



Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates

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Abstract

The concept of collective identity has been used extensively by social movement scholars seeking to explain how social movements generate and sustain commitment and cohesion between actors over time. Despite its wide application, collective identity is a notoriously abstract concept. This article focuses on the use of the concept in the literature on contemporary social movements and offers a comprehensive theoretical overview. The central elements of collective identity in the social movement literature are developed, and some key differences in interpretations are highlighted. Finally, some contemporary debates around the continuing usefulness and limitations of the concept of collective identity are explored, with a special emphasis on the challenges of applying the concept to movements that define themselves in terms of heterogeneity, diversity and inclusiveness.

Definitions and central concepts

What is it that allows actors to identify themselves and each other as members of a social movement? How does a set of individuals become a collective entity we can identify and name as a social movement? How is cohesion and commitment to a movement or movement group sustained over time? One important line of inquiry for scholars seeking to understand how a sense of cohesion that leads to collective action is developed in social movements has centred on the concept of collective identity (Hunt and Benford 2004; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Snow 2001). The concept has been explored especially by scholars who felt that more structural, rationalistic and goal-driven explanations for the emergence and persistence of movements, such as resource mobilization theory (Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1973), political process models, (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1989), rational choice models (cost-benefit analysis) and ideologically based explanations left out crucial social-psychological, emotional and cultural factors.

The concept of collective identity is not unique to social movement studies. The concept is also used in studies on nationalism, religion, management, political culture, electoral behaviour, organizational theory and psychology, among others. Within sociology, earlier formulations or influences include the work of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Goffman, Blumer (see Hetherington 1998; or Hunt and Benford 2004), and Georg Simmel (1955) who explored the dynamics of group formation and highlighted elements that are very applicable to the study of social movements, such as the need to understand that group cohesion develops in tension with conflict in specific historic contexts. My focus here is on the use of the concept in the literature on contemporary social movements. I will first offer some of the different definitions and develop the central elements of collective identity in the social movement literature. Then, I will highlight some key differences in interpretations of the concept. Finally, I will explore some contemporary

debates around the continuing usefulness and limitations of the concept of collective identity and point to possible future lines of enquiry.

What exactly is collective identity? Is it something outsiders can point to and recognize? Is it something potential movement members identify with which leads them to participate? Is it something insiders or movement members identify with which keeps them committed and active within the movement? Or is it something different altogether, not a 'thing' at all but a process that is generated through the interaction of movement members as they attempt to mobilize for a shared goal? The concept of collective identity is notoriously 'slippery', and there is no consensual definition (Snow 2001). Whereas Polletta and Jasper (2001) locate collective identity within the individual, defining it as: 'an individual's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution' (p. 285), it is more frequently understood as something generated and created between individuals, as in Snow's definition (2001), which places collective identity in a shared space and explicitly links it to collective agency:

...discussions of the concept invariably suggest that its essence resides in a shared sense of 'oneness' or 'we-ness' anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one more actual or imagined sets of others. Embedded within the shared sense of we is a corresponding sense of collective agency... Thus, it can be argued that collective identity is constituted by a shared and interactive sense of 'we-ness' and collective agency (online document no page number).

In a work that treats collective identity extensively, *Feminist Generations*, Whittier (1995) says, 'I conceptualize...collective identity as located in action and interaction-observable phenomena-rather than in individual self-conceptions, attitudes, or beliefs' (p. 16).

Another influential formulation is that of Taylor and Whittier (1992) who define collective identity as 'the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences and solidarity' (p. 105).

Snow (2001) and Taylor and Whittier's (1992) definitions draw in part on the work of Alberto Melucci (1980, 1988, 1989a,b, 1995, 1996) who brought the issue of collective identity to the fore in the study of contemporary 'new social movements'. Influenced by the work of Alain Touraine (1981, 1985) and Pizzorno (1978), among others, Melucci developed arguably the most systematic, comprehensive and influential theory of collective identity in social movements. I will summarize the key elements of his formulation in the following. Melucci was writing in a European context where class-based movements were declining and new social movements (e.g. environmental, peace, autonomous, feminist) that could not be explained by member's shared class position were emerging. As Hunt and Benford (2004) argue, 'In a sense, collective identity replaced class consciousness as the factor that accounts for mobilization and individual attachments to new social movements' (p. 437).

