all legislation and authority must be rejected. In opposition to the state, anarchists envisage a society based on a voluntary compact between free individuals (Heywood 2007). The following ideologemes of anarchism can thus be understood on the grounds of anti-authoritarianism (Heywood 2007; Botella and Rodríguez 2012):

1) *Anti-statism*. ‘In practice, the anarchist critique of authority usually focuses on *political* authority, especially when it is backed up by the machinery of the modern state. Anarchism is defined by its radical rejection of state power’ (Heywood, 2007: 180, original emphasis). The anti-political instinct of anarchism – ‘politics’ being understood as the struggle of diverse groups to seize state power – leads to the rejection of political parties or standing for election, plus political organization, bureaucracy, and electoral participation (Botella and Rodríguez 2012), as corrupt practices (Heywood 2007). From this context springs the anarchist idea of non-government, which stems from the Greek *anarkos*, the absence of government, although not of rules or behavioral patterns.

2) *Natural order*. The anarchist idea of human nature consists in the belief that human beings are rational and naturally – or, at least, potentially – good: ‘Corruption, oppression, phenomena of exploitation are due to the authoritarian forms of social organization, which hinder and limit the full development and expression of human nature’ (Botella and Rodríguez 2012: 103). On the basis of this anthropological vision, social order arises naturally and spontaneously in a self-managed way, without the need for the machinery of law and order. Anarchist views on direct democracy, communal control, decentralized organization, and mutual assistance (Martin 2015) can be related to the notion of spontaneous harmony. Thus, and versus the habitual identification of anarchy with chaos, left-wing libertarian thought proposes a different type of social order based on reason: ‘every individual and social opposition to the existing disorder of things, is illuminated by the spiritual light of Anarchy’ (Goldman 2008: 32).

3) *Anticlericalism*. Since the anarchist perspective considers any kind of power as a corruptive factor, the anti-authoritarian principle is also applied to institutions like the Church. In fact, religion has been seen as a source of authority in itself insofar as it fosters obedience and submission to its leaders. For example, the idea that individuals should accept the imposition of religious moral principles is reprehensible for anarchists. Expressions like ‘Neither God nor master!’, convey a complete rejection of the system.

4) *Economic freedom*. Economic structures are also challenged by anarchists, who find ownership and inequality distasteful, while understanding capitalism as the oppression of the masses by a dominant class. In contrast to individualistic, right-wing market libertarianism, collectivist anarchism ‘stresses the human capacity for social solidarity, or what Kropotkin termed “mutual aid”’ (Heywood 2007: 186). Anarchist social organization is based on the self-management of the economy, collective ownership, cooperative labor, and freedom of association.

Based on this operationalization, we perform a qualitative approach to text analysis whereby anarchist ideologemes serve as the analytical construct for the study of Eskorbuto's lyrics. The socio-historical context surrounding the band is also considered in the analysis – something that is particularly important regarding punk cultures, whose engagement with politics ought to be understood in its historical, socioeconomic, and geographical context (Lohman and Worley 2018). The study sample is made up of 79 songs from recordings released by Eskorbuto between 1983 and 1991 (see Eskorbuto, 1983a-1991, for details). The songs included in the band's demo 'Jodiéndolo todo' ('Screwing everything up', 1983) have also been considered. Together with the songs' lyrics, statements of the band members, interviews, and fanzines, plus a radio drama recorded in 1988, have also been analyzed.

### **Eskorbuto's anarchy**

The anti-statism ideologeme is the most relevant and frequent in the lyrics of Eskorbuto – which is only natural considering the band's critical character. Many songs attack the state in all its expressions and facets, 'Maldito país' ('Damn country') (1986) being a good example of this:

National police, fucking civil guard, captains general.

This damn country's a real dump.

Ministers, governors, presidents who do bugger all.

This damn country's a real dump.

