

CHAPTER 5

HARDCORE — MULTIPLE LEVELS¹

Pedro Rios

“You may have the right records, you may have the right clothes, but if it doesn’t come from the heart, it cannot be hardcore.” And so they sang, the legendary band of Portuguese hardcore X-Acto, in their song *We are a single voice*. In 1995, away from media’s spotlight, Lisbon moved: Ritz’s Club Sunday *matinéés* in the nineties were filled with hundreds of people every week, united by the same culture...”

With a foot on that mythical past (perhaps mystified), Portuguese’s hardcore scene continues solid, despite being less populated – and, almost everyone says, with less ‘attitude’. However, 2004 seems to make us believe in a new generation, with new participants: editors, distributors, bands, concert organizers, designers or just fans, many of them under the age of 20. Active fans, inspired by the example of others who brought them into the scene, dedicated on inspiring new entrants, creating a ‘home’ for those entering for the first time. Today, for example, is a day expected by many: Day Of The Dead, Twentyinchburial and All Against The World will play with the north-American band Champion and Canadian band Comeback Kid, at the People’s Worker Center in Campolide, Lisbon. The organization is part of the Nothing To Hide Productions and is the largest event

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organized by the promoter 'do it yourself' (DIY) and perhaps the strongest in the "underground", this year in Portugal.

The fans form a subculture and, claiming 'hardcore' as a social change by individual liberation, a counterculture. However, being a movement increasingly heterogeneous, coexist, sometimes with friction, dozens of musical ramifications: "old school" (the "hardcore" that follows music and the theme of gender roots), "emo" (near the indie rock or "hardcore" that expresses more personal feelings and invites introspection); 'metalcore' which is the cross between typical elements (choruses, lyrics, concepts) with the weight of metal, emerged in the early 90s - other sub-subgenres like 'screamo', 'post-hardcore', 'noisecore', 'mathcore' show boundaries too scattered.

Fans gather at concerts, usually with several bands, many of them inexperienced, that started in Lisbon, in the emerging scene of Porto and, more rarely, elsewhere in the country; always in the same spaces as in the past, and without any major technical conditions. Music is a pretext for the meeting, to release frustrations of the boring urban every day. Many of the bands don't last long, and many even share their members. The 'do it yourself' method is reflected in all the faces of this universe: the meager musical skills, the hundreds of records (on vinyl, prized format in the middle) edited in small independent publishers, in dedication and self-taught spirit, disconnected from the commercial interests, or in the network of informal contacts between people from different geographical points as a way of leading bands all over the world, distributing records, fanzines and "merchandise" - and, most importantly, exchanging ideas and making friends.

Don't smoke, don't drink, don't fuck

Hardcore came to Portugal a decade after it emerged in the US in the early '80s. Los Angeles, Washington DC, New York and other urban centers were watching the birth of a genre that removed the "arty" burden from the American punk. Result: The intensified punk fury, redirected to everyday problems of urban and suburban youth, a more rude style of music. They shared with the punks their despise for technical skill and cherished the DIY spirit, present in the organization of concerts, fanzines and in photocopied 'flyers'.

Between 1980 and 1982, in the first wave of "hardcore", the Minor Threat stood out from the prolific Washington DC scene with their brains set on Dischord Records, the Black Flag and Circle Jerks (Los Angeles) and the Dead Kennedys from San Francisco. This wave has defined the central themes of 'hardcore' that remain today: the Black Flag served as catharsis to the daily frustrations; the Dead Kennedys, led by Jello Biafra, decimated cynical and ironically the moral and the Yankees' political system; and Ian Mackaye, of Minor Threat, shouted 'I've got straight edge', setting the name for what was to be a lifestyle free of drugs and promiscuous sex in order to avoid alienation.

The 'straight-edge' is today a lifestyle followed by many, but it began as a Mackaye's reaction against punk nihilism. In *Out of step*, the Minor Threat summed up the attitude: "don't smoke, don't drink, and don't fuck. At least I can fucking think ". Many supporters marked their hands by painting on Xs', symbols which were used to distinguish the minors in US bars that could not drink. Two hands with 'X' painted on them form the cover of the first EP from the Teen Idles, Mackaye's first band, as a symbol of these attitudes, revolutionary within a punk and hardcore context that was intensely marked by drugs.

