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Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts

Although social movement studies have traditionally stressed conflict as a dynamic ele-
ment in our societies, since the 1980s, research in democratic society has presented an
image of an institutionalization of social movements. Since 1999, with the protest in
Seattle against the WTO Millennium Round, this image has been however challenged
by a new cycle of protest focusing on 'alternative globalization' and global justice.
Beyond describing some forms of action that (through counter-summits and social
forums) emerged in this cycle of protest, the article addresses the more general issue of
conflict nowadays by considering the emergent character of protest itself. In social
movement studies, protest has in fact been mainly considered as a 'dependent vari-
able', and explained on the basis of political opportunities and organizational re-
sources. The author suggests here a different approach, by looking at protests as event-
ful, in the sense of having relevant cognitive, affective and relational transformative
impacts on the very movements that carry them out. Some forms of action or specific
campaigns have a particularly high degree of 'eventfulness'. Through protest events,
new tactics are experimented with, signals about the possibility of collective action are
sent, feelings of solidarity are created, organizational networks are consolidated, and
sometimes public outrage at repression is developed. Data from interviews, surveys,
focus groups and discourse analysis are used in order to reflect upon the mechanisms
that make protest eventful. More in general, the article suggests that the contemporary
sociological reflection on conflicts as producers of social capital, collective identity and
knowledge, could be useful to balance the negative vision of conflicts as being disrup-
tive of social relations, an analysis that can emerge from an exclusive focus on the most
extreme forms of political violence.

KEYWORDS
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protest; social movements.*

Protest as Routine versus Eventful Protest?
An Introduction

Social movement studies have traditionally stressed *conflict* as a dynamic element in our societies. The 'European tradition' has looked at new social movements as potential carriers of a new central conflict in our post-industrial societies, or at least of an emerging constellation of conflicts. In the 'American tradition', the resource mobilization approach reacted to a, then dominant, conception of conflicts as pathologies. In his influential book *Social Conflict and Social Movements*, Anthony Oberschall (1973) defined social movements as main carriers of societal conflicts. In *Democracy and Disorder*, Sidney Tarrow (1989) forcefully pointed at the relevant and positive role of unconventional forms of political participations in democratic processes. Not by chance, 'Social Movements, Conflicts and Change', one of the first book series to put social movements at the center of attention, linked the two concepts of social movements and conflicts. From Michael Lipsky (1968) to Charles Tilly (1978), the first systematic work on social movements developed from within traditions of research that stressed the importance of conflicts for power, both in the society and in politics. In fact, a widely accepted definition of social movements introduced conflicts as a central element in their conceptualization:

Social movement actors are engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts, meant to promote or oppose social change. By conflict we mean an oppositional relationship between actors who seek control of the same stake – be it political, economic, or cultural power – and in the process make negative claims on each other – i.e., demands which, if realized, would damage the interests of the other actors. (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 21)

Social movements are 'conflictual' not only because of their stakes, but also because of their forms. Protest has been in fact considered as the main repertoire of action – or even, the modus operandi – of social movements. It is defined in the sociology of social movements as a 'resource of the powerless [...] they depend for success not upon direct utilization of power, but upon activating other groups to enter the political arena' (Lipsky, 1970: 1). In order to obtain voice, social movements 'employ methods of persuasion and coercion which are, more often than not, novel, unorthodox, dramatic and of questionable legitimacy' (Wilson, 1973: 227). The same non-conventionality of protest allows those without power to be heard through the channels of the mass-media. Large public demonstrations, disruptive direct actions, or even innovative symbolic initiatives, are the protest groups most capable of attracting the attention of the public opinion.

Those who protest must also understand the selective use of information in the mass-media, while forms of protest should be adapted to the characteristics of public institutions. The centralization of decision-making power during the formation of the nation-state led to a repertoire of centralized political activity and social move-

ments organized at the national level (Tilly, 1978), while recent changes to the state have led to the development of multi-level social movement organizations (della Porta and Tarrow, 2004). Not only do rational actors mobilize above all when and where they perceive the possibility of success (Tarrow, 1994), but their strategies are also influenced by the reaction of the authorities: The opening of channels of access moderates the forms of protest, while its closure easily induces radicalization (della Porta, 1995).

In the 1990s, this instrumental view of protest has been linked also to the spread of an image of a 'protest society', with a sort of 'conventionalization' of once unconventional forms of action: their spreading to the most various groups of the society as well as a routinization by the authorities and large acceptance among the public (della Porta and Reiter, 1998; Meyer and Tarrow, 1998). Widespread images were those of 'movements without protest' (della Porta and Diani, 2004), and, in parallel, of protest without movements. A sort of 'normalization' – or routinization – of protest is for sure part of the picture of contemporary political conflicts in Western European societies.

There is however also another part of the picture, which started to became more focused in 1999, with the protest in Seattle against the WTO Millennium Round and spread after the attack at the twin towers in 2001. This is an image of political conflicts expressed again on the street through mass rallies or direct action in what can be considered as a new cycle of protest. A main actor in it has been the global justice movement, that is those networks of groups and individuals that mobilize at various geographical levels for global justice, having been identified, in different countries, as alter-global, no global, new global, global justice, *Globalisierungskritiker, altermondialists*, globalizers from below, and so on (della Porta, 2007a).

Beyond describing some forms of action that (as counter-summits and social forums) emerged in this cycle of protest, I shall address the more general issue of conflict in nowadays society by considering the emergent character of protest itself. Notwithstanding the relevance of protest events for social movements, they have been however mainly studied as aggregated collective action (e.g. in protest cycles). In social movement studies, protest has been in fact mainly considered as a 'dependent variable', and explained on the basis of political opportunities and organizational resources. In my analysis I want instead to stress the effects of protest on the social movement itself. I shall in fact focus on what, following the historical sociologist William H. Sewell (1996), I would call 'eventful protest'. Differently than in 'teleological temporality', that explains events on the basis of abstract transhistorical processes 'from less to more' (urbanization, industrialization, etc.), and in the 'experimental temporality', comparing different historical paths (revolution versus nonrevolution, democracy versus nondemocracy), '*eventful temporality* recognizes the power of events in history' (Sewell, 1996: 262). Events are defined as a 'relatively rare subclass of happenings that *significantly transform structure*', and an eventful conception of temporality as 'one that takes into account the transformation of structures by events' (Sewell, 1996: 262; emphasis added). Especially during cycles of protest, some contingent events tend to affect the given structures by fuelling mechanisms of social change: organiza-

tional networks develop; frames are bridged; personal links foster reciprocal trust. In this sense, protest events – especially, some of them – constitute processes during which collective experiences develop in the interactions of different individual and collective actors, that with different roles and aims take part in it. The event has transformative effects, in that 'events transform structures largely by constituting and empowering new groups of actors or by re-empowering existing groups in new ways' (Sewell, 1996: 271). Some protest events, in fact, put in motion social processes that 'are inherently contingent, discontinuous and open ended' (Sewell, 1996: 272).

With reference to 'eventful temporality', the concept of 'transformative events' has been developed. As McAdam and Sewell observed,

> no narrative account of a social movement or revolution can leave out events [...] But the study of social movements or revolutions – at least as normally carried out by sociologists or political scientists – has rarely paid analytic attention to the contingent features and causal significance of particular contentious events such as these. (2001: 101)

The two scholars therefore (with not much resonance) called for attention at the way in which events 'become turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action but by no means abolished' (McAdam and Sewell, 2001: 102). Moments of concentrated transformations have been singled out especially in those highly visible events that end up symbolizing entire social movements – such as the taking of the Bastille for the French revolution or the Montgomery Bus Boycott for the American Civil Rights movement. These represent important turning points – 'A transformative event is a crucial turning point for a social movement that dramatically increases or decreases the level of mobilization' (Hess and Martin, 2006: 249).