The trio from Santurce openly criticized all the instruments of the state, from the government, the exchequer, and the national insurance system in 'Shit, Shit, Shit' (1985), to the armed forces – 'Soldados' ('Soldiers') (1984) – and the politicized press – 'such radical press, such liberal press, press why do you censure?', are some of the lyrics of 'Pelos largos, caras enfermas' ('Long hair, sickly faces') (1988). Be that as it may, Eskorbuto's main enemy were the state security forces, whose relevance should be understood in the context of the Basque Country in the 1980s. In fact, the abovementioned 'Lots of coppers, little fun' (1985) was the band's hymn, with its explicit, 'Lots of coppers, little fun/A blunder, a blunder!/Who has the cash?/Who?/Who has the power?/Who has the future?/Who?/Who establishes the law?' In the same vein, there is '¡Oh no! Policía en acción' ('Oh no! The fuzz in action') (1985):

Oh no!

I knew it wouldn't last

two cars are approaching, the fuzz.

Oh no! In the city at night

it's the fucking reality,

there's only the fuzz, the lousy fuzz.

Party politics was another of Eskorbuto's banes. As to the band's lyrics, vocalist and guitarist Josu claimed, 'Well, yeah, they're political but not partisan. We've got nothing to do with any party, neither right-wing, nor left-wing, nor anything' (in Ortega 2012a: 110). So, based on the discredit of the democratic system that Josu openly recognized – 'I don't believe in democracy as a system' (in Ortega 2012b: 57) – most of Eskorbuto's discography was devoted to combating the figure of the politician. A vision of the professional politician as an avaricious, Machiavellian, and vile individual crops up time and again in their discourse, from brief but scathing attacks in songs like 'El infierno es demasiado dulce' ('Hell's too sweet') (1987), in which 'the bestial behavior of depraved politicians' is referred, to more complex criticism as in 'La marcha del siglo XX' ('The evolution of the twentieth century') (1987), where Eskorbuto put themselves in the place of who they considered to be the 'typical politician':

I'll pursue a parliamentary career  
I'll dodge the flak,  
prepared by my image consultant.  
Easy words, that'll be my tactic  
before the Crown, a perfect gentleman.  
In my speeches, radicalness  
shouting there, in front of the riffraff.  
I'll bribe the members  
of the police forces  
of state security.  
The best'll work for me,  
the best lawyers.

Frontal rejection of party politics got them into trouble even with the Basque left. It is no coincidence that 'as they clashed with its premises and criticized it, the MLNV [Basque National Liberation Movement] would systematically veto Eskorbuto through likeminded bodies' (Pascual 2015: 169). As a result, and besides composing the aforementioned song 'Fuck off the Basque Country', there is practically no interview in which the members of Eskorbuto did not refer to the veto imposed on them by Basque nationalism (Anon. 2009).

In line with the rejection of party politics, the band criticized the right-left dichotomy, accusing both of having a sole concern: the economy – 'for us the PSOE [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party], the PNV [Basque Nationalist Party, a right-wing regional political party] and HB [Herri Batasuna] are equally bad' (Josu in Anon. 2009: 40). This chimes with the view of the

renowned linguist and anarcho-syndicalist activist Noam Chomsky that the Democrats and Republicans in the United States have traditionally been two factions of the same 'party', namely, the 'Business Party' (Jones 1990). The song 'Nadie es inocente' ('Nobody's innocent') (1985) exemplifies this:

The rifles whistle out of tune  
the song of death that they've composed.  
Those on the right run into  
those on the left and vice versa.  
We're caught in their trap, the law,  
we've fallen for their trick, money.  
As losers, as losers, as losers.  
We're playing their game.  
Subjected, controlled  
by a Third World country.  
Corroded, condemned,  
by a system of cowards.

Parties' economic priorities were applicable to other social agents and institutions, including employers' associations and trade unions, as 'Es un crimen' ('It's a crime') (1986) reveals:

The party governing this country  
and all its parliamentary opposition,  
the employer's associations, the trade unions,  
all contribute to our failure.  
It's a crime! It's a crime!