Melucci's (1995) point of departure was that: 'The empirical unity of a social movement should be considered as a result rather than a starting point (p. 43)...To understand how a movement succeeds or fails in becoming a collective actor is therefore a fundamental task for sociologists' (p. 55). Melucci therefore rejected the idea that collective identity was a given. Instead of analysing a social movement as an already constituted collective actor, Melucci sought to understand how it became a movement in the first place. He tried to bridge the gap between individual beliefs and meanings and collective action by exploring the dynamic process through which actors negotiate, understand and construct their action through shared repeated interaction. Collective identity as a process

involves cognitive definitions about ends, means and the field of action; this process is given voice through a common language, and enacted through a set of rituals, practices, and cultural artefacts. This cognitive framework is not necessarily unified or coherent but is shaped through interaction and comprises different and even contradictory definitions. This point is important because it means that actors do not necessarily have to be in complete agreement on ideologies, beliefs, interests or goals in order to come together and generate collective action, an assertion that counters more structural understandings of what brings and keeps movement actors together (the concept of class consciousness in the Marxist tradition, for example). For Melucci, collective identity refers to a network of active relationships and he stresses the importance of the emotional involvement of activists (p. 45). Collective identity involves the ability to distinguish the (collective) self from the 'other' and to be recognized by those 'others'. A social movement recognizes itself through a reflexive understanding of its relation to the context or environment in which it develops, including an awareness of the opportunities and constraints it faces in a given field of action (p. 47). Conflict provides the basis for the consolidation of group identity and for solidarity, rather than shared interests (p. 48). Collective identity establishes the limits of the actor in relation to the field: it regulates membership of individuals and defines the requisites for joining the movement (p. 49).

Despite criticisms that his work is too abstract (Shriver et al. 2000) and not sufficiently grounded in empirical studies (Gilbert 1998), Melucci's comprehensive formulation highlights the key elements of collective identity that have been developed fruitfully by other theorists analysing collective identity formation in social movements.

The importance of *emotions and affective ties* in collective identity formation has been highlighted by Hunt and Benford (2004) in their excellent overview of collective identity, solidarity and commitment in social movements. Other work stressing the importance of emotions in collective identity formation includes Adams (2003), Jasper (1997), Hercus (1999), de Volo (2006), Hetherington (1998) and Yang (2000). Flesher Fominaya (2007a, forthcoming) shows that a positive emotional experience of movement participation can keep activists involved even when the group is not meeting its political goals, whereas a hostile environment can dissuade activist participation even when their commitment to the cause is strong. Emotional ties between activists can keep activists going through set backs and help them overcome the effects of repression. As the process of defining what 'we are' inevitably involves establishing what 'we are not', another central characteristic of collective identity formation is *boundary work*, which involves creating a reciprocal identification between group members that simultaneously express commonalities and difference with reference groups. Studies analysing how this boundary work takes place and its implications for sustaining or impeding commitment and movements include Gamson (1995), Hunt and Benford (2004), Taylor and Whittier (1992), Rupp and Taylor (1999), Flesher Fominaya (2007b), Mansbridge (1986) and Lichterman (1995). Within the framing perspective, Hunt et al. (1994) have described boundary work in terms of protagonist framing (which establishes in and out group definitions) and antagonist framing (which identifies and devises strategies for interacting with opponents). Buechler (2000) also subscribes to this approach to collective identity. But as Gamson (1997) points out, it is important to note that boundary work takes place as much *between* challenger social movement groups (e.g. different environmental groups) as it does between dominant and challenger groups (e.g. a polluting multinational corporation and an environmental organization). It is also a process that takes place *within* movement groups in the process of consolidation (e.g. between more radical or reformist activists in a given group).

Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue that collective identity formation in social movements is by nature *oppositional to dominant cultural practices*. This implies that movement practices and organizational forms, such as decision making based on consensus, communal living or 'horizontal' democratic organizational structures are conscious and explicit alternatives to dominant paradigms. This aspect of collective identity formation is clearly central to movements practicing pre-figurative counter cultural or alternative lifestyle politics (Futrell and Simi 2004; Hetherington 1998). Aesthetic and lifestyle requirements for acceptance into a movement subculture can act not only as means of establishing commonality between activists but can also act as barriers to potential activists. Because these requirements serve as a means of distinguishing 'us' from 'them', they are also linked to mechanisms of exclusion. As Haenfler (2004) shows in his study of the straight-edge movement that promotes clean living within the punk rock subculture, collective identity can also form in opposition to dominant *sub-cultural* practices. This oppositional aspect of collective identity formation applies to movements seeking to 'resist or restructure existing systems of domination' (Taylor and Whittier 1992, p. 111) and to a greater or lesser degree to other subordinate or challenger movement groups, but not necessarily to conservative movements seeking to preserve the status quo, whose collective identity may rest in part on practices that uphold and reinforce dominant paradigms.

