The Fabric of Resistance: Identity and the Power of Clothing

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Abstract

This essay is a personal, creative research essay into the power of resistance clothing. Utilising theorists' work on image and identity, such as Roald Barthes' theory on semiotics and Judith Butler's theory of performativity, to analyse and understand case studies that demonstrate the effect of resistance clothing. This research argues that clothing becomes politically potent when it acquires a symbolic meaning that exceeds its material function. Analysing Case studies such as the Appalachian miners and the Brown Berets to understand the power of uniformity in expressing solidarity. The Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa, who use resistance clothing as a political weapon. And finally, looking at movements such as the Anti-Nazi league and Rock Against Racism in Britain to understand how communities can make change through political accessorising to change societal ideologies. Overall, this Essay demonstrates that dress is not only decorative but also capable of shaping political movements, fostering solidarity, and influencing social change.

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Introduction

“Every Revolution begins with a change of clothes”- René Bizet, French Journalist and critic, 1913 (cited in Benda, 2021, p. 1). A remark that is not a romantic metaphor but an important observation about the politics of appearance. The power of clothing cannot go unnoticed; it is the visual language that tells us about a person before we have asked their name. We learn about and assume their class, culture, life experiences, generation, and much more just from what they choose to wear. Clothes turn bodies into a site where identities are transmitted, contested, and weaponised. Whether dressing individually or collectively, the body as real estate elevates clothing to an integral part of resistance.

Throughout history, clothing has lent the wearer power by allowing them to express themselves, amplifying their voices and feelings. The idea that clothing can function as a political language is not new, but it has taken on renewed urgency in an age of image circulation and ideological polarisation. From labour movements to fascist networks, from emancipation struggles to feminist marches, dress has served as a semiotic battlefield (Bathes, 1972; Eco,1976). This essay argues that clothing becomes politically potent when it acquires symbolic significance that exceeds its material form.

Judith Butler’s (1988) Theory of performativity is central to this argument. Butler explains that identity is constructed through the stylised repetition of acts. Butler explores how identity should not be seen as a noun, but as a verb, as a *doing r*ather than a state of being. Complimenting this, Roland Barthes’ (1972) work on semiotics provides a framework for understanding how clothing operates in a system of signs. Signs consist of a signifier (the material form) and a signified (the mental concept),

with denotations giving rise to connotations that are organised into myths; ideological meanings that appear natural and inevitable. Within this framework, clothing is not simply worn but read.

This essay explores three avenues through which clothing operates as resistance. Firstly, examining uniformity as a form of empowering dress and a symbol of solidarity. Secondly, it analyses how resistance clothing is strategically utilised within political movements and electoral campaigns to convey specific ideological messages. Finally, examining case studies closer to home and relevant to the society that surrounds me today, I consider the dangers of visibility that resistance clothing ties to a person. I will examine how different movements utilised clothing and accessories to advance their views and create change. Exploring resistance as a wearable performance staged viably on the body. By reading these garments through the framework of semiotics and performativity, I will be able to understand the value and power of clothing in resistance more deeply, actively learning from garments of the past, and effectively analysing the society I am surrounded by.

With the threat of a world controlled by fascists and dogmatic leaders, weaponizing AI and spreading misinformation, I believe it's important we look to the information before us that is tactile and true. Through objects that have helped bring us together for generations, weaving humanity through the people. It is essential that we learn from past generations, understanding how they successfully fought back against injustice; therefore, we can utilise the same tools. You might not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you. Examining the various ways resistance clothing is utilised can provide individuals with the tools to initiate and empower their own movement, as well as to analyse the world around them and understand the

risks associated with physically expressing their beliefs. Clothing continues to shape political identities and collective action in the present.

This research adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach grounded in fashion theory, cultural studies, and political history. Combining primary and secondary sources of clothing as an embodied and visual form of resistance. Drawing on critical theory of performativity and semiotics, including the works of Judith Butler, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Erving Goffman, alongside historical scholarship, journalism, and archival material documenting labour movements, political organisations, and anti-fascist activism. These sources provide the framework for analysing resistance clothing as a system of signs and performances embedded within specific and political contexts.

Primary research, incorporated through visual and material analysis of political objects and garments, including a personal collection of Anti-Nazi League and socialist badges. These objects are treated as wearable media, examined for their graphic design, colour, symbolism, and modes of public visibility. In addition, this essay incorporates insights from an original interview with Roger Huddle, a founding figure in Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League. This interview offers firsthand perspectives on the production, circulation, and personal experience during periods of heightened racial tension in Britain. Together, these methods allow for an analysis that moves between theory, history, and lived experience, recognising clothing as both a material artefact and a political action.

Theories of Wearing and Seeing

Clothing plays a central role in shaping how identity is produced, perceived, and contested. Dress serves as a powerful visual language through which social norms and political affiliations are communicated. To understand how clothing functions as a form of resistance, it is necessary to examine how identities are performed through the body and how garments are read as signs within broader cultural systems. This chapter draws on theories of performativity and semiotics to establish a framework for analysing clothing as an embodied and political practice.