In Portugal, 'hardcore' - or what came to be known as such - emerged in the late 80s and early last decade, centered in Lisbon, a city that is still prevalent in the scene. Pedro Mateus, bassist founder of the X-Acto, the biggest band that the Portuguese 'hardcore' can recall. There were several stages. In the beginning, around 1988, it was a more intense kind of thing. Concerts were not only filled with 'hardcore' people – There were metalheads, punks, skinheads, goths. The divisions were less pronounced and, as there were fewer people, people had to walk together. In Lisbon, and around, small communities were born as if they were mushrooms, in the light of neighborhood tradition of American 'hardcore'. "Many bands appeared at the same time, in Sintra's line in 1992: X-Acto, Alkoore, Subcaos ... This phase was cool. We thought there wasn't 'hardcore' anywhere else. We threw parties in garages in Sintra's line. We called it the Sintra's Line of Hardcore. Three times a year we held a concert there. Suddenly we started to know people from Linda-a-Velha, from Margem Sul, people from Lisbon that were doing the same thing at the same time!" He explained.

Peter points the years 1995-1998 as the 'phase of the 'straight-edge' and of a more positive and active construction'. 'Straight-edge' philosophy, coupled with vegetarianism or veganism (denial of consumption of any product derived from animals or that involves their exploitation), occupied and occupies an important role in a good amount of Portuguese bands. The X-Acto always defined themselves as 'straight-edge', and that led to the influence of dozens of young people to be like them – many of them for a short period of time and because of fashion, others with strong convictions. New Winds, Pointing Finger and Day Of The Dead, the biggest names in current Portuguese 'hardcore' abroad, address animal liberation and the need to be lucid in the

world. The almost naïve American 'straight-edge' of the early 80's is today the means of a broader struggle. "These are ideas in which I believe in, it's an alternative and rational way of living. It's about saying 'no' to the machine that capitalism has in order to condition our lives through substances that are not necessary to live free and happy," sums up Ricardo, vocalist of Day Of The Dead.

The golden years of the Ritz. The second half of the 90s is remembered with nostalgia by those who lived it and is even quoted by younger people. Joaquim, now lead singer of The Vicious 5 and former member of the Liberation, Renewal and O Gafanhoto, lived close to the 'golden years'. 'When the straight-edge began appearing in Lisbon it was a big thing. I remember concerts at Ritz with 500, 600 people. And everyone was singing lyrics from X-Acto, fully aware of what was happening and at the same time, all 'drunk' in ecstasy', he says. 'There was so much shit happening [during concerts]. Everyone started laughing and suddenly they were all dancing. At one point it was about who looked more stupid. People were drunk from fun. From the moment people were seriously aggressive, with the 'new school' and the 'metal', all the fun was thrown away'. He adds. Paulo Segadães, known as 'Sega', drummer of the Vicious 5 and former member of X-Acto also recalls: 'Going to concerts on Sundays, we felt like we belonged. We knew most people. On Monday, we were already thinking about the following week's concert. Music is part of people's lives and sometimes it's the reason to make life go on', claims Paulo.

After the end of X-Acto in 2000, at a time coincident with the closing of the Ritz, the 'scene' and the spirit vanished. 'The last concert at the Ritz had a lot of people - 600 people for a concert of 'hardcore' is too much. The Ritz closed and we ran out of

location. There was a time when every Sunday there was a concert. It was always organized so there were several bands playing, one from Margem Sul, another from Lisbon, one from Sintra's line and one from Cascais and a new band. That brought people from various locations that were there for the same thing'. Says Sega. Joaquim adds: 'Not only that. The Portuguese punk rock and 'hardcore' have always been lazy. There wasn't an editing and distribution structure strong enough to support a market of at least 600 people in Lisbon'. Diogo Narciso from Pointing Finger, a band from Faro that emerged at that time, concludes. 'We went from 500 to 100 in a few months. The scene, after all, was built on feet of clay. There were half a dozen people doing things and there were 500 that consumed at the weekends. It couldn't last long!'

