

**Original citation:**

Charles, Nickie, Wadia, Khursheed, Ferrer-Fons, Mariona and Allaste, Airi-Alina. (2018) 'I'm a feminist, I'm not ashamed and I'm proud': young people's activism and feminist identities in Estonia, Spain and the UK. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 67. pp. 23-29.

**Permanent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/96368/>

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:**

© 2017, Elsevier. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

**A note on versions:**

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

## **‘I’m a feminist, I’m not ashamed and I’m proud’: Young people’s activism and feminist identities in Estonia, Spain and the UK**

In recent years there has been an upsurge in young people’s activism across Europe in opposition to the cultural and economic practices associated with neo-liberalism and, particularly, austerity. This ranges from Occupy and the 15M Movement<sup>1</sup> to the mobilisation of young people in support of Jeremy Corbyn in the June 2017 general election in the UK. Upsurges in activism are often understood in terms of waves or cycles of protest<sup>2</sup> which refer to periods of intense social movement activity interspersed by periods when movements go into ‘abeyance’ and activities continue but in less spectacular, more institutionally-based forms (Tarrow 1994; Bagguley 2002; Mann and Hoffman, 2005). Within feminism the wave metaphor is contentious and has been critiqued for both overlooking the varying temporality of feminist movements in different parts of the world and being ethnocentric (Woodhull, 2003; Mackay, 2011). Furthermore, it is often associated with divisions between waves rather than a recognition of their convergence and the ‘underlying continuity’ characterising feminist movements (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015). Third wave feminism is particularly problematic. The term was coined in the US by black feminists to distinguish their own feminism from both post-feminism and second wave feminism (Springer, 2002) but has been used in many different ways since then (Dean, 2010; Evans, 2015, 2016). Moreover, while the wave metaphor might be helpful in understanding the temporality of US and, to a lesser extent, UK feminisms (see for e.g. Aune and Holyoak, 2017; Charles and Wadia, 2017; Redfern and Aune, 2010; Evans, 2016), it is not necessarily helpful in understanding feminist movements elsewhere, particularly in post-communist and post-fascist societies (Aune and Dean,

2015), where the history of feminist movements has been different from that in the US or the UK (Graff (2003).

In what follows we do not engage with debates about whether the current upsurge of feminist activism can be understood as third or fourth wave, our focus instead is on the repertoires of action engaged in by contemporary feminist and LGBT movements, and the part played by social media and affect in both mobilisation and collective identity formation. The argument we develop is that feminist identities, both individual and collective, are critical to the feminist and LGBT movements we studied; that affect, both positive and negative, contributes to processes of mobilisation and identity formation; and that repertoires of action draw on a range of cultural resources, many of which derive from earlier cycles of activism. In order to develop this argument, we look first at how activism has been theorised, focusing on the role of social media and affect/emotion in mobilisation and collective identity formation. We then describe the ethnographic studies of young people's activism on which this paper draws before discussing the repertoires of action characterising the movements, the way affect operates as both a vehicle of action and an element of collective identity formation, and the importance of a collective feminist identity for these forms of activism.

### **Understanding activism**

Social movement theorists argue that the current upsurge in activism is distinguished from previous social movements by the availability of the Internet and social media which, as well as creating spontaneity and obviating the need for leadership and organisation (Castells, 2012), create new forms of action (Funke and Wolfson, 2014).

This view is promulgated by the news media which, according to Gerbaudo, approach ‘the emergence of any new movement in terms of the technology defining it’ (Gerbaudo, 2012: 6). In the UK, for instance, journalists characterise the current upsurge of feminist activism as a fourth wave distinguishable from its predecessors by its basis in digital culture (Cochrane, 2013), a view that has been taken up by academic commentators (Munro, 2013; Knappe and Lang, 2014; Chamberlain, 2017). While it may be the case that new communication technologies are associated with new repertoires of action they are also a powerful resource both for facilitating forms of action which have been evident in previous cycles of protest and for mobilising young people. Indeed, the exploitation of new technologies appears more ‘natural’ to generations of young activists whose protests and grievances in the 2000s have been directed against older generations of power elites. However, while social media may be an important means of social movement mobilisation, mobilisation cannot be ‘reduced to the material affordances of the technologies it adopts’ (Gerbaudo, 2012:9). Importantly it ‘also involves the construction of shared meanings, identities and narratives’ (Gerbaudo, 2012: 9) in which emotions and affect are central.

The importance of emotions to mobilisation has long been recognised, with early resource mobilisation theory suggesting that social movement organisations highlighted certain injustices and inequalities to potential participants in order to raise righteous anger (Fireman and Gamson 1979) or to allow would-be activists the possibility of finding justifications for feelings of anger, guilt and shame already experienced (Scher and Heise 1992). More recently attention has been paid to the way affect and emotions are involved in both social movement mobilisation and the formation of collective identities (Flam and King, 2005). It has been argued that

social movements allow would-be activists to discover that stigmatised identities (feminist, gay, lesbian, trans) are not in themselves 'deviant' or associated with negative affect but are constructed in this way by society. By claiming these identities, individuals are able to replace feelings of guilt, fear or shame with anger and eventually pride (Whittier, 2012; Kleres, 2005; Britt and Heise, 2000; Castells, 2012). Acting collectively within a social movement allows them to express anger and to channel damaging emotions outwards, holding society or unjust socio-economic, political and cultural systems responsible for defining specific attributes negatively. Activist anger constitutes important emotional capital and becomes part of the resources used by social movements for collective mobilisation.