Judith Butler's (1988) key concept about gender and identity is performativity: the ways in which gender identity is embodied and enacted, rather than a reflection of someone's underlying bodily reality. Butler draws on the theorist Michel Foucault (1978) in several respects, looking into identity as a social process. She proposes identity is provisional rather than complete, deeply ambiguous and an unstable moment. Performance isn't merely acting; it's the constant reiteration of social norms that, through repetition, create an illusion of stable identity.

Performance in respect to clothing can be explained in the choices we make and how we interact with the stereotypes and ideologies tied to clothing. In my interpretation, we actively shape our identity through our clothing choices. Our interactions with the world, where we go, what we do, what we wear, and how we speak, all contribute to building our identity. This highlights the significance of clothing in shaping one's identity.

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory enriches Judith Butler's theory of performance by conceptualising social life as a theatrical performance (Goffman, 1959). Furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background elements provide the

scenery and stage props for the various human actions to be played out before, within, or upon them.

When diving into the world of visual language, the semiotic theory begins with Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified. Ronald Barthes' Theory of Semiology extends this; it provides us with the tools and language to make sense of and "read" the world around us. He explores the power of signs, which consist of a signifier (a word, an image, a sound, and so on) and its meaning, the signified. Denotations signify connotations, which are the associations of the denotations. Denotations and connotations are organised into *myths*, which are the ideological meaning; these make ideology seem natural. For example, the literal definition of a suit is a tailored garment; however, the *myth* is that it is associated with the upper class and wealth. The near-automatic, unconscious use of codes pervades all aspects of culture, from basic verbal communication to mass media. Therefore, we have specific codes for clothing associated with politics and identity.

I am interested in highlighting and investigating the origins of these myths surrounding clothing, how they are utilised in movements to symbolise a certain ideology, and the dangers and risks of the symbolism displayed on the body as it interacts with the world around it. Furthermore, exploring how they are integrated to create a political identity and serve as a symbol of solidarity. Umberto Eco helps expand this view by arguing that fashion is a "semiotic system" structured by codes. Clothing is encoded by the wearer and decoded by the viewer; however, the relationship between these is unstable. Meanings may shift, multiply, and maybe be resisted (Eco, 1976). Ecos' work highlights why political movements often adopt

certain colours, symbols, or uniforms to foster a shared understanding among diverse audiences.

Empowering Clothing: A Uniform of resistance and solidarity

When the term *redneck* is used today, it often evokes the imagery of an angry trump supporter with a deep southern accent spewing hate speech towards immigrants. However, in an example cited by Patrick Huber (2006, pp 1), during the 1920s and 1930s, its definition in the northern and central Appalachian cornfields was ironically a ‘communist’. During the first four decades of the twentieth century, it referred more broadly to a coal miner who was a member of a labour union, particularly one who was on strike.

The origins of the term lie in a simple item of clothing: the red bandanna. striking miners wore red bandanas around their necks for both practical reasons and union solidarity. They proudly adopted the term *redneck,* along with the red handkerchief, as badges of working-class identity. The red bandana wasn’t just a form of identity; it was a tool in bringing workers of all races together. It reduced conflict and racism between workers and united them to fight the bigger problem of exploitation and mistreatment by the big coal companies.

The bandana itself has a long, transnational history. Its characteristic paisley pattern originated in the Kashmir region, once part of the Persian Empire. Recognisable by its curved, feather-like motifs. Paisley entered Western popular culture through colonial trade. In the United States, the bandana gained political significance during the American Revolution. In the late eighteenth century, Martha Washington commissioned a souvenir bandana featuring George Washington on horseback, surrounded by cannons, flags, and patriotic text. Designed by printmaker John

Hewson, this object is often cited as the first American bandana and marked the beginning of its use as a political and promotional medium (Jakobsen, 2017, para. 7)

By the nineteenth century, bandana production had become industrialised. The process was labour-intensive and relied on natural dyes, such as madder root, as well as substances like sheep dung, bullock's blood, and urine. These materials produced a deep red colour, highly valued for its durability and resistance to fading. Ironically, a garment created through arduous labour would later become a symbol of working-class resistance against industrial exploitation.

Coal miners originally wore them to keep gritty coal dust off their necks, out of their work shirts, and out of their noses and mouths. By transforming a practical garment into a symbol of solidarity, miners created what Barthes (1972) calls a myth: a cultural object whose literal meaning is overwritten by ideological significance. Redefining the red bandana meaning transformed it into a signifier of collective struggle, bravery, and loyalty to the labour movement.



Figure 1

As discussed by Smith, Steele and Russel (2018), this symbolism reached its peak during the West Virginia Mine Wars. Miners were striking for rights such as free speech, an end to blacklisting union members, and better working conditions. The operators rejected all these demands, and for nearly a month, the strike was conducted without violence. However, this changed when the coal companies contacted the Baldwin-Felts detective agency, and 300 agents were brought in. Their aim was to break up the strike using various tactics. In 1921, black, white and immigrant workers took up arms to battle the coal companies. United, they wore the red bandana to identify each other in battle, calling themselves the “redneck army”. Cumulating at the bottom of Blair Mountain, more than 10,000 miners marched from Kanawha Valley towards Mingo to join other striking miners in protest. Also called the “redneck war”, this uprising ranks as the largest armed insurrection in American labour history.

