QUESTIONING WHILE WALKING.

The 'Disobedient movement',
and the Centro Sociale Rivolta in Italy

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines the organisational principles, repertoires of contention, practices, and the political culture of the *Centro Sociale Occupato Rivolta* as an expression of the Disobedient movement. The study, which is based on 42 interviews, participant observation and original documents, discusses the main theories on social movements which combine different theoretical perspectives, namely resource mobilisation, new social movements and the theory of political opportunity structure.

Providing a definition of CSO as a convenient name to indicate a number of profoundly heterogeneous experiences that rely on illegal occupations of empty buildings and the principle of self-management, the study interprets the *Rivolta* as a proactive subject and political entrepreneur. These two concepts refer to the attempt of the *Rivolta* to overcome their identity as a new-left organisation, its ability of mobilising symbolic and material resources and to its continuous change and development. The case of the *Rivolta* shows that a movement actor has to continually 'destroy' old conditions and create new ones in order to survive and expand.

The combination of different theoretical approaches and the analysis of the *Rivolta* has allowed the research to highlight some specific issues. Firstly, this movement area has overcome the dichotomy between conflict for recognition and for socio-economic resource distribution. While the *Rivolta* is an actor that mobilises resources, it also aims to promote its autonomous cultural identity and to extend social and political rights in society. Secondly, the relations between local and national institutions and the Disobedient movement area, far from being linear, either in terms of conflict or dialogue, are changeable and discontinuous. The study shows that the extra-institutional advocacy of this movement network still persists and has been combined with institutional participation. Finally, the thesis shows that the movement area to which the *Rivolta* belongs, in exploiting the opportunities offered by the general context, has set its struggles, claims and protests both at the local and the global dimension, marginalising national issues and targets.

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Introduction

Introduction

This research investigates organisational principles, forms of action, practices, and the political culture of the *Centro Sociale Occupato* (CSO) *Rivolta* and the *Movimento Disobbediente* (MD). The period studied is between the occupation of the *Rivolta* in 1995 and the campaign against the 'global war' in winter 2003. The choice of a case study has been made on the basis that it can explain what the CSOs are and summarise a process of change involving these movement networks. The *Rivolta* was chosen because of the idea that, first, it represents an example of innovation and political entrepreneurship, and second it is a centre of the political project that has involved the CSOs linked to the MD. The study aims to enter the political culture and systems of action of the *Rivolta* and MD and through them, to answer some research questions.

The first section of this introduction examines the research subject. The second section briefly analyses the heterogeneous identities that compose the archipelago of the CSOs. The third section describes the structure of the thesis while the fourth section outlines the research questions

1.1. Research subject: empty spaces/contended spaces

1.1.1. A definition of centri sociali occupati

The CSOs rely on the illegal occupation of empty buildings, undergoing an architectural and social regeneration. This differentiates the CSOs not only from other, apparently similar, collective aggregations, such as charity organisations and juvenile groups of political parties (Consorzio AASTER 1995) but also from other urban movements. The squatted buildings become

public spaces where people gather, establish social relations and organise a wide range of political and cultural events. These can be strictly politicised, such as the campaign for the liberation of political prisoners, supporting social movements in other parts of the world or precarious workers' rights. The activities can also be cultural, such as the organisation of concerts and sound systems, events like poetry readings, art performances, exhibitions and conferences on various issues.

By the CSO we refer to heterogeneous and multifaceted movement networks, spread throughout the whole national territory, and which resemble the segmented characteristics of all social movements. They are not homogeneous empirical units with definite internal structures, but "a complex and contradictory phenomenon that challenges every kind of univocal definition … it is a convenient description of diverse experiences indicating either the occupants or their methods of using urban spaces" (Dines 1999: p91).

The CSOs are widespread and conflicting movement networks that have marked the radical youth political scene over the last twenty years. To some extent, this phenomenon has developed specifically in Italy and no other movement, elsewhere in Europe, is comparable in its deep roots, longevity and its capacity to mobilise young generations encourage their need for radicalism. Since the early eighties, when the CSOs defined themselves as the *Movimento Antagonista* (MA), they have organised and taken part in many campaigns, ranging from those against antinuclear power to campaigns for the livelihood and sustainability of cities. More recently, the diverse networks of the CSOs have also been a conspicuous part of the mobilisation against current economic globalisation and some of its leading organisms, namely G8, WTO, MFI-WB, and the war on Iraq.

The illegal nature of the CSOs and their largely informal and un-institutional characteristics make the CSOs precarious places. Some of them survive for many years, others just a few days or hours. They are often the result of hard struggle, clashes with the police, legal prosecution and negotiations between activists and political institutions. Therefore, it is hard to establish their exact number and state how many people organise activities and attend them. Some limited research carried out in 1996 (Dazieri 1996) mapped 114 CSOs,

although their number has probably grown in the last few years. Research shows a strong concentration in two of the main former industrial towns, Milan and Turin, and in the capital city Rome and a widespread presence in the rest of the country. Although such a number bears witness to their strong roots in Italian society and their spread through the whole national territory, other data show that they involve mainly young people. Research carried out on a sample of about 1400 attendants of two of the main CSOs in Milan in 1996 suggested that the vast majority were young people between 18 and 25 (Consorzio AASTER *et al.* 1996). Indeed, the number of activists and attendants is highly volatile, and depends on several factors.

1.1.2. Historical roots and the current social composition

The origins of the CSOs are rooted in the antagonistic juvenile social movements of the 70s, since "groups of young people started a process of 'claiming the city' through widespread squatting of public spaces and the occupation of empty buildings, in a move that brought them into the centre of the cities from the poor hinterlands" (Ruggiero 2000: p170).

Although some components and activists claim an identity embedded in the youth movements of the seventies, the CSOs are not merely nostalgic imitators of leftist and autonomous groups of that era; they are well-rooted in the present time. Their presence would not have been possible without the transition from industrial to post-industrial society. From the perspective of urban transformations, the CSOs have settled in the physical voids left by the dismantling of inner-city factories and their move towards extra-urban areas. The members and attendants of these places are representative of the labour force restructuring that has occurred in Italy over the last twenty years (Vecchi 1994). The quantitative survey mentioned before tells us that the social composition of the CSOs reflects the current fragmentation of the labour market, based on the increase of flexible work in the service sector and the decline of permanent and full-time employment. At the same time it rejects the idea that attendants and members belong to marginalized strata of the population and shows that there is a large area of income stability (AASTER 1996). Instead, the CSOs give political and cultural representation to people

who build their identity outside the work place and whose interests cannot be defined only on a structural basis (Dalton 1988 in della Porta; Bascetta 1994).

1.1.3. Organisational principles

The CSOs participate in networks based on self-help, shared identities, and strategic alliances for specific campaigns. These networks are the organisational feature that characterises the CSOs over the last few years. According to Vecchi (1994: p12), "the theorised organisational model is in fact the net constituted of nodes, independent one from the other, but connected by a web of knowledge".

Every single CSO takes part in the movement's networks in an independent although connected way, collaborating on specific campaigns for limited periods of time. This structure has a variable geometric form that allows the CSOs to enjoy a certain autonomy and to build relations with other social and political subjects, not necessarily homogeneous in terms of identity and objectives. The CSOs are involved in local campaigns, co-operating with associations, political parties, unions, charity organisations and informal groups of youngsters that operate within the territory. As will be seen, in the case study of this research, the CSO *Rivolta* can collaborate with actors, who differ in identity, in common projects without necessarily sharing the same general values.

Self-managing and self-organisation are the principles through which CSO members organize political and social activities. That means that the young people who occupy these places are directly involved in their management, there is no formal separation between the decision making process and the execution of activities, and there is no control from political parties and institutions. The members refuse any kind of bureaucratic hierarchy and are responsible for the activities they organise and carry out. In this respect the CSOs inherit the 'anti-bureaucratic thrust' (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989) from the movements of the sixties and early seventies and adopt horizontal forms of decision-making processes. The general assembly is the place where campaigns are discussed publicly and decided on collectively. Moreover, the activities in which they are involved are not profit oriented,

although in some cases they can produce the basis for an informal economy and provide income for the members of the CSOs.

1.2.Heterogeneous political identities

The CSOs are heterogeneous movement networks that differ in political and cultural orientation (libertarians, neo-Leninists, post-autonomous, not ideological), in relation with institutions (hostile, pragmatic, strategic), in purpose (cultural, political, social). According to Dines (1999: p91): "occupation and self-managing as methodology and the safeguarding of their political autonomy still remain the common features; however, the practical implications of these are problematic too. *Centro Sociale* is a category that varies in time and space".

Because of the internal fragmentation and the variety of cultural and political expressions, the CSOs cannot be considered a wholly homogeneous body with a single identity. Therefore, more than a movement the CSOs constitute movement networks, sometimes in conflict with each other. Different political and cultural orientations can, therefore, often be found.

Following Moroni's categorisation (1996) we can attempt to make a distinction between two macro-areas that often cross and combine with each other: the 'countercultural' and the 'political'.

The 'counter-cultural' area emphasises the innovations of artistic, cultural and political language through an alternative use of information technology, the organisation of independent cultural activities, anti-prohibitionist events and the production and distribution of independent music. The *Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito* (CSOA) *Conchetta/Cox 18* in Milan was one of the most notable examples during the nineties. According to Moroni (1996), its activists focused on what they considered the very heart of the contemporary capitalist system: communication and knowledge. As post-industrial capitalism is driven by immaterial productive forces such as language and knowledge, the movement should focus on the cultural sphere and specifically on the alternative uses of information technology and on countercultural issues. As a consequence the CSOA *Conchetta/Cox 18* was involved in a number of counter-cultural entrepreneurial initiatives including the establishment of

alternative publishing houses, the organisation of experimental electronic music events, the building of counter-networks and hackers' meetings aiming to build a political and cultural resistance to power.

The 'political' area can be further subdivided into three main movement networks: Libertarian, Antagonist, and Disobedient. While counter-cultural CSOs are mainly engaged in cultural initiatives, others focus their activities on the political struggle. The Libertarians are anarchistic and represent a minority grouping within the CSOs. They are against any subordination of individual freedom to collectivity, either institutional or antagonistic, which is considered hierarchical and repressive (Berzano, Gallini and Genova 2002). The most extreme CSOs not only refuse any kind of formalisation of their structures and dialogue with state institutions, but also with movements that they judge too moderate. Therefore, "they take part in some protest events, if they believe that moments of intensive conflict can take place" (Genova 2003: 9).

The Antagonists feel themselves legitimate inheritors of the autonomists' movements of the seventies and base their analyses of the social system on Marxist class categories. Anti-institutionalism is the main trait of these CSOs. As a consequence, like the libertarians they formally refuse to enter into dialogue with state institutions (CSOA Askatasuna 2000) and consider street battles with the police as perhaps the most radical type of class conflict (CSA Dordoni 2001). In accordance with this view they believe CSOs should be revolutionary subjects aiming to represent the interests of a composite proletarian class of the unemployed, precarious employees, and factory and service sector unskilled workers. Over the last few years the Antagonists CSOs have focused their initiatives specifically on the 'antifascist resistance'.

The Disobedient activists have a rather different agenda. These CSOs took part in the former *Movimento delle Tute Bianche* (the White Overalls Movement) and originally included the CSOs of the former *Carta di Milano*, the CSOs located in the towns of the North-East of the country, such as Venice, Padua and Vicenza, several CSOs in Rome, the southern *No Global Network*, the party organisation *Giovani Comunisti*[1] (the Youth organisation of the party of *Rifondazione Comunista*, the main Italian left wing party which was founded

after the dissolution of the PCI in 1991), the national association *Ya Basta!* and other CSOs and associations.

This movement network of the CSOs reclaims the heretical Marxist tradition and the attempt to leave the XXth century behind. This leads them to be critical of the labour movement's history. At the same time this movement network has started a process of dismissing most of the Autonomists' icons and updating some categories of analysis that it considers inappropriate for interpreting contemporary society. Moreover, its emphasis on communication and the symbolic sphere have led it to invest resources in means of communication, such as radio stations and websites, and to innovate their language. This is now less cryptic and more direct than in the past, following the example of the Sub-Comandante Marcos and the *Zapatistas* experience.

Assuming Castells (1997: 8) categories, the Antagonists and Libertarians can be considered the bringers of a resistance identity, whereas the counter-cultural CSOs and the *Disobbedienti* are the bringers of a project identity. The former are engaged in the defence of their identity, threatened by those dominating society and therefore are "building trenches of resistance and survival". The latter are proactive because they innovate cultural languages and repertoires of action and "because on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, [they] build a new identity that redefines their position in society".

What are the constituent elements of the Disobedient CSOs? What defines their proactive identity in contrast with others? How do they redefine their position in society? To describe briefly what characterise the Disobedient movement network, three key levels will be used: a theoretical framework describing, in other words their *weltanshaung* and analysis of contemporary society, and their repertoire of protest and visions of a possible alternative society.

1.2.1. The theoretical framework

First, their theoretical framework is characterised by an interpretation of contemporary society as the 'passage of an epoch' (Revelli 1996). In short, the Disobedient movement argue that Western capitalist economies have been experiencing a new era characterised as the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. According to them, the former was characterised by the political and

social centrality of the unskilled mass workers of the large factories and by the preponderant role of the State in the distribution of welfare resources and economic regulation. This mode of production is in the process of being replaced by a new one that is qualitatively very different. It is based on intellectual and immaterial work, what Marx called 'general intellect', and on the decline of state power. Immaterial labour refers to "the whole series of activities, offices and professions (spreading from the cultural industry to the Fiat factory in Melfi), marked by the employment of cognitive and communicative general skills" (Il tallone del Cavaliere 1994: 3).

Accordingly, the social composition of the labour market has dramatically changed since the Fordist age. It is now made up of flexible workers mainly employed in the service sector using knowledge and social relations as the main means of production.

At the same time, the Disobedient CSOs have shifted their attention from national to both local and global contexts. Globalisation is a social process that raises new fundamental questions about the forms and space of social conflict and the issues of collective movements. In the past, historical and political reasons pushed Italian leftist parties and movements to give their solidarity and support to specific national movements all over the world. In this way, internationalism was part of labour and youth movements' cultural heritage in Italy. However, globalisation and the New World Order have partly undermined the nation-states' borders, increased trans-national ties among movements and raised global issues. As a consequence, according to the Disobedient activists the space of political and social action is no longer the national territory. Now, the global space is the new common public sphere: it is the place where social movements act and create conflict.

1.2.2. Repertoires of protest

The use of direct forms of struggle, namely direct action and civil disobedience, is another key element of the Disobedient activists. However, while the former is also common to other traditional autonomous movements, the latter has characterised the MD latest mobilisations from Seattle onwards. Civil disobedience is considered the right to disobey 'unjust laws', to break the

copyright rules, to violate the so-called red zones, where international economic and political organisms are found, and to transpass national borders. As will be argued, what happened in Genoa during the G8 summit and the attempt to enter the 'red zone', confronting the police without using offensive objects, is an example of the new repertoire of protest. Civil disobedience is also evident in the physical dismantling of detention centres for undocumented migrants in several Italian towns. As it will be argued in chapter 8, the Disobedient activists conceive civil disobedience not only as a repertoire of protest but also as a way of pushing the limits of a given normative and social order.

1.2.3. Aims

Finally, unlike the antagonists and anti-imperialists the Disobedient CSOs are no longer teleological and refuse to regard any utopias as "a final stage in society, characterised by definitive harmony" (Ruggiero 2001: 48). As could be read in one of their on-line magazines: "the project of a-perfect-society-that-humanity-has-not-understood, with its pretentiousness 'di mettere le braghe al mondo' (to put the world to rights) and the tragedies that it has generated, is fortunately behind us"[2].

The Disobedient CSOs do not aim for any kind of transcendence and do not think that social change can occur through the conquest of State power: "Foucault taught us that the 'winter palace' is empty (…) the issue is not to seize the power" (Andretta, della Porta, Mosca and Reiter 2003: 47). The revolutionary communist tradition and the Leninist attempts to seize power through armed insurrection are therefore impracticable ways forward (Caccia 2000). The 'possible other world' which they talk about is recognised as the 'here and now'.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

The research title, 'Questioning while walking' (*Caminare Preguntando*) is a *Zapatista* slogan[3]. However, in this context it is something more than a slogan. It represents and encompasses the heart of the Disobedient movement network

and summarises the necessity stated by the movement to link two kinds of things: action and thought, struggle and questioning. As can be read in one of the MD documents: "questioning while walking means: never proceeding dogmatically, always comparing their own ideas and actions with someone else's and other alternatives"[4]. It is an invitation to continue thinking while you are struggling, asking yourself if civil society is listening to you and if you are reading social change correctly. 'Questioning while walking' is a call to avoid totalising categories of interpretation and to continue questioning society and yourself, and to correct yourself while you are walking on the basis of your questions. It is the Zapatistas method but it has become the method also of the CSO *Rivolta* and Disobedient method.

The next chapter is a review of the main theories on social movements. It will be argued that while some of them are insufficient to explain how social movements develop, others can be integrated and provide useful suggestions concerning the features of collective action. Three theories seem to be particularly useful for the purposes of this thesis. They are the Resource Mobilization theory (RMT), the Political Opportunity Structure theory (POST) and the New Social Movements theory (NSMT). The first stresses the role that rationality and the calculation of benefits and costs play in pushing social actors into collective action. The second refers to the degree of openness or closedness of a political system in a way that might facilitate or discourage the rise of social movements. The third emphasises the struggle concerning the production of meaning. It argues that 'conflict among industrial classes is of decreasing relevance, and similarly that representation of movements as largely homogeneous subjects is no longer feasible' (della Porta and Diani 1999: 11-12). All of them represent a further step forward with respect to traditional theories because they suggest that grievance, economic poverty and discontentment are not enough to account for the mobilization process. My view is that the integration of aspects of these three theories can explain social movements and describe the evolution of the CSO *Rivolta* and the MD.

The third chapter provides the methodological background to this study. It investigates the main research methods adopted in studying Italian social movements and raise some methodological problems. The chapter concludes

with a description of the methodology, based on a multiple strategy of collecting data on the basis of qualitative methodology and ethnographic principles.

The fourth and fifth chapters will focus on autonomous movements in Italy since the early sixties through the eighties and nineties. The main stages of development of new social movements will be described starting from the revolt in Genoa in 1960, then the through the students' and workers' movement of the 'red biennium' 1968-69 (Scalzone 1988), the youth and feminist movements of the seventies, and finally the recent developments of the CSOs in the eighties and nineties. Continuity and discontinuity characterise the relationship between the movements of the sixties and seventies and the autonomous movements of the last twenty years. The CSOs have inherited key elements from these movements such as the anti-bureaucratic thrust, anti-hierarchical forms of organisation based on direct participation, the struggle for an egalitarian society, the use of unconventional forms of protest and the breaking with the communist tradition and the working class movement.

The sixth chapter will start analysing the case study of the *Rivolta*. It will describe its history, the relationship with the area and the internal organisational structure. Moreover it will attempt to draw some ideal-typical profiles of activists and attendants. This thesis' view is that the *Rivolta* is one of the Italian CSOs that best exemplifies the notion of political entrepreneur. In many respects it is an unique case, specifically in its relations with institutions, repertoires of protest and analysis, and in what has been called the building of 'welfare from below'. The *Rivolta* is at the centre of a political project and movement 'experiment' showing original features in the Italian situation involving the Northern-East regions. As will be noted the *Rivolta* is part of the wider MD and its links are multiple at a regional, national and international level. These organisational connections have led me to consider both the debate occurring at the *Rivolta* and discussions, documents of analysis and campaigns that have involved the MD as a whole and the CSOs of the North-East. To a certain extent the analysis of the *Rivolta* will allow us to investigate the MD, its recent campaigns and changes.

The seventh chapter will describe the correlation between the decline of Fordist institutions, such as the Welfare State, and the provision of care and social services made by the CSO *Rivolta*. The hypothesis of the chapter is that the CSOs mobilise immaterial resources such as solidarity and social cohesion which are not implemented either by the state or by the market. The chapter will analyse some public utility services set up within the *Rivolta* over the last few years. It will be shown that this kind of development has been possible due to a combination of macro, local and subjective political conditions, such as the decline of the welfare systems and the partial dismissal of welfare provisions, openness among institutions and change in strategy of the activists of the *Rivolta*.

The eighth chapter explores the political discourse of the MTB and the MD during early 2000 when the alter-globalisation[5] movement was at its height. Because the debate has a national if not international dimension, this study will not distinguish between the MD as a whole and the CSO *Rivolta*. This chapter will focus on some key words and concepts such as empire, multitude, exodus, bio-politics and will discuss the meaning of civil disobedience as a constituent of the protest repertoire. The key words that will be presented in these pages belong to both the Disobedient CSOs and the *Rivolta* which are considered as an individual entity, a single subject sharing a mutual identity.

The ninth chapter will outline the main stages that have brought the CSOs to take part in the alter-globalisation movement. Globalisation is a social process that has transformed inter-state perspectives, altering the way of thinking, acting and organising in Italian social movements and those elsewhere in the world. This process has raised new fundamental questions about the forms and space of social conflict and the issues of collective movements. This chapter will look at the Disobedient CSOs as a global movement and analyse some of the main campaigns in which it participated, either as a part of the MTB or MD, from the march against precarity in Amsterdam in 1996 to the no-global war campaign in winter 2003.

The concluding chapter will re-examine the main findings of research and discuss two further elements regarding the character of the *Rivolta* activists and the concept of the *Rivolta* as a political entrepreneur.

1.4. Aims of the thesis

Through the case study of the *Rivolta* this study will highlight some specific issues. Firstly, the thesis will show that the MD and the CSO *Rivolta* have overcome the dichotomy between identity conflict and resource distribution/mobilisation, between social movements that struggle for the 'recognition of difference' and others that contest how socio-economic resources are distributed. Integrating recognition and distribution, the disobedient CSOs and the *Rivolta* promote a kind of social justice that assumes both terms (Fraser 1995; 1996). They mobilise resources, both internal and external, aim to expand their autonomous cultural identity, and to extend social, political and civil rights, thus demonstrating that the politics of redistribution and recognition are not mutually exclusive. By integrating recognition and distribution the Disobedient CSOs "arrive at a framework that is adequate to the demands of our age" (Fraser 1996: 12).

Secondly, the research investigates the relationship between institutions and the MD. The following pages will argue that the interaction between movements and state institutions is discontinuous and changeable and transforms the opponents, modifying their political openness or closedness as well as their repertoire and policing of protests. In addition, it will be argued that the extra-institutional policy of the MD can be combined with institutional participation. Some forms of so-called institutionalisation have not jeopardised the conflictual nature of the MD and especially of the *Rivolta* in particular.

Thirdly, the thesis will show that the MD network and the *Rivolta* locate their struggles, claims and protests both at a local and global level, characterising a glocal actor. Over the last few years the MD network has neglected national issues and focused its analysis, debate and action on the global scene, as shown by the increasing presence of its activists at some of the main global mobilizations and Porto Alegre, Chiapas, Palestine and Argentina. At the same time we will see that the Disobedient activists and the *Rivolta* have not underestimated the local dimension, organising struggles on local issues and targeting local institutions.

Conclusion

To conclude, this introduction has outlined the main characteristics of the CSOs and a partial definition has been given. The term CSO refers to a certain use of the urban space based on the illegal occupation and self management of empty unused spaces and their transformation into aggregative places providing formal and informal services and organising political initiative.

As has been suggested, the CSOs are a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single movement as if they were a homogeneous social actor. On the contrary, several conflicting identities compose the movement networks: the Counter-cultural, the Libertarian, the Antagonist and the Disobedient. While the neo-Leninist and Libertarian CSOs are the bringers of a resistance identity, the counter-cultural CSOs and the MD are proactive and are involved in the attempt to build a new identity that allows them to redefine their position in society. We have also focused on some of the constituting elements of the MD and as a consequence of the *Rivolta* identity. First, according to the Disobedient movement contemporary society is characterised by the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and by the rise of intellectual and immaterial work. Secondly, the Disobedient activists base their repertoires of protest on a renewed practice of direct action and civil disobedience. Thirdly, their struggles are no longer teleological and they do not attempt any kind of transcendence and conquest of state power. The study will show that the MD has gone beyond a number of apparent dichotomies: the dichotomy between recognition and distribution, institutional action and protest repertoires, and between the global and the local.

1 The Giovani Comunisti left the MD emphasising their criticism of violence in the beginning of 2004.

2 Sherwood Tribune (2001), 'Editoriale', January, available at: http://www.sherwood.it/sherwoodcomunicazione/sherwoodtribune/index.htm.

3 When the Zapatistas' uprising erupted in Chiapas on January the 1st 1994 the political and academic world split into two fronts. On the one hand, there were those who thought that it was a kind of social disturbance to the way of progress. In accordance with the modernisation theory rhetoric, which emphasises the contrast between modernity and tradition, placing these at the antipodes of social evolution, the Chiapas rebellion was labelled as an ethnic conflict of exploited Indian peasants, a revolt of a social class at its sunset, a way of resisting progress and development. On the other hand, others have argued that in Chiapas a modern, if not post-modern, rebellion was ongoing because it coped with the problems related to globalisation of the economy, choosing a pluralistic approach, opening up to other cultures and political identities and extensively using the internet to communicate the revolt to the whole world. With its ability to renew political languages and categories and to communicate to the whole society overcoming specific identities, the Zapatistas and its leader the Sub-Comandante Marcos greatly influenced the end of the millennium anti-systemic movements. As well as they were demanding democracy and civil rights for the indigenous population, the Zapatistas aimed to strengthen them for the whole Mexican country, demonstrating that communitarian movements can express democratic principles and link particularism and universalism (Le Bot 1997; Harvey 1998).

4 Discussion document: Anonymous (2001), Il pungiglione e l'elefante, http://www.ecn.org.

5 This definition has been adopted in contrast to no-global and new-global movement. While the former has a negative meaning, the latter does not explain the characteristics of the movement that erupted in Seattle. On the contrary, alter-globalisation points to the characteristics and the aims of the movement.

Chapter 2

Theorising on social movements

Introduction

Although sociology was born during a period of massive historical change and was characterised by the entrance of the masses into the public sphere, it was not until the early nineteen-sixties that an elaborated and comprehensive theory of social movements emerged. However, the notion of 'social movement' dates back to around the middle of the eighteenth century at the very dawn of socialism and nationalism, in particular the emancipative action of the working class (Gallino 1978). Despite this, social thought has disregarded movements as the main actors of industrial society and has not considered them as instigators of social practices or as a possible factors in social change (Touraine 1981). Movements have always been seen as an accidental element of the 'evolution' of society, as the result of certain conditions of development, as collective behaviour determined by the breakdown of certain rules or society's balance.

As many scholars note, the social philosopher August Comte, who is still recognised as the founder of sociology, attributed more importance to social dynamics and the positivist science of progress than to the study of what remains fixed and rigid in a society. However, in underlining its necessary character, Comte argued that progress is the result of natural laws and not of any kind of will (Comte 1971). By contrast, Karl Marx and Frederich Engels attributed an extraordinary importance to social forces in determining the birth of a new social system and the death of the old one. According to the two German scholars, structure and superstructure of a social system, the degree of development of the economic sphere and legal institutions are always the result of power relations and the struggles occurring between collective subjects.

However, their analysis of the structural causes of social change, and the nature of the economic development, prevented them from elaborating a notion or a study of social movements.

Though from a different perspective, the following classic thinkers did not attribute a great relevance to social movements either. Weber, Durkheim, Le Bon and Simmel did not go as far as to consider them autonomous subjects with their own logic of functioning. They argued that social movements occupy a marginal position, being symptoms or side effects more than potential actors of social change. According to Max Weber, mass movements express the protest of underprivileged classes and status groups during periods of economic crisis (Pakulski 1991); they are of a transitory character and stop working when the economic crisis has ended. Similarly, Emile Durkheim (1999) suggested that collective movements are exceptional events. They occur during periods of *anomie*, generating a kind of future integration. Focusing mainly on socialist and communist social movements, he interpreted them as a symptom of the difficulty of adapting to the rapid changes in the division of labour. They are signs of the State's limits in addressing these problems. The most widely accepted analysis of collective behaviour among all these was that of Gustav Le Bon, who at the beginning of the century compared mass movements to disruptive and irrational crowds (Le Bon 1982). They are characterised by individuals who lose rational faculties, personal autonomy and moral judgment. Through them the popular classes exercise power. People in a crowd experience an 'instinctive' and 'barbarian' state in opposition to the rational characteristic of civilisation. Therefore, parliamentary assemblies, voters and revolutionary mobs, and even court juries, all share the same characteristics: masses are seen as gullible and lacking in critical faculties. They form a 'mental unity'. Le Bon introduced an element that in some respects will recur in the future, mainly among 'breakdown' theorists like Rudolf Heberle. In fact, he says that revolutionary and social movements, the ones that seized the Bastille as well as the Paris Commune of 1871, are drawn by rootless, disorganised and mentally disturbed urban social classes. Like the other thinkers, Simmel disregarded social movements and preferred to talk about

conflict as one of the brightest forms of interaction carried out by individuals rather than organised social movements (Ruggiero 2001).

This brief review of some of the most celebrated scholars of social change shows that the notion of social movement is vague and imprecise among classical sociologists (Ruggiero 2001). The founders and the leading figures of sociological thought neither gave any definition of social movement nor attempted to build a systematic theory. The first shift occurred in the 1920s when social movements began to draw the attention of social science and to be seen as actors of change (della Porta and Diani 1999). The rise of collective protest that, far from being disorganised, questioned the social and institutional order, the increasing political autonomy of many segments of society, and the differentiation and specialisation of social sciences, have probably contributed to a significant change in the theoretical approach to social movements. Since then a systematic reflection on these movements has started to develop, albeit even if it is still at an embryonic stage. They are still considered to be a form of adaptive, non-institutionalised and potentially dangerous collective behaviour, as well as promoters of social change. In the twenties and thirties sociologists such as Park, Burgess and, most importantly, Blumer, developed the study of collective behaviour as a special field within social science (della Porta and Diani 1998; Neveu 2001). Specifically, Blumer (1994) moved from a 'mass psychosis' view such as Le Bon's explanation of mass behaviour to the observable interaction of individuals. Collective actors are either the result of social strains and changes in culture, or potentially creative actors which aim at 'a new order of life':

> "Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in a condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on the one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living" (Blumer 1994: 60).

However, according to this view social movements have still mainly structural causes. Their emergence results more from an uneven incidence of the processes of rationalisation of the social structure than on subjective wills.

Similarly in Weber and Durkheim, social movements are explained in terms of tension inherent in the development of contemporary society. Parsons' and Blumer's analyses form the basis of the so-called collective behaviour approach that dominated the study of social movements until the late 1960s (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first will consider the main theories of social movements beginning from the Collective Behaviour theory (CBT), that developed after the Second World War, to the Resource Mobilisation theory (RMT), the Political Opportunity Structure theory (POST), the New Social Movements theory (NSMT) and the culturalist or frame approach. What should be clear is that, although they often overlap and influence each other, these theories do not form a monolithic and homogeneous school of thought as is the case with the POST and RMT. Therefore, the inclusion of some authors in one current of thought or another is analytic. The second part will provide a definition of 'social movement' based on three key elements: organisational structure, identity, and engagement in systemic conflicts.

2.1. Traditional approaches

Although the collective behaviour approaches do not constitute a homogeneous theoretical *corpus*, they have enough in common to be grouped. These approaches emphasise that social movements are extensions of elementary forms of collective action that take place in periods of rapid social change when traditional social institutions weaken (Oberschall 1993). Accordingly, a social movement is "a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote a change or resist a change in the society or group of which it is part" (Turner and Killian 1970: 308). They are mainly determined by deprivation and grievance, and by shared beliefs in what has caused the situation and the means to deal with it. Uprooted, frustrated and dissatisfied people will be the most likely individuals to take part in collective movements. The emphasis on the elements of crisis in determining the birth of a social movement has contributed to this approach being called 'breakdown theory' (Cohen 1985).

An example is constituted by Kornhauser's (1959) theory of mass society. He contrasts totalitarian mass movements, Communist and Fascist, with established political parties, socialist, conservative and liberal parties and argues that alienation and weakness of recognised institutions are the conditions in which a mass movement can develop. The participation in extremist mass movements is not a matter of social class. On the contrary, it depends on a lack of social integration, attachment to the community, frustration and alienation. A situation of material uncertainty generates a kind of irrational behaviour and psychological frustration that pushes people to take part in social movements. This is the reason why mass movements recruit members among the 'rank and file' of unattached intellectuals, marginal middle-classes and isolated workers. However, these strata are not mobilised in relation to their class position, as the Marxist school would argue, but because of the resentment against their direct counterpart: integrated middle class, big business, skilled workers and employed people. Resentment becomes the main source of social conflict and a political category to explain why social movements develop.

A socio-psychological approach to the study of social movements was adopted by Gusfield (1968). He argued that people become social actors and members of a movement because they do not accept the impact and the strains caused by deep and sudden social changes. This type of approach also has methodological implications and rising tension can be predicted and avoided once we point out the causes of discontent. According to Gusfield (1968: 446): "one of the sociologist's tasks in analysing a movement is to identify the particular social changes that have generated discontent and to specify their relation to the movement".

A more sociological approach is constituted by functionalism and by Neil Smelser's (1962) celebrated theory on collective behaviour. As is well known, functionalism is centred on the concept of equilibrium of the social system. From this perspective social movements are anything but 'disturbance elements', involving irrational and disconnected behaviour that jeopardise this equilibrium. They are mostly the result and the side-effects of excessively rapid

social change and not the cause of innovation in society. Accordingly, social movements have a marginal role with respect to other social phenomena and functionalist sociologists do not pay any attention to them.

Within this strand, the Smelser attempt to explain collective behaviour, social movements included, is generally considered the most systematic (della Porta and Diani 1998). By the notion of 'collective behaviour' he means "a mobilisation on the basis of a belief which redefines social action" (Smelser 1962: 8). He includes a wide range of heterogeneous social events: panic and craze response, hostile outbursts and riots, social reform movements and religious revolutions. Smelser argues that collective movements highlight the inability of social institutions to reproduce social cohesion and are a reaction to a crisis situation through the production of shared beliefs, which become the basis of a new collective solidarity (della Porta and Diani 1998).

He distinguishes between norm-oriented and value-oriented movements. While the former are an attempt to innovate norms in the name of a generalised belief, the latter aim to protect, restore or create values in the name of a generalised belief. An important role is played by what Smelser (1962) calls 'determinants': structural conduciveness, strain, generalised beliefs, precipitating factors, mobilisation for action, and the response of social control agencies. The 'determinants' are necessary and consequential stages. They need to be organized into well defined roles to generate an appropriate condition and to obtain a collective action. Furthermore, they must follow the logic of value-added, according to which, as in the manufacture of a car, "the earlier stages must combine according to a certain pattern before the next stage can contribute its particular value to the finished product" (1962: 14).

Other authors have focused on collective action as a type of behaviour resulting from situations of crisis and frustration. Analysing social phenomena such as Nazism and Black American movements, Davies (1962) adopts a kind of psycho-sociological approach. He uses the expression J-Curve to refer to a process in which rising expectations and declining satisfactions cause collective social actions. Rebellions and revolutions occur when the gap between expectations of satisfaction of basic needs and practical results becomes

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intolerable. Also Gurr, in his book *Why men rebel* (1970), explains the development of political violence with discontent, connecting it to the intensity of expectations. Movements do not depend on conditions of absolute poverty, but on the frustrated expectations of individuals. The collective overcoming of a condition of frustration is the key to explaining every social movement. One of the most interesting aspects of Gurr's analysis is the importance attributed to symbolic production whether by collective actors or by state institutions.

As Neveu (2001) has suggested, the Collective Behaviour theory (CBT) has several merits with respect to the theories of the past. This theory abandons a pathological approach towards social movements. The movements are not just a disruptive threat that has to be eradicated to preserve social order. On the contrary, they posses an internal logic and determine cultural and normative innovations. However, according to this view, social movements do not have a defined autonomy from the rest of society. They are considered a kind of collective behaviour amongst others, a non-rational response to change or a reaction to social strain. Yet, their role in the innovation of society is marginal when compared with other institutions; and people involved in collective movements belong to frustrated economic and social strata.

2.2.   Resource and organisational structure as conditions of social movements

The theoretical limits of the classical approach became apparent in the sixties and early seventies when massive and variegated social movements spread not just in western countries but all over the world (Cohen 1985). The Black Civil Rights' Movement, Berkeley's Free Speech Movement, and then the Anti-War and Student Movement involved a wide social strata and diversification of issues, forcing social science to change its theoretical assumptions (Jenkins 1983). The struggles of the sixties made it clear that social movements did not rely on aggrieved populations, frustrated intellectuals or marginal working class members that did not adapt to rapid changes. These struggles were not an attempt to resist social change, but rather to promote it, introduce innovations in society, experiment with new forms of life, communication, and

socialisation. Moreover, the social movements of the sixties showed that organisation, solidarity, tactics and strategy have an important role in determining collective action.

Questioning the supposed link between deprivation, frustration, discontent and the rise of social movements, and inspired by a new social context, the RMT proposes a different kind of conceptualisation. It underlines the rational and organisational rather than non-institutional and frustrating aspects of conflicts. So, while the CBT posed a clear and distinct boundary between institutional social life and collective movements, the RMT emphasises continuity between conventional politics and social movements (Cloward and Piven 1991; della Porta and Diani 1998) and the importance of rational choice in explaining the involvement of social actors in various forms of collective protest. There is always sufficient discontent in every kind of society and among social groups to generate collective movements. They are fairly permanent and recurring characteristics of the historical landscape (Oberschall 1978). Nevertheless, organised conflict and protests do not arise wherever grievances and discontent appear. This idea forces analysts "to move from a strong assumption about the centrality of deprivation and grievances to a weak one, which makes them a component, indeed, sometimes a secondary component in the generation of social movements" (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1215). Therefore, the problem is to understand *how* rather than *why* social movements rise in certain circumstances and not in others, even when there is the same level of frustration and resentment.

Basing itself more on sociological and economic theories rather than upon the social psychology of masses and collective behaviour (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Neveu 2001), the RMT states that "a social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1217-8). A social movement is a sort of political entrepreneur that possesses resources, mobilises them and aims to direct their distribution in accordance to the preferences of the population that it represents.

The RMT relies on three conceptual mainstays. The first is the rational choice of individuals in selecting costs and rewards. Social actors decide whether to take part in the collective action on the grounds of what Olson calls *selective incentives* (Olson 1965). The participation in collective action depends on the calculation of cost and reward: people who might benefit from the success of a social movement will take part in it. Otherwise, if they believe that the rewards are not enough and costs and sanctions in terms of time, labour, social stigma, and risk are too many, they will not take part in the collective action.

The second mainstay is the relationship between the availability of material, relational and intellectual resources of social movement organisations and the possibility that a mobilisation may occur. As McCarthy and Zald argued, "the social movement organisations must possess resources, however few and of whatever type, in order to work toward goal achievement" (1977: 1220). The consequence is that the more the available amount of discretionary and absolute resources, the greater the possibility that individuals will join together and engage in collective action to compete for these resources. Some studies on the USA collective movements of the sixties supported the validity of this statement and showed that the rise of social movement organisations and social movement industries were based on the increase of relative and absolute available resources (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977). The resources to mobilise are material, consisting of work and money, as well as immaterial and relational, including authority, legitimacy, services and a sense of belonging and community. As Neveu (2001: 82) suggests, a list of resources would be endless. Quantity and characteristics depend on the concrete historical context and on particular social networks: "The resources are anything but something potential which needs to be activated, mobilised – in a military meaning – toward a view of strategic action and being available to organisations or leaders".

The presence of solidarity and organisational structures is the third defining characteristic of the RMT. The success and failure of social movements and the possibility to mobilise resources depend on organisation and the intensity of will of the people who take part in collective action. In addition, the "structured

arrangements of individuals and groups in a social system" (Oberschall 1973: 33) and the degree of internal integration clarify the meaning of *mobilisation of resources*. As shown first by Oberschall and then Tilly, social conflicts do not arise from a context of social disorganisation or individual atomisation. They are not a "simple mechanical reaction to grievances and frustrations experienced in the pursuit and defence of material interests" (Oberschall 1973: 35). On the contrary, social movements rely on a "pre-existing form of organisations among those segments of a population which share preferences" (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1218), and "the greater the density of social organisation, the more likely that social movement activity will develop" (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988: 703).

The RMT has given a relevant contribution to the study of social movements. It no longer conceives social movements as deviant forms of collective behaviour, or as an outcome of social disorganisation. The RMT emphasises the normality of social conflict and the rationality of the actors involved (Ruggiero 2001). Furthermore, it highlights the importance of pre-existing organisational structures and social networks and underlines the relevance of resources for the mobilisation of social movements. In some respects, it can be argued that the presence of collective conflict is a symptom of the wellbeing of a society in terms of cohesion and social institutions, solidarity and resources. At the same time, the emphasis on rational choice risks reducing collective movements to a cost-benefit calculation, disregarding the sources and the stakes of social conflicts (Melucci 1982; Piven and Cloward 1992). Moreover, it has been noted that RMT analysts commit the reverse error of 'breakdown' theories. Arguing the continuity between institutional and protest behaviour, they de-emphasise collective action as a specific form of conflict, used by people who stay outside institutions. As Piven and Cloward (1994: 139) suggest "protest is indeed 'outside of normal politics' and 'against normal politics' in the sense that people break the rules defining permissible modes of political action".

2.3. Social movements and the political environment

The POST is also based on a rational choice model of pursuit and calculation of possible outcomes. It has developed contemporarily with the RMT and it might represent an alternative that can integrate with it. The concept of POS refers to the degree of openness or closure of a political system in a way that might facilitate or discourage the rise of social movements (Neveu 2001). This idea is not completely new. From a practical perspective it is somehow intuitive: the action of collective movements is calibrated on the basis of the political landscape, as every activist or member of a political organisation knows very well. From a theoretical view, the problem is how to identify the political environment, or in other words what it constitutes, and how to match political structure variables and social movement action. It has been noted (Tarrow 1994) that Toqueville established a close relationship between political institutions and collective action more than a century ago. In his analysis and comparison between France and America, he argued that centralised and strong states weaken civil society and incite violence and confrontation when collective movements erupt. On the other hand, weak states encourage the development of civil society and therefore facilitate peaceful forms of participation in organised action. Toqueville's analysis of the relationship between state and civil society and in particular of French society and the American state were unfruitful (Tarrow 1994). However, "the idea that the strength or weakness of states influences social movements' strategies remains central to the literature on collective action in general and on revolutions in particular" (della Porta and Diani 1998: 197). Peter Eisinger (1973), who compared protest cycles in different American cities, found that they varied in accordance with the closed and open nature of the local political system. He, therefore, revalued the meaning and importance of political processes in modelling collective action.

Since this first formulation, several variables have been introduced to address the meaning of political process: political instability (Cloward and Piven 1977), the presence of influential allies among the elite (Gamson 1990). McAdam (1996). Summing up the approaches by Brockett (1991), Kriesi *et al.* (1995),

Rucht (1996). Tarrow (1994), suggests four main variables through which 'the political environment' (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977) interacts with collective protest. They are:

- the relative openness of political institutions;
- the presence and stability (or instability) of a system of alliances among the elite alignment;
- the presence or absence of elite allies;
- the level of repression of the State.

There has been discussion about the presence of state repression in determining the possibility or impossibility for a movement to develop. Some authors suggest that the repression attitude is not an autonomous variable and it cannot be grouped with the others. It is an expression of the closure of the political system rather than an independent variable (McAdam 1996). Sidney Tarrow (1994), for example, includes state repression in the degree of openness of a political system variable. Accordingly, collective protest will raise different reactions from state institutions as a consequence of democratic traditions and the political culture of the country: protesting in China, which is an authoritarian and more restrictive political regime, will be harder than in France. On the other hand, della Porta and Diani (1998) attribute an autonomous role to state repression, or the 'policing of protest' as they call it. It has the capacity to influence models of organisation, repertoires of action and the aims of protest.

The POST has been accused of drawing a rigid and static profile of the political environment. Gamson and Meyer (1996) thus introduce a more dynamic model which focuses on two basic distinctions. First, they distinguish between a complex collection of stable political opportunities and more volatile variables. These variables can be seen again in culture and institutions: the strength of the state institution is the most stable variable, while capacity for social control and elections are the most volatile. Among the other variables, myths and values are the strongest. Secondly, Gamson and Meyer add an important element in order to define the political process. This is the interaction between movements and opportunities and the subsequent possibility for social movements to alter the

structure of opportunities by their pressure. In this respect the political environment is not fixed and eternal but something that social activists can change (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). As Gamson and Meyer (1996: 276) state: "Opportunities open the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities...Opportunities may shape or constrain movements, but movements can create opportunities as well".

According to these authors, the structure of political opportunity is something more than an institutional environment. It is a wide spectrum of formal and informal variables that constitute a kind of ecosystem where the collective action takes place, continually redefined in relation to the action performed by social movements.

This interpretation risks being too broad and inclusive. For example, are we sure that the 'myths' of a society, which according to Gamson and Meyer are cultural variables, belong to the political processes and can still influence the development of a social movement? If they do, how can we measure their influence? The POST has enlarged the possibility to explain the processes of formation and development of social movements. The problem is that it risks becoming "a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment ... an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action" (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 275).

Many observers have outlined the difficulties of the 'political process' approach. Della Porta and Diani (1998), for example, suggest four problems: first, a great deal of variables are added by empirical studies and cross national comparisons. This has increased the clarity of the concept and, at the same time, its vagueness; secondly, demonstrating the connection between the POS and its effects on social movements is a rather difficult operation. In this case the problem is not to identify abstract categories like electoral volatility, but what interferes with political institutional processes and the action of social movements. Therefore, the third problem, which is related to the previous one, is the difference between objective reality and its social construction. For changes in the POS to have an effect on social movements, activists must read

and interpret them correctly. As della Porta and Diani (1999: 224) suggest, "looking at structural opportunities without considering the cognitive processes which intervene between structure and action can be very misleading". Lastly, the political process perspective lacks clarity about social movements, their characteristics and their relationship to the political process.

2.4. The new social movements' cultural turn

The NSMT developed in Western Europe between the seventies and the eighties. Its background is made up of three elements. The first element is the rise of the post-industrial society which is characterised by information and communication technology. In his seminal book *The Postindustrial Society* (1974), Alain Touraine suggests that science has become the main productive force, and that production is based more on symbolic than material goods. As he added some years later, "research and development, information processing, biomedical science and techniques, and mass media are the four main components of postindustrial society" (1985: 781). The second element is the conceptualisation of post-material values society. It means that capitalist advanced economies went through a historically unique period of development and prosperity between the forties and the seventies. As a result of this, the post-war generations who grew up in the sixties enjoyed unprecedented levels of economic prosperity. The satisfaction of fundamental needs provoked a replacement of 'material' values with 'post-material' values, such as autonomy, non-economic quality of life, freedom of expression and self-fulfilment. Therefore, Western societies prioritise post-material values which have become the real object of social conflict and this underlines the issues of 'new' social mobilisations. Inglehart (1977) describes this transition as a 'silent revolution' and supports his thesis with a massive amount of evidence collected in the USA and European countries throughout the seventies and the eighties. According to Inglehart (1990: 48) "the post-war generation in these countries would place less emphasis on economic and physical security than older groups, who had experienced the hunger and devastation of World War II, the Great Depression, and perhaps even World War I". As a consequence,

collective protests target less the economic sphere and more the non-economic quality of life.

