



Konstantinos Eleftheriadis

# Queer Festivals

Challenging Collective Identities  
in a Transnational Europe

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Queer Festivals

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# Queer Festivals

*Challenging Collective Identities in a Transnational Europe*

*Konstantinos Eleftheriadis*

Amsterdam University Press

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*Konstantinos Eleftheriadis*

*Paris, September 2017*

# 1 Introduction

## Queer Festivals and the Anti-Identity Paradox: Transnational Collective Identities beyond the State

‘The LGBT movement is often confined to the sacrosanct trench of gay marriage and adoption. We must try to imagine new ways of progress, new practices, new insights.’ This is how the festival ‘Da Mieli a Queer’ in Rome started in a spring day of April 2013.<sup>2</sup> QueerLab, a ‘new association born to renovate the LGBTI movement’,<sup>3</sup> together with the association Mario Mieli and the squat-theatre Teatro Valle, organized a four-day event in order to ‘experiment in the words, in the body experience, in poetics, in the imaginary’. Two months later, in a more northerly part of Europe, another queer festival was starting: the Queeristan festival of Amsterdam:

The manipulation of gay rights has made it possible to actively support blatantly racist, classist, sexist and xenophobic policies. [...] Let’s abandon sexuality as a personal identity that just defines a lifestyle. We are angry, we are pissed off, dissatisfied, *indignados*.<sup>4</sup>

In 2010, the year I started my research, a crucial moment in sexual politics was occurring in Western Europe. LGBT<sup>5</sup> movements had achieved a great breakthrough in institutional politics and public sympathy, at the national and the European scale. Gay civil unions, marriages, adoption, although in different steps, and with different forms, seemed to make their way towards institutionalization (Paternotte 2011) and legitimization in the

1 Da Mieli a Queer, ‘Festival Call’, [http://www.mariomieli.org/damieliaqueer/?page\\_id=138](http://www.mariomieli.org/damieliaqueer/?page_id=138) (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

2 All extracts from the web are presented the first time with their author, the title, their URL links and their last day of access. For the following uses, I use the author and the title of the source. Theoretical sources and media articles used as such are referenced alphabetically in the bibliography. Therefore, readers can look at the bibliography for the theoretical references, and in the footnotes for the empirical sources.

3 QueerLab Associazione GLBTI, ‘A Propos’, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/QueerLab-248793105177065/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/QueerLab-248793105177065/about/?ref=page_internal) (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

4 Queeristan, ‘Call for Participation: “Queeristan 2013”’, <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/salon21/?p=12424> (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

5 I refer to the umbrella term LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) as a category used in scholarly literature and the public discourse to describe people with ‘deviant’ sexual and gender identities (Ayoub 2016: 1).

public sphere, manifested in social and legal recognition. For many gay, lesbian and transgender people, however, this recognition came with a cost. It progressively allowed a dangerous slip towards mainstreamization, seen as recognition of specific gender and sexual identities over others, accompanied by an over-regulation of homosexuality through patriarchal norms, and for some, even an attempt to re-privatize sexuality (Brown and Browne 2016: 63). Moreover, a few scholars and activists argued that this process of assimilation of Western LGBT identities into the normative world of heteronormativity<sup>6</sup> was followed by increasing sentiments of racism and xenophobia inside the LGBT communities, especially regarding Muslim postcolonial populations, either European citizens or migrants. LGBT rights were seen as justifying imperialist wars in the world and racism in the West.

Back in 2010, when I was starting my PhD thesis, two events triggered my interest in the queer critique of the process of LGBT mainstreaming. These events exemplified the need to efficiently articulate the connections between sexual, gender and antiracist politics, beyond traditional identity categories. The first refers to Judith Butler's refusal to accept the award of Berlin Pride Civil Courage on 19 June 2010 (Jaunait et al. 2013: 6; Ayoub 2016: 2-3). In fact, during Berlin's Christopher Pride Parade, the famous queer theorist and activist Judith Butler delivered a speech, in which she stated that: 'I must distance myself from complicity with racism, including anti-Muslim racism. [...] Bi, trans and queer people can be used by those who want to wage war'.<sup>7</sup> As a 'remedy', she proposed to offer the prize to organizations of people of colour. In her refusal, which went viral in social media, Butler pointed at the increasing criminalization of migrants, or Germans from migrant backgrounds, whose supposed 'cultural norms' are portrayed as opposed to women's rights and homosexuality. Since then, this culturalizing discourse has been often reactivated, producing widespread moral panics.<sup>8</sup> Butler's refusal pointed to what she saw as the unacknowl-

6 Heteronormativity describes 'the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organize homosexuality as its binary opposite' (Valocchi 2005: 756).

7 No Homonationalism, 'Judith Butler Refuses Berlin Pride Civil Courage Prize 2010', <http://nohomonationalism.blogspot.fr/2010/06/judith-butler-refuses-berlin-pride.html> (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

8 A characteristic case is the 'Cologne aggressions' which took place during the New Year's Eve celebrations on 31 December 2015 in Cologne, Germany. In the aftermath of these New Year Eve's festivities, German media reported that a series of sexual aggressions were notified to the police, pointing to Muslim migrants and refugees as the main assaulters. The news got quickly diffused by other international media, too, reporting foreign politicians' statements that migrants should respect 'women's rights'. The incidents were not presented through the

edged nature of race and migration in contemporary LGBT discourse, a theme that came back, in academic discussions this time, some months later, at the University of Amsterdam's 'Sexual Nationalisms' conference.

The second event pointing to the LGBT identities' mainstreaming and triggering this research refers to the 'Sexual Nationalisms' conference that took place in January 2011. This event organized by the Amsterdam Research Center for Gender and Sexuality (UvA) and the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), stated that 'homophobia and conservatism, gender segregation and sexual violence have been represented as alien to modern European culture and transposed upon the bodies, cultures and religions of migrants, especially Muslims and their descendants'. The organizers asked 'how can progressive sexual politics avoid the trap of exclusionary instrumentalization without renouncing its emancipatory promise?'<sup>9</sup>

The conference was portrayed by some scholars as revealing the numerous 'problematic trends in academia concerning the politics of speech, silence, and representation' (Stelder 2011). In fact, a series of conflicts emerged during this conference that addressed both 'the premises of the event and the modalities of its implementation' (Jaunait 2011: 5). Scholars of colour in the field of feminist studies and queer theory, such as Jasbir Puar, Fatima El-Tayeb and Jin Haritaworn, addressed critiques against the organization of the conference, on the premise that it was made up of white, gay European men. The conference crystallized, for these scholars, a process of silencing issues of racism, homonormativity and imperialist wars in the name of gender and sexual liberation. They argued, moreover, that twenty-first-century sexual and gender movements in the continent participate, if not contribute to, in the de-politicization of gay and lesbian identities, accompanying it with racism in the LGBT communities (Perreau 2016: 120). The two above events, despite the differences in scope and the location and the publics they addressed, caught my attention in that they pointed at the reorientation of sexual and gender politics in Europe towards *queer* critiques.

frame of 'mass sex assault', which would be an expected response to such a massive harassment. They were rather presented through the frame of 'the lack of respect for women demonstrated by Muslim migrants', hinting at the alleged irreconcilable differences of migrant, and mainly Muslim, men's values with those of the West, which include women's rights.