Another key way that group and movement commitment is maintained and bonds of solidarity are forged is through *shared leadership, organization, ideologies and rituals* (Downton and Wehr 1991; Hirsch 1990; Hunt and Benford 2004; Klandermans 1997). Some scholars, such as Wieloch (2002), Haenfler (2004) and Adams (2002), focus on the connection between material culture, ritual practices and collective identity. *Symbolic resources as signifiers of collective identity* can also be very important in movements, such as the black-clothing worn by Women in Black (Helman and Rapoport 1997), or the 'Black Bloc' in some anarchist or autonomous movements (Juris 2005). An integral part of the Black Bloc collective identity is an engagement in direct action tactics, which shows that collective identities can also be framed around particular tactics or organizational styles (Jasper 1997). *Shared meanings or consciousness* or what Melucci (1989a,b) calls *cognitive frameworks* are also important (Seel and Plows 2000; Taylor and Whittier 1992). As Melucci argued, in social movement groups collective identity is crucially linked to a *shared collective action project* (Barr and Drury 2009), and the *context, political field or organizational structure* within which movement groups operate also have important effects on collective identity, as Van Dyke and Cress (2006), Valocchi (2001), Sarabia and Shriver (2004), Gamson (1996) and Whittier (1995) show. As collective identity is concerned with *social-psychological aspects* of mobilization, it is not surprising that much work in this area has been produced by social psychologists (see Gamson 1992). Apart from Melucci, notable examples are the work of Barr and Drury (2009) and Drury et al. (2003).

Collective identity: process or product?

Melucci argued that the submerged networks of new social movements acquire a life of their own and their impact or importance cannot be reduced to visible mobilization events or their impact on the polity. Instead, the processes that sustained or failed to sustain the (temporally contingent) consolidation of a collective actor were what interested him. Because he was particularly interested in movements that generated cultural meanings through their daily interactions, he argued forcefully that collective identity must be understood as a dynamic reflexive process. But this insistence did not sit well with some who wanted to use the concept. One of the most coherent arguments against Melucci's

exclusively 'process'-based formulation is that of Snow (2001) who argues that while process is important, 'it is questionable and unnecessary to contend that the process is more fundamental than the product to understanding the character and functionality of collective identity.' For Snow, the *product* is 'generative of a sense of agency that can be a powerful impetus to collective action, but it functions as well... as the constructed social object to which the movements protagonists, adversaries, and audience(s) respond...(4).'

So which is it? Product or process? Can it be both? Although often conflated, I would argue that while both are legitimate uses of the term, they refer to two different things, not to two elements of the same thing. That is, the 'product' definition, collective identity as something people outside the movement recognize and respond to (whether they are antagonists or sympathizers or even potential members) is fundamentally different from the 'process' definition that addresses an intra-movement phenomenon; however, much that collective identity is shaped in relation to the field or context in which the movement exists. The 'product' definition refers more to a perception of shared attributes, goals and interests (something that can be felt by movement insiders but also by those outside the movement), whereas the 'process' definition is more concerned with shared meanings, experiences and reciprocal emotional ties as experienced by movement actors themselves through their interaction with each other. The 'product' understanding refers to a sort of 'shorthand' reference point for insiders and outsiders that encapsulates key movement frames, issues, tactics, identities, ideologies and orientations. Scholars emphasizing the 'product' aspect of collective identity understand it as a sort of public good produced by movements and available to everyone, a 'public pronouncement of status' which they see as an important aspect of recruitment or incentives that motivate participation (Friedman and McAdam 1992).

Part of the reason for the confusion between 'product' and 'process' understandings of collective identity lies with the fact that the adoption of this concept coincided with the rise and keen theoretical interest in identity politics and identitarian movements (e.g. Futrell and Simi 2004; Gamson 1995, 1997; , Taylor and Whittier 1992; Valocchi 2001; Van Dyke and Cress 2006). Unfortunately, although this coincidence has yielded excellent and influential studies, and furthered our understanding of collective identity, it has also meant that the distinction between collective identity as a process and as a product has sometimes been blurred. Rupp and Taylor (1999), writing on the women's movement, stress that collective identity as it has been used by social movement scholars 'is not essentialist or exclusive or apolitical' (p. 365). But because these movements have as a central concern the mobilization of a collective identity that not only overlaps with but often forms an integral part of individual members' personal identities, collective identity is sometimes mistakenly understood as synonymous with these personal identities (e.g. gay, black, white, nationalist). As Haunss (2000) argues 'the examination of identity oriented movements covers only a specific form of the process of collective identity.'