Wheeler’s analysis of the Mountaineer Mine Wars discusses how, during the fight, miners wore their blue bib denim overalls and red neckerchiefs provided by the UMW (United Mine Workers) as their unofficial uniform(1976). It became a form of symbolic armour, visually asserting collective strength and mutual recognition in the chaos. As displayed in Patrick Huber's journal on Red Necks and Red Bandanas, songs were used to keep up morale and displayed that the miners were proud to be referred to as red necks, with the despised strike-breakers referred to as ‘scabs’.

“Red Necks, keep them scabs away,

Red Necks, fight them every day.

Now any old time you see a scab passin' by,

Now don't hesitate? blacken both of his eyes." (Korson 1943)

The red bandana is one of the oldest symbols of the labour movement in the United States and Europe, and such neckerchiefs have long served as protective gear for railroad workers, roughnecks, cowboys, loggers, and other American working men. The term Redneck shifted from an insult to a reclaimed symbol. It was not just American labour movements that utilised the tool of resistance clothing. In 1920, Turin factory workers used red scarves and uniforms during strikes to symbolise solidarity (Libcom, 1920). Drawing on Umberto Eco's work on shifting meanings, this case illustrates how signs can be reclaimed and re-encoded in opposition to dominant ideology. What was once a practical garment became a contested symbol, repeatedly decoded and reinterpreted by different audiences depending on political context and media representation.

The legacy of the Appalachian coal miners remains alive today. With the decrease in coal extraction in America and cheaper extraction abroad, much of the work that once existed there no longer exists. The decline of coal mining has left Appalachia underdeveloped, with corporate interests prioritising profit over community. Yet the legacy of red bandanas endures as a symbol of solidarity (Coals, 2025). The Appalachian miners highlight the importance of community and solidarity. Clothing was an integral part of holding those together.

The significance of uniformity within these movements cannot be ignored. Within my costume career so far, I have been fascinated by how uniforms have been used historically to take away personal identity and as a tool of people in power to make lower-class people conform to a certain role, reduce resistance and keep order. The

link between uniformity and obedience has been displayed throughout history, socially and scientifically. As seen in Milgram's study on obedience (1961) and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (1971). However, within this investigation, I have seen another side of the power of uniformity. A power that helps people fighting discrimination and injustice display solidarity and create their own powerful opposing movement. Utilising clothing that holds them back into something different. Changing its meaning and use completely.

A parallel example of uniformity in resistance that sparked my interest is the lesser-known Brown Berets. Activist and historian Mia Elliott's senior thesis investigates the political and symbolic use of uniform dress by the Black Panthers, Brown Berets, and Young Lords, demonstrating how clothing served to communicate identity and solidarity within these movements (Elliott, 2025). The Brown Berets were an LA-based Chicano Nationalist organisation active from the late 1960s through to the early 1970s. Dressed in all-brown military berets and M-65 field jackets, the Brown Berets projected the ideal of the new man of the Chicano Movement, a militant, empowered, and proud of his heritage. Young Chicanos harnessed the symbolic power of the field jacket to express their militant demands for dignity and to criticise the Vietnam War. But the brown berets' use of the M65 military jackets reflected another side, often neglected, side of the anti-war movement, rooted in oppression that treated Chicano lives as expendable. They needed an image that would reflect their pride in their Chicano heritage yet also signify solidarity with their brothers in the Black Panther Party and other revolutionaries across borders and history. Founding member Olmeda Becerra(1969) explained, "Because the Beret was like a symbol of urban guerrilla warfare from World War II and France… there was a history to that, and we would be tying in with that history, apart from the fact

that the Panthers were wearing it as well… They were our brothers." This displays the semiotic language they were actively using through clothing to display a message of militant power.



Figure 2

In addition, David Sanchez, the co-founder of the movement, (2013) described the impact of their uniforms, saying, "It was like a theatre, a good theatre." Displaying how their interaction with their identity was, in a sense, a performance, supporting Judith Butler's theory of Performativity. It was calculated and well thought out to convey a particular message of militant resistance; an active interaction with the environment around them forming a shared identity.

While research by Elliott and Truelman (2025) expands the discussion, historical accounts of women's use of resistance clothing remain scarce due to social oppression and domestic isolation. Within my research, many of the case studies are Western struggles or take place in English-speaking countries. I found it harder to

access information about other countries and examples of resistance clothing; I had limited access to personal accounts. Moving forward, I could extend this research and investigate other societies and their histories in depth to find examples of resistance clothing, which would also contribute to the discussion. However, what makes studying resistance clothing so valuable is that it allows people from all classes, regardless of whether they can read or write, to fight back visually. The inclusivity of the movements is what makes them so impactful.

Political Dress, Symbolism as a Political Weapon

The colour red, as a symbol of left-wing ideologies, has its origins in the early Communist Party and the US labour movement. Even further back, red became the colour of French radicals and protestors during the French Revolution; it was even used to paint guillotines during the Reign of Terror. In the 21st century, politicians across the world use colour to semiotically convey their political positions and identities.