In addition to constituting an important vehicle of action, emotions are central to the formation of collective identities. Collective identities can be defined as 'the shared identification of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity' (Taylor and Whittier, 1995: 172) and are a product of the symbolic 'meaning work' undertaken by social movements (Snow and Benford, 1992). They provide a link between individuals and social structures and help us understand 'the means by which structural inequality becomes subjectively experienced discontent' (Taylor and Whittier, 1995:171-2). Constructing a collective identity is crucial for both 'recruiting participants' (Poletta and Jasper, 2001:291) and building a social movement (Della Porta et al, 2006) and is achieved through continual re/negotiation within social movement networks (Rupp and Taylor, 1999). These networks, both on and offline, provide important spaces for the creation of 'moral and emotional connection' (Poletta and Jasper, 2001:285; Taylor and Whittier, 1995).

Such connection relies on ‘reciprocal’ emotions which bring social movement participants together (Rupp and Taylor 1999) and ‘shared’ emotions which are directed outwards (Pilkington, 2016:179). Both types of emotion lead to individuals identifying with and feeling connected to others, a process facilitated by social media (Gerbaudo, 2012). This feeling of connection and a shared identity enables individuals to develop positive feelings about themselves (Whittier, 2012). Moreover, being part of a social movement where common attributes, values and a vision for society are shared enhances communication, solidarity and feelings of belonging. As well as fostering inclusion, however, collective identities can also exclude. This can be countered by a commitment to intersectionality which enables the creation of a collective identity with ‘deliberately permeable boundaries’ (Whittier, 2012: 154).

Clearly affect, both negative and positive, is crucial to how we understand social movements; it constitutes an important element of their rituals and performances (Taylor and Whittier, 1995) and is both a resource for mobilisation and an important aspect of collective identity formation (Melucci 1995). In what follows, we explore the rituals and performances characterising our three social movements, how affect operates as both a vehicle of action and element of collective identity, and the significance of feminist collective identities for young people’s feminist and LGBT activism. First, however, we describe the research on which this paper is based.

### **Feminist and LGBT activism in three countries**

The ethnographic case studies of feminist and LGBT activism were conducted in the UK, Spain and Estonia, countries which belong to the EU but have contrasting histories and political legacies.<sup>3</sup> The UK has a long history of liberal democracy,

homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967 and there was an active women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Charles, 2000). There is legal protection from discrimination on grounds of gender and sexuality, and (with the exception of Northern Ireland) abortion and same-sex marriage are legal. Spain experienced a long period of fascist dictatorship under Franco which only ended in 1975. In the last years of Franco's rule autonomous feminist groups and organisations were in evidence and, three years after Franco's death, feminists were demanding the inclusion of women's rights in the new constitution (Kaplan, 1992: 198, 201). Homosexuality was decriminalised in 1995 and there is now legislation for equal pay, protection from discrimination on the basis of gender or sexuality, and abortion and same-sex marriage are legal. Estonia emerged from Soviet control in 1991. Like other countries in the Soviet bloc, 'it skipped the radical 1960s' which, in the West 'covered a lot of ground in terms of women's rights and gender roles' (Graff, 2003:108). Since the incorporation of EU law in 2004, it has laws on equal pay, sex discrimination is outlawed and abortion laws have been liberalised. In 2016 gay partnerships were recognised but, although homosexuality was legalised in 1992, homophobic attitudes are widespread (ERR.EE Editorial, 2014), the law on civil partnerships has not been fully implemented and discrimination against homosexuals is prohibited only in employment (Roudik, 2015; UN Secretariat, 2001). It is in these contrasting national contexts that we carried out our research. In the UK we focused on UK Feminista and the feminist networks associated with it; in Spain the *Feministes Indignades* movement that emerged in Barcelona from the 15 May *Indignados* movement of 2011; and in Estonia the LGBT movement and its leading organisation, the Estonian LGBT Union, based mainly in Tallinn.

For all three studies we used a range of ethnographic methods including (participant) observation and semi-structured interviews; in addition we collected documents, screen shots of web pages, online audio/video/photographic materials and generated our own visual data. We conducted 30 interviews in the UK between November 2012 and January 2014, 19 interviews in Spain between October 2012 and April 2013 and 15 interviews in Estonia between May 2012 and November 2013. All except 5 of the LGBT case study interviews were with women (Table 1). In addition to interviewing we participated in events and actions.<sup>4</sup> All data were anonymised and interview transcripts and fieldwork diaries were coded and analysed using Nvivo. In this paper we draw on our interviews and observational data.

Initially we had intended to focus on activists under the age of 30. In the event, interviewees' ages ranged from 15 to 73 years with UK Feminista having the youngest age profile (average age 23) and *Feministes Indignades* the oldest profile (average age 41). This can be seen in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 also shows the ethnic composition of the sample with UK Feminista being the most diverse and the Estonian sample the most mono-ethnic.

Activists across the case studies were from relatively privileged backgrounds and, while some, especially amongst the *Feministes Indignades*, were experiencing economic hardship, this precarity is different from that faced by many young,



working-class people (cf Pilkington, 2016). Most of the interviewees could be described as middle class in terms of their social and cultural capital and all were well-educated, something that was also the case for earlier periods of feminist activism in Europe and the US. This can be seen in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

We did not ask explicitly about sexuality but many interviewees defined themselves as LGBT.