Snow (2001) distinguishes between personal identities; (those the actor attributes to his or herself); social identities (identities attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space, often consistent with social roles); and collective identities. He stresses that in reality, there is overlap and interaction between these different identities. However, these important distinctions are easily lost sight of in discussions about collective identity in identity-based movements. Rupp and Taylor's (1999) or Whittier's (1995) work on the women's movement suggests that even movement collective identities with strong overlaps with activists' personal identities need to be negotiated and constructed through repeated shared interaction and cannot be taken as given. Buechler (2000) argues that collective identity should be understood in terms of a continuum, with structurally

and historically given identities at one end and collective identities that must be formed from 'scratch' at the other. This approach attempts to reconcile structuralist and constructionist understandings of the term, but Buechler also recognizes that even structurally grounded identities must be actively cultivated to form a basis for collective action. Gamson (1991) distinguishes between 'given' and reflexively constructed collective identities. As Rupp and Taylor (1999) point out, there is a body of work that understands that the collective identities that activists strategically deploy to make public claims and demands are generated by movements rather than being readymade and available to them (Hunt et al. 1994; Klandermans 1992; Mueller 1992). Conversely, Goodwin and Jasper (2003, p. 103) argue that some collective identities, such as African-Americans facing discrimination in the United States in 1955, are widely accepted and activists can take them for granted. Whether *any* movement collective identity can be taken as a given, or taken for granted by activists, is still open to debate.

Related to the 'process' versus 'product' debate is the issue of whether collective identity is the result of protest or necessarily precedes it (Polletta and Jasper 2001). The effects of protest on collective identity are well documented, particularly when activists face repression (Barr and Drury 2009; Fantasia 1988; Gamson et al. 1982). Participating together in protests generates bonds between activists and builds up a shared history and memories that can sustain movements even in periods of low activity or abeyance (Flesher Fominaya 2007a; Hirsch 1990; Taylor 1989; Whittier 1995). Gamson (1991) argues that, 'public demonstrations of commitment under conditions of risk help create solidarity and strengthen it: movement identity is central to the willingness to undertake such risks' (46). Melucci (1995) distinguishes between 'latent' (day to day movement activities such as preparing protests, fundraising, decision-making processes) moments and 'visible' moments of movement activity (actual protests, or other activities oriented towards actors outside the movement). Seel and Plows (2000, p. 113) root the development of collective identity among British Earth First! activists in shared experiences in both the latent (day to day) activities such as sitting around a campfire or sharing time in a squat and visible protest experiences such as direct actions. Taylor and Whittier (1992), like Melucci (1989a,b), emphasize the development of collective identity as something that is constructed through daily interaction between movement members. I too would argue that collective identity is the result of an interaction between more latent or submerged day-to-day activities and visible mobilizations: both of these types of activities provide crucial arenas in which activists can foster reciprocal ties of solidarity and commitment, and clarify their understandings of who they are, what they stand for and who the opposition is (Flesher Fominaya forthcoming).

As we have seen, although collective identities can be understood as (potentially) encompassing shared interests, ideologies, subcultures, goals, rituals, practices, values, worldview, commitment, solidarity, tactics, strategies, definitions of the 'enemy' or the opposition and framing of issues, it is not synonymous with and cannot be reduced to any of these things.

Does collective identity really strengthen movements?

Collective identity is generally thought of as necessary to strengthen and sustain movements, but is this really the case? Boundary work can lead to fragmentation as strong group collective identities or different understandings of collective identity (such as whether or not transsexuals belong in the women's movement, for example) can make building alliances between movement groups difficult (Adams 1989; Coles 1999; Echols

1989; Flesher Fominaya 2007b; Gamson 1995; Lichterman 1995; Snow 2001; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Crowley (2008) shows that individuals who belong to social movement organizations do not *necessarily* identify with the broader movement to which those organizations belong. Does this mean that the existence of strong collective identification at group level weakens collective identity at movement level?

Saunders (2008), writing about radical, conservative, and reformist environmental organizations in the United Kingdom, provides another case study that shows how strong collective identity at the group level works against movement cohesion because of strong differences between movement organizations. Saunders argues that there exists a theoretical muddle between collective identity at group level and at movement level and argues forcefully that the kinds of processes of collective identity formation that Melucci and others describe can only take place at the group level (p. 232). For Saunders, collective identity is a concept best reserved for groups as opposed to movements: 'Collective identity (in the singular) at the movement level does not exist, but *collective identities* do' (p. 232). Saunders argues that collective identity at the movement level is essentially impossible 'unless we choose to water down our definition of collective identity until it becomes virtually meaningless' (p. 249).