9 Amsterdam Research Center for Gender and Sexuality and Institut de Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur les Enjeux Sociaux, 'Sexual Nationalisms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Belonging in the New Europe', <http://calenda.org/203157> (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

## Queer ... What is queer? A research trajectory in collective identities

'Queer' movements and individuals identifying with this label have been marking the activist landscape in many parts of the world. Drawing upon the US experience, Joshua Gamson defined queer as a 'loose but distinguishable set of political movements and mobilizations, and second a somewhat parallel set of academy-bound intellectual endeavors [...] [that] defined itself largely against conventional lesbian and gay politics' (1995: 393). For Europe, queer is slightly different. Queer in the continent became known through the circulation of queer theories into academia (Downing and Gillett 2011). In addition, queer activists and groups participated in other left-wing transnational movements, such as the global justice movement or the *No Borders* network (Brown 2007) or local anti-authoritarian movements (for Greece, see, for instance, Eleftheriadis 2013). Progressively, anti-institutional forms of 'queer' political organizing around local-based groups and transnational festivals emerged in the social movements scene.

The organization of queer politics around festivals and their number intrigued me. I wondered, Why a festival? What does this specific repertoire offer to sexual identities politics? I took a look at their programmes: political and cultural workshops, collective cooking, parties, performances, DIY (Do-It-Yourself) structures. Moreover, sexual and gender transgressions were largely emphasized: gender boundary-crossing performances and sex parties. What also surprised me were the commonalities all these festivals presented: all events took place in highly politicized spaces, mostly squats, and shared a strong internationalist character. Their callouts enthusiastically welcomed people from all over Europe and beyond, while many of them were open to new members to staff their organizing committees. Finally, they all called for 'abandoning identities', inviting us to imagine and realize new forms of gender expression and non-normative sexual practices: 'a space where you can feel free to express other forms of sexuality and ways of living than the straight and gay norms we have in today's society'.<sup>10</sup> Finally, their short-term, ephemeral character gave the impression of bringing people, ideas, and practices together in order to work collectively against identities. The festival seemed therefore the most appropriate repertoire of action in order to study the mobilization of queer movements and their beliefs in 'abandoning identities'.

10 Oslo Queer Festival, 'Home', <http://osloqueerfestival.blogspot.fr/2011/> (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

As a scholar of social movements, I was aware of the importance of collective identities for mobilization directed to the state and institutions in order to gain resources. But here was a movement that first wanted to abandon identities and second seemed as it did not care whatsoever about claiming anything from the state. I considered theories of protest then as an impasse for studying anti-identitarian movements since most studies have primarily focused on collective identity as a crucial factor in mobilization in order to ask for *rights*, as LGBT and women's movements usually do, or request other resources. For Sabine Lang, for instance, women's rights groups addressing supra-national organizations, such as the EU, or national institutional authorities, employ 'a mix of mobilization strategies that target larger audiences as well as institutional actors' (2013: 167). In that sense, women's movements combine institutional advocacy with public outreach, both embedded in the rights discourse. Phillip Ayoub (2016) claimed in a similar vein that LGBT movements, either those targeting supranational institutions or national polities, are looking for better representation and new rights. This rights discourse was not much present in queer festivals' calls, while the state was only present in order to be criticized for its 'mainstreaming' force. If the desire to ask for further rights from the state is not there, therefore, it seemed that strong identity categories were not useful either. Under which umbrella, then, do queer festivals manage to bring people together?

It appeared to me that within queer festivals, identity is perceived as a constraining rather than an engaging factor in their movement politics. It should then be precisely this normative belief, that we should go beyond identities, that succeeds in putting people together. A paradox thus emerges based upon an assumption and a question. The assumption is that queer indicates a shared anti-identitarian vision and this vision organizes some publics. The question is, How is this vision transformed into a dynamic movement in which actors mobilize some form of anti-identitarianism? To put it differently, How is it possible for a collective identity to be anti-identitarian?

## **Anti-identitarian movements and collective identities**

I argue that the queer movement does not avoid the construction of a collective identity, despite queer's insistence on the contrary. This construction is not only a by-product but an explicit quest in the movement's process of autonomization vis-à-vis increasingly institutionalized LGBT movements



and vis-à-vis a public sphere saturated with the exploitation of LGBT and women's rights for nationalist and racist purposes. For such an autonomization to become possible, a community-building process is necessary. This process is not, however, a romantic path of love and peace, similar to how we imagine older hippie subcultures to have been (which, indeed, they weren't). This community-building is rather full of conflicts, tensions and disagreements that activists face in their way to establish practices and to advance discourses that would most resonate with their ideals on what queer anti-identity *should* be. For this purpose, the book focuses on the discourses and the practices that pull activists and individuals together into spaces of political socialization and brings the process of collective identity construction to light.<sup>11</sup> As per discourses, I focus on the discursive tactics that get deployed in a specific historical moment of a given context, and for queers this includes self-definitions of their identities and 'deconstruction, boundary crossing, label disruption' (Gamson 1989). As per practices, I include these tactics of space-building and organizational processes, but also other, often unacknowledged norm-binding acts, like dressing and eating, that coexist with the above in the queer festivals' process of identity-building. Thus, I adopt a pragmatic approach of mobilization that focuses on the 'modalities of action, in the process of making [...] and the practical skills of social actors' (Mathieu 2016: 8). It is through the analysis of the arrangement of their practices and discourses that we can see how queer festivals contribute to the creation of anti-identitarian identities, that challenge both the dominant representations of fixed gender and sexual identities (and the paradigm that sustains them alive), as well as the LGBT movement's representational logic that the latter strategically uses in order to achieve concrete policy reforms by the state.

I analyse the argument of the book in three parts. The first is the historical part. Social movements might go through a period during which they attempt to regroup forces, to recruit new activists, to widen their frames and to establish their presence in a more constant way in the public space. For queer movements, this is the autonomization period, in which festivals, as a specific repertoire of action, strengthen their presence in the local and the transnational arenas. This process of queer autonomization is a rather

11 I operate this distinction between 'discourse' and 'practice' purely for analytical reasons. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), discourse is just one among many aspects of a social practice, in the sense of an act of intervention in the public space. Therefore, we should be rather talking about 'discursive practices' and 'non-discursive practices'. I, however, decided to keep this distinction in a more pragmatic sociological perspective.