Figure 3

In April 2016, South Africa's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) launched its local government manifesto before 40,000 people at Johannesburg's Orlando Stadium. Julius Malema, who serves as both the party's political and satirical "Commander-in-Chief" (McBrien, 2016), led the proceedings, wearing his iconic red beret and Jumpsuit. This is a carefully constructed image, Malema's used red to commemorate "those who have died during the struggle for economic freedom". (McBrien, 2016) The EEF declares it is a radical and militant economic emancipation movement, rooted in grassroots formations and struggles.

Despite post-apartheid economic growth, South Africa remains deeply unequal, a context that gave rise to the EFF's militant visual politics (Lawal, 2024). Within this context, Malema's clothing functions symbolically rather than practically. The beret nods to the revolutionary spirit the party seeks to rouse, while the overalls and jumpsuit convey solidarity with the working class. Malema's personal closet would tell a different story: previously wearing designer shoes and Gucci suits, his appearance change reflects his efforts to affiliate with the working class. Illustrating the power of symbolism and connotations in clothing choices, thereby advancing a movement and fostering visual solidarity among those who share the same message. This display of identity was an active choice and performance; the EEF utilised myths to push forward a message of working-class unity.



Figure 4

As an article in the BBC (2014) shows, this visual strategy was not limited to male party members. In 2014, when the EFF attended their first parliamentary session, most of the women wore red coats and aprons to show they intended to represent the workers. Therefore, giving power and representation to maids and women workers across the country, as they could visually identify with them.

Judith Butler's concept of performativity further illustrates how political identity is constructed through repeated visual acts. The EEFs' consistent use of red clothing and labour-associated uniforms can be understood as a performative enactment of working-class solidarity, in which political belonging is not only declared but continuously rehearsed through appearance.

The origin of the *myth* of the revolutionary Beret is uncertain. Ironically, its origins most likely started within the Carlists in Spain (Vscw.ca, 2022). An ultra-conservative right-wing defender of Carlos V, the red beret was a symbol of Carlism, the ultra-Catholic, monarchist and reactionary movement that emerged in Spain during

the 1830s. However, it most likely gained its revolutionary symbolism when Che Guvera, the Argentinian revolutionary, adopted the black beret with a red star. This illustrates how the meaning behind clothing can be manipulated and altered as it is adopted by different political movements.

The semiotic language of the beret was shaped by its military background, as it was used by the British armed forces in the 1920s (Forces News, 2022). Tank regiments found it easier to wear helmets over the beret, and it was also relatively inexpensive to manufacture. And therefore, it became adopted by militant revolutionaries and political activists such as the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, and New York crime-fighting Guardian Angels in the late 1970s.



Figure 5

Curtis Sliwa, the founder of the Guardian Angels, is not a stranger to utilising the red beret within his political campaign. He ran for mayor of New York in 2025, against Zohran Mandami and Andrew Cuomo. Sliwa, the Republican candidate, wasn't the most popular, but his image and his quirky persona pushed him into the race and attracted 7.01% of voters, thereby splitting the vote, helping Zohran Mandami gain

the majority. His distinctive image, which previously put him at personal risk, illustrates both the power and dangers of visible political symbolism (Gabbatt, 2025).

A carefully constructed political image can win elections and influence audiences, a phenomenon amplified by social media. I believe it is important we recognise these signs and symbols and not always take them as fact. Symbols need to be analysed and contested to be fully understood.

In the current political climate, we should consider how capitalism has affected and manipulated the clothing of resistance. Fashion brands can capitalise on popular resistance clothing, such as the red beret and bandanas, and therefore manipulate them into something different, diminishing their significance. With increased image circulation and social media, I believe we tend to take things at face value; we have become less adept at analysing what we see. The same happens with fashion.

Fascist movements can adopt what was once a liberal identifier and take it as their own, distorting its symbolism. Such as Make America Great Again hats. A red baseball cap, once a working man's accessory. Now associated with the wealthiest in America. We must be vigilant in understanding when symbols and iconography have been manipulated by the other side. Reject it and create something new.

Community Solidarity: Changing Societal Ideology Through Accessories

Launched in November 1977 during heightened racial tension, the Anti-Nazi League's (ANL) visual and political legacy remains visible through badges, archival imagery, and activist accounts (Brown, 2025). The ANL was set up in my grandad's living room, so I have always felt a tie to the movement. Founded after Enoch Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, the ANL emerged in a climate where economic recession and rising unemployment enabled the National Front (NF) to scapegoat immigrants and become Britain's third-largest party (T, 2025; Brown, 2025)."

Geoff Brown's book, The People's History of the Anti-Nazi League 1977-1981, gives a well-rounded picture of the events at the time. The NF drew on established fascist traditions, placing particular emphasis on street politics and spectacle. Its members frequently marched through immigrant neighbourhoods to provoke fear, assert dominance, and generate media attention. Resistance to this tactic culminated in the

Battle of Lewisham in 1977, when thousands of anti-fascist protesters broke through police lines to physically block an NF march. This moment marked a turning point, demonstrating that collective opposition could successfully disrupt fascist mobilisation and galvanise support for the formation of the ANL.

