

# **FRAMES OF CLASS STRUGGLE**

**An ethnography about local labour and global capitalism during the  
“ThyssenKrupp Acciai Speciali Terni” steel plant strike in Terni, Central  
Italy.**

PhD Thesis  
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I, Matteo Saltalippi, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. The photographs and the visual material used in this thesis are my own. I confirm that, where the information has other sources, it has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

This thesis, which focuses on a prolonged period of unrest that took place at the TK-AST Terni steelworks in Central Italy in 2014 and addresses the ways in which labour activism contributes to the articulation of working class self-identification and consciousness. The thesis draws on anthropological approaches to class in a context of historical change that requires the Terni workers to engage in multiple and contradictory relations with local and global capital and with political entities. The thesis shows how contemporary labour struggles incorporate coercion and solidarity and demonstrates that the strike is reassessed as the main instrument of protest, while the Terni steelworkers' political agency fails to resonate with traditional repertoires of class struggle transmitted through memories and narratives about a glorious past. Through visual ethnographic methods, the thesis explores the steelworkers' engagement with their current possibilities: film and text draw on and illustrate the Terni workers' search for visibility for their cause and show how the fragmentation underpinning the organisation of production is reflected in the different ways that contractors and blue and white-collar workers engage with the struggle, thus undermining the emergence of a united front.

The thesis considers how new configurations and geographies of power undermine the pivotal role of local trade unionists and shape the demands of workers and the innovative forms of struggle they adopt to ensure media visibility. This leads to a proliferation of new forms of struggle that reflect the fragmentation of the Terni labour force even while they are pursuing the shared aim of safeguarding the future of the plant and the town. By analysing workers while they are stepping outside the boundary of the protected sphere of production and occupying public space, thereby transforming the economic struggle into a political one, the thesis demonstrates that the working class has not disappeared and highlights its relevance in the present socioeconomic landscape.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my first supervisor Massimiliano Mollona, whose research and films on steelworkers and the steel industry have been inspiring me since my time as an MA student at Goldsmiths; his formal and informal feedback, comments and encouragement have been crucial to the development of this research. I wish to thank also my second supervisor Victoria Goddard: her insights into the steel industry, and into what anthropology can do in order to understand the work and lives of steelworkers, have been thought-provoking and have guided me throughout my research.

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This research has also greatly benefited from the help of CGIL-FIOM in Terni, represented by Carlo, who introduced me to the Human Resource department of TK-AST.

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I wish to thank my mother and brother for their support and also my father, a retired worker, who transmitted his political ideas to me without impositions – it is probably he who is responsible for my interest in the workers' struggle.