The post-X-Acto disorientation, followed by the multiplication of small scenes, all of them said hardcore, but sometimes incompatible. 'After a hiatus, came the apathy. When there is boredom, people turn themselves against each other. Subdivisions and useless bickering was created. Some of us, me included, detached from it because it was never our thing to aggressively defend 'hardcore' and 'straight-edge''. Said Joaquim Albergaria. 'There were so many pressure groups that when we got to the concert, no one was dancing. People were afraid to express themselves. We even played in concerts that became painful because we didn't have any 'feedback''. Recalls Pedro and Sega.

'Sociologically, it is studied that the best defense a minority can have is to attack. The culture of 'we and others' was created. From the moment that others failed to recognize the 'hardcore' scene [with the decline], this theory turned inward and began to stress the differences. Niches were created and the niches turned against each other'. With the subculture divided, it was inevitable the

shrinkage of audiences. Sega adds: 'There were the 'straight-edge', vegetarians, vegans, and whatever else... This was the cause of death. The concerts went from 600 people to 200 and then to 50. And 50 apathetic people!'

Despite the decline, here and there the scene gave some signs of life. Even without a room with the conditions the Ritz provided and the aura of the mid-90s lost, new bands appeared, like the Time X from Sacavém and the Pointing Finger. A short 'hardcore / punk' scene of Kasa Enkantada was born, an occupied house in Praça de Espanha in Lisbon, which would be demolished in 2003 by the city of Lisbon. 'From 15 to 15 days there was a concert in Kasa, in a garage that supported about 100 people and everything started all over again', recalls Diogo, from the Pointing Finger. Other supplementary sites hosted concerts, such as associations in Campo Grande, in Campolide, in Estrela or parish councils and IPJ centers. However, the absence of a regular area is still a problem today. 'More frequently is there less room and they all have minimum conditions. None of them are equipped with a good PA and people who organize concerts often feel immense difficulties in arranging one', said Bruno Coelho, of the Nothing To Hide Productions. The People's Worker Center in Campolide is one of the few spaces where they make this kind of concerts regularly.

The new generation. As the 'old school' hardcore arrived years late to Portugal, so did the fusions with metal, emo or derivatives genres such as screamo or metalcore that only recently came by. Bands like the Renewal or the always active Twentyinchburial, Blacksunrise and Morethanathousand are only the most visible part of a recent trend. "There was a boom in terms of styles. Countless emo / screamo / metalcore bands appeared, genres that almost did not exist in the Portuguese scene," notes André

Oliveira, one of the founders of I Owe You Nothing Records in 2001.

Interestingly, while the scene was going through a not so good phase, we witnessed the creation of new structures, and that is what is on the origin of the movement that "hardcore" was going through. Recent publishers I Owe You Nothing (releasers of *What Went Wrong*, *Lockdown*, *For The Glory*) and *Best Times* (*Day Of The Dead*, *Fight For Change*, *Time X*) dedicated themselves exclusively to gender. The Raging Planet publishes "hardcore" and metal in a healthy coexistence of styles, including the well-publicized last records of *Twentyinchburial* and *More Than A Thousand*.

‘There has been an evolution. If in the 90s only a few records were edited in Portugal, today there’s releases every month. Production studios proliferated, the quality of the editions improved, more specialized publishers emerged. It’s complicated to attest this evolution in terms of quality, but it’s easy to see that the ‘punk / hardcore’ no longer has the levels of rejection by the media that it had years ago. This is a good indicator’, says Pedro Vindeirinho responsible for *Rastilho*, publisher and distributor since 1999 and punk / hardcore merchandise distributor since 1996 (distributors like *Rastilho* and *Ataque Sonoro* are fundamental in a market that lives out of mail orders and not out of shops).

Diogo, a member of *Pointing Finger*, thinks that ‘things have never been so well in terms of structures’. Thanks to the network of informal contacts and to the typical solidarity of "hardcore", his band, like the *X-Acto*, *Day Of The Dead*, *Team X*, *New Winds* and others, have done tours around the world and have their work edited in several countries – a reality that always escapes when it comes to the internationalization of Portuguese music. Even so, he

also acknowledges that 'now things are kind of bitter'. 'If I had just begun to go to concerts now, I would be thrilled. If it was all new, I would have said that 2004 was the year of 'hardcore'.