The third change is, of course, the spread of new forms of collective action and the development of collective mobilisations to affirm the civil rights of ethnic minorities, the emancipation of women, the recognition of cultural and sexual identities and the defence of the environment against the threats of industrialisation. In other words, the NSM approach expanded in a context where collective mobilisation challenges radically differ from the labour and national movements of the 20th century.

These three elements exercised a strong influence on sociology of social movements in Europe. The main assumption of the NSMT is that social conflicts no longer concern distribution, welfare and economic growth, and they do not involve social *strata* encompassed in the productive processes. On the contrary, collective conflicts, which have moved from the factory to society, regard 'the grammar of forms of life' (Habermas 1981) or the 'historicity of a society' (Touraine 1981) rather than the social relations within the place of production.

Habermas (1981: 33) suggests that conflicts in late capitalist societies are an attempt to resist the colonisation and reification of the 'life world'. What distinguishes 'new politics' from 'old politics' is that the former "entails problems of quality of life, equality, individual self-realisation, participation, and human rights". The actors involved in NSMs struggle for their 'life world such as sexuality, health, body, linguistic and cultural heritage, the physical environment, and for values such as autonomy and identity (Offe 1985). From the point of view of social composition these actors have also radically changed. They are no longer the productive and manual workers of factories but elements of three social segments: the new middle class of professionals and workers of social service and public sector; the old middle class and people outside the labour market or in a marginal position.

Similarly, in Touraine's (1981: 77) view what is at stake in the most important conflicts is the cultural field. In fact, he argues that a social movement is an organised collective actor "struggling against his class adversary for the social

control of historicity in a concrete community". The term *historicity* refers to the cultural orientations of a given society, the normative patterns that organise our relationships with the environment, the "overall system of meaning which sets dominant rules in a given society" (1981: 81), in other words the instruments of transformation and production of social life. Therefore, popular social movements contend with ruling class social movements "not only the control of 'the means of production' but the production of symbolic goods, that is, of information and images, of culture itself" (Touraine 1985: 774). Nowadays, this cultural conflict is central, just as the economic conflict was in industrialised society and political conflict was at the dawn of modern society (Touraine 1998).

In short, the NSMT can be summarised using Melucci's (1996: 8) words: "In the last thirty years emerging social conflicts in complex societies have not expressed themselves through political action, but rather have raised cultural challenges to the dominant language, to the codes that organize information and shape social practices. The crucial dimension of daily life has been involved in these conflicts, and new actors have laid claim at their autonomy in making sense of their life". Although interesting and innovative, this view risks underestimating economic conflicts which still occur and are often grafted on to identity and cultural claims.

2.5. The performative role of culture

As we have seen, the NSM perspective emphasises the role of culture in explaining collective action. According to this outlook it is indeed the central locus of social conflict. As in industrial society, where economic conflicts primarily involved the working class and capitalist class, in post-industrial society new social classes struggle to gain control over the production of symbols, codes, languages and so on. However, culture can also be viewed from other theoretical perspectives.

First, it can be considered in relation to its capacity to shape the course and the characteristics of collective action. According to the CBT, social movements not only react to structural changes occurring in society, but they are also

"shaped by their inclusion in and modification of aspects of the dominant culture" (Johnston and Klandermans 1995: 6). Hence, culture is an external element that channels collective action.

In recent years a second school of thought has developed. This regards collective movements as cognitive praxis and underlines the importance of culture as a 'tool kit', a set of instruments through which people shape both reality and their own experience. Culture is seen as a set of rituals, symbols, stories, and world views (Swidler 1986). It performs reality and guides individuals in collective action. This view considers interaction among individuals as the main unit for analysis and suggests that groups, identities, and social problems are not fixed entities but the result of interactions and social processes (Neveau 2001).

In his book *The Frame Analysis* (1974) the social psychologist Erving Goffman introduces the concept of interpretative frame. It is a schema of interpretation that transforms social reality into something meaningful. It allows individuals "to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms" (Goffman 1974: 21). Therefore, the interpretative frames are a process of definition of social reality: "social problems do not exist as such, but only to the extent that certain phenomena are interpreted in this way, in the light of the cultural frames of those involved. Their emergence represents an autonomous social process, with unpredictable results" (della Porta and Diani 1998: 70). How culture interprets and performs social reality, provoking unexpected desirable or undesirable effects, is explained by Gamson (1990) who deals with the relationship between the media and social movements. He uses the concept of 'collective action frames' and he refers to set action-oriented beliefs that inspire and legitimise social movement activities. The collective action frames are made up of three components: the injustice frame, which is moral indignation; the agency frame, which refers to the consciousness of the possibility to alter an unbearable situation; the identity frame, which is the definition of a 'we' in opposition to 'they'. The media discourse affects intensity and diffusion of social

movements. Therefore, the media possesses a large amount of power in causing and retarding the frames that in one way or another determine collective action.

A further development of this approach is represented by the theory that views the experience of social movements as cognitive praxis. It argues that social movements can be better understood for ideas and concepts that they produce, and that knowledge is the central element of movement identity formation (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

According to Eyerman and Jamison (1991) the cognitive praxis is what distinguishes social movements from other kinds of collective action. It addresses a double meaning; first, it refers to the frames of reference that influence - "most often implicitly and even unconsciously" (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 2) - the action of collective actors'. The meaning of action is affected by the environment in which it occurs and the actor's understanding of it. From this perspective, knowledge has a creative role in determining the characteristics of individual and collective action. Secondly and most importantly, knowledge is a form of social action. It means that social movements produce knowledge, both formal and informal, both popular and professional, which encompasses all social activity. According to these two authors, a movement creates new ideas, concepts and forms of science. Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 48-9) conceptualise social movements "not merely as a challenge to established power, but also, and more so, as a socially constructive force, as a fundamental determinant of human knowledge ... It is, we might say, the social action from where new knowledge originates ... it is from, among other places, the cognitive praxis of social movements that science and ideology – as well as everyday knowledge – develop new perspectives". Knowledge of what constitutes a 'social movement' is, therefore subject to interpretation, different readings and definitions.

2.6. Towards a definition of social movement

The following pages will draw a profile of the main features of contemporary social movements and attempt to synthesise the theories discussed above. Theorists have often distinguished between the American and the European

school. Specifically, CBT, RMT and, to an extent, POST, would belong to the American tradition, while the NSMT is primarily development of Marxism in European countries. These schools of thought have often been considered incompatible, rendering impossible any synthesis (Diani 1992). However, some attempts to build a synthesis have already been made in the last few years and contributed to the debate on social movements. Based on the discussion of the main theories, this section aims to provide a comprehensive definition of social movements describing the characteristics that differentiate them from other kinds of behaviour and collective action. These characteristics are: the network structure, a common identity and the systemic conflicts that aim to break the limits of compatibility.

2.6.1. *The network organisational structure*

The network is the organisational structure of contemporary social movements. A social movement is a network of individuals, groups and associations which organise themselves through a more or less formalised and horizontal structure. Every individual, group or association is a node of this network, which is open to others all and where a formal central point is absent. The informality of social relations refers to the absence of formal membership, the lack of formalised sanctions or elected board of governors such as president, vice-president, secretary and a division of labour sanctioned by a statute and so on. The network organisation mobilises both symbolic and material resources. The former includes identity, moral gratification and a feeling of belonging. The latter includes services, jobs, and the desire for a different redistribution of social resources. The maintenance and mobilisation of symbolic and material resources constitute some incentives for activists to take part in collective action.

Diani (1992) emphasises both the informal character of interactions and the network structure. As he puts it, the presence of these two features is widely accepted by theorists of social movements. The RMT first argued, in opposition to the CBT, that the presence of organisational structures is an important requisite to the mobilization of resources: "resource aggregation requires some

minimal form of organisation" (Meyer and Zald 1977: 1216). Social movements rely heavily on pre-existing organisations, and the more the population is internally organised, the more likely it is that a social movement will produce organised forms of protest. As has been shown (Meyer and Zald 1977) the civil rights movement, for example, contained a large number of organisations, and the participants in the mobilisations and demonstrations of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) were all involved in other organisations.

More recently, evidence shows that the network is the organisational structure adopted by the social movement which opposes the new global order, and which broke out in Seattle in November 1999. According to Brecher and Costello (1994, 2000) this form of organisation mirrors the structure of the great global companies which organise their production through a network of firms scattered all over the world. Similarly, the strategy of global movements creates a network of locally based organisations linked in a net of self-help and strategic alliances. This network is trans-national, involving individuals, groups and organisations from different countries. It allows the subjects who take part in the movement to overcome political and ideological differences and national distances. However, the network structure is not only a mechanical adaptive behaviour related to the organisation of the informational society. The network structure, which is horizontal and anti-hierarchical, fits with the participatory practices of contemporary movements. As Brecher and Costello (1994, 2000) write, the network structure is a Lilliputian strategy. The global network is made of hundreds of invisible linkages that ignore national boundaries. It allows the movement to accumulate strength, widen participation, and to build a worldwide independent counter-power. Moreover, through this structure, groups and individuals who have very different traditions and experiences can create a shared identity.

Manuel Castells (1997: 362) has also related the forms of organisation of social movements to the organisational structure of society in the informational age. The network organisation is a "decentred form of organisation and intervention,

characteristics of NSMs, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination on the informational society".

2.6.2. *A common identity*

Individuals, groups and organisations must share a common identity in order to constitute a social movement. Scholars of social movements have called identity by different names. All these authors connect the possibility of having a social movement to the existence of a shared sense of belonging or a feeling of 'solidarity' among members (Melucci 1996). Blumer (1994), for example, uses the unhistorical and rather vague category of *esprit de corps* to describe this feeling. With this term he refers to "the sense that people have of belonging together and of being identified with one another in a common undertaking" (1994: 67). The *esprit de corps* is formed by close relationships, ceremonials and rituals, gestures, attitudes, values and a philosophy of life. It gives solidity and persistence to the action of a movement and contributes to a new idea of itself. Even Melucci (1989, 1996) emphasises the role played by identity – what he considers to be the solidarity arising from the'actors' mutual recognition of each other as members of the same social unit (1989: 27).

In the introduction, I have defined the 'identity' of the *Rivolta* and Disobedient movement as a set of opinions, beliefs and practices which make them recognisable from other movement areas. The definition of the 'self' involves aspects such as the repertoires of action, the analysis of social reality, the link between modernity and tradition, and the aims of action in order to overcome a given situation. Therefore, the identity of a collective action relies also on its view of the world, what kind of repertoires of action it adopts and which solution they put forward to overcome a certain situation and to build a new totality. Identity can be regarded as a collective process of construction of internal and external social reality through collective symbolic definitions, idioms and practices of action, which makes people feel that they belong to the same 'community'. In the building of identity the symbolic and practical dimensions are closely interwoven. The making of the collective identity goes through three stages: first, the self-perception of an individual. Secondly, the

perception that individuals have of their own level of involvement within the same movement and thirdly, the perception that the opponents and the rest of the world have of this collective actor. As it is a process of construction of a 'we' and of a 'they', it allows a social subject to say that it exists and defines the boundaries of a social movement (Diani 1992).

In a sense, collective identity mirrors the complexity of a social movement. As the latter is "a result rather than a starting point" (Melucci 1995), similarly the former is a process of constructing meanings and common definitions of social reality. Collective identity is never given, yet it is a discontinuous and historically determined process in defining a 'we' against the environment and opponents (Melucci 1995). Purposes, limits, resources, constraints and conflicts that the physical and social environment presents to individuals, groups and organisations, define its boundaries. Collective identity may persist over time ensuring the social movement's continuity during periods of no of mobilisation (Diani 1992).

Therefore, identity and movements are closely related, the former drawing the profile of the latter. In relation to social movements Manuel Castells (1997) defines identity as the construction of meanings through a process of individuation and symbolic identification of the purpose of collective action. He distinguishes three kinds of collective identity: the 'legitimising identity' which is introduced by the institutions of a society and aims to legitimise the structure of domination; the 'resistance identity' which is defensive and raised by those subjects who feel threatened, devalued and stigmatised by the structures of domination and the 'project identity', which aims to transform society, redefining the position of its social actors. Whereas legitimising identities have faded away with the industrial era and the decline of civil society, the others two forms of collective identity still persist, leading to different outcomes: the resistance identities produce reactive movements such as religious fundamentalism, nationalism and communitarianism, which resist the forces of globalisation. In Castells' (1997: 105) account American Militia, *Zapatistas* and Japan's *Aum Shinrikyo* are included in the same kind of identity although their goals largely differ: "The three movements are primarily

organised around their opposition to an adversary that is, by and large, the same: the agents of the new global order, seeking to establish a world government that will subdue the sovereignty of all countries and all people". The project identities drive activists to build proactive movements such as feminism and environmentalism. The environmental movement, for example, is proactive because it does not reject scientific achievements but uses them to fight for a historical redefinition of its material expressions.

2.6.3. *Systemic conflicts*

Most of the theories agree that a social movement is a collective action characterised by conflict, a kind of social relation that opposes two actors aiming to control the same stakes (Touraine 1981). Functionalism, for example, suggests that a social movement is a type of behaviour characterised by collective action to promote or resist change. Therefore revolutionary movements are based on conflicting relations with their opponents because they challenge the basic value scheme of society and urge their replacement (Turner and Killian 1970). The notions of movement and countermovement elaborated by the RMT also imply a conflicting relationship among social groups aiming to control the same resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

According to Touraine and Melucci, conflicts characterising social movements are systemic (Diani 1992). This means that the agents of opposition are social classes and what is at stake is historicity as a totality (Touraine 1981). The agents of the past were workers and management, classes that were in conflict over the social control of industry. Nowadays conflicts are around cultural patterns and involve new social actors. In this respect, social movements differ from other kinds of collective action, such as collective competition and the individual's mobilisation to improve his/her own position. While the latter lies within the system's compatibility limits, the former breaches the rules of compatibility of a given social system (Melucci 1996). Therefore, a social movement "does not just restrict itself to expressing a conflict; it pushes the conflict beyond the limits of the system of social relationships within which the action is located. In other words, it breaks the rules of the game, it sets its own

non-negotiable objectives, it challenges the legitimacy of power, and so forth"
(Melucci 1996: 30).

Their conflictual action is immanent, it refers to the 'here and now' of a system
of social relationships. This is a distinctiveness of contemporary movements
with respect to those of industrial society. As Dalton, Küechler and Bürklin
(1990:11) put it, the members and adherents of contemporary movements ask
for a greater opportunity to decide about their present life, "whether through
methods of direct democracy or increased reliance on self-help groups and
cooperative styles of social organisation". They allow the coexistence of the
radical critique of the existing political order and the integration in the same
society they fight. In this respect there is not any "inclination to escape into
some spiritual refuge" (Küechler and Dalton 1990: 280). Contemporary
movements refuse to postpone their happiness and they do not pursue a final
and harmonious stage of the society (Ruggiero 2001). With respect to industrial
movements they aim at social change, but not in utopian terms.

2.6.4. *An analytical definition of social movement*

On the basis of these considerations it is now possible to construct an analytical
concept and to draw a definition of social movement. A social movement is a
specific form of collective action engaging conflict and questioning the
compatibility of a given system which operates on the basis of a network
organisational structure and a certain degree of internal identity.

The combination of these characteristics does not allow the researcher to
portray collective movements as a unitary empirical phenomenon or to regard
them as fixed and homogeneous. On the contrary, social movements are
multifaceted forms of collective action, having in common the network
organisational structure but characterised by external diversity and internal
fragmentation with regard to identity, the stakes for which they struggle and the
repertoires of protest. As Melucci (1996: 13) puts it social movements are:

> "Heterogeneous and fragmented phenomena, which internally contain a
> multitude of differentiated meanings, forms of action, and modes of
> organisation, and which often consume a large part of their energies in

the effort to bind such differences together. Movements, characteristically, must devote a considerable share of their resources to the task of managing the complexity and differentiation that constitute them".

Again, the global movement for democracy and social justice is the latest example of heterogeneity and internal diversification. The definition of 'the movement of movements' given by Naomi Klein describes the heterogeneous character that these forms of action can have. As Smith (2001) puts it this movement is a co-operative web of a wide variety of local, national, transnational, formal and informal, groups and associations ranging from steelworkers and greens to members of the Catholic Church and students. Thus, the unity of a social movement as an object of analysis can be built only analytically. Melucci (1996: 21) warns that concepts social movement "are objects of knowledge constructed by the analyst, they do not coincide with the empirical complexity of the action".

The three ideal-typical features characterising contemporary social movements, network structure identity and systemic conflicts, coexist in and allow us to interpret the CSO *Rivolta* and the Disobedient movement too. From an analytical view the CSO *Rivolta* is part of a movement relying upon a network horizontal organisational structure, sharing mutual values and practices and pushing the conflict beyond the limits of the system of social relationships. Nodes of groups and individuals constitute the movement network. Every member represents him/herself and rejects rigid hierarchies and formal leaderships. The structure is extremely flexible and allows the movement to adapt to specific and local situations and to interact with other identities. The same movement feels part of a shared identity that differentiates it from other collective organisations. This identity attempts to overcome the resistance identity of the MA of the eighties and to draw new distinctive boundaries through the innovation of repertoires of action and analysis. It is volatile, although strong and cohesive. This shared identity has changed with the years and is still undergoing transformation.

The systemic conflict is another element that characterises the action and the identity of the CSO *Rivolta* and the Disobedients. As will be seen in the following chapters, systemic conflict assumes the form of direct action, exodus and civil disobedience. It can be confrontational, demonstrative or violent, but it can also assume the form of withdrawal, as with the movement for global democracy and freedom (Brecher *et al.* 2000). In any case this conflict aims to redefine the systems of social and political rules without taking part in the seizure of power.

Conclusion

To conclude, the notion of social movement is contentious and occupies a marginal position in the history of sociology. Social movements are not seen as promoters of social change or social subjects who put forward innovations. On the contrary, they are considered as symptomatic of a malfunctioning society, a kind of deviant and irrational behaviour among others. From this perspective, Gustav Le Bon expounds the optimal, though possibly most extreme example of this kind of approach.

The CBT is the first systematic attempt to consider social movements as a specific object of study. It is a bridge between the early and the latter theories. Social movements are still viewed as a kind of adaptive behaviour or the result of social disorganisation. At the same time they are considered as promoters, alongside other actors, of cultural and normative innovations.

On the basis of the study of social movements of the sixties, which showed that conflicts are not an attempt to resist social change, several theories clarified the limits of traditional approaches. The RMT highlighted that social movements do not rely on grievances and frustration of the population but on the reasoning of rational and organised people. In addition, it emphasised the continuity between institutional politics and social movements. The POST approach stressed the importance of political environment in determining the uprising of collective protest with which social movements interact. Social movements are affected by this, and in turn, alter its structure. The NSMT was also influenced by the conflicts of the sixties and seventies, and suggests that conflicts no

longer regard the material sphere of production. On the contrary, they have raised cultural challenge, and involve heterogeneous social strata such as new and old middle class, marginal and public sector workers. The Culturalist approach argues that culture is a 'tool kit' through which people shape social reality and their own experience.

The chapter has also provided a definition of social movement as being based on three specific elements. A social movement is a form of collective action that adopts a network organisational structure; which involves individuals and organisations sharing a common identity; and which engages in conflicts that push the limits and rules of a given system. All these three characteristics are present in the Disobedient movement and the *Rivolta*.

Researching social movements

Introduction

My personal biography is characterised by political activism aiming to promote alternative 'spaces of life' and social justice. Over the eighties and nineties I spent most of my energy and commitment in meetings, debates, demonstrations, and other political activities of rank-and-file activists, such as distributing leaflets, putting up posters, serving beer at political fairs and so on. With some friends we opened a movement radio station *'per dare voce a chi non ha voce'* (to give voice to people who do not have a voice), carried out campaigns against heroin, squatted houses for homeless people and occupied several *centri sociali* for ourselves and hundreds of young people like us who did not have any place to spend their leisure time. Like most of my friends, I was involved in clashes with the police, arrested, and beaten up on several occasions. Over that period I trained in several subjects gaining skills and interests, one of which was in social research, which I would use in the labour market. I had contact with hundreds of people and have seen many Italian towns by taking part in demonstrations or meetings. This experience enabled me to understand society from a critical perspective and to consider issues usually neglected by institutional political agendas. During those years I was able to measure the distance and disproportion between what the Autonomists[1] actually were, how we perceive ourselves, and the way in which the media depicted us as nothing more than political hooligans devoted to clashing with the police and practicing any kind of illegality, from 'proletarian shopping' to smoking marijuana.

My participation in collective movements has been one of the main reasons that convinced me to start this research; it has allowed me to reflect not only on

the experience of the CSOs, and specifically the Disobedient area and the *Rivolta*, but also on my political experience. At the same time, my personal involvement in the CSOs has possibly affected the development of this research. This means that doubts about the reliability of the methods for collecting data and therefore of the findings can be legitimately raised. Therefore this chapter will discuss the methodologies in studying social movements, the debate on the degree of involvement and participation in undertaking research and fieldwork, and the attempts I made to reduce the risk of bias. In the first section a critical review of some of the main research methodologies used in studying new social movements in Italy will be made. The second section will analyse some of the main problems related to social movement research methodologies and strategies. In the third section the methodology of this research project is outlined. It consists of a combination of research tools: semi-structured in-depth interviews with activists of the CSOs, participant observation, the analysis and use of primary source documents and texts produced by the CSOs.

3.1. Research methodologies on Italian social movements

This section will explore the main research methods adopted in studying Italian society, specifically the use of life histories of political activists, the quantitative empirical data analysis from a 'newspaper of record', and the research-action approach.

Danilo Montaldi's book (1971) *Militanti politici di base* (Rank-and-file political militants) was one of the first and most notable examples in studying political activism in Italy during the fascist regime and after the Second World War. Montaldi's *operaista conricerca* (workerist co-research) methodology is a kind of political-sociological intervention where the distance between the researcher and the object of the research should be progressively abolished. According to this strategy the object of research, the political activist, collaborates with the social researcher and together they look for the best tools, practices and places to generate conflict and improve the activist situation. Social researchers do not assume a detached and neutral position. On the contrary they are directly involved in the actions and aims of the militants.

Therefore Montaldi's view is that research is not only a way to understand social reality but it is also a moment of critical-practical activity aiming to transform it. According to Montaldi "certain sociological techniques could help in the development of revolutionary theory" (Wright 2002: 23).

Although *Militanti politici di base* was not a political-sociological intervention in the centre of social conflict as other surveys carried out in the sixties and seventies were, the book and the method adopted (based on the oral and life history method), were a keystone in research on Italian social movements. As della Porta (1992: p172, translated by and cited in Cunnighame 2002) put it, this study was:

"An early example of a research strategy centred on the analysis of memory and imagery [where] the author traces the language and attitudes of the interviewees back to their ideological beliefs, and tries to explain the latter by looking at the wider social context, [showing] that general ideological principles make 'sense' in the narrow context of the power relations that the activists experience in their everyday lives".

A more recent example based on the *conricerca* methodology is *Futuro Anteriore* (Borio, Pozzi and Roggero 2002). This research is based on about 60 in-depth interviews and outlines the political discourse of Italian workerism and groups such as *Potere Operaio* (Worker Power) and *Autonomia* (Autonomy). The oral descriptions included in the book aim to provide a sociological account of the development of workerist activists in the sixties and seventies and avoided intervening in ongoing social conflicts.

Content analysis from newspapers is an attempt to adopt a quantitative approach towards assessing the issue (Tarrow 1989, della Porta and Diani 2004, Andretta and della Porta 2001). More specifically, Tarrow's book on collective protest in Italy between 1965 and 1975 is a prominent example. His strategy of research was to study empirically the actions of protesters and their interactions with the elites, opponents and allied groups over time. In his study, Tarrow was largely influenced by Gamson's (1975) historical reconstruction of American social conflicts, and by Tilly's work (1975, 1976, 1984) on France and England. Like Tilly, he used newspaper sources to study both qualitative and quantitative aspects of protest events over time, and like Gamson, he was

more interested in the results of the action than the internal dynamics and social relations that underlay cycles of conflict and protest. The newspaper record was combined with movement documents, statistical sources and interviews to "... show how the cycle of protest developed out of the ordinary people's grievances and how – through a process of internal differentiation, competition, and alliances – they returned there" (Tarrow 1989: 31). The use of newspaper in studying social movements raises three kinds of problem. Firstly, newspapers can be considered more as actors in social and political conflicts than disinterested, detached observers of events (Cunnighame 2002). Secondly, what is read in the newspaper is not the action itself but the objectification of the relations and meanings of the structure of the action (Melucci 1988). Although Tarrow accepts this criticism, he rejects that such "objectified results" are unimportant and unrelated to a NSM's "subjective" relations and meanings. Thirdly, the use of newspaper sources allows the researcher to investigate only some quantitative aspects, e.g. the frequency of protest events over certain periods and approximately[2] the number of participants, and only partially some qualitative features such as the content of the protest events and their degree of disruptiveness. Newspaper records do not allow the researcher to analyse the internal dynamics of movements and subjective meanings given by the actors to the action. As a consequence, this method excludes the movements which imply criticism of consolidated roles and inter-subjective relations. The Feminist movement, for example, which so greatly involved the personal sphere, subjective relations and meanings, would be excluded from a deep analysis based on newspaper accounts.

The third approach is the 'contractual relationship' elaborated by Melucci. Notwithstanding some differences, Melucci is indebted to Touraine's (1981) sociological intervention. According to this method, the social researcher must go further than (participant) observation and "enter into a relationship with the social movement itself. We cannot remain contented merely with studying actions or thoughts. We must come face to face with the social movement itself" (Touraine 1981: 142). In order to do this, the researcher builds a kind of 'artificial environment' where actors produce social relations and debates similar to those developed in the course of a social struggle. This artificial

environment aims to encourage the self-reflexivity of the actors involved and help them with interpreting the meaning of their own action. As Papadakis (1989) put it, this sort of 'Leninist' approach to New Social Movements implies that "the researcher plays an active role by promoting discussion among activists over the meaning of their struggle. The sociologist aims to assist the activists in 'elevating' the level of their struggle to that of a true social movement" (1989: 238).

Although Touraine's *intervention sociologique* is an obligatory reference point for any discussion on the method of research in the field of social movements, it also raises some questions: can the researcher really help social movements in elevating their level of consciousness and struggle? Should social movements accept that social researchers interfere with them? And finally, does organising an artificial environment really imply that the social researcher reduces the distance from a social movement more than taking part in real activities and protest events?

Touraine's work represented the starting point that shaped the development of Melucci's method in investigating New Social Movements. Another main problem in Touraine's approach was the researcher-actor identification and the lack of separation in roles. Melucci's 'provisional alliance' (1989) tries to overcome the problem of the identification by making the relationship between researchers and actors an object of analysis. In the *intervention sociologique* the researcher is part of and participates in the action: "hence the point is not that the actors themselves *are* the object of analysis; rather that they *produce* the object of analysis and supply its meaning" (Melucci 1989: 239). The researcher who enters the 'field' activates a process in which both the actors and the researcher play a significant role. Together they produce an action that is the object of the investigation. It is the whole process that must be taken into account and analysed by the researcher, because the relationship is not external to the research, but part of it.

This method, which was applied to the seminal work on new social movements in Italy (Melucci 1984), is extremely elaborate and involves several stages (Melucci 1989). It was mainly centred on videotaped encounters with groups of activists occupying a central position in the movement as a whole: "the usual

sequence was to expose the group to certain stimuli, to select the most significant passages and then to play these back to the group as new input" (Melucci 1989: 244). In the final stage the researcher analysed and compared the videotaped material with other information. This relationship assumes the form of a 'contractual relationship' where both the researcher and the actor control and exchange specific resources. As Melucci puts it (1989: 240):

"The researcher possesses 'know-how', consisting of a research hypothesis and techniques which cannot be verified or utilized without the participation of the actors. Meanwhile actors exercise control over action and its meanings, but they also require reflective knowledge to increase their potential for action: here they may value the researcher's analysis of their action. The relationship is thus one of interdependence, but not of coinciding or overlapping roles (...) The researcher offers information resulting from the application of concepts and techniques; the actors offer information about their own action".

The mutually beneficial exchange between the researcher and the actor is "an 'alliance' in that both sides potentially gain from the experience and 'provisional' in that it is temporary and the artificiality of the researcher-actor relationship under these conditions is formally recognised" (Cunnighame 2002: 41).

However, as with sociological intervention, Melucci's method remains problematic in a number of aspects. First, it is reciprocally instrumental and this instrumentality can affect the quality and dynamics of interaction. Secondly, the researcher has the same pastoral role as in Touraine's method. The actors should be convinced about taking part in these groups by the fact that they learn something about their activities and therefore increase their potential for action. Thirdly, because the research project is based on a group occupying a central position, it risks leaving out the rank-and-file activists. Fourthly, this method implies the investment of a large amount of resources and researchers[3]. Finally, are movement activists more open in an artificial environment than they might be in face to face interviews?

Over the last few years the tendency seems to be to adopt multiple strategies. Most of the studies carried out on Italian social movements have utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods such as interviews,

participant observation, questionnaires and empirical data analysis from newspapers. At the moment the search for original methodologies in studying social movements seems to be left aside in favour of a mix of traditional techniques.

This brief review shows that methods of studying social movements depend on a number of factors and primarily on the objectives of the research. As Touraine (1981: 140) says: "A method is not freely chosen. Each method presupposes a given idea of the nature of the facts under consideration" (1981: 140). In relation to Italian social movements, where the study aimed to investigate the language, attitudes and political culture of activists the scholars mainly adopted interviews, documents, and participant observation. Content analysis from newspapers aimed to investigate some quantitative aspects such as the outcomes and frequency of protest events over time. The discussion groups, in both Touraine's and Melucci's method, had as an object of analysis the interaction amongst activists.

3.2. Some premises and methodological problems related to this research project

There are two further issues to emphasise in studying social movements. First, the researcher has to face the problem of empathy and how this can affect and bias the findings. In fact, whenever the involvement assumes a political character the researcher risks becoming either an ideologist or the spokesperson of the movement. In the case of an excessive empathy the researcher will do anything but record and report what the movement does and he will not critically interpret actions and social relations. Although closeness is sometimes desirable, an excessively sympathetic attitude might negatively influence the selection and interpretation of data. The problem is to understand to what extent empathy is a desirable attitude or biases the research findings. To avoid this happening, it has been suggested that a 'friendly distance' be preferable (Cotterill 1992). As we will see, in this research the friendly distance has been integrated with and supported by a triangulation of methods, in order to compare and verify oral and written sources.

Secondly, the researcher has to deal with issues of instrumentality and authenticity in relation to what the actors say during an interview or how they behave in front of the observer. On the one hand, social actors who belong to ideologically marked groups, as is the case with the activists of social movements, might attempt to gain the consent of the researcher, viewing them more as a potential recruit than as an external observer. In this case, the activists will either consciously or unconsciously calculate their words according to their instrumental aims. On the other hand, social movement activists can interpret the role of the researchers as media promoters of the movement and through them communicate with public opinion. Starting a research project, the scholar of social movements must therefore be aware that activists often provide an ideological representation of what a movement is. This reason makes the employment of multiple methods in studying social movements highly appropriate.

My participation in Italian radical movements has naturally affected the progress of this study in several ways. First, it has influenced my choice of the movement area of the CSOs to investigate. Secondly, it has helped me to identify the main past events of the MA and the CSOs, to select problems, focus on the most relevant current issues and analyse the collected data on these bases. Over the years I have also built a nationwide network of relationships allowing me to identify the main actors and key informants to interview. Knowing many members and attendants personally has made it possible to reduce ethnographic distance, in some cases facilitating my dialogue with social actors. Additionally, during my activism I built up a copious archive of documents, magazines and books produced by and with respect to the CSOs.

Starting the study, I was aware that my involvement could turn into empathy and an excessive closeness to the object of study jeopardising any kind of detached view and biasing the findings of the research. According to classic positivist perspective, which attempts to apply the rules of natural science to social science, the personal involvement of the researcher in the object of study is untenable. The explanation of behaviour and the pursuit of objectivity

require the researcher to detach himself from the phenomena under investigation (May 1993). Therefore, the distance between researcher and actor is highly recommended and allows the collection of reliable data, uninfluenced by personal views (Corbetta 1999). Feminists and Neo-Marxists have undermined this position and suggested instead that academic disengagement is a myth. They claim that the researcher always takes part in value and relation systems, that a sympathetic attitude does not prevent him from reaching a new form of objectivity (Terragni 1998; Oakley 1981). On the contrary, good research relies on personal participation and a strong interest of the researcher can be positive. In fact, involvement does not mean that the researcher and the interviewee wholly share the same opinions and that there is complete accordance between them. It means establishing a sort of 'passionate scholarship' (Du Bois 1983), which relies on the immersion of the researcher in the fieldwork and integration between subjectivity and objectivity. To a certain extent 'passionate scholarship' can be a motivation in carrying out research. Moreover, it sometimes helps to drop the barriers between two separate worlds, the one of the researcher and the one of the activists. The activist can interpret positively the researcher involvement and become less diffident. However, the researcher must not try to hide or underestimate influences based on interests, values, ideologies, theories and prejudices. In order to reduce the risk of bias, two strategies should be adopted contemporarily. The first is ethical and consists of making the researcher position explicit, exposing the implications for research and allowing the reader the space to accept or refuse the research outcomes. The second is methodological and relies on the use of several methods of research to compare different sources (Ford and Hedwig 1995).

3.3. Methodology and sources of the research

This study is based on qualitative methodology and ethnographic principles. To reduce the risk of excessive participation and to investigate how activists interpret their actions and the political discourse of the *Rivolta* and MD, I chose a strategy of multiple methods. I spent periods of time in close relation to members and attendants, interviewed activists and key informants and analysed

original documents. Also, I reviewed some secondary sources from magazines. The use of different methods of research allowed me to compare different sources and specifically what interviewees told me, what they wrote and how I could see them act in natural settings.

3.3.1. Interviews

I conducted 42 in-depth interviews with activists of the CSOs and the *Rivolta*. The interviews were unstructured and followed different schema according to the role played by the interviewees (Corbetta 1999). During the interviews the actors were asked to rebuild their political and working experiences, to refer to their information and their beliefs about the CSOs or the specific case of the *'Rivolta'*. In order to observe the actor in a 'natural' setting, the interviews mainly took place where people normally carry out their political activities.

The selection of the sample was based on a 'snowball sampling' approach, a sampling technique which is usually used in quantitative research but can be also adopted in a qualitative research design. This approach is particularly useful in researching hidden or dispersed groups, and when the researcher knows only a few individuals of the population under investigation. In the snowball sample the researcher makes an initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others and enlarge the sample (Bryman 2001).

On this basis I first contacted activists who I had already met during my political activism in the CSOs. For the case study of the *Rivolta*, I had informal meetings with those who played the role of 'brokers', helping me to select and connect to a number of additional activists. They put me in contact with and introduced me to the other activists in the position of a 'comrade who is doing a thesis on the *Rivolta*'. This allowed me to gain access and enjoy the activists' confidence. They did not perceive me as a person from outside but as one of them and therefore one whom they could trust.

The sample was divided into four groups. The first group was activists coming from the CSOs. These interviews allowed me to have a general view of the Antagonist Movement and the CSOs in the eighties, and nineties and to reconstruct some particular events. The second group was made up of activists

of the case-study *Rivolta* to whom I put questions related to the organisational structure, decision-making processes, and beliefs. Third, I interviewed some activists during protest events and demonstrations in order to understand the meaning of their participation in those specific events. Fourth, I selected a sort of control group made up of former activists of the *Rivolta* in order to compare and contrast differences in the facts, perceptions, opinions and biases between informants. The reason why I interviewed activists was because I was interested in the meaning of their actions rather than their interaction with institutional actors. I was only partially interested in the external environment and to the extent to which it could directly or indirectly affect the CSOs and the *Rivolta*. The general context and recent political and social transformations have been reconstituted by the use of secondary sources.

I did a number of interviews to build a satisfactory picture of the CSOs and Disobedient movement trajectories and of the *Rivolta*. As a qualitative study, the sample does not pretend to be representative of the different movement areas of the CSOs. Activists were chosen on the basis of their political experience and position in the case study investigated in these pages. The interviews were conducted in Italian and literally transcribed. Then quotations were translated into English with the help of native English speakers who speak Italian fluently. The translations have been as literal as possible except in cases where the Italian did not have any English equivalent.

The interviews of current and former activists of the *Rivolta* were divided into four main sections investigating:

- the main events characterizing the development of the protest cycle of the CSOs in Venice-Mestre;
- the organisational structure of the *Rivolta*, the decision-making processes and the division of labour amongst activists, and the relationship between the CSOs and other movement subjects, both national and international, institutional local actors and third sector organisations;
- the meaning of some key concepts, relevant issues and protest events in which activists took part;

- individual biographies ranging from occupation and education to former and current political experiences and degree of participation in political initiatives.

The interviews were open ended. I introduced some points regarding historical events, identity issues and political events of the movement in the eighties and nineties and allowed the interviewees flexibility in answering questions so that discussion and self-reflection could develop. The interviews conducted during the protests addressed these specific events with which the protest was concerned and aimed to investigate the meaning attached to them by the activists.

3.3.2. Participant observation

Since interviews cannot record action in progress, this research tool has been integrated with periods of participant observation. I have sometimes employed a 'going native' perspective, which has been particularly apt in a mainly unstructured context and characterised by informal rules, taking part in public meetings, rallies and socialising initiatives. In these contexts I have varied the degree of participation and played both covert and overt roles. My previous activism and help from some activists facilitated the process of moving into the setting.

Participant observation has been an extremely useful strategy in entering the spaces where actors live and assisted in the discussion of their experiences, in picking up on the meaning of their relations and in catching the uniqueness of their actions (Melucci 1998). As noted (May 1993: 119), "how people manage and interpret their everyday lives is an important condition of understanding a social scene. In this sense, the experiences of the observer are central".

This technique of research allowed me to compare the 'acted' and the 'said', what actors did and said, and to observe them while they were building their action in a natural setting. In the participant observation I was guided by theoretical assumptions and the aims of my research. Because my aim was to understand the social action in its making and the political culture of activists, I observed interaction among activists, participation of the leaders in protest events and their role, and the dynamics of discussion and the internal 'division

of labour', the forms of protests. During the participant observation I did not make any analytic notes, preferring to postpone this to another time, in order not to bias or jeopardise the authenticity of action.

3.3.3. Documents and texts

The study has been considerably helped by the collection and reading of documentary material. There is a wide debate on the use of documentary material as a research strategy. Several scholars and schools of thought have expressed profound criticism towards the use of these sources. Positivism, for example, has dismissed documents as impressionistic and the use of this type of data as crude empiricism (Plummer 1990). Also Touraine (1981: 141) has dismissed documentary sources; according to him, written documents are mostly ideological, and "no more than statements of belief, propagandist texts, or ideological tracts". However, because this study also aimed to investigate the political discourse of the Ddisobedient activists and the *Rivolta*, it has been greatly served by documentary material. While a research project cannot be exclusively based on written documents, they can prove useful in meeting the research aims. The wide spectrum of documents, from leaflets to internal texts, from newspapers and magazines to posters, reveals much about a movement, its culture and links to the external world. May (1993: 133) has argued that documents allow the researcher to "construct a particular reading of past social or political events. They can tell us about the aspirations and intentions of the period to which they refer and describe places and social relationships at a time when we may not have been born, or were simply not present". In my study, they have allowed me to compare the communicative strategies and narratives over a span of years, to gain insight into the interaction with external society and public opinion, to reconstruct political categories and debate among movement areas. This research has also included secondary sources such as books and articles from newspapers and magazines. They have provided data on perceived public opinion and institutional strategies for dealing with this movement and their analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a methodological background to my research and discussed problems and theories in studying social movements. The first section has explored some of the main research methods adopted in studying Italian social movements. We have seen that research methodologies chosen as the most representative were the use of life histories, the quantitative empirical data analysis from a 'newspaper of record', and the method developed by Alberto Melucci based on the contractual relationship between researcher and actor.

The second section has discussed some problems in researching social movements. Specifically we have seen that studying social movements involve problems of empathy, and distance. On the one hand, these two issues can jeopardise the validity of a study; an excessive closeness may present several disadvantages and bias the findings of research. On the other hand , we have also said that the personal participation and a strong interest of the researcher in the object of the research can be the motivation for studying collective movements. The point is that researchers must not try to hide their involvement, but make it explicit in order to expose any implications for the research. This section has also discussed the issue of source reliability.

The third section has presented the methodology adopted in this study. We have seen that this study has adopted a multiple system to collect data on the basis of qualitative methodology and ethnographic principles. The research relied on four main strategies of data collection: interviews, participant observation, analysis of original documents and secondary sources.

This strategy has reduced the risks of an excessive participation in the dynamics of the movement and has facilitated pursuing of the aims of the study, which were to reconstruct the political discourse and the main actions in which the movement has been involved over the last few years.

[1] *Autonomi* (Autonomists) were called the activists of *Autonomia* (Autonomy), one of most radical movement of the Italian left in the seventies and eighties.

[2] Depending on the source, if it is the demonstrators, the police or the journalist itself.

[3] With regard to the Milan research on new social movements Melucci said: "The Milano research project extended over a four-year period. It was conducted by a team of ten researchers and it involved spending a considerable amount of time with groups of movement activists in four different areas: among women, urban youth groups (such as punks and social centres [centri sociali]), ecologists and neo-religious groups which operate outside the official churches and have a strong spiritualist orientation" (1989: 198).

Turning Italy upside down: the long mutiny of a generation

"Keep your ears open, we are making a bit of noise"
(Clint Eastwood: The beauty, the ugly and the beast)

Introduction

The subject of the chapter is Italian collective movements over the sixties and seventies. Their history has not been linear in Italy as it has in other western countries. As a whole these movements do not constitute something homogeneous either in terms of the characteristics of their action or in the aims pursued. Their development has been affected by ruptures, discontinuities, and interruptions. Social protagonists have changed during these years and issues too. Students, workers, citizens, women, magistrates, prisoners, conscripts and so on have alternated in challenging the system's compatibility and inventing forms of protests to 'shake the world'.

From the early sixties collective action moved away from places of industrial production and no longer relied on clearly defined social class interests. Apart from some exceptions, it involved society and life as a whole. As a consequence, civil and human rights, cultural recognition, the environment, peace and the distribution of public resources became some of the main contended areas of interest.

The movements of the sixties and seventies were based on a powerful anti-institutional thrust (Grispigni 2000). They detached from leftist parties and

developed autonomous forms of organisation, original protest repertoires, and new politics. In spite of many other differences, their refusal of any institutionalisation and thus protection of their autonomy with respect to political parties, connected them and characterised their identity. Finally, these movements did not aim for any kind of future utopia and no longer considered the State as the main protagonist of social change. Their action was not representational but *constituent*, positive and constructive (Hardt and Negri 2000). The objective of their struggles was anything but the conquest of state power, preferring instead to change lives 'here and now'. Because some constitutive elements of contemporary movements can be found in the *centri sociali occupati* (CSOs) too, this and the following chapter draw a partial profile of social protests, cultural rebellions and autonomous movements in Italy starting from the early sixties onwards. This chapter will describe the 'season of movements', a historical period between the sixties and seventies in which social movements were the protagonists of political and social life in Italy (Grispigni 2000). The first section will briefly describe the economic and social context of Italy after the Second World War. The following sections will go through some of the main stages that have characterised the development of protest and social movements in the sixties and seventies. The protests against the centre-right government in July 1960 and the *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (UIL)[1] in July 1962, heretic Marxism and counterculture tendencies, the red biennium 1968/9, societal and feminist movements of the seventies and the so-called 'movement of 1977' in the second half of the seventies are examples of such movements. The next chapter will describe the *movimento antagonista* of the eighties and the development of the CSOs in the nineties. The aim of these chapters is to highlight the similar aspects that link collective and organised action over different historical periods.

4.1. Fordism in Italy

From a social and economic perspective, the Post-war years until the late sixties can be remembered as those of 'reconstruction', industrial development and the 'economic miracle'. They were characterised by profound structural

transformations of the country and in the composition of social classes. Although the economic growth of the country was not linear, by the dawn of the *biennio rosso* 1968/69 Italy was a completely transformed country and its economic system had reached a stage of progress 'which has never been seen in the Italian economic history or in any other country' (De Meo quoted in Wright 2002: p. 7). This was the period when 'Fordism' reached its full development, not only as a way of producing consumer goods but also as a system to regulate social relations among classes.

However, economic conditions before this period did not arouse optimism. In the mid fifties Italy was still, in many respects, characterised as a rural economy (Ginsborg 1990). Industrialisation only involved northern and north-eastern areas of the country. Large-scale industry was still mainly concentrated within the triangle between Milan, Turin and Genoa and the country's economic weight was limited. The agricultural sector accounted for 42% of the working population, with peaks of 57% in the south in 1951. Apart from certain areas of the north, Italy was marked by particular technological and economic backwardness (Ginsborg 1990). Low industrialisation and the high levels of unemployment and underemployment of the South caused a massive emigration to foreign countries, such as Australia and the Americas and then European countries, and Northern Italy.

The mid fifties were the turning point. The end of traditional Italian protectionism and the creation of a European common market, the growing investment in some important factories and expanding sectors of Italian industry, the presence of new sources of energy and above all the low cost of the labour force were some of the main factors which led to the so-called economic miracle between 1958 and 1963. This was characterised by an impressive average increase in GDP of 6.3 percent per annum, by a rise in the standard of living and by the expansion of some strategic sectors such as the domestic electric-appliances industry, the car (Fiat) and typewriter (Olivetti) industries. However, some striking imbalances still persisted, such as the backwardness of the public sector (hospitals, schools, public transport) and the imbalance between north and south. All the expanding sectors were located in the north-west and some areas of the centre and north-east of the

country. The south was only marginally touched and its population did not take part in the economic boom (Ginsborg 1990). As a result thousands of Italians left their homes in order to find employment. This new migration was significantly different from that which occurred at the beginning of the fifties, being now directed towards the most powerful European economies and the industrialised regions of the country. It influenced enormously the social, economic and cultural development of the country (Sonnino 1995).

From a political point of view, Italy entered the sixties inheriting a dramatic crisis of the labour movement. The role of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) in the political and institutional context was rather limited in spite of its past relevance in the war against the Nazis and its electoral weight. The other big leftist party, the Socialists, ranged between Marxism-Leninism in the early fifties and the search for more autonomy from the PCI in the second half of the decade. This strategy led the Socialist Party to take part in the future centre left governments with the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) of the early sixties. The main leftist Italian union, the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), was fishing in bad waters too. While they emerged from the Second World War with growing power due to their participation in the anti-Nazi resistance, the first half of the fifties can be remembered as the *anni duri* (the hard years) for trade unions. They had to confront a prolonged employer offensive consisting of mass redundancies, *reparti confino* (isolated departments) and discrimination against leading militants, while what remained of their power was based on skilled labour force sections, which would weaken as a consequence of mechanisation and investments in the large factories.