In my conception of eventful protest, I share the focus on the internal dynamics and transformative capacity of protest, looking however at a broader range of events than those included under the label of transformative protest. My assumption is that many protests have cognitive, affective and relational impacts on the very movements that carry them out. Especially some forms of action or specific campaigns tend to have a particularly high degree of 'eventfulness'. Through these events, new tactics are experimented with, signals about the possibility of collective action are sent (Morris, 2000), solidarity feelings are created, organizational networks consolidate, sometimes public outrage at repression develops (Hess and Martin, 2006). In this contribution, I shall therefore look more at the transformative capacity of protest than at specific events. Protest will be considered as, so to say, the independent variable: I shall look not at what produces protest, but at the 'byproduct' of protest itself. In more general terms, I would suggest that, in the contemporary sociological reflection, attention to some expressions of conflict as producers of social capital, collective identity and knowledge could be useful in order to balance the negative vision of conflicts as disruptive of social relations that might come from a focus on most extreme forms of

political violence. In what follows, I will reflect, in particular, on what makes protest *eventful*. As mentioned, in most social movement literature, protest events have been analyzed especially as 'dependent variable', with an attempt to explain their size and forms on the bases of macro, contextual characteristics. Recently, two different theoretical developments brought about some shift in perspective. On the one hand, there has been a growing attention to the cultural and symbolic dimension of social movements (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001; Flam and King, 2005). On the other hand, a more dynamic vision of protest has been promoted, with attention paid to the social mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001).

First of all, if the protest is a resource which some groups utilize to put pressure upon decision-makers, it should not however be viewed in purely instrumental terms (see on this Taylor and van Dyke, 2004). During the course of a protest both time and money are invested in risky activities, yet often resources of solidarity are also created (or re-created). Many forms of protest 'have profound effects on the group spirit of their participants', since 'in the end there is nothing as productive of solidarity as the experience of merging group purposes with the activities of everyday life' (Rochon, 1998: 115). Protest promotes, in fact, a sense of collective identity which is a condition for collective action (Pizzorno, 1993). For workers, strikes and occupations have represented not only instruments for collective pressure but also arenas in which a sense of community is formed (Fantasia, 1988) and the same has occurred during the occupation of schools and universities by students (Ortoleva, 1988) or in squatted youth centers. Further more, in social movements the means used are very closely tied to the desired ends: 'Tactics represent important routines, emotionally and morally salient in these people's lives' (Jasper, 1997: 237). In what follows, I shall in fact look at the capacity of some protest events to produce relations, by facilitating communication as well as affective ties.

Together with attention to contingency and emotional effects came the reflection on processes that stressed the role of temporality in the analysis. In macro-analyses, causal mechanisms have been linked to systematic process analysis (Hall, 2003) and 'causal reconstruction' that 'seeks to explain a given social phenomenon – a given event, structure or development – by identifying the process through which it is generated' (Mayntz, 2004: 238). Adapting Renate Mayntz's definition (2004: 241), we might consider mechanisms as concatenation of generative events linking macro causes (such as contextual transformation) to aggregated effects (cycle of protest) through transformation at the individual and organizational levels. Mechanisms refer, therefore, to intermediary steps between macro-conditions and macro-outcomes. With more or less awareness, some research on social movements has gone beyond causal macro-macro inferences, looking at mechanisms that link the macro and the micro (Coleman, 1986), such as the construction of identity (Melucci, 1996), the processes of networking (Diani, 1995), framing (Snow et al., 1986) and the escalation of action-strategies (della Porta, 1995). In my analysis, I'll build upon this literature distinguish-

ing *cognitive* mechanisms, with protest as an arena of debates; *relational* mechanisms, that brings about protest network; and *emotional* mechanisms, with the development of feelings of solidarity 'in action'.

I will refer as a way of illustration to various pieces of research on contemporary protest events, especially those promoted on issues of global justice and democracy from below. In the next part, devoted to counter-summits, I shall refer to interviews with representatives of social movement organizations conducted in Italy (della Porta and Mosca, 2007). In the third part, to illustrate the social forum process, I shall present some results a study on the European Social Forums (ESFs), based upon an analysis of organizational documents as well as a survey of their activists (della Porta, 2007b). Finally, looking at direct action, I shall draw upon a case study on the protest campaign against the construction of a high-speed railway in North Italian Val di Susa (della Porta and Piazza, 2008). Although relational, cognitive and emotional consequences of protest on protestors will be relevant in all three forms of protest, long-lasting transnational campaigns seems particularly apt to illustrate relational processes; open arenas for debates (such as the social forums) to discuss the cognitive effects of protest; and direct action to analyze the role of emotions in mobilization. In the concluding remarks, I shall reflect on the conditions for the development of 'eventful protests' in contemporary societies, linking them to a new cycle of protest, with strong transnational characteristics.

Networking in Action

European Marches targeted the EU summits in Amsterdam, Cologne and Nice, promoting a social European dimension, protesting the Lisbon employment strategies as based upon 'flexible' (precarious) jobs, and developing an Alternative Charter of Fundamental Rights. These protests, initially launched by organizations of unemployed and critical unions, became more and more multi-issues and also succeeded in sensitizing the activists of the institutionalized trade union confederations. The European marches have been defined as very early example of the formation of a flexible network addressing social issues at European level (Mathers, 2007: 51). This long-lasting and intense form of protest (inspired, among others, by the Hunger Marches of the 1930s) provides a perfect illustration for the growth of formal and informal networks 'in action'.

The European marches became visible on June 16 and 17 1997, in Amsterdam. On the first day of the summit, that was going to issue a new EU Treaty, the European March mobilized 5,000 people that arrived from all over Europe to ask for policy measures against poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. Eleven marches had started on April 1997 from places as far away as Finland, Ireland, Bosnia and Morocco, converging on the Dutch capital. After the success of the first, a second European March began in Brussels on May 24 1999 and arrived in Cologne (where a new EU summit had to take place) on the 28th bringing about 30,000 participants to the final rally. A few months later, on December 10 1999, a European day of action against workfare and for a Guaranteed Income took place. The next year, yet another European March contested yet another EU Summit. On December 6 2000, the day before the opening of the European Summit,

80,000 people gathered in Nice, in a protest called for by an alliance of 30 organizations from all over the Europe, asking for more attention to social issues. On June 16 2001, in what was defined as the largest protest staged by the radical Left in Sweden, 25,000 marched in Gothenburg 'For another Europe', contesting the EU summit. Against a 'Fortress Europe', defined as a 'police superstate', and 'a Europe of the Market', the opening banner proclaimed that 'The world is not for sale'. On 2002, three EU summits are to be met by protest. On March 16, 300,000 people marched in Barcelona, on the slogan 'Against a Europe of capital, another Europe is possible', from Placa de Catalunya to the Mediterranean harbour front in the largest demonstration against EU policies. Following an opening banner proclaiming that 'Another world is possible', protesters called for full employment and social rights against free-market globalization (Global Civil Society Yearbook, Chronology, 2003 http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/index.htm, accessed December 2008) few months later, on June 20, the opening day of the EU summit held in Seville was marked by a general strike organised by the Spanish trade unions (with reports of up to 85% participation); two days later, the counter-summit conference ended with a demonstration of about 200,000 marching 'Against the Europe of capital and war' (Global Civil Society yearbook, Chronology, 2003). Six months later, on December 13 to 15, a counter-summit was organized in Copenhagen by an Initiative for a different Europe, formed by 59 NGOs from all over Europe. Against a Europe that 'does not like democracy', the coalition of grassroots movements, social and students' organizations, trade unions and left wing political parties asked for a Europe without privatization, social exclusion, unemployment, racism and environmental destruction. While the summit discussed civil rights, the protesters called for a right to free movement and dissent. On December 13, about 2,000 marched on the summit denouncing racism; on the next day, 10,000 marched behind the opening banner 'Our World is Not for Sale' (Global Civil Society yearbook, Chronology, 2003).