If anti-statism and anti-politics were essential aspects of Eskorbuto's discourse, the band's philosophy had a more complex relationship with the anarchist ideologeme of natural order. The idea of a self-managed order is a libertarian socialist concept that clashes with the normal media representations of anarchism as chaos, irrationality, and violence (Porton 2001). Eskorbuto did not seem to share the natural order ideologeme, endorsing instead the most simplistic picture of anarchism conveyed by the media, with songs and statements in a constructive vein being far and few between. The band opted for revolution and a new society, but they did not exactly know what kind: 'That there's at least a way of breaking with so much control. We offer our lives, we're prepared' (Josu in Cabeza 2009: 30). The song 'Busco en la basura' ('I'm looking in the rubbish') (1985) evinces this: 'I can't be bothered with the constitution, I lean towards revolution'. Some

songs, like ‘Las más macabras de las vidas’ (‘The most macabre of lives’) (1988), also urge people to rise up so as to achieve a better future:

Onwards, without looking back!  
Onwards, like the rest!  
Onwards, without mercy!  
And we’ll only weep for the dead one more time.  
And afterwards  
happiness will reign.

In ‘Únete al desorden’ (‘Join disorder’) (1991), the people are also urged to rise up, warning them, ‘don’t wait for things to change, without you/they won’t change’; similarly in ‘De ti depende (tú eliges)’ (‘It depends on you (you choose)’ (1986), there seems to be a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, making it clear that change is possible if you fight for it. At any rate, perhaps the band’s most optimistic song was ‘Nueva esperanza’ (‘New hope’) (1991), which directly calls for a revolution: ‘Here we are destitute/being treated like slaves/Let’s raise our fists/let’s improve our status/New hope for the desperate’. However, and beyond the revolutionary stage of anarchism, the hope of a collectivist, self-managed social order based on mutual aid, is not clear.

Eskorbuto did indeed clarify that anarchist anti-authoritarianism did not boil down to criticizing the government. Specifically, the band’s stance on religion did not leave any room for doubt: ‘We don’t believe in any god [...]’ (Josu in Ortega 2012a: 195). The band’s atheist and irreverent posture can be observed in many songs, evincing the anarchist ideologeme of anticlericalism, such as ‘Dios, patria, rey’ (‘God, country and king’) (1984) – a humorous adaptation of Bakunin’s maxim, ‘Neither God nor master!’:

They talk about a powerful god,  
the father and creator of all.  
As far as I know he’s not my father,  
he’s not my father, no, no, no,  
he’s not my father, he’s not my lord.

In ‘Sociedad insociable’ (‘Unsociable society’) (1985), they also attack Catholicism: ‘Without religions, without obligations/living in Catholic mortal sin/living in Catholic accelerated sin’. In ‘Rogad a dios por los muertos’ (‘Pray to God for the dead’) (1984), the lyrics are even more insolent and caustic, if possible – ‘They should be in hell/They can’t fly to heaven’ – with a stanza encouraging necrophilia in a ‘cemetery’: ‘I’ve searched in many tombs/for the dead body of a woman/I wanted to kiss her bloody mouth/caress her now dead body’. In the same offensive and

obscene tone there is ‘Hipócritas’ (‘Hypocrites’) (1987): ‘You nuns who’re dying for sex/looking for satisfaction/look for a broomstick/and masturbate yourselves’.

Lastly, the anarchist ideologeme of economic freedom points to a revolutionary restructuring of society in a post-capitalist order. Although revolutionary unionism was popular in countries like Spain (Heywood 2007), Eskorbuto’s collectivist economic proposals were few and far between – despite the band’s explicit criticism of the capitalist system. In ‘Intolerable’ (‘Intolerable’) (1991), money – the metaphor of economic power – is lambasted as a symbol of capitalism: ‘I’m sick of this society/I’m not its slave/if you’re penniless, it ignores you/and, in contrast, if you have cash, you have thousands of friends’. ‘Mi degeneración’ (‘My degeneration’) (1983) – a reference to the song ‘My Generation’ (1965), by British rock group the Who – also censures money (‘There’s no fun without money/there’s degeneration with money’), reflecting one of the paradoxes of capitalism – the need for capital to live decently, on the one hand, and the dehumanization of the individual, when he obtains wealth, on the other. Eskorbuto also condemned the rich-poor dichotomy, as in ‘It depends on you (you choose)’, which vilifies the powerful: ‘The shitting bums/appear over the balconies and shit/they live in high buildings/in luxury and comfort’. ‘Dios, patria, rey’ (‘God, country and king’) openly criticizes capitalism and the financial oligarchy as a system above governments and ideologies:

They’re living like gods  
using our bodies as a country  
as money is king,  
money, their power

Criticism of capitalism also appears in ‘Hace un millón de años’ (‘A million years ago’) (1986), establishing a metaphor between the law of the jungle in the Jurassic period and the current law of economic power, to condemn the struggle between countries over the control of oil to demonstrate economic clout. Referring to the title of the film *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth* (Val Guest 1970), the lyrics are as follows:

A million years ago in prehistory,  
they were the strongest and strength was the law.  
Gigantic, brutal, savage, animals.  
But that was how things happened: they all perished.  
Now they are oil, necessary in our times.  
When the dinosaurs dominated the Earth,  
they did so by force and now it is done in another way.

The band depicted a post-capitalist order, albeit somewhat naïvely, in its conceptual double album, *The Hyper-Crazy Lads*. Given the difficulty in understanding its overall plot – because of the vinyl format’s capacity, the songs do not appear sequentially – they tried to do so on a radio program. According to Gonzalo (2016), this punk opera narrates the rise and fall of a megalomaniac politician, drawing a parallel between PSOE’s socialism and nationalism, on the one hand, and Nazism and Francoism, on the other. Beyond this core idea, the record includes characters with different points of view, hunger for power, major companies, revolts, murders, and so forth. Additionally, in 1988 the band recorded a sort of anti-capitalist ‘radio drama’ – the first punk radio drama (Ortega 2012b) – whose intention was to delve deeper into the plot of the double album, with dialogues like the following: ‘Who said money doesn’t buy everything? He was a dreamer. Money buys armies, it makes the world go round, but everything revolves around democracy’ (Ortega 2012b: 81). It is a long monologue delivered by the character called ‘the boss’, a senior executive of a multinational; an attack against capitalism that illustrates Eskorbuto’s intentions.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Punk’s attitude and sound served as a bridge between the musical discourse of Eskorbuto and anarchism. The Basque band reflected the political dimension of punk and its rebellious character, especially deriving from British punk. Thus, this paper has highlighted that the rebellious, anti-establishment war cry of punk can even be heard in a provincial rock group.

Our intention was to determine the extent to which Eskorbuto’s songs represent the key ideas of anarchist political philosophy. The analysis performed on the presence of ideologemes in the band’s discourse has revealed values like anti-statism – a core idea in other expressions of punk culture (Stewart 2016) – criticism of mainstream politics, anticlericalism, and anti-capitalism. In this connection, Eskorbuto’s discourse is in line with punk’s anarchist attacks against the government, the police and the religious establishment (Donaghey 2013). More specifically, parallels could be drawn with anarcho-punk bands like Crass, which also censured religion, the state, the system’s inequalities, and the orthodoxies of the political left; and like the Dutch communist band Rondos, who focused on class inequality, alienation, and religion (Lohman and Worley 2018).

However, the most constructive anarchist ideologemes, like the belief in a spontaneous and rational natural order, and the idea of a self-managed collectivist economy, do not surface clearly in Eskorbuto’s music. This may be because, more often than not, their discourse was more destructive and nihilistic than that of other contemporary Spanish bands. Clinging to punk slogans like ‘No future’ and ‘Destroy’, Eskorbuto reflected a nihilistic anarchism that lacked a political project that served as a social horizon. The band’s anthropological and social pessimism contrasted strongly with the attitude of Spanish techno-punk anarchists Aviadro Dro, who



developed a radical critique of political, social, religious, and economic power politics. Unlike Eskorbuto, Aviador Dro's punk disco sets forth a constructive anarchism, based on a rationalist faith in progress and optimism driven by scientific progress (Fernández Gómez and Pineda 2018). It is possible that Eskorbuto's destructive attitude reflected the fact that their anarchism was not as intellectually robust as that of Aviador Dro or La Polla Records. Eskorbuto thus exemplifies the way that many punk bands have been led to libertarianism by their life experiences and contact with their communities, instead of learning directly from classic anarchist theoreticians (Dunn 2012).

