‘One big family’: emotion, affect and the meaning of activism

Following discussion of the ideological dimensions of EDL activism (Chapters 4 and 5) and of the particular ‘injustice frame’ (Jasper, 1998: 398) of ‘second-class citizens’ underpinning the rationalised meanings attached to EDL activism (Chapter 6), attention turns here to the emotional and affective dimensions of activism. The recent rehabilitation of ‘the emotional’ in the field of social movement studies has led to a recognition that emotionality does not equate to irrationality (1998: 398) and that the rational and the emotional may be entwined in social movement participation rather than constituting alternative explanations of motivation to engage (Crossley, 2002: 50). Indeed, Jasper (1998: 398) argues many aspects of collective action in social movements that have been viewed as primarily cognitive in fact have emotional dimensions to them.

This chapter starts with a brief discussion of theoretical debates on emotion and affect in relation to social movements and adopts the notion of ‘affective practice’ (Wetherell, 2012: 4) as a means of understanding and exploring the role of emotion in EDL activism as more than the social expression of feelings that drive or accompany rationalised action. The second section of the chapter considers the principal form of EDL activism – participation in street demonstrations – as one such site of affective practice. Demonstrations, it is suggested, are experienced by respondents as not only a place for achievement of the rational goal of ‘getting your message across’ but also, emotionally, as ‘a good day out’. The associated pleasures of the ‘demo buzz’ and, for some, of violence or ‘disorder’ are also discussed. The third section engages with the contention (Virchow, 2007) that, in the case of far right movements, ‘collective emotions’ are consciously generated at demonstrations and other events to integrate supporters and sustain movements. In this section the forms and means – the use of symbols, colours, chanting and other performative acts – by which the emotional collective is formed within the EDL are considered, in particular whether these emotions are instrumentally orchestrated from above or generated bottom-up. Finally, what Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001: 20) call the ‘reciprocal emotions’ – rooted in participants’ ongoing feelings toward each other and including the close, affective ties of friendship, love, solidarity and loyalty – generated within social movements are discussed. They are articulated...
in this study in respondents’ understanding of the EDL as ‘one big family’. These emotions are shown to both arise out of, and enhance, the pleasures of shared activism. They also ameliorate risk and, for some respondents, evoke an ontological security missing in their past or wider lives. The emotional sustainability of movements is far from assured (Brown and Pickerill, 2009: 33), however, and these same emotions can work to undermine as well as strengthen groups of activists. The chapter thus concludes with a discussion of the limits of affective ties within the group studied.

**Emotions and social movements: from irrational behaviour to affective practice**

The original ‘collective behaviour’ approach to understanding social movements in both its symbolic interactionist form (developed by Blumer) and its later structural functionalist variant (in the work of Smelser) share an understanding of collective behaviour as emotionally driven rather than deliberative and thus as different from normal, ‘rational’ behaviour (Edwards, 2014: 37). Emotions were considered central to understanding extra-institutional political action; crowds and their dynamics were conceived as the heart of protest movements; and a political ‘type’ was constructed of an individual alienated, predisposed to violence and seeking, through activism, to compensate needs unfulfilled in private life (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001: 2–3). In this way, those involved in social protest were viewed as being motivated less by a particular ‘cause’ than the need to participate in and of itself (2001: 2–3).

In a conscious attempt to move social movement theory away from viewing activism as the manifestation of protest by the irrational, usually marginal, few, ‘resource mobilisation theory’ (which emerged in US social movement studies in the 1970s) focused not on ‘grievances’ and ‘beliefs’ as the key to the emergence of collective action but the ability to mobilise resources (money, participants, communications infrastructure, skills and public support). Resource mobilisation theorists (drawing on rational action theory) argue that both decisions to join a movement and the ensuing collective action (participants’ behaviour in protests) are rational in nature (Edwards, 2014: 44). From the end of the 1960s, emotions played almost no role in theories of social movements and collective action (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001: 5).

The published literature on social movements and their collective action has shown that the collective behaviour approach was wrong to understand collective action as irrational group behaviour in which the individual is overwhelmed by the emotion associated with the cause and ceases to act rationally. However, empirical research also suggests that it is equally problematic to eradicate emotion from the understanding of the motivations and actions of social movement actors and reduce their collective action to an instrumental activity designed to achieve particular objectives or promote specific interests. The field of social movement studies has been characterised recently, therefore, by what might be said to be the rehabilitation of ‘the emotional’. This is not to dismiss rational, political or
ideological motivations or to suggest that a social movement can be reduced to no more than ‘the sum of its members’ personal preoccupations and inadequacies’ (Billig, 1978: 8). It is rather to seek to understand how the emotional and the rational are intertwined in collective action. Here it is worth returning to Blumer’s understanding of the role of emotions as the glue that holds the acting group together by generating what he calls ‘esprit de corps’ through: the identification of common enemies, which cements the existence of the group and loyalty to it; the formation of personal relationships within the group; and group rituals such as meetings, rallies, parades and demonstrations that reconfirm commitment to the group (cited in Edwards, 2014: 26–27). While this first and foremost has an emotional outcome – generating a sense of solidarity and feeling among participants of belonging to something bigger than themselves – it is not disconnected from the rational dimension of engagement. This same esprit de corps is identified by Klatch (2004: 491), in her study of affective bonds among members of the Students for a Democratic Society, as initial feelings of ‘relief and enthusiasm on discovering others of “like minds”, with shared values and perspectives’ develop into a deepening sense of attachment to the movement through the affirmation of activists’ views of the world.

In studying the role of emotions in contemporary social movements, an important distinction is made by Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001: 20) between the different roles played by ‘reciprocal’ emotions and ‘shared’ emotions. Reciprocal emotions concern participants’ ongoing feelings towards each other – friendship, love, solidarity and loyalty – and the more specific emotions they give rise to, that are the substance of the affective ties binding the group and that generate much of the pleasure of collective action and protest. In contrast ‘shared’ emotions are held in common with other group members but are directed externally; these emotions include anger, outrage and so forth. How such emotions are turned into action is elaborated by Collins (Collins, R., 2001) who draws on Durkheim’s concepts of collective ritual and ‘collective effervescence’ to suggest a process by which collective rituals generate ‘emotional transformations’ through amplifying the original emotion (for example outrage) or transforming the initiating emotion into an ‘emotional energy’ arising out of consciousness of collective engagement and solidarity. However, emotions do not always produce positive ‘affective solidarity’ (Juris, 2008: 66) and emotions and relationships can also be destructive to movements (Klatch, 2004: 489).