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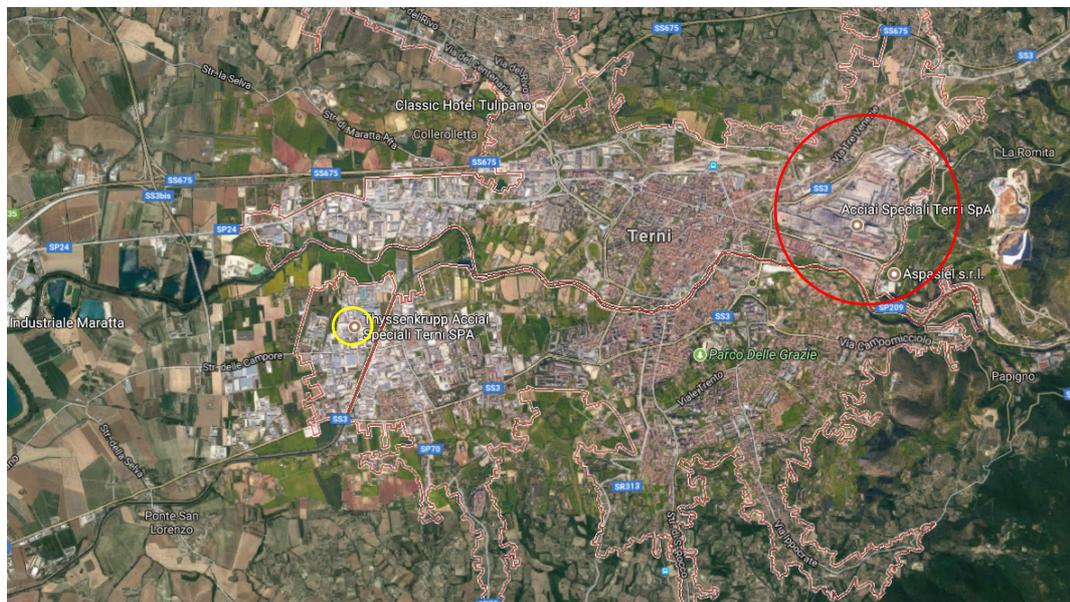
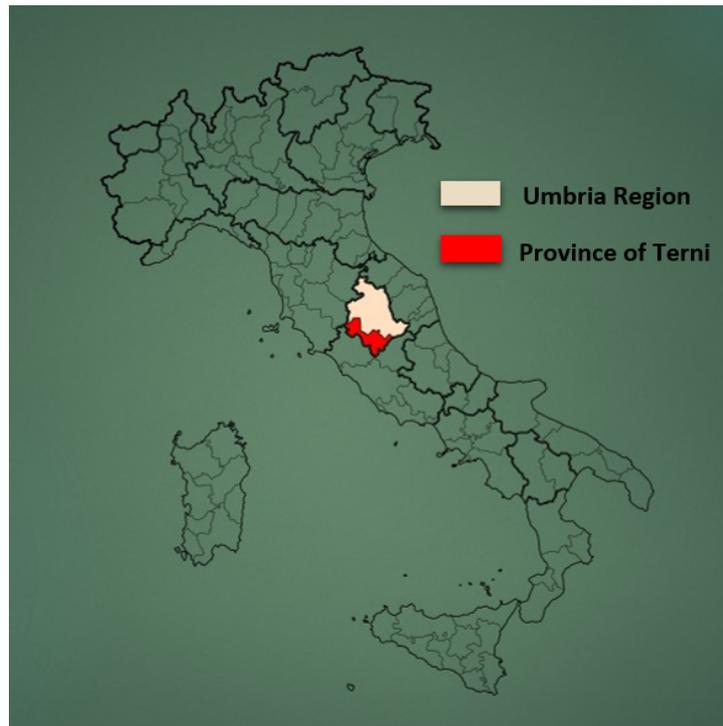
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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer.
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro – Italian General Confederation of Labour
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori – Italian Confederation of Trade Unions
CWO	Contracted Workers Organised
EAF	Electric Arc Furnace
ESF	Earnings Supplement Fund
FIM	Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici – Italian Federation of Metalworkers
FINSIDER	Società Finanziaria Siderurgica SpA – Steelmaking Financial Company
FIOM	Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici – Metal Workers and Employees Federation
FISMIC	Federazione Italiana Sindacati Metalmeccanici e Industrie Collegate – Autonomous Metalworkers and Linked Industries Union
IRI	Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale – Institute for Industrial Reconstruction
M5S	Movimento Cinque Stelle – Five Star Movement
MISE	Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico – Ministry of Industrial Development
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano – Italian Communist Party
PD	Partito Democratico – Democratic Party
RC	Rifondazione Comunista – Communist Refoundation Party
RSU	Rappresentanza Sindacale Unitaria – Joint Union Representatives
SAFFAT	Società degli Alti forni, Fonderie e Acciaierie di Terni – Blast Furnace Company, Foundry and Steelworks of Terni

SCU	Steelworkers & Citizens United
SdF	Società delle Fucine
TAS	Terni Acciai Speciali S.p.A.
TK	ThyssenKrupp
TK- AST	ThyssenKrupp-Acciai Speciali Terni S.p.A. (in the text also referred to simply as AST)
TKES-AST	ThyssenKrupp Electrical steel-AST.
UGL	Unione Generale del Lavoro – General Labour Union
UIL	Unione Italiana del Lavoro – Italian Union of Labour
UILM	Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici – Italian Metalworkers Union

## Map of the region



 TK-AST Finishing Department

 TK-AST Main Steel Factory

The town of Terni has 111,270 inhabitants, with approximately 88,000 in employment, divided as follows: primary sector – 1000; secondary sector – 25,000; tertiary sector – 62,000 (my elaboration of data up to 30 June 2015, collected by SISTAN, *Osservatorio provinciale sull'economia della provincia di Terni*; data available at: [https://www.istat.it/it/files/2011/05/Economia\\_Terni\\_1\\_sem\\_2015.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2011/05/Economia_Terni_1_sem_2015.pdf), accessed: January 2016).