### **The three groups**

As well as their different national contexts, the three groups take different organisational forms and have different goals. UK Feminista is a very small organisation which is mixed in terms of gender (Charles and Wadia, 2017), committed to intersectionality and aims to bring about a ‘world where women and men are equal’ (<http://ukfeminista.org.uk/about/>). Until 2014 its main form of activity was an annual summer school for training feminist activists although it also organised one-off events, such as the feminist lobby of parliament in October 2012, to draw media attention to feminist issues. It worked closely with other feminist organisations, activists and third sector women’s NGOs and was mainly concerned with combatting cultural manifestations of sexism. In particular it opposed the ‘pornification’ of culture which has led to sexual pressure and bullying of young women to conform to the demands of a hypersexualised culture, whether in school, university, the workplace or cultural spaces<sup>5</sup> (Long, 2012; Banyard, 2010).

In Spain, the *Feministes Indignades* were a leading feminist group during and after the period of the *Indignados*' mobilisation.<sup>6</sup> Their protests centred not only on the gendered impacts of the 2008 economic crises but also on the prevalence of sexism in Spanish society and within the *Indignados* movement itself. They combined militancy with the struggle for a feminist public space and, alongside the 15M movement, they demanded participatory democracy, an end to austerity politics, radical reform of the political system and an end to political corruption. Their fight was also waged against a patriarchal system which continued to reproduce and reinforce unequal social, economic and political roles for men and women within capitalism; importantly they described their feminism as anti-capitalist.

The Estonian LGBT movement began to emerge in the late 1980s with LGBT groups and NGOs becoming more established in the 1990s. The movement brings together lesbian, gay and transgender groups whose common aims are the protection of sexual minorities from discrimination and violence and the advancement of equal rights for LGBT people. Unlike LGBT movements in the West, the Estonian LGBT movement has been a timid social actor historically, not only because of the legacy of illegality under Soviet rule but also because of hostility towards LGBT people (European Commission 2006 and 2012).

As well as emerging in different socio-cultural contexts and having different goals, the groups also have different repertoires of action; all three, however, combine new and old forms of activism.

### **Repertoires of action**

It has been argued that the rituals and performances associated with protest are important sites for emotional expression and a crucible for the formation of a sense of shared identity (Taylor and Whittier, 1995). This was evident in all three cases in different ways.

The repertoires of action of UK Feminista and the *Feministes Indignades* took new forms which were often related to the Internet, particularly social media, and combined them with forms of organising familiar from earlier periods of activism. UK Feminista, for instance, works with other feminist groups and networks to create a repertoire of action which includes lobbies of parliament (24 October 2012), workshops in schools and annual summer schools all of which provide activist training. While lobbying parliament involved participants adopting suffragette clothing and tactics, at their August 2013 summer school, which attracted 500 participants, they promoted Internet activism. The summer school included a panel on ‘Building feminist movements through social media’ (17 August 2013) where activists such as Lucy Holmes (No more page 3, <http://nomorepage3.org/>) and Laura Bates (The everyday sexism project, <http://everydaysexism.com/>) told delegates how to initiate campaigns by using e-petitions and Twitter. There was also a workshop led by Lucy Holmes on Internet activism (17 August 2013). The No More Lads’ Mags campaign, which recruited new participants at the summer school, had been launched using Twitter and an e-petition to mobilise mass opposition to the stocking of lads’ mags by supermarkets (Fieldnotes, 24 August 2013, 15 October 2013).

The *Feministes Indignades* also combine the use of social media with older repertoires of action associated with ‘the activist legacy of the Spanish feminist

movement during the first years of democracy, [1975]' (Gámez Fuentes 2015: 4). They have a very active twitter account @feministesbcn with 9,372 followers (verified on 10 February 2015) and a free access Facebook account. Twitter is used constantly to spread information about their activities (from assemblies to protest actions), to discuss other protests and calls for protest, and for training and awareness-raising.

As well as using social media, the repertoire of protest actions used by *Feministes Indignades* is wide ranging and, like earlier periods of feminist activism, involves public space (cf. Gerbaudo, 2012). They stage performances, always in busy, central areas of Barcelona. Thus a high-impact performance, on 15 October 2011, represented a catwalk of exploited women in front of a Zara<sup>7</sup> store while another involved parodying the traditional Mass of La Mercè<sup>8</sup> in front of the basilica which was full of church and political dignitaries. They engage in transgressive actions ranging from street performances, to the occupation of underground trains, the removal of staple foods from supermarket shelves for distribution to people in need, and participation in the general strike of 14 November 2012. They understand these actions as challenging the heteronormative-patriarchal-capitalist framework. They are 'bad girls' carrying a bold political message; their actions are defiant, spontaneous (or rather seem to be because enormous preparatory work is involved), playful and have a sense of humour. On International Women's Day 2012, they created videos which went viral on the Internet, defending abortion and women's right to control their bodies. The videos, based on the slogan 'Get your rosaries out of our ovaries', contained images of vulvas playing with crucifixes.

These two movements use social media to generate support for campaigns and actions. They also engage in occupying public space to carry out various forms of action, some of which echo those of earlier periods of activism and which bring activists together in emotionally-charged rituals and performances (cf. Pilkington, 2016). In contrast, while Estonia's Internet penetration is above the EU average and a lot of activists use social media, Estonian LGBT and feminist activism seems to rely less on social media than UK Feminista or the *Feministes Indignades* and, according to interviewees' accounts, Internet activism was not very much in evidence. This notwithstanding, social media are used by activists in Estonia: there is, for instance, a feminist Facebook group called 'Virginia Woolf is not afraid of you' (with almost 4,000 members) and a blog, *Feministeerium* (a play on the words feminism and ministry) with some of the key feminists involved being LGBT activists. Furthermore, small, grass-roots feminist and LGBT groups are active on the Internet and social media. Older repertoires of action are, however, more apparent and draw on forms of activism associated with Western LGBT movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the cultural politics of Western feminism during the 1990s. Most publicly visible are the gay pride marches, four of which were held between 2004 and 2007, and cultural activities.<sup>9</sup>

The gay pride marches were initiated by lesbian activists inspired by similar events abroad and can be seen as a form of 'cultural borrowing' (Graff, 2003:103). Some saw the open and proud display of an LGBT identity as important for lesbians and gay men but although gay pride marches were potentially a source of solidarity and pride, many activists feared that they could lead to a backlash against the LGBT community and a reinforcement of the stigmatisation associated with an LGBT identity. Indeed,

the 2006 march suffered violent attacks by skinheads, something which has also been experienced in other post-soviet societies (Mikus, 2011; Woodcock, 2009).