European phenomenon and takes place through community-building after a long decade of links with the global justice movement and its radical components (Brown 2007). After 2009 and the decline of the latter, queer actors did not abandon the struggles and did not fall in abeyance, contrary to women's movements in the 1980s (Taylor 1989). Queer activists chose to pull together and create dynamics in a distinct way, by emphasizing the internal dynamics of community-building. Therefore, European queer movement activity is the result of two larger processes. First, the decline of the global justice movement. Second, the institutionalization of the LGBT movement, and the need for some activists to bring into the public space claims and performances that did not find easy access in the institutional arena and the public sphere. Chapter 2 presents this genealogical approach (Balsiger 2014) through some evidence from the history of queer politics in Europe and its intertwinement with the global justice movements, and sheds light on this period of autonomization. Through historical accounts of secondary sources, I demonstrate how European queer politics were from their very beginning part of transnational left-wing movements. The latter were very active in the flourishing global justice demonstrations of the early millennium.

The second part replies to the main question: Under which umbrella can queer movements pull people together and transform them into active members? In order to approach this question, I identify several levels of analysis, explained in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. On the one hand, queer movements' process of autonomization comes together with their refusal to claims-making in the institutional arena. Queer movements do not address the rights-discourse, since they do not look for concrete policy change, something that primarily defines current LGBT movements. This is a main differentiation parameter for these two social movements, and makes queer an autonomous actor in the gender and sexual identities field. Beyond state-oriented structural approaches of social movement studies, this part of the book explains that social movements which do not address the state mobilize resources, create collective identities and align with other social movements in order to express a voice through distinct vocabularies and performances in and against a normative public sphere. Queer festivals make us understand that movements seeking autonomous internal dynamics are equally important as external policy-oriented ones: creating and sustaining a social movement community without addressing the state, and being against collective identities is, however, a challenge that queer activists are called to take. In these chapters, the main questions are: How do queer festivals carve out a space, distinct from the one

of LGBT movements? and, What consequences does this identity-averse discourse have for identity-building? I address these questions through closer ethnographic insights into queer festivals and activists' discursive and practical tactics.

The final part builds on transnational social movements literature. In fact, what queer festivals inform us is also about their mobilization activities at the transnational level. Moving beyond state-centred approaches on social movements, Chapter 6 shows how queer festivals make openings to the transnational arena, too, without passing through supra-national organizations (EU, Council of Europe). Their aim is rather to build transnational identifications and solidarities with activists and participants from other parts of the continent (and beyond). This is achieved through the arrangement of a set of practices that allow queer festivals to build their queerness through cross-border practices.

How is it possible to mobilize without drawing upon at least some elements of identity? In the Copenhagen Queer Festival, we could read very clearly that 'This is not a gay party. This is a queer party.'<sup>12</sup> So, we are queer, because we are not gay. If collective identity still describes 'a shared sense of "oneness" or "we-ness" anchored in real or imagined shared attributes' (Snow 2001), then queer *seems to be a real and effective* collective identity that defines its 'we-ness' in relation to who we are not rather than to who we are. Such an identity is 'affirmed in terms of a negation rather than an affirmation' (Flesher-Fominaya 2015: 66). The negation against a positively defined identity has its own effects in the way queer actors imagine their 'we-ness', since it allows them to identify the actors against whom they would erect boundaries. These 'key others' for queer festivals are the state and the LGBT identities.

This book makes us understand how the building of an anti-identitarian collective identity can be paradoxically a claim in itself. Queer festivals are the most appropriate object to unfold this social movements paradox, because their politics focuses on the concrete discourses and practices that make social movements activity based upon an anti-labelling discourse possible. In the following section, I provide two main parameters that will locate queer festivals' anti-identitarianism in the literature. First, queer festivals do not address the state as their main challenger. A collective identity is thus possible to be born as a result of a process of autonomization from the state and from movements targeting the state to achieve concrete policy reforms. Movements are not therefore always confined to

12 Poster, personal collection of the author.

a relation with the state. Second, queer festivals' identities expression blurs the boundaries between cultural and instrumental goals, between identity and strategy. This becomes possible through community-building.

### **Beyond the state: Queer identity-building as a goal in itself**

Queer should not be understood as an identity, it should be understood in an anti-identitarian manner.

– Commentator on the Queeruption mailing list<sup>13</sup>

The queer 'we-ness' operates through an imagined 'self-sovereignty' against the state and the normative consequences it brings once a movement enters in contact with it through processes of institutionalization. Saying that 'queer is not gay' means that queers do not want to enter in negotiation with the state as other social movements do to achieve concrete policy reforms. But social movement studies have often taken the relations between identities and the state as granted.

For resource mobilization theories, movements are seen as rationally choosing 'political strategies to optimize the likelihood of policy success' (Bernstein 1997: 534). In this respect, social movements interact with the state or political institutions to obtain resources (McAdam et al. 2001). New social movement theories have also addressed social movements' relations with the state and the way the latter interacts with collective identities. These approaches have illustrated the distinction between strategy and identity-oriented movements (Touraine 1981). In fact, for new social movements theories, social movements are divided into 'cultural' or identity movements (Taylor and Whittier 1992) and 'instrumental' or strategic movements (Duyvendak and Giugni 1995: 84-85). Instrumental movements are the ones 'pursuing goals in the outside world for which the action is instrumental for goal realization', whereas identity movements are the ones realizing 'their goals, at least partly, in their activities' (Bernstein 1997). As Mary Bernstein has shown, however, LGBT movements have demonstrated the analytical limits of these two terms, for that identity can become itself an instrument, a political goal per se. So, at first glance, we can say that queer festivals make identity-building an essential goal of their collective action, not so much as to gain acceptance through 'sameness' in

13 Retrieved from the Queeruption mailing list on 4 June 2010. This mailing list does not function anymore.

society, but rather as an attempt to deconstruct already existing identitarian categories, in this case 'gay', 'straight', 'man', 'woman' (Bernstein 1997: 535).

Moreover, Bernstein's model on identity types of mobilization informs us about what she calls 'emergent movements', meaning movements with no establishment in the political arena.<sup>14</sup> For these movements, which lack political access and organizational infrastructure or collective identity, an emphasis on difference will be needed to build solidarity and mobilize a constituency: 'Such movements will tend to focus building community and celebrating difference, as will those sectors of a movement marginalized by exclusive groups encountering nonroutine opposition' (Bernstein 1997: 541). Although some 'emergent' movements might never evolve into more structured organizations, it is important to stress that movements with no access to the polity and with few organizational resources tend to focus on their differences rather on their similarities with other movements. Queer actors in that respect can 'afford' to insist on difference, because they have little to gain from the state. Claiming their difference from the LGBT movement implies building another, new identity, that is as important for their identity as their strategy of mobilization. Queer festivals remind us in that sense of what Francesca Polletta calls *prefiguration* (2002), meaning that festivals organize their actions through the ideals they want to put in place. This concept helps to understand the organizational logics of the festivals that draw upon horizontality. It has, however, its limits when we want to understand why internal conflicts emerge in queer actors' attempts to implement their ideals.