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## Anthropology and working-class struggle

### 1.1 The field

When I arrived in Terni in November 2013, the town was celebrating the steelworks' 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For this occasion, the county council and TK-AST (ThyssenKrupp Acciai Speciali Terni S.p.A.), commonly referred to with its old name 'La Terni',<sup>1</sup> had organised a series of public events, exhibitions, conferences and institutional visits to the plant. These were mainly aimed at exalting both the proud historical labour tradition and the technical quality of the plant's steel production. However, as I perceived, the celebration entangled memories of the glorious industrial past with a ritualisation of optimism, intended to dissipate the clouds of uncertainty and the preoccupations which surrounded the steel factory. In fact, one year before this event took place, the workers had gone on strike to push the then-owner Outokumpu, a Finnish company, to issue a viable industrial plan to programme and guarantee production for at least the next two years. In light of these events, the first intention of my research was to investigate the relation between the internationalisation of capital and local labour, the impact of this relationship on the steelworkers and the construction of their identity within the production sphere in one of the last big Italian steel plants. This required becoming a worker and following the methodological approach of seminal research in similar industrial contexts (e.g. Beynon 1973; Burawoy 1979).

Furthermore, I intended to use visual methodologies to investigate the relationships between men and machines, and between the industrial environment and its surroundings.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the beginning of the previous century, the company and the steel plant itself have been called 'La Terni', like the town's name but with the feminine article, a semantic overlay which remains today and testifies to the degree of identification between the town and the steelworks.

In this light and after a few preliminary contacts with my informants, I felt the need to narrow the field and set access to the factory, even if only for a brief period, as my main priority.

The TK-AST factory is a town within a town, with identifiable boundaries and social actors, and the same fascinating exotic appeal as an archetypical anthropological field, formerly thought to be the highest step in the hierarchy of “field sites purity” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 13). Negotiating the gates to the huge buildings – triumphantly testifying, with their architectural heterogeneity, to the plant’s history – was the first obstacle to overcome, in order to begin the research that I had in mind at the time. I soon reached my first gatekeeper, the provincial CGIL-FIOM trade union<sup>2</sup> secretary in Terni, who set up a meeting with the ThyssenKrupp coordinator for public relations. The upper management employee granted me full access to the *Archivio Storico della Società Terni* (the factory historical archive, located 100m outside the gates). However, he kindly revealed to me the various difficulties and impediments to carrying out participant observation inside the plant, since internal regulations do not allow external researchers to investigate labour and production processes, unless it is carried out for specific purposes relevant to the firm.

My solution was to spend as much time as I could at the AST historical archive in order to expand my contacts among the network of employees involved in the firm’s public relations, then to negotiate access to the canteen, where I could interview workers during their breaks and possibly obtain permission for a guided visit in order to put one foot inside what I believed to be the ‘real’ fieldwork.

Contrary to what I had hoped, the archive was not a fruitful place to establish a network

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Trade unions’ and ‘trade unionists’ will also be referred to as ‘Unions’ and ‘unionists’ in the text.

since only two employees worked there, and most of the time I was the only visitor. However, thanks to its vast collection of photographs,<sup>3</sup> the archive made me reflect on the visual aspect of the research, and on how labour can be represented through images. The photographs in the archive had been commissioned mainly to document the production phases or for commercial purposes as product catalogues; in many instances, they showed men at work in static poses. Paolo, one of the archivists, claimed that at the beginning of the century “workers were just a means of showing how big the machines were”, thus positioning the workers, as Lanzardo (1999, p. 237) claims, “in a relationship of dependence and subordination” to the machinery itself. It was during the fascist regime that, however marginally, the workers became integrated as an aesthetic element into the technological apparatus. This was visible in the two series of photographs called *Dopolavoro (After-work)*, documenting the fascist ‘Total Factory’ model, which aimed to control the totality of the workers’ social life and leisure time. Mussolini even commissioned a screenplay by Luigi Pirandello to celebrate ‘La città dinamica’ (the dynamic city), as he renamed Terni, which later became *Acciaio* (1933), a pre-neorealist film directed by Walter Ruttmann. Impressed by the gigantic forges, Ruttmann shot long sequences inside the steelworks at the expense of the screenplay (Camerini 1990), representing the toiling workers as heroic “soldiers at work” (for this expression, see Lanzardo 1999, p. 237).