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the context, there is disagreement about which forms of action are appropriate – those which display difference, like gay pride marches, or those which emphasise ‘ordinariness’ and similarity. Those for whom gay pride marches are inappropriate take the view that difference should not be emphasised; they see gay pride as ‘angry activism’ and as an incitement to hatred and misunderstanding. Angry activism for them is a stigmatised form of activism which reinforces rather than challenges the shame associated with an LGBT identity (cf. Ahmed, 2009). Instead they prefer to convince straight society that LGBT people are ordinary and therefore deserve the same rights as everybody else. This gives rise to a repertoire of action characterised by the wish to engage in a less flamboyant and ‘in your face’ way with Estonian society and, between 2007 and 2017, gay pride marches were replaced by cultural activities which became the preferred form of activism. An example of this is the OMA (*Oma Maailma Avardamine* – ‘Expand Your World’) festival, which, compared to gay pride marches, is not so visible and is therefore less likely to provoke a reaction. It is still, however, a public expression of ‘identities and emotions’, albeit in a safer space than the streets, and can also be understood as a politics of visibility (Whittier, 2012:154).

There is a strong overlap between LGBT cultural activities and the feminist movement and many women LGBT activists are also feminist. They are involved in Ladyfest – a non-profit, ‘Do It Yourself’ cultural festival of music, art, film, discussions and workshops which emerged from the American Riot Grrrl movement in the early 1990s. Since 2000, Ladyfests

have been organised worldwide by feminist, lesbian, trans and inter activists, artists and musicians of various genders (see Dean and Aune, 2015) and, beginning in 2011, they have also been organised in Estonia (<http://news.err.ee/v/Culture/cee319dd-d163-4b10-96cf-308d850b0aa2>). One of the local organisers, an LGBT activist, said:

We consciously try to include lesbian, bi and transsexual issues. Most probably, if we were heterosexuals, we would not think of it //...// I believe fighting for women's rights and standing against patriarchy is easier when you don't have a husband at home to whom you have to explain everything. It gives a lot of freedom in my opinion, psychologically. (Stina, LGBT)

Her understanding of activism being easier when you 'don't have a husband' has echoes of lesbian feminist positions in earlier phases of activism in the UK and indicates that feminism informs her politics.

Like gay pride, this repertoire of action was already developed in the West in the 1990s but, increasingly, there has been less reliance on Western models; activists have begun to understand that the specific socio-cultural situation in Estonia requires specific action. LGBT activism mostly takes a cultural form which is not so much about displaying difference as about blending in and emphasising 'ordinariness'; it cannot be labelled as 'angry activism'. Similar forms of activism are apparent in other post-communist societies (Dioli, 2009; Kondakov, 2013).

### **Pride, shame and collective identities**

Affect is important to activism in several ways: it acts as a motivation for involvement; the networks out of which activism grows and which nourish it are experienced as supportive and often overlap with friendship networks; and taking part in activism generates strong emotions which can be both positive and negative (Pilkington, 2016). Pleasure, passion and voice are central to being an activist. Activism involves a sense of belonging, pride, excitement, love, confidence and agency which contribute both to continued involvement and to the formation of collective identities.

This was evident in our case studies. For instance, in the UK Feminista case study, anger and rage were mentioned in discussions of how women became involved in feminist activism. Young women felt angry that they were unable to do everything boys could do at school, they raged at male perpetrators of violence and colluding mothers, and were frustrated at the lack of power they felt in relation to street harassment. They had something to be angry about, their anger was ‘loaded with information and energy’ (Ahmed, 2010:51) and, in contrast to those LGBT activists in Estonia who were reluctant to be associated with ‘angry activism’, they did not worry about being labelled as angry. Feminism allowed them to channel their anger by providing both an explanation for their experiences and a legitimate way of fighting against the injustices that angered them. It enabled them to direct their anger against sexism and towards a more socially just and gender equal society and to transform negative emotions of shame and self blame into positive emotions which were directed outwards and which they shared with other activists. Their shared anger provided the energy and motivation for activism.



Reciprocal emotions within feminist networks are important to sustain activism (Goodwin, Jasper and Poletta, 2001). Young women referred to these emotions when they spoke about how becoming part of a feminist group or finding like-minded women had resulted in lasting friendships and created friendship networks when they moved to a new place.

Similar affective practices are evident amongst the *Feministes Indignades* who support each other through sharing resources, information, chores, job opportunities, housing and clothing. Furthermore, they have created a Liveable Lives<sup>10</sup> group to develop specific practices to support each other and survive precarity. Bonds of affection between the *Feministes Indignades* were important and many saw them as an integral part of feminist practice naming them as ‘sisterhood’.