4.2. Signals of revolt

The early sixties saw the return of social conflict and collective mobilisation on an increasingly large scale. They were initiated by the so-called *fatti di Luglio 1960* (the 'July days'), a massive popular uprising against the centre-right Tambroni government and its decision to allow the neo-fascist MSI national congress into the traditional working-class town of Genoa. Demonstrations took place all over

the country, some of them particularly violent: ten people were killed by the police and hundreds injured. The prime minister resignation and the shift of the MSI congress were a victory for workers which gave them a renewed sense of confidence (Lumley 1990). The significance of these remarkable events is still controversial. Some regard them as relatively marginal, arguing that they were the last and definitive conclusion of a historical period beginning during the Second World War and the struggle against Fascism (Del Carria 1977; Ginsborg 1989). Others emphasise their importance. For example, Montaldi (1960), who was one of the leading figures of the coming 'worker enquiry'[2], suggested that these events represent the first appearance of a new generation of workers and young people who did not have any memory of the Fascist regime and Resistance. Most of them, for example in Genoa, were immigrants from the south who had grown up after the Second World War in the northern outskirts where industrial employment had dramatically increased. They occupied the lower strata of the factory hierarchies and, unlike the working class aristocracy of the traditional parties of the left, refused to accept work as their 'fate'. Moreover, they adopted new repertoires of protest without being directed by unions and leftist parties. After the Second World War, mass riots took place independently from and sometimes against the will of the unions and parliamentary left parties for the first time.

In the early sixties, a generation of intellectuals responding to the crisis of Stalinism after 1956, and criticising the bureaucratisation of historical leftist parties, started a process of renewing Marxism based on a closer relationship between theory and praxis, and a transformed reading of capitalism. It was the beginning of critical thought and heretical Marxism. Political and cultural magazines such as *Quaderni Rossi* (1961-1966), *Classe Operaia* (1964-1967) and *Quaderni Piacentini* (1962-1972) had a fundamental role in the development of the Italian New Left. In particular, *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia* produced the theoretical strand called *operaismo* (workerism). Their actualisation of Marxist categories was based on a political reading of Marx's 'Capital' (Negri 1978) and the critical use of sociology through the workers' enquiry. Reading 'capitalist development politically' meant relating it to the social composition of the working

class and emphasising the subjective role of working class conflict in determining social change: "... the beginning is the class struggle of the working class ... capitalist development is subordinated to working class struggles and comes after them" (Tronti 1966: 89). Therefore, the basic theorisations were that the development of productive forces is the response to molecular, resistant and organised workers' struggles, and that capitalism can be interpreted only through the autonomous struggles of the working class. This assumption can also be summarised with the words of Harry Cleaver: "If autonomous workers' power forces reorganisation and changes in capital that develop it, then capital cannot be understood as an outside force independent of the working class" (Cleaver 1979:53).

According to workerists, protagonists of the class struggle in Italy would become a new kind of working class. Class composition, as they defined a particular mix of behaviours and technical characteristics of the working class, was characterised by unskilled workers on the assembly lines. This new class composition was the effect of the mechanisation of productive processes and organisation of labour-power, using Taylorist principles. They occurred in the main northern factories over the fifties and dramatically affected the power relations and composition of the labour force within factories. The newness of the 'mass worker', as this new working class was called by the workerists, did not rely only on technical characteristics but also on needs and behaviours which were considered incompatible either with those of the labour movement or capital (Wright 2002). The creative use of Marx's thought and the action-research based on 'the worker inquiry', the *conricerca* (co-research), made up the 'tool kit' to enter the new 'class composition' with its conflictual behaviour. Some of the most powerful issues and leading figures of the Italian New Left and social movements of the late sixties and seventies would emerge from the groups of intellectuals who founded and joined *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*.

The class composition analysed by the writings of the *Quaderni Rossi* would be the protagonist of the *Piazza Statuto* riot in July 1962, three days of urban guerrilla warfare involving at least 6-7000 workers, which shook Turin. It was not a sudden

and irrational eruption of working class anger against politically moderate unions[3], bosses and police, but the arrival point of a series of struggles in some important Turin factories, and was preceded by a strike at FIAT, which had started the month before (Lanzardo 1979). The *Quaderni Rossi* emphatically welcomed the riot as the end of working class subordination to the 'network of capitalist relations' (Quaderni Rossi). Even if this was not quite the case, *Piazza Statuto* openly showed how changes in social and political composition of the working class had been radical and dramatic. The riot was a sign of the working class' ability to organise its interests autonomously from the major unions (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). For the first time the unskilled and immigrant mass workers of the assembly lines, which would become the protagonists of the cycle of struggles between 1968 and the second half of the seventies, occupied this stage in class conflict in the country.

The sixties witnessed the first appearance of youth cultures. The diffusion of counter-cultural expressions such as rock and pop music, the beat generation books and poems and the use of illegal and recreational drugs were evidence that an existential revolution was occurring. It appeared clear that young people were becoming autonomous actors and a generational class (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). They had different needs, aspirations and values from their parents and their attention shifted from the value of work to consumption with a greater emphasis on daily life. Self-managed magazines and former beat bands contributed to making public some of the main issues of the beat generation and expressed the protest against dominant values: consumerist lifestyles, family, wellbeing symbols, social climbing, and the Vietnam War. The Italian beat culture was a further signal that "wide segments of youths were going to withdraw from mainstream values and lifestyles" (Grispigni 2000: 65). The diffusion among young people of counter-cultural issues was another anticipation of the great mutiny of the following years.

4.3. The student year

In a way, 1968 was not only a planetary (Ortoleva 1988) or a world revolution

(Arrighi *et al.* 1989), but a global process of societal transformation. First, it embraced all continents and all political and economic systems. Secondly, it involved social subjects which never before had taken part in social movements to any great extent. Thirdly, it attempted to transform radically the social institutions of the time, power relations between genders, classes and cultural groups and the economic distribution of wealth. That is why 1968 was a turning point, an event which drew a temporal line between 'before' and 'after' in history (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997).

1968 in Italy was the beginning of a long period of conflict. It has come to be known as the 'Italian anomaly' to describe a situation of permanent conflict, which was the deepest and most lasting in Europe (Ginsborg 1989). The student revolt heralded a series of conflicts that would culminate in the *autunno caldo* in 1969 and continue until the late seventies, involving, in various forms, all sectors of Italian society. Not only students and factory workers but also diverse groups including women, homosexuals, artists, theatre and film directors, clerks of the public sector, the armed forces, convicts, priests, psychiatric patients and their doctors started a process of confrontation with social and political institutions. Almost all sectors of Italian society took part in what has been called the 'creeping May'. At the end of 'the ten years that shook Italy' a completely transformed country emerged. Begun as an attempt to change radically aspects of society, the Italian '1968' led to a modernising process of the whole country (Melucci 1990). From then on Italian movements started to put forward cultural alongside distributive demands .

The material bases of student revolt were in the education reforms of the 1960s. The introduction of compulsory secondary education until the age of fourteen, and the liberalisation of access to university made it easier for students to attend higher education. The number of school and university students nearly doubled between 1959 and 1969 and their social composition changed dramatically. However, institutional structures had not been designed to have such a large quantity of students[4], lecturers were too few and could rarely be found in their departments, there were no state grants for students and most were forced to have part-time

jobs.

The ideological bases relied on cultural *stimuli* occurring across Italian society[5] and on what was going on in the world, such as the questioning of technocratic and consumerist values developed over the economic miracle years, some major international events such as the black riots, the civil rights and the student movements in the USA, the death of Che Guevara in October 1967, the escalation of the Vietnam war, and the cultural revolution in China.

Refusing authoritarianism and notions produced and transmitted by Italian universities, students attacked the whole system, its hierarchies and rules (Rossanda 1968). In autumn 1967 students occupied the state universities of Trento and Turin, and the Milan Catholic University. These occupations had a deep symbolic impact on society and the establishment. Students of Trento refused the role of capitalist planners given by the founders and began to interpret sociology as a tool of social change (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). The Catholic University students of Milan struggled against authoritarianism and for more cultural and political autonomy. In Turin the university occupation lasted several months and focused on the authoritarianism of the academic body and its relation to scientific knowledge. Authoritarianism was not seen as an expression of the backwardness of the system, but as an instrument to exercise control over knowledge, work and, in one word, society: "Authoritarianism in a neo-capitalist world is not a hangover from feudalism; it is the fundamental form of class domination, to which all social institutions are subordinated" (Bobbio and Viale 1968: 222).

According to the Turin students, authoritarianism could be fought through a critical approach to academic science. Therefore, they organised seminars and counter courses discussing the student condition, social repression and their professional future. Against 'university' knowledge the student movement proposed 'collective' knowledge as an outcome of the experience of struggle (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997). They aimed to elaborate "new forms of knowledge communication, in which study can be transmitted, acquired and discussed by others without being an instrument of an authoritarian imposition" (Viale 1968:

101).

In winter and spring the occupation spread very quickly and involved many Italian universities. But the turning point was the 'Battle of Valle Giulia' in Rome on 1st March 1969. Student resistance to a ban on demonstrations was attacked by the police with tear-gas and truncheons. However, unlike other times, the students did not run away – *"non siamo scappati più"* a celebrated student revolt song said - but confronted the police and responded. After that, the confrontation between students and the state worsened. On the one hand the police, who had maintained a fairly low profile until then, started to adopt a repressive strategy against the movement, which culminated in the use of gunfire and the killing and wounding of several demonstrators. On the other hand, the student movement would change its outlook and the right to use violence became a central topic of political debate. As Guido Viale (1978: 43) wrote: "The government and the movement, from this moment, found themselves face to face as protagonists of a conflict with a national dimension. The government did not miss another opportunity to force a showdown with students and workers. And the students responded by forming 'defence organisations' (*servizi d'ordine*) to keep control of the streets".

The year ended with some other events: the occupation by 'absentee students'[6] and young workers of a former hotel in the centre of Milan in November 1968, and the protest against two symbols of the Italian bourgeoisie: *La Scala* theatre in Milan on December 7th, and the *Bussola*, a famous night-club in Tuscany on December 31st. Students organised a peaceful protest using vegetables, fruit and eggs against what they considered to be symbols of local elite extravagance and consumerism. The demonstration was charged by the police, who shot and injured a demonstrator. This episode was a further example of military escalation in the confrontation between State and the student movement. It would worsen over the following years.

The 'students' year' had a revolutionary and anti-systemic nature. Establishing a close relationship between university, society and economy, their action aimed to criticise the whole system and to change the power relations within it. Criticising authoritarianism and academic teaching, students contested economic relations and

their potential role in the productive system as 'planners of the capital plan' (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). In such a way they opposed the use of scientific knowledge as a tool to rationalise capitalist society and to exploit the working class.

They contested social hierarchies and traditional authorities. None of them were excluded. Not only school and university, but also political institutions, parties of the left and bourgeoisie and catholic values were questioned and substituted with egalitarian, libertarian and collectivist ones. As a result, mass assemblies, where people were encouraged to participate, became the places of collective decision making, informality substituted formality in all social relations[7], and communes were established, frequented and shared by students and activists. Finally, for the first time in the Italian Republic, family rules and values came under irreverent attack (Passerini 1988) and traditional sexual habits, seen as repressive tools, changed too. Students challenged family links and turned the private sphere into a political one. Personal and private life was no longer something occurring behind 'bourgeois' walls but became public and politically contentious

4.4. The red biennium

As we have already seen, starting from the early sixties the political climate in the factories began to change. After a decade of 'social peace' in the productive places, which was made possible by a strong repression of the union cadres and a theoretical crisis of the labour movement, increasing social conflicts appeared in the factories of the most industrialised areas of the country. They characterised the second half of the sixties and culminated in another determinative period for the Italian Republic: the *autunno caldo* (the hot autumn) 1969.

The student movement had an enormous influence on the development of the workers' struggles; their protests helped to increase working class self-confidence (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). In Turin, for example, students were seen as a social force potentially allied with workers (Bobbio 1978). They organised leafleting, pickets and meetings with workers outside some of the most important factory gates: Montedison of Porto Marghera in Venice, Pirelli in Milan and Fiat in Turin

were some of the most notable examples.

Although the apex of the worker struggles was reached in autumn 1969, a series of signals had appeared in 1968. They showed that the political temperature was rising and something new was about to occur among industrial workers. In March 1968 unions called for a nationwide general strike to demand higher pensions. On 19 April 1968 a riot against the Marzottos textile factory took place in the company town of Valdagno in the region of Veneto. Some 4000 workers, women and students coming from the university towns of Padua and Trento marched to the town square and destroyed the statue of the founder. Far from being a *jacquery* against a patriarchal and "anachronistic feudal despotism" (Bologna 1988), it was a violent protest against the restructuring of production, the rhythms and load of work, the decline of real wages and the threat of 400 redundancies. Moreover, it displayed an embryonic alliance between students and workers (Bologna 1988). A series of strikes which highlighted the insurgence of the working class initiative (Giacchetti 1997) took place in Fiat over 1968. In the summer at the Montedison in Porto Marghera, groups of workers, students and intellectuals coming from *Classe Operaia* started a cycle of struggles often in opposition to the unions and developed a project of working class autonomy as it was theorised by workerists over the sixties. Workers demanded equal pay increases for all and the abolition of the lowest occupations. Hard pickets, occupations of urban territory, barricades, and clashes with the police took place, anticipating forms of protest which would develop the following year (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). Finally, between spring 1968 and autumn 1969 a permanent conflict emerged in Pirelli in Milan. It was led by the CUB (*Comitari Unitari di Base*), an independent union made up of workers and students, which had more influence than the official unions within the factory (Lumley 1990). It would become a model of working class autonomy and union between workers and students. It invented original forms of struggle for the Italian working movement and produced a sort of counter-power within the productive place. The *autoriduzione*, the self-reduction of working speed, was one of them. The experience of struggle at Pirelli was the longest and the most radical among those of the biennium 1968-69 (Lumley 1990).

The 'battle of *Corso Traiano*' between thousands of workers and police in front of the plants of Fiat in Turin on 3rd and 4th July[8] 1969 opened the 'hot autumn'. Turin was still the third 'southern' Italian city and a second wave of immigrants had settled there. Many had come directly from the south, others returned from foreign countries (Germany, France and Belgium) where they had emigrated some years before. The majority were young people. All of them had been drawn by the mass recruitment of 15,000 new employees and found an unfriendly town, unable to give them the most fundamental services such as houses, public canteens and dignified shelters. These immigrant workers were "squeezed like a lemon in the factory and marginalized in the city" (Lumley 1990: 210).

The 'battle of *Corso Traiano*' was the peak of a series of agitations organised by an autonomous worker and student assembly and the beginning a cycle where the main political and social protagonist would be the mass worker. Protagonists of this phase were not just the young workers of assembly lines, but also the old, professional and highly qualified workers who had had struggle experiences, were least likely to be intimidated and had knowledge of the whole productive cycle. However, their role ended very quickly and in the following period their participation was mainly passive (Regalia, Regini & Reyneri 1977). Politicisation of young immigrant workers occurred between 1968 and 1969 and upsurged in autumn 1969. They were the 'mass' of unskilled and semi-skilled workers attending repetitive or fragmented operations on the assembly lines. This social composition was the result of a second wave of factory restructuring and mechanisation that followed the economic crisis of 1964-5. Massification, de-qualification and location at the very heart of the direct productive process made up their strength. Although de-qualification made the mass workers individually interchangeable, their massification and location in the productive place gave them an indispensable collective power (Wright 2002).

In the beginning of working class autonomous initiative, the influence of far left groups continued to be strong[9] and unions lost some control. Then unions attempted to regain consensus among workers and to channel their non-negotiable demands (Ginsborg 1990; Crouch and Pizzorno 1968). The move partially

succeeded, "but this involved riding the tiger (that is to say the movement)" (Lumley 1990: 257). From autumn 1969, radical protests and strikes spread in factories and productive places which had remained at the margins of the struggle in the first phase. They culminated in a general strike of the metalworker sector for a new contract in November 1969. In the end the 'hot autumn' resulted in the third workers' movement ever seen in Italy (Lumley 1990). However, statistics show only a small portion of what happened and decisive battles occurred at a level that official data cannot reach. The workers' movement invented forms of struggle, such as hiccup (*a singhiozzo*) and chess-board strikes (*a scacchiera*), the sabotage of machinery, the deliberate production of defective goods, 'go slows', the exercise of violence against the foremen and shop floor managers (Cunnighame 2002), which affected production enormously, causing dramatic decline (Salvati 1975) and changes in power relations. Workers obtained remarkable concessions: equal wage increases to all, reduced rhythms and work loads, the right to hold assemblies at the workplace and the forty-hour working week. Moreover, they opened a much longer period of conflict between the working class and employers, which had a permanent and extended character until the late seventies (Regalia et al. 1977; Bordogna and Provasi 1984). It affected labour force sections which traditionally did not have any bearing on unionism, such as commerce, private and public services, schools, civil servants, postal services, hospitals, and energy.

4.5. Movements and society

In a very short time, social struggles developed outside the factories. Italy experienced a spread and multiplication of conflicts that pervaded the whole of society and caused dramatic changes in the country. Demanding civil and social rights and encouraged by students' and industrial workers' action, a variety of movements started a process of institutional apparatus and cultural innovation. Young magistrates and the group of *Magistratura Democratica* were involved in an attempt to renew an antiquated and class based legal system. Prisoners struggled to improve their horrific living conditions and to obtain the recognition of some fundamental civil rights. The *Proletari in Divisa* (Proletarians in Uniform)

promoted protests in the army against the eighteen months' compulsory military service perceived as futile (Ginsborg 1990).

In civil society the most widespread movement was concerned with housing and thousands of flats were occupied by a wide range of social groups: families, young people, proletarians and unemployed but also blue collars and low and middle cadres of the clerical labour force. These struggles were not just a reaction against threats of increasing rents but were offensive in character (Cherki, Mehl and Métailié 1977). Evicted tenants and people living in poor conditions started to squat empty houses and lodgers began to self-reduce the prices of rents to ten percent of their salary. Rent strikes took place in the peripheries of major Italian towns, and in Milan about 40 per cent of the 100,000 families living on public estates went on rent strike between 1968 and 1970. Soon urban movements spread to meet other objectives: the reduction of public transport and other services prices, the improvement of educational infrastructures, and the creation and renewal of social services more able to respond to the new needs of social classes. The urban movements organised alternative structures to those of the market and the State: kindergarten, shops and markets, restaurants, social clubs, and surgeries were opened and managed by collectives and groups of self organised citizens (Ginsborg 1990).

4.6. Women in revolt

Traditional hierarchies between men and women, consolidated roles in politics and old organisational structures were debated and powerfully attacked by the Feminist movement. The women's movement was transverse to the movements of the seventies and, at the same time, it constituted an autonomous collective subject, claiming to be 'other' in respect to protests and other issues of that time. Therefore, the women's movement rejected the idea of 'general interest' and 'class struggle' within which the 'feminine question' had been traditionally excluded. As Balestrini and Moroni argue "From the late sixties it would start to be said that every kind of social transformation is partial if it is based on the concealing of women's existence. It would be masculine and determined by the times, wishes

and contradictions of one gender that poses itself as a model for the other" (1988: 270).

The women's movement based its action on contesting the unity of human nature and stating that reality is double-faced. Therefore, the key idea is that female gender is *other* with respect to the male. These and other issues of the movement can be found in Carla Lonzi (1970) *Rivolta Femminile* (Feminine Revolt), one of the earliest and most powerful feminist manifestos. It starts by underlining the irreducible difference between the two genders: "the woman is something else with respect to the man. The man is the 'other' with respect to the woman...The woman does not refuse the man as a subject. She refuses him as an absolute role" (quoted in Balestrini and Moroni 1988: 267). Arguing for the existence of an autonomous identity based on an irreducible 'otherness', the text rejects the idea of equality as an unacceptable condition:

> "For the woman, getting free does not mean accepting the same way of life of the man. This is in fact unlivable. It means that the woman can express her sense of existence". The manifesto goes on to claim self-determination, freedom of choice about maternity and abortion, to reveal the centrality of unpaid domestic labour in the surviving of capitalism and to criticise ideologies, including Marxism which "has sold women to the hypothetical revolution" (quoted in Balestrini and Moroni 1988: 269)

Rivolta Femminile expressed the gender difference in political terms for the first time (Balestrini and Moroni 1988) and emphasised the return to subjective and personal dimensions as the only way through which women's liberation is possible (Lumley 1990). As for the student movement, the personal sphere became a terrain of political conflict.

At a national level the feminist movement went through two main stages over the seventies. The first was that of 'otherness' and centred on the attempt to re-think politics starting from the irreducible difference between genders. The movement focused on everyday problems and raised issues concerning personal spheres. Emphasising difference, feminists separated their realms from the New Left groups, where men often played the main role in political leadership, reproducing

stereotyped gender hierarchies. They set up groups for women only and organised meetings and demonstrations, refusing the presence of males. This process of separation assumed several forms: self-consciousness raising groups, a practice imported from the US feminist movement, psychoanalysis activities and socialising initiatives such as restaurants, yoga, gym, listening to music and so on. These meetings mobilised affective and relational resources and contributed to the building of a collective identity (Mormino and Guarnieri 1988). The collectives of women were informal and decentralised, small, loosely-bound groups, emphasising friendship and rejected any form of bureaucratic and formal power. They were considered an optimal instrument to allow women to express themselves and understand their own oppressed condition "through a revisited reading of their everyday life together with other women" (della Porta 1996: 54). They aimed to discuss a variety of issues related to the personal sphere and usually sacrificed to the general interest of 'class struggle' such as reproduction, sexuality and interpersonal relations. This organisational structure intended also to criticise centralised groups of the New Left, their male leadership and traditional politics. Moreover, although the feminist movement dealt with the personal sphere in political terms, it did not focus on the taking of institutional power: "(Women) did not pay any attention to power and the need to change themselves emerged without taking too much care about the external reality" (della Porta 1997: 64).

The second half of the seventies was characterised by a number of political campaigns which differentiated feminism from the first stage. The small groups of women did not disappear but were overcome by public activities aiming to influence the traditional political agenda (Lumley 1990). Although most in the movement disregarded the legislative stage, feminism obtained crucial outcomes such as divorce, family and parity laws, abortion legislation and the setting up of women's advisory bureaus (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). This did not mean the institutionalisation of the movement. On the contrary, it was pervaded by a strong feeling of disillusionment with state institutions. However, conflict shifted at a public level to encompass the law and morality of the state. In the mid seventies, the campaign for the right to abortion, for example, mobilised a vast repertoire of

protests and struggles: from petitions and mass demonstrations, which gathered hundreds thousands of people, to "civil disobedience and illegality which brought activists into confrontation with the authorities and challenged established procedures and values" (Lumley 1990: 322). They were seen and, of course, used as social practices which aimed to change social relations and the laws of the state from the bottom, starting 'here and now'.

The relevance of feminism was enormous and from its appearance political thought, social practice and relations would no longer be the same. It was the conclusive word for any kind of idea based on 'general interest'. As Tronti (1992: XIII) puts it "the project of a revolutionary practice could not but start from there. From the definitive end of any kind of general class and universalistic thought".

4.7. The youth movement

The youth movement occupied the Italian political scene between 1975 and 1979. It touched a number of cities in various ways (Virno 1997) and protagonists were mainly absentee students, precarious and service sector employees and workers from small factories. Their political culture differed radically from the labour movement and their brothers of 1968. It was a strongly politicised and radically alternative movement that brought to light the crisis of traditional politics, represented by historical leftist parties and New Left organisations. The youth movement filled the political agenda with new issues: gender relations, the rise of precarious jobs, the growing use of drugs, leisure time and the liberation of time from work. By arguing that *il personale è politico* (the personal is political), it gave the personal sphere a political meaning.

In the biennium 1975/6 groups of young workers coming from the small factories on the outskirts of Milan started to squat empty buildings and set up the *Circoli del Proleariato Giovanile* (CPG: Proletarian Youth Clubs), which were the precursors of the CSOs (Wright 2002). As many as fifty-two CPGs were occupied in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Milan in those two years (Moroni 1996). On the one hand, the CPGs followed the widespread territorial settlement of small factories where young people could find work more easily. With respect to the early

seventies when group sites were overwhelmingly concentrated in the centre of the towns[10], in the mid seventies there occurred a sort of 'political delocalisation' to the outskirts in the search for a new social composition: "young people were no longer concerned with the locus of power, which had become completely irrelevant. Self-realisation can only occur in the spaces where people have their individual everyday experience" (Moroni 1996: 170). On the other hand, these young people refused to stay at the margins and started a process that brought them from periphery to the centre of the city where a number of self-reductions of prices at restaurants and gate-crashing of cinemas were organised.

The occupants, concerned by the continuous control of territory operated by State institutions and the lack of spaces to satisfy their demands, aimed to build social spaces where they could express their identity without submitting to the external rules of the market, political parties and state institutions. Unlike their parents, their attention was no longer on primary needs such as a roof over one's head or the right to work (Lumley 1991). They demanded allowances and 'superfluous' goods in contrast with the austerity policies promoted by the government: "we do not only claim the right to the necessary, to *pasta* every day, but the right to luxury too...this is an ideological, cultural and political conflict" (document quoted in Grispigni 1997:16). In a rhetorical picture, they wanted bread but above all the 'roses': "We are here in order to affirm the proletarians' rights to take what the bourgeoisie keeps for itself: luxuries, privileges, cinemas, theatres dance hall [...] We take these things as well as houses and places of labour. Bosses must make sacrifices" (Circoli Proletari Giovanili di Milano 1977).

Cultural needs are considered here as fundamental rights of citizenship. In line with this, 'young proletarians' organised mass actions based on self-reduction of prices and gate-crashing of cinemas, theatre, concerts, and also *spese proletarie* (proletarian shopping) for food, clothes and books. Their practice was also based on a sort of territorial counter-power and 'social' unionism. CPGs self-organised young workers in the small shops of the outskirts (Wright 2002) and a number of actions were carried out against the so-called *covi del lavoro nero* (lairs of cash-in-hand work), mainly small factories and shops: "the CPG of Cinisello organised

two rounds, against a butcher and a hair stylist. Both of them were accused of exploiting two young apprentices" (Vento 1976). In the same period heroin started to become one of the big issues among young people and the CPGs implemented a number of initiatives to combat its diffusion, ranging from the 'proletarian liars' against deliveries to musical festivals to self-consciousness and informative meetings (Circoli Proletari Giovanili di Milano 1977). Being places mostly attended by young people, the CPGs had to deal increasingly with this problem. Their territorial and social position allowed them to witness the diffusion of heroin and its lethal effects on young people and social movements. The CPGs could see that the increasing popularity of heroin was undermining participation and involvement in political activities, while allowing the repressive agencies to enforce control over political expressions. As has been noted (Ruggiero 1992), starting from the mid seventies the massive use of this substance among young people coincided with the decline of countercultures and youth movements. In the following years the war on heroin and marginality was still one of the main issues that the CSOs had to face and on which they focused their initiatives.

In 1976 and 1977 the youth movement spread to other cities and assumed different characteristics. It varied in its relation to problems and opportunities offered by each town. The Neapolitan movement, for example, mobilised jobless workers in a town which was characterised by high rates of unemployment and governed by patronage (Wright 2002). Elsewhere, for example Rome, a further reason to join the movement was its actions against fascists which were perceived as a continuous threat to the activists in neighbourhoods and schools (De Luca 1999: III).

The height of the youth movement, alongside violence and mass illegality, was reached between winter and spring 1977 when students became mobilised against the attempted introduction of a quota system in Universities. All over the country hundreds of schools and universities were occupied and confrontations between the youth movement, the state and leftist political parties became more intense, escalating over the year. In February, students 'expelled' the general secretary of the biggest union confederation from Rome University. It was the end of any kind

of dialogue between the labour and new movements. Between March and May violent street battles with guns and petrol bombs between demonstrators and police became a sort of ritual on Saturday afternoons, and some of them caused injury and death on both sides. Several free and local radio stations, which were founded by the movement, were closed down and many of protagonists of the movement were arrested. The movement of '77 culminated in a three-day national conference/event in September when one hundred thousand young people from all over the country occupied Bologna. However, this mass participation could not hide political weakness and was the beginning of the decline of the youth movement.

The youth movement of the second half of the seventies was contradictory and characterised by both reactive and proactive elements: "it had a multipolar trait: it was a melting pot of radically different and sometimes opposing social subjects" (Scalzone and Persichetti 1999: 48). This explains the coexistence of innovative and orthodox languages, loose organisational practices and new versions of neo-Leninist politics. There were, however, some common features. First, it gave voice to a new social composition which started to emerge in the mid seventies and brought to light major changes in the economic structure of the country. Specifically, the decentralisation of production, the dramatic growth of small and specialised factories, the flourishing of a *sommersa* (submerged) economy along with an expanding service sector segmented the labour market into three main parts: the industrial working class of large factories, workers of small and submerged factories, and intellectual labourers within private and public sectors (Paci 1973). Along with students, the movement resembled the rise of the last two growing segments which would become pillars of the Italian productive structure in the following years.

Secondly, the movement was characterised by significant changes in attitudes towards the work of its protagonists. As many scholars have underlined, the activists refused "to follow their parents into the world of the assembly line" (Wright 2002: 201) and to identify themselves through their job (Rossanda 1997). Refusing any ethics of labour, they considered work as a small portion of their life.

Instead of work they demanded other kinds of income. Therefore, "they turned mobility of the work place into a conscious and privileged choice with respect to an eight-hour-lifetime guaranteed job. Instead of requiring and struggling for the lifetime-work-place, in shops or offices, the subjects of the movement of 77 experimented with alternative ways of procuring a salary" (Moroni and Balestrini 1987: 310).

Thirdly, the youth movement was the definitive breaking of the new generation from the political culture of unions and leftist parties. In the refusal of traditional representative politics embodied by the new left revolutionary groups and traditional leftist parties, the movement broke with some key ideas of labour movement tradition of both the social democratic and communist variants: the subordination of social and economic spheres to politics, the Leninist form of organisation based on the centralisation of decision making processes and professional politicians. Most importantly, the youth movement abandoned the idea of seizing power through a violent breaking of institutional parliamentary democracy. Establishing a close *ideal* relationship with feminists and their criticism of politics, and in opposition to the old politics, its demand was for community and 'otherness' through the conquest and defence of its own vital spaces.

In these respects, radical and unconventional repertoires of struggle such as proletarian shopping, the self-reduction of prices of cultural activities, the occupation of empty building and the sometime excessive use of violence had several meanings. Needless to say, these forms were a kind of salary integration for unemployed, precarious workers and students. But most significantly, through this kind of conflict, the young proletarians aimed to affirm a new and emerging social identity and a way of exercising a political counter-power in the society. As a young man would declare in an illuminating interview "Politics is sacrifice! To this we answer: we want to live communism now. We want to take now what belong to us. We want to become strong so we can practice our objectives now. The same as when we wanted to go to the cinema: we went and saw the movie. We did not need to struggle to demand a lower-price ticket" (quoted in Grispigni

1997: 17). In a sense this is the manifesto of the new course of social movements. 'Communism', for the youngsters of the CPGs, did not coincide with the seizure of the 'Winter Palace'. For them, it was something to live in the present and not in a hypothetical future and utopian society.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has described the dramatic changes in social conflicts which occurred over the sixties and seventies. These two decades were crucial for the development of New Social Movements in many respects.

First, from the early sixties, collective action moved away from industrial productive places and involved society and life as a whole. Although in the late sixties and first half of the seventies the working class played a remarkable role in developing social conflict in Italy, a large number of movements and groups came to light and emerging social subjects grew in importance in the sixties and seventies. Urban, feminist, counter-cultural and regional movements, groups claiming their identity, consumer associations and psychiatric patients (Melucci, 1977) imposed their presence in the political arena. They expressed new demands, set up original organisational structures and raised issues which were unknown to the tradition of industrial conflict. Civil rights such as divorce and abortion, the cultural recognition of women, youngsters and other minority groups, urban livability and the environment, peace and the distribution of public resources became some of the main objects of contention.

Secondly, this chapter has shown that the movements of the sixties and seventies were based on a powerful criticism of institutions. The anti-institutional thrust involved the state, the society and the left parties. The New Social Movements questioned state institutions, such as university, the army, the national health, and society institutions such the family and gender roles. At the same time they distanced themselves from left wing parties and developed autonomous forms of organisation, original protest repertoires, and new politics. In spite of many other differences, their refusal of any institutionalisation and thus protection of their

autonomy with respect to political parties was a shared character of New Social Movements and characterised their identity.

Thirdly, these movements did not aim to seize the power and no longer considered the State as the main lever of social change. Their action was not representational but constituent and immanent. The purpose of the New Social Movements was not to build a perfect society but to create new social relations starting from the time and space where they lived.

Fourthly, this chapter has also demonstrated that while New Social Movements demanded recognition and struggled for autonomy and cultural issues they also claimed a different distribution of economic resources. As already said, the new distribution of resources did not only involve the places of production, but also society as a whole. Reclaiming their different identity and questioning the power relations, the women's movement contested also the distribution of common wealth in the society. Reclaiming the right to the city, the 'young proletarians', as they named themselves, protested against their social unstable conditions, the power relations and how economic resources were distributed.

[1] UIL was the third Union and included centre left parties such as Socialist, Social Democrat and Republican.

[2] See chapter 3 section 1 and in this chapter the next few pages.

[3] *Piazza Statuto* is, in fact, the place the moderate unions UIL and the chance was given by an agreement between the union UIL and the management of the factory car Fiat.

[4] Ginsborg (1990: 299) writes: "By 1968 the three universities of Rome, Naples and Bari had 60.000, 50.000 and 30.000 students respectively, while they had been designed for student populations of little more than 5.000 each".

[5] The student leader Guido Viale (1978) includes the publication of *Lettera ad una professoressa* (1967) by Don Milani, a dissident catholic priest, and the *Scuola di Barbiana*, who exercised a formidable influence over all students. Using clear and understandable words, this book documented how the Italian educational system really worked: as a discriminative system against the students of the lower classes.

[6] Students who can sit exams without having attended lectures.

[7] Lumley reports that "The familiar tu form of address was widely adopted within the movement for all exchanges, whereas previously it would not have been used except when addressing a friend, close acquaintance or member of family" (1990: 90).

[8] Thousands of workers who went out from the gates of the factory, students, intellectuals and people living in the estates around Fiat engaged a harsh street battle against hundreds of policemen which lasted several hours and ended the early morning of the following day. At least two hundred demonstrators were detained, 29 people were arrested, about one hundred policemen and an incalculable number of demonstrators were hurt (Giachetti 1997).

[9] See for example the Petrolchimico di Porto Marghera (Di Paola 1996), and Fiat Mirafiori in early 1973 where the signing of the new contract was accompanied by six moths of ferocious struggles, production blockades and mass pickets (Wright 2002).

[10] According to Primo Moroni (1996) in the area of Porta Ticinese in the centre of Milan there was the largest concentration of far-left group sites in Europe in the early seventies.

Chapter 5

From resistance to a new identity

Introduction

The harsh repression that hit collective demands and the arrest of many thousands of activists influenced the subsequent development of Italian social movements in the eighties. On the one hand pacifist, environmentalist and feminist movements embraced the route of realism and pragmatism (della Porta 1996). The radicalism and extremism of the seventies turned into peaceful repertoires of protest and processes of institutionalisation, which took different forms: the building of formally recognised associations, the foundation of political lists and parties, and the adoption of conventional forms of political negotiation and change. The outcome was increased professionalism and the proliferation of formal associations. On the other hand, the groups surviving from the youth movements of the decade before, the so-called *Movimento Antagonista* (MA), in continuing to identify with the autonomist movements of the seventies, adopted a resistance and anti-institutional identity. The repressive state campaign heavily affected their political agenda, which was mainly focused on freeing imprisoned activists or defending the history and identity of autonomous movements.

This situation began to change slightly from the mid-eighties onwards. As we will see, the MA, enlarged its field of intervention and took part in wider collective protests such as those around peace and environmentalist issues. As a key informant remembers "*it was an exit from the closed militant circle and a chance to meet, have conversations and discussions with real people*" (Interview 26).

This chapter will focus on the MA, which was together with factions of the anarchist punk movement the main protagonist of the development of the CSOs in the eighties and nineties, and on protest events which saw the participation or were influenced by the action of the CSOs. The first section will briefly describe the Italian political and economic situation in the last two decades. The second section will describe the MA and its main campaigns. Although on a lesser scale quantitatively and qualitatively, it represented continuity with the sixties and seventies cycle of struggles in terms of issues, theoretical analysis, identity, and protest repertoire. The third and fourth sections will focus on the first wave of CSOs and the resistance of the Leoncavallo in August 1989. It will be argued that this last event represented a turning point in the development of the CSOs and the beginning of the constitution of a new identity. The fifth section will be on the Panther movement in 1990, a university student movement that greatly influenced the CSOs in the following years. The sixth section will discuss the debate on social entrepreneurship in the CSOs. The seventh section will analyse the birth and growth of the White Overalls and Disobedient movement. The last section will explain the lack of visibility of women and feminist issues in the CSOs[1].

5.1. After the storm

The decade starting in Autumn 1980 with the 35 day strike of the Fiat workers in protest against the owners' decision to lay off roughly 14,000 workers - concluded with the harsh defeat of the blue collar workers and the beginning of profound industrial restructuring. As Revelli (1989) argues, the stakes were not salaries and power, but the identity of the two protagonists: workers and bosses. The outcome of the strike was the definitive signal that social restructuring was ongoing and that the power relations between capital and labour were changing greatly. This was at the very end of the cycle of protests, which started in the red biennium 1968/69. After more than ten years of organised collective conflicts, Italy seemed to be entering a new period of social peace in regard to labour conflicts. While from the late seventies to the early eighties the internal economy was experienced alternating periods of

crisis and growth, from 1984 Italy began to see a positive period of economic expansion which several scholars have defined as a new 'miracle'. The GDP and margins of profit increased dramatically, making way for productive restructuring and resulted in fiscal benefits for the Italian industry (Paci 1998). New values permeated the country and substituted the collectivist ideals of the seventies for the pessimism of the early eighties (Ginsborg 1989). The decline of Fordism and the introduction of flexible technology in the manufacturing industry affected the labour market, which was to become extensively fragmented, characterised by a sharp reduction of employees in industry, the increase of women in employment, unstable and atypical jobs, self-employment, and clerical and professional occupations in both the private and public sectors (Fumagalli 1997; Paci 1992, 1998).

From a political perspective, two processes in particular characterised the eighties. First, every single aspect of social and institutional life was politicised. This meant that every state appointment and public office became the object of political bargain. As Revelli (1996) argues, the most important institutional areas - the army, police, the judicial system, universities, state and local administration, the public financial and industrial sectors - were occupied, redesigned and shared amongst the governing parties in order to resemble the political apparatus. To a lesser extent, this process involved the PCI, the principal parliamentary opposition, which dismissed any claim to represent opposition movements after the mid-seventies. Secondly, the eighties were characterised by substantial government continuity. The political scene of the eighties was mainly dominated by the *pentapartito*, a coalition which encompassed liberal, conservative and socialist parties, and by the political leader Bettino Craxi who was prime minister from 1983 to 1987, the longest period for a prime minister in Italy since the Second World War. His leadership was controversial. With a strong political personality, he was perceived as a moderniser and authoritarian at the same time and was the main protagonist of those and the following years. As Ginsborg writes: "His assertive personality, tactical skill and innate political ability earned him many admirers and not a few enemies" (1990: 419).

In spite of the personality of the decision maker, the longevity of his government, the economic and financial growth of the eighties and the substantial lack of social and parliamentary opposition - or probably because of this lack - the push towards reform and the renewal within the country was extremely weak. On the whole, the instability of the seventies gave way to a period of political stability that lasted for a decade, until 1992, when a judicial earthquake dissolved the *pentapartito*, some thousands of politicians, local administrators and entrepreneurs were accused of corruption and ended in jail, and the main government political parties dissolved.

5.2. The Antagonist Movement and the resistant identity

While the national political scene of the eighties was characterised by a certain degree of continuity, social movements were prone to alternate defeats and victories. The peace movement, which mobilised millions of people both in Italy and around Europe, retreated after the deployment of the Cruise and Pershing II in the mid eighties and the subsequent collapse of the socialist bloc in those years. After the Fiat strike and the defeat of the working class, which was felt throughout the rest of society (Porta and Simoni 1990), the labour movement went through a further process of institutionalisation. Moreover, the restructuring of productive processes and the introduction of flexible technology, which dismantled the rigid division of labour, allowed the ruling class to regain control over the productive process, thus changing the power relations within factories and weakening the ability of the working class movement to mobilise. Only the environmental movement saw a dramatic growth and achieved some significant outcomes, such as the referendum against nuclear power. In the second half of the eighties, environmental protests had their highest period of expansion and intensity (della Porta and Diani 2004), and the movement tried to extend the successful mobilisation against nuclear power to other hazardous and polluting productions and industries.

The first half of the eighties was a period of political and social isolation for the MA - "*There was a desert around us*", one witness says about that period. Although on a lower quantitative and qualitative level, the MA aligned itself

with the seventies autonomist movements in terms of theoretical categories, identity and protest repertoires (Cunnighame 2002). It focused mainly on the so-called 'emergency laws', which provided the police and magistrates with legal means to imprison thousands of activists on the sole basis of vague suspicions of involvement with armed groups or having taken part in illegal activities. Because of the thousands of arrests between the seventies and eighties, the MA was forced to devote most of its initiatives to repression issues and to put everything else aside, as happened in Milan, for example:

> "Milan presented a smooth surface. That is why the first mobilisations I remember were against repression. Repression was the epicentre of every mobilisation. It was in the order of things ... During this period, the Milan movement was practically decimated. In the earlier years there had been enormous police operations that emptied the lake to take the fish" (Interview 5).

The campaign against repression, which was mainly based on traditional repertoires of action such as demonstrations, conferences, public meetings and petitions, had several aims. Firstly, it had pragmatic objectives, such as the political and legal defence of 'comrades' and their liberation on grounds of health problems. Secondly, the attempt to free imprisoned activists was a defence of the history and identity of radical movements. The combination of pragmatic objectives and the defence of identity was summarised by the slogan 'History cannot be put on trial', which headlined most of the MA documents and leaflets of that period. As can be seen from documents issued in that period, this campaign ranged between utopian and pragmatic aims: "it must be stated again: our strategic target is the destruction of prison and the material conditions that generate it. However, in this political phase we have to articulate our objectives and focus on some partial and intermediate targets that aggregate the entire imprisoned proletariat"[2]. Thirdly, this campaign aimed to break the isolation of the movement and to gather segments of civil society around the issues of civil liberties and human rights.

The demonstration in Voghera in July 1983 was the highest point of the campaign. Some 3000 people marched against the jail of the town, one of the

most sophisticated and technologically advanced Italian prisons, protesting against the living conditions of inmates, before being charged by the police. It was possibly the first national demonstration after the cycle of arrests and trials of previous years and marked the attempt to build organisational structures involving autonomous militants and antagonists from the whole country. After this event, mobilisation against emergency laws and State repression lasted for several years, albeit to a lesser extent.

In the early eighties the MA took part in the peace movement which opposed the installation of Cruises missiles in Italy and other European regions. However, the phantoms of the past still weighed on these activists and heavily conditioned the repertoires of analysis and practices of the MA. In addition to this, its relations to other areas of movement, made up of Catholic associations, leftist political parties and associations, and trade unions, were scarce and often conflictual. In accordance with the Leninist practices and views that characterised the MA, the Cruises and Pershing II missiles were seen as a strategic phase for the 'imperialistic' politics of the European and NATO powers. In the analysis of the movement nuclear armament was part of a design which encompassed "the division of the planet into Western and Eastern blocks, the militarisation of territories, and factories which produced weapons and hazardous material"[3]. As a consequence, it was suggested, the missiles were set up in order to exercise control over "energy and raw materials in the Middle East and Africa"[4] and to exploit peripheral countries. Because of its geographical position on the banks of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy played a strategic international role.

The mobilisation against repression and the Cruise and Pershing II missiles furthered the national co-operation of locally based groups and collectives sharing a common identity. On this basis they gave birth to the CNAN/AI, an autonomous network movement of groups acting at local level and claiming continuity with the radical movements of the seventies.

The CNAN/AI set the basis for a series of campaigns in the second half of the eighties against nuclear power and what the MA called the production of hazardous material, such as chemical plants, weapon factories, and polluting

sites. After the Chernobyl catastrophe, which mobilised millions of people around the world, the CNAN/AI focused its action on civil nuclear power. Its criticism was addressed not only to environmental groups but to the system as a whole. What the MA questioned regarding nuclear power was its role in this economic system and its importance for the strategies of trans-national corporations. Nuclear power was a "strategic investment to command the productive cycle and the social reproduction at an international level. It is the renewed source of capital accumulation, the driving force of research linked to the civil and army nuclear" (Autonomia 36: 3).

The courses of action were characterised by demonstrations, direct action and sabotage. These repertoires of action constituted the main divide between the MA and the Green movement. While the environmentalists had a range of repertoires, varying from the institutional, such as referendum and pressure action on members of parliament, to protest, the CNAN/AI focused mainly on direct action and blockages against nuclear power plants. According to the CNAN/AI the institutional way was absolutely insufficient in opposing nuclear plans and direct action was the only appropriate kind of conflict in order to "question the political, economic, and imperialist arms strategy" (Autonomia 36: 3).

This cycle of protest culminated in a referendum, which was organised by the Greens and other environmentalist associations and established the closure of all Italian nuclear sites in 1987, and in a number of direct protests against hazard and pollutant productions. These mobilisations displayed a marked difference with respect to the past in that they allowed the MA to differentiate its political action and to communicate to a wider public opinion, as a key informant says:

> "After the second half of the eighties, environmental problems came to the fore, above all after what happened in Cernobyl... These campaigns allowed the movement to progress from the resistance phase...I remember these campaigns as an exit from the narrow circle of militants. It allowed the movement to meet, talk with real 'flesh and blood' people" (Interview 30).

However, the identity and language of the MA was still mainly derived from the autonomous and youth movements of the seventies. They still contemplated a 'communist' and 'revolutionary' horizon, and their categories of analysis were almost exclusively inspired by Marxism-Leninism: the class conflict as a lens to read the transformation of society and the decision making processes of the ruling class.

5.3. The twilight of the *Centri Sociali Occupati* and the right to the city

The occupations of empty and derelict industrial buildings and their transformation into CSOs that occurred in many Italian towns in the second half of the eighties marked a shift from strictly political to cultural campaigns. In effect, politics did not disappear, but did not prevail in the early eighties. Moreover, they represented the need for change and for a move from a confrontational to a communicative agenda, from a kind of action that mainly targeted political institutions and adversaries to one that promoted autonomous ways of life and cultural practices.