McDonald (2002) goes even further, arguing that that collective identity is a conceptual liability, and that scholars should go beyond the collective identity paradigm (which he argues is the new orthodoxy) and instead conceptualize collective action as 'the public expression of self'. He interprets the autonomous activists' rejection of representative politics and emphasis on individual expression as evidence that scholars need to 'explore what may be an emerging paradigm of contemporary social movement, one constructed in terms of fluidarity rather than solidarity, and in terms of the 'public experience of self' rather than collective identity (111).' In the context of the global anti-capitalist movement, McDonald is uncomfortable with interpretations of collective identity that reduce the concept to a set of shared characteristics or principles, or shared affiliation to specific groups, and rightly so. I would argue, however, that it is neither necessary to place fluidarity in opposition to solidarity nor to abandon the concept of collective identity in the face of movements based on diversity or strength through weak ties as long as one retains the processual, as opposed to 'product' interpretation of the concept. Contra McDonald, I would argue that some movements, including the global justice movement, understand and even explicitly define their collective identity in terms of diversity, heterogeneity and inclusivity. Autonomous activists in the global justice movement and other movements such as the British anti-roads movement or radical eco-movements (in theory if not always in practice) reject ideological purity and fixed identities on principle (see Katsiaficas 1997). In reference to British Earth First! activists, Seel and Plows (2000 p. 112) write, 'Most activists avoid definitions of who or what they 'are' like the plague'. One might say a hallmark of the autonomous anti-capitalist collective identity is precisely an 'anti-identitarian' orientation. In Western Europe, autonomous activists would not subscribe to the notion of consensual definitions of movement membership. Instead, criteria for membership are highly elastic or tolerant (Della Porta 2005; Flesher Fominaya 2007b). Smith (2001) describes the global justice movement's strength through inclusivity. Yet activists *do* self-identify as belonging to or being a part of a broader global 'movement of movements', even when they might reject or categorize as 'other' groups in their network who might *also* feel they belong to the broader movement (Flesher Fominaya 2007b).

Activists can also identify with a global movement without feeling strongly identified with any particular group in it (Gamson 1991 p. 40). In fact, activists within many

autonomous networks have the idea that networks are 'biodegradable' (a term used among anti-roads and anti-capitalist activists in the United Kingdom), which means that groups form and dissolve with regularity, they do not presuppose their own permanence but conversely presuppose their temporal contingency: following the practicality principle, when they cease to be useful or satisfying, they will dissolve and elements of the group or 'space' will resurface in another form. Multi-militancy means activists overlap in many different combinations in different network groups. This is a feature of many movement networks (see, for example, Della Porta 2005; Flesher Fominaya 2007b; Rupp and Taylor 1999) including autonomous ones. This may or may not work against the development of a strong group collective identity but it is a defining feature of some network or movement collective identities. Melucci (1995, p. 123), writing mainly about Italian New Social Movements in the 1980s and 1990s, stressed the provisional nature of commitment and the circulation of individuals in different groups and organizations in contemporary movements. If anything that tendency has increased in contemporary anti or alters systemic movements.

The ability to generate a movement collective identity across differences is by no means limited to autonomous movements. In her work on the women's movement in the United States, Mansbridge (1986) talks about pursuing a strategy of 'strength of weak ties' (Granovetter 1973). Mansbridge (1986) points out that the ideology of the women's movement is inclusive, a fact that helps counter the effects of exclusivity that come from strong collective identity at group or organization level. Goodwin and Jasper (2003, p. 148) write about cross-cutting ties (social groups with social connections that overlap with other groups) arguing that other things being equal, cross-cutting ties reduce the likelihood that contradictory or incompatible identities will form between groups. In their work on the women's movement, Rupp and Taylor (1999) argue that 'a collective identity approach to defining feminism ...both avoids a static notion of identity and sheds light on how feminists with conflicting interests and ideas are able to talk across their differences' (p. 366). They show that even fierce loyalty to individual groups does not preclude development of a collective identity at movement level. The point is, just because a high level of identification with a particular group might lead activists to reject or exclude as illegitimate other members or groups of the movement network does not mean there is no collective identity at the movement level. Saunders (2008) argues that groups with non-comprehensive collective identities (by which she means groups who are together for strategic reasons only but have little in common, see p. 229) can build movements across different groups. But Rupp and Taylor's (1999) work shows that movement building and movement collective identity can exist *despite strong collective identity at the group level* and even groups that compete fiercely can also come together in coalitions.