I think it’s called sisterhood, and sometimes it appears. It’s wonderful! A part of us being mates. I don’t know if many people would be uncomfortable with this word, but we are comrades, we’re sisters in the struggle. (Natalia, FI)

Natalia is clearly aware that sisterhood is not an unproblematic term when she indicates that some people might be uncomfortable with it. She is alluding to its contentious history within feminism which derives from its association with the WLM of the 1960s and 1970s where it was critiqued for making differences between women invisible (Evans, 2015). Here, however, it is being used in a positive way to highlight the support that women provide for each other within *Feministes Indignades* (see also Taylor and Whittier, 1995: 179). Caring and empathy are also important affective practices and, when women gather together, there is always someone who brings food

and drink, they share what they have and hug each other. These bodily and caring practices create affective bonds which hold them together.

While anger, love, care, empathy and friendship are important for both mobilisation and the creation of a feminist collective identity, activism also involved the transformation of shame into pride (Jasper, 2011: 292; Whittier, 2012). This was evident in the coming out stories we were told and brings out an important difference between our case studies.

### *Coming out stories*

In the 1970s in the US 'gay liberation activists began to come out' in order to 'create social change by challenging invisibility, stigma, and assumptions about the nature of homosexuality' (Whittier, 2012: 145). It was an attempt on the part of activists to 'regain the self, to politicise it and to define it for themselves' (Whittier, 2012:149) and was an integral element of their repertoire of action (Whittier, 2012). For the activists we spoke to its function was different; it was not part of a public political action but an individual transformation made possible by the affective bonds within activist networks.

These affective bonds were important for those who defined themselves as gay, queer, trans, bi-sexual or lesbian and wanted to 'come out'. Often the strength to come out resulted from the support of other feminists, both on- and off line, and the realisation that they were not the only person going through these experiences.

I was meeting other feminists and through that I actually came out as a bisexual... So for me that was a life changing... that was when I met people who were... who were like me, but I had all my life been alone in that sense. (Shanaya, UKF)

Feminism allowed young women to find others who were 'like me' and to find the courage to come out. This was not the case amongst LGBT activists in Estonia where, apart from lesbian feminist activists, shame was often associated with an LGBT identity.

In Estonia, the positive affect found in personal contacts and friendship networks and which is important for the development of a collective identity is nurtured in social spaces which are LGBT friendly. However, the LGBT community is weak and there is a reluctance amongst some LGBT people to be seen as part of it. Furthermore an LGBT identity is stigmatised and coming out as gay or lesbian is often fraught with difficulty; this has implications for LGBT activism and the creation of a collective identity. People are frightened of being open about their sexual orientation and simply attending events organised for LGBT people is seen as a form of activism.

You know what, to me it seems that in Estonia, since like Estonia is so small, everyone is so deathly afraid, so I think it is already kind of like activism when people show up at those OMA centre events, and they even perceive it as activism ... (Brita, LGBT)

Furthermore, the weakness of civil society means that protesting and speaking openly has not been common practice in Estonia until recently. Indeed, speaking up has been associated with ‘activism’, which itself has a negative image:

I don't *like* to consider myself a gay activist since *in Estonia* the word [activist] has such a poor meaning. //... // if you openly support any point of view, in Estonia, this is actually still activism. (Lisa, LGBT)

Thus in Estonia the negative affect associated with activist and LGBT identities has made the creation of an LGBT collective identity difficult.

What these findings suggest is that in all three cases collective identity formation involves the re-framing of a stigmatised identity but, while feminist activists in Spain and the UK challenge the negative affect and stigmatisation of a feminist identity, there is less evidence of an effective challenge to the stigmatisation of LGBT identities in Estonia.

#### *Feminist, LGBT and activist identities*

UK Feminista explicitly challenged the stigmatisation attached to feminism by adopting the name UK Feminista.<sup>11</sup> The naming of the organisation was conscious and deliberate and was part of a campaign to reclaim a stigmatised identity; it was a process of collective identity formation (Melucci, 1995) which involves the transformation of negative into positive affect (Taylor and Whittier, 1995: 78). The language used to talk about being a feminist reflected this; young women talked of ‘coming out’ and being ‘proud’ of being a feminist.

I felt like everybody would hate me, and I over-estimated I think the amount that people would react negatively, because actually when I came out and I was openly feminist it wasn't that bad. (Yolanda, UKF)

Yolanda's fear that everyone would hate her arises from the culturally dominant stereotype of 'the feminist' in the UK who is dismissed as 'angry' and 'unhappy' (Ahmed, 2009) and 'read as not easy to get along with' (Ahmed, 2010:582).

In a similar way, all the *Indignades* interviewed identified as feminist and explained that once they had become aware of their feminist identity, there was no going back. For those who had not previously considered themselves feminist (or were uncomfortable with the 'label'), the experience of 15M and being with the *Feministes Indignades* was an important turning point. Some even said that they were no longer afraid to say 'I'm a feminist'.

And for the first time, I was not ashamed to say 'I'm a feminist'. Now, when I say 'I'm a feminist', I say it with pride. And before the events in the square, that wasn't the case. I became empowered in this respect: 'I'm a feminist. I'm not ashamed and I'm proud'. (Inés, FI)

Her experience illustrates the transformation of shame into pride that is involved in identity transformation at a personal level and how it contributes to a feminist collective identity (Whittier, 2012).

Many of the women LGBT activists in Estonia also identified as feminist and were involved in organising feminist cultural events such as Ladyfest; indeed a significant aspect of the limited LGBT activism that exists in Estonia is that it is very ‘female’. One male interviewee said, ‘The Estonian gay movement was actually started by angry lesbian women’ (Ralf, LGBT). This gendering of LGBT activism may partly arise from the alliance between women LGBT and feminist activists, many of whom are the same individuals. There was a view that, in Estonian society, it is not as hard for a lesbian to come out as it is for a gay man. As women and their sexuality are a secondary concern in patriarchal society, their deviance from heteronormativity is not condemned as strongly as it is in the case of men.

