6 Queering Transnationalism

Introduction

1 Da Mieli a Queer festival. Teatro Valle, Rome, 6 April 2013, 11:30

It is time for the 'Bridging the Gap in a Queer Europe/Oltre la dicotomia teoria/pratica' workshop. The Queeristan crew from Amsterdam comes on stage to present the group and share their experiences. The crew is composed of five people, all living in Amsterdam: Tobin (Dutch), Korin (Swedish), Gianni, Stefi (Italians), and Danna (Puerto Rican). Tobin and Korin start presenting Queeristan in English, showing slides from their actions in Amsterdam. Gianni and Stefi translate into Italian.

[...]

Now Andrea Gilbert comes from the organization team of Athens Pride. Her first words are: 'Athens Pride is not a queer organization' (Why does she say this? I wonder.) She gives some contextual information on gay politics in Greece. She claims that gay rights are almost non-existent in the country. She stresses the recent uprising of Golden Dawn,1 as an obstacle to gay rights implementation. I notice her almost native level of English.

[...]

It's the turn of Paulo and Ines. They will present the queer group Panteras Rosas from Lisbon.2

2 On Sunday the 2nd of June Queeristan 2013 will take the streets! Under the banner 'Not in our name ... Breaking down borders ... No one is illegal', we will march against the violent and exclusionary politics of borders and specifically protest the ongoing criminalization of people without papers in the Netherlands.

[...]

As queers, we resist and want to break down social and cultural binaries (male/female, straight/gay, black/white, migrant-non-migrant, etc.) as

1 Golden Dawn (GD) is one of the most extremist far-right political parties in Europe with Neo-Nazi inclinations. It secured 6.92 per cent, 425,990 votes and 18 seats in the June 2012 Greek elections. Despite the association of GD with violence, subsequent polls have shown the party reaching 11-12 per cent’ (Ellinas 2013: 544).
2 Field Notes, Rome, April 2013.
we know from our own experiences that these binaries serve as a basis for discrimination, exclusion and marginalization. In the same way that we resist these social and cultural ‘borders’, we protest the violence exercised at the borders of the nation-state and the repressive policies and mechanisms that keep these borders in place. Additionally, we protest the way in which currently the LGBT rights discourse is instrumentalized by right-wing group in their anti-migrant policies. These groups want us to believe that ‘the progressive Dutch society’ is under threat of homophobic migrants and that is why we need more strict migration policies. We resist this false duality: the Netherlands is not a queer paradise and homophobia is not a phenomenon that arrives with migration.3

In previous chapters, I explained how queer festivals are becoming spaces where their actors manifest their ability to offer interpretations of their identities and needs, as opposed to ‘a comprehensive public sphere imbued with dominant interests and ideologies’ (McLaughlin 2004: 160; Fraser 1997: 81), as well as opposed to public policy, state-oriented claims. Festivals’ identity-work takes place within local scenes of social movement activity, mainly in squats. This identity-work, however, is imagined at the intersections between the local and the global, taking distances from national identities, to which they stand critical. Queer festivals organize identity around the sense of belonging to a community where, first, the nation-state is challenged in its effort to define normative sexualities and genders, and, second, the nation-state is seen not as an ally, but rather as an enemy against queer efforts to break down binaries. In addition to these logics, queer festivals explicitly address international publics. Can we assume therefore that queer festivals have visions of participating in a transnational, rather than a national, public sphere? And if so, how does this impact on their identity-work?

Queer festivals are embedded in cross-border coalitions. Activist groups and individuals travel from different countries to participate in the gatherings. Contrary to LGBT movements whose transnational links and identifications with the nation-state and the European Union or the Council of Europe have been part of their agenda and their claims-making (Ayoub 2016), queer festivals present a specificity regarding their own transnational dimension. Since their politics is not so much concerned with policy and changing the law, they engage little with the state or with international organizations, if not to criticize them for perpetuating the binaries, and thus the hierarchies, of gender and sexual identities. Queer

festivals’ transnationalism lies therefore in their desire to create queer as a ‘post-national’ identity that exceeds national borders. Their effort relates to, but is not included in, what Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) defines as trans-local forms of resistance spanning national borders. El-Tayeb’s definition relates more to queer of colour organizations and their diasporic networks, which is not necessarily the case of queer festivals. But what is important in her definition is how Europe has become a post-national space in which activists can co-create collective identities that go beyond their national arenas. For festivals, queer is imagined as a sense of belonging to a community that extends borders. But for them, borders do not only define the physical lines dividing the globe into countries (Spurlin 2013: 71). Queer festivals perceive them in a broader sense according to which borders are linked to gender and sexual boundaries as well, maintained through fixed identitarian categories. This interest of queer festivals in imagining their identities as moving beyond all borders aligns, moreover, with previous Chicana theorists who have theorized ‘borders’ through a broad inclusion of geographical, political, but also gender, sexual and race boundaries (Anzaldúa 1999). According to these theories, borders do not only divide territories and people for the sake of it, but these divisions are constituted with the objective of placing territories and people into hierarchies through processes of creating the deviant other. Queer festivals set as their aim to challenge these processes of deviance and othering through their transnationalism.

In this chapter, I explore how queer actors produce their festivals as arenas that provide them with the possibility for transnational identities to emerge through the activation of specific practices. The departure hypothesis is that transnationalism does not only constitute a discursive strategy for a political event, and as such it should not be limited to its narrative-building. I rather argue that transnationalism functions as a vision which directly relates to festivals’ identity-work. This is achieved

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4 Post-national for El-Tayeb relates primarily to the queer of colours organizations who draw upon diasporic resources (2011). Queer transnationalism in my respect is more about transnational networks of queer activists, who are primarily defined by their colour, but by their queerness, although both can be incorporated and claimed by some activists. This is especially visible in the Queeristan festivals, where race issues have been significantly taken into account.