During the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, part of the photographic collection was arranged in an exhibition, covering the period from 1907 to 1965, which was curated by Paolo and displayed in the town centre from November 2013 to January 2014. As Paolo proudly asserted, the exhibition, entitled *La Terni in posa* – translated into English as *The*

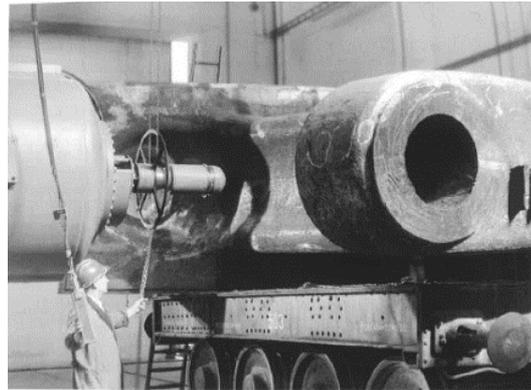
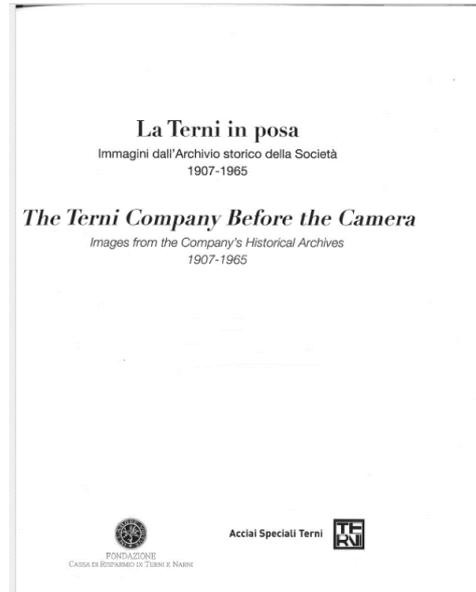
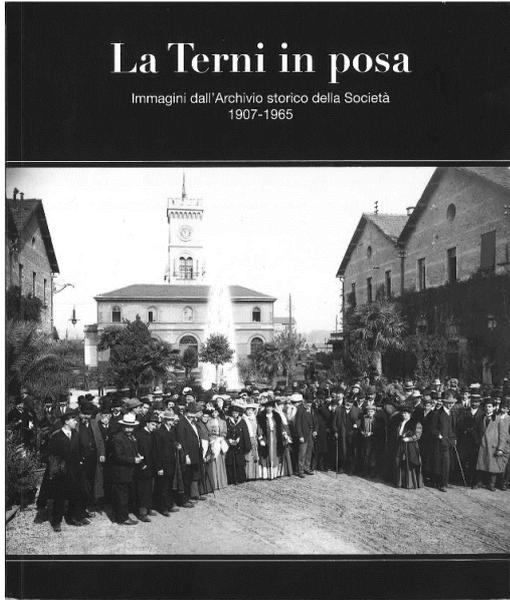
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<sup>3</sup> The *Archivio Storico della Società Terni* contains over 10,000 glass negatives, plus negatives on film and print negatives, from 1906 to the early 1990s. The audio-visual section contains 590 copies, including 16mm and 35mm films, VHSs and DVDs on the factory’s history and production processes, which have not yet been fully catalogued. See: [http://www.officinadellastoria.info/pdf/societa\\_terni.pdf](http://www.officinadellastoria.info/pdf/societa_terni.pdf) (accessed: 10 October 2014).