These occupations were the outcome of the meeting between the political culture of the MA and the punk counter-culture (Tiddi 1997). They were being carried out by a variety of punk and antagonist groups with different degrees of organisation, politicisation and cultural approaches. The groups affiliated to the MA were in the majority, had a hegemonic political role and were more organised. They issued some periodicals, such as *Autonomia*, which focused mainly on the region of Veneto but had a nationwide readership, and *Autonomen* in Milan, radio stations, and a network of local groups spread throughout the country. Moreover, they could count on the legitimisation gained 'in the field' during past mobilisations against repression and nuclear power. The anarchic punk movement was the second main entity. Although it mainly developed in the early eighties and had its epicentre in Milan, many of its followers were still active in the second half of the decade. Through these occupations they aimed to develop a kind of counter-culture based mainly on the organisation of music concerts and distribution of records and alternative magazines. Their degree of organisation was limited, and based on friendship

and affinity. Punks and Antagonists brought two rather different but complementary kinds of culture. The punk counter-culture brought the definitive split with Marxism-Leninism still surviving in the MA, and promoted self-production and pro-sumerism, mainly, but not exclusively in the musical field. Self-production and 'pro-sumerism' encouraged these groups to develop an embryonic small-economy where the producer and the consumer are the same figure, in an independent social niche where work serves the immediate needs of the inhabitants (Bonomi 1996; Ruggiero 2001). The MA political culture brought with it the practice of direct action, territorial intervention on housing and environment, and the historical memory and identity of the radical movements of the past. The relationship between these two groups was not easy and did not last for long. The punks focused more on cultural aspects and self-realisation. The MA looked at the occupations as a moment of a wider political intervention aiming to combine this with social aspects of life.

The occupations of the CS mainly involved movement activists, youngsters and some urban countercultures, relying upon music, street art, and independent theatrical experiences. The CSOs intercepted their wish to prevent the sphere of leisure time and culture from becoming a commodity, to make a stand on the use- value of the city (Castells 1994) and to create an autonomous lifestyle (Melucci 1991). They also responded to the growing need of countercultures with places where experiments with language and practice could occur. Recalling the Padua experience, one key informant said:

"In summer 1986 the town council gave a co-operative a former industrial area in Via Ticino (Padua). They opened a place called 'Cernobic'. This area had already been occupied by groups of youngsters living in the neighbourhood in the seventies ... therefore it had been already conceived as a public and not private space, and several thousand people occupied it. Therefore we decided, there were very few of us, just a few dozen, to enter this place, which had absolutely nothing, and start this experience of the centro sociale. *In a short time it*

gathered other people who were looking for a physical place to express their like-mindedness" (Interview 42).

The purpose of the activists in Padua was to intertwine the dimensions of social life and political intervention and to give social and cultural spheres a political meaning:

"(In the past years) *...we managed, in a way, to resist in breaking the isolation that institutions attempted to build around us. But it was still a political dimension... I mean... there was not, and this is the reason why we occupied the CS... an ability... because there was not a place to do it... to represent the communitarian dimension, sociality, the link between life, in its whole meaning, and political membership. Therefore, the CS was born as the result of the necessity to have a place where doing what you wanted, in political terms ... and the attempt of a small group of people to force the situation even though there was not a young or social pressure ...the fact that having a place to open a different kind of sociality was right (...) these places did not just produce a political identity but also a new identity based on cultural expression and the refusal of a plain sociality like the one of the eighties had been"* (Interview 42).

Also in other towns, such as Brescia and Milan, the emphasis was on the cultural needs of youngsters. However, this was carried out on the basis of Marxist categories, such as class, need, commodification and reification. According to this analysis, people involved in the occupations did not only express the existential condition of being young people. They were mainly 'young proletarians of peripheral areas of the towns' who claimed a cultural autonomous identity. As a consequence, the needs of autonomy and freedom coming from young people are located in a more general context of cultural exploitation. "The struggle of the last few years has shown that large sections of proletarians still exist (...) that just want to make music and culture out of commercial circuits and the record and leisure time businesses. They just want to stay together without being 'milked' by bars, discos and concert managers"[5].

As mentioned above and will be investigated in the following chapters, cultural events such as concerts, theatrical shows and editorial initiatives were not simply a way of expressing cultural autonomy, but allowed the development of a subsistence economy. Furthermore, the CSOs became 'training fields' where people could learn working skills. The activists have done their 'apprenticeship' (Ruggiero 2001) in the CSOs where they have informally learnt interpersonal, managerial and negotiation skills.

The occupations of the CS brought to light the conflict between political, economic and social forces around the uses of public and de-industrialised areas. Claiming the right to the city, the CSOs settled in the contended spaces left by the restructuring of industry, the growing migration towards the urban belts, and the demographic decline in certain areas of the country. As in many other European towns, former and sometimes dilapidated shops, factories, offices and schools were often destined to regeneration projects driven by an alliance of political, economic and financial forces. These forces aimed to transform these towns into post-industrial areas, production process coordination centres of new and specialised services related to finance, information, fashion, and research (Sassen 1991). The struggles regarding the social use of space opposed these plans. With their action, the occupants of the CSOs accused the *padroni della città* (city 'owners') of aiming to transform these areas into financial sites and shopping centres while ignoring the social and cultural needs of the local civil society. One interesting example was in Milan, where the processes of de-industrialisation had advanced more than in other towns. According to the promoters of the early occupations of the CSOs, the development of these areas played a strategic role for financial capitalism and the implementation of a service-sector based society. Focusing on some specific areas the MA in Milan connected regeneration plans and financial capitalism development: "...the localisation of a huge directional section in Central Milan is necessary for every kind of development (...) and also former industrial areas, such as Bovisa and Garibaldi, will see a huge concentration of financial and directive activities in the next few years ..." (Autonomen 1988: 8).

The CSOs highlighted the contrast between the redevelopment efforts of business and the upper-middle class and the attempts of countercultures to reappropriate the use value of the city (Castells 1994). They underlined the incompatibility of the capital-driven regeneration programmes with the needs of 'proletarians of peripheral areas: the unemployed, precarious workers, squatters and students'. De-industrialised areas should have been regenerated places devoted to socialisation and where cultural initiatives could be held rather than becoming directional centres. Therefore, the occupations and self-management of these sites were a kind of alternative and bottom-up regeneration process of former industrial areas providing public utility and cultural services.

However, according to the occupants, the CSOs did not have the sole function of expressing cultural autonomy and alternative lifestyles. They also had the political function of organising the struggles of a restructured workforce that could not be identified as a homogeneous social class. This workforce was what Negri (1988) called 'socialised worker' and included the precarious manual workers of the labour intensive service sector as well as the educated worker with a higher degree, characterised by geographical mobility and time flexibility. The CSOs were intended as places where a heterogeneous variety of social subjects could connect and from where new cycles of protest could start. They had the ambitious purpose of unifying the class interests which were fragmented by the restructuring of the labour market: "The *centro sociale* is a standing point, it is a place where the people who struggle for the right to housing, in schools, work places and in the neighbourhood can interconnect" (Autonomia 1987: 20).

5.4. When enough is enough: from the ruins of Leoncavallo

The first half of the nineties saw the occurrence of a series of traumatic political events. The crisis of mass parties such as the Communist Party (Bagnasco 1996), the hard judicial fall of the political ruling class, in particular the Christian Democrats and the Italian Social Party between 1992 and 1993, the dramatic growth of the regionalist movement Northern League and the

seizure of power by the owner of the media empire Silvio Berlusconi were the most significant. Together they brought about the downfall of what was called the First Republic, contributing to the delegitimisation of institutions and the opening of new opportunities in the political structure.

1989 and the early nineties were the turning point for the CSOs, which started to innovate their ideological repertoires, while the number of occupied sites and activists steadily increased. A number of new movements also developed over that period. In winter 1990 students occupied dozens of italian universities, impeding their ability to function (Portelli 1997). In summer 1990, migrants began a series of struggles claiming rights and recognition. In autumn 1992 a worker movement violently contested the unions, which were accused of being wholly homogeneous with state power (Revelli 1996). In the meantime the CSOs consolidated their presence in the political scene and many groups shifted towards a more proactive identity. The CSOs increased considerably, the area of activists and sympathisers widened, recreational initiatives diversified, and a number of campaigns began. Moreover, the CSOs became the epicentre of a vivid musical scene and of a parallel independent market of cultural goods. These years also saw the development of the debate on the role of communication and information technology in what the Situationists called the society of spectacle, the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, the changes in the labour market, and social enterprises.

A turning point for the following years was on August the 16th 1989, when hundreds of policemen and *carabinieri* besieged, attacked and evicted the *Leoncavallo*, the oldest and most celebrated Italian CSO. The activists, who had known of the eviction order and were waiting for the police, actively resisted. The battle involved extensive use of *molotov cocktails* and tear gas, and lasted more than one hour, until the police defeated the resistance, cleared the building of youngsters, and allowed the owner to demolish it. The number of injured is uncertain, but 55 occupants were formally charged, and 26 arrested, for producing 'war weapons'. The Italian broadsheets dedicated headlines and entire pages to the event, impacting greatly on public opinion and forcing civil society to choose between the two contenders. The ruthless and

violent eviction and the resistance brought to the surface of society the existence of the CSO as cultural project and political subject. It was the first time since the late seventies that the antagonist movement had used the *molotov cocktails* as instruments of defence against police attack. This did not prevent thousands of people, sectors of public opinion, and sections of political parties to mobilise in favour of the *Leoncavallo*. Although demolished and reduced to ruins, the site was soon re-occupied and partially rebuilt by hundreds of volunteers. The attempted eviction was turned into a great movement of solidarity (Ibba 1999) while the resistance ignited a new wave of occupations all over the country.

Without giving an excessive and misleading emphasis to this event, the 'resistance of *Leoncavallo*' was a turning point and affected the development of the movement in a series of ways. It marked the end of one cycle and the beginning of a new one. The images of the young activists besieged within the Milanese CSO spread all over the country and became a *topos* of opposition to institutions after a long period of cultural normalisation (Membretti 2003). Thousands of young people regarded the *Leoncavallo* as a symbol of reaction against the social and cultural conformity of the eighties. To them the resistance of *Leoncavallo* represented the emergence of new lifestyles and the need to replace with different values the individualism and social Darwinism which had been characteristic features of the eighties. In a way these young people questioned the whole value system of capitalist society: work, property, profit, consumerism and family. In some cases precarious work was a choice that represented the refusal to accept a predetermined kind of life.

The MA gave its interpretation of the facts and considered the *Leoncavallo* defiance as a crucial event that denoted major changes and an emerging social composition. The main magazine of the MA, *Autonomia* (1989), devoted a specific issue to the event, emphasising its relevance for the 'class struggle'. Its analysis, although tortuous and not always clear, presented two key ideas of the movement that would persist throughout the nineties: first, the emergence of a new class composition, which is socially fragmented and scattered as a consequence of the dramatic growth of small and territorially integrated

factories and the rise of the service sector, whose common identity is determined by the struggle for a better quality of life and autonomous living spaces; second, the central role of political conflict in determining social change.

This analysis resumes and extends Antonio Negri's (1988) reading of some of Marx works, specifically the *Sixth unpublished chapter of Capital* and the concept of real subordination of labour to capital. According to Marx, the process of real subjection of labour to capital is the specifically capitalist mode of production. It is characterised by technological development, the application of science to large scale production, and, therefore, by a complete revolution in labour productivity and in social relations between capitalists and workers. The whole development of capitalist social relations and the systematic application of science to the productive process imply a borderless extension of productive labour, which produces surplus-value for the capitalist. At this stage of the capitalist mode of production the main agent is no longer the single worker but a combined labour-power:

> "The real lever of the overall labour process is increasingly not the individual worker. Instead, labour-power socially combined and the various competing labour-powers which together form the entire production machine participate in very different ways in the immediate process of making commodities, or, more accurately in this context, creating the product. Some work better with their hands, other with their heads, one as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc., the as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge...If we consider the aggregate worker, i.e., if we take all the members comprising the workshop together, then we see that their combined activity results materially in an aggregate product which is at the same time a quantity of goods. And here it is quite immaterial whether the job of a particular worker, who is merely a limb of this aggregate worker, is at a greater or smaller distance from the actual manual labour" (Marx 1976: 1039-1040).

The MA took on the idea of real subordination of labour to capital although it provided its own extensive interpretation. According to *Autonomia* (1989), the

Marxist concept of real subordination of labour to capital means that production relations are no longer relegated to the traditional industrial factory and production itself is not a matter of traditional working class interest. If we consider the combined work force, production involves society as a whole and both manual and intellectual workers give their contribution ("one as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc., the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge..."). *Autonomia* (1989: 3) deduces that every aspect of life, both in the realms of production and reproduction, is subordinated to the processes of capital valorisation: "this is the real subordination of labour to capital: every second of life is marked by society's capitalist rhythms".

The socialisation of production has brought about the spread of capitalist and exploitative relations and, as a consequence, conflict in the whole of society. If the reproductive and cultural spheres become part of the productive cycle and eventually generate value, the re-appropriation of leisure time, through the occupation and defence of the CSOs, turned into a form of contemporary anti-capitalist struggle. It does not take place in the workplace and does not assume the form of immediate conflict between capital and labour, but adopts the form of autonomy, self-determination, the 'conquest of freed social places', and the improvement of the quality of life. Withdrawing leisure time from the processes of commodification, the CSOs question and attack the rules of valorisation of capital: "the self-managed CSO is a place where proletarians can take back their leisure time. This is our goal: to withdraw ever more of our time from the totalising mechanism of capital". Therefore, as *Autonomia* insists, the struggle for individual and collective autonomy and self-determination is part of a more general class struggle and "the *Leoncavallo* is a turning point of class struggle in our country".

It is a commonly-held opinion that the defiance of *Leoncavallo* represented a turning point for the movement of the CSOs. They grew in number and, willy-nilly, become a non-traditional political subject recognised by institutions, political parties and other movements (NGOs). It was the manifestation of the social and political subjects and individualities developed over the eighties. As one key informant argues:

"The socialist city government attacking the Leoncavallo think they are dealing with a residual subject. The roofs of Leoncavallo clearly show that a not insignificant subject has grown over the previous years. The biography of its protagonists tells us that the eighties have given root to a new social subject. It represents the coming out of a political generation from the seventies" (Interview 8).

It is doubtful whether this was the farewell to the seventies that this interviewee argues. However, from that point onwards, the CSOs assumed a more visible position in the Italian society. Moreover, for some of them the battle of the *Leoncavallo* was the beginning of a redefinition process of their political agenda and the constitution of a new identity.

5.5. 'The Panther is us'

At the end of 1989 a series of faculty occupations turned dozens of Italian universities into self-managed sites where students organised seminars and lectures on the future of education, the privatisation of public services such as schools and universities, and the function of education in contemporary society. The Panther movement was the first mass university student movement after the seventies and involved dozens of universities and thousands of students. Over the eighties the situation was not particularly favourable for student movements and none of the protests in high-schools and universities had the same impact as the 'Panther' movement. As Portelli (1997: 251) puts it:

"There had been no noticeable stirrings in the university for several years. A movement of high-school students in 1985 received paternalistic media endorsement for its moderate demands, and seemed to vanish quickly. Politics in the universities seemed to be in the grip of a clientelistic catholic group, *Comunione e Liberazione*, that combined ideological fundamentalism with sharp business practices. The left was in disarray after the East European events of 1989, and the Communist party was busy with internal feuding over changes of name and identity".

An attempt to revitalise university debate was made by the journal *Analfabeta* in the mid eighties. It was characterised by its ironic approach and a series of empirical inquiries into the right to study and the living conditions of students. Opposing the idea that research should be strongly linked to enterprises this magazine anticipated some of the main issues raised by the Panther movement, such as the relationship between universities and private industry and the separation of scientific knowledge from economic interests. However, the journal, which was published by a collective of local university groups, failed to mobilise a collective national movement.

The Panther movement was brought about by a university reform bill aiming to augment financial autonomy for each university and links between public education and private sector. According to the students, this reform would lead universities to abandon their public institutional role and behave as private enterprises, looking for resources among private subjects such as firms, banks and financial institutions in order to increase their profits. Students were concerned that the reform would subjugate universities to the private sector and dramatically affect research interests. The consequences would have been the abandonment of humanistic subjects, critical thinking and non-marketable research. Others were concerned that financial autonomy would lead to a dramatic growth of tuition fees in relation to the prestige and the geographical location of universities. The creeping privatisation would have furthered the divide between class A and class B universities, the former located in the wealthy and industrialised Northern areas, the latter in the Southern areas, and therefore between the North and the South of the country. The discontent with the inefficiency of the system and poor infrastructure and investments cannot be underestimated: "even the reasonable demands for evening classes, extended library hours, and more chairs to sit on at lectures proved to be finally utopian" (Portelli 1997: 251-2). Students were often forced to attend lectures standing, in many faculties university staff preferred to build their career outside the institution and services provided by them and offices were generally poor.

For students and leaders of the protest, the reform bill and the subsequent occupations and self-management of universities were a chance to discuss the

role of education and intellectuals in post-industrial society. If in 1968 students had 'contested' themselves as ideologists of capital and therefore as an intellectual elite which was 'condemned' to rule the world, in the early nineties they were aware that the function of intellectuals was dramatically changing. Students argued that the intellectuals were no longer part of powerful elite, but had now become a 'mass-intellectual'. The word, resembling 'mass-worker', aims to explain that intellectual work no longer belonged to a narrow educated elite but had now been 'massified'. As Franco Berardi (1990) wrote with respect to the Panther Movement, the post-industrial revolution of the eighties suppressed manual industrial work - meaning that, knowledge, information and images are now the main output of social production. Unlike the '68 student movement, which was still related to the problems of industrial society, the student movement of 1990 focused on intellectual work and discussed their condition and power relations in a digital society. Students were at the centre of what Marx called 'general intellect', the scientific knowledge embodied in the machine system, that according to Berardi is the main productive force in contemporary society. Therefore: "this movement aims to radically re-think functions, transmission and production of knowledge" (Berardi 1990: 10).

The Panther movement significantly influenced the CSOs in the nineties. Although these two movements were distinct entities they interacted with a reciprocal influence on languages, practices and analysis of contemporary society. On the one hand students learnt from the CSOs the practice of occupation, self-management and direct action. On the other hand students provided new intellectual and physical resources to CSOs, raising original cultural and political concepts such as 'intellectual labour', 'mass-intellectual', 'post-Fordism', 'language and knowledge applied to production'. In addition, the Panther has shown how important communication can be in connecting the nodes of the network. Along with the Panther, the fax soon became a symbol and instrument of "decentred, horizontal dialogic communication technology" (Portelli 1997: 253). Occupations often started from rectors' offices, not only because they directed universities but also because they were equipped with fax machines. With its massive use of fax and mass media this movement

demonstrated the importance of communication in organising protests, socialise contents and issues, and connect the network of groups. Since then, the CSOs would give ever more importance to both old and new media such as radio and information technology employing increasing resources for their empowerment. In short, the Panther was a mass autonomous social movement that had a great impact on the CSOs, as an activist from Padua underlines:

> "*The contamination between the Panther - that started discussing about knowledge and the general intellect, and adopted a network organisational structure – and the antagonist movement was very strong. The Panther movement made you think big, it made you move on from a sort of political minoritarianism. Moreover, it put forward a strong proposal on communication. From then it became a central terrain of our action*" (Interview 42).

5.6. Independent cultural production and social entrepreneurship

Over the nineties the CSOs consolidated their area and changed greatly. Many local governments began to accept their presence and in some cases handed over buildings to groups of youngsters who had occupied them. It was a kind of recognition of the CSOs' experience either as a political actor representing and involving young people or as an actor covering a social function.

Over the nineties a number of CSOs developed cultural projects generating income and became the physical places where a parallel market of this kind of goods could flourish. The production of independent music was not a new thing. The Italian radical Punk movement had made a first attempt to develop an alternative music scene in the early eighties when it started to organise concerts and produce records using its own resources. In a way, it was forced to build a small self-managed network of production, exchange and distribution of records coming from independent bands. In fact, because of their counter-cultural radicalisation and un-compromising attitude, no public places were available to promote punk concerts in the early eighties. The official market was closed to them. The founder of an independent record company remembers the eighties:

"...Italy was a very difficult place to live. It was very hard to express yourself, and difference was considered to be marginal and radical. The punk movement was the only safety valve... None of the Italian bands had any link abroad, so they spontaneously started to produce their own records, organise their concerts and tours, taking their products and exchanging them" (Dazieri 1996: 207).

On the other hand, the radical punk movement aimed to have a different approach to music. It criticised bands like Clash that allowed multinationals to colonise the punk cultural codes and their transformation into a commodity like others. The punks protested against commercialisation of their revolt and refused to allow their anger to be "at the service of record companies and clothes boutiques" (Philopat 1997: 54).

This first attempt at building an independent production market did not meet with great success and was limited to a few thousand people. It was a starting point, though, and contributed to the dissemination of a self-production culture that was to return in the first half of the nineties. However, the punk and the CSOs attitudes differed in many respects. The first was mainly founded on the attempt to build a counter-culture to oppose the multinationals and their cultural homogenisation. The aim of the punk scene's independent production was mainly cultural, not economic. Economic self-sufficiency had to guarantee freedom of expression and autonomy of choice. The second included both cultural and economic purposes. It aimed to clash with the cultural power of multinational corporations and at the same time to build a self-sufficient economic structure capable of providing some forms of income for its activists. An article by the leading hip-hop band *Assalti Frontali*, emphasised the dual purpose of independent production. According to the *Assalti Frontali* (1995: 2), independent production is a choice:

"It brings us to *express a conflict* in order to create an alternative. It aims to break the rule which says that creativity must be transformed into a television commercial. We are not attacking the bands under contract with multinationals. We are attacking the multinational corporations, their policy, their business and their Mafia network".

Moreover, the article called for further professionalism and the necessity for the distribution of some form of income: "if we want to move on from precariousness we need to solve some matters that cannot be postponed: first, the availability of modern technical tools and technology; secondly the production of wealth and the distribution of forms of income" (Assalti Frontali 1995: 4).

This calling was a substantial ideological change that marked the transition from militancy based on volunteer work to a kind of professionalism. This change, which caused several controversies within the militant body, was possible because the CSOs consolidated their experience and had become nodes of a nationwide network, where independently produced goods could be commercialised and distributed. On this basis, their activities were no longer episodic and discontinuous, but could reinforce each other and become a national collective project which would link the international music and cultural scene. As a consequence a small-scale independent economy closely related to the activities undertaken in the CSOs has grown, providing training, jobs and social capital to militants and attendants (Ruggiero 2001).

The most remarkable examples of these kinds of activities were the hip-hop/ragga music movement and the literary phenomenon of cyberpunk. Both of these developed in the first half of the nineties. From an artistic point of view, Italian hip-hop was not particularly original as it was rooted in and resembled American black music. However, the use of strongly politicised Italian lyrics on musical beats from the American black ghettos, which were seen as places both of exploitation and resistance, made it possible for this music to become the main mass media of the movement. As a consequence, a vivid musical scene developed and some of the major bands had significant success in the CSOs and among the consumers of musical products. Not only did music allow some of these musicians to build a profession and implement benefit from an independent parallel market, but also to communicate and make the antagonistic identity of the movement known to a wider public (Cordata 1994). As some key witnesses remember, all of a sudden some thousands of people started to attend the CSOs, further contributing to break their isolation.

Another example of independent economy and self-production is the successful Shake Underground publishing house, which is engaged in the production and diffusion of literature on cyberpunk, black culture and counter-cultures. People involved in this project reject the Orwellian nightmare of a society completely controlled by technology (Ruggiero 2000). On the contrary, they argue, technology can open new democratic spaces, have an anti-establishment use and broaden human experience. In this respect, cyberpunk literature offers an example of the new organic relationship between humanity and technology: "For the first time in literary history the relationship between the human body and machines is not seen as if it had a negative dimension" (Scelsi 1990: 10).

The nineties were also characterised by a harsh debate, which provoked many divisions, on the CSOs as social enterprises. It was started by a conference call made by a Milanese research institute that had links with this area. The view of this institute was that the CSOs were absorbing an enterprise culture and that a dialogue between state institutions and the movement was possible (Moroni, Farina and Tripodi 1995). According to this view, the CSOs were sorts of 'non-capitalist' economic actors involved in informal economic activities, self-managed small firms and co-operatives steadily growing, distributing jobs, wages and public utility services. Many activists of the CSOs saw this as a kind of provocation. How could places which were born as political and antagonistic sites, based on spontaneous and disinterested militancy, then become social enterprises procuring wages for people or be conceived as a kind of social service?

The 'reactive' CSOs[6], in accordance with a Marxist-Leninist view, pleaded the continuity with the MA and the eighties, and defended the antagonistic role for the CSOs as a phase of a more general class war. According to this view their activity was meant to be purely political and to recompose the different segments of the proletarian class (CSOA Ex Emerson 1995). This position did not deny that the CSOs had a cultural and reproductive function; however, their ultimate purpose should have been socialist or communist revolution: "We must be those subjects who propose and build a new way of development for

this planet" (CSOA Ex Emerson 1995: 163). In other words, these CSOs recovered the original purposes of the eighties.

In contrast to this position, the 'proactive'[7] argued that the CSOs, alongside a doubtless political antagonist role, were 'firms', although of a very specific kind. Through their social and recreational activities, they produce relational goods, cause money to circulate and distribute forms of income, although they cannot be compared either with profit or non-profit oriented organisations (Farina et al. 1995). Therefore, political activity is one among others, and the CSOs have to be also interpreted as economic subjects. First, they promote cultural and musical events that mobilise different kinds of resources, involving several thousand attendants and hundreds of activists. Second, they generate both formal and informal organisations which produce welfare services to increase well-being and social cohesion. During the nineties, a number of formal associations, some of which were non-profit making co-operatives, were founded in several CSOs. They had an internal statute, formalised organisms, and the activists became paid and in some cases highly qualified personnel. This started a series of welfare projects in areas such as the provision of child-care, immigration and homelessness.

The involvement of the CSOs in these initiatives was an important shift, but it did not change their conflictual character. Rather it differentiated the courses of action, which now ranged from protest to the institutional, and widened the CSOs' political opportunities. These welfare associations are a further route to promote citizen rights and to question current social relations. As can be read in a promotional leaflet of an association set up at the *Leoncavallo*:

> "The metropolis is becoming a social desert, while community and collective relations are more and more uprooted. The increased pace of living has reduced the space for social life. At this stage, socialising is not just leisure time but appropriation of temporal and living space, which has been denied. This represents the search for a possible community" (quoted in Membretti 2001).

Thus, the real aims were both social and political and coherent in keeping with the original purposes of the CSOs.

5.7. Phantoms in the city and the Disobedient movement

Two dates marked further changes in the CSOs in the mid nineties: January the 1st and September the 9th 1994.

January the 1st coincided with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas which greatly affected the evolution of the CSOs. Its fascinating power and influence on ideas and courses of action in a large number of CSOs, specifically on the movement network of the MTB and MD, was enormous. The ability of the Zapatistas to link the particular and the universal, ethnical claims and the new global exclusions helped the movement to overcome the traditional internationalism and to assume globalisation as the main scenario of social struggle. The Zapatistas refusal to fight for political power, their appeal to democracy and dignity for civil society, the use of communication as a strategic tool to relate conflict and consensus became some key issues of the MD, contributing to the rethinking of its languages and practice.

On September the 9th 1994 about twenty thousand people rallied in Milan to protest against the city council policy on the CSOs and specifically the series of evictions that involved *Leoncavallo*. Approximately a thousand policemen and *carabinieri* in tear-gas gear were employed in order to prevent the demonstrators from entering the city centre. Aiming to breach the dispositions from the institutional authorities, some hundreds of activists dressed in white overalls attacked the police (Interview 14). Violent clashes erupted and lasted several hours. The white overalls covering the bodies of demonstrators not only had an organisational function but also a further symbolic implication. The colour pointed to the social invisibility of the people taking part in the demonstration. It was a metaphor for the existential and working conditions of people who did not have any visibility in society, political influence on institutions or rights in the labour market. At that time the Milanese mayor, who based his electoral campaign on the eviction of *Leoncavallo*, a symbol of occupation and resistance, referred to the occupants of the CS as phantoms who lived in the city outskirts. An activist of *Ya Basta!* in Bologna recalls: "*Formentini* [the Milanese mayor] *said that the autonomists of* Leoncavallo

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were and would always be, nothing more that phantoms. The general meeting of Leoncavallo *turned this around and said: well, if we are phantoms we must appear in the streets* [as phantoms, therefore dressed in white]" (Interview 15). The White Overalls became a political and collective project and turned into MTB gathering a large number of CSOs only in 1997. As Luca Casarini, spokesperson of the Disobedient movement and of the *Rivolta*, said in an interview: "The truth is that the MTB was started in 1997 by a group of young people in Rome who called their collective 'the invisibles'. They were the first to wear white overalls and go out into the streets dressed like that to demand rights" (Navarro 2004). As will be seen in the following chapters[8], the MTB played an important role in the innovation of protest repertoires, combining direct action and civil disobedience. As a movement, MTB focused on the new emergencies, both local and global: the *Centri di Permanenza* Temporanea (CPT) – temporary detention centres - for asylum seekers without papers, the NATO war in Kosovo, the rights of social citizenship for those social subjects' generally excluded from welfare benefits such as the unemployed, precarious flexible workers and migrants.

The white overalls, which were worn during protest actions had both a communicative and symbolic function. They made the movement's initiatives more visible and represented the social precariousness and invisibility of their wearers. More specifically, the overalls symbolised three different meanings. Firstly, white is used as a metaphor of plurality of social productive figures employed with a number of different precarious contracts: *"the colour white was an allusion to different social subjects that are productive figures of whom we are part and yet not represented. Therefore, the colour white was allusive, metaphorical"* (Interview 7). According to the movement, these new subjects resulted from the decline of the factory hegemony and the dissolution of the working class as the main productive class.

Second, the colour white is a metaphor for invisibility. The productive transformations have not only produced a multiplicity of social subjects, but also emphasised the inadequacy of the welfare system before these changes.

The new working subjects are multiple but do not have rights, therefore they are invisible from the point of view of the welfare system:

"If in the old productive paradigm citizenship was an abstract right that was recognised by the constitution and work was the concrete medium to access rights, in the so-called post-Fordist paradigm there has been a multiplication of invisible subjects from the point of view of rights. This is true both for those who work, in non traditional forms and sectors, and for those who do not work at all" (Interview 7).

Finally, the white overall was worn for communicative reasons. It became a sort of counter-logo, an object that could be immediately recognised as a source of protest. The use of white overalls during demonstrations and protests allowed the activists to turn their initiatives into shows and gain more visibility in the communication system: *"this means that media and public opinion were able to notice you even though there were only one hundred people whereas they would ignore bigger mobilisations"* (Interview 10).

Moreover, the use of the white overall was adopted because it had the same communicative function that the black balaclava had for Sub-Comandante Marcos and the Zapatistas, as one key informant has underlined:

"The white overall was like the balaclava, which had a great communicative impact. We are invisibles, we are ghosts, but showing ourselves as 'invisibles' we turn the matter upside down. As the balaclava has been used to be seen and not to be covered, the white overalls not only state that we are invisibles but also force people to look at them" (Interview 7).

The MTB reached its heyday in 2000-2001 and coincided with the campaign against detention centres for migrants, the participation in the global movement and some protests for the universal basic income. As we will see in chapter 9.4.4, the MTB turned into the *Laboratorio della Disobbedienza Sociale* in November 2001 and the *Movimento delle/dei Disobbedienti* in January 2002. This transformation signalled the necessity to adapt protest strategies to a different national and international political context. A number of events determined the new political context: the election of G.W. Bush at the end of

2000, the election of a right-wing government in Italy in the spring 2001, the harsh policing at the Genoa protest in 2001 and the impossibility of practicing certain forms of civil disobedience, the rise of fundamentalist terrorism and beginning of the so called pre-emptive or permanent global war, according to the individual perspective. As can be read in the foundation document: "the decision to become Movement of Disobedients and to act as movement among movements ... is also a consequence of a shared analysis of the new phase that began after the days in Genoa in July 2001 and the events of September the 11th"[9]. If before Genoa some forms of dialogue between the movement and the government partially regulated the conflict and the policing of protest was based on ritualistic stand-off (della Porta 1996), the events in Genoa opened a new phase where the relations with the right wing government, which is interpreted as the continuation of the imperial power, have been exclusively confrontational and characterised by the complete absence of communication. As Luca Casarini said in an interview released a few days later: "As MTB we have gone a long way, walking and questioning what we were doing. It was a positive experience, but I think that it is now inadequate to face the current imperial logic, where politics is the continuation of war and not *viceversa*, as Karl Von Clausewitz wrote" (Vecchi 2001).

The transition from the MTB to the MD represents the passage from civil to social disobedience. Protest repertoires have not changed. What has changed is the scene where they take place. The changes in the political context and in the policing of protest mentioned before convinced the activists of the MTB to open a new phase that can be called 'glocal'. This means a deeper territorial ramification of the movement and the translation of global issues into local campaigns and "neighbourhood and urban struggles". The necessity of focusing on local campaigns was emphasised in the *Relazione del Primo Laboratorio Disobbedienti Nordest* (Laboratorio Disobbedienti Nordest 2001) and in the document *Nasce il movimento delle e dei Disobbedienti* (Movimento delle e dei Disobbedienti 2002) that underlined the necessity to *"fare società"* (to make society). This expression points to a kind of territory-based action that aims to "intensify alternative social relations" and to "network local struggles

that express the interwoven differences between global and local". Instead of the direct confrontation with trans-national institutions, the Disobedient activists leaned towards molecular intervention in the territories and the political exchange with local institutions. As we will see in the following chapters[10] this has had two consequences. On one hand the movement has attempted to develop what it has called "welfare from below": the organisation of structures and the provision of social services. On the other hand it has organised protest actions against local targets, such as estate agencies, companies involved in the war and recruitment agencies. Some of them were carried out from a global perspective: for example the war on Afghanistan and Iraq or the globalisation of rights. Others were based on local needs and involved local negotiations and targets.

5.8. Women in revolt?

This penultimate section focuses on the gender difference within the movement. From the previous pages we have seen that within the CSOs there has never been a kind of feminist movement as in the seventies, when traditional gender hierarchies and division of roles were questioned and powerfully challenged by women. In the seventies, women rejected the idea of including the 'feminine question' into a more general struggle, contested the unity of human nature and emphasised the irreducible *otherness* of the female gender. According to women, men could represent men while women should represent themselves. This approach led women to have separate realms and to organise public initiatives where the presence of males was refused. Except for rare and temporary circumstances nothing like this happened in the CSOs during the eighties and nineties. When groups of women set up feminist collectives their existence was ephemeral as well as their theoretical elaboration. Female specificity was often claimed but rarely practiced, in terms of meetings, mobilisations or debates organised by women for women. It was subordinated to a more general class analysis, as can be seen in the following leaflet distributed by a collective of women in Brescia after the occupation of the CSO in November 1989: "A group of women has been established. It is

distinct from institutions and political parties and organises open meetings every week. It aims to make people sensitive and fight against issues that affect all the proletarian workers, and specifically the female proletariat..."[11]. The leaflet goes on to list some female issues and concludes by inviting "women and men to have direct dialogue". However, this experience, like many others, lasted only a few weeks and the topic of femininity was sacrificed to others. Moreover, nothing relevant came out from the CSOs in terms of publications or cultural expression that might indicate the existence of a vivid and flourishing feminist environment. The male-centred repertoires of protest and the prevalence of class analysis prevented women from building a clear and separate identity.

The practice of civil disobedience has not radically changed things and the feminist debate still languishes. As we will see, civil disobedience is a protest repertoire based on the use of the activist's body as an instrument of protest. This is why the Disobedient activists usually say that they put their body on the line. Civil disobedience is a confrontational protest repertoire, but in contrast to direct action of the past and traditional street battles, activists protect the whole body and with it they try to break prohibitions. Because it relies upon some forms of protection *"it allows everybody to use their body"* (Interview 7). However, civil disobedience was still based on direct confrontation with the police and was mostly practiced by male activists. In other terms, it is still a gender-based repertoire of contention. In Prague, Genoa and other places where civil disobedience took place participant observation revealed a division of labour between male and female activists. Men occupied the first rows and confronted the police. Women had a supportive role, carrying water to put out teargas bullets or helping injured people.

The lack of a female protagonism has been underlined in the only document written by women belonging to the MD and addressed to women and men. The document (Assalti-a-salti 2003: 121) denounces the absence of a specific female discourse within the MD:

> "We are too often fascinated and drawn by patterns of communication
> and action which have a male character ... In Prague 2000 and Genoa

2001 we have only seen the male protagonism in Italian demonstrations, either in the anachronistic form based on the seventies or in the more renewed and fanciful form of the neo-middle age army of the Disobedient activists".

Despite this, the conditions exist for a different kind of female participation. Women have marked their presence in the global and new-global movement with original forms of struggle. However, their influence is still too limited and has considerable room for expansion:

> "we can do more. Any kind of improvement will depend on our ability to bring about a new feminine protagonism. We cannot wait and see while our comrades put their own bodies on the line in the ways they think best. We also want to put our female bodies at risk and to give free play to our active imaginations, giving life to a multitude of differentiated but coordinated and organised actions and subjectivities"

(Assalti-a-salti 2003: 121).

In terms of female specificity the CSO *Rivolta* is no exception. There is not a separate place where women debate issues from their point of view, and the spokespersons are mainly men. At the same time, female activists do not believe that a separated space should be built:

> *"I have always been against the 'difference' thought. Some days ago I was contacted by the 'women in black' in order to organise an initiative against the war in Piazza S. Marco and to write 'peace' with our bodies. I am not against this but this is not my way to protest as a woman. Women say that because they make children they give life. But that is not true. The war in Kosovo was led by Madeline Albright and I think she is a woman"* (Interview 41).

However, the lack of women in key roles does not only characterise the CSOs. As several protagonists and commentators have noted, the Italian segment of new-global movement suffers from the same problem. According to a spokesperson of the Genoa Social Forum, which organised the protest in Genoa in July 2001, this movement has absorbed a lot of things from feminism: its

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conception of politics, its criticism of power, the ways in which to organise and act. However, such a female movement only shows the visibility of the male. Thus the lack of visibility seems to be a common issue, shared by both the CSOs and the new-global movement. In this respect new contemporary movements have done very little to go beyond the power practices of traditional politics. As Sarasini (2003: 25), a former editor of an Italian leading feminist magazine[12], wrote on the Disobedient movement magazine:

> "Men talk, women listen, both in institutions or movements (...) The point is: there is not any public discourse for women in the shared place of women and men. Although with fatigue, girls know how to behave at work. The working woman has patterns, narrations, victims and heroines in whom she can identify herself. This does not happen in politics. In alternative movements, politics neither".

Is this lack of visibility in the CSOs and new contemporary movement conscious? Is the lack of visibility the outcome of practices aiming to innovate relations within and between genders, starting from daily life and ignoring the search for political power? Or on the contrary, is it the result of specific power relations and contentious interactions that subordinate the role of women?

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has shown how the antagonist movement, heir of the identity and custodian of the memory of the seventies movements, has changed over the eighties and nineties. The early eighties were characterised by resistance and by defence of memory and identity through the judicial defence of the many thousands of people arrested. As Primo Moroni (1996, 43), the most attentive observer, said: "Over the eighties, the movement was forced to dedicate itself to repression issues and to put everything else aside". The defence of identity was deemed necessary due to state repression. Resisting repression meant defending and claiming the same identity that was being put into question owing to thousands of arrests and several forms of attack against the movement. The State had dictated the ground rules and the movement had to play the same game. Therefore, also when the issues changed and peace and

anti-nuclear protests arose, repertoires of action, languages and forms of protest did not dramatically change. One interviewee tells how far the identity of the seventies influenced the forms of protest of the eighties:

> *"I think that identity has had a great effect, because we have a generation of twenty-year-old people in the early eighties... both for its biography and age collocation. There is also a huge amount of experience, ideals and views that come from the seventies. The eighties generation is largely influenced by the events of the seventies. As the pictures of that period show the protest repertoires also monkey concepts, words and dynamics of the past. The movement had a strong anti-institutional and antagonistic identity which was brought about by the big judicial inquiries. They represented a breach to which the movement answered by becoming extraneous, conflictual without any mediation, without dialogue. Mechanisms of action and reaction entwined"* (Interview 8).

The early nineties saw much differentiation among the CSOs, coming from the experience of the MA. While some CSOs still claimed an antagonistic and revolutionary identity, for others in Veneto, Lombardy, Rome, Bologna, Turin and so on, the nineties were the beginning of a process of research of a different set of ideas, the start of a walk which has lasted several years. According to a spokesman of the CSO *Leoncavallo*: *"The two extreme points were 1989 and 1994, but in between there was the movement against the war, the Panther movement (...) These were five years that changed the ideological structure of the movement. At the end of 1994 a cycle began and it is still going on"* (Interview 8).

Language, practices and identity became more open towards the external society. Conflict was still the centre of their reflections and practices in the nineties but slowly shifted from being self-referential towards searching for consensus among civil society. The forms of protest also stopped aping those of the seventies. It was a partially new beginning in search of practices and codes which is still in progress today.

1 Because of the scarcity of books and articles and the lack of attention from the academic world about the youth movement and the CSOs, this chapter is mainly based on empirical material such as interviews with activists, which will be quoted in italics from now on, original documents, and the magazines Autonomia, which was based in Padua but had a national readership, and Autonomen, which was based in Milan.

[2] Discussion document: Compagni del movimento, 'Rivogliamo nel movimento comunista i compagni prigionieri e latitanti', Brescia, 25 November 1982.

[3] Discussion document: Coordinamento Nazionale Antinucleare Antimperialista, 'Campeggio di Lotta 1-10 Agosto 1984', Padova, 1984.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Leaflet: L'assemblea di lotta per la conquista degli spazi sociali, Brescia, 'Contro i padroni della città', Radio Onda d'Urto, Brescia, October 1989.

[6] For a definition see chapter 1.2.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See chapters 8 and 9.

[9] Discussion document: Movimento delle e dei Disobbedienti, 'Nasce il movimento delle e dei Disobbedienti', 2002.

[10] See chapters 6 and 7.

[11] Leaflet: CSO Via Battaglie, 'Donne Organizziamoci', Brescia, November 1989.

[12] The name of the magazine is Noi Donne.

Chapter 6

The *Rivolta* and the making of a political decentralized actor

Introduction

The previous chapter focused mainly on the CSO movement and its development throughout the eighties and nineties. In this chapter I will analyse the case study of the CSO *Rivolta* and, through this, the repertoires of action, political discourse and campaigns of the Disobedient movement. In many respects the *Rivolta* is a unique example. My own view is that this CSO is particularly innovative in a number of respects and, in particular, with regard to institutions, repertoires of protest and analysis, and in what has been called the building of 'welfare from below'. The *Rivolta* is also at the centre of a political project and interprets the notion of the proactive actor and political entrepreneur. It is not a subject that has tried to resist changes but rather its campaigns, protests and performances are the result of deliberate choices and strategies. As can be read in a discussion document "(We have to consider the) *Rivolta* and the metropolitan area of Mestre-Venezia, because of the characteristics that we have described many times, as a central reference point of our intervention and political action"[1]. The *Rivolta* is, therefore, the central locus of an attempt to experiment an innovative political project that shows original features in the Italian context involving the Northern-East regions. According to an activist who left the *Rivolta* in 1997:

> "*From a political point of view, I think that they focused on the* Rivolta *as a central element, not only in the town but in the whole region. The* Morion *is*

a CSO; the first Rivolta *is a CSO of Marghera. The current* Rivolta *is not a CSO. It is the application of a theoretical plan. It is something on which they are pinning a lot of hopes. It is an experiment, a laboratory in respect of the relationship with institutions"* (Interview 25).

In fact, as will be noted, the *Rivolta* is not a social movement *per sé*, but part of a wider movement with multiple links. At a regional level it adheres to the *Melting* (in English, editor's note) *dei Centri Sociali del Nordest* (MCSNE), a network of CSOs, groups and associations scattered throughout the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions. At a national level it was part of the MTB in the late nineties and the first years of the new century, and has taken part in the MD over the last few years. The CSO *Rivolta* has participated in the 'new global movement' and has been involved in a number of initiatives that have taken place over the last few years. All these ideological and organisational connections will lead us not only to consider the debate occurring at the *Rivolta* but discussions, and analyses of documents and campaigns involving the MD as a whole and the CSOs of the North-East. The analysis of the *Rivolta* will allow us to shed light on a wider movement and its recent campaigns and changes.

This chapter will outline the evolution of the *Rivolta* and analyse its main organisational aspects. The first section describes some events that marked the CSO movement in Venice-Mestre and the main phases in the history of the *Rivolta*. The second section will analyse the internal organisational structure and external network. It will be argued that an organisational distinction has to be made between the *Rivolta* and internal associations. While the former has been characterised by higher degrees of informality, the latter have developed formal and specialised organisational structures. This difference is organisational but does not imply any kind of political differentiation. Therefore the *Rivolta* and associations gathered under the *Officina Sociale* (OS) will be treated as parts of an individual political and social project. The third section will explore the characteristics of the occupants and concentrate on the background of their political activism.

6.1. The *Centri Sociali* in Venice and the *Rivolta*

The CSO *Rivolta* is located in the industrial area of Marghera in the town of Venice-Mestre. Venice is a city made up of two socially and geographically different urban agglomerates: the historic centre and Mestre. The former is built on a group of islets and mud banks in the middle of Laguna Veneta, a crescent-shaped lagoon separated from the Adriatic Sea by a barrier of narrow islands and peninsulas. This is the tourist part of the city. Spreading inland from the Laguna Veneta is Mestre and the industrial borough of Marghera occupied by Porto Marghera and its enormous shipping docks. A one kilometre long road and a railway bridge connects the historic and modern city. Although Venice and Mestre formally constituted a single town, they are two distinct areas with different characteristics and economic development as well as problems. Venetian economy is based on commerce, tourism and the University, the latter on industry and services. Venice has to face problems related to the lack of any economic development other than from tourism, the ageing of the population and demographic reduction. Mestre and its industrial municipality of Marghera, which underwent massive industrial development in the last century and was the site of the biggest Italian chemical development/industry[2], have had to deal with massive deindustrialisation processes and the environmental inheritance of the petrochemical industry.