In the Estonian context, coming out has been uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous because of homophobic attitudes. Many LGBT people, especially gay men, prefer to lead a quiet life rather than defining themselves according to a sexual identity. There is not yet a sense of collective LGBT identity – the identities of both activist and LGBT are stigmatised and associated with negative affect (Scharff, 2010). Our evidence suggests, however, that a lesbian feminist identity is claimed by some activists and is crucial for the LGBT movement.

## **Discussion**

The case studies provide evidence that feminist identities, both individual and collective, are important for all three forms of activism; that affect, both positive and negative, plays a critical role in processes of mobilisation and collective identity formation; and that repertoires of action are a product of ‘cultural borrowing’ as well as innovation. This means that social movements across time and space share ‘both

issues and modes of campaigning’ (Evans, 2016:411). We look at these in turn, beginning with repertoires of action.

For UK Feminista and the *Feministes Indignades* there is evidence that social media are important as a means of mobilisation and that they are associated with new repertoires of action. Thus, UK Feminista is engaged in activist training and cultural politics; it takes ‘lad’ culture as one of its targets and social media are central to its mobilisation strategies and forms of protest. *Feministes Indignades* have also incorporated innovative features into their activism such as creative performances, online and offline protest actions, a philosophy of care for each other and various mechanisms to encourage a plurality of voices. New repertoires of action, however, are usually combined with older ones (Redfern and Aune, 2010; Aune and Holyoak, 2017) which involve the physical coming together of people to protest in particular places (Gerbaudo, 2012). And in all three cases there is evidence that repertoires of action include forms of action that were typical of Western social movements in the 1960s and 1970s and the cultural politics of the 1990s. In the UK, feminist activists were able to build on feminist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries while, in Spain, the *Feministes Indignades* drew on the experiences of anarcho-feminism in the 1930s and of autonomous feminist groups which emerged during the early years of the post-Franco Transition (mid-late 1970s); their repertoires of action reflect these divergent histories. And while the Estonian LGBT movement’s repertoires of action are less reliant on new forms of Internet activism, there is evidence that a repertoire of action is emerging that differs from those developed earlier in Western Europe and that have been promulgated by EU-based NGOs (Paternotte, 2016). Moreover, as Estonia was ‘behind the iron curtain’ and missed the counterculture and social

movements of the 1960s, the issues that were important in Western countries three to four decades ago became topical in Estonia only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These findings suggest that it may not be so easy to distinguish cycles of protest solely by their repertoires of action and even less by the technologies they use (cf Gerbaudo, 2012). In our case studies repertoires of action combine elements from earlier periods of activism with new elements, some of which are to do with technology while others relate to the social and political context within which movements are operating and the cultural resources available to them.

The central role of affect and emotions to activism is clear in all three cases. Thus, friendships and emotional ties cement solidarity within movement networks and contribute to the creation of a community of interests and collective identity. What emerges strongly from our findings, though, is how negative affect can operate to impede the formation of collective identities and that there is work to be done to transform negative into positive affect in order to overcome the stigmatisation of identities such as feminist, lesbian and gay. This is epitomised in the opposition to gay pride marches as a form of ‘angry activism’ in Estonia and the shame and fear associated with coming out as LGBT or as an activist. In these circumstances it is difficult to generate the positive affect required to sustain activism; the crucible of anger is too dangerous to allow the transformation of individual shame into collective pride and this makes it difficult to challenge the negative affect associated with LGBT identities. This contrasts strongly with the experiences of feminist and LGBT activists in both UK Feminista and the *Feministes Indignades* where coming out was a positive experience, transforming fear and shame into anger and pride. These findings provide evidence of the way negative as well as positive affect is implicated not only in the



formation of collective identities and the ability to mobilise but also in the repertoires of action characterising feminist and LGBT activism in different times and places.

Finally, in all three case studies, feminist identities appear to be crucial to activism. Thus, young women in the Estonian LGBT movement identify as feminist and their activism takes cultural forms with demands for recognition being expressed in artistic and intellectual arenas. Similarly, in our UK Feminista study LGBTQ women find support within the feminist movement and are able to come out and be proud of their activist and sexual identities, while many of those we spoke to in both Spain and the UK talked of their pride at having ‘come out’ as feminist. This suggests that in all three contexts the stigmatisation of a feminist identity is being challenged and, in the case of Estonia, this challenge is critical to the emergence of the LGBT movement. Thus, feminist identities, as well as being associated with the transformation of negative into positive affect at an individual level, at the collective level constitute a vehicle for action, enabling feminist and LGBT activists to engage in forms of protest that undermine oppressive gender and sexual hierarchies. This notwithstanding, the different socio-cultural and political contexts shape the conditions of possibility within which activists operate and, hence, their ability to challenge stigmatised identities. This suggests that while the wave metaphor is helpful in alerting us to upsurges in activism, we need to move beyond it in order to understand both the dynamics of activism and the forms it takes in different times and places.