This brief chronicle of recent EU summits and counter-summits shades doubts on the image of a broad 'permissive consensus' around the EU. If truly European protest events might be few, they seem however to be eventful protests in the history of an emerging movement, protesting for global justice and 'another Europe' (della Porta, 2007a). Especially, the mentioned counter-summits involved a growing number of social movement organizations, networking networks of activists that had developed specific campaigns on EU issues – with the European Marchers, there were environmentalists active on Genetically Modified Organisms, NGOs promoting a social vision of Europe, organizations for peace, protesting against the wars in ex-Yugoslavia and the Middle East. It was during the (often long-lasting) preparation of these events that interactions developed between different actors, mobilized on different issues and in different countries. In this sense, protests created social capital (in Bourdieu's understanding of it as relational capital) of a particular type.

During this long campaign, successful networking is testified for by the steady *growth* in the number of organizations involved in the protest, as well as their diversity by country of origins and focus of concern. The first march was promoted by activists of two French organizations – Agire ensable Contre le Chomage (AC!) and the rank-and-file union Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratiques (SUD) – that during the

mobilization of the French unemployed in the mid-1990s (della Porta, 2008) had started to reflect upon of the European dimension of the problems of the unemployed. According to the 'thick description' of the campaign provided by Andy Mathers (2007), the first meeting of 25 representatives of organizations promoting a European March was held in Florence, on the occasion of an EU summit in June 1996, after a proposal had emerged in Turin a few months earlier. In November, 40 participants from eight countries met in Paris, in what an activist describes as 'a climate of co-operation. [...] There were people from different ideological position and they entered into a dialogue and found a form of working together' (Mathers, 2007: 57). After the success of the rally in Amsterdam, about one hundred people from eleven countries met in Luxembourg, in October 1997, and formed a European Marches network, defined as a loose net of groups that had to decide by consensus.

During the organization of the counter-summits, the mobilization extended to involve different types of actors at different territorial level. During the preparation of the first march, 'The various committees that sprung up to support the marches at European, national and local levels were notable for the plurality of participating organizations and for generating a discernable spirit of goodwill for the project' (Mathers, 2007: 56). While the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was initially very critical, to the point of sending a memo to its affiliates stating that groups opposed to ETUC policy were among the supporters of the marches, 'the Amsterdam campaign had enabled cross-national links between unions such as SUD (France), COBAS (Italy), and CGT and CCOO (Spain)' (Mathers, 2007: 73). During the preparation for a next march to Cologne, also leftwing tendency of CGIL and IG Metall, IG-Medien, part of CFDT and CGT joined. Even the ETUC accepted to march with the European Marchers in a rally organized for the 'Job Summit' in Luxembourg. In Nice, together with associations of unemployed, immigrants and environmentalists, 'alter-globalist' ones as ATTAC, progressive and left-wing parties, communists and anarchists, Kurdish and Turkish militants, women's collectives, Basque and Corsican autonomists was the ETUC. The march in Barcelona, with representatives from the 15 EU countries, initially called by the ETUC, was then joined by new unions, 'soft' and 'hard' environmentalists, anarchists and independentists, anti-capitalists and different civil society organisations.

At the turn of the millennium, similar processes of convergence of different social and political actors developed also at the local and national levels through processes of 'contamination in action' (for the local level, see della Porta and Mosca, 2007; for the national level, della Porta, 2007a; 2007b). Protest produced in fact relations between once disconnected individuals and groups. Networking developed 'in action'.

Networking 'in action' is first of all instrumentally important in increasing the influence of each organizations and individuals. Coordinations and umbrella organizations emerge with the pragmatic aim of facilitating mobilization, and then help the development of inclusive norms. The logic of the network as an instrument for the coordination of activity facilitates the involvement of different political actors: The

network in fact, especially in the beginning, often kept together mainly through an emphasis upon mobilization on concrete goals. In the European marches, the coordinated action was promoted, first of all, as instrumentally useful. According to an activist, 'The concept of the European Marches Network has always been to say that even if there are tensions it is necessary to find the spaces where we can work together' (Mathers, 2007: 56). The same 'instrumental' reasoning seems to have been at the basis of coalition building also in other campaigns. In the words of an Italian activist:

one of the more important and useful things of the last years' experience is the fact that network-logic has been concretely affirmed [...] we were already active on some issues, but we were alone. Clarifying that it is better working together, that this is a further resource and that this logic is more useful for the people to whom you want to bring results: this idea starts to be affirmed. I think that one of the most positive aspects of this logic is precisely this reflection on the networks (SF17).

Beyond this instrumental aim, however, the preparation of common protest campaigns is seen also as developing social ties. The European Marches 'produced new personal and collective identities amongst the unemployed as well as new representations of them as an international and internationalist social and political force' (Mathers, 2007: 87).

The marches themselves produced social ties first of all by facilitating an exchange of knowledge. Interactions produce cognitive changes. All along the protest, together with the number of organizations involved, and the structuration of the network, also the definition of the stake changed: from the focus upon unemployment to a broader range of EU politics, and with the participation of activists from various movements. Especially:

An important element of the marches was the opportunity they provided for sharing personal experiences of unemployment, for experiencing a sense of fellowship through sharing elements of everyday life such as food and entertainment, and for collectively tackling common practical and political problems. These sharing of common experiences and common problems helped to establish a sense of camaraderie amongst the marchers and in some cases friendships developed that were cemented through exchange visits and contact by mail between the continental events. (ibid.: 90)

During the long march, the activists met with participants in local struggles related with employment issues (e.g. Dockers of Liverpool, Renault workers from Vilvoorde). In the words of an activist, 'What was extraordinary about this first march were the networks that formed out of it. That's to say that the people who crossed over Europe gave their addresses to the people who the came in contact with and since then have been corresponding amongst themselves' (ibid.). Recognition of similarities across countries through action in transnational networks enables the construction of a transnational identity.

More in general, in a scale shift process (Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow and McAdam, 2004), during transnational campaign activists begin to identify as part of a European or even global subject. Italian activists involved in transnational protest campaigns stressed the growing dialogue between leaders (or spokespersons) of different organizations as an effect of better reciprocal understanding:

after several years of developing common actions, you meet in the same movement, talk, you start understanding each other, you find codes of communication, methods for resolving problems [...] in the different mobilizations you meet different organized and non-organized actorswith whom you had nothing to share before [...] there you started to enter into dialogue and to discover that you can do things together (SF2).

This reciprocal understanding is also considered by activists of various recent protest campaigns as pushing towards multi-issue claims: overlapping membership as well as participation in organizational coalition have indeed been seen as preconditions for the spreading of innovative ideas (see, e.g., Meyer and Whittier, 1994 on the women's and peace movements). Common campaigns link different issues while they do mobilize:

we took part in networks following the principle that associations must avoid [...] an hyper-specialization that de-localizes them; our principle is that they must re-localize and root themselves in their own cities, in their own territory, be loved by the people around them, build contacts, etc. (SF20)

Also at the personal level, participation in protest campaigns helps developing reciprocal knowledge and, therefore, trust 'in action'. From this point of view, during the European marches, informal networks were in fact created along with the more formalized ones. As an activist stated,

In France in '97 I followed the activists for one week and we became friends [...] With some people you become friends and then it becomes normal to see them and to call them and to ask them what they are doing? And to say "we are doing this, why don't you come?"