The development of the CSOs in Venice and Mestre can be read through the social and urban characteristics of the town and, as will be seen in the forthcoming pages, the political opportunity and constraints within the boundaries of institutional politics. Their story is made up of campaigns, relations with neighbourhood populations, adaptation to the political and social context, attempt to push forward the limits of compatibility, occupations, evictions, clashes between occupants and police, protests, further campaigns and new occupations. The series of occupations starting in 1985 when a number of heterogeneous subjects, political groups, students, bands and associations organised the claiming of places to gather, play

music and set up social activities. This campaign led to the occupation of *Villa Franchin* in October 1985. This initial stage was not only marked by demands for expressive autonomy, but also for different uses of urban spaces and public resources. The first occupation was launched by a committee that:

"On the one hand started to denounce financial investment of billions of lira in 'cathedrals in the desert', judicial structures and prisons; on the other hand it started to locate a number of closed, (dismissed), abandoned spaces owned by council administration and to claim their social use. Villa Franchin *was among these. It was a building, a villa with a park, which was completely restructured by the council but still closed because there was not any project for it. A number of initiatives carried out between 1984 and 1985 led to the occupation in October 1985. The occupants were evicted the same night of the first occupation. However, the eviction, the clashes with police, the prosecution and the arrest of 15-16 and 17 year olds brought uproar. These things happened after a long period of social peace and involved adolescents who just claimed rooms to play music and nothing more. Therefore, the phenomenon grew in the following months. It involved bands, students of the movement, university groups but also common people, groups of elderly people who used to meet to play Bingo and people who were passionate about mountains. In other words a heterogeneous committee was created and succeeded in obtaining the management of* Villa Franchin *a few days per week. However, as soon as they gave us the keys of the place, the part-time arrangement was no longer respected.* Villa Franchin *was always open and became the CSO of the town"* (Interview 36).

The occupation lasted several years until the occupants of the site were evicted in July 1988 and this site of social activity was eventually replaced by a metropolitan police station.

In October 1989 and spring 1990 two buildings were occupied in Mestre and Venice: the first *Rivolta* and the *Morion*. Both these occupations were fuelled by

two circumstances and by how the occupants framed them: first, the dozens of occupations that in the meantime had been occurring all over the country, as a consequence of the solidarity movement for the *Leoncavallo*; second, the rise of the 'Panther' movement in Italian Universities in winter 1990. Regarding this second event, one witness reported: "*the Panther was the signal that something was changing*" (Interview 25).

The first *Rivolta* was in a derelict industrial site and the occupants concentrated more on organisation of cultural and musical events than political initiatives, becoming part of a nationwide cultural and political movement:

> "*We started to organise gigs and initiatives that brought in one thousand people. It was absolutely new for all of us; none of us had seen anything like it before. In those years there was the boom period of the CSOs in Italy. A lot of them were occupied and from the point of view of cultural production a lot of new bands came out suddenly. They were from other CSOs such as the* Isola Posse *from Bologna, the* Officina 99 *from Naples, the* Onda Rossa Posse *from Rome the* Lion Horse Posse *from the* Leoncavallo" (Interview 10).

The structural conditions of the place and its marginal location with respect to Venice, did not allow the *Rivolta* to become a catalyst of either cultural or political initiatives and the turnout of activists and attendants soon fell. The site of the *Morion* was formally assigned by the Venice council after a number of protests around the historic centre - occupation of buildings and public gardens, interruption of town council meetings, clashes with the police – which led to the assignation of the CSO *Morion*.

> "*After a number of meetings we decided to occupy a place called* Palazzo Cappello. *This occupation was decided by six people who forced circumstances ... Hundreds of people attended* Palazzo Cappello *and came to see gigs.* Palazzo Cappello *lasted one month and then the eviction* manu militari *came. After that there was a demonstration, it was summertime, July or August, and the turnout was extremely high, although we were in*

Venice and in summer ... it was a good outcome ... there was an attempt to occupy another place, some clashes with the police and suchlike with the police on the backs of people in the street ... at that time the attacks of political police were quite heavy. After the eviction there was also a town council so we occupied the Papadopulos *gardens, at the entrance of Venice, with tents and so on ... We invaded the council town hall, we climbed over the benches and started to walk on them ... these were new things for Venice where everything was so placid .... After these protests a negotiation started and the newly elected government of the town assigned us this place, the* Morion, *in the neighbourhood of* Castello..." (Interview 25).

The *Morion* and the *Rivolta* were politically linked and shared a mutual identity, but their structural conditions and different locations brought about two different kinds of development. All activists and key informants agree in saying that the *Morion* was more politically active and socially rooted in the urban context than the *Rivolta*.

The *Morion* was a small place and was located in a deprived area of historic Venice among narrow streets and buildings. Its occupants understood the widespread need in the town of Venice to have a radical political actor [movement is better] that was active on a number of issues. Therefore, its campaigns ranged from the social problems of the area, i.e. the lack of affordable housing and services, to more global political issues, i.e. the first gulf war, and its repertoires were based on direct action. All these activities relied on the participation and tried to involve university students and the local population. However, the settlement process was not linear encountered a number of difficulties

"At the beginning we had some problems with people who lived in the areawho protested against our presence...During the first Gulf War the Morion *became the reference point for students and demonstrations. The* Rivolta *used to organise only concerts, the* Morion *organised political initiatives and had more social links. It was more rooted and blocked*

housing evictions, squatted houses together with housing committees and organised a number of other things" (Interview 26).

Among these initiatives *Carnevalaltro* (the other carnival) was the most significant. It was an alternative, protest carnival, based on demonstrations, concerts, squatting of empty buildings and other initiatives aimed at disrupting official celebrations.

The *Rivolta* arose in a structurally derelict premised industrial site: *"the roof was falling down"* (Interview 17). Its social rooting and legitimacy were extremely low, and apart from organising concerts it had never had a political identity: *"The* margherotti *(people who live in Marghera, ndr) were jinxed, they did absolutely nothing"* (Interview 25).

Things changed over the second half of the nineties when the centre of political intervention shifted to Mestre and the *Rivolta* became a real social and political actor and one of the most active Italian CSOs. In fact in 1994 a number of high school students started to attend the *Rivolta* and organise some events. With the contribution of these new activists, the old activists occupied another building nearby. The wide availability of abandoned factories and workshops allowed the occupants to finda new place very easily. Therefore, on September the 30th 1995 *"we crossed the road and occupied this area"* (Interview 17).

The 'new' *Rivolta* is in the ex drugs and spices factory *Paolini-Villani*, in *Via Fratelli Bandiera*, one of the main streets of the town. Coming from central Mestre, on one side of the street is the industrial area, on the other is the residential neighbourhood of Marghera. The industrial area has been largely abandoned and is undergoing transformation. Some of its old factories, mechanical workshops and warehouses are empty and disused, while others have been turned into places hosting service and tertiary activities. In spite of plans for the future and some forms of regeneration from the transformation of productive activities, the whole area is still largely economically depressed. The residential neighbourhood was founded in the twenties and supposed to be a city-garden designed for the thousands of blue-collar workers employed by factories located nearby. It is now

an urban area facing the problems of social exclusion, deprivation, pollution and lack of recreational services for young people. As can be read in a discussion document of the *Rivolta*: "the street which divides these two zones causes several problems for the local population. It is used by trucks and heavy traffic, and so it is extremely polluting and dangerous for pedestrians. At night it becomes a centre of the sex industry"[3].

The *Paolini-Villani* architectural structure is typical of old Fordist factories. There is the office building, which is visibly distinct from the rest and is the first on the right when entering the area; there are workshops and warehouses, while on the left there is a small building that served as a guard flat and is now used for housing. Finally, there is a big square in the middle and a small green. In short, it is a multifunctional structure which can host several thousands of people and that has allowed the occupants to organise different kinds of activities, ranging from big concerts to hospitality for migrants and the homeless. According to the spokesperson of the *Rivolta* "*we occupied this place because it had the right characteristics to become an ideal town, meant as the first utopians intended a self sufficient town*" (Interview 20). The use of the *Rivolta* for recreational, housing and, as we will see, working purposes, and the fact that it is open day and night has allowed the occupants to develop communitarian relations:

"*It immediately became a chance to have a place to stay for some young comrades, which is not the main characteristic of the CSOs of the North-East. This is very interesting because the lack of affordable housing for low-income people is one of the big problems in this area. This is because there are many more working-class families and at that time, when we occupied this place, income was much lower than in towns like Padua. In Venice university students were in the majority. Most of them were from other towns but their housing was provided by their families, by university facilities or because they lived together and could afford a house. In Mestre the majority was made up of young workers and the unemployed. The situation was much more problematic from a social point of view. The*

Rivolta immediately became a housing place. It has always been a place where people have lived, which has not happened very often in other towns. This was a peculiar thing at the Rivolta, because when entering, the first thing you could see was the warden's house. Therefore, this immediately became a place where people could live. I remember the first kitchen was in the warden's house and we would all meet to have lunch together at noon. It was very spontaneous, not like now ... but it was the beginning of a way of life ... the kitchen, the flat and the will to build an aggregation and a strong feeling of community" (Interview 17).

Starting from the new occupation, two main phases can be discerned. In the first phase the activists of the *Rivolta* were engaged in the building of a new political identity. It lasted from 1995, when the *Paolini-Villani* was squatted, to 1999 when it was bought by the town council. In the beginning, the activists were mostly involved in the organisation of recreational activities, local campaigns and in architectural restructuring:

"As always happens, it happened everywhere in Italy, you occupy a place and you gain possession of the structure, of the walls, of the floors, of the spaces step by step. Before, this was not possible. This is because the CSOs are communities and develop as communities. Therefore we gained possession of the structures on the basis of their functions and of the things to be done" (Interview 17).

The participants soon moved from the *Morion* to the new CSO: *"In a few months, 80-100 people started to attend the management assembly. The assembly was made up of a heterogeneous variety of people, from the* punkabbestia *to some politicised components, to other people who were not politicised at all"* (Interview 10).

In a short time the *Rivolta* became the centre of radical activism in the metropolitan area of Venice-Mestre and the network of the CSOs of the North East started to attribute a new political centrality to it. Some activists moved from other towns of the region to Venice as a result. The debate focused on issues such as

municipal federalism, welfare 'from below', independent work and social enterprise, and on the opportunity to put forward candidates at local elections. This was a period of theoretical renewal, fuelled by a number of international, national and local circumstances. At the international level the Zapatistas revolution innovated political categories and a repertoire of action and communication. Its focus on local communities, participatory democracy, communication, its emphasis on binomial conflict and consensus, its critical approach to Marxism and the Leftist tradition and other issues had a strong influence on the Venetian movement. At a national level the Italian political situation was still in turmoil, although less so than in the early nineties. The growth of the ethnic-regionalist movement of the Northern-League in Venice which gained 30% of electoral votes and became the mayoral party in 1993 (Biorcio 1997); the sharp weakening of institutions and disappearance of traditional parties, electoral reform and the subsequent empowerment of local institutions opened new opportunities for the emergence of new, in some cases ephemeral, social and political actors. At a local level the settlement of a centre-left council in Venice in 1993, run by the philosopher Massimo Cacciari and including the Greens and *Rifondazione Comunista*, led to a new kind of relationship between institutions and the movement of the CSOs.

Contacts between the CSOs and local institutions were possible due to the presence of bridging figures on both sides. On the one hand, local administrators or institutional internal allies supported some campaigns and initiatives organised by the *Rivolta*, as happened in 1997 when the occupants rescued a group of illegal migrants from Moldavia, from arrest, giving them hospitality within the CSO. The deputy mayor Gianfranco Bettin organised a press conference and publicly affirmed his support for this initiative. On the other hand, some activists saw in the local institutions a chance to build a non-state public sphere and to develop forms of welfare from below. According to them, conditions were right to realise what they had described some years earlier - the 'appropriation of the administrative nexus' - and to take part in a variety of institutional projects related to the

provision of welfare services. Therefore, in 1996 two activists of the *Rivolta* stood in the local election, and one of them was eventually elected as a council member for the Green party, becoming town councillor of the social policy department in 2001. This institutional shift was severely criticised by many of the antagonists and libertarian movement network and also many internal activists, who, after much debate and discussion, took the painful decision to walk out of the CSO. According to its critics, by supporting the centre-left local government and accepting financial help from institutions, the *Rivolta* was going through a phase of 'institutionalisation'. This would not be limited to organisational aspects but would also occur at a political level and would lead the *Rivolta* to integrate with institutions and assume relevant positions within them (Berzano *et al.* 2002). In other words the activists of the *Rivolta* were being traitors and selling themselves out to the class enemy.

The second phase, starting in September 1999, was the real turning point in the life of the *Rivolta*. It was marked by the creation of associations intervening in a number of social issues, the participation in the alter-globalisation movement and, parallel to this, the debate on the new constitutional order of globalisation. On September 21st 1999 the town council bought the former factory *Paolini-Villani*, which would then be temporarily assigned to the association OS "in order to organise self-managed social and cultural activities"[4] in March 2001. According to the activists, the acquisition by the town council opened new perspectives. It was seen as a great chance to stabilise their condition and to solidify what the movement had been saying for years about welfare from below and the building of forms of social and participatory cooperation. Therefore they could write that the acquisition by the town council: "opens exceptional spaces of initiative and experimentation … it is the recognition of the principle of self-management and self-government … it is a chance to build a 'non-state' public sphere, a network of services, a welfare obtained through conflict a struggle from below"[5].

As we will see, this project of 'welfare from below' would be based on the setting up of associations and charities and on the close relationship between these and the

social struggles organised by the *Rivolta*. From this point of view the associational shift and conflict cannot be kept separate:

> "(Several third sector experiences have shown that) solidarity is not enough to build social cohesion. There must be some antidotes to the lethal viruses that affect social cooperation. The challenge is the building of a new social and political subject whose DNA is associative and mutualistic, and that looks for possible routes by doing concrete things and by organising conflict in order to build a social and political identity different from the tradition of the working class movement of this century"[6].

According to the activists of the *Rivolta*, the interaction between conflict and cooperation can be the antidote to degeneration towards mercantilist or subsidiary forms of welfare provisions.

As a consequence of the purchase by the town council and the temporary assignation to a formal organism, the occupants were engaged in setting up a number of associations to provide welfare services. This process involved formal contacts and relations with institutions, rules, statutes, professionalism and the appointment of people to established positions. Therefore, those activists who thought that militancy should be volunteer-based did not accept the abandonment of its voluntary character. As reported by an activist:

> *"For many activists it was hard to see what we were doing as a part of political activism, as part of our political growth ...Still today this transition is not very easy. The fact that you get money to do these kinds of activities is read as something... 'That is work, - politics is something else' There is still this difficulty"* (Interview 16).

This accusation has always been strongly rejected by the activists of the *Rivolta*. Indeed, they do not deny having relations with institutions and designing some social interventions with or on behalf of them. However, they do argue that these changes have not jeopardised the contentious character of the *Rivolta* and of the movement area to which it belongs, as Luca Casarini stated in an interview: "We are pointed at and criticised because of our relations with institutions. However,

we are also the ones who protested with shields and that, I do remember, first came out in Trieste during the demonstration to shut down the detention centre for migrants, later closed by the home office" (Giannetti 1999).

The period was also characterised by active participation in the new-global movement and demonstrations that took place in Amsterdam, Prague, Nice, Genoa and so on. The following chapters[7] will show how this local subject has contributed to the formation of a global sphere (Sassen 2004) and has attempted to combine with institutional modes of action and protest.

6.2. Internal organisational structure

The *Rivolta* belongs to the family of the *Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti* (CSOA). This assignation implies the occupation and self-management of buildings and the lack of formally regulated relations between occupants and local institutions. However, the status of the *Rivolta* is ambiguous, as not the whole area is under occupation. As we have seen, from March 2001 the Venetian government assigned some parts of the *Paolini-Villani* to OS, an association closely linked to the *Rivolta,* whose president is one of the oldest occupants, while other buildings were declared unusable because of structural problems and are still squatted:

> "*At the moment not the whole area of the Rivolta has been given in convention. There is still the matter of the restructuring of some parts of it that the municipality has not declared usable because of structural problems and that have been officially squatted by the management committee*" (Interview 36).

Therefore the *Rivolta* and OS have to be considered two organisationally distinct entities in the degree of institutionalisation in their organisational structures, and in the characteristics of the events that they set up.

The CSO *Rivolta* activities focuses on expressive and cultural events: concerts, poetry readings, presentation of books, and events supporting fair trade and organic food production. Within its walls can be found one of the biggest concert venues in the region, another hall for smaller gigs, a bar, a bookshop, and the

'Trattoria allo sbirro morto' (Dead cop restaurant). It is managed by some of Venice football team's hardcore supporters and offers a service of meals to occupants and attendants and people who work in the nearby area. The *Rivolta* provides people with de-commodified services (Esping-Andersen 1990). Their price does not depend on the cash-nexus (Esping-Andersen, Frasund and Kolberg 1988) and satisfies what the activists consider to be the fundamental social needs required to achieve full citizenship. These services are directed to a general public that varies in age, cultural characteristics and social status but they are self-organised and therefore directed also towards activists and adherents. Not only does the *Rivolta* provide services to local recipients, but it is also a political group that sets up a series of sustained political campaigns in order to make collective claims on target authorities (Tilly 2004). Activists organise unconventional forms of protest and usually involve other movement actors. These campaigns can have a local, national and trans-national character.

Organisational structures of social movements are generally shaped by their political ideologies, internal cultures and identities. Scholars have documented that new social movements attempt to put their anti-hierarchical and horizontal world-view into practice through their organisational structure and relations (Whittier 2002, Reger 2002). The same can be said about the *Rivolta*. The participation in expressive activities and political campaigns is informal and does not require any membership. The general management meetings are inclusive and open both to activists and attendants and reflect their anti-bureaucratic identity and criticism of representative democracy. Therefore, the assembly is based on their refusal of delegation and on participatory and direct democracy. Decisions are taken by the consensus method, aiming to reach a common view through debate. As has been noted (Andretta 2004) this method can present several advantages, both organisational and motivational. Participatory democracy allows the activists to choose their roles, to assume responsibilities and to contribute to collective decisions. Therefore it is structured so as to be inclusive and open not just to

militants and activists but also to people who attend recreational activities and use the space.

OS manages the parts of the *Rivolta* that Venice council has formally assigned in order to organise public utility services. OS was founded in 2000 and coordinates other associations that have their site within the *Rivolta* such as *Ya Basta!, NoiUltras, Razzismo Stop, Gli Invisibili, Radio Sherwood*. These associations constitute part of the skeleton and the basis of a possible 'welfare from below'. They not only provide services to some disadvantaged and excluded groups, promote rights (e.g. for the homeless and migrants) but also organise political and solidarity campaigns (Chiapas and Palestine). The management meeting of OS takes place every week and is attended by members of other associations. In this meeting members make decisions about and promote further campaigns: "*it is a kind of management committee of associations where the members decide what to do together*" (Interview 16). This does not prevent associations from having autonomy and determining their own campaigns: "*every single association has got its own specific objective. OS is the association that links all the others together*" (Interview 16).

Outside of, but closely linked to the *Rivolta* are two other associations: *Nadir* and the *Caracol*, a social enterprise that is a further development of the association and manages citizenship services aimed at ensuring the social inclusion of their recipients. Both of them represent a further step towards the professionalisation of their activities. They provide services in connection with the Venice Social Policy Department and while associations are mainly based on voluntary work, the *Caracol,* as a cooperative, employs occupants who work as community and social workers. Its office is situated outside the *Rivolta*. This location guarantees it managerial autonomy and avoids it being seen as 'the cooperative of the *Rivolta*', either by the local institutions or other charity organisations.

All these associations and organisations are the bricks of what the occupants of the *Rivolta* call 'making society': building a civil society based on solidarity links in order to go beyond the atomisation and individualisation of current social relations

(Revelli 1998). They are the bricks of a new kind of welfare, which is no longer state centred but based on the self-management of citizens and local societies and characterised by participation and self-organisation, and aiming to represent and operate in the interests of unrepresented social actors.

This decentralised organisational structure and the distribution labour among the *Rivolta* and other associations is not due to any kind of political division. Associations and the CSO *Rivolta* are organisationally distinct and have different rules and statutes. However, they share a mutual identity; the activists involved in the initiatives of the CSO run and are employed in associations and the cooperative *Caracol*. The link between the issues raised by political campaigns and the kind of activities organised by these associations is further evidence of political unity. Some services have been set up after political campaigns, and in order to formalise and organise activities carried out by the *Rivolta* in an informal way. Therefore, the *Rivolta* and the associations is an individual subject that articulates its actions in various ways: *"then, as is clear, when there is any initiative, all of us take part in it. When the* Rivolta *was about to be evicted, who was part of one association or another, all of us...we locked in here in order to defend what we think belongs to all of us"* (Interview 41).

The division of labour between the *Rivolta* and other associations can be described in terms of specialisation of tasks. Before 1999 the general meeting used to discuss and organise everything from political campaigns to cultural events. Starting from the new changes:

"The management meeting can no longer be an opportunity to discuss everything in a chaotic and often unproductive way. The management meeting must become the place where we discuss the *Rivolta* and gather together all the people who want to give their contribution to the experimentation of the new languages, creativity and to the elaboration of new forms of socialisation"[8].

The organisational revolution implied that every association would focus on single campaigns and specific issues, while the general meeting of the *Rivolta* assumed a more logistic function, where information circulates and single campaigns are

shared among activists and coordinated between each other. This decentralised structure has allowed the activists to optimise and make more effective use of collective resources. It reflects the complexity and heterogeneity of issues raised by the users of these services. This complexity requires ever more specialisation and the precise knowledge of rules and norms and the bettering of activist skills in order to provide specialised community welfare services:

> "*As* Razzismo Stop, *we really needed to specialise, because, for example, when migrants come and ask something, giving them the wrong information can be a big problem ... so the fact of doing one thing very well and not two hundred badly. We can't say the wrong thing. We have to know the laws, listen to lawyers, ask questions; if someone comes and asks me a question, and I answer badly, it can be a small mistake for me, but not for the person who does not get their residence permit*" (Interview 41).

In addition to this, specialisation has allowed activists and adherents to find their location in accordance with their identity (Whittier 2002), personal attitude, time and working needs and professional abilities. As an activist informs: *"a larger number of realities has been set up ...several places where 'decisions' could be taken have been set up because a single general meeting could not satisfy all the people's needs"* (Interview 41).

6.3 The territorial network: between identity and projects

The external network is extremely changeable and varies according to the characteristics of events, and depends on the circumstances and campaigns. It is in this context that we should distinguish between the *Rivolta*, the associations that refer to OS, and the cooperative *Nadir*. Some of them work mainly at a local level and in cooperation with local institutions and associations, which vary from third sector organisations to environmental urban committees and parochial groups. 'Alliances' and relationships are based on specific activities and concrete projects rather than ideological affinities. These contacts occur frequently but are not structured in a fixed network. They are based on campaigns, single-issue

mobilisations and individual projects. Others, for example *Ya Basta!*, have a wider ramification and relate to other sectors of the national network.

As previously stated, the CSO *Rivolta* is part of the MCSNE and is a branch of the MD, the former MTB. The MCSNE is a network of CSOs, radios, associations and groups mainly located in Veneto and Friuli e Venezia Giulia. They are involved in common campaigns, have tight organisational links and share a common identity. Given this, the *Rivolta* has taken part in all the main initiatives of the alter-globalisation movement.

So two kinds of networks can be considered. The first is loose and based more on single issues and projects. The second is built on ideological foundations. One interviewee said of the former:

> "*Our relations with other subjects are aimed at what you want to do. Well, on immigration you can do things with the Caritas or don Mario, who is a priest , much more similar to us than many left wing people. It happens very often that you do many more things with Catholic people than other parts of the left*" (Interview 5).

These networks build up a sort of internal solidarity, albeit one that is temporary. They are characterised by instrumentality, the lack of a shared identity and a mutual adversary. In contrast to the first, the second kind of network is more ideological because it is based on a common view of the world that leads the activists to share an identity, relying on a 'we' in opposition to an opponent. They also have a political character, addressing their claims to governments and institutional subjects of one sort or another. While the first network gives life to projects providing services, campaigns and single protests without being a movement, the second network meets some of the standards of social movements: organisational network structure, shared identity and unconventional forms of action and protest.

6.4. Routes to activism: political background and motivations

The socio-demographic composition of the *Rivolta* activists interviewed shows some interesting features. The average age of the occupants has grown over the years and their educational qualification is generally medium-high; most of them have a diploma, some did some university examinations, others have been attending university, and a few have graduated. They are mainly employed in the third sector and the vast majority are community workers in professional and salaried activities related to *Officina Sociale* and the cooperative *Caracol*. The *Rivolta*'s activists work under temporary contracts and their working times are extremely flexible, allowing them to combine political activism and a profession. Flexibility is considered positively by the activists of the *Rivolta* because it gives them freedom to choose between different opportunities:

> "*Working for the cooperative, you can also free your time and do other things. because as you work with your comrades you can say: 'today there is an event' so we divide and manage time in different manner, so that we can self-manage our time within the working-place. Obviously, if your task drives you to go out every night, you go out but you have the chance to manage it*" (Interview 19).

In relation to the political background of the activist, it is possible to distinguish three main routes of entry. First, a certain number of activists took part in the autonomist movements of the seventies and in the internationalist, student, environmental and peace mobilisations of the eighties. These activists, some of them from other towns, are the historical remnants of the movement and have guaranteed a sort of continuity, in terms of direct action practices, political and social categories and values, between the autonomous movements of the seventies and the CSOs in the eighties and nineties. On the other hand, because of their charismatic and leadership role the same activists have had an innovative function and brought about some of the main breaks with the traditional identity. Most of the changes which have occurred over the last few years have depended on these historical activists, their charisma and their sympathies towards innovation of

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political practices and discourse. In addition, the permanence of these activists has allowed the growth of the generational composition of the *Rivolta* and, more generally, of the CSOs of the North-East:

"It is not by chance that, and I think it is the only place in Europe, there is a generational continuity of a revolutionary path that began in the late sixties and continues up to the present day. From a generational point of view we preserve our links, and our communities are full of comrades who have lived through several generations. If you go to other places, you can see that the CSOs represents a generational cut with a new composition and experience. Here it is not so. It is a continuing thing. Some structures have lasted for 30 years" (Interview 17).

Secondly, a certain number took part in high school and university mobilisations in the eighties and nineties. As we have already said, high school students participated in large numbers in the occupation of *Villa Franchin* in 1985 and university students in the occupation of the *Morion* in 1990. High school students had a prominent role in the occupation of the 'new' *Rivolta* in 1995, to the extent that they essentially made the whole thing possible:

"In 1995 about thirty students between 15 and 19 years old entered the management assembly. They are still in the Rivolta *and are the spokespeople of the current structures ... They had the* Rivolta *as a cultural horizon. I still remember banners in occupied schools: Venetian schools are with the* Rivolta*"* (Interview 10).

Schools and universities have historically been a source of recruitment for the CSOs and youth movements in Italy. Also at the *Rivolta*, high school students guarantee a generational turn over, a function that has been emphasised by another interviewee: *"in Venice, historically speaking, the students mainly from secondary schools, have always been an extremely strong presence, with great mobilisations and school occupations. Therefore, my feeling is that the student movement has been the one that has contributed to the* Rivolta *with more continuity than any other"* (Interview 10).

The third group is represented by people with little or no political experience and 'enlisted' during public events. They are contacted through public initiatives and the daily activities of the CSO. Some have come from other organisations, like this 25-year-old activist:

> "*At the Lyceum I did not have any experience of political movements. I went to some demonstrations so I did have a certain awareness, but I came across the* Rivolta *in my final year of university. At that time I was an activist of* Lega Ambiente *and I came here for the* Petrolchimico *and for the referendum that the* Rivolta *was organising. After that I started to come here for all assemblies and I stayed here*" (Interview 37).

In contrast to what usually happens with political parties, recruitment at the *Rivolta* does not occur through formal routes. Procedures of selection are not formalised and internal careers do not follow standardised stages as in old and 'new' political parties. On the contrary, the barriers to entry are low and recruitment is based on the ability of initiatives to produce symbolic resources, identity and a feeling of belonging, and to bring about some form of social change. This is why many initiatives are based on exemplarity, thought to be easily communicable and reproducible in other places, and have to bring about concrete, though partial, effects. Protests and demonstrative actions have not only the purpose of pressing institutions and decision making processes in order to obtain some form of change, but also to build consensus and attract new activists and participants to mobilisations. For example, the squatting of flats aims either to influence policy makers or to convince public opinion and those who believe in the necessity of action and radical protest, join them and take part in other initiatives that imply these kinds of unconventional courses of action.

Being activists in radical movements may imply certain judicial consequences and economic and symbolic costs. Activists are often subjected to public stigmatisation, not only from political opponents, to criminalisation and victimisation. In this respect, occupants of the *Rivolta* are no exception. Most of them have been prosecuted by magistrates at least once, while others have been

arrested and accused of having organised a 'subversive association', which is a crime that can lead to several years of prison in Italy. Activism often requires the provision of time, energy and resources and can be frustrating and characterised by a lack of reward, a private life and time for oneself. So, what does the *Rivolta* offer to its old and new activists in exchange? Movements such as political parties combine what Pizzorno (1993) calls 'identifying' representation and 'efficient' representation. Through the former movements, parties promote identity and shared symbols by which people recognise themselves as members of a mutual community. Through the latter, groups mobilise in order to improve or defend their position in society. What attracts activists seems to be the ability of the *Rivolta* to combine efficiency and identity. The *Rivolta* provides a number of material incentives and high standard cultural services that are otherwise available only on the market. The *Rivolta* organises concerts and other events that are affordable for those on a low-income, the unemployed or migrant workers. These events require great organisational effort but their success is a source of recognition and further resources for other initiatives. In addition, over the last few years, the setting up of small social enterprises and the involvement of some activists in local institutional projects have allowed the distribution of jobs and income. These material incentives have contributed to combining work and political engagement, thus keeping the activists within the movement.

In addition, the *Rivolta* provides symbolic incentives to its adherents. Being an activist of the *Rivolta* may imply several things: taking part in a political project that aims to produce social change, making them 'count for something' and asserting a kind of popular sovereignty, acting to change situations considered to be morally unbearable, and the feeling of belonging and being part of a larger community. As an activist of the *Rivolta* said:

> *"Disobeying means a lot of things. Regarding migrants, we disobeyed when we went to dismantle the* Centro di Permanenza Temporanea *(CPT) in Bologna. You are prosecuted and beaten by the police but with a sense of great satisfaction because when you work with migrants you see so many*

awful things (...) They live in such bad conditions, and you personally know some of them, because they do not have the permission to stay. So it is one of those things that satisfies you. After the action nobody ended up in a detention centre for two months, we closed down the CPT in Trieste and there too we were beaten so dreadfully, although we went with shields, padding and protections...these are meaningful things" (Interview 41).

This is the symbolic exchange that counts and that being an activist of the *Rivolta* provides. Whether true or not, the activists of the *Rivolta* believe that their collective action can lead to some change, and undoubtedly the role and the strength of this CSO and of the MD as a whole has dramatically increased over the last few years. What matters is that this belief is less ideological and more pragmatic and similar to what Melucci (1996) calls the breaking of compatibility limits, rather than to the revolutionary processes of labour and national movements of the past century.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the development of the CSOs in the metropolitan area of Venice-Mestre and has focused on the *Rivolta*, the case study of the second part of this thesis. This evolution has not been linear but characterised by periods of crisis, decline and boom. More specifically, relevant changes have characterised the second half of the nineties when a number of both structural conditions and subjective intuitions and choices have allowed the *Rivolta* to develop different frames and a new political agenda, to implement new activities, to gather a higher number of people together and to mobilise a larger amount of symbolic and material resources.

As has been said, a central role has been played by the opportunities found in the political environment both at local and national level, and by the ability of the activists of the northern-east areas of the country to comprehend the situation and focus their organisational efforts in this metropolitan area. The decision to focus on the *Rivolta* and the industrial town of Mestre was taken at a regional level and

led to the delocalisation of resources from other towns, as a former activist of the *Rivolta* said cynically:

> *"I think that some of the most militant activists of the* Rivolta *have come here from other towns. The super-spokesman Luca himself, he came to Marghera not because he loves living here or Venice. Some political reflections are behind this choice. Therefore, they have gambled quite a lot on that place: in economic terms because the concerts produce a lot of profit, in terms of projects and in terms of social rooting"* (Interview 25).

The same can be said about other occupants that have elected Venice as their domicile. The last few years have also been characterised by what we have defined as a process of organisational specialisation. A number of associations have been set up, the links with local institutions have become closer, some activists have taken part in local elections under the sponsorship of institutional parties such as *Rifondazione Comunista* and the Greens, and one of them was elected and eventually became the Social policy administrator. These changes have allowed the activists of the *Rivolta* to develop public utility services and what they call a kind of 'welfare from below'.

The institutional links and the setting up of projects receiving economic support have had an important role in the growth of professional activists, people who live *for* and *by* politics. Some of these projects have employed the activists of the *Rivolta,* providing them with work and economic recognition. As a key informant and former activist of the CSO in Venice has rightly argued:

> *"Through politics and their contacts with the Greens and sectors of local administration they have managed to provide income, which is one of the main problems of movements like us. Because if you are a student you are a student and you have time. When you start to work things change ... on the other hand, linking your political activities to income allows you to go on with activism and propaganda and to have people who work for you and are closely linked to you because without you they would not have any*

income. This has been possible because of their relations with Venice administration" (Interview 25).

In this process of professionalisation many income problems have found some resolution but it has raised several other dilemmas. One of them is the self-exploitation of the activists and the huge amount of working time that often exceeds the normal timetable. As we will see in the remaining chapters, relations with institutions have not undermined the conflictual identity of the *Rivolta*. They still squat houses, organise anti-fascist raids, take part in civil disobedience and direct action and suffer judicial consequences about what they are continuing to do. As one activist proudly claimed: *"we have been accused by magistrates of being a group of people who united in order to commit crime. Does this mean that we have abandoned conflict? Sincerely, I do not believe it"* (Interview 5). Instead, over the last few years what the activists of the *Rivolta* have done, and we could extend this argument to the whole movement of the North-East, is to combine different courses of action, some of them based on protest, others based on the provision of services, and to act at different levels: the institutions and the social conflict.

[1] Discussion document: Radio Sherwood, 'Contributo per l'approfondimento dei nodi politici di fase: spunti, idée, opinioni, proposte, possibilità. Riflessioni ad alta voce di alcuni compagni della Rete Autonoma', Padua, 1997.

[2] Porto Marghera and its economic and industrial history has always had national relevance. The development of the chemical sector in Italy is closely linked to Porto Marghera and still depends on it for 70% of national production. In terms of employment, its highest point was between the thirties and late sixties-early seventies, when 30,000 workers were employed in the factories of the area. Starting from the deindustrialisation processes of the eighties, employment dramatically decreased to the present 5,000. The whole area is now concerned with re-development projects based on the service sector.

[3] Discussion document: CSO Rivolta, 'Linee guida per il Progetto di fattibilità delle opere di ristrutturazione e messa anorma ad uso socio-culturale dei manufatti dell'area 'ex Paolini Villani' a Marghera, oggi occupata dal CSOA Rivolta PVC', Venice, 1999.

[4] Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Discussion document: CSO Rivolta, 'Solidarietà, cooperazione e conflitto: elementi statutari di un nuovo soggetto politico e sociale', September, 1999.

[7] See chapter 7 and 9.

[8] Discussion document: Casarini, L., 'Breve bilancio prima di partire', Venice-Mestre, 1999.

Chapter 7

Local action between conflict and welfare community

Introduction

Social movements underwent a deep transformation over the second half of the XXth century. In a way, everything changed: issues, organisational models, social composition and their relationship with power. The labour movement, from being the main political subject as it was in the first half of the XXth century (Tronti 1999), became one social movement among many. In the sixties, first in the USA and then in the rest of the world, a number of social movements claiming civil rights, peace, individual freedom and cultural autonomy, dramatically increased their ability to mobilise wide masses and to achieve results. Social subjects moved from the factory into society, raising issues that no longer concerned redistribution but rather cultural recognition, quality of life and solidarity. The Eighties and Nineties were characterised by the rise of two radically different kinds of movement: new nationalist and fundamentalist movements on the one hand, and by NGOs and trans-national civic networks on the other (Kaldor 2003). The former aimed to mobilise the popular masses; the latter relied on professionals, experts and limited groups of activists. While the former were exclusive the latter were inclusive; and, while new nationalist and Fundamentalist movements were vertically and hierarchically organised, NGOs and trans-national civic networks were horizontally organised and based on small groups and individuals connected within a network.

NGOs include associations, charities and voluntary organisations. They are value driven organisations and base their action on service provision and advocacy. The

service provision includes legal services, care activities, information, housing, training, education and many others. Advocacy is exercised through a vast range of activities such as public demonstrations, petitions, campaigns and organisation of parallel summits, and use of media through strike action. Furthermore, NGOs and trans-national civic networks constituted one of the organisational structures of the alter-globalisation which developed at the turn of the century.

Although on a reduced scale, and along with unconventional protests, since the second half of the nineties some CSOs have also developed parallel forms of resistance through the setting up of NGLOs (non governmental local organisations). These either provide services for local communities or carry out lobbying activities in order to influence the institutional decision making processes. Some tasks that previously were undertaken informally through the voluntary activity and militancy of the CSO activists have progressively been turned into semi-professional or professional services, provided for the local communities and immigrant citizens, and were sometimes funded by official institutions. The transformation has led to debates, controversy and divisions among the CSOs, the most radical of them accusing the others, among them the *Rivolta* and the Disobedient movement, of having lost their very anti-institutional nature.

By setting up formal associations and accepting funds from local governments, these movement networks has chosen a policy of mediation and dialogue with institutions, while abandoning their conflictual identity.

This chapter will analyse some public utility services set up within the *Rivolta* over the last few years. It is based on three hypotheses and theoretical assumptions. Firstly, that contentious politics can coexist with other forms of collective institutional actions within the same group or organisation. Far from becoming an institution, the Disobedient CSOs including the *Rivolta*, integrates unconventional forms of protests and activities of service provision for the local community. Secondly, the political environment, which is the outcome of the interaction between several social subjects, determines the route taken by collective action, favouring or deterring certain processes such as the ones

analysed in these pages. More specifically, it will be shown that the development of formal associations has been possible due to a combination of macro, local and subjective political conditions such as the decline of the welfare systems and the partial dismissal of welfare provisions, openness among institutions and a change in strategy of the *Rivolta*. Finally, we will see that the CSO integrates struggles for recognition and for redistribution, responding to the requisites of social justice posed by Fraser (1995, 1996). By integrating recognition and distribution, the *Rivolta* promotes a kind of social justice that goes beyond this dichotomy and assumes both terms. In order to verify these theoretical hypotheses the first section will discuss how the crisis and decline of the welfare state is linked to the growth of the third sector and to public utility services. The second section suggests that the CSOs have been involved in the provision of services since the Eighties and outlines the distinction between implicit and visible service. This part will argue that the nature and form of these services have changed dramatically over the Nineties. The last section will add to the case study and describe some of the services and associations of the *Rivolta*.

7.1. Historical functions of social policies

The development of services provided both by the market and by tertiary sector organisations has coincided with the decline of state expenditure and the disengagement of the public sector from the welfare system. Broadly speaking, the welfare state can be considered as a system of policies which aims to broaden citizens' rights to a political community, reducing the market related risks through the provision of allowances, unemployment benefits, care and health services, schools and education. According to T.H Marshall (2002), one of the leading theorists of the welfare state, citizenship includes civil, political and social dimensions. Therefore citizenship does not only correspond to personal freedom, property rights and political participation, but includes the right to share collective wealth and implies a number of social rights such as work, economic welfare, health and insurance against the risks related to illness and old age. In accordance with this view, the welfare state has been not just a 'safety net' provided by the

state in order to free its citizens of need, but means to reduce social inequalities and to promote human development (Bascetta and Bronzini 1997; Offe 1997). Although some examples of state welfare service provisions already existed in the XXth century, (see for example the co-operative movement in Italy or the paternalistic Bismarkian insurance system) the welfare state reached its peak from 1945 to 1967/73, when a steady acceleration and a geographical extension of a variety of measures took place (Pellizzon and Casparis 1996). In European countries this process reflected the growing political influence of working class and socialist parties. The welfare state that developed after the Second World War was the outcome of a social contract between capital and labour, based on the inclusion of the working class in the governing of the state (Offe 1996). Indeed both the dominant classes and the labour movement agreed that a compromise was necessary after the social unrest and war that had shocked Western Europe throughout the Thirties and Forties. In most industrialised countries, expenditure on resources, distribution and welfare assurance for the working classes grew enormously. If the heyday of the welfare state coincided with widespread social and popular unrest in western countries and anti-colonial struggles in peripheral countries, its decline began with the 'fiscal revolt' and the so-called 'neo-liberal revolution' in the USA and in the UK. The welfare state started to be seen as a dysfunctional brake on economic development, and an obstacle to the competitiveness of the system and to the globalisation process. The effects of 'war on welfare' have been devastating. It has restricted the concept of citizenship, narrowed the realm of solidarity, and dismantled public spaces and services (2003).

As for other western countries, the calling into question of the Italian welfare state[1] started in the Eighties and continued in the nineties with the disengagement of the public sector from social policies. The privatisation of public services, a different management of the public sector and the processes of out-contracting led to a dramatic growth of the third sector throughout the Nineties (Ascoli and Pavolini 1999). Social cooperatives[2], and third sector organisations providing public services and work for their members, rose dramatically throughout this period,

holding a central position in the context of social policies in Italy (Barbetta 2000). In 1993 there were approximately 2000 social cooperatives, while in 1999 this number more than doubled to about 5000 (ISTAT 2001). Although this growth is related to the dismantling of the welfare state, the fact that the social cooperatives and voluntary associations are often the outcome of citizen self-organisation (Montagna 1998) and allow participation, democracy and both internal and external mutuality (Laville 1998) cannot be undervalued.

For some decades it has no longer been possible to regard the welfare state as a centralised agency providing insurance, health, and care services; rather it has become a decentralised structure funding either non-profit associations or private initiatives depending on the market. To some extent this process has involved the CSOs too. Since the second half of the nineties some of them have started to consider the social cooperatives and the associations not only as job opportunities but also as a way to affirm certain rights, to question how resources are distributed and to participate in the social life of their 'territory'. They have not abandoned social conflict and the unconventional forms of protest but have broadened their action repertoire.

7.2. From invisible to visible services: conflict, community welfare and the experience of the CSOs

The CSOs have been often considered as a deviant phenomenon located at the margins of political behaviour. Mostly in the past, newspapers have referred to them as a kind of political trouble-making movement or, at best, an annoying throwback to the seventies. In some cases, the media has mounted moral panic campaigns against the CSOs arguing that they are subversive groups which aim to destabilise law and order, connected in some way to terrorist organisations[3].

Far from being a deviant or a subversive phenomenon, the CSOs are one of the major expressions of political aggregation of the younger generations. Their politics is based on participation, and individual responsibility, it deals with aspects of the modernisation processes, such as the transition to a post-industrial society and the transformation of the welfare state, which are influential through a

variety of conflicts and the self-organisation of community services. Their means of intervention are unconventional forms of protest that belong to the tradition of autonomous movements and the provision of community services. Through them the CSOs intervene in the redistribution of welfare resources, contend the urban spaces, defend their identity, and aim to create an extra-institutional and autonomous public sphere.

In the earliest occupations in the eighties, the CSO provided their young attendants with cultural and social services: concerts, social activities of various kinds, language courses for immigrants and so on. These activities relied upon a subsistence, non-profit economy. Through them activists of the CSOs criticised the market relations and the embedding of social life in economic rules. On the one hand these initiatives attacked the colonisation of life by the market, on the other hand they provided a series of informal services to people who managed and attended these places and events. These services were not planned and managed by formal organisations but implicitly provided through the cultural and communitarian activities of the CSOs. They varied from individual care to recreational activities, from the organisation of popular lunches to courses for migrants or legal assistance for activists, and were regulated by informal resources including personal motivation, availability of personal time, and spontaneity.

Unlike what was to happen in the following years, there were no formal associations appointed to provide these services. The activists of the eighties perceived themselves as political militants aiming to build revolutionary processes and to obtain spaces of political and cultural autonomy, not as providers of welfare services either for themselves or for local communities. The CSOs did not acknowledge their role as cultural service promoters.

This perspective changed dramatically in the first half of the nineties when some CSOs formalized a certain number of activities, which became small, temporary autonomous enterprises, and started to redistribute some forms of income. In some cases this was obtained through the setting up of small and transient publishing houses, the provision of music services and the organisation of concerts. In other (exceptional) cases some activists were informally paid for their working

contribution to activities of the CSOs, for example the management of internal bars and canteens. As already mentioned, this change caused a harsh debate within the movement. Some CSOs argued that the provision of informally salaried services and the setting up of entrepreneurial initiatives should no longer be conceived as a *taboo*, but a chance to improve the services provided and give them continuity. Supporters of this line argued that it was becoming part of the reality of the CSOs and an expression of autonomy and self-organisation. In a meeting of CSOs, an activist of *Conchetta/Cox 18* (Gomma, Shake e Cox 18 1995: 91) in Milan summed up the situation in this way:

> "There are several enterprises in the CSOA *Conchetta*. Here, this kind of choice is more common. We produce books, some work in theatre and some have set up enterprises. At least 70% of Centro's comrades are self-employed. They have maintained the same identity: they were conflictual before, they are conflictual now".

According to this view, self entrepreneurship in welfare and cultural services is an expression of autonomy consistent with the search for autonomy that has characterised the social and cultural activities of the CSOs.

Other CSOs struggled with this position, arguing that their purpose was to recompose the class unity of the exploited workers, not to become market enterprises. Paying activists for their efforts and opening companies and cooperatives within the CSOs would imply a class division among activists: on one hand the class of intellectual workers; on the other hand the class of manual workers engaged in labour intensive activities (CSOA Ex Emerson 1995). Moreover, most importantly, political activity was regarded as a vocation, something to live *for* and not a completely free activity which could not be involved in any kind of economic transaction.

In the following years the provision of welfare had a further development. This process involved an increasing number of CSOs, among them some of the most representative, which transformed the usually provided *implicit* and *tacit* services into *visible* and professional ones. This came about by the setting up of cooperatives and associations of voluntary workers.

These two terms point to two highly different aspects. Implicit services are attached in the activities carried out within and by the CSOs and not declared through formal statute or public statements. The legal assistance given to their activists through the support of lawyers who sympathised with their cause and the opening of public canteens distributing cheap meals are two examples of *invisible* services. In both these cases the purposes are not formally declared. On the contrary, *visible* services imply formal purposeful organisations relying upon a statute, employing people and providing either material or immaterial resources (Membretti 2003). Where these experiments took shape, informal social activities were replaced with services formerly provided by non-profit organisations, and the intentions were openly declared.

7.3. Welfare from below and the political opportunity structure

At the *Rivolta,* transition from invisible to visible services and the constitution of formal organisations began in the late nineties. The start of this process was the result of the interaction between subjective choices and political opportunities: the debate on control of the so-called 'administrative nexus' and the welfare from below, some important changes in the local political opportunity structure and other significant changes occurring at a macro level. The combination of these circumstances made possible the proliferation of a number of associations, cooperatives, and formal organisations, and through them the collaboration between the activists of the *Rivolta* and the Social Policy Department of the Venice-Mestre council.

A series of analyses and discussions occurred in the CSOs of the North East and at the *Rivolta* in the second half of the nineties. Notably, in 1996 and 1997 some political documents and discussions dealt with the crisis of the nation-state, federalism and, as a consequence, the decline of the traditional welfare state.