A further crucial contribution to the debate has been the recognition of the role of ‘affect’ alongside emotion. The distinctive role of ‘affect’ is rooted in the differentiation between feeling (as a personal sensation), emotion (as the social display of feelings) and affect (as the pre-personal or non-conscious movement between one experiential state of the body to another) (Massumi, 2004: xvii; Shouse, 2005). While much recent literature on affect has emphasised its non-human dimensions (Thien, 2005: 451), understanding it primarily as the process of ‘becoming’ as a result of impact and change rooted in the body (Massumi, 2004), for the purposes of this study, the notion of ‘affective practice’ (Wetherell, 2012: 4) is employed. ‘Affective practice’ focuses on the emotional as it appears in...
social life and concrete activities. It asks how people are moved and move others in the context of particular affective performances, scenes and events (2012: 3). Affective practice recognises that affect can be held inter-subjectively across a few or many participants and can thread across a scene, a site or an institution (2012: 13). This is important for this study of EDL activism because it allows a fresh look at the question of collective (or ‘crowd’) behaviour by asking how affect moves from one body to another. Rejecting notions of transmission as ‘contagion’ or chemically induced ‘entrainment’ (2012: 146), it is argued that affect is not generated randomly or universally but is communicated in crowds with shared identity and social practices; this makes actions and affect intelligible to those inside the crowd whilst not being transmitted automatically to onlookers (2012: 148). The notion of affective practice thus also allows for the reconnection of emotion, affect and meanings attached to activism at the cognitive level.

**A ‘good day out’: love at first demo**

Twenty-eight different forms of activism were mentioned by respondents in this study; from leafleting and writing to MPs to violence and vigilantism. However, narratives are heavily dominated by references to participation in national, regional and ‘flash’ demonstrations. This reflects the fact that the EDL is a self-consciously ‘feet on the street’ movement, and while each demonstration has a formal rationale – in line with the official ‘awareness raising’ mission of the movement – in practice for many participants it means ‘a good day out with a load of friends’ (Richard). Demonstrations allow people to travel to different parts of the country, making ‘connections all over the place’ (Tim), and, in this way, forge the substance of solidarity; the feeling of being ‘one big family’. Thus in contrast to the frequent scepticism expressed about social media communication (see Chapter 2), the embodied communication with other EDL members that takes place at demonstrations evokes pleasure: ‘I love demos, do you know what I mean? You can’t beat a good day out’ (Connor). Even remembering demonstrations is pleasurable: ‘Walsall was a great day. [It] sparked back memories … of all these years gone by’ (Chas). Through the evocation of memories, affect is passed from the body past and present as one demonstration becomes pleasurable through memories it triggers of an earlier one.

**Chemical reactions? The demo buzz**

A ‘good day out’ starts with the build-up. Posts to Facebook record emotions in the ‘countdown’ to the day of the demonstration: ‘you kind of psych yourself up over the week before and then it comes to demo eve and that’s it, nobody can sleep, so yeah it’s proper exciting’ (Michelle). In practice, ‘demo eve’ often runs into demo day:

People go on the drink because it’s Friday the night before … it’s like an early start, people think, ‘Oh, it’s 1, 2 o’clock, I’d better get my head down, I’ve got to...
get up for 6’. Then they look, think, ‘Oh I’ll have one more’ and before you know it half of ’em just stop up. (Matt)

Activists in this study generally travelled to national demonstrations together on a hired coach and the journey is an important part of the build-up. This is where you ‘get in the mood’ (Rachel) and engage in the ‘singing’ and ‘banter’ (Tina), story-telling and practical jokes (Tim). Of course the mood is enhanced, for some, synthetically through consumption of alcohol, cannabis and cocaine. Ray’s description of the coach on ‘a good day out’ evokes the noise and atmosphere of a crowd embarked ‘on a big mad ’un’; the coach ‘literally does bounce down the street like’ (Ray).

Notwithstanding this steady build-up of emotions, the demo itself sometimes generates an ‘affect’ that is experienced in a physically embodied way. While it is almost impossible to capture this adequately in narrative data, there are a number of cues in the stories told that signal these affective moments. The first is the use of the word ‘whoa’ by respondents to mark the moment when one bodily state is interrupted or taken over by another, more intense, one. Jordan, for example, describes emerging from the train station into the crowd at his first demonstration: ‘When we landed into the street I was just like “whoa”.’ While prior to this he had been emotionally charged – he talked of being ‘psyched’ about meeting people he had only met online before – this ‘whoa’ signals the moment when he becomes physically overwhelmed by the presence of others. On reflection, when he has processed the affect into a feeling that he can articulate, he says the demo experience ‘was the best thing … I’ve ever done’. In the following excerpt, Theresa also indicates a change of bodily state she experiences with the same ‘whoa’ as she describes the sensation of ‘all marching together’ at a demonstration in Tower Hamlets:

Well, there was like nearly 3,000 people that did turn up for the demo. The police didn’t know what to do with us, so … they walked us for four miles. We got taken over Tower Bridge all marching together on this lovely hot day and like, the Japanese tourists and everything and all the boats waving to us and we were like, ‘whoa!’ just singing England songs. It was like St George, ‘English until I Die’ and all of that. It was a fantastic demo. (Theresa)

A second cue indicates being taken over by a physical sensation, often described in similar ways to the effect of drugs or alcohol, as a ‘buzz’, ‘adrenaline rush’ (Nick) or being ‘wired’ (Richard). This sensation of being overtaken by chemical agents lends itself to understanding through theories of affect that view emotions as transmitted from one body to another by chemical reactions, or ‘entrainment’, as a result of the effect of pheromones² (Brennan cited in Wetherell, 2012: 146). Thus Richard describes being nervous when he attended his first demonstration but then experiencing ‘an adrenaline buzz, which I liked because you don’t know what’s going to happen’. Wetherell is sceptical, however, of the evidence that pheromones and chemical signals are the missing mediating link in affective contagion since it explains neither why some bodies are entrained while others resist
or why one emotion, for example anger, evokes anger in some while evoking other emotions, such as anxiety, laughter, indifference or sadness, in others (2012: 146). Moreover, actors themselves experience the ‘buzz’ as an emotional response to concrete, not mysterious or unseen chemical, stimuli. This is evident in Tim’s description of the moment of stepping off the coach and being overwhelmed visually (by ‘a sea of England flags’) and audibly (by the ‘roar’ of the crowd) when he arrived at his first demo in Stoke (2010):

… you could just see a sea of England flags, there was all different kinds, of like mixed races and whatever, there and it was just, I stepped off … this bus, and every bus that turned up got a roar and … I was just like, ‘yes, finally!’ It just felt like … people of England was finally standing up, saying like we’ve had enough of this bullshit that’s been pushed on us all the time and it’s just like right we are standing up. (Tim)

While Tim’s experience is strongly embodied, it remains associated with the meaning he attaches to his activism; the sensations made him feel ‘like the people of England was finally standing up’. Rachel too becomes animated as she describes the sensation of feeling part of a mass of bodies at a large demonstration in Luton:

It was massive. It is unbelievable. It was hundreds and hundreds. Police always say something like there was 300. There wasn’t three hundred. There was three thousand. Do you know what I mean? But the police always say there was three hundred. I mean if you’ve got somebody standing up the road like with the camera and you can see bodies for as far as the eye can see that’s not 300 people. (Rachel; emphases in original)

As Malbon (1999: 22, 185–87) has shown from the study of clubbing crowds, however, while participants in such gatherings may take deep pleasure in ceding their body to the crowd and atmosphere, in fact what is experienced is a fluctuation between belonging to the crowd and ‘differentiation’ from it, between ‘losing oneself’ and having a heightened awareness of self. In this way, the pleasure of collective immersion does not replace but embodies, sensitises and enhances rationalised meanings of activism. This is reflected in the feeling among respondents that ‘A good demo is when you get there and you get a turn-out’ (Ray, Chris), while demos where ‘20, 30 people turn up’ are ‘a total waste of time. … [Y]ou want thousands to turn up and make yourselves heard’ (Rob).