The development of friendship ties was facilitated by the playfulness of the protest. Although speaking a language of anger (*la colère* was mentioned in several, especially French, slogans), the activists remember action as parties, festivals, Christmas events. 'Collective action also enabled the unemployed to emerge out of the misery and solitude of everyday life and share in an episode of collective existence and solidarity that was on occasion a joyful experience' (Mathers, 2007: 90). By rank and file members, common campaign are perceived as enabling a mutual familiarity that favors the construction of shared objectives, as knowledge allows to overcome prejudice. As an interviewee notices: 'we have also got to know each other and to soften some attitudes, and

there is trust and respect for every representation within the committee' (SF11). Additionally, marching allows the individuals to acquire a social position, as well as linguistic and technical skills.[1]

The creation of mutual knowledge, trust, and friendship through protest is, of course, nothing new. In his research on workers conflicts, Rick Fantasia (1988) challenged the widespread ideas of a lack of class-consciousness among U.S. workers. By looking at intense moments of protest (such as strikes and occupations), he developed the concept of a 'culture of solidarity' as a more dynamic substitute for 'static' class consciousness. Also in the past, the preparation of some, symbolically relevant, protest events used to take long months. This is evident in the history of the First of May, which played a most important role in the labour movement. In country such as Italy, France or Germany, it was during the preparation of the demonstrations for Labour day (that took often up to an entire year) that relations developed between the labour movements and other social movements. What makes networking particularly relevant in contemporary movements is, together with the already mentioned plural background of their activists, the transnational level of the action. Together with the European marches, the European Preparatory Assemblies for the European Social Forum as well as the meetings preparing the EuroMayday represent in fact moments of reciprocal knowledge among activists coming from different countries and backgrounds (Doerr and Mattoni, 2007).

Protest as Arenas for Conversation

The Social Forums have been an innovative experiment promoted by the global justice movement. Counter-summits against the official summits of International Governmental Organizations (especially the G8, World Bank and IMF, WTO, and the EU) represented conflictual forms of protest at the transnational level. Different from a counter-summit, which is mainly oriented towards public protest, the Social Forum is set up as a space of debate among activists. Although the first large scale social forum to be organised, the World Social Forum (WSF), was indirectly oriented to 'counter' the World Economic Forum (WEF) held in Davos (Switzerland), it however presented itself as an independent space for encounters among civil society organisations and citizens.

Since the very beginning, the WSF showed a large mobilisation capacity. The first meeting, held in Porto Alegre in January 2001, was attended by about 20,000 participants from over 100 countries, among them thousands of delegates of NGOs and social movement organisations. Its main aim was the discussion of 'Another possible globalisation' (Schoenleitner, 2003). Since then the number of organisers and participants as well as the organisational efforts of the following WSFs (in Porto Alegre in 2002 and 2003, then in Mumbai in 2004, and again in Porto Alegre in 2005) increased exponentially. The WSF also gained large media attention. According to the organisers, the WSF in 2002 attracted 3,000 journalists (from 467 newspapers and 304 radio or TV-stations), a figure which doubled to more than 6,800 in 2005 (Rucht, 2005: 294–5). As Dieter Rucht (2005: 291) observed,

During its relatively short existence, the WSF has become an institution in its own right and can be seen as a kind of huge showcase for a large number of issues, groups, and claims. ... Within the short period of their existence, WSFs have become a trademark that has begun to overshadow its competitor, the World Economic Forum, in respect to public attention. It is also a structure that, according to its slogan 'Another world is possible', raises many hopes, energises many participants, links large numbers of issues and groups, and – last but not least – contributes to the creation of an overarching identity and community as expressed in the vision of a meeting place for the global civil society.

Since 2001, social forums also developed at macro-regional, national and local levels. Pan-amazzonean Social Forums were held in Brazil and Venezuela in 2004; African Social Forums in Mali and Ethiopia, Asian Social Forums in India (Sommier, 2005: 21). Among them, the European Social Forum (ESF) played an important role in the elaboration of activists' attitudes towards the European Union, as well as the formation of a European identity. The first ESF took place in Florence on November 6 to 9, 2002. Sixty thousand participants – more than three times the expected number – attended the 30 plenary conferences, 160 seminars, and 180 workshops organized at the Fortezza da Basso; even more participated in the 75 cultural events in various parts of the city. About one million participated in the march that closed the forum. More than 20,000 delegates of 426 associations arrived from 105 countries – among others, 24 buses from Barcelona; a special train from France and another one from Austria; and a special ship from Greece. Up to four hundred interpreters worked without pay in order to ensure simultaneous translations. The second ESF, held in Paris in 2003, involved up to 60,000 individual participants and 1,800 groups, among which 70 unions, in 270 seminars, 260 working groups and 55 plenary sessions (with about 1,500 participants in each); 3,000 worked as volunteers, 1,000 as interpreters. According to the organizers, 150,000 people participated in the final march. The third ESF, in London in 2004, involved about 25,000 participants and 2,500 speakers in 150 seminars, 220 working groups and 30 plenary sessions, as well as up to 100,000 participants at the final march. The forth one in Athens in 2006 included 278 seminars and workshops, and 104 cultural activities listed in the official program; there were 35,000 registered participants and up to 80,000 participated in the final march.[2]

The format of the social forum epitomizes the cognitive processes that develop within protest events as arenas for encounter. An element that was present also in many previous forms of protest, factory occupations among them, the cognitive dimension of protest events as spaces for exchanges of knowledge and ideas is strongly emphasized in the social forum process. Not by chance, the ESF is represented in the press as 'an exchange on concrete experiences' (*La Stampa*, 10/11/2003), 'an agora' (*Liberazione*, 14/11/2003), 'a kermesse' (*Europa* 3/11/2003), a 'tour-de-force of debates, seminars and demonstrations by the new global' (*L'Espresso* 13/11/2003), 'a sort of university, where you learn, discuss and exchange ideas' (*La Repubblica* 17/10/2004), 'a supranational public space, a real popular university, but especially the place where to build European nets' (*Liberazione* 12/10/2004). The spokesperson of the Genoa Social Forum (that organised the anti-G8 protest in 2001), Vittorio Agnoletto, writes of the ESF as a 'non-place':

It is not an academic conference, even though there are professors. It is not a party international, even though there are party militants and party leaders among the delegates. It is not a federation of NGOs and unions, although they have been the main material organisers of the meetings. The utopian dimension of the forum is in the active and pragmatic testimony that another globalisation is possible. (Il manifesto 12/11/2003).

The common basic feature of a social forum is the conception of an open and inclusive public space. The charter of the WSF defines it as an 'open meeting place'. Participation is open to all civil society groups, with the exception of those advocating racist ideas and those using terrorist means, as well as political parties as such. Its functioning, with hundreds of workshops and dozens of conferences (with invited experts), testifies to the importance given (at least in principle) to the production and exchange of knowledge. In fact, the WSF has been defined as 'a market place for (sometime competing) causes and an 'ideas fair' for exchanging information, ideas and experiences horizontally' (Schoenleitner, 2003: 140). In the words of one of its organizers, the WSFs promote exchanges in order 'to think more broadly and to construct together a more ample perspective' (Schoenleitner, 2003: 141). References to 'academic seminars' are also present in the activists' comments on the European forum published online (see e.g. http://www.lokabass.com/scriba/eventi.php?id_eve=12, accessed 20/12/ 2006). Writing on the ESF in Paris, the sociologists Agrikoliansky and Cardon (2005: 47) stressed its pluralistic nature:

Even if it re-articulates traditional formats of mobilisations, the form of the 'forum' has properties that are innovative enough to consider it as a new entry in the repertoire of collective action. [...] An event like the ESF in Paris does not indeed resemble anything already clearly identified. It is not really a conference, even if we find a program, debates and paper-givers. It is not a congress, even if there are tribunes, militants and mots d'ordre. It is not just a demonstration, even if there are marches, occupations and demonstrations in the street. It is neither a political festival, even if we find stands, leaflets and recreational activities. The social forums concentrate in a unit of time and space such a large diversity of forms of commitment that exhaustive participation in all of them is impossible.