According to these documents[4], the building of a 'welfare community' has now been made possible because of the irreversible decline of the XXth century welfare state and the growing importance of local institutions. The welfare state has been characterised as a direct intervention of institutions in the economic sphere

through the use of public expenditure. Therefore, the Keynesian welfare state could be conceived only within the nation-state framework and within national economies. Nowadays the link between the production and the redistribution of resources has been severed while the welfare state as nation-state is crumbling under the pressure of economic globalisation and neo-liberal policies. However, according to the CSOs of the North-East, the end of the nation state and its related forms of welfare cannot be considered as a tragic event to be mourned, in contrast to what the traditional left usually think. On the contrary, it represents a chance to develop a federalist system, based on solidarity and cooperation principles, relying on political and administrative institutions much closer to citizens than the nation-state. This kind of system would allow a turn to the 'welfare state' into a 'state of welfare'. As stated in a discussion document:

> "The building from below of a 'welfare community' is our objective. Welfare community means a concrete and material management and design of local resources and services within a framework of new individual and social citizenship rights, which are guaranteed at a European level. Social self-organisation, and its transition to a 'social enterprise', is a founding element of this hypothesis"[5].

In this project, the CSOs can play a fundamental role in testing forms of welfare community that come from the self-organisation of citizens. In another document the network of CSOs of the North-East put forward the proposal to "attempt the first experiments, although embryonic and partial, of self-managed social services aimed at the appropriation of a welfare from below"[6]. The action, carried out by associations and cooperatives has to be seen through this perspective. It aims to build a kind of self-managed welfare, starting with the new needs of excluded and exploited social strata, of people without rights and in areas where there is a lack of public initiative. It follows, then, that this was the purpose of the *Rivolta* when its activists started to collaborate with public institutions and set up the first formal organisations.

Theory and empirical research has shown that a wide variety of political opportunities can influence the emergence of movements and how they express

their issues. They can be structural or cultural and are present under various forms, affecting social movements in a variety of ways. The openness of the political system, changes in political alliances, mass media access and strength of social cleavages are some of them. As far as it might concern the CSO *Rivolta,* several local political conditions have favoured the development of formal associations and some of them are particularly remarkable. As we have seen in the previous sections[7], changes in social policies at a national and global level have interacted with the debate among the CSOs of the North-East regarding the opportunity to manage welfare services 'from below'. Therefore, the restructuring of the welfare system and the disengagement of the State from social policies has opened up towards the intervention of non-profit and civil society organisations.

A further opportunity was represented by enlightened local governors and public officials who were able to receive the demands for change and involvement raised by the activists of the *Rivolta.* These institutional representatives paid increasing attention to the 'frontier' experience of the CSOs and to some issues related to marginality and immigration raised by its activists. The election at the town council in 1997 of an activist of the *Rivolta* as a representative of the Green party has helped this kind of development. While this election provoked harsh debates and divisions among the activists of the movement, it increased the opportunity to access local financial resources, allowing a closer co-operation around some sensitive issues, specifically on social policies, between institutions and the movement.

Finally, another change in the political opportunity structure was the implementation of innovative projects which will be analysed in the following section. By requesting their collaboration and skills, the local institutions assessed the human and intellectual capital that the activists of the *Rivolta* accumulated during their social and political activities as a valuable and particularly apt resource for a kind of community work involving close relations to disadvantaged people:

> "*What is funny is that I started to work, and I worked two years for this administration as a 'raw' social worker. Just before being recruited I was*

on the point of graduating, and when I graduated they did not consider my degree, my professional certificate. What they assessed was what I said before, the closeness to the street, this ability to pick up even the smallest human suffering, to relate to these people" (Interview 16).

Changes in political structure and possibilities offered by the political context do not sufficiently explain why relations between the *Rivolta* and institutions have dramatically changed. The activists of the *Rivolta* have been able to see and interpret changes in the political opportunity structure as a chance to start the process of building what they call 'welfare from below', linking militant political activism with income. This means that some of the activities in which they were already involved, although in an informal and voluntary way, could be turned into professional trajectories to which a political transformative meaning is attached. In other words, the activists of the *Rivolta* saw the implementation of projects among marginal groups as a chance to broaden their political activity, weaving political action and professional paths.

> *"We wanted to work in projects which had similar characteristics to our political practice and action. Therefore, we were not going to be handymen but we tried to get our income from what we usually do, with the additional benefit that we can now have more skills and possibilities for doing it better"* (Interview 16).

Moreover, the constitution of non-profit organisations was also seen as an opportunity to find a job related to what the occupants of the *Rivolta* were studying. A significant part of the activists of the *Rivolta* were university students of social science who had chosen to focus studies and working career on the care services area and for whom employment opportunities were scarce and relegated mainly in the third sector.

7.4. The development of visible and invisible care services

7.4.1. Nadir and drug harm reduction

As a direct consequence of the debate on the 'welfare from below' and municipal federalism the activists of the CSO *Rivolta* have organised a number of structures covering a wide area of services. *Nadir* was the first association to be set up and came from the initiative of a group of female activists – *"it was founded by women, ... almost all the founder members were women"* (Interview 24) – between 1998 and 1999. *Nadir* began as a volunteer association aiming to provide services to immigrants and to promote activities of drug harm reduction. The founders of the association were already employed as social workers by the Venice-Mestre Town Social Policy Department. This work experience had allowed them to acquire 'technical' skills for problematic issues and to understand the mechanisms of the administrative machine. However, the lack of projective autonomy and the wish to make their personal and political imprint led some activists to establish their own organisation and manage some interventions on behalf of the Council:

> *"The professional skills that some of us had acquired working within a public office like the Venice Town Council allowed us to promote something else, or, at least, to interweave the path of the* centro sociale *with a welfare-related reasoning ... maintaining, at the same time, a very well-defined identity, therefore linked to the association* Nadir *or to the cooperative* Caracol. *Because, although I consider very positively that some of us –myself included – had become 'part' of the council structure, at the same time I think that this has bereaved us of the paternity of the projects on which we were working ... because taking part as a single individual in a bigger organisational structure, like the one of the town government, you don't have control of projects. On the contrary, realizing your projects, you can preserve a more distinct identity, which makes you stand out and distinguishes you from other subjects"* (Interview 16).

From an organisational point of view, *Nadir*, which had its first office within the *Rivolta*, was part of regional and national networks. At the national level it was involved in the *Forum droghe*, a network that includes other non-profit

associations and individuals and is engaged in drug-legalisation campaigns. At a regional level, the network included more homogeneous groups and associations coming from the the CSOs and with intervention mainly in Venice-Mestre, Trieste and Padua.

Initially *Nadir* focused mainly on the area of drug-addiction. This period was in fact characterised by political activism on issues related to the legalisation of recreational drugs and on street intervention among drug users. Its action ranged between the formal and informal, legal and illegal sphere:

> "*In the first two years,* Nadir *promoted a kind of counter-information campaign about anti-prohibitionist politics. This lasted until we collectively decided that a legal association is too limited as an instrument, above all in legal terms. For Italian legislation it was impossible to support informal actions, such the harvest feast, the cultivation and distribution of marijuana, and have a legal association at the same time. Therefore we decided to leave this kind of campaigns to the* Rivolta, *which also planned the opening of an info-shop and the sale of goods made of hemp, and focus on a proactive activity*" (Interview 41).

However, *Nadir* also acted on the terrain of legality through the *servizio di riduzione del danno* (harm reduction service)[9] based on the close relationship between social operators and drug users and care services, such as pharmacological treatments, the distribution of drugs, condoms and new syringes. On the one hand public officials involved the CSO *Rivolta* activists in the project, because of their specific street culture and proximity to drug related problems. On the other hand, the *Rivolta* activists saw this job as a chance to employ what they had learnt in their anti-prohibitionist struggles, considering themselves promoters of individual rights through the use of technical and professional skills (Mazzi 2000). This project, which has continued since 1998, has involved several activists ranging from those graduated in psychology to others with no specific skills other than those acquired 'in the field'.

The second stage was characterised by the abandonment of illegal action and the designing and management of specific projects. The service that required the

biggest effort from the associates of *Nadir* was *Emergenza inverno* (winter emergency). This aimed to build a full social citizenship for excluded subjects through the provision of health services, food, shelter and help for the homeless. It started almost spontaneously as a political initiative targeting the town institutions and to protest against the living condition of the homeless in Venice-Mestre during the extremely cold winter 1999-2000: "*we started to give out blankets, tea, coffee, according to what we felt like doing at any given moment, opening the doors of the centro sociale, so that people could come and sleep*" (Interview 5).

The following winter this militant political action carried out by the activists of the *Rivolta* became a structured service financed by the municipality and managed in collaboration with other associations:

> "*That was one of the reasons for our saying: Why do we try to submit a project to the local authority? We are doing this, we would like to continue, but we do not have enough resources to do it on our own. One of the reasons for this was that although we were good at collecting bedding, the finding and distribution of 100 blankets is very hard. It is very difficult to guarantee our presence, having to work the day after, every night for one month*" (Interview 16).

Therefore, the continuity of the service required a formal organisation and the cooperation between local institutions and voluntary associations – "*for example we worked along with associations very different from us, politically speaking, such as the* Ronde della carità, *which is a voluntary catholic association. It is funny*", witnessed an activist (Interview 5).

In a way, these projects rely upon a kind of division of labour between the CSO *Rivolta* and the association. The former acts on the terrain of protest and conflict and brings to light social issues. The association acts through institutional channels, setting up projects in cooperation with other subjects of the non-profit sector. However, the same individuals carry out different initiatives showing how this actor combines both institutional instruments and protest repertoires.

7.4.2. The Caracol *cooperative: from voluntary work to professional services*

However, *Nadir* was still an association based on voluntary work, an instrument considered by the activists highly insufficient for building a 'new welfare' and preserving their project autonomy with respect to the social policy department. Therefore, the cooperative *Caracol* was conceived as a further necessary stage in implementing welfare services and turning voluntary work based on militancy into professional employment (increasing continuity and efficacy):

> "*We were the nucleus that had founded other associations, like the association* Nadir *and therefore we also needed to structure a ... sort of cooperative so that we could go on with something that we had in mind to do. It was an organisational transformation, in order to have a more adequate instrument to do what we wanted*" (Interview 24).

The *Caracol* cooperative has been involved in several projects, providing assistance and help to different groups without rights. However, the project *Milan*, which derives its name from a volunteer engaged with the Rom population, was the most important for both mobilisation of resources and for its originality. The project, which started in 1999 and ended in 2003, aimed to close down and dismantle two refugee camps, set up in 1992 by some hundreds of citizens coming from the former Yugoslavia (Brunello 1996), and to find them alternative housing accommodation.

Because of its geographical position, Italy and the North-Eastern regions represented in fact the main escape route and the natural arrival point for many refugees. Throughout the nineties, the number of former Yugoslavian citizens grew dramatically. Between 1990 and 1998 the number of former Yugoslavian citizens increased by 270% and reached 92.012 in 1998, while the Albanians grew by 4,400 reaching 91,537 (Caritas 1999). Some hundreds of refugees arrived in 1992, camping around Venice-Mestre and occupying an area together with the activists of the *Rivolta*. As an organiser of the project remembers:

> "*We occupied the refugee camps during the war in Yugoslavia and the first important flow of citizens, above all Rom coming from Kosovo, arrived before the war in 1992. They camped under a flyover and we went with them to ask for emergency accommodation, a place of* prima accoglienza

(drop in centre) with them, where we could put some caravans. Two refugee camps were set up, both of them in the Venice area, one in S. Giuliano the other in Zeleaghino. It was a victory in the battle for urban spaces. Yet, eight years after, these people were still there, turning their initial accommodation into a ghetto. We did not decide to start a campaign for their closure, but for an alternative" (Interview 41).

Therefore, the project consisted not only of the 'dismantling' and the closure of the refugee camps, but of going beyond the reclusive logic of these ghettos. In concrete terms, it allowed people who lived there to buy or rent flats in other areas of the province, supported by the members-activists of the CSO *Rivolta* who helped the Rom citizens, acting as financial guarantors: *"Our mediation helped the residents of the camps to buy a house, considering the fact that they have been here for long time, they work here, and they were willing to do it. It has worked"* (Interview 41).

The project succeeded in reaching its objectives. The refugee camp in Zeleaghino was closed in March 2001 and the camp of S. Giuliano in March 2003. All the households have found an alternative housing solution: 47 of them have bought or rented their house on the market, 18 have received a flat from a public institution, and 14 have gone back to their original towns and villages.

7.4.3. Noi Ultras *and cultural recognition*

Noi Ultras is an association that unites the hardcore supporters of the Venice-Mestre football team. It was founded in January 2000 as the result of a long period of politicisation of some areas of local football supporters: *"we are first supporters and then militants"* said one activist (Interview 13). Through a series of services for its associates and local community and the organisation of solidarity activities, the association aims to obtain a sort of cultural recognition of football supporter identity. *Noi Ultras* arose to protest against the repressive legislation and criminalisation campaigns that hit the football team *ultras* in Italy and the penalisation of the supporter role in favour of television rights and financial interests. Therefore, according to the activists there is a close relationship between

the media criminalisation of football team supporters and the transformation of this sport into a financial machine: *"We argue that there is a direct link between repression in the stadium and the attempt to turn football into show business that no longer needs supporters but wants to build a dynamic based on customers"* (Interview 13).

The activists of the association *Noi Ultras* support this position putting forward an acute analysis of what could happen if television rights were the only basis of football companies:

> *"According to our view, it is not very interesting to base everything on show business. The decline of the audience and interests proves this. Therefore, we think that the relationship between a football team and its supporters cannot be the same as in a supermarket, with the loyalty of clients. I will try to explain this concept better. If I go to a supermarket and I find wonderful shiny new products and the things I like best, I will continue to go there. When that supermarket faces a financial crisis I go to another one. This implies that when a football team is going through a critical period and there is no longer business with its supporters the team fails. If this is what they want, it is against every kind of logic"* (Interview 13).

The television copyright rule is, therefore, the enemy to struggle against. It represents the economic system that pushes small clubs out from fair competition and reduces the role of football team supporters. To campaign against the latest developments of football, *Noi Ultras* promote what they call 'another possible football'. An example is the collection of about 85,000 euros, through music concerts, shows and subscriptions, for the municipality of Guadalupe Tepejac in Chiapas. This initiative aims to build a football stadium in the main municipality of the Zapatista area of Chiapas. However, according to the activists of *Noi Ultras*, this place is more than a stadium; it should provide the local population with a public space to use in several ways:

> *"Actually, it is a workshop, a support to the reconstruction of the village. It is a football pitch that won't only be a football pitch, but also the central*

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square of Guadalupe Tepejac, it will be the market, it will be a public space and used in this manner" (Interview 13).

Noi Ultras claims to be an antifascist and antiracist association. Therefore, one of its purposes is preventing the extreme right-wing groups from spreading and taking root among the Venician teams' supporters, as has happened in many football federations:

> *"The stadium is one of the biggest meeting-places for young people and one of the most important national industries. Believing that this world does not exist is very dangerous...therefore we want to build a block against the far right; we believe that football does not fit at all with far right movements"* (Interview 13).

Moreover, the association aims to offer legal aid to football team supporters and to combat police abuse. In order to reach these purposes, *Noi Ultras* has set up an centre in Venice-Mestre that will be managed by a professional social worker, who will promote and coordinate all the association's projects and services, from the legal assistance to a number of collateral initiatives, such as participation in anti-racist football games, involving either immigrant communities or fans and that take place in Emilia Romagna every year.

7.4.4. The Invisibili: between recognition and resource distribution

The *Invisibili* is an association that co-ordinates and homogenises a variety of groups providing services for homeless people, squatters, workers and immigrants. It aims to contribute network skills, resources and a data base in some towns in Veneto and provide various types of services, ranging from information about work legislation and immigrant rights to legal defence. At the same time the *Invisibili* wants to organise and support initiatives such as occupations, protests and road blocks. The *Invisibili* is an 'experiment' acting to combine social struggles and legal instruments, unconventional repertoires for protests, service provision and any possibility offered by legislation to unite the interests of a multiplicity of fragmented subjects. The combination of conventional and unconventional activities is the key element of this association:

"This movement not only aims to bring about conflict but also to organise itself and provide legal instruments to resist the current social processes, so that the organisation of the *Sportelli degli Invisibili* can be an important opportunity to provide legal instruments and information and to undertake surveys on current social composition in order to promote diverse kinds of mobilisation and struggle"[10].

The association's logo is a white mask like the face of a phantom. It represents an invisible subject without a body, representing universal rights of citizenship. Behind that white mask there are

"New subjectivities without rights, the precarious workers, subjects that are deprived of their basic rights and regular income, work, social services. They are destined to become 'invisible', to not exist as persons entitled to have their own rights and therefore to be 'visible people', on the contrary becoming numbers having the same value as the goods"[11].

According to the founders of the *Invisibili*, some closely related processes, namely the transformation of industrial society, the decline and restructuring of welfare expenses and the increase in the immigrant population, has caused growth in numbers of migrant subjects, the working poor and flexible atypical workers. These subjects are deprived of the typical social securities of Fordism and of all unionised representation. The association attempts to give a presence to these subjects and focuses its services mainly on three social groups: flexible workers, migrants and squatters:

"Over the last few years work has changed deeply and productive and global market cycles have been modified. As a consequence, productive relations based on the permanent working contracts of the Fordist period, which were formally guaranteed by the *Statuto dei Lavoratori*[12], have continuously changed. The dependent workers, having a permanent contract and protected by unions, have dramatically reduced in number leaving space to an infinity of new figures without any kind of protection. They are atypical, the so-called *Co.Co.Co*[13], temporary, self-employed workers. All these workers have in common the loss of work security that

characterises people who still have a traditional contract. Within this social composition there is a specific kind of figure that adds to the characteristics of the new working figures the fact of being a workforce with fewer rights than others, only because they come from extra-European countries ... As can be easily guessed the 'Invisibles' will pay particular attention to migrant workers, particularly now that the 'Bossi-Fini' has become state law. Another subject certain to be part of the category of the invisibles is the homeless and people who live in unstable housing conditions. This phenomenon is continuously expanding and sees at its centre the migrant, as it has been witnessed by the recent struggles in various provinces of the North-East"[14].

The organisational structure relies upon a network of associations already operating on specific single issues, such as workers' legal defence, racism and immigration, and the lack of affordable houses, at a regional level. The nucleus of the CSO *Rivolta* can count on a core staff of two or three people, who specialise in immigrant legislation, the legal defence of squatted houses and the recent laws regulating the labour market, and a number of peripheral activists who collaborate more sporadically. According to the promoters of the *Invisibili* this organisational structure answers two needs. First, the reticular organisation allows the activists to connect issues related to the precariousness of living and working conditions that can be no longer kept separate. The *Invisibili* should facilitate the unification of segmented social subjects who share similar problems thus far unconnected.

Second, the network structure functions in order to reduce costs, sharing human and capital resources and increasing the effectiveness of the service. Although every office has its own operative autonomy, its technological resources, which include computers, printers, a telephone line and an internet connection, allow groups to interconnect and so to share some limited and specialised resources. For example, the association is assisted by a small number of skilled volunteers who support the activists with information, consultancies and training which are shared through information technology.

If the Invisibles only provided legal assistance and info services, it would not very different from other organisms and associations operating in the same field. However, the association also organises protests, advocacy activities and pressure initiatives on institutional organisms ranging from petitions to 'ticket strike' on public transport and 'discount on shopping' consisting of a negotiated reduction of the bill in local supermarkets. From this perspective, the *Invisibili* are not only a network of the front office, but a movement area combining different kinds of activities struggling for recognition and resource re-distribution. Non-EU migrants constitute the most notable example of invisibility. They are prevented access to resources by the fact that they are foreigners and as such, subject to cultural devaluation.

7.5. The centrality of the poor in postmodernity

The services described in these pages are directed at the new forms of exclusion and poverty that populate contemporary society and, specifically, the subjects that represent it: immigrants, flexible and temporary workers, the working poor and the unemployed, squatters and lodgers, youngsters. As analysed by the CSOs of the North-East and in the following years the Disobedient activists, these subjects are the outcome of a series of processes and transformations which have occurred over the last two decades. Instability of living conditions characterises these social subjects, and their number is rapidly growing. They are the poor, a transversal, omnipresent and mobile class, the proletariat of postmodernity. They are a subjugated and exploited subject and, at the same time, a figure of production. The poor are power, they are an "indispensable presence in the production of common wealth" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 156). Therefore, in post-modernity the poor represent a 'dangerous class', a threat for the survival of the capitalist system. The poor, namely the immigrant, the unemployed worker, the squatter, the under-employed or the flexible worker represent a threat to economic order because they take part in the production of social wealth in various ways but are excluded from the community surplus value appropriation (Negri 2003).

It follows that these new social actors are subjected to social engineering experiments in terms of control policies and repression. Once again, the migrants are the paradigmatic figure. European penal systems are experimenting with new restrictive regulations in terms of spatial and working mobility and reducing their civil and individual rights. According to this view, the Bossi-Fini law, for example, that links permits of stay to a working contract, providing for the expulsion of the migrant in case of prolonged unemployment, do not aim to stop the migration flows but assign foreigners a juridical status different from that of Italian citizens. This leads to a kind of 'subordinated inclusion' that means that migrants are not completely excluded but they are kept in a condition of inferiority and their access to the host society's rights and resources is highly restricted (De Giorgi 2003).

Not only are these subjects suffering new forms of exploitation and social engineering, but they are also under-represented by the traditional left. In the past the traditional working class movement considered the poor an unproductive social class with unstable political tendencies or, as Hardt and Negri (2000: 158) put it, for their "immunity to the discipline of the factory and the discipline necessary for the construction of socialism". Nowadays, although the picture is not homogeneous, the unions regard these subjects only in as far as that they are dependent workers. On the contrary, the Disobedient activists see the poor, in the meaning described above, a potentially revolutionary class aiming to suppress, in Marxian terms, their poverty and the structural conditions of their situation (Negri 2003). They are productive although they are not within the realm of immediately productive labour. From this point of view, this variety of subjects will be protagonists of all tomorrow's struggles. As one interviewee has said when referring to immigrants: *"now the unions are beginning to understand that the migrants are the new subject ... maybe they'll begin to catch on that these are the new subjectivities who will struggle, so being with them is very important"* (Interview 36).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the growth of welfare services at the CSO *Rivolta*, connecting it to local and global political opportunities which have opened up over the last decades, and to the subjective initiative of the activists of the *Rivolta*. The fieldwork has also highlighted several changes of the last few years within this movement.

First, the transformation of political activism into a profession with, as a consequence, constant source of income is an ongoing process among the Disobedient activists. The growth of professional associations indicates that many activists can now combine employment in welfare services and political activism. If for some Italian movement organisations the process started in the early nineties (della Porta 1996), this transformation is a new and highly relevant innovation for the CSOs. In the past, the two spheres were completely separate, militancy was freely offered and any overlapping between activism, profession and income avoided. According to occupants of the CSOs, only in this way could the creation of a class of professional politicians separate from the other activists and militants, which would have provoked an unequal labour division, be avoided. The foundation of associations and cooperatives turned this logic upside down. The fieldwork has shown that if the activists of the *Rivolta* wanted to live *for* politics they needed to live *of* politics.

A second change is related to the reasons of mobilisation and poses the question of what social justice is in the context of contemporary society. On the whole, this chapter shows that the *Rivolta* is a collective actor that combines mobilisations for cultural recognition and for the redistribution of resources. The initiatives promoted through formal and informal organisations aim to combine, the 'new social movement' issues and matters of re-distributive justice taming and locating them in contemporary society. The former was concerned with quality of life, the rights of citizenship, individual freedom and the use of urban space; the latter are related to income, either direct, universal basic income, or in indirect form: social services, housing, work. On the one hand, this movement area seems to be emancipated from the 'new social movements'; on the other hand operating on the

double dimension of recognition and distribution, it responds to those requisites of social justice posed by Fraser (1996).

The fieldwork questions a further theoretical aspect regarding social movements and is related to the dichotomy between institutional and anti-institutional behaviours. All these interventions were born as political campaigns and later became activities of a professional organisation made up of the activists of the CSO *Rivolta*, displaying the continuity between these two spheres. Institutional and extra-institutional actions are not exclusive but part of a wider range of repertoires. This would confirm that social movements adopt legal instruments without abandoning non-conventional form of protests. As we have seen, the employees of associations and cooperatives are the same as those that occupy houses and organise other forms of protest. The *Rivolta* is not an isolated case. As has been noted, the combination of movement and institutional practices is common among collective actors. On one hand institutional actors often organise forms of protest that belong to collective movements; on the other hand, social movements adopt legal and institutional forms of participation (Meyers and Tarrow 1998). However, in both the first and the second cases these two realms of action are combined.

Finally, the debate on the welfare state and the number of activities in which they are involved emphasises the role of the *Rivolta* as a proactive and immanent collective actor. In the attempt to build welfare services from below it deals with social change, a new identity, interventions independent from external challenges and the redefinition the society's borders. The activists of the *Rivolta* do not aim to defend their position in society or to resist social change but to locate themselves and their identity in a new position on the basis of changes which are occurring in society. At the same time, they do not postpone the realisation of their aims to a 'new society' or to the building of the 'new man'. They act on the 'plane of immanence' and aim to affirm new forms of life starting from current society. Immanence means that "liberation must be achieved within this world ... with no possibility of any, even utopian, outside" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 65). The activists of the *Rivolta* do not postpone the realisation of their happiness and purposes to

any perfect future society, but aim to exercise control over their own cooperative activities and over the outcomes of their own efforts within this world.

[1] The Italian welfare state went through several stages and models that were characterised by the increasing inclusion of new social segments and growth of spending. However, if we consider EU countries over the post II World War period, welfare expenditure in Italy has been one of the lowest; the universal coverage of national health insurance arrived only in 1978. The Italian welfare state has been characterised as being more focused on 'fathers' than on children. This means that most of the expenditure has been absorbed by the pension system, to a lesser extent by the National Health Service and only a small portion by social assistance. In 1998, for instance, previdential expenditure was 72.7% of total expenses, the health service covered 20.6% and assistance only 6.7% (CENSIS 1999). Moreover, other data (Eurostat Sespros: statistiche in breve maggio 1999) show that the expenses for social exclusion were statistically insignificant, 0.0%, in Italy over the nineties, while they were 7.8% in UK and 3.4% on average in EU countries.

[2] Social Cooperatives are charity organisations aiming to pursue the community public interest and social cohesion through the management of social, health and educative services and the working training of disadvantaged people.

[3] Two days after a demonstration that ended with a street battle between the police and activists of the CSOs, the right wing newspaper il Giornale headlined the opening page: 'Autonomous: it is a red alert. Some months ago the secret services denounced the growing presence of subversive groups, mainly in Lombardy, and the hidden direction of Red Brigades militants' (Il Giornale 12/09/1994). This allegation has never been proved.

[4] Discussion document: Arsenale Sherwood (ed.) 'Materiali per la discussione', Padua Luglio 1996.
Discussion document: Arsenale Sherwood, 'Risposta ai compagni/e della Toscana', Padua, 1996.
Discussion document: Arsenale Sherwood, 'Nordest Laboratorio Politico', Contributo al convegno di Venezia, 15-16 Novembre, 1996.
Discussion document: Arsenale Sherwood, Associazione Difesa dei Lavoratori & Melting dei Centri sociali Nord-Est, 'Marce europee contro la disoccupazione, il precariato, l'esclusione sociale: contributo alla discussione', Padua, 1997.

[5] Discussion document: Rete Liberare e Federare, 'Parole-guida per marcare la direzione di Liberare e Federare' Padua, 22 Luglio 1997.

[6] Discussion document: Rete autonoma del Nord-Est, 'Contributo per l'approfondimento dei nodi politici di fase: spunti, idée, opinioni, proposte, possibilità', Padua 1997.

[7] See this chapter section 1.

[9] This service promoted by the Venice-Mestre Council and Department of Social Policy, which in the late nineties adopted the Government political line in terms of drugs. The damage reduction strategies based on several interventions that bring the social worker closer to the street, where drug users usually spend most of their time.

[10] Discussion document: Invisibili: un movimento di lotta per i diritti e la dignità, 'Progetto di costruzione dello sportello degli Invisibili', Padua, 2002.

[11] Ibid.

[12] The Statuto dei Lavoratori (the Labour Charter) guaranteed rights such as meetings, recruitment and union activity in general and contained norms which made it illegal for employers to discriminate against unionised workers (Lumley 1990).

[13] This acronym means Coordinative and Continuative Collaboration and points to one of most widespread temporary contract used by public bodies and private enterprise in order to recruit mainly young employees reducing the costs of the workforce.

[14] Discussion document: Invisibili: un movimento di lotta per i diritti e la dignità, 'Progetto di costruzione dello sportello degli Invisibili', Padua, 2002.

The key words of the Disobedient movement

Introduction

During the second half of the nineties the CSOs of the North-East started innovating their theoretical categories and, as a consequence, the political language of the Left. On the one hand the antagonist area movement was mainly involved in defending the identity of the past through the publication of *Vis-à-vis,* a journal which dealt with Marxist issues, and organising conferences investigating the radical movements of the seventies. On the other hand, the Veneto CSOs started to debate with some workerist and post-workerist intellectuals. Together they published the two-issue theoretical journal *Riff Raff* in 1993/4 and the single-issue magazine *Il tallone del cavaliere* in 1994. The former focused on a wide variety of issues: the crisis of the first republic and the *Tangentopoli,* the political reforms, universal basic income and immaterial labour. In a way, most of these articles established the bases for the strategy of the following years. For example, in 'La Repubblica costituente' Antonio Negri (1993: 80) raised the issue of constituent power and control over local administration, arguing that "the destruction of the State can be carried out only through the re-appropriation of administration". Large parts of the movement considered this phrase a kind of political address that anticipated the so-called institutional shift of some of the North-East CSOs. The latter included mainly articles on the new social composition and on the necessity of breaking with traditional approaches of 'old' and 'new' left. Over the same period another magazine was published: *Derive e Approdi.* It had a national circulation and, more importantly, it hosted writings by some of the most prominent intellectuals from the workerist tradition such as Antonio

Negri, Sergio Bologna, Paolo Virno and Lucio Castellano. Its audience was mainly made up of activists and university students who in many cases took part in the initiative, either writing articles or collaborating in other ways. However, if *Riff Raff* and *Il Tallone di Achille* were expressions of a specific area movement, the one that would become the White Overalls and then the Disobedient movement, *Derive Approdi* was more open and collected contributions from activists, CSOs and intellectuals who belonged to various movement areas.

The importance of these publications was twofold. First, they generated a wide debate within some areas of the CSOs on issues related to the changes in society which occurred after the seventies. In particular, these magazines focused on post-Fordism, the role of intellectual labour, the definitive decline of the working class and the rise of new social subjects, the crisis of the nation state and the growth of ethno-nationalism, the transition from a disciplinary to a control society. They served to innovate and systemise the categories of autonomous movements in Italy. These writings were influenced by numerous authors ranging from Marx, specifically his *Grundrisse* and some parts of the *Capital*, to Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Gorz. Secondly, after years of silence and reciprocal stand-off, these two magazines can now be considered the starting point of a long-standing dialogue between intellectuals belonging to the workerist tradition of the sixties and seventies and some segments of recent far-left movements.

As we have already said, the geo-politics of the CSOs of the North-East moved to Venice over the nineties. The *Rivolta* was among the promoters of several national meetings and conferences directed towards the MD. Some of these were meetings where activists dealt with political campaigns and organisational aspects. Others were conferences that saw the participation of scholars linked to the Disobedient activists and mainly coming from the workerist tradition. All of them aimed to train the movement's activists, to develop internal debate, to create theoretical categories and to build a common framework by which individuals and groups with different political experiences could reach an understanding on issues such as gobalisation, international politics, work and

so on. In this chapter we will deal with the political discourse established over these meetings, in books, magazines and journals of the Disobedient movement and in other contexts. Because the debate could not be circumscribed at a local level and had a national if not international dimension, we will not distinguish between the Disobedient movement as a whole and the CSO *Rivolta*. The key words that will be presented on these pages belong to both the Disobedient activists and the *Rivolta* which are considered as a single entity, a group sharing a mutual identity and view of the world. The same method will be adopted in the chapter on global mobilisations.

The first section will discuss issues related to municipal federalism and the crisis of the welfare state. We will see how these issues have assumed a central importance in the debate of the Disobedient movement, and specifically in the CSOs of the North-East and the *Rivolta*. The second section will focus on the meaning of some concepts and terms such as empire, multitude, exodus and bio-politics. These concepts constitute the new lexicon of the Disobedient movement in the context of the global protest cycle. Finally, we will discuss the meaning of civil disobedience according to the Disobedient activists.

In some respects, these concepts have progressed and become clear in close relation to the growth of the global movement and of the global political situation. On the one hand, the global movement has made these concepts readable and concrete: *"if there had not been Seattle, if there had not been Genoa or Florence, these terms would not be in use. The intuitions of Negri and of his book would have been remained scrap paper or closed in the vocabulary of an inner circle"* (Interview 34). On the other hand, however, the furthering of the global movement has enriched the meaning of these terms, clarifying their content and context and developing their internal implications.

8.1. The debate on crisis of the nation-state and municipal federalism

In the biennium 1996-97 the CSOs of the North-East began debates on issues related to the form of the state: municipal federalism and the end of the nation-state. This debate was favoured by a number of emerging changes that had an enormous impact on Italy as a whole, and some of them on the regions of the

North-East. First, the ethno-regionalist movement *Lega Nord* (the Northern League) became the primary political party in many Italian northern regions, specifically Veneto and Lombardy. Its dramatic electoral growth had a fundamental role in the decline of traditional parties and of the first republic, and put federalism at the centre of the political agenda (Biorcio 1997). This ethno-populist movement raised a number of other issues that caught the attention of the movement of the North-East, ranging from the taxation system to the interests of the self-employed, to the autonomy of local communities from the nation-state. The CSOs of the North-East did not undervalue the racist and nationalist ideological background of the Northern League. Nonetheless, they argued that "the Northern League has assumed issues, for example the criticism to the nation-state, which belong to movements, transfiguring them and changing their meaning"[1].

Another key factor that fuelled the debate on federalism was the features of the economic growth of the North-East. One case in point was the economic development in Veneto, which was based on networks of small enterprises, thus increasing the role of independent work. The strength of the system relied upon the entrepreneurial network and the development of small artisan companies (Censis 1992; Anastasia and Corò 1996). The CSOs of the North-East were concerned with the social composition of the network economy and on the claims of this social composition. According to the activists of the North-East it was made up of former large factory workers of the Fordist age and the 'second generation' self-employed (Bologna and Fumagalli 1997). These workers did not correspond to the ideological stereotypes of the Left, which described them as small tax evading employers. Contrary to this, however, they were actually exploited by the market and the state and suffered a form of self-exploitation based on longer working hours, instability and flexibility without security. Therefore, some of their claims had to be supported and given a different political direction. According to the movement it would have been a big mistake to leave the representation of these subjects to the Right, namely, to the Northern League.

Third, in 1993 the reform for the election of town council contributed to building the context for the debate on municipal federalism. It instituted the direct election of town mayors and encouraged a greater participation of citizens in choosing local governments. This reform was to change the relationship between citizens and local governments and increased the responsibility of town mayors towards their electors (Operto 1999). It was seen as a chance to give more autonomy to local communities and to increase their participation in the governing of towns.

The movement looked at these phenomena with increasing interest. Instead of demonizing and resisting them as expressions of cultural and political backwardness, the activists of the North-East attempted to understand how they could utilise these new social processes and whether they could offer any prospects of conflict and, thus, liberation.

Certainly, the Northern League was profoundly criticized, both through action and written documents. In October 26th 2000 while two student and migrants demonstrations against racism were taking place in Venice and Mestre, a group of masked young people using a battering ram smashed the door of the Padania Government in the historic town and in a few minutes destroyed all they found. Although the action was clandestine, an unknown group ironically self-defined "T.B. [*Tute Bianche, perhaps?*] Nati sotto il segno dell'Ariete" (T.B. Born under Aries) claimed responsibility for this action, the Northern League accused the White Overalls of the North-East. According to the CSOs of the North-East, the Northern League was an expression of the worst aspects of neo-liberalism. Its secessionist project was seen as:

> "The celebration of new forms of individualistic and possessive spirit, a new State, a new Nation, a new race of bosses, it is a monstrous corporative and pseudo-communitarian block which defends its own privileges and economic wealth, it is the breaking of solidarity and of universal rights, in the name of a mythological relationship with the earth, blood and work community"[2].

Although the Northern League crudely represents the fact that economy rules every other aspect of social and cultural life, its role in the institutional turmoil

of the early nineties was unvaluable. It is a modern post-ideological political force that expresses the end of great ideological narratives. Therefore, according to the CSOs of the North-East, the ethno-nationalist movement cannot be interpreted using the old theoretical schema and locating it on the left or right. On the contrary, the real challenge is questioning its ability to find consensus among the large strata of exploited workers, which range from the dependent labourer to the 'restructured' worker of large factories, from the self-employed to the micro-enterprises, and to represent them at a political level. The challenge posed by the Northern League had to be faced by opposing the identitarian federalism with a solidarity-based municipal federalism:

> "We are trying to design a constituent power against the centralistic state-constituted power. It must be deeply left-oriented, based on radically democratic premises, able to mobilise social and political forces and to contrast the neo-nationalist secessionism, both in Padania and Veneto. Our point of view is that, in order to get new social rights and counteract inequality, racism and exploitation, a radical political project must be based on a cooperative and solidarity municipal federalism, and on open and permanent conflict. This project must start from a communal dimension and permanently relate to other municipalities and territories"[3].

Municipal federalism should be the reverse of the Northern League. The main claims of the latter are the centrality of the person rather than the market, the refusal of any kind of ethno-centred agenda, the choice of Europe as a common political space, and cooperative and solidarity relations based on the welfare community and social economy. As argued in a political document forwarded to the MA of Tuscany, which criticised some choices made by the CSOs of the North-East[4], municipal federalism is described as "a conflictual relation with institutions and the appropriation of the 'nessi amministrativi' (administrative nexuses)". According to this document the constituent power can only be based on "the appropriation from below of the administrative nexus. This means appropriation of goods, services and collective use values rescued from market and capitalist valorisation"[5]. Over the years, this has entailed the setting up of

associations and organisations providing care services and the involvement of associations linked to the *Rivolta* in institutionally funded welfare programmes. But we have also stressed that the movement has been involved in the attempt to combine forms of institutional action and protest repertoires. Therefore, the action of the movement should not be accompanied by acquiescence but by conflict, and it should aim to exploit political cleavages and divisions within institutions: "indeed, local administration is not a monstrous or a modern moloch. On the contrary, it is crossed by fractures, tensions and contradictions. In the age of real subsumption the institution itself is terrain of antagonism!"[6]. In these terms, the movement area of the North-East tries to combine negotiation and conflict and to build a more projective relationship with institutions. In fact, that which characterises municipal federalism and the movement over these years is a changed relationship with institutions and political forces. They are no longer alien actors who fiercely act wholly in opposition, but are potential, though conflictual, partners. The relation is now open to a new dialectic in which conflict and negotiation are combined. Therefore, the movement cannot just say 'no' and resist political change but it must "exert its pressure on current political administrations by permanent social negotiation and proactive conflict"[7].

8.2. A new dictionary for new conflicts

The theoretical framework of the Disobedient activists is made up of concepts such as empire, multitude, citizenship, bio-politics, civil disobedience and exodus. These concepts have been formulated in close relation with a number of post-workerist intellectuals in books, magazines, documents and conferences and through the course of daily political debate. Intellectuals such as Negri, Hardt, Virno, Bascetta, Marazzi, Mezzadra have been largely read by the Disobedient activists and have actively taken part in some events organized by the movement, effectively contributing to the growth of the debate. These concepts, developed by these authors in close relation to the movement and the struggles of recent years, mark the genuine attempt to renew Marxist political categories, to provide a mutual identity and narrate the specific forms that

political and economic power has assumed in post-Fordist society. As Casarini (2002: 9-13), the spokesperson of the *Rivolta*, argued, they constitute a new dictionary that:

"Summarises the whole of experience, examples and practices that have characterised the conflicts of the last few years (…) These key words do not represent the political line of the movement. They do, however, contribute to the building of thought, a connection of nexus which, together with actions, form one of the many political languages".

8.2.1. Empire vs. Imperialism

'Empire' is at the basis of a number of other concepts. In the past and present days it has often been identified with the USA and the role played by this superpower after the socialist regimes collapsed in the late nineties. This notion, developed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and debated within the movement, has become opposed to this view and to the fact that it can be identified with a specific nation-state. On the contrary, they argue, Empire is the decline of the nation-state sovereignty and of its ability to regulate flows of goods and people across national boundaries. It is a form of global sovereignty of post-modernity and the "political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world" (2000: xi).

The decline of national sovereignty does not mean that sovereignty no longer exists, but that it has assumed a new form. Sovereignty, the transcendent power that imposes its order on the mass, has been transferred from the nation-states to a superior entity (Negri 2002). This entity is the Empire, which has neither territorial boundaries nor temporal limits, and presents its rule as if it were a permanent moment of history dedicated to perpetual peace. In short, it is:

"A single power that determines them all [*imperialist powers*] them in unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right, that is decidedly postcolonial and postimperialist. This is really the starting point for our study of Empire: a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and

legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 9).

As Empire cannot be identified in one nation-state, it has nothing to do with imperialism. According to the traditional Marxist view, the imperialist phase of capitalist development implied the nation-state as its basic unit. The main actors, either financial or industrial, were nation-based and required the support of, and the territorial division amongst, the greatest capitalist powers. Quoting Hobson's book *Imperialism*, Lenin (1990: 92) wrote: "the new imperialism differs from the old, first, in substituting for the ambition of a single growing empire the theory and the practice of competing empires, each motivated by similar lusts of political aggrandisement and commercial gain; secondly, in the dominance of finance or investing over mercantile interests". More recently, defining contemporary 'capitalist imperialism', Harvey (2003) has emphasised the political, military and diplomatic strategies used by the state in asserting its interests and achieving its goals. Therefore, imperialism implies a state-system that creates rigid boundaries between dominant and dominated national entities, blocking the free flow of capital, labour and goods and precluding the formation of a world market. According to Hardt and Negri (2000: xii-xiii):

> "In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rules that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colours of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the global imperial rainbow".

Therefore, imperialism creates a striated space, while Empire and the world market require "a smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialized flows" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 333).

If Empire has no territorial centre it cannot be confused with the United States. Although they occupy a privileged position both in global hierarchies and in the formation of the Empire, the centre of command is not rooted in any

specific place, even in the US. Empire is a *non-place*: "in this smooth space of Empire, there is no place of power" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 190). At the same time it includes every region of the planet: being Empire the political constitution of globalisation and its merging boundaries across the planet, there is now no more outside, there is no more a distinction or an opposition between inside and outside, the civil order and the natural order as it was in modernity.

The concept of Empire has been extensively criticised on many sides. Arguing that the Hardt and Negri's view offers a far left variant of the left-liberal analysis of forms of global governance, orthodox Marxism has opposed it with the Bukharin/Lenin model of classical imperialism that rested on consolidated blocs of nationally integrated national capitals (Callinicos 2001). Tariq Ali (2002: 3) goes even further, describing it as follows: "the notion of 'Empire' as a nebulous entity without a centre is flippant, dangerous and apolitical". More founded criticisms have underlined the imprecision in the historical reconstruction of the some events (Tilly 2003), and the vagueness of a notion such as Empire (Bowring 2004).

However, it is important to highlight that the notion of Empire is the recognition that a global order has been developing and that it is either the cause or effect of the weakening of the nation-states' sovereignty. This notion deals with the issue of sovereignty in an economic global system. In order to exist, this system needs a new political constitution at a global level, and the imperial one seems to fit the criteria. However, the same notion also presents some limits, such as an exaggerated optimism in the ability of the multitudes to question the imperial constitution, a progressive view of history and an excessive simplification in the analysis of the end of the state. Ethno-nationalist and identity movements and some forms of protectionism and trade wars seem to contradict the notion of Empire and point to the fact that national identities and interests still play a role in the economic global space.

8.2.2. Multitude beyond people and mass

In the view of the Disobedient activists the actor that can oppose the constitution of Empire is not the nation-state but the multitude. In their

documents and leaflets, the 'multitude' is the ever-present subject to which the movement always appeals in order to build an opposition to Empire. This was, for example, the case in the mobilisations against the G8 in Genoa in 2004: "From the multitudes of Europe marching against Empire and towards Genoa". The multitude is the subjectivity that can rise against Empire and its ontological limits (Negri 2002, 2003). As Hardt and Negri (2000: 60) put it: "the other head of imperial eagle is the plural multitude of productive, creative subjectivities of globalization that have learned to sail on this enormous sea. They are in perpetual motion and form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfigurations on the system".

For some scholars, the 'multitude' has a rather pessimistic meaning. It is associated with an anomic society which has been deprived of social ties. The multitude rises when the Fordist society and some of its traditional institutions, such as the state, family, political parties and unions decline. It is the result of a new sort of 'anomie' (Durkheim 1999); which has been disrupting the industrial society institutions. According to this interpretation, the multitude is the triumph of acquisitive spirits and its prevailing characteristics are indifference, individualism and competitiveness (Bonomi 1996).

In contrast, the post-workerist and Disobedient activists view is 'progressive', a step further in the process of the dissolution of the capitalist system. The multitude can be read either as a political or a social actor. It does not result from the disintegration of social ties but from the extinction of the state. The multitude is not the mass and is to be read in opposition to the People. Mass is a concept that mainly belongs to the XXth century and has adopted a wide variety of meanings. It is a subject without subjectivity, the indistinct bulk which popular parties try to aggregate and gain consensus. According to the most common interpretation, the 'mass' is characterised by passivity, political dependency and can be easily influenced (Gallino 1978). The mass is inert and malleable matter. As Bascetta (2002: 70) says: "the mass is, thus, an indistinct whole characterised more by gravitational force than by willingness".

The multitude has also been conceived in opposition to the modern concept of the People as unity, identity and, thus, the basis of the modern nation-state. The

modern concept of the People implies one *will* that is represented and embodied by the sovereign. The People is the *reductio ad unum* of singularities and tends towards an internal homogeneity that excludes the external. According to Hobbes: "the People is somewhat that is one, having one will, and to whom one action may be attributed ... The People rules in all Governments" and reciprocally, "the King is the People" (Hobbes 1983: 151 cited in Virno 1996: 200).

On the contrary, the multitude appeared when the nation-state sovereignty started to decline. It is a multiplicity of singularities that cannot be represented by the figure of the sovereign. The multitude is a plurality that persists in this state, and is therefore the negation of state sovereignty: "the multitude is the form of social existence of the many in so far as they are the many" (Virno 2002: 12). It is not a sign of crisis but the mature arrival point of the ongoing transformations (Virno 1996).