**The pleasure of disorder?**

I ain’t even going to lie about it. That is part of the demo buzz. It makes it more violent. Makes you more proud of what you’re there for. (Ray)

The ‘buzz’ of demonstrations discussed above cannot be detached from the thrill of the potential for, and actuality of, aggro with the opposition and even violence. The thrill of the eruption of violence between EDL and MDL or UAF
counter-demonstrators at a demo is described by Tim as ‘just like Braveheart’, while Connor talks of the ‘adrenaline rush’ of ‘having a good scrap’.

Reference to violence as ‘having a kick off’ (Ray, Connor) or ‘having it off’ (Chris) is indicative of the links between this kind of fighting and football hooliganism. Peter and Kyle, who identified primarily as Casuals, describe the ‘excitement’ of the moment before violence kicks off at a football match and how ‘that adrenaline lasts for days’ (Peter). Although they attended EDL events, this was primarily motivated by the search for a similar pleasure in ‘a bit of disorder’ (Kyle): ‘I wouldn’t say I have an interest about the EDL, well … only in the violence like’ (Peter). This pleasure in violence (‘disorder’) is what Peter and Kyle think motivates EDL activists, too: ‘I think the EDL are just banned football hooligans, lads that aren’t allowed to go to football, what else are they looking for to do on a Saturday, they go there for their disorder, don’t they?’ (Peter). This trajectory is not uncommon and is discussed in Chapter 3.

However, the pleasure in ‘disorder’ or ‘chaos’ is not confined to those with a football background:

Best thing I’ve ever been to erm wow Stoke was just chaotic. It was wild. There was fireworks, there was smoke grenades going off. You were just coming through clouds, you just got caught, horses running charging at ya. There’s riot vans getting knocked over and that was chaotic. (Tim)

Some respondents thus associate violence and trouble at demonstrations not with football hooliganism but with life-stage; being young. These respondents attribute their own earlier participation in violence to their youth (Jordan, Tim, Matt). As Sean puts it, ‘Maybe a few years ago, if I’m honest, … I would have got in with the ruck, but no. From some of my friends dying in the war and what not my views have changed on it. I just wanna go along, peaceful demo, get your word heard’ (Sean). Connor admits, ‘if you say it is definitely going to go off, you know a hundred percent there is going to be more youths there. Cause … youths are going there for a fight. Know what I mean?’ (Connor). At the same time, his brother Ray confirms that the EDL’s reorientation away from its Casuals roots and violence had led many younger members to leave the movement:

Most youth – them are out for violence … Whereas you come to the EDL, you aren’t getting no violence. You get the odd one but apart from that, you ain’t getting no violence. You’re there to do your peaceful protesting and things like that. But if you go to a football match, you’ve got 50 times more chance of having a kick-off and having a bit of violence, like. (Ray)

There is active discussion and disagreement within the EDL on the efficacy and acceptability of the use of violence. The efforts of the leadership to rid the movement of the ‘thuggish’ element and improve the public perception of it have been decisive in the decisions to leave of many of what Jack refers to as the ‘hard-core’ that ‘look for the violent side of it’. For those that choose to stay
the attraction of the EDL is that it offers more meaning than football violence. Jordan says he used to be in a local football firm and thus ‘I’ve been there done that and it gets you nowhere to be honest. You don’t get your point across.’ Tim, talking about an early demonstration at which there had been significant violence, describes this process as the struggle between the emotional and rational dimensions of activism:

All hell broke loose and I mean like we’d already had a few beers and that and it just got outta hand, and the thing is the police didn’t anticipate that many people. … [I]t was almost like the first raw emotion. … [W]hen a fight breaks out, at first you can go crazy but then … after a while the energy starts to, you know, you’ve released that anger so you calm down and then you have to start thinking about the real … ways. (Tim)

For Tim, it seems, violence or fighting is an affective practice – raw emotion or energy release – that precedes the rationalisation of activism. Others, however, find rationality in violence in as much as it is the most effective way of gaining publicity for the movement:

Like if you stood there in the town chanting ‘E, EDL’ you ain’t making nothing. You know as soon as you chuck something bang you am on worldwide news man, for rioting. … I think it promotes our event. It says that we have been out there and we are proving our point, that we aye gonna bow down to the police. (Connor)

This reflects what Juris (2008: 63) sees as a trade-off that social movements have to make between ‘scripted’ and peaceful demonstrations, which may win sympathy from the media but feel mundane to protestors and ‘generate diminishing returns with respect to visibility and affective solidarity’, and more spectacular, confrontational free-form actions, which are ‘particularly potent in emotional terms’ but ‘often contribute to media frames that stigmatize or belittle protesters’. This is not only a question of tactics. At the grassroots level pleasure in violence was rejected as a matter of principle by some. Ollie says, ‘I’ve never had a proper violent fight’ and when trouble kicks off, ‘I don’t get adrenaline at all, sometimes I get really angry by it’. For others the movement’s continued association with violence is a source of deep frustration: ‘You do get the odd few that kick off but you know, that spoils it for the rest of us like’ (Jason). In these cases, meanings attached to EDL activism are quite different. Kane states, ‘I dow like getting involved with the fighting and that cause we ain’t there to fight. We ain’t there for violence. I’m just there to show my respect and that.’ Indeed, even for those described as enjoying a ‘kick off’, violence was not necessary for ‘a good demo’.

CHRIS: A good demo is when it all goes peaceful and you get your point across. That’s what you’re meant to be there for.
CONNOR: You can be loud and proud at the same time and it comes under peaceful.
At the same time those who are reluctant to engage in fighting the opposition directly may have the most tolerant attitude to extreme violence. In the same breath Andrew says he would not attack members of the opposition unless in self-defence yet condones Anders Breivik’s mass murder on the grounds that ‘He didn’t cause them any pain … he didn’t stop them and shout abuse at them or torture them or whatever, he just shot them’ (Andrew).