Recognising the importance of visibility and mass mobilisation, ANL organisers used leaflets, posters, and badges to construct a shared visual identity. Around 750,000 badges were sold between 1977 and 1979, demonstrating their effectiveness as wearable propaganda (London Museum, 2025; Brown, 2025).



Figure 6

The ANL badge itself was deliberately simple and striking. Featuring a bold sans-serif typeface and the iconic arrow symbol, adapted from the insignia used by German anti-Nazi Social Democrats in the 1930s, the design prioritised clarity and immediacy (Brown, 2025). The arrow emblem historically signified direct opposition and forward motion, visually communicating resistance rather than neutrality. The

use of red against a bright yellow background heightened visibility in public space; semiotically, red connotes urgency, danger, and political struggle, while yellow functions as a warning colour that demands attention. This high-contrast palette ensured the badge could be instantly read from a distance, transforming the wearer's body into a mobile site of political communication (Barthes, 1972).

Although badges occupy a space between clothing, graphic design, and propaganda, their inclusion within this study is justified. Badges are worn on the body and function as extensions of dress, operating within the same semiotic systems as garments. Their low cost, ease of production, and accessibility make them especially effective tools of resistance, both historically and in contemporary activism. As wearable signs, badges transform private political belief into public declaration, aligning closely with Butler's understanding of performativity as action enacted through the body (Butler, 1988).

Closely aligned with the ANL was Rock Against Racism (RAR), a cultural movement founded in response to vile racist statements made by prominent musicians, including Eric Clapton's public support for Enoch Powell and David Bowie's comments suggesting admiration for fascist aesthetics. As described in Browns book, RAR sought to combat racism and fascism through live music, deliberately placing black and white bands on stage together to foster solidarity and challenge segregation within popular culture. The movement understood culture not as separate from politics but as a central battleground.



Figure 7

RAR's founders, Roger Huddle and Red Saunders, were deeply committed to the idea that art and design were integral to revolutionary politics. Early in the movement, they enlisted graphic designer and political artist David King, who worked for the Sunday Times magazine. He was frustrated by what he saw as poorly designed left-wing print materials. King believed that well-considered visual language could significantly increase political impact, allowing messages to cut through noise and reach wider audiences. This philosophy led him to design the first RAR badge. In my interview with Roger Huddle (2026), he recalls that "the star itself is slightly different as it's the one that El Lessitzky designed for the Russian Red Army in the Russian Revolutionary period. But the circle around it came from American Pop. So, there was an amalgamation of the two visual styles." (Huddle, 2026, personal interview,17 January). The combination of styles and colours creates a visually striking symbol of anti-racism. If worn, its semiotic language communicated that you were anti-fascist. When I asked Huddle about the choice of colours within the RAR

badge (red and yellow, red and green), he commented, “Red has always been a colour of resistance, not just in terms of bloodshed, but it’s the blood of humanity, something that is the heart of human beings that the blood pumps”. This is displayed by earlier research. Most of the items include the colour red. It is a symbol of liberation.



Figure 8

This design balanced militant symbolism with accessibility, avoiding overt aggression while still signalling left-wing internationalism. The badges sold in their thousands and became RAR’s primary source of income, further demonstrating the material power of design in sustaining political movements. Reflecting on their approach, Red Saunders emphasised the importance of visual language, describing RAR as “the most bottom-up organisation ever, so bottom-up it didn’t have a top” (Saunders, cited in Geoff Brown book, 2025). Young people actively participated by making their own

T-shirts, knitting garments, and customising clothing, reinforcing the badge's role as a focal point for collective identity.

Wearing the badge served multiple functions. It signalled to fascists a clear refusal to align with their ideology, while simultaneously communicating solidarity to marginalised communities. However, this visibility carried real risks. In areas such as London's East End, racially motivated violence was common, not only against immigrant residents but also against those visibly associated with socialist or anti-fascist politics. The murder of Atab Ali, a clothing machinist beaten and stabbed to death by a group of racists on Whitechapel High Street in 1978, exemplifies the lethal consequences of this climate of hatred (Socialist Worker, 2010). Wearing an ANL or *Socialist Worker* badge in such contexts could mark an individual as a target, underscoring the danger inherent in politicised dress. Huddle recalls, "I was attacked in Leyton, where somebody came up to me, and just tore the badges off my clothing; it was only that I had the gift of the gab that I talked my way out of physical violence." But despite this threat of violence, Huddle continued to campaign and dedicate his life to activism. As Huddle continues, "but the other side of this is that people could respond saying 'good badge" demonstrated that the badge actively opened conversations and created community.