## **References**

Ahmed, S (2010) ‘Killing joy: feminism and the history of happiness’, *Signs* 35 (3): 573-594

Ahmed, S (2009) 'Embodying diversity: problems and paradoxes for Black feminists', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12 (1): 41-52

Aune, K and Holyoak, R (2017) 'Navigating the third wave: Contemporary UK feminist activists and 'third-wave feminism'', *Feminist Theory*,  
[doi.org/10.1177/1464700117723593](https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700117723593)

Bagguley, P. (2002) 'Contemporary British feminism: a social movement in abeyance', *Social Movement Studies*, 1 (2): 169-85

Banyard, K (2010) *The equality illusion*, London: Faber and Faber

Britt, L and Heise, D (2000) 'From shame to pride in identity politics' in Stryker, S, Owens, T J and White R W eds *Self, Identity and Social Movements*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press pp. 252-268

Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble*, New York: Routledge.

Calvo, K (2013) 'Fighting for a voice: the Spanish 15-M movement' in C. Fominaya and L. Cox (eds) *Understanding European movements. New social movements, global justice struggles, anti-austerity protest*, London: Routledge, 236-245.

Castells (2012) *Networks of outrage and hope. Social movements in the Internet age*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Chamberlain, P (2017) *The feminist fourth wave: affective temporality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Charles, N (2000) *Feminism, the state and social policy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Charles, N and Wadia, K (2017) 'New British feminisms, UK Feminista and young women's activism' *Feminist Theory*, DOI: [doi.org/10.1177/1464700117723592](https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700117723592)

Cochrane, K (2013) *All the rebel women: the rise of the fourth wave of feminism*, London: Guardian Books

Della Porta D, Andretta M, Mosco L and Reiter H (2006) *Globalization from Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Dioli, I (2009) 'Back to a nostalgic future: the Queeroslav utopia' in *Sextures* 1 (1): 24-42

ERR.EE Editorial (2014) 'EU's LGBT survey highlights hate-motivated harassment rate in Estonia', *ERR.EE*, 24 November, <http://news.err.ee/114358/eu-s-lgbt-survey-highlights-hate-motivated-harassment-rate-in-estonia>, accessed 22 June 2017.

European Commission (2007) *Discrimination in the EU*, Special Eurobarometer 263: 11-12, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_263\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_263_en.pdf).

Accessed 7 February 2015.

European Commission (2012) *Discrimination in the EU in 2012*, Special Eurobarometer 393: 38-42, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/eurobarometer393summary\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/eurobarometer393summary_en.pdf).

Accessed 7 February 2015.

Evans, E (2015) *The politics of third wave feminisms*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Evans, E (2016) 'What makes a (third) wave?', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 18 (3): 409-428.

Evans, E and Chamberlain, P (2015) 'Critical waves: exploring feminist identity, discourse and praxis in Western Feminism' in *Social Movement Studies*, 14 (4):396-409.

Flam, H and King, D (eds) (2005) *Emotions and Social Movements*, London: Routledge.

Fireman, B. and Gamson, W. (1979) 'Utilitarian logic in the resource mobilisation perspective' in M. N. Zald and J. D. McCarthy (eds) *The Dynamics of social movements*, Cambridge: Winthrop, pp. 8-44.

Funke, P N and Wolfson, T (2014) 'Class in-formation: the intersection of old and new media in contemporary urban social movements', *Social Movement Studies*, 13 (3): 349-64.

Gómez Fuentes, M. J. (2015) 'Feminisms and the 15M movement in Spain: between frames of recognition and contexts of action', *Social Movement Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14742837.2014.994492.

Gerbaudo, P (2012) *Tweets and the Streets: social media and contemporary activism*, London: Pluto Press.

Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. M. and Polletta, F (eds) (2001) *Passionate politics: emotions and social movements*, Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.

Graff, A (2003) 'Lost between the waves? The paradoxes of feminist chronology and activism in contemporary Poland', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 4 (2):100-116.

ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Intersex Association) 'LGBT family exhibition at Baltic Pride 2011'. <http://www.ilga->

[europe.org/home/guide\\_europe/country\\_by\\_country/estonia/exhibition\\_baltic\\_pride\\_2011](http://europe.org/home/guide_europe/country_by_country/estonia/exhibition_baltic_pride_2011), accessed 13 February 2015.

Jasper J. M. (2011) 'Emotions and social movements: twenty years of theory and research', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37: 285-303.

Kaplan, G (1992) *Contemporary Western European feminism*, London: Allen and Unwin.

Knappe, H and Lang, S (2004) 'Between whisper and voice: online women's outreach in the UK and Germany', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21(4): 361-381.

Kondakov, A (2013) 'Resisting the silence: the use of tolerance and equality arguments by gay and lesbian activist groups in Russia' in *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 28: 403-424.

Long J (2012) *Anti-Porn: the Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism*. London: Zed Books.

Mann, S A and Hoffman, D J (2005) 'The decentering of second wave feminism and the rise of the third wave', *Science and Society*, 69 (1): 56-91.

Mackay, F. (2011) "A Movement of their Own: Voices of Young Feminist Activists in the London Feminist Network", *Interface* 3, 2 152-179.

Melucci A (1995) The process of collective identity. In: Johnson H and Klandemans B (eds) *Social Movements and Culture*. London: UCL Press, pp.41-63.

Mikus, M (2011) “‘State pride’”: politics of LGBT rights and democratisation in “European Serbia” in *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (4): 834-851.

Munro, E. (2013) Feminism A Fourth Wave? *Political Insight*, September, pp. 22-25.

Paternotte, D (2016) ‘The NGOization of LGBT activism: ILGA-Europe and the Treaty of Amsterdam’ in *Social Movement Studies*, 15 (4): 388-402.

Pilkington, H (2016) *Loud and proud: passion and politics in the English Defence League*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Pilkington, H and Pollock, G (2015) “‘Politics are bollocks’”: youth, politics and activism in contemporary Europe’ in H Pilkington and G Pollock (eds) *Radical futures? Youth, politics and activism in contemporary Europe*, Sociological Review Monograph/Wiley Blackwell: London.