5 There is a growing literature on the intersections between queer theory and nationalist studies, which demonstrates how nations are built upon certain ideas of manhood and masculinity, and tend to exclude ‘others’ on the grounds of their sexuality from the national body. The special issue ‘Queering Nations and Nationalism’ (2013) in the journal *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* is one relevant example of this recent trend.
through specific mechanisms and practices. The transnational character of the queer festivals is thus always under construction (Juris 2008a: 210). It is therefore the setting in motion of these practices that allows festivals to enrich their identity-building through the transnational aspect.

I start with a brief theoretical overview of transnational movements. In social movement studies, transnationalism has been largely inked with movements addressing another state or an international organization. Queer festivals fill this gap by providing insights into how transnationalism becomes part of a movement’s collective identity construction. I reply thus to the following question: Which are the practices that queer festivals use in order to build themselves as arenas in which their identity-work of queer can be seen as going beyond national borders? To begin with, I present the results of the survey I conducted at the Oslo queer festival in 2011, which demonstrates the sociological tendency of foreign participation in the festivals. I then proceed to the analysis of the four sets of practices, used as analytical categories to examine the formation of the festivals’ transnational identities: multilingualism, networks, political trajectories and digital communication. These four categories capture the extra-institutional nature of the processes constructing the festivals. Multilingualism addresses a transnational audience and has the possibility to create ‘inclusive deliberation’ (Doerr 2009). Networks and trajectories point at the experiences of activists coming from other countries, bringing in new practices, points of view, and politics in queer festivals. Finally, digital communication and social media consolidate festivals’ collective identities through self-identification strategies, while they also contribute to the archiving of memory. I conclude by arguing that, for queer festivals, transnationalism expands rather than limits their anti-identitarian idea. The blurring of national borders is part of the narrative construction of festivals’ attempts to deconstruct any kind of borders, gender and sexual ones included. Thus, the transnational character of the festivals aligns with the queer identity-work and its normative assumptions. In this effort, however, queer festivals run the risk of a selective transnationalism, placing more emphasis on the transnational than the local.

Moving transnationalism one step forward: A theoretical overview

Sidney Tarrow was one of the first scholars to introduce transnationalism into social movement studies (2001, 2005). He conceptualized ‘transnational contention’ as ‘conflicts that link transnational activists to one another,
to states, and to international institutions’ (2005: 25). Della Porta and Tarrow used a similar definition in their study ‘Transnational Processes and Social Activism’ by defining transnational collective actions as ‘coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions’ (2005: 2-3). Concerning Europe, these transnational processes are part of the political changes occurring in the continent after the late 1980s and intensifying after the early 2000s (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005: 7). These processes have taken the name of ‘Europeanization’, and the mobilization of social movement actors affected by Europeanization as ‘Europeanization from below’ (Della Porta and Caiani 2007).

Concerning specifically sexual identity movements, the growing literature on how they operate transnationally in Europe focuses more on policy-oriented LGBT movements. Phillip Ayoub has described that Europeanization has influenced the legislative achievements of LGBT movements in Eastern European countries, as these new-adopter states are influenced by norm-diffusion from older member-states (2015). Europeanization has, moreover, the capacity of changing the tactics of LGBT movements, when the latter use Europe as a justification of legitimacy to obtain breakthroughs in their own national institutions (Ayoub 2015: 310) and encourage the change of norms in their societies (Ayoub 2013). Europeanization and transnational advocacy networks have, therefore, shaped national LGBT activism, especially in Eastern Europe (Binnie and Klesse 2012; O’Dwyer and Schwartz 2010), by reorganizing their tactics and strategies towards ‘international symbolism’ and by assisting them into yielding valuable resources (Ayoub 2015: 309-311).

LGBT organizations in Europe have found it advantageous to politicize their causes at the transnational level, by building advocacy networks which are closer to European decision-making centres (Ayoub 2015: 297). ILGA-Europe (International Lesbian and Gay Association) (Paternotte 2012; Ayoub and Paternotte 2012) and IGLYO (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth and Student Organisation) (Vella et al. 2009) are illustrative cases of transnational organization of sexual identity movements that seek for influence and policy change primarily at the European level. All the above movements have something in common. They

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6 Or, as he explains in 2001, transnational social movements are ‘socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interactions with power-holders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution, or a multinational economic actor’ (Tarrow 2001: 11; Della Porta 2005b: 177).
address either the nation-state or supranational organizations to achieve policy change. In addition to this, they organize at the transnational level in order to succeed in their claims-making and to coordinate more efficiently the various national and local LGBT movements.

Working so closely with institutions configures to a large extent the way LGBT movements represent the social groups they are supposed to fight for, by emphasizing strong identitarian categories. Using these categories might help to achieve policy change, very important for the material conditions and the symbolic recognition of LGBT people across the continent. But they run the risk of keeping unchallenged identity boundaries, between gay and straight but also between men and women, a political goal in itself for queer movements, as we have seen previously. There is thus a gap in covering this political claim at the transnational level. Do queer festivals fill this gap and how? In order to reply to this question, we need to find out if it is possible to speak about transnational social movements, without having as a target the state or an international organization.