For political opportunity structures theorists, political institutions offer specific opportunities to social movements, allowing for successful collective actions (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 16-19). These approaches have often seen the state as the main challenger for LGBT movements, demonstrating how these movements have been addressing institutions in order to promote rights. Tremblay et al.'s edited collection *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State* (2011) introduced insights into the ways gay and lesbian social movements across the globe interplay, according to open or closed opportunity structures, and depending on the context in which they develop. Taylor et al. have addressed the issues of same-sex wedding performances as a political claim vis-à-vis the state of California (2009). In all these approaches, gay and lesbian movements' state-oriented character channels them into choosing the role of the strategic actor. In this respect, the expression of a collective identity can be deployed at the

14 She uses the example of the US homophile movement.

collective level, as a political strategy aimed at rather instrumental goals (Bernstein 1997: 535).

All the above-mentioned approaches are linked to structural theories. Structural theories relate, one way or another, to the way movements configure their identities and their framings to 'convince' the state. These theories presuppose that movements' final goal is legislative change in specific policy sectors. Especially for new social movements, in which gender and sexual identity are usually included, movements have been seen as strategic actors in their fight for equality between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Structural approaches thus explain little on social movements identities created as a relational response to other movements' processes of institutionalization. But, as queer festivals show us, social movements might want to direct their strategies towards other non-state directions. Movements might desire to stay out of institutionalized processes, in order to keep their 'autonomy'. In fact, not directing efforts towards the state allows certain movements to produce 'subversive' or non-representational identities.

Queer festivals urge us, moreover, to look at social movements' transnational mobilization, since their objective is to attract publics from other countries, too. But here again, transnationalism has been often linked with the state or with supranational organizations. Transnationalism (or transnational diffusion) is defined as the 'relatively deliberate and "grounded" construction of cross-border networks between individuals, groups, organizations and countries' (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002: 697). This concept has been quite prominent in the recent debates of social movement studies, but it takes as granted that transnational movements consider the state as at least one key target of contention. How do queer festivals relate to this premise? As I argued earlier, one of the main objectives of queer festivals is not rights-claiming. The state or supranational organizations are therefore not directly targeted. Their main aim is community-building through practice and discourse. Queer festivals do not address uniquely local publics, but they also attempt to attract publics from other cities and from other countries. Their emphasis on that is evidenced through the different practices they put in place in order to attract these foreign publics. We can assume that queer identity is thus imagined not as local-based but rather as cross-border that wants to escape from strict national boundaries. In that respect, queer anti-identitarianism might translate into anti-border politics as well.

At the European level, transnational LGBT and women's rights mobilization has been often associated to Europeanization, defined as a process that relates to elite-driven, top-down processes of EU norm diffusion in member states (Kollman 2009; Montoya 2013). Different movements address state or

supranational power, some of them targeting directly the Council of Europe and EU institutions (for the ILGA-Europe, see Paternotte 2016), and some others using resources from one state in order to target another government, such as the case of Polish activists in Germany targeting Poland (Ayoub 2013). In this last work, Ayoub points out that, beyond top-down interactions, Europeanization can also incorporate 'horizontal interaction', which functions as an 'important pre-condition for (LGBT) mobilization because the EU does not directly offer such public spheres' (2013: 285). To that extent, and away from top-down processes, what sort of public spheres do queers build through their cross-border networks and to what extent do the latter impact on their identities? For Ayoub, the mobilization strategies of LGBT movements, and the resources they possess at a specific moment, target state institutions and/or supranational organizations. On his analysis on Polish activists from Berlin filing cases against Poland, Ayoub claims that

Europeanization provides different types of mobilizing structures for LGBT mobilization, which come together to mobilize transnational actors to make claims for LGBT recognition in target states (2013: 304).

In this respect, the resources that actors mobilize should align with the available opportunities they possess at that specific moment in order to successfully address the state.

In a similar vein, Kelly Kollman has discussed the importance of political opportunities for LGBT actors' mobilizations in Western democracies (2009). She takes as a case the same-sex union that she sees as a case par excellence of international norm diffusion and socialization, for activists mobilizing both in international and in national arenas. Actors use their resources to target the state. In all these exemplary efforts to address LGBT movements' claims and targets, we realize that states (or supranational institutions) have been playing a primary role in movements' identities for mobilization. The state becomes therefore both an arena (for instance, by getting discrimination cases in the court) but also an actor who participates in movements' identity-building, since movements need to adapt their discourses and practices, in order to achieve stakeholder legitimacy to advance concrete policy reforms. For these approaches, the state largely shapes sexual movements' resources and identities.

Queer festivals inform social movement studies about the limits of structural approaches for movements that look for autonomy from the state, and resort, for that reason, to anti-representational and anti-identitarian identities. In fact, queer 'claims-making' is difficult to imagine as one



addressing the state, because festivals' main aim is the deconstruction of existing binary gender and sexual identity categories. Is the state responsible for producing and keeping these binaries? Certainly yes, but in this case where should queer movements locate their problem? In the law, the administration, the police, the schools? And what about the media? What about society? And capitalism? And the public space? For queer festivals, the target is thus not a single, well-defined entity, but something that is multi-faceted and interconnected.

In this respect, queer identities seem to align more with Armstrong and Bernstein's model of the 'multi-institutional politics approach' (2008). According to this model, actors' perceptions of domination are equally important as domination itself. Breaking away from purely structural theories of state-centeredness, the authors propose to look at the meanings that actors challenge, meanings that are inseparable from the structures in which they exist. Cultural codes are a significant part of the challenge faced by movements because they are not only the product of texts, but they are embedded, enacted and materialized within concrete institutional locations. The institutions producing and maintaining these codes often do it to produce classificatory and hierarchizing systems with symbolic and material consequences for social actors (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 83). Such an approach on domination has direct implications on how social movement studies defines politics. A social movement is the one that can target not only the state, but also other institutions, or cultural meanings (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 84). Within such an approach, thinking queer festivals as 'identity' or 'instrumental' is limited, since they can at the same time fight against multi-faceted domination while focusing simultaneously on identity-building.

Queer festivals align to this model, because they focus on empowerment through community-building by practice and discourse, emphasizing their difference, rather than their similarities to society (Fraser 1990)<sup>15</sup> in order to challenge dominant codes. Queer festivals might

15 Queer festivals remind us in this respect Nancy Fraser's 'subaltern counterpublics'. Queer claims are subject to the exclusionary practices of the official public sphere, as we know it by Jürgen Habermas (1989). In one of her most important critiques, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', Fraser makes another reading of the 'bourgeois' public sphere. According to Fraser, 'members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (1990: 67; emphasis added).



look at the destabilization of classificatory systems in a wide array of institutions (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 87) and ask for material and symbolic change at the same time (Fraser 1997). Drawing upon the 'multi-institutional politics' model, we can argue that for queer festivals, politics has the potential of becoming a 'struggle over which imaginary would have greater sway' (Calhoun 2012: 162). As follows, queer festivals and their publics seem to want to 'shape politics itself and not simply rectify social and economic harms, severe as these were' (Calhoun 2012: 180; also Warner 2002: 82).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, queer festivals invite us to question structural political process approaches to gender and the mobilization of sexual identities movements through a multi-institutional approach to power.