In understanding these debates around violence, it is important to distinguish between violence and ‘aggro’ or ‘banter’. Pre-planned violence was not encountered in the course of fieldwork. The only exception was a planned flash demo that, it was said, would involve tables (on which Islamic literature was displayed) being overturned in the city centre. This led some core respondents to refuse to take part and the action in fact never took place (field diary, 1 December 2012). Fighting was also unplanned and is recounted as being responsive or opportunistic: ‘every demo I’ve been to, … it’s never been us who’s kicked off. It’s always been someone confronting us for us to kick-off’ (Connor). Notwithstanding this, Connor adds, ‘if you get confronted then obviously you prove your point, you aye gonna run off you know. You stand there and you be heard for who you am.’ Moreover, what counts as ‘confrontation’ varies and can include taunts, chants, bottle- or egg-throwing by counter-demonstrators. ‘Banter’ with counter-demonstrators is routine and ritualised and jibes about the opposition as ‘the great unwashed’ or suggestions that ‘we all want a go at them’ are delivered occasionally by speakers from the podium (field diary, 10 May 2014). Organised violence, however, is replaced by routinised scuffles which occur at easily identifiable trigger points. Corners along the route of a demonstration are one such point; as this is where the opposition often comes into view and the ‘banter’ starts. The police push forward at these points to keep order, fuelling antagonism and a sense that EDL demonstrators are being unfairly treated. These incidents are characterised by rumours and multiple interpretations, even amongst demonstrators themselves (field diary, 13 September 2014). Whatever the ‘truth’ is, observation at more than twenty demonstrations suggests the most peaceful marches are those where the opposition is kept consistently out of the line of vision.

The fine legal line between banter and violence was brought home to EDL demonstrators prosecuted following the Walsall demonstration. At the trial of two of them, one of the police officers giving evidence noted that prior to the violence, the mood had been ‘good-natured’, although there had been a two-way exchange of ‘banter’ or ‘obscenities’ between EDL demonstrators and people behind the police line. The EDL, he said, had chanted ‘E, E, EDL’ and ‘Muslim bombers, off our streets’. Counter-demonstrators had used similar ripostes to the EDL. Jack (one of the defendants), he said, had encouraged others to move towards the police line, saying, ‘UAF are down there, let’s go and get them.’ The mood became more agitated, the police officer says, and when a counter-protestor jumped up onto the wall and gave a ‘Come on’ motion to EDL supporters, the latter surged towards the police line and a violent confrontation between police and EDL demonstrators ensued (see Chapter 6). The prosecution’s case against Jack and his co-defendant was not built on evidence that they had committed any
violence themselves but that their participation in the chanting among the front lines of the EDL supporters and, in particular, Jack’s alleged encouragement of others to move up to the police line constituted incitement to violence. While both defendants freely admitted that they had been stupid to choose to go to where the trouble was and join in the chanting rather than stay listening to the speeches, for both the notion that ‘banter’ was incitement to violence was completely alien. As the second defendant noted ‘there is “no malice in banter”; it is just tit for tat’. When the prosecutor insists that the purpose of banter is to encourage violence, he responds, ‘No, it’s banter’, and that they expect only that the opposing groups shout back (field diary, 7 October 2013). Jack’s understanding of a good demonstration as having a bit of a laugh and ‘a shout at the opposition’, as he put it, ended in a thirty-six-month prison sentence.

The management of emotions and the creation of affective solidarity

The build-up to, experience of and stories told about demonstrations create a sense of ‘togetherness’ that binds members of the movement. It is these affective bonds that are central to sustaining activism and they are saturated with emotion. Virchow (2007: 148) argues that the creation of ‘emotional collectives’ and ‘collective emotions’ is an objective of these events as ‘leaders of far right organisations carefully plan these emotions to integrate sympathisers’. That emotion is not ‘an incidental aspect of activism’ but ‘strategically deployed and fostered by organisers to engender sufficient commitment amongst activist collectives to maintain their on-going participation’ is recognised by Juris (2008: 65) too. This is achieved, he argues, by building affective attachments (to the cause, and among activists) and creating particular emotional moods during protests. In this section the forms and means – the use of symbols, colours, chanting and other performative acts – by which the emotional collective is formed within the EDL are considered. It is argued that, while much might be read into the symbols deployed in EDL communications and demonstrations, understanding signs, in this case, is not the key to understanding activism; action is not a public display of representation of identity but an embodied practice (see also McDonald, 2006: 196). It is suggested also that, in contrast to Virchow’s findings, these emotions are largely generated bottom-up rather than instrumentally orchestrated from above. Indeed, for former EDL Chair Steve Eddowes the ‘raw emotion’ he sees among some supporters is a constraint rather than an asset, since it inhibits their capacity for rational engagement (‘they won’t grasp what you’re saying to them’) (Eddowes, 2015).

Symbolic markers: style and tattoos

Bushner (2012: 420) draws on the notion of ‘civil religion’ to understand the use by EDL organisers and supporters of rituals and symbols of national and Western ‘civilisational’ belonging – articulated and performed during demonstrations, meetings, online discussions and other activities – to evoke a sense of a clash of
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civilisations between a Christian Europe and an Islamic Middle East. This is epitomised for Busher in the adoption of symbols and nomenclature of the crusades, such as the cross of St George, the motto in hoc signo vinces (associated both with the adoption of Christianity by Emperor Constantine I and with the order of the Knights Templar), and images of medieval crusades and crusaders in the formal and informal promotional materials that circulate among activists and their supporters.

Such symbols and references were encountered in this study but primarily at national demonstrations and sported by demonstrators who were not respondents. A Knights Templar battle flag – a black cross on white background with red St George’s cross in the centre – was encountered at the Rotherham demo in 2014 (field diary, 13 September 2014). At Tower Hamlets a demonstrator had used the EDL hoody design on the back of a crusader-style cloak and personalised his division name to ‘Crusaders’ (see Figure 7.1) while a participant at a local demonstration in Leeds had a tattoo featuring a cross and sword with the motto ‘English by the Grace of God’ displayed that covered his back.

The one exception among respondents in this study was Ed, who also said that, when having a tattoo himself, he would prefer ‘a Crusader leaning on his sword … or an England tattoo, bulldog, Knights Templar’ rather than, for example, ‘EDL’, since the longevity of organisations could not be guaranteed. Indeed there was also significant scepticism about some symbolism; on a number of occasions respondents quipped that only the English would have a patron saint who was actually ‘a Turkish Muslim who never came to England’ (field diary, 21 April 2013).

However, in general, in this study it was national belonging and EDL affiliation that dominated symbolic displays. Rachel had a large tattoo indicating her ‘Angel’ status on her calf (see Figure 7.2) and always wore shorts to demonstrations so it was visible. She was frequently complimented on it and often passed the number of the tattooist to other demonstrators, making it a sign literally passed from one body to another (field diary, 30 June 2012). Less permanent visual symbols included Lisa’s St George’s cross contact lenses (see Figure 3.8).