*Terni company before the camera* (see Fig. 1), was attended by over 30,000 participants, testifying to the strong connection that still exists between the factory and the town that emerged around it. The exhibition promoted by TK-AST reflected the 1980s and 1990s wave of nostalgia that pushed companies and Unions to direct their attention towards a recovery of the past that served a new image of the factory, as a centre of cultural as well as material production (Lanzardo 1999, pp. 265-271). The exhibition did not contain testimonies of the workers' struggle, which strongly characterised industrial labour in Terni; indeed, as later confirmed by the second archivist, there is no visual evidence of the workers' conflict in the AST archive.

If photographs, as Sekula (1997, pp. 443-447) claims, *interpret* reality, archives accurately catalogue this interpretation, and maintain by their very structure a hidden connection between knowledge and power. Knowledge of this sort can only be organised according to bureaucratic means, so the archival perspective is closer to that of the capitalist, the professional positivist and the bureaucrat than that of the working class. This is reflected when the photographs are exhibited. However, as Lanzardo (1999, p. 271) claims, the workers involved in building the archives considered only evidence of the workers' movement worthy of collecting, whereas all non-antagonistic behaviour was seen as an extraneous factor in their work history. Factories, indeed, provide a conflictual dynamic that is fundamental and irreconcilable; it would otherwise mean that their symbolic reproduction has no material limits, and no interested parties (see Roberts 2012).

I was very interested in exploring this tension and, as the weeks passed, and I started to get in touch with the first workers through my contacts at the CGIL Union, two events took place that shaped the future of my research.