Scholars working on oppositional (in the sense of counter-hegemonic) and horizontally networked forms of contention agree that movements might be called transnational, despite the lack of a distinct target in the form of the state, or other international bureaucratic institution (Alvarez 1997; Escobar 2001; Juris 2008b; Olesen 2005). As Jeffrey Juris claims in his study on anti-corporate globalization networks, decentralized oppositional formations are movements which do not have any ‘coordinated actions against fixed targets’ (2008a: 201).7 Transnational identity-building can thus be a claim in itself for social movements. But how?

In order to understand how queer festivals attempt to synthesize their anti-identitarianism with visions on post-national identities, we should take into serious consideration the way their actors seize the opportunities available in the ‘post-Westphalian’ (Fraser 2007) space,8 and how they put in place mechanisms that establish them in this transnational public sphere. To approach therefore how actors organize their own transnationalism,

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7 Based on the Habermasian definition of the public sphere, Guidry, Kennedy and Zald refer to ‘transnational social movements’ as ‘transnational public spheres’ (2000). In their definition, the ‘transnational public sphere’ is the ‘space in which both residents of distinct places (states or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries’ (Guidry, Kennedy and Zald 2000: 6-7).

8 For Fraser, the post-Westphalian space describes processes of disaggregated sovereignty. Political power is diffused today among states, international organizations, intergovernmental networks and NGOs (2007).
Pascal Dufour suggests analysing actors’ ‘practices’ put in place in concrete settings. For her, movements do not deterministically follow pre-existing transnational political opportunity structures, but they deliberately work to transnationalize their actions and identities through different mechanisms they put in place.

Dufour’s approach of transnationalism through the study of practices relates to the whole book’s discussion of practices as important tools to understand social movements’ identity-work. In the case of transnationalism, looking at practices allows us to understand how queer festivals are constituted as arenas that go beyond their local and national geographies, aspiring and looking at beyond the borders. We can call these mechanisms that festivals put in place to achieve this goal ‘cross-border practices’ since they relate to practices that connect actors from at least two different states. These cross-border practices can be either physical or digital. They share a common characteristic, however, to the extent that they shape physical, embodied counterpublics, and not digital ones. Therefore, cross-border practices build queer festivals as physical arenas where organizers and participants meet and build their identities together.

Cross-border practices are equally important for the construction of the anti-identity narrative of queer festivals, together with the other discursive, organizational, and cultural practices which shape their identity-work. Festivals’ identity project aligns with ambitions which go beyond the nation-state. By creating these transnational arenas, queer activists enrich their anti-identitarianism with the idea of moving beyond national borders, as the Queeristan’s demonstration slogan ‘Breaking Borders’ illustrated very emphatically. Thus, the general problematization of the politics of borders (be it national, gender or sexual) fits well, both with the queer anti-identitarian ethos, but also with the broader anti-border social movements which have been active in Europe since the global justice movement,9 and with which several queer activists share common activist spaces and political socialization overlaps.

Let me begin the discussion with the sociological constituency of the festivals. The results from the Oslo festival indicate a strong transnational component among participants. This is an important finding to understand that queer festivals resonate not only with local but also with international publics. In the second place, I discuss the different practices festivals put in place to transnationalize their events and conform their identity-work to their post-national visions.

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9 See for instance, the transnational European network Queers without Borders.
A strong presence of foreign members, even in isolated contexts

In the online survey I conducted at the Oslo Queer Festival in 2011, I collected data on the geographical origins of the participants and on their actual country of residence. The results indicate a specific trend in queer festivals: many people across Europe travel to the cities where festivals take place in order to participate. Taking into account that Oslo is the most geographically isolated city of all the case studies, I could confidently generalize the results for cities which are located in more central positions in Europe.

To begin with, I asked two questions concerning geography. The first was: ‘In what city and country were you born?’ and the second: ‘In what city and country do you live now?’ The objective was double: to identify the geographical constituency of the festivals and confirm my observation about people who travel in order to attend the events. In both questions, I expected a largely transnational constituency. Both results confirmed my expectations. In the first question, ‘In what city and country were you born?’, fewer than half of the respondents replied that they were born in Norway (46.2%); 46% were born in another European country, and 7.7% in Asia. The composition of the representation of European countries reflects the geographical location of Oslo. Thus, the majority from European countries were born in Sweden, Iceland and the UK, while participants from Italy, Germany, France and Greece were also present.

Although these results reveal a transnational trend, those regarding actors’ place of residence confirm transnationalism to a lesser degree. In fact, 59.3% of the respondents lived currently in Norway (Oslo and the rest of the country), and the rest in different European countries: 22.2% in Sweden, 7.4% in the UK, and 11.1% in Iceland, Austria and Italy. It becomes obvious that many foreigners living in Norway participate in the festivals. Comparing this with the other results on participants’ professional occupations, we could confidently assert that the majority of participants are highly skilled, with high cultural capital, and form part of intra-European mobility. Two critical observations relating to transnationalism can be identified at this point. First, people attending the festival come, in their big majority, from Northern and Western Europe, that is the richest regions in the continent (and in the world). Second, no Eastern European traveller or resident in Norway was identified in the poll, which confirms the Western trend of queer activism in Europe, as highlighted by Kulpa and Mizielinska in their previous studies (2011).

For the rest of the results, see Chapter 2 and the Appendix.
Festivals’ transnational sociological constituency might be an indicator of the efforts organizers put in place in order to construct their publics beyond local scenes. But how do they achieve it in practice? And why? In the next section, I show how cross-border practices allow queer festivals to build their anti-identitarian identity in conformity with their post-national visions on what queer should be.