We have seen that most LGBT and women's movements have been studied through their relationship with the state. Undoubtedly, the state's impact on LGBT movements' mobilization and identities has been tremendous. LGBT movements largely suppress their differences from the majority society, strategically to achieve concrete policy reforms (Bernstein 1997: 532). But queer festivals on the other hand celebrate their differences. After having discussed the autonomy claimed by queer festivals vis-à-vis the state, I will look now at their identity-building as a means and a goal, replying to the following question: Upon which identity can queer festivals still mobilize?

### **'This Is Not a Gay Party. This Is a Queer Party': Queer festivals facing LGBT identities through autonomy**

The previous question leads us to another important aspect in how the analysis of queer festivals brings new insights into collective identities studies. The literature on collective identities is enormous, and gender and sexual movements have largely contributed to this flourishing. LGBT movements are usually seen as positioned in the 'difference versus sameness' dilemma. This means that 'the lesbian and gay movement seems largely to have abandoned its emphasis on difference from the straight majority

<sup>16</sup> Michael Warner's concept of 'poetic world making' is very relevant to our discussion: 'The point here is that this perception of public discourse as conversation obscures the importance of the poetic functions of both language and corporeal expressivity in giving a particular shape to publics. The [rational-critical] public is thought to exist empirically and to require persuasion rather than poesis' (2002: 82).

in favor of a moderate politics that highlights similarities to the straight majority' (Bernstein 1997: 532). In a similar vein, Paternotte has argued that 'gay marriage' is not only the result of mobilizing Western liberal values, but it is also a way to reinforce universality by claiming that homosexuals and heterosexuals' claims are essentially comparable. The following statement of this Belgian MP during the parliamentary discussions on the gay marriage law is illustrative of how gay marriage is framed as moving towards sameness. Els van Weert, of the Flemish Social-Liberal Party, argued that the objective of the law was not to authorize the first 'gay' marriage. Instead, she proposed that the law would allow 'the first marriage whose future spouses would be of the same sex, and this constitutes an important nuance' (cited in Paternotte 2011: 24; translation mine).<sup>17</sup> So, if politicians focus on 'sameness', the LGBT movements are invited to do so too as a necessary step to claim their rights. On the contrary, the queer statement 'the LGBT movement is often confined to the sacrosanct trench of gay marriage and adoption' (Da Mieli a Queer 2013) points to the opposite direction. Queer festivals' discourse seems to align against sameness advanced by their 'competing' LGBT movements, and this makes part of their own collective identity-building.

Movements use identities to direct their claims to the state, to institutions or to international organizations (Tarrow 2011: 7-8; Bernstein 1997). Older paradigms viewed identity as a rational way to proceed to collective action: 'if a group fails in these, it cannot accomplish any collective action' (Klandermans 1992: 81), a widespread model in social movement studies until the late 1990s. Today, collective identity is rather seen as a process in the making: 'social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings' (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 91). Verta Taylor's and Nancy Whittier's analyses on the lesbian feminist communities played a key role for this constructivist approach. In fact, the authors proposed a 'social movement community' model, seen as 'a network of individuals and groups loosely linked through an institutional base, multiple goals and actions, and a collective identity that affirms members' common interests in opposition to dominant groups' (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 107). 'Social movement community' actors do not share, however, necessarily common structural locations. Further boundaries can be erected paradoxically within the challenging group, 'dividing it on the

17 '[pas] le premier mariage gay mais bien le premier mariage dont les futurs epoux sont de même sexe [...] ce qui constitue une nuance importante'. E. Van Weert, in *Chambre des représentants, Compte rendu integral*, PLEN 318, p. 60.

basis of race, class, age, religion, ethnicity, and other factors' (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 113-114).<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, however, and as a result of transnational movements, sociologically diverse types of actors have met together in collective action. These actors did not share necessarily common identity locations. But, their differences did not prevent them from joining, for instance, the global justice movements. As the latter expanded through World and European Social Forums, the interest in collective identity shifted from identity politics towards a more open and inclusive model, in which collective identity was based on the different experiences that social actors shared. This new model could be described as one in which 'identity shift[s] from single-movement identity to multiple, *tolerant* identities [...] characterized by inclusiveness and positive emphasis upon diversity and cross-fertilization, with limited identification' (Della Porta 2005b: 186). This definition of collective identity changes from its previous conceptualizations, according to which actors are assumed to share more 'stable', exclusive and unique identities. The global justice movement's 'emphasis on diversity' shifted the social movement literature towards the subjective experiences of the activists, and the multiple identifications they develop through their individual life trajectories and unequal structural locations.

Both the social movements community model and the tolerant identities model closely describe the attempt of queer festivals to pull people together. The social movement community model helps us understand the role of the festival, as a space in which identity-building becomes possible. The multiple identities model helps us explain the sociological heterogeneity of activists and participants in the festivals. But, we still lack references that would help us understand what queer actors want and how they express it. If we assume that festivals' main aim is to deconstruct dominant identitarian categories, by showing and embodying the fluidity of classifications, then we can look at how other similar anti-identitarian movements put in practice their anti-labelling strategies. In fact, queer movements are not the only ones to fight against categories.

18 Their example is taken from the analysis of the American lesbian feminist movement of the 1980s: 'African-American feminists criticize the tendency of many white lesbian feminists to dictate a politics based on hegemonic cultural standards' and this is the reason they embrace different cultural styles' (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 121). What can be derived from this observation is that within the same lesbian feminist 'community', the cultural interpretations of the same narratives vary according to power relations developing within the movement ('hegemonic cultural standards') interrelated with identities being constructed through life experiences ('African-American').

Based upon post-structuralist theories, inspired by Michel Foucault (1978), other anti-identitarian movements have challenged ‘any and all identities (Jasper et al. 2015: 21). Flesher-Fominaya points out, in her study of the Spanish autonomous movements, that anti-identitarian identity can be broadly described as ‘a collective identity that has as a central defining characteristic a refusal to have a common central defining characteristic’ (2015: 66). To avoid strong identifications, therefore, which in the past might have been experienced as oppressive, certain social movements nowadays tend to attract actors with no fixed, exclusionary, and positively defined identities. As Jasper and McGarry point out, we can argue that this might be actually part of a ‘queer turn’:

Scholars and activists today – *influenced by queer studies* – may feel that they are the first to be uncomfortable with strong collective identities, but that is probably because scholarly portrayals of the past exaggerate the homogeneity of groups and identities (2015: 11; emphasis added).