The multitude is also the form assumed by the current composition of the global workforce. From this point of view, what makes it possible for the multitude to be counter-empire is its relation to work, its composition of subjectivities from the terrain of production. In these terms, the multitude is the universal capacity to produce:

> "It is the cooperating set of brains and hands, minds and bodies ... it is the desire and the striving of the multitude of mobile and flexible workers; and at the same time it is intellectual energy and linguistic and communicative construction of the multitude of intellectual and affective labourers" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 209).

Like the concept of Empire, the notion of multitude also presents both clear and obscure points. It seems particularly apt when describing social actors that mobilise at a global level and that are no longer represented by the State, as was the case of the people, who can be no longer organised by political parties, as was the case of the mass. Both people and mass were notions closely related to modernity, when the nation-states were the main depositary subjects of sovereignty, and political parties organised, mediated and channelled interests and conflicts. Multitude represents that kind of collective action that has

overcome traditional national borders to become global. The people who were mobilised in Seattle, Genoa and Porto Alegre were really a global multitude that could not be channelled into the narrow borders of political representation. In these terms, the notion of multitude cannot be applied to an anomic society, but it can be helpful in explaining the segmentation of homogeneous social actors in singularities involved in the building of new social ties.

The notion of multitude presents also problematic aspects. First, although it has been said (Bascetta 2002) that the multitude is not a teleological concept destined to develop towards positive ends, in post-workerist description it seems that it contrasts with Empire because of its own ontological nature. The multitude is often presented as the good-in-itself. It is a negative entity that denies the importance of state-power (Virno 2002) and the other head of empire, ontological limit and opposition to the new constituted power (Hardt and Negri 2000).

Secondly, further problems arise when a notion that is eminently political also assumes a sociological meaning which aims to explain the current characteristics of the social composition of work. Therefore, there is an excessive similarity between the notion of multitude and what the post-workerist scholars have named general intellect, mass intellectuality, communicative work, abstract labour or the socialised worker. More precisely, these two concepts overlap; they blur together, rendering it difficult to make a clear distinction.

The third problem is in close relation to the previous one. Because the notion of multitude coincides with abstract labour, it encompasses social subjects which are very different from each other: the intellectual labourers of it companies and unskilled migrant workers, the chain-worker employed at McDonald's and the care services professional. It is immediately clear that what links all these figures together is only the fact that they posses a general ability to work and sell their labour-power. They can also share problems related to labour market deregulation worldwide, such as flexibility, mobility and the precarious nature of their working conditions. If we look at the concrete determinations, some enormous differences determine their location in the labour market and their

strength and competitiveness. The result is rather ambiguous. In terms of political theory, the notion of multitude correctly multiplies and recognises singularities and the collapse of the unity of masses and the People. In sociological terms, the same concept masks the differences existing among social actors, between the farmers of Chiapas and the intellectual labour in the cities of the North. Like Empire, multitude risks being an undetermined element, a horizontal strata and condition that cancels out the hierarchical division of labour, income and opportunity distribution.

8.2.3. Exodus vs. revolution

Exodus, along with similar notions such as defection and desertion, is another important concept that contributes to the identity and framework of the Disobedient activists. Once again, this notion has been built on differences with regard to another political category. As Walzer (1985) has argued, political thought, specifically of the Jacobin and socialist tradition, identified revolution with the biblical idea of exodus. According to this tradition, exodus is the paradigm of revolution. It summarises the process of liberation and expresses it in religious terms, where the end is nothing like the beginning, the 'promised land'. The concept of exodus was closely linked to the conquests of State power in the revolutionary tradition.

The notion of exodus adopted by the Disobedient activists breaks down the socialist and communist revolutionary model of the XIXth and XXth centuries, which was based on resistance, accumulation of strength and revolutionary rupture, and substitution of the old state machine with a new one (Caccia 2002). This model was eminently teleological because it postponed the realisation of the 'promised land' to the destruction of the state apparatus and its replacement with a new one: "the outcome of the revolutionary breaking and destruction of the state machine was still another state" (Caccia 2002: 127). Exodus rises from a different conception of Revolution that no longer implies the seizure of state power but concerns partial and molecular processes of transformation: "we are revolutionaries, we still have utopian horizons. But utopia must interact with the present time, with the conquest of objectives that

can be partial and limited. It must interact with the development and experimentation of alternative social practices, associative forms of life and communication"[8].

In Virno's account (1996: 197) exodus means *engaged withdrawal* from the duties of the state through disobedience, intemperance, right of resistance: "I use the term exodus here to define mass defection from the state". Therefore, the exodus has not so much to do with protest but mainly with defection or with what Albert O. Hirschman (1982) named *exit*. Historical examples of exodus were the mass migration from the factory regime to the 'frontier' in order to colonize low-cost lands, starting with the workers of North America over the second half of the nineteenth century, or the escape from the big factories to temporary and intermittent jobs of the younger members of the Italian workforce over the second half of the seventies (Virno 1996). More recent examples are the mass migration of skilled workers from Eastern Europe, which played a central role in the collapse of the Socialist bloc, and the migratory flows from non-western countries (Hardt and Negri 2000). These movements cannot be considered as mere examples of social and geographical mobility, but are forms of political action, manifestations of open political conflict: "in these modern examples, mobility became active politics and established a political position" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 214).

The current exodus is immanent, therefore it can only occur 'within' and 'against' Empire, "on its hybrid, modulating terrain" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 218). This means that, in opposition to resistance, which was based on sabotage and characterised the industrial age, the exodus constitutes both a powerful form of class struggle and the attempt to build alternative social relations 'here and now'. The pattern is represented by the Christian communities, who organised themselves on the basis of denouncing and refusing Imperial power. They did so: "either on the terrain of the production relations, because they communised their own material and immaterial goods in a communitarian form, or by the refusing of the political legitimacy of the Roman Empire. In doing this they were building a radical alternative to the social, productive and political relations within the Empire" (Caccia 2002: 131). Despite the

Disobedient movement referring to Christian communities as an example of 'good practice' in opposing the power of Empire, the notion of exodus must not be interpreted in messianic and millenarian terms. The Disobedient activists belong to the family of social movements that no longer conceive the perfect society of the future as the end of history and conflict. Exodus is an immanent practice related to civil disobedience and which aims to build new social relations in the world we are in.

8.3. Civil disobedience and the criticism of traditional politics

The meaning of exodus is to be read in close relation to civil disobedience. This latter concept refers to a protest repertoire aiming to generate political and social change. Civil disobedience can be classified as a political process only in the light of a concept such as exodus. The MTB and then the Disobedient activists adopted civil disobedience, a form of protest which was extraneous to the autonomous movements of the past, as the main repertoire of contention, adapting it to their own tradition and to the opportunities and constraints of the political context. Its importance lies in the fact that it represented the turning point for the movement and was its most innovative aspect.

According to the Disobedient activists, civil disobedience is a form of action based on the premise that violating 'unjust' laws aims to build a new normative order 'here and now'. It is a form of protest that aims to combine conflict and consensus through direct action. On one hand it has no relation with individualistic and liberal forms of disobedience. On the other, it is far both from the protest forms of the Italian autonomous movements and from non-violent individual practices.

In the first instance, civil disobedience cannot be considered as a form of individual non-violent protest and does not imply any absolute approval of non-violence either as a philosophy or practice:

> "Civil disobedience is strictly linked to the development of mass illegality, to the breaking of the constituted order and withdrawal from command. It is non-violent but it assumes possible forms of self-defence. This is its radical character. It questions the very source of

power: the duty to obedience. For us, it can have the same strength as had the 'refusal to work' in Fordism. There is one difference: civil disobedience represents a refusal of power in the post-Fordism era which has now extended to the whole of society"[9].

Therefore, civil disobedience is a public and political collective action that does not exclude the right to resistance, as happened in Genoa in July 2001[10]. From this point of view, the collective character marks a substantive difference with respect to the classic civil disobedience cases of Socrates and Thoreau based on non-violence and on individual choices. As Hannah Arendt (1972) argued these cases must be classified as conscientious objections because the decision to disobey the law was a process that grew in Socrates and Thoreau's personal consciousness. Acts of suffering were not political and public gestures, but individual and occurred *in foro coscientiae*. They did not presuppose any group action and followed only the rules of conscience; therefore, these actions aimed neither to be heard by a wider public nor to cause any political change. Particularly Thoreau acted on the grounds of individual conscience and its moral obligation (Arendt 1972: 60). In contrast, the disobedience actions through which organised individuals disobey unjust laws are the outcome of collective decisions and are bound together by a general view of the world[11]. Therefore, civil disobedience is an immediately public and political kind of action aiming to influence the decision-making processes.

Secondly, although some within the movement have interpreted civil disobedience as a 'restorative' principle (Martelloni 2002), the Disobedient activists do not conceive it as being a practice inherited from the 'liberal' tradition to test the law and restore the violated norms. Civil disobedience is something more than the attempt to test the legitimacy of the law and to preserve or restore the old normative order. If that were the case it would imply a deeper loyalty to the command of the state (Virno 1996) and turn the Disobedient movement into a reactive political subject that resists social change and defends former institutional conditions. On the contrary, their civil disobedience questions the state legitimacy and aims to overcome the existing legal order:

"Although we should look at civil disobedience as something that of course resists and questions all the hateful and unacceptable aspects of Imperial power, civil disobedience is something which is immediately creative, productive and a constituent of a new reality" (Caccia 2002: 132).

In the third instance, and most importantly, civil disobedience has moved away from the traditional protest forms of the antagonist movement, which based its activism on the tradition of Italian youth movements of the seventies and German autonomist movements of the eighties (Katsiaficas 1997). These repertoires of contention demanded direct and uncompromising confrontation and involved the aesthetics of protest, based on lines of tied-up activists, thick sticks with small red flags on the top, threatening slogans, Palestinian *kufia*, balaclavas and black clothing. According to the Disobedient activists, the MA area substituted historically determined practices with empty words and behaviour. It mimed the street behaviour of autonomists of the seventies without practicing real conflict, and was completely disinterested in the building of consensus. As an activist of the *Rivolta* summarized: *"demonstrating with balaclavas, wooden sticks and other things recalls the aesthetics of the seventies, but for sure you do not create conflict and do not create consensus. Maybe, after that demonstration there are less of you than there were before"* (Interview 40).

The Disobedient activists perceive civil disobedience as a new type of protest repertoire which goes beyond the labour movement and new-left tradition, as one interviewee emphatically underlined:

"Not only have we thrown to the sea the concept of revolution, but also the concept of insurrection, which is much more problematic because it comes from a piece of history to which we belong, the one that started in the early sixties and ended in the late nineties. What is more important, we have thrown to the sea the concept of counter-power, which was so fundamental in the seventies and eighties. By counter-power we mean a nucleus of resistance that keeps historical memory

alive and exercises a kind of alternative territorial power" (Interview 15).

Therefore, civil disobedience cannot be compared either to conscientious objection or to the restorative practices of the legal order. In addition, it breaks with the traditional concepts of revolution, insurrection and counter-power that marked both the revolutionary movements of the XXth century and the new-left. From what has been noted in the participant observation and witnessed by activists, civil disobedience is a form of unconventional protest by which individuals and activists "put their body into question" (Casarini 2001). It implies a confrontational attitude and direct contact with the police, both passively and actively, but not the use of offensive weapons. Putting the body into play does not mean that civil disobedience is "accompanied by a passive acceptance of punishment"[12]. During civil disobedience actions the Disobedient activists equip themselves with padding, helmets, knee-pads and plexiglas·shields, which protect them from the assaults of the police. Neither does the adoption of protest forms based on civil disobedience prevent the Disobedient activists from practicing other forms of direct action and sabotage. During the last few years a number of boycotts have targeted symbols of economic globalisation and global war such as McDonald's, Exxon and Caterpillar. Through combining direct action and non-violent or defensive forms of protest, the Disobedient activists believe that 'civil disobedience represents the solution to the dichotomy between violence and non-violence', as one activist argued during an informal dialogue. Despite their beliefs, there is a critical tension concerning the distinction between violence-and non-violence in MD practices. In their documents the Disobedient activists argue that civil disobedience is a protest repertoire based on non-violence. In practice, the Disobedient activists justify the right to react and use some forms of violence in the case of attack. In contrast to the Blue Block, (which acted in Prague and adopted strongly confrontational behaviour, attacking the police with 'an arsenal of Molotov cocktails' and paving stones) (Chesters and Welsh 2004), civil disobedience was intended to be in self-defence. However, the right to resistance can easily turn into offensive violence, as happened in Genoa

in 2001. In those circumstances, after defending themselves from the continuous attacks of the *carabinieri*, organised groups of the Disobedient activists attempted to break into the 'iron-cage' surrounding the old centre and break through the red zone. In doing so they were going beyond the right of resistance and were adopting a form of direct action.

The emphasis on the body connects civil disobedience to the notions of bio-power and, closely linked to it, bio-politics (Foucault 1976). Bio-power is the specific form of exercising power in modernity. In Foucault's account, power is not characterised by its right to decide the life of the king's subjects, but by its ability to guarantee life as a whole, not only its security from external enemies, but also its welfare. As a consequence, bio-politics, which is exercised during civil disobedience actions, aims to withdraw and subtract the whole life from the exercise of sovereign command. The human body is withdrawn from mechanisms of subordination and directed against power. Therefore, 'putting our body into play', a recurrent phrase in many documents and public declarations of the activists of the movement, means: withdrawing their own bodies from obligation, the state command and the rules of the market. Bio-politics is the appropriation of the body in order to challenge the market codes, which subsume everything under the form of genetics, consumerism and so on. Civil disobedience has another implication: "it is not a way to defend the street or a kind of stewardship, or a new way to demonstrate. It must be conceived as a political project and social process"[13]. According to the Disobedient activists, the violation of unjust laws should drive towards a new anti-state legality and a different normative order. In these terms, civil disobedience makes sense only if it produces a *constituent process* to go beyond the old order and put forward the basis for a new one. Therefore, civil disobedience is both a form of struggle and a foundational practice:

> "*The shifting of legality borders is the most interesting aspect of civil disobedience. In concrete and material terms it means going beyond a certain limit in order to force the old legality and to conquer space, parts of the street. These material meters of streets were new citizenship rights*" (Interview 12).

The campaign against the CPT was an example of a protest that aimed to build a new factual order through the practice of its objective. It ranged from the physical dismantling of detention centres and their 'closure from below', to the support of immigrants trying to escape from them. The CPT were viewed as concentration camps where people were illegitimately deprived of their freedom if found without documents. The dismantling of the CPT of Bologna in January 25th 2002 was the epicentre of this campaign. About 100 activists entered the CPT, closed the gate behind them and smashed everything they found: walls, toilets, and electrical energy supplies. The action caused several millions euros worth of damage and delays in the completion of the CPT.

The dismantling of the CPT displayed both the main characteristics of disobedience: a protest repertoire breaking the most salient symbols of law, and the foundation of a new practical legality based on freedom of circulation and equality of all citizens:

> "Everybody can take a working tool and dismantle a piece of a 'lager' to build a piece of freedom. Sometimes, as has often happened in history, disobeying unjust laws is necessary to push forward the limits of legality, to affirm new rights or defend the guaranteed rights which have been violated"[14].

As one Disobedient activist wrote after the action: "we experienced the dismantling as a forerunner to building something different " (Martelloni 2002: 149). This action also shows the limits of civil disobedience, the different social and civil order was only reached temporarily, and eventually the centre was completed. This outcome highlights a central issue underlining civil disobedience: it is a philosophical and abstract notion or at best an original and communicative protest repertoire and not the foreword to building something more stable. The action in Bologna and the others that followed have neither contributed to any change in the legislation on migration nor fuelled any movement against CPT. Nobody, took the working tools and dismantled any CPT as the activists probably expected.

8.3.1. Civil disobedience: between conflict and consensus

The demonstrative character of the dismantling of the CPT in Bologna, the use of non-violent methods, the communicative tactics of asking for the support of Members of Parliament and the organising of a press conference regarding the action that was taking place emphasises both the role assumed by communication and the relation between conflict and consensus. First, civil disobedience actions are also organised in order to promote conflict and develop consensus. In sociological theory this relation points to the transition from a value-rational action (Weber 1968) to one that takes into account the possible political effects of protest in terms of concrete outcomes and consensus. The need for consensus in relation to protest has been emphasised in several documents and interviews. The spokesperson of the *Rivolta*, Luca Casarini argued:

> "*A lot of us thought this in the eighties: why, while we are creating conflict, are there less of us than there were when we started? We have thought about it millions of times. This dynamic is related to the building of a new public sphere, of a new public opinion. The conflict is necessary in order to turn a public opinion movement into a constituent movement, therefore transformative. However, conflict and consensus are inseparable (...) All of us know that we must maintain this relationship, or at least try to keep it, because we need to be many and radical, not few and radical or many and absolutely passive*" (Interview 17).

Another activist summarised the link between conflict and consensus: "*the meaning of disobedience - and I think that we succeeded in that - is that you do something radical and then you can communicate the justness of what you did. In such a way, the next time there are more of you and not fewer*" (Interview 39). Thus, civil disobedience is considered a route and medium to generate conflict along with consensus.

Second, communication has a central position in civil disobedience actions. The relation between conflict and consensus have been closely linked to the Disobedient movement communicative strategies. Both of them have been

largely influenced by the struggle the Zapatistas carried out in Chiapas. The Zapatistas example demonstrates the extent to which communication could assume a central position in the building of consensus and solidarity networks, in the shift of scale from a local uprising to international public opinion and in preventing the insurgents' repression by the Mexican army (Castells 1997; Cleaver 1995; Tarrow 2004). In these terms the Zapatistas dramatically influenced the Disobedient action repertoires:

"We had underestimated the relevance of the new language devised by the Zapatistas. Yes, we had gone as far as realizing how brilliant they were in making a political, revolutionary use of symbols and words, how cleverly they pointed at new horizons and shifted from the particular to the universal, but we hadn't taken account of the strict relationship between that conflict and the necessity of consensus, till we witnessed millions of people drawing near to the commanders and making the EZLN a strong force all over Mexico. The continual pursuit for language and the ways to turn language into action are related to the kind of domination we are subjected to, a domination that is cognitive as well as material, a command on information, opinions and feelings. It is necessary to unveil in order to spur the multitudes towards the practical anticipation of a new society. Either we are able to create different information, opinions and feelings, or the conflict is going to be toothless, vain and ineffectual. Nobody is going to see it or hear about it. There will be conflict all the same, but it will be directed and exploited by those in power. In plain words, if after an action, a campaign, an experience we are fewer than before, then it is time to think. Had the Zapatistas remained the ones of the 'Levantamiento' [*the 'Awakening' of New Year's Day '94*], they wouldn't be here now. The improvement of forms of action, the pursuit for languages that embody new views of the world, politics, society and the 'revolution' itself is not only an aesthetical issue. Have civil disobedience, shields and mobile barricades been only cover-ups for 'moderatism'? Certainly not[15]".

In Chiapas the movement saw "radical, in some cases armed, struggles and a high degree of consensus. This made us realize that talking to millions and being extremely radical in our struggles was possible"[16]. According to the Disobedient movement in Italy this means that consensus could be realised both through the innovation of protest repertoires and through communicative practices. Therefore, civil disobedience actions had to be communicative using extensively either the mainstream or their own media. The Disobedient activists organised press conferences before some of their actions to explain their aims and what they were going to do, openly describing which tools they were going to adopt. Moreover, and again taking from the example of the Zapatistas, the Disobedient activists adopted a new language when writing documents and talking to civil society. It became a more direct narrative and less strictly politicized. Giving communication a central role, the Disobedient movement agreed with the Situationist view according to which only what appears to be can have a real existence in the society of spectacle (Debord 1990).

One communication tactic aimed to use the mainstream media system, reverse its function and turn it into a way of circulating messages of disobedience and subversion. As a Disobedient activist said:

> "In 1998 the movement decided to break through to the media, infiltrating events or places where there was communicative tension [programmes focused on some debated political and social events]. For example, we interrupted some television programmes in order to spread our message. Once the TB interrupted the television programme presented by Santoro, in another circumstance they interrupted Lerner. These were blitzes that were made in order to communicate. We infiltrated in order to provide a message for the media focus their attention on" (Interview 12).

Communication has also a practical function. It allows segments of movements to diffuse and circulate and to be connected in the middle of protest and struggles. According to the movement, this happened in Seattle, where actions were coordinated by a communicative infra-structure operating in the town and

set up by information technology industry workers, and during the no-global war campaign *Trainstopping*. There, the radio network linked the Disobedient activists' actions and coordinated groups and individuals in order to stop the trains from carrying weapons and tanks to Iraq. These events showed that communication was not only informative but primarily con-active, a tool to coordinate actions and therefore of acting according to what was actually happening. This awareness of the role of communication has led the movement to invest resources in the media over the last few years. In the early nineties the North-East area of the CSOs along with the *Leoncavallo* started to develop the ECN (European Counter Network) and to empower some local radio stations (Radio Sherwood in Veneto and Radio Onda d'Urto in Brescia and Milan) that had already been working. The empowerment of these tools went on throughout the nineties. In 2002, the Disobedient movement started up the ambitious Global project, which was based on the setting up of a magazine, websites and one satellite television channel. The Global magazine published only five issues, while the television channel broadcasted only particular events.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the main political categories by which the movement of the Disobedient activists has built its own narrative of the world. Although these categories rose from Marxist tradition, they aim to go beyond it and to create a new theoretical apparatus made up of several currents of thought. This common vocabulary, which shares a view of the world, has not only an analytical relevance also a symbolic one. These terms belong to the daily language of the activists of the movement and have contributed to building a common identity. Through these categories and the words that represent them, the Disobedient activists define and differentiate themselves from the alter-globalisation movement.

The fate of the categories analysed in this chapter is twofold. On the one hand they lack of empirical evidence. The notion of Empire, for example, which aims to go beyond that of imperialism is too vague if it cannot be matched with

any specific political and social actor, and risks becoming a metaphysical entity. In a way, the notion of exodus contradicts that of Empire. If the Imperial constitution does not allow any outside, how can the exodus be possible? The notion of multitude, which should be the most important as it is at the basis of the constitution of any form of subjectivity is confusing. It is at the same time political and social. The multitude is both the people without state and the social composition of the post-fordist productive regime, what the post-workerists call *general intellect*. From this point of view we can argue that while the category of multitude can be useful, as a political concept it lacks precision as a sociological notion. As a political concept it represents well the decline of the nation-state and of old political actors, and the impossibility of new political actors representing and unifying the earth's population. As a sociological concept it is theoretically unfeasible because it includes heterogeneous actors and groups in a single individual category. On the other hand, the extent to which these categories have taken into account the large transformations of the last thirty years cannot be undervalued; they have renewed the language and categories of large movement areas and of politics in general, and have been prolific in producing new developments. In a way, although often misinterpreted, these concepts have become hegemonic among the global movement and have raised debates among scholars and activists.

This chapter has also explored the meaning and practice of civil disobedience. Even when the outcomes have been extremely ambiguous, civil disobedience has given a new lease of life to the traditional repertoires of protest of antagonist and autonomous movements. As has been stressed by one activist, civil disobedience has dramatically changed the relation between vanguard and mass and has widened the opportunity to produce conflict: *"civil disobedience tried to produce a conflict that was possible for everybody, it had the body as a unique weapon and no professionalism"* (Interview 12).

Broadly speaking, civil disobedience was a communicative strategy *in sé*, a way of creating conflict and a kind of political action, aiming to build consensus among larger social strata of the population. It promoted a new

movement identity and protest repertoires, but also it was conceived as a practice which aimed to build a new social and civil order 'here and now'.

1 Leaflet: Consulta dela rete autonoma dell'autorganizzazione sociale, 'Riflessioni sui vecchi e nuovi nazionalismi', Padova, 1 Giugno 1997.

2Discussion document: Arsenale Sherwood-Padova, 'Nordest Laboratorio Politico', Contributo al convegno di Venezia 15-16 Novembre 1996.

3 Leaflet: Consulta dela rete autonoma dell'autorganizzazione sociale, 'Riflessioni sui vecchi e nuovi nazionalismi', Padova, Giugno 1997.

4 In the document 'Alle realtà del Nord-Est dalla Toscana antagonista' (Movimento Antagonista della Toscana 1996) the Tuscany antagonist area attacked the 'frontist line' and accused the CSOs of the north-east to be allied to institutional Left, Rifondazione Comunista and CGIL in particular, in order to contrast the Northern League secessionism.

5 Discussion document: Arsenale Sherwood, 'Risposta ai compagni/e della Toscana', Padua, 1996.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Discussion document: Sherwood tribune, 'Nella bottega del vecchio antiquario', Padua, 2000.

9 Ibid.

[10] See chapter 9.4.3.

[11] Discussion document: Anonymous, 'Trent'anni dopo... Appunti su 'Civil Disobedience' di Hannah Arendt', 2001.

12 Ibid.

13 Notes taken at the National Meeting of the White Overall Venice January 2001.

14 Press release: Movimento dei/delle Disobbedienti, 'Bologna-Europa-Pianeta Terra, 25-01-02 All'attenzione della società civile globale, agli organi di informazione', Bologna 2002.

15 Discussion document: Ya Basta! and Movimento delle Tute Bianche, 'An address to the civil society, and all the people we have met in these months of travel, those who love us and those who despise us, the brothers and sisters who are going to be in Genoa', Genova, 2001.

[16] Ibid.

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Chapter 9

The long march within the global movement

We are new but we are the same as always

(Siamo nuovi ma siamo quelli di sempre)

Wu Ming 2003

Introduction

The Disobedient activists and the *Rivolta* have both actively participated in the alter-globalisation movement. After the battle of Seattle, they participated in initiatives 'to resist the power of the multinationals' in Genoa and Bologna in 2000, they laid on the 'global action express', which transported some one thousand people to Prague on September 26th 2000, and went to Davos to protest against the World Social Forum in January 2001. They also attempted to bring one thousand activists to Nice on December the 6th 2000 and to Göteborg in the spring of 2001. In July 2001, they camped in the stadium *Carlini* in Genoa, where they hosted several thousand people from Italy and other European countries and they have claimed to have participated in the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002. Finally, a number of activists actively participated in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2002 and during 2003.

Before the alter-globalisation movement erupted in Seattle, the Disobedient activists took part in a series of initiatives targeting trans-national objectives and built trans-national connections. The most notable were the train to Amsterdam to protest in favour of the European citizenship income and their link to the Zapatistas movement in Chiapas, in the South-east of Mexico. These initiatives have shown that this type of movement has identified the global

dimension as a relevant arena for their action and that they have targeted transnational institutions rather than national ones.

Chapter seven described how the *Rivolta* is involved in local policies. This chapter will analyse the global dimension of the *Rivolta*, its relation to 'the movement of movements' and the categories through which it explored globalisation; focusing on the participation of the MD in some major campaigns against neo-liberal globalisation, between Amsterdam in 1997 and the 'no-global war' campaign in winter 2003. The first section will discuss concepts and meanings of globalisation and the second section will focus on the transition from international to global movements. The third section will analyse globalisation from the perspective of the MD and activists of the *Rivolta*. Meanwhile the fourth and final section will look at the Disobedient activists as a global movement and analyse some of the main campaigns in which it took part, from the march against precariousness in Amsterdam in 1996 to the no-global war campaign in winter 2003. The CSO *Rivolta* actively took part in these campaigns; at the beginning, in Amsterdam 1997, as a node of the *Melting dei Centri Sociali del Nordest* (MCSN). In that period, the nationwide movement had already split up into several segments and the North-East was rebuilding contacts with some branches of the CSOs in Rome, Milan, Turin and other parts of the country. In the meantime, between the mobilisation in Amsterdam in 1997 and the Battle of Seattle in 1999 the movement turned into *Tute Bianche*, whereas after Genoa it became the *Laboratorio della Disobbedienza Sociale* in October 2001 and the *Movimento delle/dei disobbedienti* in January 2002. It was composed of several sub-groups including the *Tute Bianche*, the national association *Ya Basta!*, the former north-western CSOs from the *Carta di Milano*, the *Giovani Comunisti*, the youth section of the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, the *Rete No Global*, from Campania, and a number of CSOs from Rome. As a part of the MD, the *Rivolta* participated in the demonstrations against the global war and in the *Trainstopping* campaign, which was organised to stop trains carrying weapons and carriages for the war in Iraq and involved other areas of movement.

9.1. Characteristics of globalisation

From a sociological perspective, globalisation is a process that involves social relations as a whole. It is not only an economic phenomenon, but also social, cultural and technological. It affects all aspects of our lives either through intimacy or social relations and ever more people are experiencing globalisation. It is determined by pushes that come either from above or from below: globalisation centralises and decentralises at the same time and its effects can be seen both in western nations and elsewhere (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). Essentially, globalisation is something that is happening to all of us independent of our wishes or our will (Bauman 1998).

There are several views on the intensity, extension and characteristics of globalisation, its social consequences and its conceptualisation. Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999) have summarised three main theoretical strands: hyperglobalizers, sceptics and transformationalists.

Hyperglobalizers include both neo-liberals and neo-marxists who argue that globalisation is a fully complete phenomenon and that it is bringing about the dissolution of national economies. For them, the world is a unique economic space characterised by interdependence and integration. This space has supplanted the nation-state and is dominated by market forces. From a neo-Marxist point of view:

> "The impersonal forces of world markets ... are now more powerful than the states to whom ultimate political authority over society and economy is supposed to belong. Where states were once the masters of markets, now it is the markets which, on many crucial issues, are the masters over the governments of states" (Strange 1996: 4).

However, between neo-liberals and neo-Marxists there is no agreement on what the consequences of globalisation are. While the former group sees the winning of individual autonomy and market forces over the state as a positive fact, the latter emphasises the negative consequences of this and the growth of new social and economic disparities (Held *et al.* 1999).

Sceptics do not agree on the dissolution of national economies and do not think that the current degree of international trade and investment is unprecedented. On the contrary, some of them suggest that nation-states still determine their own strategies and that what has been called globalisation is at best an increased internationalisation of economy (Hirst and Thompson 1996). According to Hirst and Thompson, a fully globalised economy is largely questionable and what is called globalisation is nothing but the exertion of the G3 regions' influence: the triad of Europe, Japan and the USA which controls most global trade and investments.

Transformationalists suggest that globalisation is a driving force in some of the rapid changes, the extensions and intensity of which is historically unprecedented. Unlike hyperglobalizers they emphasise the qualitative features of the globalisation process. Among others, Beck (1999, 2000) can be considered to adopt this standpoint. He suggests that globalisation is a fundamental change in the way of experiencing physical space. This is not only quantitative and does not only refer to the growth of economic trade, but also qualitative. It erodes our root experiences. Globalisation is a process through which the Nation-States and sovereignty are subordinated and deeply influenced by trans-national actors. In accordance with this view, the world society cannot be considered as an enormous mosaic of several national societies. Such an idea would be based on the principle of territoriality which is exactly what globalisation has brought into question, while the global society is a completely different entity with its own specificity in terms of trans-national networks spatial extension, temporal stability and density. As Beck (2000: 20) put it, the new characteristics of these networks erode nation-state bases and break their relationship with society:

> "So does globalisation conjure away distance. It means that people are thrown into transnational lifestyles that they often neither want nor understand – or, following Anthony Giddens's definition, it means acting and living (together) over distances, across the apparently separate worlds of national states, religions, regions and continents".

Therefore, transformationalists suggest that changes which occurred under globalisation must be related to the spatial-temporal dimension of human experience. Globalisation is the result of what Bauman (1998) calls the Great War of Independence from space, the final outcome of a process freeing the decision-making centres from territorial constraints.

This spatial compression, the dramatic closeness of different points on the terrestrial surface (Robertson 1992; Harvey 1989) has several implications and affects life in various ways. The ecological crises caused by affluence, such as the hole in the ozone and the greenhouse effect, or by poverty, such as the depletion of the tropical rainforest (Beck 2000), do not know frontiers and as such have been becoming ever more global. The development of information technologies and migration processes has increased the cultural flows through national borders and among populations. From a political point of view, if the nation-state has not completely disappeared, its sovereignty has dramatically reduced and autonomy jeopardised by local and trans-national entities. Today, governments are locked into "global, regional and multilayered systems of governance which they can barely monitor, let alone control" (Held *et al.* 1999). Therefore, world politics have become irreversibly polycentric (Beck 2000) and more individuals acting at a global level have been taking part in the international decision-making processes. Finally, economies have also been becoming increasingly global. Due to the dramatic development of communicative infrastructures and information technology the world economy is now able to work as a unit, in real time and on a world scale (Castells 1996).

Far from being a universal opportunity, globalisation has different speeds and creates new global hierarchies, forms of economic and cultural exploitation and environmental threats. Whether globalisation provides chances or condemns people very much depends on where they are located in the 'new geography of centrality and marginality' (Sassen 1998). This ambivalent character and its ability to generate either chances or new hierarchies can be fruitfully represented by two ideal-types: the tourist and the vagabond (Bauman 1993). Both of them move *through* space, have a futile relationship of sorts on a localised level and know that they will not stay where they are for long.

However, their experiences of space and extra-territoriality differ in several respects. While in their former lives it was a privilege, the freedom to move through the space depends on how much they can regard the experiences of extraterritoriality as a dependence and lack of freedom. It is not necessarily to choose either an itinerary or a destination. He is "pulled forward by hope untested, pushed from behind by hope frustrated" (Bauman 1993: 240). This clear metaphor depicts in a simple way the new divides and hierarchical lines that are crossing global society.

9.2. From international to global movements

As the development of modern nation-based movements brought together the growth of the nation state (Tilly 1982) globalisation is the new geo-political space for global movements. Hardt and Negri (2000) referring to the Empire, the constitutional order and political structure of globalisation, argue that struggles should look at this context which increases the potential for liberation and therefore is good *in itself*, although not *for itself*. As a consequence this new situation constitutes the background of new movements' action. Other scholars (della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht 1999) emphasise that the current context, whether we call it Empire or globalisation, is the 'political opportunity system' of many national and transnational social movements. Globalisation has deeply changed opportunities and although internationalism was a characteristic feature of many movements, there is a qualitative difference between the past and the present: the transnational social networks have been intensified, problems and targets often have a supranational relevance, civil society has assumed a global dimension. Therefore, we have to distinguish between international, world and global movements.

International movements involved nationally based collective actors connected to each other on the basis of common values and a shared solidarity and identity. They had a national identity, were organised at a national level and addressed issues that can mainly be addressed in national terms. International movements presupposed a well defined national state system, were made up of movements based in their own states with links and connections across

frontiers. The internationalist Socialist movement, both in its reformist and revolutionary positions, has been a key feature of European political thought (Holbraad 2003) and an example of an international actor. It refers to any organisational practices, political repertoires and ideological beliefs which rely on solidarity and tend to transcend national borders on the basis of universalistic principles. For the working class and socialist movements these practices were translated into activities of solidarity towards movements, 'fellow parties' and liberation struggles in industrialized and developing countries on the basis of universalistic principles and the egalitarian idea that class affinities should prevail over national diversities and develop a kind of transnational solidarity. However, the term internationalism logically depends on some prior concept of nationalism (Anderson 2002), either opposing or including it, the nation-state being its basic unit.

The world movements can be considered further developments of international/internationalist movements and defined as types of collective action occurring simultaneously and based on communication at an international level. The single segments of the world movements still have a national dimension, in that they address national issues and mobilise at a national level. The revolution of 1848 was an example of a world movement. It took place simultaneously in several European countries and had a common social and political basis. The aims of the movement were similar too: the popular sovereignty within the nations and of the nations (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989). Also the 1968 student protests were transnational in character. Their occurrence at global level was due to the intensification of the international circulation of people and ideas. This had been made possible by the new culture of travel among the younger generations and the new role of the media (Ortoleva 1988: 29-30).

Therefore, the world character of student protests was not assured by formalised organisational means, similar to the labour movement. Student organisational links were unstructured and based on the transmission of information, not on organized common strategies and very rarely on mobilization (like the international movements). Moreover, although the

student movement had a transnational character, it continued to be state-centred and based its actions on a national level. As Ortoleva (1988: 40) writes :

"The linguistic and cultural diversities, which were linked to the different nationalities and were often denied and rejected on ideological and psychological bases, continued to characterise the movements coming from different states, producing different political lines, historical references and self-images".

The intensification of globalisation processes has widened cross-national conflicts (della Porta and Kriesi 1999), increased the channels for the diffusion of protests and furthered the transnational character of social movements. These can be direct and based on interpersonal and inter-organizational ties and rely on the diffusion of information through the media. From this perspective the Internet has helped and improves the organisational capacities of collective protests and at the same time allows for the diffusion of information and news. The nation-state is no longer an exclusive arena and new possibilities have been opened up for social organisation. While international movements organized their mobilizations and targeted their objectives mainly at a national level, the mobilization context of trans-national movements has shifted to a new level, as the increasing presence of movement foreign activists in Chiapas, Seattle, Göteborg, Palestine, Genoa, Porto Alegre, Florence and the post-war Iraq testifies. The targets of these protests have also changed and have assumed a supranational character. They are no longer exclusively national governments; rather they range from regional to world organizations. Examples of this are the mobilization to introduce social issues to the Nice treaty, the demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle and the mobilizations against the G8 in Genoa. Likewise, organizational transnational contacts amongst local and national groups and associations are extensive and are quite stable, facilitated by diminished transport costs, quicker travel opportunities and the development of information technologies. Languages have changed too and reading documents and leaflets in different national idioms has become ever more common. This means that transnational social movements speak to a civil society which is not based at national level. Finally, transnational movements

address issues that transcend national borders, from the world peace to the flexibility of the labour market and from the global warming to the debt of developing countries.

The transnational social movements have assumed different attitudes in relation to the characteristics, targets and organisations of protests. During the eighties and nineties mobilisation relied mainly on counter-conferences that were organised in coordination with intergovernmental events and meetings of supranational economic institutions. These events point to global economic institutions as the main protagonists of inequality between north and south and as objectives of their protest. These counter-conferences faced the issues of human rights and the north-south divide but from different perspectives with regards transnational institutions (Pianta 2001), while protests and direct actions were in the background or totally absent. The cooperation between northern and southern civil society organisations started from the counter IMF and WB meeting in New York in 1990. Since that date the international networks further developed and consolidated along with the participation of activists and the radicalisation of protest strategies (Pianta 2001).

During the 'Battle of Seattle' on the evening of November 29th, 1999 the action strategies dramatically changed and assumed more unconventional forms. In several respects it represented a moment of discontinuity with the past. Protests against the WTO were in fact characterised by blockages, demonstrations and civil disobedience more than by parallel summits. They aimed to have the immediate and practical effect of deterring governmental delegates from taking part in the meetings of the Third Ministerial Conference of the organisation. These actions broke with traditional counter-conferences and were carried out "entirely outside the conventional arena of orderly protests and white paper activism and the timid bleats of the professional leadership of big labour and environmentalism" (St. Clair 1999: 82).

The alter-globalisation movement that emerged from the 'Battle of Seattle' was not spontaneous but the result of deepening transnational ties among groups, civil society organisations and individuals that occurred throughout the nineties (Pianta 2003). These ties could be informal, diffused, made into routine or

based on a higher degree of formality (Smith 2001). These transnational mobilizing structures have intensified over the years making the growth of a global social movement, which operates across borders and overcoming the national bases of past international collective actors, possible. What has characterised this movement is that its protests are no longer state-centred and targets issues and the setting of actions have assumed a global level. Notwithstanding the apparent prevalence in Northern countries participation of the South has been growing. The period between 1988 and 2003 shows that the majority of parallel summits and protests, 45%, took place in Europe, while North America accounted for 19% and Southern countries, 38%. However if we consider the year, 2002—2003, we can see a rather different picture and can note that the majority of summits took place in the South (Pianta and Silva 2003).

To conclude, we can argue that the intensification of trans-national networks and the decline of the nation-state as a basic unit of action strategies, decision-making progress, targets and issues of protests have allowed the transition from an international to the global dimension of social movements.

9.3. A critical view of globalization

As we have seen in the chapter on political concepts the Disobedient activists and neo-workerist intellectuals have organically reflected on the political sphere of globalisation, empire, civil disobedience, and multitudes, rather than rely upon economic theory alone. They have assumed globalisation to be an ineluctable fact involving both the social and economic dimension and argued that it has changed the characteristics of inequalities and hierarchies, both among individuals and geographical areas. According to the Disobedient activists, globalisation does not only refer to the sphere of world trade but also points to a unique productive social space. It is what makes segments of production located in different parts of the globe and connected to each other in a network possible. This global productive space is anything but homogeneous and linear. On the contrary, it is described as being characterised by discontinuities and hierarchies among places and social groups, following

chaotic dynamics and conflicts and continually crossed by flows of commodities, financial products and the labour force:

"What do we mean by the term globalisation? This term does not only refer to a single trade space, but mostly the creation of a common social and productive space. The fact that the world has become a common trade area does not mean that it is homogeneous. On the contrary, its making has followed chaotic dynamics and fractal developmental lines. Globalisation has several layers and plans, it is structured through the overlapping of networks and 'networks of networks' where places and non-places draw, progressively but not linearly, a hierarchical space come across by goods, financial products, communication and labour-power" (Caccia 2000: 72).

Globalisation has overcome and restructured the geographical world tripartition of centre, periphery and semi-periphery: "the passage from imperialism to empire makes the traditional hierarchies of the international division of labour and the asymmetries between core and peripheral countries problematic. This is why the global labour force, its multiplicity, resists the flows of value on a global scale and the unequal redistribution of wealth" (Marazzi 2000: 79).

From this perspective globalisation has unified the world, it has created an economic universal order but it has not reduced poverty and class differences. Nowadays extreme poverty and third world conditions can be found in the most industrialised countries. Meanwhile huge financial wealth can be accumulated in poor and developing countries:

"Starvation is possible in the last asshole of the world, Burkina Faso and the forests of the Andes, for example, as well as – malnutrition, exploitation and oppression – in the Los Angeles ghettos or in the Paris *banlieus*. The third World no longer exists or better it is everywhere like imperial command" (Negri 2000: 91)

This fractal and unified space has become the new social and political scene of social movement protests. Globalisation and empire reduce the autonomous political power of the nation-states. Of course, national entities do not disappear but lose their importance in regulating the internal economy and

social relations. This means that struggles and conflicts which target national objectives are no longer possible. As a consequence, according to the Disobedient activists, collective action has to overcome state borders. Globalisation as the new dimension of global capitalism represents an opportunity for social movements and they have to deal with it in an open way. As Negri (2000: 97) put it after 'the battle of Seattle': "the Left wing must recognise itself in globalisation. It has to be interpreted and viewed as the inevitable and just horizon of social struggles and conquests. The general objectives of the struggle for what is 'common' can be posed only within mondialisation".

Therefore, the MD has criticised groups like Attac and the magazine *Le Monde Diplomatique* that nostalgically regret the regulative function of the nation-states. The European movement should abandon its national view and not yearn for the century of the nation-state. Democratic instances cannot be found on the terrain of the nation-states but at an European level: "if Europe ... wants it to be a wedge of regulation with social aims in (the) global capitalism, exporting juridical values and instances of universal protection, it must not rebuild hateful and unbearable borders within itself, and neither revitalise the impotent 'holy' power national governments" (Global 2002).

From the perspective of the Disobedient activists, the alter-globalisation movement is not against globalisation and does not express any attempt to resist current processes regressively. The new-global movement assumes the world economy's planetary dimensions as the space of social and political action and the context of current and coming conflicts (Caccia 2000). This is possible because the protagonists of the battle of Seattle were not, or not only, the victims of globalisation but those subjects who contributed to make gobalisation possible: the manipulators of symbols, the new economy and network workers, the precarious employees of both labour and capital intensive services. All these manipulators of symbols generate the common language of rebellion that connect and compose the social interests of new and old subjects: information technology engineers and *campesinos* from Chiapas and Brasil,

communitarian workers and steel workers from the northern industrial towns of the USA.

These protesters call into question two specific aspects of globalisation: cultural codes and allocation of resources, the control over which we can call bio-codes and globalisation in a free market. First, the movement has mobilised against the 'bio-powers', which means the control operated by power over life itself and the regulation of social *bios* from its interior. The Seattle slogan 'for trees and for jobs' claims the defence of the bio-codes from the manipulation of the bio-power. At stake are the genetic manipulation and the control over human life and its sources. Therefore, what is new in this movement is its struggle against the colonisation of the human DNA by the market (Caccia 2000).

Secondly, the movement is not against globalisation in general terms as many scholars have argued[1]. Although, a lot of heterogeneous views cohabit within the movement the Disobedient activists contest globalisation as a 'free market' - "managed by multinationals as the only way for a successful future: the local barriers to business are cancelled, it accompanies the Welfare state's dismantling and the circulation of free financial flows, while they build strength, in fact, they obstruct the free circulation of people" (Yellow Block, 2001).

This means that the movement of movements did not contest globalisation in itself but rather the domination of the economic capitalist dimension over the social sphere and the subordination of all aspects of social life to the economy.

9.4. The Disobedient activists: movement in the movement

As we will see in the following pages, the MD and the CSO *Rivolta* took part actively in the global movement for democracy and social justice. They enthusiastically welcomed the unexpected upsurge of the movement and some weeks after the incidents in Seattle the *Rivolta* printed a number of postcards showing some scenes from the street battles between protesters and police alongside the phrase 'we love Seattle'. They saw this movement as the beginning of a new phase of struggle.

However, it arrived unexpectedly and the preparations for mobilisation in Seattle were viewed with scepticism. When mobilisation was convened in Seattle in 1999 the movement looked at it as the umpteenth ritual protest without any chance of influencing the decision-making process. In an article on the days in Seattle, Luca Casarini (2000), an activist of the Venetian MD and spokesman of the 'Rivolta' wrote:

> "I did not follow the preparations for this enormous protest very much. I could not imagine such a big thing. After a number of experiences in Italy and Europe, I was used to thinking of these mobilisations against super-national organisations, such as GATT, IMF etc. as events which resemble each other: on one side the counter-summit, a sort of shadow conference where the NGOs met up to press the official decisions; on the other side the 'anti-imperialists, a few people who usually imitated elements of the 'class war' that there would have been a need for the world capital and its 'command structures'. These two parts usually did not talk to each other at all while summits of the main global powers took place without any major problems. It looked like a plot that had already been written. This is why I had read the news on the Internet without paying any real attention. I did not understand that there was a certain turmoil in the net. I should have understood that the Americans, those of Art and revolution from San Francisco and of the Rain Forest were serious. They were not just simple protests. The protesters wanted to shut down the conference".

Soon after, the first news came from Seattle reporting furious street battles between the police and demonstrators, the movement activists realised that what was going on was not only a ritual counter-summit of civil society but something more concrete.

This section will consider the participation of the movement and the *Rivolta* to some of the main global mobilisations which took place between Amsterdam in 1997 and the no-global war campaign in 2003. All of these mobilisations were characterised by a different agenda which showed the ability of the movement to raise issues and develop systemic political views. As a part of the

CSOs they went to Amsterdam to raise the issue of social rights for the post-Fordist generations and the construction of a new welfare state at a European level. As MTB they demonstrated in Prague against the neo-liberal economy and its support of the IMF-WB. In December 2000 they also attempted to reach Nice on board the 'global action express', they brought with them the constituent articles of a Social Charter to substitute those of the Institutional European Charter. In July 2001 they moved to Genoa against Empire and in 2002-2003 they took part in the global campaigns against the permanent war.