Polletta F and Jasper JM (2001) Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283-305.

Roudik, P. (2015) ‘Estonia: Access to Abortions Simplified for Minors’, *Global Legal Monitor*, 28 July, <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/estonia-access-to-abortion-simplified-for-minors/>, accessed 18 June 2017.

Rucht, D. (1990) 'The Strategies and action repertoire of new movements' in R. Dalton and M. Küchler *Challenging the political order: new social and political movements in western democracies*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 156-175.

Rupp, R and Taylor, V (1999) Forging feminist identity in an international movement: a collective identity approach to twentieth-century feminism. *Signs* 24(2): 363-386.

Scharff, C (2010) Young women's negotiations of heterosexual conventions: theorizing sexuality in constructions of 'the feminist'. *Sociology* 44(5): 827-842.

Scher, S. J. and Heise, D. (1992) 'Affect and the perception of injustice', in E. Lawler, B. Markovsky, & J. O'Brien (eds.), *Advances in Group Processes (Vol. 10)*, Bradford: JAI Press.

Snow DA and Benford, R (1992) Master frames and cycles of protest. In: Morris A and Mueller CM (eds) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pp.133-155.

Springer, K (2002) 'Third wave black feminism?', *Signs* 27 (4): 1059-1082.

Tarrow, S. (1993) 'Cycles of collective action: between moments of madness and the repertoire of contention', *Social Science History* 17(2): 281-307.



Tarrow, S. (1994) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, V and Whittier, N (1995) 'Analytical approaches to social movement culture: the culture of the women's movement' I H Johnston and B Klandermans (eds) *Social Movements and Culture*, London: UCL Press, pp. 163-187.

Teune, S. (2005) 'Art and the re-invention of political protest', paper presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECPR conference, Budapest, 8-10 September.

[https://protestkuriosa.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/teune\\_re-invention-of-protest.pdf](https://protestkuriosa.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/teune_re-invention-of-protest.pdf), accessed 13 February 2015.

UN Secretariat Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (2001) 'Population Policy Data Bank: Estonia', [www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/estoni1.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/estoni1.doc), accessed 18 June 2017.

Whittier, N (2012) 'The politics of coming out: visibility and identity in activism against child sexual abuse' in G M Maney, V Kutz-Flammenbaum, D A Rohlinger and J Goodwin (eds) *Strategies for social change*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 145-169.

Woodcock, S (2009) 'Gay pride as violent containment in Romania: a brave new Europe' in *Sextures*, 1 (1): 7-23.

Woodhull, W. (2003) 'Global Feminisms, Transnational Political Economies, Third World Cultural Production', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2: 76-90.

**Table 1: Age, gender and ethnicity breakdown of activists**

Case study	Interviewee Numbers	Age			Gender (self-declared)			Ethnicity		
		15-25	25-30	30+	M	F	Other	White (with/without qualifier)	Other named categories	Unknown/declined to say
<b>LGBT Movement</b>	<b>15</b>	-	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	-	<b>11 (without qualifier)</b>	-	<b>4</b>
<b>FI</b>	<b>19</b>	-	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	-	<b>19</b>	-	<b>19 (with qualifiers)</b>	-	-
<b>UKF</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	-	<b>30</b>	-	<b>15 (with qualifier)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>

Note: Fourteen of the Estonian interviewees were ethnic Estonians and one was ethnically Russian.

**Table 2: Education and employment status of activists**

Case study	Number interviewed	Education			Employment status		
		At school	At university	Completed university	F/T	P/T	F/T Ed or U/E
<b>LGBT Movement</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8 (+ 1 dropped out)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>FI</b>	<b>19</b>	-	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>UKF</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>

---

<sup>1</sup> The 15M movement refers to mass protests and occupations of public space which occurred in over 70 Spanish towns and cities in 2011-2012, in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008 (Calvo, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> According to Tarrow, a cycle of protest may be seen as ‘an increasing and then decreasing wave of inter-related collective actions and reactions to them whose aggregate frequency, intensity, and forms increase and then decline in rough chronological proximity’ (Tarrow, 1993: 287).

<sup>3</sup> The studies were part of a larger, EU-funded project, MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement), which explored the civic and political engagement of young people across Europe in societies differentially affected by totalitarianisms of the left and right. Countries included ‘contrasting social and political heritages from communist to fascist as well as countries with no such experience’ (Pilkington and Pollock, 2015:21).

<sup>4</sup> Further details of the methodology of each ethnographic study are available in the full individual reports at: [http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverable\\_7.php](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverable_7.php).

<sup>5</sup> Since 2014, UK Feminista’s main focus has been the ‘Schools against sexism’ campaign aimed at combating sexism and promoting gender equality in schools.

<sup>6</sup> By 2017 the *Feministes Indignades* had scaled down public action, maintaining activities only on their website and Facebook profile, as increasing numbers of them suffered activist burnout.

<sup>7</sup> Zara is a Spanish fashion chain with shops in over 1400 cities worldwide.

<sup>8</sup> La *Mercè* is the main religious festival in Barcelona.

<sup>9</sup> Gay pride marches were reinstated in 2017 after a ten-year break.

<sup>10</sup> This term comes from Judith Butler’s ‘Gender Trouble’ and refers to lives which are more than just bearable (Butler, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> They are not alone in this. In 2014, for instance, the Fawcett society in Britain encouraged politicians and celebrities to wear T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan ‘This is what a feminist looks like’. Such practices are seen as a process of reclaiming feminism (Evans, 2015).