Figure 9

This sense of community was heightened by the badge, out in the streets and the workplace, with different professions having their own versions of the ANL badge and sticker. Groups included Council Workers Against the Nazis (CWAN), Miners Against the Nazis, Bus Workers Against the Nazis and so on. A young miner, Ian Mitchell, remembers helping establish the ANL in Silverwood pit “It seemed you couldn’t find anyone without an Anti-nazi league sticker. As miners, we used to get stickers to show support for something. So you would have some people with loads of stickers on their helmet among the grime and the dirt” (Brown,2025). The miners demonstrated the importance of accessorising with representation; adorning their helmets signified their beliefs and fostered solidarity. Other movements included Women Against Racism and Fascism (WARF), Gays Against the Nazis, Teachers Against the Nazis, and School Students Against the Nazis (SKAN). When I asked Roger Huddle about his positive experiences with the badge, he explained, “Yes,

especially in the workplace. It was very important as it isolated the racists. It was a conscious decision to wear the badge at work, as it would polarise the workplace. And people had to really decide where they were with".

In both the ANL and RAR, badges operated as tools of recognition, solidarity, and resistance. They enabled individuals to identify allies, perform political commitment, and participate in a shared visual culture that transformed bodies into sites of protest. Also reminding us that visibility, while powerful, is never neutral. My granddad, Paul Foot, commented on the anti-racist activist Darcus Howe, "I well remember Darcus at that meeting saying that the fight against the fascists and the National Front meant that his children had grown up at ese' in a less racist Britain." (Kmflett's Blog, 2017). Demonstrating the positive generational effect the ANL had on changing societal ideologies and making Britain a safer space for all ethnicities.

Conclusion

This investigation has encapsulated what I value most about studying costume: understanding people and why they wear what they wear, and recognising clothing as a reflection of lived experience, belief and struggle. People are endlessly fascinating, and learning from others' experiences has enriched my ability to understand and appreciate well-written characters. Costume is uniquely suited to resistance compared to other media, as it is a storytelling tool. Understanding resistance clothing not only allows you to accurately depict the people within movements of resistance but also to incorporate those symbols and ideologies into different new narratives. From the Appalachian Miners Union to the EEF to the ANL, all these movements exemplify the effective use of resistance clothing in fighting a wider struggle, one rooted in community. One that looks out for the people.

Commitment, repetition, and visibility, all displayed by these movements, demonstrate the successful use of resistance clothing. This is something the powers that be can never replicate; of course, they can copy, but creativity consistently emerges from the working class.

As Barthes (1972) suggests, clothing transforms political struggle into mythic imagery, making resistance immediately legible. I see resistance clothing all around me, from red berets of the communists, keffiyeh and watermelon symbolism of people supporting Palestine, pride flags, to political pins on jackets and bags. As the struggle continues, we show solidarity and support through what we wear. The read thread still weaves itself through society as the blood runs in our veins.

However, resistance clothing is fragile, constantly threatened by co-optation, dilution, and misreading. It's important that we are always mindful of the other side and combat it where we can. If a symbol has been changed, there is little you can do to take it back without giving visibility and discourse to opposing sides. Therefore, we must generate new symbols and reclaim ones of the past. The world of art and design is something to be cherished and nurtured, as it’s a medium of expression for all. This research provides people today with tools for understanding how others have resisted oppression. To provide an identifier for people with similar views and a semiotic weapon against those who disapprove.

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Appendix 1: Interview Transcript

Natasha: Take your time, there's no rush. It's on resistance clothing and the importance of clothing in political movements. So, it's a creative research essay, it's an ongoing investigation. My point is that clothing becomes politically potent when it acquires symbolic significance and extends its material form. In one of my chapters, I've been looking at the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism, focusing on the badges and how they were used to advance the movement and create change. I've done a bit on the dangers of visibility and the symbolism displayed on the body. So, I have a couple of questions.

Roger: Okay, Try one out!

Natasha: Can you describe the role of rock against racism badges played within the movement? And what did wearing one signified to you at the time?

Roger: The major thing was that people were anti-racist. That's the key signifier. But that rests on its visual impact. So, the actual design was as important. In terms of creating that signification. In terms of the RAR star is slightly different as it is the one El Lessitzky designed for the Russian Red Army in the revolutionary period. But the circle around it came from American pop. So there was an amalgamation of the two visual styles. And then Dave King who was the wonderful designer of both our badge and the ANL symbol. He was influenced by Russian Constructivism. And he brought over into the present the symbols. I mean the arrow was a long standing symbol of ant-racist, anti-nazi, right back to the revolution in Russia. So they were taken and given a modern twist in terms of look. And so the wearing of the badge fitted in with all the badges. Both RAR and ANL were symbols of being anti-racist against the NF. Actually, more anti-fascist for the ANL, of course.

Which meant in some areas you couldn't wear one. I mean I was attached in Layton, where somebody came up to me and just tore the badges off my clothing. It was because I had the gift of the gab that I could talk my way out of physical violence.

Natasha: Wow, the threat of violence was very apparent. I guess history is repeating itself in some ways.

Roger: Well, I think the best thing to think about at present is to wear the keffiyeh or to wear any symbol of Palestine. Which can result in being attacked. But also, the other side of it is that people could then respond saying…good badge, good Scalf, free Palestine.

Natasha: So it created a sort of community? And be able to open conversations with people?

Roger: Yeah, which is certainly the same during the late 70s and 80s. Which is also associated with the punk movement. And the style. And the fact that we fitted in with that meant that is was current and in the general cultural stream. So people would wear our clash badge, and one that I can't remember the name of… it'll come to me; it was a word used within Caribbean communities. So people would wear the rasta colours with this word that I can't quite remember, haha… but it'll come to me. So there was definitely identification with politics outside of the individual.