What unifies these different activities is the aim of providing a meeting space for the loosely coupled, huge number of groups that form the archipelagos of the global justice movement. Its aims include enlarging the number of individuals and groups involved but also laying the ground for a broader mutual understanding. Far from aiming at eliminating differences, the open debates should help to increase awareness of each others concerns and beliefs. The purpose of networking-through-debating was in fact openly stated already at the first ESF in Florence, where the Declaration of the European social movements states:

We have come together to strengthen and enlarge our alliances because the construction of another Europe and another world is now urgent. We seek to create a world of equality, social rights and respect for diversity, a world in which education, fair jobs, healthcare and housing are rights for all, with the right to consume safe food products produced by farmers and peasants, a world without poverty, without sexism and oppression of women, without racism, and without homophobia. A world that puts people before profits. A world without war. We have come together to discuss alternatives but we must continue to enlarge our networks and to plan the campaigns and struggles that together can make this different future possible. Great movements and struggles have begun across Europe: the European social movements are representing a new and concrete possibility to build up another Europe for another world.

The development of inclusive arenas for the creation of knowledge emerges as a main aspiration in the social forum process. I do not want here to asses if, or to which extent, this aspiration is successful. The (still short) history of the social forums testifies of the difficulties that the implementation of those aspirations brought about. The World Social Forum process has been criticized 'from within' because of the dominant role of few founding organizations, as well as the linkages with some parties and political institutions. The tensions between those who perceive the forum as mainly a space for exchanging ideas and networking and those instead that privilege the constitution of a unitary actor, capable of political mobilization, has characterized not only the WSF, but also its European counterpart. The degree of inclusiveness of the European Preparatory Assembly, that organize the various ESF editions, is often discussed, and various groups have preferred to organize autonomous spaces outside of the official forums. The constant restructuring of the organizational format testifies of the perceived gap between norms and practices (on the ESF, see della Porta, 2007b, on the WSF, Smith et al., 2007).

This notwithstanding, the very continuity in time of both WSF and ESF, with declining media attention but sustained participation of individuals and groups indicates the search for spaces where communication between groups with very different organizational forms, issue focus and national background can develop, free from the immediate concerns for decision of strategies and actions. This is also not new, although the internal heterogeneity as well the transnational nature of these mobilizations gives a special character to this search. Cognitive exchanges develop during various forms of protest, used by various movements. The assemblies have developed as, more or less formalized and ritualized, spaces of encounters and debates. Marches have been usually closed by speeches of a more or less ideological content. What seems to make cognitive exchanges especially relevant for the global Justice Movement in general, and the social forums in particular, is the positive value given to the openness towards 'the others', considered in some activists' comments as a most relevant attitude in order to 'build nets from the local, to the national to the supranational' (see e.g. http://www.lokabass.com/scriba/eventi.php?id_eve=62, accessed 20/12/2006).

In this sense, social forums belong to emerging forms of action that stress, by their

very nature, plurality and inclusion. Similar forms of protest that favour cognitive 'contamination' (or cross-fertilization) are the 'solidarity assemblies', a series of assemblies where multiple and heterogeneous organisations active on similar issues are called to participate with their particular experiences,[3] or the 'fairs of concrete alternatives' whose aim is to link together various groups presenting alternatives to the market economy ranging from fair trade to environmental protection (della Porta and Mosca, 2007).

Additionally, the content of the exchanges that take place during forums and the like is usually less ideological than informative. In this, it reflects an attention to the construction of an alternative, but still specialized knowledge that seems to characterize nowadays many local as well as global protests. For instance, in campaigns against high speed railways, airports, roads or bridges, a main activity of protesters is the collection, elaboration and diffusion of information on the projects, based on technical knowledge obtained through dialogue with experts, 'internalized' through the participation to the protest of 'experts' (economists, engineers, urban-planners, etc.) (della Porta and Piazza, 2008). If the use of technical information has a legitimizing effect on the elaboration and implementation of public policies (Lewanski, 2004), technical 'counter-knowledge' is in fact considered a fundamental resource for those who protest. Beyond this instrumental use, knowledge can also transform the form and content of the protest as the various actors which participate in the protest tend to adopt a specialist language but also, in the course of the mobilization, technical knowledge becomes appropriated, transformed and transmitted by the activists.

How Protest Creates Communities

The deputy police commissioner glimpsed local politicians: my councilor and I were wearing the national flag, it was not the first time that the state turned on itself, but this time it was strange because it was the deputy commissioner that gave me orders to evacuate the streets in 5 minutes. They would have passed through anyway! At this point I began to call other politicians, various other people, asking them to come and join us. We are fortunate that we know the mountains well, the paths and mule tracks. After 10 minutes the deputy commissioner returned to ask us what we had decided, and I replied that we would not move and would defend our territory. At this point the police advanced with their shields above their heads. We conducted an entirely pacific resistance, with our hands in the air; we were retreating because we could not stand such a conflict, until behind us came reinforcements from everywhere, which helped us to resist the advance. So many people arrived that the police had to stop, and despite pushing from us the side were unable to move us. This went on until late in the evening, it was a very tough confrontation, from 7 in the morning till 8 in the evening, until the deputy commissioner, in agreement with the President of the Mountainous Community, suspended their activities. At that point we decided to leave, as the police themselves were doing. That same night the police occupied the area. (IVS7, cit. in della Porta and Piazza, 2008)

This is the chronicle, in the words of the mayor of a village in the Val di Susa, of an 'eventful protest' in the campaign against the construction of a High-Speed railway system on his territory: the so called 'battle of Seghino' on October 31, 2006. The evolution of local conflicts around large infrastructures often sees an escalation towards more disruptive forms of protest, as more moderate actions have failed to break the perceived 'brick wall' of the authorities (della Porta, 2004). Mass demonstrations are so accompanied by direct actions such as blocking roads or railway lines that, although excluding violence, represents a challenge to the state in terms of public order. A radicalization of conflict is particularly evident in Val di Susa, around a classic mechanism of interaction with the law enforcers that also attains a strong symbolic value. The escalation in the conflict with the police, centered around the occupation of the building site, which both sides are seeking to control, is perceived by the activists as a source for growing solidarity for and increasing identification with the protest. The eventfulness of protest emerges especially through the development of strong emotional ties, presented as at the basis for the development of a sense of belonging to a community.

Together with the mentioned 'battle of Seghino', charges in Venaus on November 29, the dispersal of the site occupation on December 6, the re-occupation of the site on December 8: these are the most acute moments of the conflict with the police around their presidiums in the valley, eventful protests which have accompanied this wave of mobilization. In similar ways, Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg, Genoa – with their images of street battles with the police and wounded people – have heathen emotional feelings of participants as well as by-standers.