Another research aim was whether the music of Eskorbuto can be considered as anarcho-punk. After analyzing the band's discourse, the answer would be affirmative, but with nuances. Eskorbuto shared with anarcho-punk the desire to convey a radical left-wing ideology, confronting the status quo, and turning music into a political weapon, but, at the same time, they did not dwell on certain aspects of 'the politicised anarcho-punk subgenre' within punk culture (Bestley 2016: 57). Actually, Eskorbuto's discourse coincides with the rhetoric of early 'punk-anarchism', above all in relation to the reaction against oppression, the DIY approach, and an intuitive anarchism that abominates organized politics and emphasizes nihilistic oppositional elements (summarized in the album *Anti-everything*). Moreover, the lack of constructive aspects in the music of Eskorbuto would be related to the crudeness of early punk: 'Owing to the importance of freedom,' Donaghey writes (2013: 168), 'a particular conception of class, and a populist/non-programmatic basis, it is extremely difficult to identify early punk's implicit politics as anything other than a crude, nascent, or inchoate anarchism.' The 'punk anarchy' component in Eskorbuto relies on the fact that despair and nihilism do not chime much with collectivist political efforts. As a result, and directly related to their negative vision of the future, Eskorbuto took anti-social stances, which can be related, in turn, to the idea of class of early punk, which was not based on socialist solidarity, but on a 'class-informed hyper-individualist stance', in the words of Albiez (cited in Donaghey 2013: 167); a non-Marxist concept of social class where 'the combination of individualism and class-consciousness was *anarchist*' (Donaghey 2013: 167, original emphasis). Thus, Eskorbuto's political commitment would not be fully comparable to what became retrospectively known as 'anarcho-punk', and their nihilistic attitude would be closer to other UK bands from the 1980s (Glasper 2014).

If in left-wing circles it was feared that punk would degenerate into insane individualism (Martin 2015), Eskorbuto's punk-anarchist crudeness could bring their anarcho-individualist premises closer to libertarianism – an ideological swing that has also been observed even in relation to Crass' individualist anarchist traits (Lohman and Worley 2018), and which is reflected by the tension in anarcho-punk culture between individual freedom and collective effort (Cross 2010). In any event, even this conclusion has its nuances, insofar as the band's members qualified the antisocial nihilism attributed to them – 'We aren't antisocial, as has been claimed, it's this

society in which we live that's antisocial' (Josu in Seguroloa 2009: 7). Eskorbuto thus illustrated the punk tendency to avoid political definitions – as Steinholt has observed, 'Punk is in a constant process of undefining itself and it is getting away' (2012: 283); a tendency towards vagueness which is in line with anarcho-punk itself (Donaghey 2013). Since Eskorbuto rejected both the political left and right in Spain and the Basque Country, they seem to be consistent with the claim of anarcho-feminist punk band Poison Girls: 'Right wing, left wing, people with old and new ambitions for power and control' (cited in Cross 2014: 68). The humble origins of Eskorbuto and the social and political context in which they lived shaped an 'against all' attitude, perhaps aesthetically appealing, but politically untenable – an environmental determinism in line with the notion that the engagement of punk cultures with politics ought to be understood in their historical, socioeconomic, and geographical context (Lohman and Worley 2018). The influence of this close and vital context is consistent with the idea that, in punk, priority is often given to 'a sense of anarchism that places lived experience above wider activism' (Stewart 2016: 235).

The tension between punk anarchism, antisocial individualism, and nihilism makes Eskorbuto's music an interesting object of study. Eskorbuto's discourse illustrates, with respect to Spanish and Basque reality, that anarcho-punk can be a multifaceted phenomenon replete with nuances – when not contradictory (Dunn 2012) – displaying what Lohman and Worley call the 'conflicting understanding of punk's cultural politics' (2018: 71). It is possible that Eskorbuto shows that the only useful approach to the analysis of punk and anarchism is to accept the confusion and ambiguity of its definition (Donaghey 2020). In this regard, additional research is needed to shed light on the ideological implications of punk, both in the case of Spain and from the perspective of comparative studies aimed at highlighting similarities and differences between Spanish- and English-language anarchist punk bands.

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