Natasha: Did you get people coming up to you in a positive way?

Roger: Yes, yes, um, especially in the workplaces. It was very important to the workplace because it isolated the racist. And it was a conscious decision to wear the badge at work to isolate the racist; it would force polarisation in a workplace, and people had to really decide where they were, you know. I think the other important thing, the RAR badge was associated with the music, mainly Punk and Reggae. and

the ANL was identified as street action and workplace action. Really, if you think about it, one's daytime, one's nighttime… there's an old Indian introduction to revolution and literature by Trotsky. He talks about how, um, poetry was the manova of the owl of knowledge that flew at night. When the people had been fighting all day long they were cleaning there boots, cleaning their rifles. He definitely saw it that poetry and culture, and art were the cement of the community that held them together when the struggle was in our bands, does that make sense?

Natasha: Yes, it's interesting the link between a socialist society and the importance of the arts and creative outlets and within a more capitalist society that gets squashed and doesn't flourish as well. I think art is super important for the human condition; it helps us express ourselves in different ways.

Roger: Yeah, its essential. I think.

Natasha: So that was essential to your movement. Taking the design seriously and not just posting any old thing on it.

Roger: Yeah. It was very serious. We thought about everything. In terms of what it said what it looked like. Because there is a language, it speaks a language. I can't actually define it, but it speaks a language.

Natasha: Well, it's that semiotic language, you can tell so much about something before you even fully understand it. You get an innate response to certain colours, images, and typographies.

Roger: The typography is central. I mean, there's a great quote from Vhenko, the great Russian uh artist, uh well, yeah, the textile worker and uh and photographer, and typographer, because they developed this whole idea of the strong sans serif

typface. and also like sort of reduced everything down to the primary colours. so red, blue, and yellow become central.. And Dave King definitely picked that up on that as well. I think the RAR badge would not have been anywhere near as strong if it had been in any other colour, but yellow and red.

Natasha: Interesting, the different use of contrasting colours and harmonious colours,

Roger: And also the meaning of red is always associated with the socialist left. Blue is Tory, something I don't think we use blue anywhere.

Natasha: Definitely, yeah. Yeah. Well, you can see from like labour movements like even in America in the like 1920s, they would wear red bandanas to like to symbolize and bring them together and even in the French Revolution, they're like red hats that they would wear. It's always been a colour of kind of resistance.

Roger: It's a symbol. yeah. which is not just in terms of blood's field, but it's the blood of humanity, something that is the heart of human beings that the blood pulsates. So it's very, very much that. I think essentially lots used to it was a essentialots who had the red caps, I think. And it was uh it was in the uh in the Midwest in the mining areas like there wore the red bandana.

Natasha: The Appalachian miners I've done a bit of that in my essay. Oh Yeah, it's very interesting because I didn't know anything about it before and kind of delving into this topic kind of led me in that way, even just seeing like how it was originally like made and how the bandanna was brought over from like Persia at the time to America, um and how, yeah, how it's produced and the Paisly print I'm big into like textile prints and patterns and stuff. So yeah, it all kind of links together

Roger: Well, if you think like two years ago, when after October seventh, um, it was almost impossible to have it, but to get a keffier. They were they weren't available. My one was brought back to me by a friend who went to Palestine. And and now, I mean, God, you have thousands of out there.

Natasha: You can get them when you're on a march, yeah.

Roger: And I think that the checked back-and-white design will influence a hell of a lot of fashion development in the future.

Natasha: Definitely. um yeah. It's interesting to see the difference as well in like a like how times have changed and there's more like image circulation and things like that that do you think, like symbols have become more important or like less important and do you think there's like a danger of things being manipulated or like um sort of like uh not explaining fully what something means like in America with the the red hats that they're using make America great again. Do you think there's a danger in like that type of symbolism being manipulated

Roger: Yes, I think it's only what we call cultural warriors, people involved in culture for, you know, with progressive intent, not necessarily all of it, but a necessary part of it. they understand that's was of important, but most people take care just as it is because they live in the visual world. And there's no doubt that the red cap, I mean, American mid cat, but also it can be subverted so easily, because you go, uh, I just saw one the other day with someone else said, make America Trump Free. It was but it was it was the red cap, yeah. Had it been subverted or not? I don't think it had. I think it still remains the thing that trumps adopted and pushed that symbol pushed through. But the most important thing, of course, is a cap. You know, it's a workingman's expression... uh, that definitely you can use symbols, the uh, the

politicians of the far right will use images that are usually associated with the left, uh, and to subvert. The way that Trump uses the clenched fist. A complete rewriting of history.

Natasha: Yeah. it's of the right. Yeah, trying to change the meaning of it.

Roger: Yeah. Or to say I am that, I am not one of them I am one of you. And that's the other way is I think.

Natasha: And it's hard, yeah, it's like having to recognise that in a way, like not to be manipulated by that and to kind of like understand the context behind it all, not just to take it at face value.