As mentioned, protest repertoires are often chosen, or at least justified ex-post, as instrumentally useful. Despite the risk of stigmatization, direct action is perceived by those who protest as an instrument that raises the visibility of a protest ignored by the mass-media. As the President of the Mountainous Community in Val di Susa recalls:

thanks to Minister Pisanu, our visibility increased. I was hoping that this would happen, because from an electoral viewpoint 100,000 people count for nothing (given that they all vote differently), but if the protest spreads throughout Italy then their fear grows and their insults escalate along with the accusations of "localism". For this reason we are talking of a "large back-yard". (IVS8)

Even beyond the valley

the attacks by the police earned the sympathy of those who knew nothing of the Tav [...] for them it was counter-productive because it gave us added visibility and prompted a democratic spirit that went beyond the Tav conflict, because in a democratic country certain things should not be done. (IVS3)

However, beyond the instrumental dimension linked to increased visibility, the important effect of direct action on the more close circles of protestors is the strengthening of motivation through the development of feelings of solidarity and belonging. If emotions had long been looked with suspicion – not only in social movement studies,

but in political sociology and political science at large – attention to their role in social movements has recently (re)emerged. The emotional intensity of participation in protest events as passionate politics has been stressed (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001; Aminzade and McAdam, 2001) together with the role of subversive 'counter-emotions' in cementing collective identities (Eyerman, 2005). Research has stressed the mobilizing capacity of 'good' emotions (such as hope, pride, or indignation), and the movements' work on potentially dangerous emotions (such as fear or shame) (Flam, 2005). Reciprocal emotions (such as love, and loyalty, but also jealousy, rivalry or resentment) have especially important effects on movement dynamics. The role of dramaturgy, narrative and rituals in intensifying commitment has been investigated for protest events in general (as effect of an 'emotional liberation', see Flam, 2005) as well as for specific critical emotional events. All these elements emerge in our narratives.

In Val di Susa, the activists underline the positive effects of direct action as a moment of growth in solidarity with the local population. In particular, forms of direct action tend to produce more intense emotional effects. The accounts by the protesters in Val di Susa stress the strong emotional effects of some moments of escalation around the site where the work for the high-speed trains had to begin. They help singling out some emotional chains that are produced in action.

First of all, the interaction with the police around the occupied spaces produces the spread of *injustice* frames (Gamson, 1990), often mentioned by protesters as a source of consensus within the community and the strengthening of a collective identification with it. In Val di Susa, the intervention of the police to clear the site occupation became the symbol of an unfair attitude towards those who were protesting peacefully, the military occupation of the area 'being seen as an arrogance that nobody could justify' (IVS4). As local activists observe, 'the explosion of the movement (and nobody expected a participation of this strength) occurred from October 31 onwards, the days in which the violence of the government sent the troops into the valley' (IVS2); 'At the site occupation there were always 100–200 people during the day. When it looked likely to be cleared out then 2,000–3,000 people arrived, staying throughout the night to defend our position' (IVS11). Participation becomes more intense when faced with a perceived external aggression, described by activists as an act of war against a peaceful community. In the words of one activist, this perceived aggression forces the community to 'join the front-line':

People appeared in very large numbers on a week-day, they didn't go to work but went to the site occupation instead, believing that there was no use just in talking but that they should join the front-line. They all appeared with banner and flags. In Bruzolo, when the police were confronting the crowd, we joined in with our household utensils to defend ourselves. We are not afraid of anybody; we want to defend our territory in a peaceful way. Maybe you will laugh at us, but the battle is long. (IVS5)

The same sense of injustice emerges in the narratives on the dispersal of the site occupation by the police forces. In the recollection of one activist:

They destroyed the books of the university students who were studying (after all this was time taken away from daily activities) throwing them in a bonfire. And when people were forced to leave the fields, the police went round with the No Tav banners as if they were a symbol of conquest [...] and they also had the cheek to destroy the food supplies that were needed to live in the camp [...] old people were beaten and they stopped the ambulances from coming. An old man stayed an hour slumped on the floor, because they never even let the stretchers in (IVS10). [4]

Going beyond the Val di Susa case, injustice frames produced 'in action' have been central in the development of the global justice movement, as related to interventions by the police that are considered as all the more unjust given the non-violent forms of action chosen by the activists. In the protest against the WTO in Seattle as well as in those against the G8 in Genoa the images of the police brutalities against peaceful demonstrators have produced emotional shocks not only in those who had participated in the demonstrations, but also among those who later on identified with the protesters (della Porta et al., 2006).

Together with injustice, *arrogance* is a main narrative frame that emerges with regard to the presence of the police in Val di Susa, perceived as a 'militarization of the valley'. In the core narrative of the protest the militarization of the valley is the 'final drop that makes the glass spill over', while the successive mobilization is the 'reaction against arrogance: The moment in which they made false moves with arrogance and even trickery there was a popular reaction, from everybody not just militants' (IVS4). Its consequences are often recalled as an act of violence on the territory and its inhabitants:

On the night of the 29th my mobile rang. It was a friend of mine who said that they had come out and militarized the area. I set out with my heart in my mouth, the news made me feel trodden and tricked, with respect to a struggle that we had always conducted in the open, without subterfuge, while they carried out their actions in the middle of the night. [...] at Venaus they would not let anyone enter, we were stopped by the riot police. The scenes I witnessed were truly shocking, lots of people that normally work at dawn could not enter. An old woman arrived saying that she had to look after her grand-daughter and the police told her to have the baby taken out of the town, as she would not be able to get in. (IVS4)

The arrogance of a power that violates the very principle of democracy is often stressed with regards to the transnational demonstrations, when demonstrators are rejected at the borders, kept at distance from international summits, preventively arrested, charged by the police. The images of the police forces, militarily equipped and aggressively deployed to protect few powerful leaders from the large number of citizens ('You G8, we 8 billions' was the slogan of Genoa protest) is often communicated by the movement media as illustrating this arrogance.

The arrogance of the enemy can, however, discourage from collective action if it not accompanied by *anger*. If repression, increasing the costs of collective action, can discourage protest, it may however also reinforce the processes of identification and solidarity (della Porta and Reiter, 2006). In the perception of the activists, the police brutality in Val di Susa produced indignation:

The people started to get angry, there was no way of stopping them, they occupied roads and highway (the people, not the associations), they would have stayed day and night until the government gave a signal [...] from the 1st of November till the 6th of December it went ahead like this, then on the 6th they used force, beating old people. Two days later people shouted "let's take back the land" and 100,000 people descended and took it back. (IVS5)

La colère is also mentioned by those marching against unemployment (see above). What makes anger a mobilizing emotion is its connection with a feeling of *empowerment*, that comes from the experiences of successful moments of direct action. Remaining in Val di Susa, the re-conquest of Seghino (the place where the works were due to begin) is narrated as an epic return. In the words of one interviewee, the police charges mark the start of:

the time of fighting: The morning after in the valley there was a massive strike. The workers left their factories, the teachers never entered the schools while the parents never took their children there, and everyone went to occupy the valley, which remained so for 3 days. It was the time of the revolt, which culminated in the 8th of December with the re-conquest of the field. It was wonderful.

The memories of the police blockade at Mompatero are added to the observation that 'even the meek in front of injustice are capable of rebellion and will not turn back, because they understand it is a question of pride and dignity. This was the most important thing' (IVS10).

A feeling of *belonging* therefore develops on the street (or, in the case of Val di Susa, on the occupation sites). The activists in Val di Susa talked of a process of identification with the community which stemmed from the experiences of conflict with the police forces, coming from outside, but also from the encounters with the fellow citizens in the spaces that the protest had created. Again in the word of an interviewee,

Our identity began to strengthen itself from June, when the government tried to initiate the works. That summer people began to stay at the site from morning till night, people from the same town became friends who were only acquaintances before. The pensioners said that we should 'do it in this way because the battle is not over', because they understood the difference between watching it on TV and organizing activities. *The people became a community.* [...] the site occupation became a social event and this cemented an identification between territory and citizen which is quite exceptional. Then the events of Venaus obviously emphasized the solidarity in these difficult situations.

People ended up in hospital from police beatings, and a sense of community had been created (IVS8, our italics).