Anti-identitarianism going beyond borders: Building transnational identities through practices

Queer festivals, as locations where new collective identities are generated and ‘transnational solidarities’ created (Dufour 2010: 103), are shaped through the realization of specific cross-border practices. These practices are performed through physical and digital action. These four sets of practices are illustrative cases of blurring the boundaries between strategic and contingent, in order to avoid binary dilemmas, between ‘acting’ and ‘feeling’ transnational, and between strategy and practice (Favell et al. 2011: 19). I divided these practices into four analytical categories: multilingualism, composition of the organization committees and participants, links with other left-wing movements and cultures, and digital communication.

Multilingualism

1 Queeristan festival, 20 May 2012
Op De Valreep Squat, Amsterdam

The ‘Queer Activism and Class’ workshop is ready to start. I have been preparing it since last night. There are around fifteen people. I invite them to sit on the floor in a circle. As people take their seats, I am told by a festival organizer that three members from Spain wanted to participate in the workshop, having, however, a very poor understanding of English. Sara, a Greek girl, also from the festival’s organization, is standing next to us, and takes the initiative to make a direct translation into Spanish for these members. Apparently, she speaks both English and Spanish fluently. The Spanish people and Sara move to the back in the room. She translates to them in Spanish quietly, while I start speaking."
I am going to take part in a workshop on safe sex practices. I am already late; the workshop has already started. I enter the room. The presenter carries on speaking in Norwegian. I raise my hand. I say I do not speak Norwegian. I ask him if the conversation could instead take place in English. He immediately changes his presentation to English, without expressing any negative comment whatsoever.12

One of the strategic aims of queer festivals is to address an international public. What’s more important than communicating in a language that all people would understand? Language helps to enhance ‘inclusive deliberation’ (Doerr 2009), and permits transnational political events to be more inclusive than nationally based ones, in which a single linguistic format is usually applied. As Nicole Doerr describes in the case of European social forums:

Inclusive deliberation in the European meetings could be an outcome of the multilingual working practices in these European meetings compared to single language formats in national social forum meetings (2009: 93).

For queer festivals, the aim for inclusive deliberation is achieved primarily through the use of languages beyond the local one. This is a strategy that allows them to enlarge their potential publics both at the local and at the international level. This is the reason, many callouts are produced in different European languages (French, German, or Spanish) or non-European languages to attract migrant publics. Producing callouts in languages such as Turkish and Arabic becomes part of festivals’ broader strategy of inclusion, which allows them to attract members from migrant communities. Since 2013, for instance, the queer festivals of Amsterdam and Berlin13 have displayed their callouts in multiple languages, non-European migrants’ languages included:

The call set out is available in other languages including: Nederlands, Deutsch, Español, Português, Italiano, عربى, & Türkçe. Please specify if

12 Field Notes, Oslo, September 2011.
you will be conducting your workshop in a language other than English so we could connect you with community translators.  

Despite using multilingualism as strategy for broader inclusivity, English becomes the de facto lingua franca for festivals’ internal and external communication. All the main activities of the events take place in English: daily plenaries and workshops are indicative examples. Equally, the texts circulating within the spaces are also in English: fanzines, flyers, programmes, advertising posters, rules, and prices of drinks are displayed in English, together with local languages. Personal interactions adapt to the common languages of the people involved, although English is considered the common language par excellence. Examples from everyday interactions in the festivals confirm this. The queer festival in Rome was the only exception. In this festival, Italian was the predominant language of the event. Translation into English, however, was assured by the organizing committee, in order to create an inclusive space for non-Italian speakers.

Dealing with language issues is a basic component for queer festivals inclusive identity. Organizers try therefore to create mechanisms of translation at the level of organizational practice as well. These mechanisms are certainly less organized than in other political transnational events, such as the European social forums, but still very useful for the broader proclaimed inclusive character of the events.

Organizers claim that festivals should be multilingual environments so that more and more members feel included. According to this logic, linguistic inclusivity enhances communication but also comprehension of the political context for a larger majority of activists, without imposing a single unified linguistic code. Although it has been noted that language barriers can constitute a disadvantage for the construction of a European public sphere (Offe 2003), queer activists, like their predecessors of the global justice movement and the European social forums, develop strategies to remove, to the greatest possible extent, these barriers. The logistical arrangements, however, of queer festivals and of European social forums are different. In contrast to the latter’s extensive use of technical infrastructure and skilled personnel, with assured continuous translation through technological systems such as Babel (Doerr 2009), queer festivals, because of scarcity of material resources but also due to their smaller size, negotiate multilingualism in terms of human capital than technological equipment.

This does not mean that linguistic arrangements do not generate tensions. Many concerns from the activists regarding the widespread use of English were observed. During the ‘Queer Activism and Academia’ workshop, organized at the Oslo Queer Festival, Kate, an Australian participant, argued: ‘As an English speaker, I see that some are uncomfortable with that.’ As she further explained, according to her, people coming from countries where English is not widely taught and spoken (e.g., Spain and Ukraine) might have some difficulty in following the everyday interactions or the workshops and performances.

Other participants have stressed the use of the queer vocabulary, as we saw in previous chapters, and its use in English. Terms such as, ‘heteronormativity’, ‘cis’ or ‘essentialist’ circulate within the everyday discussions during the festivals, constituting a fundamental part of the theoretical toolkit used in the workshops. The fact that these are English words add to the difficulties of some participants to follow. As Tobin, a member of the organization committee of the Queeristan festival in Amsterdam, and a PhD candidate in cultural analysis, says:

The majority of queer theory is presented and published in English. So, it’s also like we organize things here only in English. So, that also already appeals that, sort of interpellates international, transnational audience’ (Amsterdam, May 2012).