It's almost unanimous that hardcore grows. But not everyone is happy with the direction it takes. 'I do not think the doldrums can be transfigured with the simple passing of the years. The spirit of the past was lost. In the present time, dispensable ornaments are given too much importance. The essence of the 90s is no longer felt at these concerts; it's hard to explain, but the chemistry between people, the will that moved them in organizing concerts, in making the releases, to live 100 percent the DIY spirit, has faded'. Laments Vindeirinho. Among the problems of this scene, the head of Rastilho quotes 'the progressive erosion' and 'daily acculturation' that removed the political character out of hardcore – 'the bickering between the bands, narrow-minded people who are in the middle with irascible attitudes; and the venom, the Puritans who preach the Quran punk / hardcore'.

Miguel Gomes, known in the midst as Xibanga, is 34 years old and is a rare case of perseverance. He runs the bar Boca do inferno in Bairro Alto, Lisbon, the only bar centered in this music genre (and related), and the promoter Xuxa Jurássica, who has brought bands like H2O, Hatebreed and the traveling festival Deconstruction Tour to Portugal. How he organizes concerts less "underground" and more expensive, is often criticized. He counters: 'People stay for two or three years, they out find that there is no chicks in 'hardcore', so they go to 'techno'. In these last 14 years, I've seen hundreds of these situations. And then they say 'Are you still there?' I answer, 'I'm here because this is my life'. He critics today's generation', concerned about the American visual and with little attitude and recalls the 'natural charisma' of X-Acto 'to attract people'. 'After they left, a gap stayed', he

laments. To Xibanga, what he does is also DIY and hardcore. '[Hardcore] is to continue to believe and fight for the things we always believed in'.

A second home. Porto has always been off the scene, an incomprehensible fact for a city with a legendary punk name, the Renegados de Boliqueime. But the scenario is changing. The All Against The World, formed in 2001, are the strongest name of an embryonic stage and have already managed to play abroad. '[At first] There was a band, the July Thirteen. There was no scene yet. They played with other bands, with other styles of music, and the audience was what available', says guitarist João Ramos. The All Against The World, together with July Thirteen, streamlined concerts and groups started emerging - No Forgiveness, Outrage (crossover punk and metal), Voidshape (nu-metal with emocore tics) and the melodic July Thirteen, No Age Limit and Not My Fault. 'I do not like dividing things. I'm not one to say that they are not hardcore', he explains. Porto seems – and setting up the necessary demographic and cultural distances - to live what Lisbon lived in the early 90s.

'Lisbon's problem is that the subgenres are more marked. In Porto that doesn't happen because there are not enough bands', he says. As an example of how the union is the right path, João speaks at the festival "Animal and Human Liberation" held on May 1st in Lisbon. 'Those 500 people were there [the 'golden years'] because it was a concert with different things like Symbiosis (crust) or Banshee (ska). Everyone was there for the same cause and it had a great atmosphere. It's stupid for people to separate'.

He also recalls the tour of All Against The World in Spain. 'They gave us food, a place to stay. The connection was the hardcore'. Enthusiasm is notorious. In addition to the band, João and his friends organize trips to concerts in Lisbon (like today in

Campolide) to 'bring people together' and prepare an editor for early 2005. 'Every person engaged in 'hardcore' had to create a home to outsiders. That's how it works. 'Hardcore' was the house we created to live our own way. We were born in this system, according to these rules, but within it we were able to create our home'.

The idea of 'home' is dear to André of I Owe You Nothing Records: 'I see the 'hardcore' scene like a second home where we meet, we live, we met new people, and especially had fun'. For Bráulio Amado, self-taught designer [see box], 'hardcore' is 'an alternative way, created and constructed by ordinary people for ordinary people. A controlled space that was made by us without monetary interests and where we can contribute and participate - do it yourself'.

Ricardo, a member of Day Of The Dead puts the emphasis on individual freedom: 'What I learned in 'hardcore' serves me as a pillar in life. It has to do with living in an alternative way. To live my life a little more instead of living according to what is socially acceptable'.