9.4.1. Amsterdam 1997: the border-breaking train

In a way, if there was a turning point for the North-Eastern CSOs, it was the mobilisation against the European Council's conference in Amsterdam on June 16th and 17th 1997, which was going to approve the Treaty of Amsterdam. From that date onwards this movement network started to consider Europe and the trans-national space as a new chance to generate conflict (Caruso 2004). The mobilisation in Amsterdam was not the first time a super-national institution had been targeted and other protests had taken place during the eighties and nineties. Furthermore, in other circumstances and specifically in their theoretical review *Riff Raff* the North-eastern CSOs had already discussed the role of the European Union and the need to move towards Europe. However, with the border-breaking train, which brought several thousand activists from Naples, Rome, Milan and Veneto to Amsterdam, the trans-national mobilisation assumed a concrete dimension. Although most of the activists were prevented from taking part in the demonstrations by strict security measures and by a massive police presence, which stopped them from leaving the train (Caruso 2004), Amsterdam was a turning point and Europe started to assume an increasing relevance either as a target or as a geo-political area of conflict.

In a discussion paper written before the mobilisation in Amsterdam[2] the movement of the North-East assessed the influence of post-Fordism on the labour market and put forward the proposal of regulated income as a possible agenda for struggle by the movement. It starts by criticising the traditional left

which is not ready to admit that the industrial society based on labour has come to an end and that a new social contract based on universal basic income is needed. It should prioritise "not the right to work, but the right to well-being, existence, life and happiness for all people, as it was written in the revolutionary constitution at the origins of modernity"[3]. This new pact should assume the crisis of society founded on work as a conclusive one and therefore focus on a simple agenda: the generalised reduction of working hours, the development of social and cooperative economies and the institution of a universal basic income.

> "It is of fundamental importance to start from a concept of universal basic income as a new universal citizenship right. ... The right to perceive income should not be subordinate to the participation of the person to forms of salaried or assisted work, which is absurd and useless. The universal basic income should be based on a redefinition of those activities that can be considered useful for the collectivity. These activities do not rely on the market and should produce use-values instead of exchange-values, they should serve the needs of local communities and not the state bureaucracies, they should employ and use local wealth and resources in order to improve local living standards, the cooperation and solidarity from below, together with territories and communities, and help the poorer populations"[4].

According to this document universal basic income can be sustained through a kind of welfare state. It should be based on a social economy that overcomes the state-centrism of traditional welfare systems and rely upon freely federated local communities. The document concludes by proposing a general reduction of working hours.

Two more aspects seem particularly interesting in this document. First, it assumes that the local welfare policies are determined at a European level and therefore social movements must act somewhere between local and global levels. The nation state has exhausted its function in regulating social and economic processes and has been now superseded by supranational institutions, such as the European Union. Therefore European institutions have become the

target of movement strategies of action; demands must be negotiated and addressed mainly at a European level. However, movements have to organise social subjects at a local level connecting local and global action. Only the integration between local conflicts and global targets can influence the decision-making processes and build new welfare institutions: "conflicts and movements that act on the continental scene will win, also at a partial level, only if they link the 'local' dimension to objectives that are super-determined by European policies, communicating with self-managed social realities and experiences from the whole continent"[5].

The focus on the link between the local and regional dimension is the response to ethno-nationalist parties of the North that promoted a populist polity based on the defence of common ethnic roots and the exclusion and hostility towards migrants.

Secondly, the document emphasises the role of social economy in the building of a new kind of welfare state. According to this view the social economy can represent a project of alternative society where work has been radically transformed and has lost its character of pain and sufferance and become a freely conducted activity. This kind of social economy is based on cooperation among members of the society and aims to empower individuals.

9.4.2. From Prague to Genoa travelling around Europe

The wide range and types of issues raised by the movement highlight its anti-systemic character, whilst its presence in mobilisations external to Italy reflects the assumption that for the CSOs of the North-East, who in the meantime have become the MTB, their context is no longer national. Global issues, trans-national demonstrations and institutional summits have become occasions to gain visibility and to connect with others. Some of the main stages of the global transformation of this movement area were represented in the demonstration against racism in Paris, in April 1999, the mobilisations against genetic engineering in Genoa, May 25th 2000, the 'Global Action Express' to Prague in September 23rd 2000, the European demonstrations in Nice in December 6-7 2000, and the protests against the G8 in Genoa in July 2001. All these

initiatives shared the assumption that Europe is the most proximal and direct place in the process of globalisation. According to the MTB, social movements can give their own direction to globalisation, counterbalancing the increasing power of international institutions. As they wrote in a discussion document before the demonstrations against the IMF and WB in Prague, "from the point of view of market and capitalist interests Prague represents the attempt to widen the economic and political space towards the East. However, this space can be retraced and crossed using antagonistic subjectivity, which is in the condition of redrawing the charter of universal rights"[6].

In September 2000 the MTB organised the 'Global Action Express' that left Rome on the 23rd and collected individuals, members of the CSOs and other groups in Florence, Bologna, Padua, and Mestre and arrived in Prague on the 25th, having crossed Austria. They went to Prague to 'liquidate' the IMF and participated in the Yellow block march dressing in white overalls and wearing protection made from rubber foam and cardboard. Their action was mainly symbolic in contrast to the Blue Block, which started to throw stones and Molotov cocktails as soon as they came close to the Czech police. The liquidation "was to take place via water pistols and water bombs and was coupled with the release of hundreds of balloons bearing the slogan 'liquidate IMF'" (Chesters and Welsh 2004: 323).

In December 2000 the MTB organised a Global Action Express to reach Nice in France, where the European Council was going to proclaim the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The movement was not prejudicially against the constitution of Europe as a political entity but were critical of two specific aspects of it. First, the content of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights was extremely weak. By lacking a clear position on war, it ratified the Europe's subordinate position to Empire. Furthermore, the right to enterprise and business is sustained at the expense of citizens' rights, which were granted by the North-European models of the welfare state, and social protection measures such as the basic income or the *minimun* wage: "the fundamental Charter has a neo-liberal framework. Within it many civil conquests of the past are sometimes present in a very reduced way, while in many other cases they have

been completely forgotten"[7]. Moreover, according to the MTB, the Fundamental Charter chooses the *ius sanguinis* instead of the *ius soli* in entitling rights, so that only people who are born as European citizens are in the position to enjoy citizens' rights. Finally, the criticism of the content of the Charter was also motivated by the lack of any sensibility towards the environment, its safeguard and the threat of bio-diversity.

Second, the decision making process that generated the Charter were characterised by the lack of participation from below and democratic involvement. The European constitution is seen as an imposition, the outcome of decisions being taken from above, following a process which is alien to the constituent tradition of the continent "where the constitutions were always designed and written by constituent assemblies elected through universal suffrage"[8].

In opposition to an Europe of technocratic bureaucracies without any political substance, the MTB reclaims a 'political Europe' where its citizens could take part in constituent processes and foresee the enlargement of rights and freedom for all the residents and not only for the citizens of the European countries[9]. Therefore, the MTB turned the perspective of a technocratic Europe upside down declaring themselves to be in favour of the construction of an European political space, which could enlarge the borders of new legalities and new rights. This process should rely on a widened participation of people, assume peace as the main means to solving international controversies, grant citizens' rights to migrants and to new social subjects risen from the decline of the Fordist regime and take environmental emergencies into account.

9.4.3. Genoa July 2001: the end of civil disobedience

The protests against the G8 general meeting in Genoa, July 2001, and the events that occurred in the week between the 16th and the 21st of July were probably the most dramatic for the global movement thus far and marked the end of the MTB and their transformation into the MD. They were preceded by an intensive and drawn out mass media campaign that forecasted a scenario composed of provocations, clashes and violence from organised groups. This

campaign aimed to terrorise those who were going to take part in the demonstrations and to prepare the scene for the legitimacy of a particularly harsh military intervention. Almost the entire old city centre was locked up in a cage made of concrete barriers and iron grids which prevented the demonstrators from contesting the G8 meeting. However, this did not stop thousands of people from taking part in the forums and demonstrations that occurred that week. While the first four days were characterised by debates, forums, concerts and one peaceful demonstration, the last two days were marked by a complete change of scene. The policing of protest was characterised by the escalation in the use of coercive means (della Porta and Reiter 2003). For two days, Friday the 20th and Saturday the 21st, the Italian police and *carabinieri*, repeatedly attacked thousands of men and women, beating and shooting them with bullets and teargas. One demonstrator was killed by the *carabinieri*, and hundreds were injured and arrested. Many of them were taken to the police station of *Bolzaneto*, in the periphery of Genoa. There the police agents beat and stripped detainees, threatened them with sexual abuse and forced them to shout slogans in favour of fascism and Mussolini. On the night of the 21st, hundreds of policemen besieged the Diaz school, which served as a night asylum/sanctuary and meeting place for demonstrators, entered and wildly beat all the people who were inside. It was a planned and systematic repression against the whole movement and an attempt to shut down an experience that since Seattle had gone well beyond any possible expectations in terms of turnout and continuity of mobilisation.

Similar to other movements, the White Overalls also took part in the protests against the G8 summit. According to them, the G8 was an unelected organism contrary to any democratic principle - "the G8 meeting is not legitimised by any international norm or deal. It is an informal organism which imposes and disposes economic policies without any confrontation or mediation"[10] – and they were accused of imposing a new political and economic order, "a single world, a single thought, a single ideology ruled by money, profits and the market of commodities"[11]. According to the MTB, "the world is their empire, they are the Emperors and billions of human beings are simple vassals"[12]. To

this new world order the White Overalls and their "army of dreamers, poor and children, *Indios* of the world, women and men, gay and lesbians, artists and workers, the young and the elderly people, whites, blacks, yellows and reds will disobey" and declare war 'formally' but symbolically[13].

The counter-demonstrations in Genoa were prepared by an intensive communicative campaign made up of 'formal' declarations, interviews and demonstrative actions. The 'Declaration of war on masters of injustice and misery' and the subsequent 'Declaration of peace to the town of Genoa'[14], a number of interviews and magniloquent declarations made by the spokespersons of the movement, the setting up of a website and forums of discussion aimed at engaging a communicative battle and gaining more visibility. In the political documents the use of language was extremely sophisticated, rich in symbolic images and far from the cryptic and obscure rhetoric of the early eighties. It was a clear narrative, resembling the Sub-Comandante Marcos evocative poetic-style. It aimed to talk to the 'multitudes of the planet Earth' and to build a consensus around acts of civil disobedience[15]. If the kind of language they have adopted can be considered an indicator of openness or closure towards civil society, this period was the most open for this movement network coming from the cryptic forms of communication and political isolation of the MA of eighties.

The MTB either used the media or were a media to communicate the content/context of their protest. They instrumentally used the mass media in order to break the wall of communication and aimed to reach this objective through provocations and actions with a strong communicative impact. The use of metaphors, for instance *'Braveheart'*, the 'declaration of war on the masters of world' and the idea of employing 'rat-men' to dig subterranean routes into Genoa were some examples of communicative provocations aiming to gain coverage on the front pages of the newspapers. To the critics who accused them of using 'Hollywood language', they replied: "we use the winning languages, those that go directly to the people. It is not by chance that Hollywood wins. This is the society of communication. We cannot ignore its codes" (Pedemonte 2001). The white overall is not a kind of shared 'uniform' to display

worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment and to gain immediate recognition anywhere in the world (Tilly 2004). Most importantly it is a symbol, a communicative code and therefore a media *in itself*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, on one hand it allows the activists to communicate their invisibility in terms of citizenship rights and political representation. On the other when the activists of the CSOs and *Ya Basta!* don their white overalls they gain a new level of visibility and can be immediately identified as a specific entity with its own identity.

The MTB was part of the Genoa Social Forum, the main organiser of protests that included some hundreds of groups, associations, and unions and a wide range of political and ideological beliefs, from Catholics to communists. The shared framework was characterised by the protest for global rights and democracy and by the attempt to stop the G8 from having their conference (Andretta *et al.* 2003). However, according to the MTB unity should not cancel out the differences between groups and within their practices. They argued that the demonstrators should apply the Quebec City model where different groups in terms of beliefs and practices agreed on a common objective, which was to attack the wall that divided demonstrators and the summit: "in Quebec City there was not any idle, useless, annoying controversy on violence and non-violence. As the objective was indicated (the attack on the 'shaming wall') a dialectic started on the different ways of carrying it out"[16]. The same should have been done in Genoa: an agreement on the common objective to violate the 'red zone' and let people and groups freely act according to their practices.

Therefore the White Overalls went to Genoa to actively siege the forbidden area and eventually invade it. They arrived at this decision after a public consultation on the example of Zapatista movement. The public consultation was supposed to involve any meeting and street rally, party cells and associations, squats and trade unions, newsgroups and the Web, and was based on three questions:

"1) Provided that the forms and the tactics of the 'active siege' are considered legitimate and right, will you support disobedience on the ban against demonstrations and the enclosure of forbidden areas? 2) Do

you think that mass invasion of the forbidden area is a viable common purpose? 3) Do you agree that people need collective self-defence in order to keep the police off, avoid man-to-man fights, degeneration, beating-ups and mass arrests?"[17].

The purpose of civil disobedience was to break through the barriers that fences off the area where the G8 was to take place and enter the 'red zone'. However, the MTB were aware that police would outnumber demonstrators and would employ any necessary means to prevent them from blocking the meeting. What came out of some informal conversations and meetings was that entering the forbidden area for some dozens of metres would have been the only possible thing to do and would have been considered a political success. They did not foresee that police and *carabinieri* would have been ordered to keep the demonstrators and specifically the MTB far from the delimitated area and would have employed any possible means of doing this.

At the end of the consultation some thousands of people expressed their opinion and therefore self-defended civil disobedience was the protest strategy chosen in order to violate the off limit area. The plan was for them to be unarmed and confrontational at the same time, the idea being to use legitimate and shared means of self-defence, helmets and other protective materials, in order to keep the riot squads off, but not to use active violence. The central event of the protest was, on July the 20th, when some twenty thousand people left from the *Carlini*, the stadium where the MTB had set up their headquarters, and moved towards the centre of Genoa (Chiesa 2001). In order to resist the attacks of the police and fulfil their aim they prepared protective clothing using a variety of materials and built enormous plexiglas shields. Giulietto Chiesa's (2001: 40) journalistic description of the rally was extremely effective:

"For me and for everybody else the head of the rally was something absolutely new. Massive two-meter high shields of thick semitransparent plastic were set upon wheels - they were in fact too heavy to be transported – and linked to each other...At least two thousand people, all of them were very young, were protected like American football players in films, for example in Rollerball ... All of

them had a helmet on their head. Arms and legs, elbows, knees and various joints were covered with thick pieces of foam-rubber. It is a small army of warriors. But they are strange warriors. In fact, they do not have any weapons … The order to 'not bring any offensive arms' was respected".

Despite the fact that the organisers declared their demonstrative and peaceful intentions, police and *carabinieri* suddenly and savagely attacked the street rally aiming to wipe it out with furious charges, the use of jeeps and armoured cars. What the MTB had planned for some months before became impossible. The battle lasted several hours and soon the civil disobedience was turned into active defence. Many thousands of teargas bullets were shot from vans and helicopters. The White Overalls replied with what they found on site: stones, bricks, bars, sticks and bottles in an attempt to defend themselves from these attacks and to go beyond and try to reach the red zone. Dozens of MTB were arrested and many others were injured. During the clashes a young demonstrator was shot dead by the *carabinieri*. The civil disobedience was wiped out by the furious force of Italian police and probably by the calculations of the G8 countries. The heightening of the level of confrontation and the massive use of firing arms made civil disobedience ineffective and impossible to put in practice.

As we have already said, the Battle of Genoa marked the end of the MTB and the transition from civil to social disobedience: "*indeed, Genoa changed the nature of the discourse, it made us question ourselves us and forced us to debate the meaning of disobedience before and after Genoa*" (Interview 39). Genoa was perceived by the movement as a radical change in the policing of protests. It was a turning point that witnessed the transition to a military tactic in dealing with protests and showed the inadequacy of protected and confrontational civil disobedience in front of a harsher repression. At the same time the events in Genoa highlighted how flexible the practice of civil disobedience was, how much it could be shaped through interaction with state repression and how far it was from classical non-violent forms of protest, as an activist of the *Rivolta* says:

"Our reasoning after Genoa changed a lot because when you see that you peacefully and without offensive instruments aim to violate the forbidden area and the state replies by massacring you ... In Genoa the problem was not only to protect your head but to keep them far enough away because if they got close to your back they could kill you. We saw it. Therefore, in those circumstances the problem of disobedience was not to wear protection but to have as many stones as possible and things to throw against them to keep them far enough away. Thousands of people who threw stones against the carabinieri *in* Via Tolemaide *were disobedient. Burning an armoured-van was disobedience because when they approach you at 80 km per hour they want to kill you. Stopping an armoured car and making it offensive, by burning or not burning it, preventing it from killing people is disobedience"* (Interview 41).

Although the MTB claimed the right to resist the police charges, they also argued that accepting armed confrontation would have been political suicide. In an interview to the communist newspaper *Il Manifesto*, the spokesperson of the *Rivolta* argued:

> "In Genoa there were all the security forces, the army, the intelligence, of the most economically and militarily powerful countries of the world. Our movement cannot face that military power. We would be crushed within three months. We must find a third way between those who just witness their refusal of globalisation and who choose symbolic gestures, like smashing a bank" (Vecchi 2001).

The 'third way' after Genoa will imply the partial abandonment of protected civil disobedience at trans-national summits. It will be based on social disobedience and the return to the 'territories', or the local dimension, in addressing global issues such as the 'permanent war'.

9.4.4. The no global-war campaign

What happened in Genoa demonstrated that a kind of protected and confrontational civil disobedience was no longer possible, while the events in New York September 11th, the following attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq and

the worsening of the conflict in Palestine showed the new features of war. First, the state of war has become permanent. It is not a transient or contingent event, nor is it linked to inter-imperialistic dynamics but it is a permanent state of exception. Secondly, war is global and has now been extended to all regions of the planet, from Chiapas to Afghanistan, from Palestine to Iraq. Thirdly, as a consequence of its global character the borders between what it is internal and external to a state and between war and police action have therefore become indeterminate (Negri 2002). The lack of any distinction leads to the transformation of war apparatus and its presence anywhere on the planet. Armies have taken on an ever more police type function and police have been transformed into armies (De Giorgi 2002). For example, the detachment of *carabinieri Tuscania*, which was definitively turned into a branch of the army under the Centre-left government, were employed to preserve public order both in Genoa or in a war situation such as in Somalia and Kosovo (Bascetta 2003). Finally, the situation of permanent war aims to build a new political order. It overcomes old national rights and builds a new imperial constitution. As a consequence, the war is not only imperialistic but aims to control primary sources and exploit labour forces. It takes over resources but also forces regimes to change, it shapes the global environment and where it intervenes it reconstructs the political order (Hardt 2002).

The MTB, that in the meantime was turned into the *Laboratorio dei Disobbedienti* in October 2001 and *Movimento Disobbediente* during the national meeting in Bologna on January 12th 2002, established two main campaigns to stop the global war: Action for Peace in Palestine in 2001 and 2002 and *Trainstopping* in Italy in January and February 2003. The solidarity campaign Action for Peace was organised by *Ya Basta!* in coordination with a number of Italian groups, associations and unions, and with Palestinian and Israeli peace groups. It was based on 'diplomacy from below' aiming to substitute passivity and idleness of the so-called 'international community': "this campaign starts from the direct protagonism of the international civil society which is playing that role which is not played by the official international community"[18]. The difference with similar campaigns of the past

is in that this was in part based in Palestine and brought some dozens of activists from the *Rivolta* and other CSOs to the occupied territories and Jerusalem. Local organisations played a fundamental role and most of the actions were facilitated by contacts with local groups that had become familiar with the MTB and their action strategies through the media:

"We knew that there was a group in Palestine that had adopted strategies which were inspired by the White Overalls. We had already overcome the phase of the White Overalls but we thought that if there was a group that mobilised like us it would be right to network with them. Anyway, it was not easy at all" (Interview 37).

Action for Peace consisted of a number of demonstrative actions carried out in the occupied territories over the Christmas period of 2001 and 2002 and over Easter in 2002 and in the boycotting of Israeli goods and companies in order to 'stop occupation and stop apartheid':

"On the shores of Mediterranean sea, apartheid has been becoming a real fact for thousands of people whose fundamental human rights have been violated every day. This brutal horizon is part of the global war started on September the 11th. That is why it is a central body acting as one, breaking the common places and disobeying apartheid. Shall organise a permanent presence in Palestine along with Palestinian civil society and Israelians who oppose the occupation. Shall start a campaign to boycott economic and political relations with Israel"[19].

The campaign was also based on the boycotting of economic and political relations between Italy and Israel. Consumers were invited to not buy Israeli goods and a number of direct actions took place against some Venetian and Tuscan branches of Caterpillar Companies. These actions aimed "to condemn the illegal use of bulldozers provided at low cost to the Israel state in order to devastate Palestinian territories"[20].

Trainstopping was the second campaign and the name is an efficacious periphrasis of the film *Trainspotting*. The campaign against the second US war on Iraq in the winter of 2003 did not rely on mass demonstrations but on civil disobedience carried out on a territorial and local basis. It consisted of an

attempt to prevent the 'trains of death' from carrying tanks and other military instruments from bases in Northern Italy to the front line, going through a port on the Tyrrhenian Sea, in order to be employed in the war in Iraq. This campaign was based on the occupation of train stations and the blocking of railway tracks, invasions of military airports and the boycotting of activities connected to the US army:

> "The war can be disobeyed through concrete actions and the use of our bodies with the aim of hampering the bloody mechanism of war. In order to stop the war and build a new world we have to violate the unjust laws and to build a new order from below corresponding to fundamental human rights"[21].

Although it took place in several regions of the country, it was mainly focused on Tuscany and Veneto where two of the most crucial NATO bases are located, Camp Darby in the province of Pisa and Aviano in the province of Vicenza. A number of demonstrative actions were carried out and 'sanctions from below' took place along with the stopping of trains. On February the 13th 2003, two days before the global demonstrations in which about one hundred million people took place worldwide, premeditated actions took place in Rome and Padua. In the Italian capital about one hundred Disobedient activists invaded Ciampino airport in an attempt to stop aircraft from landing or taking off. In Padua a number of Disobedient activists came from Veneto and blocked the market that officially refurnishes the American aviators based in Aviano. According to the MD, these actions did not stop the war, but they could slow its mechanisms and build a wider consensus on peace issues.

These campaigns made the MD activists consider themselves as a political force raising general issues and confronting them with state institutions and superpowers. Therefore, a few months later, during the national meeting of the Disobedient activists on May 18th 2003, an activist of the North-East network stated with a strong emphasis: "when I was trying to stop the trains I strongly believed that we could stop the war. We must leave all the other evaluations to intellectuals". This can be taken to mean two things. First these actions were not only symbolic but their purpose was to concretely contribute to stopping

the countdown to the war. Second, this campaign put the MD at the level of a political subject negotiating and dealing with other political forces. The Disobedient activists and the *Rivolta* can no longer be regarded solely as a youth movement but they belong to the family of political movements (Tilly 2004) targeting national and super-national institutions.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have described the participation of the *Rivolta* in the global movement. As we have seen the *Rivolta* took part in the protests as a node of a network of the CSOs and its contribution to this campaign cannot be considered separately from what the network did. We have seen that the making of a certain areas of the CSOs into a global movement has come across three different moments. The first was the mobilisation in Amsterdam in 1997. At that time the new global movement had not yet come to a head and the potentiality of globalisation for social movements was still largely unknown. The mobilisation in Amsterdam was an European event, involved European actors, and was part of the campaign for more socially sustainable European institutions. In a way, for the White Overalls and Disobedient activists this was the starting point of the globalisation of protest. The second was characterised by the cycle of protests that started in Seattle in November 1999. This was the beginning of the development of a global movement. This movement has been geographically mobile, it has a shared frame, identity and values, alternating protest and public discussion and targeting trans-national political and economic institutions. The CSOs and the *Rivolta* took part actively and massively organising cross border trains to Nice and Prague and a massive presence in Genoa. A small representation of the *Rivolta* went also to Chiapas, Quebec City, Porto Alegre and Argentina. The third was the no-global war campaign, which was an example of the combination between local action and global targets and issue. Veneto was one of the epicentres of the campaign and the activists of the *Rivolta* were widely active and organised some *Trainstopping*, student demonstrations and pickets outside markets in an

attempt to clampdown the war mechanism. The *Rivolta* also contributed actively to the Action for Peace campaign in Palestine in 2001 and 2002.

Although with different extension and intensity, these campaigns deepened the global character of the Disobedient CSOs. This chapter has demonstrated that the MD have taken part in the transnationalisation of collective action. This means that the action has been coordinated internationally by movement actors and has targeted international institutions or other states. The mobilisations analysed in these pages had a transnational dimension because they were organised by transnational civic and movement networks at a global level and targeted super-national institutions or foreign states. Furthermore, these events were also marked by transnationalisation of the protest scene and by a cross-border mobilisation.

[1] See for example Amartya Sen (2003).

[2] Discussion paper: Arsenale Sherwood, Associazione Difesa di Lavoratori and Melting dei Centri sociali Nord-Est, 'Marce europee contro la disoccupazione, il precariato, l'esclusione sociale: contributo alla discussione', Padua, 1997.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Discussion document: Yellow Block, 'Praga 2000: l'Europa dei nuovi diritti o l'Europa dell'Impero', 2000.

[7] Discussion document: Ya Basta!, '6-7 Dicembre Nizza: contro la carta dell'impero costruiamo l'Europa dei diritti', Bologna, 2000.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Casarini, L. (2001), Memoriale sui fatti di Genova. Document presented at the parliamentary commission on the events occurred in Genoa from 16 to 22 July 2001.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Press release: Tute Bianche per l'Umanità contro il Neoliberismo, 'Declaration of war on masters of injustice and misery', Genoa, 26 May, 2001.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Press release: Tute Bianche per l'Umanità contro il Neoliberismo, 'Declaration of peace to the town of Genoa', Genoa, 13 June, 2001.

[15] In order to understand the role of communication it should not be undervalued that the ghost-writers behind most of the White Overall documents were the collective of writers hidden behind the names Luther Blisset/Wu Ming.

[16] Discussion document: Beppe, C. & Wu Ming Yi, 'Considerazioni da Quebec City (utili per Genova)', New York 23 April 2001.

[17] Discusssion document: Ya Basta! and Movimento delle Tute Bianche, 'An address to the civil society, and all the people we have met in these months of travel, those who love us and those who despise us, the brothers and sisters who are going to be in Genoa', 2001.

[18] Ya Basta! (2003) Stop occupazione! stop apartheid! boicottiamo i prodotti israeliani! 2003 http://www.yabasta.it/palestina/index.htm.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Discussion document: Movimento delle/dei Disobbedienti, 'Disobbedire alla Guerra', 13 February 2003.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have investigated the MD and the CSO *Rivolta*. This movement has been interpreted as a proactive and multidimensional entity, one involved in an attempt to enlarge the limits of democracy, to extend social rights, and promote a different distribution of economic resources. In this concluding chapter, the main findings of the research and theoretical discussion will be re-examined and the character of the *Rivolta* activists and the concept of the *Rivolta* as a political entrepreneur will be expanded.

The first chapter provided a theoretical background to the study as a whole and dealt with the theory and the notion of social movements. I have seen that the idea of social movement occupies a marginal position in classical sociology. Social movements have long been regarded as symptoms of a malfunctioning society or as a kind of deviant and irrational behaviour. Although CBT attempted to consider social movements as a specific object of study, they were still viewed as a kind of adaptive behaviour or as the result of social disorganisation.

To make the limits of traditional approaches clear, a number of theories have shown that collective movements are not merely an attempt to resist social change. More specifically, RMT highlights that social movements do not rely on the aggrieved and frustrated population but rather on rational and organised people. The approach of the POST stresses the importance of political environment in determining the uprisings of collective protest movements and the interaction between social movements and the institutional context. The NSM perspective, which is also influenced by the struggles of the sixties and seventies, suggests that conflicts are no longer aimed at the material sphere of

production but have become culturally based challenges. The Cultural approach argues that culture is a 'tool kit' through which people shape their social identity and their own experiences. The first chapter also provided a definition of social movements based on these theories and on three specific elements. A social movement is a kind of collective action that adopts an organisational network structure, and as such involves individuals and organisations who share a common identity and engage in conflicts that test the limits and rules of a given system.

The second chapter provided a methodological background to my research and discussed the methods for studying social movements. First, the chapter pointed to some research methods adopted in studying Italian social movements and to some of the main problems in researching social movements in general. Second, the chapter presented the methodology adopted in this study, one based on a multiple system to collect data on the basis of qualitative methodology and ethnographic principles.

The third and fourth chapters examined the historical background of new radical movements in Italy from their inception in the sixties. More specifically, the third chapter described the extra-parliamentary, anti-institutional, conflicts which occurred during the sixties and seventies. The working class played a considerable role in developing social conflict in Italy. The main actors in such conflict were the so-called mass-workers, a social group composed of unskilled workers employed in the assembly lines of large northern factories. Furthermore, a number of movements and groups came to light in the seventies and their conflict replaced the traditional class struggle. A wide spectrum of youth, urban, feminist, counter-cultural and regional movements, consumer associations and psychiatric patients (Melucci, 1979) imposed their presence in the political arena. The new movements expressed new demands, set up original organisational structures and raised issues which were partially unprecedented in industrial conflicts. I have seen that the youth movement was an autonomous social group claiming its own identity, a different position in the social structure and a fairer distribution of resources. The aim of this chapter was to depict the movements that grew outside the

unions and the main parties of the Left throughout the sixties and seventies and to draw a link between those movements and the CSOs.

The fourth chapter described the development of the AM during the eighties and nineties. In a way this can be considered as the heir of the historical legacy of the autonomous youth movements of the seventies. The early eighties were characterised by resistance and by the protection of memory and identity threatened by state repression and thousands of arrests. Resisting repression meant defending and claiming the same identity that was being put into question through the judicial attack against the movement. Also when the issues changed and Peace and Anti-nuclear movements rose, the repertoire, language and forms of protest of the MA did not change.

In the nineties things progressively changed. While some CSOs still persevered in claiming an antagonistic and revolutionary identity, for other groups in Veneto, Lombardy, Rome, Bologna, Turin and so on, the nineties saw the beginning of a process of research into a different set of ideas, which lasted several years. This process of redefinition started with the *Leoncavallo* resistance in August 1989, which paradoxically was a symbol of resistance and a moment of change at the same time, and lasted through the Panther movement in 1990, the movement against the war in 1991 and came to close with the end of 1994. As I have seen, these were the five years which changed the identity of an area of the CSOs. In the mid-nineties the CSOs, that so far were largely characterised by anti-institutionalism and antagonism, split and consequently chose different routes. Some deepened their anti-institutional identity, while others, specifically the CSOs of the North-East and the MD were more sensitive to the changes that were occurring within society and to the example of Zapatistas revolution, with its innovative language and practices. The identity of this part of the movement area changed dramatically and became more directed towards external society. Conflict was still a central theme for their analysis but slowly shifted from being self-referential to the searching for consensus among the civil society. This movement area took part in the demonstration in Amsterdam in 1997, a turning point in the mobilisations for a different globalisation, and turned into what became known as the *Movimento delle Tute Bianche* and the *Movimento dei Disobbedienti.*

The final four chapters have focused on the MD and the case study of the CSO *Rivolta*. The fifth chapter outlined the development of the CSOs in the metropolitan area of Venice-Mestre and focused on the *Rivolta*, the case study for this thesis. I have seen evidence that the story of the *Rivolta* has been characterised by periods of crisis and growth. More specifically, I have focused on the second half of the nineties when both structural conditions and subjective choices allowed the *Rivolta* to develop and become one of the most important CSOs in Italy. A central role has been played by opportunities found in the political environment either at a local or national level and by the ability of the activists in the Northern-Eastern region of the country to frame the situation and focus their organisational efforts in this metropolitan area. The last few years have been characterised by what I have defined as a process of organisational specialisation. A number of associations have been set up, whose links with local institutions have become closer. These changes have allowed the activists of the *Rivolta* to develop community services and what they refer to as 'welfare from below'. The institutional links and the setting up of projects which receive economic support have had an important role in the growth of professional activists, people who live *for* and *by* political means. Some of these projects have directly employed the activists of the *Rivolta*, providing them with work and income. However, relations with institutions have not undermined the conflictual identity of the *Rivolta* which acts at different levels: the institutional and conflict level.

The sixth chapter analysed the growth of welfare services within the CSO *Rivolta*, connecting it with the political opportunities offered by local and global changes. My fieldwork also highlighted a number of processes within the *Rivolta*. First, there was the transformation of activism into a profession. Secondly, the chapter showed that the *Rivolta* is part of a movement that combines mobilisations for cultural recognition and for the redistribution of resources. Thirdly, I have also seen that all these interventions came about as political campaigns and then became institutional activities carried out by the professional organisation composed of *Rivolta* activists. Finally, the debate on the welfare state and the number of activities in which they are involved emphasise the role of the *Rivolta* as a proactive and immanent movement. In

the attempt to build welfare services from below, the *Rivolta* aims to locate itself in a new position on the basis of changes which are occurring in society. At the same time I have demonstrated that the *Rivolta* and the Disobedient activists are a part of a movement aiming to affirm new forms of life starting within contemporary society.

The seventh chapter focused on the main political vocabulary by which the MD and the *Rivolta* have built their own narrative and analytical framework. This conceptualisation of the contemporary world either serves to provide a shared view of the world or to build a symbolic identity. Terms such as empire, multitudes, biopolitics and civil disobedience belong to the daily language of the activists within the movement and through them the Disobedient movement and the *Rivolta* have defined their own identity and differentiated themselves from other components of the alter-globalisation movement. I have also seen the strengths and limitations of these categories. On the one hand, they lack empirical evidence and to a certain extent they are vague and uncertain. On the other, these categories have relied in some ways on the large transformations of the last thirty years; they have renewed the language and categories of contemporary social movements, of politics in general and of Marxist theoretical apparatus in particular. This chapter also discussed the meaning and practice of civil disobedience. It has been argued that the outcomes of civil disobedience are extremely ambiguous. It has given a new lease of life to the traditional repertoires of protest, that of antagonist and autonomous movements. Civil disobedience has dramatically changed the relation between the vanguard and the masses and has widened the opportunities to generate conflict by producing protest repertoires that are available to everybody. I have seen that civil disobedience is a form of protest based on an objective practice and on vast communicative efforts. It was conceived either as a way to create conflict or as a type of political action aiming to build consensus among larger social strata of the population. However, I have also highlighted that civil disobedience was a practice aiming to build a new social and civil order, 'here and now'.

The eighth chapter described the participation of the *Rivolta* in the global movement. As I saw the *Rivolta* participated in the protests as an element of a

network of the CSOs and its contribution to this campaign cannot be considered separately from what the network as a whole. I have seen that the making of a certain areas of the CSOs into a global movement happened in three distinct stages. The first of these was the mobilisation in Amsterdam in 1997 as a final demonstration of the campaign for work and against unemployment. The second was characterised by the cycle of protests that started in Seattle in November 1999 and the third was that of the 'no-global war campaign'. The latter was marked by a twofold transition, the first being the shift from civil to social disobedience, and the second the change from anti-meeting demonstrations to local mobilisations with global targets. Veneto was one of the epicentres of the campaign and the *Rivolta* was widely active in organising events such as *trainstopping* and also contributed to the Action for Peace campaign in Palestine in 2001 and 2002.

These chapters have highlighted some specific issues. Firstly, the Disobedient movement and the CSO *Rivolta* have overcome the dichotomy between identity demands and redistributive conflicts, between social movements that struggle for recognition and others that contest the distribution of how socio-economic resources. I have shown how the MD and specifically the *Rivolta* mobilise resources and aim to expand their autonomous cultural identity, with the intention of extending political and civil rights. In doing so, I have demonstrated that the demands of redistribution and recognition are not mutually exclusive in contemporary movements of this type.

Secondly, this research has investigated the interaction between the CSO *Rivolta* and institutions. It has shown that the relation between movements and institutions is discontinuous and changeable. This relation transforms both opponents, by modifying their political openness or closure as well as their repertoire and policing of protests. In addition, I have seen that some components have gone through from a model of total extranity to forms of mediation, participation and collaboration on some specific projects without jeopardising the very conflicting nature of the movement and specifically of the *Rivolta*. This research has demonstrated that conflict can sometimes be combined with institutional participation.

Thirdly, this study has shown that the MD and the *Rivolta* locate their protests and political discourse either as a part of the local or global dimension. Over the last few years the Disobedient movement and the *Rivolta* have focused their analysis, debate and action at a global perspective. This is confirmed by their participation in the alter-globalisation movement and the increasing presence of activists from the MD in events occurring abroad, such as Porto Alegre, Chiapas, Palestine and Argentina. At the same time this study has underlined that the Disobedient activists and the *Rivolta* have not underestimated the local dimension. On the contrary the roots of the local dimension has assumed even more a central and complementary position to their participation in global mobilisations.

This thesis has also emphasised two further points. First, the activists from the *Rivolta* are rather different from the socialist and communist militants of the twentieth century. The latter were characterised by a complete obedience of the individual *ego* to the collective *ego* (Revelli 2001). They were part of a party that served historical reasoning and had the function of turning chaos into order. This obedience found a means of expression in the democratic centralism of the Leninist party where debates were permitted only until a decision was taken (Sabine 1973). After that, any decision had to be accepted and followed without any discussion. Moreover, the kind of social action of communist militants used to be value-rational. It was determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake, required by duty, or by the importance of the 'cause', independently of its prospects of success (Weber 1968: 24-25). The *Rivolta*'s activists are typically more pragmatic and less ideological. They combine meaning and income, community work and politics. Their militancy tries to reconcile idealistic thrust and materialistic needs, a strong single identity with multiple relations. In contrast to communist militants, the *Rivolta*'s activists are part of a horizontal organisational network. This means that although *Rivolta*'s activists are deeply rooted in their organisation they can also work towards connections with other social realities/goals. Finally, the current type of activist desires to see changes starting immediately, they do not want to postpone the results of their actions. They no longer believe in a definitive and total change. The current activists

also believe that any separation between social and political dimension has vanished. They do not think that multitudes can be trained by a kind of intellectual vanguard which is separated from the rest. At the same time they interpret their role in community services as a kind of political action. Their community services with migrants, homeless people and drug users are not only a work opportunity but they are also an immediate political intervention aiming to change the structure of social relations in the here and now.

The second and final point regards the *Rivolta* as a political entrepreneur. The *Rivolta* has been chosen because it is the Italian CSO that in my opinion plays the role of political entrepreneur most effectively. First, it interprets needs, collective imaginary and political tensions mobilising material and symbolic resources. Acting as a political entrepreneur (MacCarthy and Zald 1977; Zald-MacCarthy 1987; Gamson 1990) this combines the resources found in the environment and turns them into social and political capital. The term 'resource' covers a wide variety of meanings, ranging from funds from the local council, social issues, availability of voluntary work and the structure where the *Rivolta* is located. The *Rivolta* possesses one of the biggest venues in the region and dozens of concerts and theatrical shows are organised every year. They generate a related area of informal economy that involves several dozens of people. Over the last few years two cooperatives providing work and income for its activists have been set up. Within the *Rivolta*'s walls the activists voluntarily run a bookshop, a bar, a pub, a restaurant, a radio station and various other informal activities. Moreover, many investments have been made to regenerate the area and to help with the purchase of a sound system, furniture, and other materials. These resources have been combined and in this way allow the *Rivolta*'s activists to organise political intervention and build up their social legitimacy.

Secondly and most importantly, the *Rivolta* serves as a political entrepreneur in that it is motivated in terms of 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter 1976). For a political subject it is true what Marx wrote about the bourgeoisie and what Schumpeter said about capitalism: they can never be stationary and they cannot exist without incessantly revolutionising the conditions of their existence. The *Rivolta* is an example of creative destruction, where a political actor constantly

has to destroy the old conditions and create new ones. Therefore the *Rivolta* continuously 'destroys' its own forms of organisation, political agenda, language, categories and relations with other subjects, put simply, shaping the conditions of its existence, *from within* in order to adapt and create new conditions. The *Rivolta*, either as an independent entity or as part of the MD, is an innovative and conflictual form of collective action that in order to survive and expand needs to innovate its strategies (Mac Adam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001) and systems of interpretation leading to new concepts and categories. This happened in the transition from the stage of the MTB into the MD and more recently from the MD into what is now known as the GAP (*Grande Alleanza Precaria*). The same can be said about the passage from civil to social disobedience.

Therefore, the ability of the political entrepreneur not only consists of mobilising resources much as its virtue is not only based on ideological coherence. What has marked the *Rivolta* and the Disobedient movement story is their ability to shape the contexts in which they operate. Over the last decade they have started a process of innovation of political categories and action repertoires, seizing the time of the big changes which occurred at a global level. This process has been described in terms of 'questioning while walking', where the walking, the 'destroying' act, has more emphasis than the questioning.

APPENDIX 1 - Glossary

Organisations, Publications & Radio Stations of the Radical Left
Autonomen
Autonomia
Carta di Milano- Network of *Centro Sociali* of the North-West
Classe operaia
CNAN/AI   -   *Co-ordinamento*   *Nazionale*   *Anti-nucleare/Anti-imperialista*
(Anti-nuclear/Anti-imperialist National Co-ordination)
CPG - *Circoli del Proletariato Giovanile* (Proleatarian Youth Clubs)
CSA *Dordoni*
CSA *Morion*
CSO *ex-Emerson*
CSO *Leoncavallo*
CSO *Rivolta*
CSO *Villa Franchin*
CSOA *Conchetta/Cox 18*
Derive e Approdi
GAP - *Grande Alleanza Precaria* (Great Precarious Alliance).
Global
Il tallone del cavaliere
MA - *Movimento Antagonista* (Antagonist Movement)
MCSNE - *Melting dei Centri Sociali del Nordest*
MD – *Movimento dei Disobbedienti* (Disobedient Movement)
MTB - *Movimento delle Tute Bianche* (the White Overalls Movement)
No Global Network
Quaderni Piacentini
Quaderni Rossi
Radio Onda d'Urto - Brescia
Radio Sherwood - Padua
Riff Raff
Vis-à-vis,

Associations within the Centro Sociale Occupato *Rivolta*
Cooperativa Caracol
Associazione gli Invisibili – the Invisibles
Associazione Nadir
Associazione NoiUltras
Associazione OS - *Officina Sociale* (Social Workshop)
Associazione Razzismo Stop – Stop Racism
Associazione Ya Basta! – That is enough!

Parties and Unionns

CGIL - *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (Italian General Confederation of Labour)
CUB - *Comitari Unitari di Base* (Unitary rank-and-file factory committees)
DC - *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democrats)
Giovani Comunisti - Young Communists
Lega Nord - the Northern League
MSI - *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement)
PCI - *Partito Comunista Italiano* (ItalianCommunist Party)
UIL - *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (Italian Union of labour)

Websites

Ecn.org
Global.it
Indymedia.it
Sherwood.it
Wumingfoundation.com

Sociological Terms

CBT - Collective Behaviour Theory
CSO - *Centro Sociale Occupato* (Occupied social center)
CSOA - *Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito* (Occupied and self-managed social center)
LHM - Life History Method
NGO - Non governemental organisation
NSMs - New Social Movements
NSMT - New Social Movement Theories
POS - Political Opportunity Structure
POST - Political Opportunity Structure Theory
RMT - Resource Mobilisation Theory
SMO - Social Movement Organisation
SMI - Social Movement Institution

APPENDIX 2 - Interviews

Interview 1: Barbara (Radio Sherwood)
Interview 2: Beatrice (Global project)
Interview 3: Beppe (Town councillor - Venice)
Interview 4: Billo (Radio Sherwood - Padova)
Interview 5: Burdel (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 6: Claudia (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 7: Cristina (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 8: Daniele (Leoncavallo and Town councillor - Milan)
Interview 9: Danilo (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 10: Enrico (Ya Basta)
Interview 11: Fabio (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 12: Federico (Ya Basta! - Bologna)
Interview 13: Franz (Noi Ultra - Rivolta)
Interview 14: Gabriele (Disobedient activist - Brescia)
Interview 15: Gianmarco (Ya Basta! - Bologna)
Interview 16: Laura (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 17: Luca (Spokesperson Rivolta)
Interview 18: Macho (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 19: Maya (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 20: Michele (Spokesperson Rivolta)
Interview 21: Micheletti (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 22: Michelino (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 23: Momo (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 24: Olivia (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 25: Pierpaolo (Former activist of the Morion - Venice)
Interview 26: Piero (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 27: Pietro (Former activist of the Morion - Venice)
Interview 28: Rivolta Activist 1 (Anti-racist demonstration in Treviso)
Interview 29: Rivolta Activist 2 (Anti-racist demonstration in Treviso)
Interview 30: Rivolta Activist 3 (Anti-racist demonstration in Treviso)
Interview 31: Rivolta Activist 4 (Demonstration against the G8 in Genoa)
Interview 32: Rivolta Activist 5 (Demonstration against the G8 in Genoa)
Interview 33: Rivolta Activist 6 (Demonstration against the G8 in Genoa)
Interview 34: Roberto (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 35: Roberto (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 36: Sergio (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 37: Silvia (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 38: Sonia (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 39: Tommaso (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 40: Valentina (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 41: Vittoria (Disobedient activist - Rivolta)
Interview 42: Wilma (Radio Sherwood and Ya Basta! - Padua)

APPENDIX 3 - Participant observation

Date	Place	Setting	Observation	Role
September 24-27 2000	Prague	International demonstration against the IMF-WB	Interaction among activists and repertories of protest	Covert
30-31 January 2001	CSO *Rivolta*	National Meeting of the White Overalls	Interactions among activists and political discourse	Covert
March-May 2001	CSO *Rivolta*	Social and cultural events, political activities and daily management of the CSO *Rivolta*	Interactions among activists	Overt
18-21 July 2001	Genoa: *Stadio Carlini and rallies*	International mobilisations against the G8	Repertories of protest and communication	Covert
27-28 February 2002	Faculty of Architecture at Venice University	National Meeting of the Disobedient Movement	Interactions among activists and political discourse	Covert
March-April 2002	CSO *Rivolta*	Social and cultural events, political activities and daily management of the CSO Rivolta	Interactions among activists	Overt
September-November 2002	CSO *Rivolta*	Social and cultural events, political activities and daily management of the CSO Rivolta	Interactions among activists	Overt
05-07 November 2002	Streets of Florence and *Fortezza di Mezzo*	European Social Forum	Interaction among activists, repertories of protest, communication, and political discourse	Covert
18 May 2003	CSO *Rivolta*	National Meeting of the Disobedient Movement	Interactions among activists and political discourse	Covert

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