Symbolic performance on demonstration days centres around the display of EDL flags. These are hung across the windows of the coach on the way to demonstrations to provoke reaction from passing cars. Positive responses – beeping of horns or thumbs-up signs – are celebrated with cheers and chants of ‘E, E, EDL’, while negative responses are met with jeering and abusive gestures. While demonstrations themselves were experienced as a ‘sea of England flags’ (see above), in fact a range of flags were encountered on demonstrations. The Union Jack was often displayed or wrapped around demonstrators as they marched. The well-known Muslim Scottish Defence League member Abdul Rafiq (see Chapter 4) demonstrated in Walthamstow draped in a Union Jack and with a Rangers bag over his shoulder while Chas, a respondent in this study, sported a Union Jack onesie to the Norwich demo (see Figure 7.3). This speaks to a strong Unionist agenda (alongside the promotion of a specific ‘Englishness’), which is evident also in the slogan ‘No surrender’ chosen for Louise’s tattoo (see Figure 7.2) and
7.1 Crusaders?

featuring frequently on EDL hoodies and in chants (see below). Matt and Casey’s house was adorned with both a St George’s flag and a Union Jack doormat. At demonstrations the Israeli flag was often seen (field diary, 20 July 2013) as well as the LGBT flag (see Figure 3.2). Bandanas, neck scarves and face masks to cover the nose and mouth were also sported in both St George’s flag and Union Jack colours (field diary, 29 September 2012).
Performative dress was the exception rather than the rule at demonstrations, however, and most EDL members cared little about style, declaring that they just ‘dress normal’ (Tina).

To tell the truth, I don’t give a fuck what I wear as long as I’m there. Someone can look at me and say I’m UAF. … At the end of the day, I wear what I want to wear. I can be trackied up. Little fucking chavvy look … I don’t care. I’ll wear what I wanna wear. (Chris)
The only exceptions to this rule were those with primary identifications or ongoing links with local football firms. Peter and Kyle discussed style at length as well rituals of buying new clothes and deciding what to wear as part of the build-up to a match. Ray and his brother Connor also referred to themselves as having a ‘Casuals’ or ‘hooligan’ look, including iconic brands such as Stone Island and Sergio Tacchini as their preferred style.

7.3 Chas in his Union Jack onesie

The only exceptions to this rule were those with primary identifications or ongoing links with local football firms. Peter and Kyle discussed style at length as well rituals of buying new clothes and deciding what to wear as part of the build-up to a match. Ray and his brother Connor also referred to themselves as having a ‘Casuals’ or ‘hooligan’ look, including iconic brands such as Stone Island and Sergio Tacchini as their preferred style.
On demo days, most respondents wore ‘colours’, usually an EDL hoody, exchanged for a polo shirt in the summer. Political colours are known to play an important role in the emotional life of social movements, helping to create and sustain collective identities (Sawer, 2007: 39). The EDL standard was a black hoody (a pink one was also available) with a red cross on the back, which created four squares into which text or symbols could be added. This allowed individuals to personalise the garment. Most added the words ‘English Defence League’ and their divisional belonging. Some were more ambitious and cited postcodes (indicating symbolic turf wars between rival divisions), nicknames for divisions (‘Anti-social division’) or EDL logos and chants (‘No surrender’) (see Figure 7.4).

In the case of the EDL the significance of ‘colours’ is more akin to the meaning attached to football colours than political colours, however. Wearing colours demonstrates pride in your ‘side’ and the importance of ‘being seen for who you are’, while the semiotic significance of the colour is ambiguous. Black has a long tradition in both anarchist and fascist movements and is more recently associated with autonomist movements, again of both left and right (Sawyer, 2007: 42). In this sense the colour draws something from its association with the ‘street’ identity of such movements. However, at the grassroots level, meaning is more likely to be attached to the hoody (in particular its hood) than its colour. As indicated in Chris’s statement above, wearing a hoody signals the appropriation of ‘chav’ style as a reassertion of class status (see Chapter 6), while raising the hood can help disguise appearance and mark an act of defiance against police
and other authorities. Thus, some respondents wore their hoodies around town to show they would not be intimidated and to indicate their pride: ‘I’m proud to wear this hoody cause … it’s just who I am … I’ll wear it and I’ll feel proud to wear it because every little bit of stitching is who I am’ (Declan). Others chose not to wear colours even at demonstrations because of the potential risk to safety.
this entailed moving around the city before joining the coach or demonstration (Tina). Those who adopted this approach said they were never made to feel excluded because of this (Richard).

Performative acts at EDL demonstrations are limited in comparison to those found at larger anti-globalisation or anti-austerity demonstrations. Most frequent was the use of face masks, especially pig masks but also those representing hate figures such as Osama Bin Laden (see Figure 7.5). This performativity and embodiment of protest can serve to sustain emotional experiences for activists (Brown and Pickerill, 2009: 28). However, it is not always successful. An attempt to deliver a speech from the podium in a white EDL-logoed ‘burqa’ descended into farce as the speaker was unable to see her written speech through the head-dress, which also made it difficult for her to be heard (field diary, 29 September 2012).

There is sometimes a fine line between performativity and symbolic violence. In general EDL members denied their engagement in actions such as the violation of mosques and at demonstrations grand acts of symbolic violence (such as burning the Qur’an) are avoided by official speakers – not least because of the beliefs about ‘two-tier justice’. However, ‘desires’ to violate the Qur’an (to burn or use it as toilet paper) are expressed and badges sold at demonstrations are often intended to offend; for example badges with images of pigs alongside the words ‘EDL infidels’ (field diary, 30 June 2012). At a local demonstration attended in a district of Leeds, one demonstrator marched wearing a pig mask while, later, as the speeches came to an end, a whole pig’s head was retrieved from a bag and thrown towards the police line (see Figure 7.6) (field diary, 4 May 2013).

Indeed such performative displays could arouse criticism within the movement. Ed expressed his disdain for those with highly provocative tattoos such as ‘Allah’s a paedo’. Commenting on a particular individual who had had such a tattoo done, he notes, ‘God forbid he never gets sent to prison cause he ain’t gonna fucking come out. When he’s in the shower, and then people see that, he’s dead.’ Awareness of the potential danger of sporting EDL-related tattoos was noted by others (Richard, Kane). One respondent, nonetheless, during the course of fieldwork, had ‘Infidel’ in Arabic tattooed on the back of his head (field diary, 7 September 2013).

‘We’re coming’: creating an emotional collective

While much discussion in extreme right studies is concerned with the role music has in disseminating ideology and attracting people, especially young people, into extreme right movements (Langebach and Raabe, 2013) the extreme right music scene in general was barely referenced by respondents in this study. Ian posted YouTube clips of the Swedish singer Saga (known to many for her Skrewdriver tributes) to his Facebook page, but when challenged about this (since he rejected white supremacism), he claimed to like the songs but not the ideas behind them (field diary, 18 May 2013). Other respondents dismissed what they called such
Symbolic violence in protest

‘Nazi music’ (Lisa) and expressed preferences for punk or ska music. Rachel attended a local punk music festival annually while Kurt talked excitedly about a ticket he had to a Specials gig in a nearby town. The role music plays in the EDL is thus less about recruitment to an ideology than about creating an atmosphere, self-affirmation and community-building. When the EDL set up a ‘camp’ outside the police station in Rotherham to protest at institutional inaction against child
grooming in the town, one of the tents was named the ‘EDL community singing tent’ (field diary, 13 September 2014).