It is through long and intense actions, such as the site occupation, that, in the activists' narrative, the 'people' became a 'community'. The struggles around the No Tav site occupation of 2005 were seen as a moment of growth of the mobilization not only in numerical terms, but also in terms of identification with the protest. In the words of activists, the site occupation had 'great emotional force', 'a shared intimacy', 'wonderful as well as striking for the behavior of the people; the diversity of those present; and the sense of serenity' (Sasso, 2005: 61). In the memory of the activists, there are the 'unforgettable nights of Venaus, when we had a bonfire in the fields and the snow fell, and we felt truly united' (Velleità Alternative, 2006: 20). In their narrative, the site occupation is remembered as a serene but intense experience which reinforced feelings of mutual trust:

When on the night of 5-6 December the police forces went to occupy the land at Venaus [...] there was a wonderful encampment under the falling snow, fires burning, children and dogs playing. There were pots full of food, young people from all over Italy – because at that point we became the focus and hope for a series of struggles. All this they stopped with batons, beatings and by destroying our tents. (IVS10)

More in general, some forms of direct action (such as protest camps, occupations etc.) are eventful is so far as they affect the daily lives of the participants by creating free spaces. The site occupations in Val di Susa are in fact described as places of strong socialization,

real homes built on this territory, which became focal points – a wonderful thing. In the summer there were scores of people that came to talk and socialize, allowing feelings of solidarity to grow with the awareness that this struggle was for everyone. (IVS11)

Participation in the protest is seen as gratifying in itself, as it becomes part of everyday life: 'Throughout the whole summer there were 50–100 people that occupied three places in the valley (Borgone, Bruzolo, Venaus). In the morning, you went to get a coffee at the site occupation and not at the bar. If you wanted an alternative dinner you went to the site occupation, where you might also see a concert' (IVS5).

Allowing for frequent and emotionally intense interactions, the site occupations were perceived as an opportunity for reciprocal identification, based on mutual recognition as members of a community. According to one reportage,

this is the story of an unwitting revolution, says a young man, in these days we also changed, lost our prejudices and struck up friendships. People met each other that previously would have had little occasion to [...] we met, listened and found that we shared a common destiny. (Sasso, 2005: 62-3)

In the site occupations 'you got to know people *through the struggle*, you recognized each other' (IVS10, our emphasis). In this sense the action itself constitutes a resource of mutual solidarity and reciprocal trust, which allows the capacity to withstand later moments of intense conflict.

These site occupations also represent arenas of discussion and deliberation, places to experiment a different form of democracy, participatory because they allow for the creativity of individuals. In the words of one activist: 'Everything began from these site occupations, a wonderful form of participatory democracy where people from below could have their say: They could coin a slogan, a new banner, invent a new march, a new message' (IVS5). The site occupations thus become 'political laboratories' that produced interaction and communication:

Unity is so strong in the No Tav movement, we are so compact that we always overcome the many obstacles we have to confront [...] as militants, this struggle was a political laboratory, a moment of incredible growth, because very often it is difficult to act concretely, beautiful words we utter on the world we want, the contradictions we want to eliminate. Here we threw ourselves into the game, we experimented on the things we said and we learnt a lot from these people, from their motivation, their capacities, and we had to confront the realities of our own words which were far from the realities of political action. We concretized ourselves in a struggle of this type, and it was a moment of growth (both human and political) for all of us. (IVS1)

The experience of the site occupation transcends the opposition to high-speed trains. The occupied sites become places in which 'all the small problems which must be confronted daily are resolved through discussion, with spontaneous assemblies, with mutual trust and a complicity which reinforces the sense of solidarity' (IVS1). In the words of one activist, 'the site occupations were places inhabited by a different kind of life, where you could eat for free because money no longer had any value [...] it was a collective hope and when they responded with militarization the people rebelled' (IVS10).

If protest tends to be always emotionally intense, it is however especially in direct action – with the risks they involve – that emotional attachments are higher. If, again, direct actions have been widespread in various waves of protest, testifying the intensity of the activists' commitment as well as challenging the state control of territory, the recent mobilizations on global justice have seen in fact a return to direct action, after a period characterized by more moderate forms. Characteristics of direct actions in recent times have been a high ritualization – visible, e.g., in the 'demontage' of McDonald's shops by activists of the Confédération Paysanne, protesting against 'la mal bouffe' or Greenpeace raids against whaling boats, the blockages of nuclear sites but also episodes of passive resistance to police intervention or the recent attempts to penetrate 'red zones' during counter-summits in Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa. Part of the global justice movement, as well as the practice of the Disobedients that staged conflicts by covering their bodies with protective materials and using plastic shields to

protect themselves against police batons, but proceeding with hands-up as a sign of non aggression. In many such actions, the risk of arrest testifies to the conviction that something had to be done about a decision considered profoundly unjust, even if this involved running very serious costs indeed. However, among other the accounts on struggle in Val di Susa indicate that participation in direct action is often reworded by the creation of strong feelings of solidarity and identification in a community. Even more than that, in the intense moments of protest, activists do not seem guided by instrumental reasoning, but instead by a normative imperative to act against what is perceived as an unbearable injustice. Moreover, a second characteristic of recent uses of direct action is the attempt to create free zones in which alternative forms of life can be experimented with. The Zapatistas experience is in fact a most influent example for the global justice activists, in particular (and not by chance) for the squatted centers, that also focus on the construction of alternative space.

Eventful Protest in Context

I have until now singled out relational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms that develop throughout protest events – especially some of them. I have suggested that, although protest is used everyday by the most varied people, it is still a type of event that tend to produce effects not only (and might be not mainly) on the authorities or the public opinions but also on the movement actors themselves. In this sense, I have looked at protest as an 'independent' variable, but the effects I was interested in were especially those on the actors who participated in it. These effects – I suggested – are all the more visible in some specific forms of protest that require long preparatory processes in which different groups come together (e.g. transnational campaigns), stress more the relevance of communication (e.g. the social forums), are particularly intense from the emotional point of view (e.g. the symbolic and physical struggles around the occupied sites in Val di Susa). These kinds of protest are especially 'eventful', that is they have a highly relevant cognitive, relational and emotional impact on participants and beyond participants. Long-lasting events (or chains of events, such as campaigns), inclusive communicative arenas, free-spaces are forms of protest that seem particularly apt to create relational, cognitive and emotional effects on protestors.

I would not contend that these forms of protest are new, but I think it could be useful to reflect upon the specific contextual conditions in which *eventful protests* are more likely to occur. Above all, eventful protest seems more likely during *cycles of protest*. Cycles of protest have been authoritatively defined as coinciding with

[...] a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system that includes: a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors; a quickened pace of innovation in the forms of contention; new or transformed collective action frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified inter-actions be-

tween challengers and authorities which can end in reform, repression and sometimes revolution. (Tarrow, 1994: 153)

It seems to be especially during protest cycles that some events (e.g. the contestation of the Iran Shah in Berlin in 1967 or the Battle of Valle Giulia in Rome in 1968) remain impressed in the memory of the activists as emotionally charged events, but also represent important turning points for the organizational structures and strategies of the movements. The history of each movement and of contentious politics in each country always includes some particularly 'eventful' protests. The transnational character of recent protest and well as internal heterogeneity (a 'movement of movements' is a self-definition) of the recent wave of mobilization have added values to the relevance of those relational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms that make protest eventful.

Reflecting upon what makes 'eventful protest' more likely during protest cycles, a first general element that would impact upon cognitive as well as relational mechanisms is the *plurality* of participants. During cycles of protest different actors interact though processes of imitation, emulation or competition (Tarrow, 1989). Alliances are built and common campaigns staged. This brings about a particular need for communication that is expressed in assemblies as well as coordinatory committees. As mentioned, for contemporary movements, as the global justice movement or the peace movement, the necessity of organizing together actors involved on different specific issues, with different organizational traditions and particular repertoires of action gives even more relevance to moments of exchange of ideas. The experience of the social forum reflects a conception of the movement as an arena where different groups and individuals communicate with each other. Additionally, relational mechanisms are particularly relevant given the transnational nature of protest events. Counter-summits, social forums, global days of actions require in fact long processes of preparation in which not only hundreds or thousands of organizations, but also activists from dozens (or hundreds) of countries are involved.