Following this line of thought, abandoning strict identities is a way for queer festivals to go against traditional LGBT identity politics that has amplified sameness and homogeneity.

Unwillingness to self-identify with a defining label is, however, not only a discursive tactic of queer festivals. Their anti-identitarianism is also part of their insertion into specific activist networks and militant spaces. Queer festivals are embedded into those European left-wing scenes which are unwilling to engage in representation as a condition for political action. Emphasizing their anti-identitarian identities, queer festivals follow on from the long tradition of European autonomous movements that tried to take distances from institutional left actors. This internal battle between anti-institutional and institutional movements has led since the 1960s to countless scissions inside the progressive movements field (Katsiaficas 1997). Autonomous movements have refused the representative logic of politics as practiced by the institutional left, a key ‘other’ that autonomous movements engage with in their boundary work (Flesher-Fominaya 2015: 66). In their search for anti-institutionalism, however, these movements are difficult to identify from the outside, while their focus on anti-identitarianism often makes them unable to get named by other actors and movements of the same scene. These last processes have an impact on autonomous anti-identitarian movements’ dynamics, making them susceptible to fluctuated relations and dependent upon contingent activist recruits.

To sum up, queer festivals' collective identities borrow elements from all three main collective identity models, although they seem to be closer to two models. First, the 'multiple, tolerant identities' model (Della Porta 2005b:186), where struggle is based on 'recognition of difference rather than on imputed commonalities in experience' (Nicholson and Seidman 1995: 12). Second, the 'anti-identitarian' model, in which refusal of institutional representation and links with autonomy is emphasized. In the table below, I portray the different analytical models of collective identities in social movement studies.

**Table 1.1 Collective identities models and examples**

<i>Collective identities models</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Identity politics	Social movement communities (Taylor and Whittier)	Lesbian feminism
Multiple identities	Multiple, tolerant identities	Global Justice movement
Anti-identitarian	Refusal to be represented (Jasper et al.; queer studies)	Spanish autonomous movements

So, for queer festivals, anti-identitarianism is both an instrument for mobilization in a multi-institutional world of domination, as well as an identity in itself which helps deconstruct from within normative representations and sexual and gender identitarian categories. Their aim is not policy change through concrete reforms, neither claims to representation in the institutional arena. Queer festivals attempt to occupy a space in which inclusivity and anti-labelling of gender and sexuality is at the forefront. In the next section, I show how I approached festivals' anti-identitarian queer work and how the methods I used for the study informed me about the book's theoretical analyses.

## Methods of analysis

In order to analyse queer anti-identitarian politics, the most appropriate way is to empirically investigate the repertoire of action which consolidates the most activists' sense of belonging. I suggest thus looking at the *festival*, an extraordinary way for queer actors to gather activists, discuss politics, propose collective actions, but also have fun (and sex), experiment in their gender performances and create friendships and affective ties. Queer festivals are political spaces which address activists and participants

from the local and the international scenes through specific discourses, by circulating callouts, texts and images. Moreover, sustained interactions and networks across borders as well as digital communication practices are put in place. Despite these efforts, however, building a long-lasting identity is at stake due to the ephemeral character of the festivals (four to seven days per year) and their anti-representational rhetoric.

Conducting research in a field of emotional proximity might be a risky endeavour. Sympathies, misunderstandings and conflicts can emerge (and did emerge) during such a study, which might place the researcher in contrast with her own preconceptions about the field. Particularly present in ethnographies of progressive politics, social movement scholars have repeatedly addressed the influences we all have by our 'political ideologies and sympathies as well as nationality and possibly social class' (McCurdy and Uldam 2014: 43). In addition to this, I should add gender and sexuality (social movements scholars often 'forget' to mention these as crucial parameters in their field methods). In other words, it is important to stress *reflexivity* as an important parameter of the ethnographic study. Reflexivity should be seen not only as a way to distance oneself from the field, but also as a means to observe and analyse it in a more 'complete' way, beyond prejudices and sympathies which might alter the ways we understand the scopes and logics of the movement (Bourdieu 1992). In this book, I do not use reflexivity as a means for 'self-promotion', however. I rather use it as a tool to signal the power differentials developing during my fieldwork, between myself and my respondents, by providing an account of their experiences rather my own. Moreover, reflexivity helps to prevent my personal imaginaries of how queer activism should look like from the ways in which queer actors and participants prefigure their own political ideals.

My insertion in the field was facilitated by my own political proximity to queer politics – this had its limits as well. As Balsiger and Lambelet note, when one conducts fieldwork in anarchist or queer groups, revealing the goal of her presence might not be a very strategic move (2014: 156). Activists might become self-conscious about their behaviour and they might alter it each time the person identified as a researcher shows up. On the other hand, failing to disclose one's identity of a researcher feels like betraying the trust of the activists, especially if these individuals hosted you and welcomed you in very open ways, as was the case in most of my field visits. Moreover, is a researcher always obliged to disclose her identity to every single participant or just to the organization committees? These are serious concerns that I had to consider. But I need to say that these dilemmas are not resolved once and for all. My insertion in the field as both queer and as a researcher was the result

of a long process which in some cases was smooth, and in others less so. My relation to the field was therefore non-fixed and unstable, but always overt.

As a subject, therefore, in-between my multiple identities, professional, political and sexual, I acknowledge, moreover, that normative assumptions about queer politics are going through the book. But these normative statements should not be perceived by the reader as an authoritative interference of a social scientist in social movement politics. I urge the reader to see them rather as a general contribution to the current debates of social movement studies about mobilization and collective identities in the process of making. Combining a reflexive framework with a discussion on the theoretical debates is for me the most fruitful way to proceed with sociological research.

Working on community-building and identity construction in queer festivals implies a close engagement with the practices that set them up as well as the discourses that circulate. Ethnographic methods are uniquely suited if we want to understand these processes. I draw upon the observation and the description of discourses, consisting of 'official' written material and activists' narratives, as well as practices, that focus on organizational, networking, and cultural activities. The official texts are examined through the written and visual material produced or circulating in the festivals. More specifically, I see how queer activists promote some discourses over others, what kind of vocabulary they use: overall, their discursive strategies, when they discuss what 'queerness' is. Moreover, I check the practices during the festivals as they are seen through my personal engagement (participant observation) and finally I analyse the narratives through the life histories I conducted with several activists and participants. Each analytical category, however, is not autonomous from the other, and thus both discourses and practices are examined jointly.<sup>19</sup>

## Case studies

There is no accurate number of how many queer festivals have taken place since the last Queeruption festival of 2010, and how many keep alive today. We can assume, however, that festivals have been active in maintaining a queer culture. In addition, they have contributed to the reinforcement of social networks between queer activists and other participants across borders for many years (Brown 2007). Of course, 'queer' does not only stand for autonomous

19 For more details on the methodology, and especially the multi-site ethnography, I invite the reader to check the Appendix.

squat-based activism. Many other queer festivals have been taking place, including queer tango festivals or queer film festivals. For example, in 2011, the year I started my fieldwork, there were at least ten queer festivals of such a kind taking place in Europe,<sup>20</sup> and at least 15 in other parts of the world.<sup>21</sup> Although a very important question would be to ask what has provoked this explosion of queer festivals, this book focuses on European queer festivals and looks, in particular, at the ones that advance mobilization rhetoric.