Using English, therefore, as a lingua franca is not a panacea for solving all problems of intercultural communication. It allows foreign participants who already speak English, however, to feel included in the processes of the festival, empowering them to contribute actively in the collective identity-work.

**Composition of the organization committees and members**

Transnationalism is practiced and encouraged, moreover, in the composition of both the organizing committees and the participants in the festivals. The international composition of the organization committees and of festivals’ publics reveal how queer festivals seize the opportunities
of Europeanization to enlarge their recruit activity. In the urban centres in which most festivals take place, many non-nationals participating in the organizing committees live, work and study. Regarding participants, they come from the local areas but also from neighbouring (or further) countries, as the poll previously indicated.

Let us begin with festivals’ organization committees. Their members are connected through cross-border networks. Although some of their membership is stable, open calls for new members to join take place a few months before the festivals, as illustrated by the callout of the Oslo Queer Festival 2013: ‘Do you want to participate in making this year festival? We have to decide where we want the festival to take place this year! Come and help us decide.’17 Similarly, on 12 January 2013, the Queeristan festival in Amsterdam published a call: ‘We’re starting to organise again for 2013! Meetings every Sunday at the Latin American Center at 17h. If you’re interested in organising with us come to our meeting tomorrow.’18 Encouraging, therefore, a transnational public to become part of the organizing committees constitutes a basic aspect of the anti-identitarian identity-work, to the extent that it sets the basis for the creation of cross-border collective identities. The groups organizing the festivals are very keen to create a core with members from diverse backgrounds: national, gender, and sexual backgrounds. Therefore, the diversity of participants’ national backgrounds is equally part of the festivals’ anti-identitarian identity-work.

The reasons for people from other countries participating in the organization committees vary, from a feeling of belonging to an imaginary transnational queer community, to more concrete affective reasons, such as intimate relationships or friendships. A combination of motivations is also very common. As Tobin, member of the Queeristan festival, emphasized:

Many of them [the old organizational members] are still in the circles; they’re still in the network. But like I said, the group is mostly international, so many people do not have Dutch citizenship, most of them students, so they’re here for a semester or for two semesters. Or many people leave again. But there is such a commitment that people are still part of the network. […] This year one of the participants of last year’s organization flew over from the USA to give workshops. (Amsterdam, May 2012)

But, the cross-border character of festivals’ organization committees is also context-dependent and subject to variations. The Amsterdam organizing committee, for instance, has many international members, whereas in Oslo, three-quarters are Norwegians and in Rome, all the members are Italian.

Diversity in national origins is equally visible among the participants. In fact, many people cross borders in order to attend queer festivals. The pattern is influenced by geographical proximity. As we saw with the poll, residents from neighbouring countries are more numerous than those living further away, making proximity a ‘critical factor’ (this observation confirms Ayoub’s work on Polish sexual minorities mobilizing in Berlin (2013: 291)). For instance, several people from Berlin attended the Copenhagen Queer Festival,19 while many Scandinavians and British are regular visitors of the Oslo festival.

In sum, queer transnationalism is achieved both at the level of the composition of the organization committees but also at the level of participation in the festivals. Diversity and inclusivity is very important for queer festivals since it contributes to the definition of their anti-identitarian identity as transnational, one that goes beyond borders. But, the issue of geographical proximity plays its own role for festivals’ transnationalism, since it might reproduce patterns of mobility reflecting already existing paths of Europeanization, and not challenging them. Therefore, queer transnationalism towards Eastern Europe or even beyond European borders, would be a new jump into queer cross-border solidarities and activists’ coalitions that might have a further influence in their anti-identitarian work.

Activist networks and political subjectivities: Skill-sharing and cross-border ties

Queeristan Festival, Amsterdam, 31 May 2013
Workshop: House of Brag
Time: Saturday, 1 June, 17:00-19:00
Location: Op De Valreep
See Full Programme Schedule
House of Brag is a collective of radical queers and allies from London, UK

Our main project is the London Queer Social Centre. We take over empty buildings around South London to create safe, fun, creative,

19 The distance between Berlin and Copenhagen is only 356 km.
non-commercial social spaces for queers and activists and friends. We’ve run two temporary social centres so far and the third will be happening this June & July. Our workshop will take the form of a discussion and skill-share, where we share our experiences of running squatted queer social centres and ask our audience for their experiences, suggestions, and advice.\(^{20}\)

Links between the festivals allow queer activists to shape a sort of activist map, in which circulation of ideas and skill-sharing becomes possible. This kind of mapping is not new for progressive social movements, or for the European left in general. Social movements as well as institutional actors, such as political parties, have always connected through networks which allowed the creation of transnational channels of communication.\(^{21}\) Personal links are a crucial factor in the maintenance and strengthening of queer cross-border networks. In a similar way to what Ayoub refers to as ‘tactics of European socialization’ (2012: 25), queers exploit the available networking resources across Europe in order to transnationalize their festivals as much as possible. By capitalizing on these networks, organizing committees are able to invite and give space to crews from other festivals. A good example of this is the participation by the Amsterdam-based Queeristan group in Rome in April 2013. The personal links between one of the organizers of the Rome festival with the Queeristan group, made when he was studying in Amsterdam, created these ties, which brought the two groups together. The Queeristan crew, composed of eight activists from Amsterdam, gave a speech during one of the workshops entitled ‘Bridging the Gap: Beyond the Dichotomy Theory/Practice’. For this workshop, the organizers had also invited the Pink Panthers, a Portuguese queer organization; Athens Pride from Greece; and Rachele Borghi, an Italian academic and performer, who was living in Rennes, France, at the time. The organizers’ objective was to share experiences from queer politics, especially those in Southern Europe,