In contrast to performative dress and actions, chanting and singing are well-developed affective practices among the EDL, taking place: on the coach and at the muster point in the build-up to a demonstration; as demonstrators march; and as the whole crowd gathers at the main demonstration point prior to the speeches. The most frequently heard recorded music is the band Alex and the Bandits, many of whose songs consciously reference the EDL. Some of the lyrics carry ideological content. ‘We Must Resist’, for example, picks up on the discourse of injustice discussed in the previous chapter, claiming the EDL are ‘the only people to defend your rights’. However, more commonly heard and enjoyed songs are those that simply reference and affirm the movement itself. ‘Famous EDL’, for example, contains the refrain ‘Tommy Robinson’s barmy army’ and was frequently played through the sound system prior to the beginning of speeches (before Robinson’s resignation). Probably most frequently heard, however, is ‘We’re Coming’ which declares, ‘We’re the infidels of the EDL and we’re coming down the road’. Whether sung along to when played from the sound system (video clip, Walsall demo, 29 September 2012) or unaccompanied as demonstrators set off through the streets (video clip, Dewsbury demo, 30 June 2012), there is an embodied pleasure in losing oneself in collective motion or song even when amongst strangers (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001: 20). Indeed, in the process these ‘strangers’ cease to be so and singing becomes an embodied way to both create and confirm the emotional collective.

‘We’re Coming’ carries not only emotion but meaning. It declares presence and intent and signals what is perhaps the most important meaning attached to EDL activism: being seen and being heard (see Chapter 8). This is echoed in other chants that assert the rights of demonstrators to make their presence felt, for example, ‘Whose streets? Our streets’ (video clip, Dewsbury demo, 30 June 2012). The connection between chanting and the core meanings of EDL activism is captured by Connor:

That’s why you travel together. Because you’ve got to get your point across. On the way there, we’d stop at services and chant like … Well, we give a chant and make it loud and proud of who we am. (Connor)

A visual performance of the assertion of this right is also sometimes staged, for example through the physical occupation of space. At the Birmingham national demonstration, demonstrators climbed onto the roof of the bar designated as the muster point, members of one division scaled the statue outside the Registry office (see cover photo) while those from another found their way onto the top of a bus shelter (field diary, 20 July 2013).

The form and content of chants and songs at EDL demonstrations also show this combination of functions of building and sustaining the emotional collective and expressing the shared values and beliefs of the group. Such songs and
chants fall into three main types: anti-Islam, ‘patriotic’, and identity-affirming. The first two types clearly prioritise ideology over collective identity in terms of their content. However, their context of use and their form – often sung to the same tunes and rhythms of the football terraces – mean they function to create atmosphere prior to a demonstration or to rally support and speak with one voice in the face of ‘opposition’.

Anti-Islam chants and songs may take the form of extended songs, often sung in the pub or at the muster point prior to the demonstration. Classic examples of such songs include, ‘There were ten Muslim bombers in the air’ (see Chapter 5). A variation of the song heard at a local demonstration in Leeds, and referring to the failed attempt to attack the EDL demonstration in Dewsbury, began with ‘There were six Muslim bombers at Dewsbury’ who, instead of being shot down by the RAF from England, ‘saw the EDL and fucked off home’ (field diary, 4 May 2013). There are also shorter and more aggressive anti-Islam chants, which are struck up particularly when counter-demonstrators come into vision, for example ‘Allah, Allah, Who the fuck is Allah?’ and are consciously offensive to all Muslims. This is true also of the particularly controversial chant ‘Allah is a paedo’ or ‘Muzzie bombers off our streets’. This kind of chanting is a ritual of collective action which confirms common commitments among protestors, stirs up strong emotions and reinforces a sense of solidarity with the group (Jasper, 1998: 417). As an affective practice, however, this is not emotionally transformative but rather reinforces anger or outrage and, most importantly, offends and insults others.

The category of ‘patriotic songs’ includes renditions of the national anthem and of ‘Keep St George in My Heart, Keep Me English’ (sung to the tune of the hymn ‘Give Me Joy in My Heart’). Other chants shout defiance in the face of aggressors: ‘No surrender, no surrender, no surrender to the Taliban. Scum! Scum! Scum!’ The latter can be chanted independently or at the end of a rendition of ‘Keep St George in My Heart, Keep Me English’ and has its history on the football terraces where it was chanted as ‘no surrender to the IRA’. This confirms the Unionist hue to much EDL symbolism despite the apparent assertion of Englishness. As discussed in Chapter 5, chants such as ‘Burn our poppies and we’ll burn your mosques’ are claimed to contain rhetorical rather than real threats (Tina).

One of the first changes introduced by the new collective leadership following the resignation of Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll, was non-tolerance of anti-Muslim chants. This was announced by Ivan Humble (East Anglia Regional Organiser) speaking at the Bradford demonstration shortly after the leadership resignations. He stated, ‘there will be no ‘Allah’ songs sung at demonstrations any more – we don’t need them. We have plenty of English songs to sing’ (field diary, 12 October 2013). Indeed, the speeches themselves at this demonstration were interspersed with chants and songs – ‘E, E, EDL’, ‘We’re Coming, We’re Coming …’ and ‘Keep St George in My Heart’ – led from the stage in a way not previously encountered at demonstrations. This appeared to signal a strategy to encourage unity and a sense of collective spirit at a difficult time for the movement and is, perhaps, a relatively benign example of the attempt to create and manage ‘collective emotions’ (Virchow, 2007: 148).
The last category – identity-affirming chants – includes the frequently heard ‘E, E, EDL’, which is chanted on the move during a march but also often erupts at the end of longer songs or chants as a kind of signature or ‘tag’. These chants are low and aggressive in tone, designed, just as on the football terraces, to signal strength and numbers and to intimidate the opposition. EDL demonstrators also borrow football chants with which to taunt the opposition such as ‘Who are you?’ And, if the counter-demonstration looks small, the chant ‘We’re your famous EDL’ is often complemented by the taunt, ‘Where’s your famous, where’s your famous, where’s your famous MDL?’ Alternatively, if counter-demonstrators are heard booing or seen making gestures to marching protestors, the call of ‘You’re not English, You’re not English, You’re not English any more’ may be heard. Performative demonstrations of this include pogo-ing to a rendition of ‘If you canna do the bouncy3 … You’re not English any more’ (video clip, Dewsbury demo, 30 June 2012).

While these chants and songs are certainly identity-affirming, they are far from instrumentally orchestrated by the movement leadership. At the Tower Hamlets demonstration there was a steady flow of jibes and banter between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators lining the streets through which the march passed including counter-demonstrators greeting EDL marchers with monkey noises. At one place, from within the midst of such a group of counter-demonstrators, an EDL supporter emerged and unfurled his flag; a cheer from the EDL march went up amidst chants of ‘Who are you?’ and, answering their own rhetorical question with, ‘You’re not English anymore’ (field diary, 7 September 2013). For grassroots activists, these moments epitomise ‘a good day out’.