The study of the queer festivals is the result of a multi-sited ethnographic approach which consisted of understanding a variety of perspectives involved with a specific idea ('queer') in multiple settings (Marcus 1995).<sup>22</sup> Despite their variations in terms of size and background, all the festivals studied in this book share common characteristics, such as similar types of organization (horizontal, non-professionalized grassroots). The case studies explored in the book are the following:

**Table 1.2 Case studies/sites**

<i>City/festival name</i>	<i>Year (Date)</i>
Copenhagen/Copenhagen Queer Festival	2011 (25-31 July)
Berlin/QuEAR	2011 (5-7 August)
Oslo/Oslo Queer Festival	2011 (22-25 September)
Amsterdam/Queeristan	2012 (18-20 May)
Rome/Da Mieli a Queer: Culture e pratiche LGBTI in movimento	2013 (4-7 April)
Amsterdam/Queeristan	2013 (30 May-2 June)

20 Queer Lisboa (Portugal); Queer Tango Festival, Copenhagen (Denmark); Vienna Queer Film Festival (Austria).

21 Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film festival and Nigah Queer Fest in New Delhi (India); Tango Queer Festival Buenos Aires (Argentina); Beijing Queer Film Festival (China), Queer Women of Color Film Festival, San Francisco (USA); Vancouver Queer Film Festival (Canada).

22 Epistemologically, multi-sited ethnography can bring important input in social movement studies. We are used to study social movements as monolithic units of analysis, which are created through very distinct macro processes (globalization, Europeanization, etc.). In addition, it is believed that social movement networks are somehow always connected in a conscious and rational way, even if they appear in a cross-national context. Finally, it is very common to examine social movements as part of a 'national' tradition of contention in which they appear (see 'the contentious French', Tarrow 2005: 30). Although it looks reasonable that the starting point of a social movement ethnographic study would be a certain social movement organization, a multi-sited approach makes the researcher evolve her object of study in such a way that the movement is seen as part of the world system. In other words, multi-sited ethnography makes us see social movements not as separate, self-conscious unities with a start and an end, but rather as 'open-ended' processes, 'semi-autonomous social fields' formulated and renegotiated by macro-structures, social actors, and, overall, by the world system to which they belong.



This fieldwork is in no case exhaustive of queer festivals that took place during the years under scrutiny (2011-2013), but it is indicative of two parameters: first, the geographies that make queer festivals easier to develop in specific settings over others; second, my own methodological bias. The former parameter relates to social and institutional factors in the production of queer festivals; the latter relates to research constraints. First, in terms of social attitudes, European publics demonstrate varied – often opposed – views on LGBT tolerance, so a great diversity can be identified inside the continent. All the countries under study, apart from Italy, showed high rates of approval of homosexuality, according to the 2010 European Social Survey, in the Netherlands 92% of people approve it, in Denmark 89%, in Norway 83% and in Germany 81% (European Social Survey 2010).<sup>23</sup> In these public spheres, LGBT issues have been discussed in heightened public debates. As indicated by the same survey, these results are contrasted by the lower rates of approval in Eastern Europe. We can explain this contrast in the different articulations of sexual identities movements, that did not follow the linear Western form: homophile, LGBT, queer. Mizielińska and Kulpa have very insightfully argued that after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries

quite unanimously adopted a Western style of political and social engagement, without much questioning of its historical particularism and suitability for their context. When lesbian and gay activism began to emerge in CEE, the West was already at the ‘queer’ stage, with a long history and plurality of models, forms of engagement, goals and structures. (2011: 14)

For the authors, distinct forms of queer engagement are much more hardly discernible in this region right now, since homophile, LGBT and queer movements have been going through an ‘Eastern time of coincidence’, according to which, elements from the above three distinct Western movements are collapsed into new, hybrid, forms of movements. In that respect, queer identities that take clear distance from LGBT ones are more discernible in Western European settings. Therefore, festivals in these contexts are the most appropriate if we want to understand the distinct path of autonomization of queer politics.

Selecting Western European festivals over others was a necessary step in order to understand queer community-building in capitals located in countries with similar views on homosexuality but also with similar

23 Italy is not part of the survey.

institutional frameworks on LGBT rights. Europe, as the primary focus of this study, is selected as the region whose countries are subject to common sexual minorities' protection norms, through the EU and the Council of Europe systems of binding legal protection (Ayoub 2013: 281). In 2013 – the final year of the fieldwork – ILGA-Europe, the main European LGBT rights organization, published a map classifying countries according to their national legal and policy rights situation of LGBT and intersex people.<sup>24</sup> In this list, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany hit high in the scores (respectively 66%, 57%, 60%, 54%).<sup>25</sup> Only Italy scored very low with 19%. These results align to the European Social Survey's attitudes results, presented above, and indicate a trend of correlation between LGBT policymaking and positive views on homosexuality. Queer festivals were thus more present in countries with similar levels of LGBT social and legal recognition.

Although Italy might seem a bit away from this pattern, the Mario Mieli festival informs us on another parameter which might impact on queer mobilization. In fact, queer festivals tend to take place in advanced industrialized democracies with similar levels of economic development.<sup>26</sup> In this sort of economic models, workers' and new social movements have been actively engaging in contentious politics. The capitals of these countries have hosted for several decades significant intense mobilization activity (Melucci 1996). These movements have been present both in terms of redistribution as well as recognition justice (Fraser 1997). Progressive activists share therefore long histories and profit from resources that newer generations can enjoy in these Western European urban centres. Activists act within political environments with existing infrastructures (dense networks of squats, established left-wing scenes, etc.), and human resources. Many of these cities are in fact, inhabited by mobile young people with high cultural and militant capital that lie behind the organization of such events.

In addition, and in line with reflexivity as a main method of field research, I need to acknowledge, as second crucial parameter of the case selection, my personal bias. In fact, multi-sited ethnographic research entails many risks and is subject to limits of representability, since the number of site

24 ILGA-Europe, the biggest transnational LGBT organization in Europe, has published this map every year since 2009.

25 ILGA-Europe, 'ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map, May 2013', [http://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/side\\_a\\_rainbow\\_europe\\_map\\_-2013may.pdf](http://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/side_a_rainbow_europe_map_-2013may.pdf) (last accessed: 19/09/2017).