\(^{21}\) In Western Europe, actors on the left coordinated and exchanged information and resources and built common identities after WWII, and the division of the continent into two blocks. Despite local differences, European identities of the left circulated very actively in this space, building similar political categories. One clear example of how this division of political identities operated across borders can be seen, for instance, in the split of the communist parties into Stalinist/pro-USSR and euro-communist/anti-Stalinist groups, and this split has left its mark on Europe. The contemporary identity of antifa (antifascist) (Doidge 2013: 258) and the digital network Europeans against the Political System are further manifestations of the European trend to make cross-border political identifications attainable through networks.
but also, as Andrea Gilbert, from Athens Pride, pointed out: ‘to create a political network for the future’. 22

Similarly, during the Queeristan festival in 2013, members from the ‘House of Brag’, a newly founded queer squat in London, organized a workshop. Their objective was to ‘skill-share where we share our experiences of running squatted queer social centres and ask our audience for their experiences, suggestions, and advice’. 23 The workshop was lively, and participants shared their experiences on squatting and the challenges they face when they try to squat. This networking between House of Brag and Queeristan led to collaboration. As Vinci, from the Queeristan organizing committee, confirmed:

We now had two workshops at least on different ways of organizing with the House of Brag from London. So, we want to do something and talk about how to organize different ways of living, sort of living on the edge, and still making the world better, or at least the movement, the scene better. (Amsterdam, June 2013)

Working together and sharing experiences and skills on squatting is crucial for queer festivals, not only because this process consolidates cross-border networks, but also because it allows the circulation of know-how and expertise, what Ayoub has defined as ‘cooperative transnationalism’, which can take the form of horizontal interactions, similar to LGBT movements across different countries (2015: 285). The difference between LGBT and queer transnationalism lies, however, in the use of the European frame. In fact, as Ayoub highlights, ‘horizontal interaction’ for LGBT movements signifies ‘pressures and actors mobilized across member states, using European frames’ (2015: 285). This means that LGBT movements often use Europe as a way to indicate progress and convince their national audiences on the necessity to become ‘modern’. Europe in this use becomes a discursive strategy. For queer festivals, ‘horizontal interaction’ is rather about skill-sharing and the building of post-national collective identities. This does not mean that Europe is never acknowledged, but when this happens is rather in order to criticize ‘fortress Europe’ and its strict border policies.

22 Field Notes, Rome, April 2013.
Queer skill-sharing is particular and difficult to understand unless one confronts the problems it raises in practice. As we saw in Chapter 3, this skills-sharing relates to squatting experiences: how to squat, how to sustain the squat, how to engage with electric, internet, plumber issues, what to do when police arrives, what are the residents’ rights, how to deal with issues of good neighbouring, what to do with drugs, alcohol, how to organize safe spaces for minorities. This is a big list of questions that activists engaging with squats are confronted to, and cross-border skills-sharing helps a lot in this respect.

Furthermore, interviews with members in the festivals attest that the latter function as spaces in which activists build cross-border political subjectivities. Activists emphasize the need for going beyond borders, be it gender, sexual or national, aspiring to what we called above post-national identities. As we saw previously, many of these actors construct their political awareness through participation in various movements of different countries. Their life histories reveal the building of transnational political trajectories, mainly within political groups of the left, and within anarchist scenes around Europe. The interviews demonstrate that actors participating in the festivals establish political relationships in one place, and keep them alive when travelling or moving to another country. Since many of these activists have lived in places other than where the festival takes place, they tend to keep affiliations with political groups from countries they originally come from or where they have lived in. Robin’s movement engagement is illustrative of the cross-border construction of his political subjectivity.

Robin was a member of the Queeristan festival in Amsterdam. But he was also an active member of the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, the main objective of which is to fight against ‘Israeli apartheid’, as he calls it:

In the Netherlands, I gave different workshops in different venues, anarchist venues, or just specific events for Palestinian issues. I give talks, mainly about the Palestinian situation, under Israeli occupation. So, I am very active on that. I am always invited to give talks. [...] But now with the queer issue, this is very new, and this is where I find myself more and this is where I want to take it more and that’s why I want to support it with more education so that I can take it further. (Copenhagen, July 2011)

For Robin, his queer struggle in Amsterdam cannot be separated from his links with his home nation, Palestine; he is both queer and Palestinian. He describes his intersectional identity very illustratively in his interview:
The queer is part of my personality. But it is very well connected, very much connected to the occupation. So that’s how it’s different [from the other Dutch queer activists]. In the Netherlands, the queer [...] and being an international movement, not specifically about the Netherlands, but having more international activists brings it to more global perspective. Palestinian queer is a very specific, about Palestinian background. So you talk about specific things, in that group. You mainly have the campaign for BDS to stop the occupation. So you have a political agenda. And you are also bringing the queers out in Palestine, bringing them to be part of the society to be there and to be respected. Because the queers are there, calling for a cause that is important to every Palestinian. And it’s good that the members of the queer group are very well educated and, as the majority of the Palestinians, and they’re working hard, and that’s really achieving good results so far. (Copenhagen, July 2011)

In a similar vein, Sergio, a Turkish PhD student in Amsterdam, switches between cross-border activist identities. At the time of the interview, he held political affiliations with transnational radical environmentalist and climate change movements. He had also been politically socialized in students’ movements in France, where he did his BA studies. But it was the climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009, which became the landmark of his political awareness, and changed his mind on social movement politics:

I meet these wonderful people, climate justice action, basically autonomists from all over Europe, who were attracted to this call to Copenhagen. And this was my real contact with Autonomia, without really knowing what it is, again you know, being five years in France, and you just don’t realize what’s happening out. (Amsterdam, May 2012)

Another case is Zoe’s links between her queer political identity and other punk subcultures in squatting scenes in Europe. At the time of the interview, she was both an organizing member of the 2011 Copenhagen Queer Festival, and a singer in a Polish anarcho-punk group:

24 ‘Autonomia’ or Autonomism is a branch of a far-left extra-parliamentary movement based on theories of Italian workerism (operaismo) of the 1970s. Hardt and Negri have developed a great theoretical framework, which has recently developed in the theory of the ‘commons’ (2004, 2009). See Chapter 4 for how Sergio attempted to introduce autonomy theories in the Queeristan festival.
I go back and forth for the band, and we have some rehearsals and tours. I don’t know how it’s going to work now, because now I decided that I wanted to stay in Copenhagen. At least for two more years. I will see how it’ll work. I don’t know, we didn’t want to split, but maybe we’ll have a pause or something like this. (Copenhagen, July 2011)

Zoe moved to Copenhagen in February 2011, attracted by: ‘The anarchist movement [...] and the punk scene. That’s why I was very excited about living in Copenhagen’ (Zoe, Copenhagen, July 2011). The historical scenes of the left in specific Western European cities function as sites of attraction for activists who claim to be unable to feel at home at their own places of origin. As Zoe explains, there are differences between Warsaw and Copenhagen’s activist scenes:

The DIY thing is like priority for me, always. But I can see that it’s working a lot better here [in Copenhagen, so] that I really feel a part of a collective, as a group. And not a leader with all the responsibilities on my head anymore. [...] I really like this kind of very deep reflexivity about politics [...] that we are so sensitive, and so self-[critical], and so open to all these kinds of discussion. I’ve never been to a surrounding that is so open to discuss, and reflect, on things. [...] I was very surprised that we’ve discussed such issues, and in such a matter.²⁵ (Copenhagen, July 2011)

Similar to Zoe, the image of a Western European city as one that offers the space and the people with whom radical activism can be practised, lay behind Sergio’s decision to move to Amsterdam: ‘And it was also going to squats here in Amsterdam for the first time. That kind of stuff. And again, they were meeting in Amsterdam, because there were squats that they could organize this, because there was a good contingency of people here [laughter]. (Amsterdam, July 2012).

But queer festivals’ transnationalism can also be the result of cross-border socialization, manifested in affective relationships. Sergio, living now in Amsterdam, includes the socialization factor in his description of the relationships he had with some friends, who made them also when moving to the city:

My best shot would be to be in the belly of the beast. [...] I came to Amsterdam to look for schools. At the same time CJA [Climate Justice

²⁵ She refers to the political discussions which took place within the Copenhagen festival (July 2011).
Action] had its first post-Copenhagen summit here. Basically because my best friend was studying here. So, I squatted his place for one month. But also, yes, the country of liberties, etc. It was attractive. And more important, I wanted to do my research in English. That’s why I left France at the first place. I didn’t want to do it in French. England, anyway, was out of [the] question; expensive, politically not inspiring, etc., and [the] Netherlands was also attractive about design and culture. So, about for a year after Strasbourg [I was] spending a little time in Turkey, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, going back and forth to many places. Going to Strasbourg again for a NATO summit. Again, it was fast tracking of radicalization, which brought me here. (Amsterdam, May 2012)

For Zoe, friendship was an important factor in deciding to move to Copenhagen. Based on a scholarship she received to study abroad, she joined her friend with whom she used to be active together in a queer feminist group in Warsaw. They decided to engage with the Copenhagen Queer Festival together:

One or two weeks after I moved [to Copenhagen]. And we just went to Ana’s [a member of the organization committee] apartment, without knowing anyone, and we just said: “Hey, can you speak English? We are from Poland; we’d like to do the queer festival with you.” And they started to speak English’ (Copenhagen, July 2011).

Queer actors hold usually multiple political identities, one of the results of their prior participation in other social movements and subcultures in Europe and beyond. Their personal trajectories show that these multiple belongings across various national settings have shaped their political subjectivities, and they become coherent with their involvement in queer festivals. Transnational multiple belongings are very important for queer festivals. Activists bring in their own political stories and experiences, influencing each other through these interactions, and contribute therefore to the creation of queer as an anti-identitarian identity that moves beyond borders. Cross-border communication is, finally, another crucial factor for transnationalizing queer festivals.

Digital communicative and cross-border practices

We have looked so far at the physical cross-border movements that are put in place in order to build queer festivals as transnational arenas. But in this
effort, technology and communication transcending the borders play their own role in maintaining networks and contributing to identity-building. Actors tend to resort to decentralized networking supported by digital means of communication, such as mailing lists and social networks. As Tobin explains about Queeristan:

[It] has a very big international network. I know people here and there, someone else knows people here and there. So, we gather that. And we disseminate the announcement and then we have very standard [public relations] propaganda committee (Amsterdam, May 2012).