Roger: The contextualisation becomes vital. Yeah, yeah. And I think that's the same RAR and ANL days. I mean, punk was an expression of anger and frustration. And Reggae was as well from a black standpoint. And I think that the dominant art of the period was Pop Art, and uh, it became the use of black colours and things. So, it sort of fitted in with a with a common visual language. I think, I mean, I don't know. I I'm not sure about this. This is I'm thinking of the top of my head. I think so. Yeah. I because iy got a very popular, but it only got very popular because it was needed. Does that make sense?

Natasha: Yeah. It was necessary for people at the time. Yeah, yeah.

Roger: Yeah. They wanted some ways, saying that I'm not with the NF.. And the anti nazi League was the wearing of the badge. And right down in the NBS, skateboarders against the Nazis, uh, and then there were school kids against the Nazis,

Natasha: And Firefighters.

Roger: Yeah, they had a great symbol, actually, that was very Pop like, because they had the OO in the middle of a sort of target rings, red and yellow rings. Uh, and that was they even pushed the pop imagery even further.

Natasha: And it displayed that it was very community-based, like from the bottom up. It wasn't like pushed on by anyone.

Roger: It was… nothing came from above; that was the important thing.

Natasha: Yeah, do you think there's anything that we can utilise and learn from these movements and the methods of the rock against racism, today, to help combat fascism?

Roger: I think the key thing is, I mean, you can't repeat things. So, what you can do, I think, is to be really aware that cultural iconography, cultural movements, cultural developments, can and should be harnessed to combat the ruling ideas. I think the major thing at the moment is that when Tommy Robinson goes on that march, they only have one thing they can sing. They all sang Land of hope and Glory.. Uh, was it land of hope and glory? No, Rule Britannia.. Which, apart from being a most dreadfully boring song. But it was also written in the mid-18th century. um as a boost to the British navy, you know, because the British navy was attempting to control the seas, the trade routes. So that was the context for it, but also the other thing is that there's no influence of African American or black in the music at all. So it's very much white music. Um, which again links to this whole idea that uh the National Front in the 70s, they did anything, especially reggae was jungle music. Therefore, it was sub-species music. And that's why we said as our music, against them, and I think

that's the same now. that's exactly the same now, except there's different kinds of music. Now we've got incredible diverse music. You just look at the amount of stuff that's come out of America in favour of Palestine in terms of the music, and the way that the slice of lemon, a slice of melon, has become a badge. And earrings.

Natasha: I mean seen a lot of those, yeah

Roger: The earrings are fantastic look anyway. And also, because it's a slice of a people have to say, what does that mean? And you can say that's Palestine. Yeah, yeah. So the symbolism of it of humanity is now is conflated into the symbol of Palestine. And the national flag has been conflated into racism. I'm sure there must be lots of upper-class Tories who hate the fact that the far right grabbed the Union Jack as a sign that some, you know.. So that's why you know, the symbols that's the national flag is the biggest symbol, if you like. of nationality. And uh the rejection of the national flag is important certainly. But I think today the most important thing is stuff like you're doing in looking at the relationships. I think in terms of musicians and music and trying to attract it, also trying to subvert what people are listening to anyway. But I think the other important thing is to bring into the into the fire. Non-pop music. And, you only find out in retrospect that at the same time as the Ant-nazi League was going on, there were composers like Steve Wright, uh, making music, especially minimalism, which expressed similar abhorrence at the uh racism. So, you know, I don't know, but it's it's still culture is is an important weapon. Against the Far right.

Natasha: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That's brilliant. Thank you so much. It's been so incredibly helpful.

Roger: If you need anything else, you've got my number

Natasha: Oh, thank you, I appreciate it.

Hope, speak to you soon.

Take care. Bye-bye.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Fabric of Resistance: Identity and the Power of Clothing
Student Lead: Natasha Edmundson Foot
Email address: huddleroger@gmail.com
Phone number: 07973 443030

Dear Roger Huddle,

You are invited to participate in:

Natasha Edmundson Foots' creative research essay about resistance clothing in political movements. The essay argues that clothing becomes politically potent when it acquires symbolic significance that extends its material form.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate.

Why have you been approached?

To talk about your experience in setting up Rock Against Racism and what significance the badge had in your opinion. I will ask you a series of questions about the topic. You can answer them however you please.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

Have a phone call interview with Natasha

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

None.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

It will enrich the research and provide personal information linked to the topic.

What will happen to the information I provide?

It will be quoted in the Creative research essay in the chapter about changing societal ideologies through accessories.

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions or want to withdraw my consent?

Natasha Edmundson Foot
n.edmundsonfoot0320231@arts.ac.uk

ual:

PRIVACY NOTICE

Your personal data will be processed by UAL on its managed systems for research purposes with your explicit consent.

Your personal data deleted on your request or [9/02/2026] after the project end date.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

CONSENT TEMPLATE

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree to the items checked below:

   √ to be interviewed
   √ that my voice will be audio recorded
   √ for my assessment feedback to be accessed, anonymised and analysed for Research purposes.

4. I acknowledge that:

   (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
   (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

'I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form, including any special category data I may choose to provide'

Participant : Roger Hadley Date: 20:01:2026

(Signature)