‘It’s like one big family’: reciprocal emotions

The emotions discussed so far have been those engendered by shared feelings, which take on particularly affective forms through activism. However, social movements are characterised also by ‘reciprocal emotions’, that is, emotions generated by the feelings participants have towards each other (Jasper, 1998: 417). The two, of course, are connected. The unpredictability, confrontation and imminent danger of mass direct actions produce ‘powerful affective ties’ between participants ‘amplifying an initiating emotion, such as anger or rage, and transferring it into a sense of collective solidarity’ (Juris, 2008: 63). Emotions in this sense are the glue that holds the group together (Blumer, cited in Edwards, 2014: 27). However, as this study of the EDL shows, while moments of confrontation or risk produce particularly memorable days and bonding moments, more routine or mundane ‘togetherness’ experienced on ‘a good day out’ also generates affective bonds. Indeed these affective bonds are cited more frequently than anything else when respondents talk about what it means to be active in the EDL. Two related but distinct kinds of bonds were referenced: friendship and loyalty; and the sense of belonging and family. While the former are quite closely linked to the ‘style’ of the group (that is their rituals and behaviour in the course of actions) and reflect
the values of the group in an almost homological way (Clarke, 1993: 179), the latter are underpinned by a more diffuse affective solidarity based in feelings of care and concern.

**Friendship, loyalty and standing together**

Friendship, loyalty and standing up for one another are the most frequently cited meanings attached to activism. This is reflected in the repeated claim that EDL members look after each other. Reflecting on the experience of attending his first demonstration, Jordan remembers ‘everyone made me so friendly, everyone made me so welcome … I was just like, do you know what, I felt safe. I felt safe there … I lost someone a few times and they’d ring me and they wouldn’t let me go on my own and I thought that was really nice.’ Kurt played an important role in creating this sense of security. His divisional flag was hoisted on a fishing rod, making it invariably the tallest flag at a demonstration (see Figure 3.11) and guiding demonstrators to a safe place during or at the end of the demonstration (field diary, 29 September 2012).

This ethos is demonstrated primarily in practices of sticking together at demonstrations: ‘Well, when you are going out as a division, you stay together so no one gets separated just to watch each other’s backs’ (Chris). This is not meant metaphorically but in a literal, embodied, sense: ‘we all stand together. We come as like a big army, we leave as an army’ (Matt). However, watching each other’s backs can take place in the virtual as well as the real world. At the end of a long discussion of ‘trolls’ and how to recognise their approaches via social media, members of the local youth division conclude that they have never been seriously infiltrated or exposed because ‘We’re too close and we watch each other too much. … We just have to keep an eye on one another’ (Chris).

The strength of such interpersonal relationships is vital for sustaining activism and energy (Brown and Pickerill, 2009: 32) and has often kept people in the EDL. Responding to a question about whether he might ‘burn out’ or give up EDL activism, a Divisional Organiser explained that he had thought about it but it was hard to contemplate leaving, ‘Because you’ve made friends, some real good friends, you know. People who you’d genuinely miss’ (Euan). Thus even if ‘you always get the prats’ (Matt) in the movement, activists felt that beneath that ‘there’s a solid like loyalty to it’ (Tim). Kane compares his earlier ‘mates’, who had let him down badly at a time of need, with EDL friends who ‘keep me out of trouble’:

These are my real mates. I class these as family now. The EDL are my family. … My mates what I knew before the EDL they ran off and left me. But the EDL they stay by each other’s side. I class them more as family than mates now. First I classed them as friends, then besties, now family. (Kane)

The loyalty and care that comes with this friendship, for Kane, makes his EDL friends are no longer only ‘mates’ but ‘family’.
**Family and belonging**

EDL activists in this study spontaneously refer to the EDL as their ‘family’ or extended family. Lisa, after attending her first demo, describes the feeling as ‘It’s like a family, you are all there for the same reason aren’t you at the end of the day’. This is something, as Connor identifies, that cannot be captured in the media:

Like when you are at a demo the media only show like the actual demo. They don’t show like what goes on behind the scenes like the meetings. Like when you meet up at the coach park it’s like one big family. Everyone is there for each other and that’s how it should be to be honest. (Connor; my emphasis)

Matt also says that now the connection with Casuals has receded, family and friends have become more involved: ‘I think a lot of the football thing is gone out of it now, it’s more, it’s like a big family’ (Matt).

A crucial role performed by the family is providing a sense of where you belong and caring in times of need. Demo days for Jack bring pleasure because ‘it’s a great atmosphere, it’s a great feeling to belong’. Declan and his partner at the time, Ryan, are treated almost as adopted sons by local EDL organisers in a neighbouring town where they spent a lot of their time after Declan had been made to feel unwelcome by members of his own EDL division (field diary, 23 March 2013). Simply caring for one another is an important aspect of the politics of affect (Brown and Pickerill, 2009: 33) and this caring atmosphere can bring respite to difficult and troubled lives. Kurt, who had been suffering from depression during a very difficult period of his life, was visibly lifted by getting out on a demo (field diary, 2 March 2013) while Rachel had found EDL activism an important part of rebuilding her life after an abusive relationship and a period of ill health (field diary, 6 June 2012).

For some respondents, this family means even more; providing a ‘safe space’ and ontological security absent in childhood. Rob describes this sense of feeling ‘part of a family’ both when he joined the National Front in the late 1970s and again from his activism in the EDL and EVF:

Growing up my family wasn’t like a proper family, do you know what I mean? … [I]t was shit basically … It didn’t give me the fun that I was getting at these demos … And plus, I felt part of a family … Like I do now, I feel part of a family, you know? (Rob)

This was very much true for Kane too who felt ‘more safe with the EDL than what I do at home’ (see Chapter 3).

**The limits of loyalty**

It is important not to romanticise reciprocal emotions and the affective bonds they generate. The sense of collective belonging and emotional support described
above are not universal. Chas and Michelle talked about gaining acceptance as a long process rather than an immediate experience of ‘belonging’. Indeed, Chas talks about EDL activism not as a collective endeavour but a personal, psychological journey: ‘It’s like my personal like space’ (Chas). His relative isolation on demonstration days was noted in the field diary and confirmed by Connor who complains that Chas fails to ‘assert himself at demos’ in a way that leads to doubt that he would ‘come through’ if you were ever dependent on him to ‘watch your back’ (field diary, 1 December 2012). The three respondents whose affiliation was primarily with the ‘Infidels’ rather than EDL are also exceptions to the rule. Ollie does not mention friends or loyalty in the movement while Nick talks about affective bonds as being of ‘comradeship’ rather than friendship or family. The caring function of the movement sometimes also appears more an aspiration than a consistent practice. Connor complained that ‘nobody cares’ about division members serving prison sentences (field diary, 2 February 2013) while Ian notes that the movement had failed to act like a supportive family towards the widow and children of a well-respected RO who had died recently (field diary, 16 June 2013).