Apart from mobilizing human, material and symbolic resources, queer arenas produce self-organized cross-border communication. As J. Juris says, the ‘exchange regarding tactics, strategies, protests, and campaigns’ (2008a: 203) is part of transnational movements’ communication, which – in the case of queer festivals – shapes the emergence of their transnational anti-identitarian visions. Email lists, websites, and social media pages provide space for discussions on the organization and the politics of the festivals. One example of these can be found in the email list queerandnow, which served as a means to spread information among queer activists at the time of the fieldwork. Older mailing lists, such as that of Queeruptation, contributed to the publicity for the majority of queer events before 2010. Digital platforms help the organization and communication of queer activists across the continent and beyond.

The digital tools used by the festival of Copenhagen and the Queeristan festival illustrate how transnational digital communication becomes crucial for queer identity-building and for their memory archiving. The main website for Copenhagen’s festival (http://www.queerfestival.org) provides a photographic archive. At the same time, it gives to its readers useful information about present and future events, as well as information about how new members could engage in the organization of the event. Finally, it has also an informative function, since it is the main platform which displays the festivals’ ‘manifesto’ as well as other policies (and politics) of the organization, for example, on drugs, safe spaces, etc. Multilingualism is also present in the digital communication. The information is displayed in four languages: English, Danish, German and Spanish. An additional website was set up on the music platform MySpace, in which one could find out the festival’s program.26 MySpace used to consolidate the counter-character of

the festival, by hosting ‘DIY songs’, that visitors could listen for free. The songs’ titles were sexually explicit (‘How Clean Is Your Penis?’), or linked to celebrations of the non-normative body (‘Big Size Girl’) and the trash aesthetics\textsuperscript{27} promoted within the festivals (‘Tina Trasch’). A Facebook page also used to support the digital infrastructure of the event.

The Queeristan festival had a similar active digital toolkit, manifested through its webpage (queeristan.org) and its Facebook page.\textsuperscript{28} Queeristan keeps a digital archive of older events, displaying in systematic order manifestos, photos and workshop calls. It is also used as a platform to disseminate information for forthcoming events. Its Facebook page constitutes a crucial means to disseminate information and to diffuse calls for volunteering, participation, and forthcoming benefit dinners, parties and other similar activities. Issues of collective identity are debated on both webpages. For instance, the name of the festival and its supposedly orientalist character (-istan) have provoked intense debate on its Facebook page. Beyond its use in spreading information, digital communication fosters the growth of transnational affective ties generated during the festivals. As Queeristan’s organizer, Tobin, said: ‘Over the email correspondence we have still people from previous years, giving their thoughts’ (Amsterdam 2012).

Digital communication is a cross-border practice par excellence. Queer festivals use several means and tools offered by technology to help them disseminate information beyond their local scenes and attract new but also maintain older members. Furthermore, festivals’ webpages and Facebook pages help in creating and maintaining links between different interconnected actors and political communities in different countries. This supposed openness, enhanced by the impersonal character of digital communication tools, gives the possibility for actors in different countries to get in touch with each festival’s network, and organize their presence in the forthcoming event, either as an individual participant or as a collective one. But digital communication has another function as well. It allows festivals to be displayed in the public sphere as anti-identity arenas, and give a meaning therefore to their events. By emphasizing on and displaying specific vocabularies, images and aesthetics, digital communicative practices participate in their turn in the construction of \textit{queerness} as an anti-identity in which borders of any kinds should not be valid anymore.

\textsuperscript{27} See Chapter 5.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that queer festivals function as arenas constituted by a series of cross-border practices. These arenas are built beyond institutional fields, since they do not directly address the state or other supranational organizations. The transnational character of queer festivals can become the departure point from which to re-examine definitions of transnational social movements.

For queer festivals, identity-building is extremely crucial for their differentiation in the field of social movements. A set of practices is activated in order to achieve this goal. Multilingualism, international composition of the organization committees and of participants, cross-border networks and political subjectivities, and finally digital communication all make up a set of these cross-border practical dispositions at the physical and digital levels. Actors seize the available opportunities to construct their identity through transnational visions. Being queer becomes an attempt to move identities beyond fixed national categories. Transnationalism is produced by queer activists through practices, which span national borders. In this sense, the arenas they create are not used as a strategic frame to enhance institutional visibility and obtain additional resources. The arenas are rather performatively created through cross-border movements, and have as objective to build their own spaces in which they attempt to diffuse their queer critiques. Therefore, queer festivals do not explicitly address issues of transnationalism at the discursive level. The transnational character of the arenas they aspire to is, rather, the result of a series of cross-border practices they activate and promote.

Queer festivals’ transnationalism relates to their anti-identitarian identity-building. Transnationalism is produced by queer actors, as far as it produces them as well. This does not imply that in their effort to break borders, new borders are not put in place. We have already seen that queer festivals are far from utopias, but rather spaces in which oppositional habitus and controversies emerge. The use of English as a lingua franca and the exclusions it produces for people who do not speak it at all or do not feel comfortable with speaking it in public is an illustrative example of the limits of the proclaimed inclusive character of festivals’ anti-identitarian identity. Festivals seem therefore often to appear only as addressing educated nomads whose skills conform to a cosmopolitan ethos.

But beyond the limits, queer festivals’ transnational practices connect with a significant political frame: going beyond borders. The move beyond borders, either sexual/gender or any other type, constitutes a basic
component of what it means to be queer. Therefore, its implementation in practical terms, the setting-up of mechanisms which would allow festivals to become transnational arenas, aligns with the normative idea for the movement, which sets as aim to move beyond fixed identities.

This chapter ends the analysis of the practices that queer actors put in place in order to build festivals’ anti-identitarian collective identity. I move now to the conclusion of the book. What are the benefits of such an anti-identitarian identity for queer festivals? And what are the challenges that such a choice entails?