26 For a similar argument about the impact of industrialized urban centres on the development of the first homosexual cultures and the homophile movement, see, respectively, Chauncey (1995) and D'Emilio (1998).

locations can be endless. Reducing the field to six festivals that took place in five capitals of the same legal, political and ‘cultural’ zone is a conscious and deliberate decision from my side. Getting to explore sites from contexts with more diverse cultural representations and institutional arrangements might have entailed serious contradictions in the research question of the project and might have impacted on its directional clarity. Moreover, in my fieldwork, I was ‘guided’ to a certain degree by my informants through snowball sampling. My personal networks as a committed scholar in social justice movements have also contributed in the selection process. Instead of dismissing these limits as scientifically irrelevant, I prefer to incorporate them in the study, trying to analyse the reasons behind scientific and personal travel among these cities. Visiting the Queeristan festival, for instance, in Amsterdam twice was not only a choice dictated by the research (I could have avoided the second time), but it was a way to reconfirm some findings. My trip to Oslo, on the other hand, was largely due to personal and activist networks that facilitated the integration in that specific site.<sup>27</sup>

### Levels of analysis

Through ethnographic observations, I examine first the discursive tactics of queer festivals, namely how actors frame and organize ‘deconstruction of identities, boundary crossing, and label disruption’ (Gamson 1989). I identify discursive processes in the texts that circulate in the festivals and in the activists’ interpretations through their narratives. Second, I look at practices, going through the internal organizational, communication and cultural activities that take place in and during the festivals. The following table summarizes the above dimensions:

**Table 1.3 Dimensions of analysis and commonalities across festivals**

<i>Dimensions of analysis (deliberative processes and other modes of address)</i>	<i>Commonalities in the six queer festivals across Europe</i>
Discourses	Circulation of texts, content of texts, performative politics, workshops,
Practices	At the level of organization, transnationalism, networking

27 I would like to thank at this point my friend Helge Hiram Jense for his incommensurable help.

Despite differences that emerge due to local specificities, this book attempts to identify the common mechanisms that festivals put in place in order to build autonomy from state power and institutionalized oppression, which is not a local characteristic, but rather transversal and transnational. Queer festivals, as will become more evident in Chapter 6, in their attempt to create communities through distinct collective identities have transnational visions, that their common practices allow them to do so. This process, however, is often disrupted and local specificities are sometimes exploited by actors in order to stress their own differences. Whenever relevant, these differences are highlighted.

Drawing upon ethnographic evidence on queer festivals, this book contributes to the debate on social movements' collective identities, by analysing the tensions between anti-identitarianism and collective identity. I ask whether and to what extent queer festivals act as arenas which are capable of generating alternative interpretations of sexual and gender identities, and, if so, how.

This specific methodology allows me, therefore, to state the main arguments that I have been mentioning throughout the introduction. First, queer festivals cannot escape from collective identity construction. As loose as this identity might be, festivals go through this process. Second, rather than formulating a clear rational response to what queer anti-identity means, queer festivals engage with specific practices and set the agency which allows them to poetically prefigure the worlds their actors want to live in through community-building. Third, queer festivals' 'contentious' arena is the multiplicity of institutions involved in the sexual and gender binary constructions (state, education, administration, medicine, etc.), the public space, as well as the heteronormative norms they all convey. Finally, in this process of community-building, queer festivals seek for autonomy, taking distances from the state and the LGBT movements. Institutional claims-making and the rights discourse is not part of their agenda. But what is crucial for them is the construction of publics that could have some continuity in time, a target difficult for queer festivals to achieve.

## **Plan of the book**

The book is structured as follows. Chapter 2 discusses the first paths of autonomization of queer politics in Europe. I present traces from secondary literature on the participation of queer actors and groups in the global justice movements of the 2000s. These interactions have been important for

the years that followed because they consolidated a sense of belonging in a community which had been taking distances from policy-oriented LGBT movements. These actors were rather part of other left-wing movements of that moment, with strong transnational networks. Moreover, a first attempt to build queer autonomous politics became possible through the organization of Queeruption festivals in several cities around the world. I argue that those were the factors that progressively led to the creation of autonomous political spaces in the form of queer festivals.

Chapter 3 discusses the first aspect of the practical implication of queer festivals to the construction of their anti-identitarian identity. This relates to their organizational tactics and strategies which allow queer activists to organize the spaces so as to host new members and participants in their 'queer world'. The management of the space and the practices which organize the daily routine of the festivals are not just supplementary in queer publics' identity-building, but they are endowed in it, through their symbolic economy (squat and horizontality being linked to other left-wing autonomous scenes and movements). Space and its organizational practices which accompany it reconfirms, moreover, the embeddedness of queer movements into a tradition of autonomous left-wing politics which dates to the global justice movements and the squatting scenes of European capitals.

Chapter 4 turns to the discourses that attempt to create a community upon the same values. Those are conveyed through the callouts, official documents that determine and fix the contours of what queer signifies. I argue that callouts set boundaries for the festivals' identity, and this happens before they begin. From the callouts, we understand, moreover, that queer seeks not so much to abandon identity categories, but rather to incorporate more, and thus to become more inclusive. Other attempts to build the queer anti-identitarian identity are emphasized, such as inclusivity and autonomy.

Chapter 5 analyses 'cultural practices' that hold high symbolic value among the participants. Dressing, eating, speaking and performing hold their own importance in producing narratives on what is queer. In this chapter, issues of who is really 'queer' and who is less so, are debated. Stories of internal disputes demonstrate the tensions – necessary components of identity-building – and illustrate queer festivals as spaces in which internal symbolic homogeneity is far from being achieved.

Chapter 6 finally situates the findings within a larger picture of transnational social movements, by analysing queer festivals as arenas taking place in *transnational* public spheres. It demonstrates the continuity of the global justice movement (and of other transnational left-wing movements) as well as of LGBT transnational movements on European queer movements, which

have used similar diffusion strategies to create cross-border coalitions. Through the analysis of the languages used inside the festivals, the networking activities among actors across borders, digital communication, and cross-border socialization, the chapter demonstrates how queer festivals build their identities not only at the local, but also at the transnational level. This chapter questions also the temporality of these networks, by focusing on the volatility of queer political projects, very much dependent on contingent participation and activists' mobility.

The final chapter summarizes my argument that an anti-identitarian identity is another form of collective identity, built upon discourses but also practices. This identity is not directly targeting the state. Queer festivals are actually one of the most representative examples of such a case. This book challenges our thinking on identity categories as rational constructions that target only policy change. It offers a practice-oriented view into social movements' collective identities – and other spaces of socialization, in general. Yet, I bring to the discussion the contribution that queer festivals can have an impact on other movements, too, those concerning gender and sexual identities as well as other progressive movements, not only in Europe, but also in the USA and in other parts of the world.