A second element which is particularly relevant during cycles of protest is *identity building*. It is especially during cycles of protest that new movement identities (e.g. the student movement identity, the women's movement identity) develop and are given content. Cycles are promoted in the beginning by actors that mobilize within existing institutions, but also challenge them from the cultural point of view. New codes and ideas develop from the interaction of different organizational traditions, political generations, and social actors (Melucci, 1996; Rochon, 1998). Relational mechanisms therefore interact with cognitive ones. In the global justice movement, two specific cultural characteristics might increase their relevance. First of all, and in part as an effect of its internal diversity, the movement developed 'tolerant' inclusive identities, stressing differences as a positive quality of the movement (della Porta, 2004). The development of the 'method of consensus' as a principle for decision making (even if difficult to implement in praxis) testifies for this attention to the discursive element of democ-

racy. Second, the movement is characterized by a certain pragmatism: the breakdown of the big ideologies is accompanied by the search for 'concrete alternatives', or 'possible utopias' (to quote concepts that are quite widespread in the movement's language), with an acknowledgment of the difficulties of finding solutions for the existing problems. The cosmopolitan nature of several of these protests also increases the importance of communication between different languages and national traditions.

A third element that makes eventful protests more likely during cycles of protest is related to the interaction between the state and social movements, especially in the form of interaction between the *police* and demonstrators. Eventful protests are often those in which emotional feelings are heathen by violent interactions with the police. These events are likely to develop during cycles of protest since it is in these moments that new repertoires of action emerge (Tarrow, 1994) and the meta-issue of the right to demonstrate mobilizes alliances and opponents (della Porta, 1998). If the hypothesis on the development of de-escalation in police strategies in fact reflects the routinization of some protest, recent protests showed however some counter-tendencies, especially when new actors and forms of action enter the scene. Also, the militarization of police training and equipment is having most visible effects in the policing of some protest events especially since, after September 11th, issues of security are coupled with 'zero tolerance' doctrines even of petty crimes or disturbances of public order. The 'war on terrorism' had in fact a strong impact on the policing of protest as well as individual freedom at the national and transnational levels. Political transformations in the national party systems, with the weakening of the Left parties' willingness to act in defense of demonstration rights, also play a relevant role in the stigmatization and (frequent) repression of protest in the street. Finally, particularly delicate from this point of view are transnational protest events, with their high visibility, often encounters not only of activists from different countries but also of different police bodies, and (in the case of counter-summits) the adding up of security concerns to public order ones (della Porta, Pedersen and Reiter, 2006).

Notes

1. The counter-summits were 'eventful' also because of the frequent encounters with the police. In Amsterdam, the headquarter of the Central Bank, where Heads of State, Ministries and dignitaries met, was protected by 5,000 policemen. In Nice, on December 7th, attempts by a few thousands activists to block the avenue of the summit ended up in police baton-charges, with use of tear-gas. According to the chronicles, notwithstanding the deployment of anti-riot special police, armed with flash balls and rubber bullet pistol, the works of the summit were disturbed by the protest – among others, the tear-gas entered in the summit avenue, making Mr Chirac sneeze. The following year, protest escalated in Gothenburg. On June 14th 2001, some of the protesters clashed with the police, who had surrounded their sleeping and meeting spaces. On June 15, notwithstanding the arrests of bus-travellers at the borders and the strict controls on the 2,025 protestors singled out as dangerous by the Swedish police, on the evening a Reclaim the City party escalated in street battles that ended up with 3 demonstrators heavily wounded by police bullets. The dinner of the European Council was cancelled due to protest. In 2002 in Barcelona, while the long march (exceeding by far the organizers' expectations) proceeded peacefully, at its end some more militant groups clashed with the police, deployed 'en masse' (8,500 policemen) to protect the summit. Police charges, bringing about a feeling of injustice, also helped the strengthening of reciprocal ties of solidarity.
2. Data on participation are from the entry European social forum in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European _social_forum, accessed December 24, 2006).
3. An Italian activist defined these solidarity assemblies as 'a "logistical pot" in which everyone puts their ingredients' (SF20).
4. There is a frequent recollection of 'a police chief on a Caterpillar truck shouting on a megaphone "crush them all!" and encouraging the driver to push ahead until it was right in front, a nasty and dangerous experience which I will remember all my life because it was the first time I was scared that something awful could happen' (IVS4).

Interviews

Interviews in Val di Susa (carried out by Massimiliano Andretta and Eugenio Pizzimenti).

IVS1. Interview with Chiara, Centro Sociale Askatasuna, Val di Susa, 16/2/2006.

IVS2. Interview with Cosimo Scarinzi, secretary of Comitati Unitari di Base, Val di Susa, 18/2/2006.

IVS3. Interview with Gianni De Masi, councillor of Verdi, Val di Susa, 18/2/2006.

IVS4. Interview with Maurizio Piccione, Comitato Spinta dal Bass di Avigliana, Val di Susa, 18/2/2006.

IVS5. Interview with Pierpaolo Coterchio, Legambiente Piemonte, and with Gigi Richetto, university professor, Val di Susa, 17/2/06.

IVS6. Interview with Orsola Casagrande, journalist 'Il Manifesto', Val di Susa, 16/2/2006.

IVS7. Interview with Mauro Russo, Mayor of Chianocco, Val di Susa, 17/2/2006.

IVS8. Interview with Antonio Ferrentino, president of the Comunità Montana Bassa Val Susa, Val di Susa, 17/2/2006.

IVS9. Interview with Marina Clerico, university professor of Environmental Security at Politecnico di Torino, Val di Susa, 17/2/2006.

IVS10. Interview with Nicoletta Dosio, Secretary of the local Circe of Partito della Rifondazione Comunista of Bussoleno-Val di Susa, Val di Susa, 17/2/2006.

IVS11. Interview with Giovanni Vighetti, Comitato di Lotta Popolare contro l'alta velocità di Bussoleno, Val di Susa, 16/2/2006.

Interviews with representatives of social movement organizations involved in the Social Forum process in Milan (interviews carried out by Lorenzo Mosca):

SF1. Interview with responsible of the FIOM international office in Milan.

SF2. Interview with national secretary of Sin.Cobas.

SF3. Interview with national secretary of the Slai-Cobas.

SF4. Interview with national secretary of the Cub.

SF5. Interview with delegate of the Cobas School confederation in Milan.

SF6. Interview with delegate of the Slai-Cobas in Atm.

SF7. Interview with Cisl responsible for relations with the movements in Milan.

SF8. Interview with activist of the group Chainworkers.

SF9. Interview with Cgil former-responsible of the relations with the movements in Milan.

SF10. Interview with delegate of the Filt-Cgil in Atm.

SF11. Interview with voluntary of the association 'Un Ponte per'.

SF12. Interview with activist of the Lilliput Network.

SF13. Interview with voluntary of the association Manitese.

SF14. Interview with activist of the Forum on Critical Consumerism.

SF15. Interview with activist of the Group on Critical Consumerism.

SF16. Interview with responsible of the Acli international department in Milan.

SF17. Interview with organizational responsible of the Arci in the province of Milan.

SF18. Interview with responsible of the volunteers in the association Emergency.

SF19. Interview with president of the cooperative Chico Mendes.

SF20. Interview with president of the association Acea.

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