Gamson (1991) drew a theoretical distinction between collective identity at organizational, movement and solidarity levels and argued that these layers were embedded: the organizational layer 'refers to identities built around movement carriers' and may or may not be embedded in the movement layer which encompasses all carriers, and which in turn may or may not be embedded in a solidarity layer based on people's social location (e.g. as workers or black women) (p. 40). He argued that peace activists' identity often did 'not rest on any particular movement carrier; many support different efforts at different moments while subordinating all carriers to the broader movement identity' (idem). Gamson's formulation allows for the possibility of a weakening or loosening of the strength of collective identity as one moves from the group to the movement and then to the solidarity levels, without abandoning the concept altogether (see Rupp and Taylor

1999). And the various studies cited earlier show that the relation between levels of collective identity at group and movement levels is even more complex than Gamson's original formulation suggests (see Hunt and Benford 2004 for more typologies of levels of collective identity).

Finally, to argue there is no such thing as movement collective identity comes up against the fact that even when groups or organizations within a movement dissolve, the movement and movement collective identity do not necessarily disappear. And even when a movement is inactive, the collective identity forged in that movement can live on and become available to future waves of mobilization, as Taylor's (1989) work on abeyance or Whittier's (1995) work on collective identity and political generations shows.

Rather than conclude that because strong collective identity at the group level *can* lead to movement fragmentation scholars should abandon the use of the concept at the movement level, it would be better to follow Snow's (2001) suggestion that scholars need to examine more closely the relations between different levels of collective identity. If factionalization is a key feature of many movement milieus, then that would call for even more work on understanding how movements build a shared identity across difference. More empirical work needs to be carried out to understand the nexus between individual feelings of belonging, commitment and identification, and group, network, movement, and solidarity collective identities. What are the processes involved in moving from a more particularistic collective identity to a more encompassing one? Is an ideology of inclusivity what matters or are cultural practices more important? Another approach to understanding collective identity would be to understand its role in determining why people *leave* movements (see Klandermans 2004) or movement groups. What is it that causes a collective identity to disintegrate? Or do some collective identities persist even when movements decline as Whittier (1995) suggests?

The concept of collective identity has been used to analyse social movements of all kinds, from progressive to reactionary, radical to conservative, identity-based to heterogeneous, diffuse to hierarchical and has made important contributions to our understanding of social movements. By highlighting the importance of shared collective experiences and practice and the importance of affective ties and emotional factors in collective identity formation, scholarship in this area has not only served to illuminate key processes that sustain or debilitate movements over time, but has also contributed to a growing body of literature that focuses on cultural and emotional dynamics of mobilization. Through its analysis of boundary work, collective identity scholarship has also shed light on why groups that on the surface seem to be compatible in terms of goals can nevertheless have problems building alliances. However, highly elastic collective identities can have the effect of facilitating alliances between groups who might not appear to have much in common, as in the Global Justice Movement. Despite lively debates around the definition and even continuing usefulness of the concept, a real engagement with the literature shows that far from being an orthodox paradigm that should be abandoned collective identity is a concept that continues to yield rich insights into the understanding of social movements.

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Short Biography

Cristina Flesher Fominaya has conducted ethnographic research on the Spanish Green Parties, the British Anti-Roads Movement, and Anti-globalization Networks in Western Europe. She has a particular interest in autonomous social movement groups, and the possibilities and challenges of autonomous movement. Her work analyzes, among other things, the dynamics of participatory democracy within movement groups, collective identity formation, and tensions within the Global Justice Movement between institutional left and autonomous actors. She has recently published work in *International Review of Social History* and *South European Society & Politics*. Research in progress includes analysis of the 13-M Madrid protests following the 11-M bombings in 2004, and a comparative study of commemoration of victims of terrorism in Madrid and New York following the 11M and 9/11 terrorist attacks. Dr Flesher Fominaya holds a MA and PhD in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, and a BA *summa cum laude* in International Relations from the University of Minnesota. She has won numerous international scholarships and prizes including the National Science Foundation Fellowship, the German Marshall Fellowship and the Leo Lowenthal Prize for Outstanding Paper in Culture and Critical Theory awarded by the University of California, Berkeley. She was assistant professor at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and is currently Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Aberdeen.

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