EDL activists also qualify their talk about the friendship and family they find in the movement through reference to the fact that alongside the ‘real friends’ made in the movement, it is also a place where you meet ‘clowns’, ‘nuttters’, ‘pricks’, ‘idiots’ and ‘backstabbers’. Referring to recent conflicts with the leadership of neighbouring divisions over their behaviour when travelling to demonstrations, as well as the language used in some posts to Facebook pages, members of a local youth division complained that ‘We were all meant to stick together but some people like to be like the UAF’ (Chris). Disloyalty was also ascribed to those who moved out of the movement. Connor noted that a member of another city’s youth division had left the movement and gone ‘straight to the Left’; if he tried to get back in, he said, he will ‘not get out alive’ (field diary, 23 March 2013). He also dismissed a former member of his own youth division, who had moved to the National Front and then set up a local branch of the Infidels as ‘a racist prick’. Indeed there is some evidence of mutual surveillance practised by Division Organisers and ‘admins’. Discussing a recent spate of ‘troll’ scares, Rachel clarifies that warning messages had circulated about an individual who was rumoured to be a police infiltrator and that a newly appointed division leader had been ‘put on watch’ due to concern about his activities with other (more radical) groups (field diary, 4 October 2014).

By far the most destructive force in the movement, however, arises from the very same emotions that serve to sustain it. In the absence of ‘supportive spaces for emotional reflexivity’, the affection and emotion rooted in interpersonal relationships that fuel activism can also undermine it (Brown and Pickerill, 2009: 32–33). For Euan it is romantic relationships that are the source of most tension:

A lot of things what I’ve found that causes the fallouts is the relationships. … You know, somebody was going out with so and so and they fall out and then her goes out with so and so. Then they’re fighting and they’re fighting and everyone’s fighting. (Euan)
This is confirmed by numerous field diary entries in which bitter arguments often involve accusations of ‘shagging around’. In these tales, the web of ‘who said what about whom’ is often unfathomable (and sometimes farcical). But these tales have real consequences; individuals are removed from Facebook pages, stripped of admin positions and no longer feel welcome to attend demonstrations (field diary, 4 October 2014). They were a source of frustration to insiders too. Rachel, who found herself falsely accused of having a relationship with a Local Organiser, said she hated ‘the way everybody is interested in who’s sleeping with whom rather than the cause’ and chose not to socialise with other members outside demonstrations to avoid entanglement in the rumour mill (field diary, 29–30 April 2013).

Disputes and fallings out were often caused also by the entwinement not only of activist and personal relationships but also of financial or informal economic ties. Sometimes such disputes developed precisely out of the caring and supportive ethos of the group. The coach journey to the Manchester demonstration was tense, for example, as Rachel finally spoke her mind to another member of her division whom she felt had betrayed her trust and friendship and exploited her financially after she had supported him emotionally and economically over a period of time (field diary, 2 March 2013; field diary, 20 July 2013). Ian’s offer to put up Damon at his place ended in Damon moving out amidst mutual recrimination (field diary, 28 May 2013; field diary, 12 October, 2013). Suzy related how she had been beaten up badly after she had recognised on CCTV footage that one of the people responsible for a burglary at the pub where she was working at the time was her lodger. This individual, she said, was a fellow EDL member whom she had taken in and acted ‘like a second mother’ to. Indicative of the ethos of ‘watching each other’s backs’ noted above, the incident had been ‘sorted’ not by the police but a group of EDL from a town in another region who had been dispatched specifically to ‘do them’ (field diary, 4 October 2014). Thus, while leaders may seek to foster affective bonds in order to encourage integration and the internalisation of ideology among grassroots members, those bonds have a dynamic of their own and can generate frustration, annoyance and hurt as well as solidarity, loyalty and security.

**Conclusion**

The role of emotions has been rehabilitated in social movement theory and received new theoretical impulse from the ‘affective turn’ in the social sciences. This has facilitated the distinction between different types of emotions in movements – shared and reciprocal (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001: 20) – as well as between emotions as the social expression of feelings and affect as non-conscious movement between one experiential state of the body to another. In studies of anti-globalisation protests, this has led to nuanced discussion of how activists perform their networks through diverse bodily movements, techniques and styles, generating distinct identities and emotional tones (Juris, 2008: 89). In contrast, in studies of extreme and populist radical right movements, an instrumental approach continues to dominate in which it is suggested that collective
emotions are consciously orchestrated by leaders among masses in order to construct emotional collectives (Virchow, 2007: 148).

Such an instrumental approach is questioned by the findings of this ethnographic study, which suggest that affective bonds within the EDL are generated from the bottom-up, emerging from a sense of ‘togetherness’ generated through shared activism – primarily in the form of participation in street demonstrations – that binds members of the movement. At the same time these bonds – experienced as being ‘like one big family’ – enhance the pleasures associated with activism and thus are central to sustaining it. This confirms Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta’s (2001: 20) argument that, while distinct, reciprocal and shared emotions reinforce each other, thereby building a movement’s culture. At the same time, it has been demonstrated that those interpersonal relationships central to the formation and maintenance of the emotional collective can also undermine it (Jasper, 1998: 419).

While a nuanced study of the role of affect in social movements would require more focused attention than it was given in the design of this research, as well as a more sensory ethnographic approach, in this chapter moments during activism are captured where affect becomes tangible and articulated. These moments – when senses are overwhelmed by the crowd, when respondents feel the ‘buzz’ or ‘rush’ of the demonstration or are lost in the pleasures of communal singing, chanting and marching – are moments when bodies affect one another and transpersonal intensities emerge (Anderson, 2009: 78). Notwithstanding the acceptance of the importance of the pre-personal and bodily dimensions of affect, however, the findings of this study confirm the importance of understanding affect as a ‘practice’ rooted in social life and concrete activities (Wetherell, 2012: 3) rather than as a ‘contagion’, virtual or transhuman process that takes place outside the subjectivities of those experiencing them (Shields, Park and Davidson, 2011: 318). This approach reconnects emotion to affect and recognises that affect is neither generated nor experienced randomly but communicated in crowds that have a shared identity and social practices (Wetherell, 2012: 148). This also allows for the reconnection of emotion, affect and meanings attached to activism at the cognitive level and is epitomised in the understanding of EDL activism as standing ‘loud and proud’, as explored in the following chapter.

Notes

1 The exception to this rule is Infidel respondents for whom EDL activists’ treatment of demonstrations as a ‘good day out’ was a source of criticism and further evidence that they were not ‘serious’ (Andrew).
2 According to this theory, pheromones emitted by one body cause the release of hormones in the blood of another body and thus a change in the body state.
3 A football chant associated most frequently with Glasgow Rangers fans (and often accompanied by an anti-Irish tag line) but appropriated by fans of other Scottish and English football clubs.