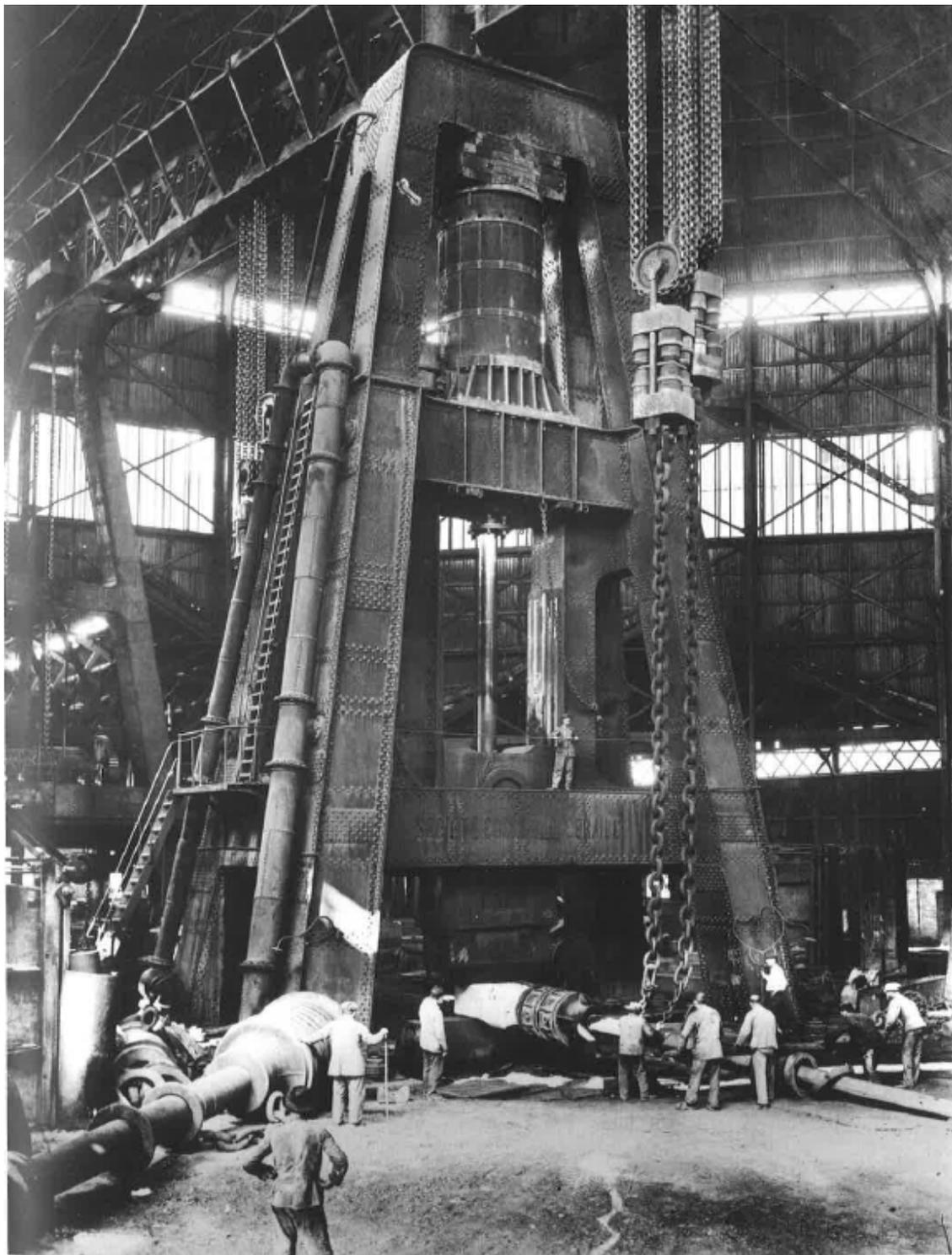


Figure 1. Set of photographs from the exhibition catalogue *La Terni in posa* given to me by Paolo the archivist as a present. First page, top right and left: catalogue cover. Middle left: 381mm bullet shells, 1916. Middle right: company kitchen, 1930. Bottom left: interior of a force tube, 1965. Bottom left: radiographic examination of a forged steel rudder, post-1965. Second page: The forge of an ingot in the ‘Grande maglio’ (Big Hammer), 1909. – Authorised by Acciai Speciali Terni S.P.A., ASAT.

Three months after my arrival, while reading a local online newspaper, I came across an article about a documentary in progress, called *Lotta senza classe (A Classless Struggle)*, which portrayed the lives of three AST steelworkers: a trumpet-player working in the cold department, a Union representative, and an Indian immigrant working for a contractor company. I contacted the director, Greca, a professional local filmmaker, asked her if I could be involved in the project, and helped her with the English subtitling.

Once complete, the documentary focused on three workers in relation to their home and work environments showing the latest steelworkers' one-day strike, which took place just before I arrived in Terni, and led to the occupation of the town's railway station. Interestingly, the final scene showed a very evocative stream of images of the small textiles and chemicals factories that closed in the 1970s, as a warning of a similar future for the steelworks. These images projected Greca's critical interpretation of the wider context in relation to the local industrial context, and the steelworks in particular.

Greca was indeed very interested and involved in the workers' life and future. She explained to me that, as the granddaughter of a deceased steelworker, she felt a strong connection with the factory and described her interest in the steelworks, linking it back to her grandfather's experience in the factory. Greca spoke about her aesthetic fascination with steel production in the hot department – a visually striking procedure by which steel scraps are melted and transformed on long scorching slabs, sliding on spinning rollers that flatten them until they are ready for the cold department. At the same time, she also talked me through the difficulties that she encountered while trying to film inside the plant. Eventually, after some negotiation with the public relations office, she had obtained a permit that allowed her to film within the factory perimeter. However, because of health and safety regulations and industrial espionage protocol, she was not allowed to enter the production departments with the video camera. This made me think further about the

obstacles that I would encounter in my attempt to capture steelworkers at work in photographs and especially in film.

Factories are indeed among the most difficult environments to film. As Farocki (2002) claims in *Workers Leaving the Factory*, it can be still said that film is rarely drawn to capture the factory even more than a century after the first camera was pointed at it – to film *La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon*, (1895) by the Lumière brothers.

Films about work or workers have not become one of the main genres, and the space in front of the factory has remained on the sidelines. Most narrative films take place in that part of life where work has been left behind. [...] Over the last century virtually none of the communication which took place in factories, whether through words, glances, or gestures, was recorded on film. (Farocki 2002)

As Roberts (2012) claims in *The Missing Factory*, elaborating on Farocki (2002), this is because the factory cannot be made compatible with the symbolic. This is partly for capital's sake, since the entry of representation into the factory destabilises the value process and must therefore be excluded; and it is partly for labour's sake, since workers would be encouraged to take pleasure in, or pedagogic instruction from, their own alienation. In Roberts's (2012) opinion bourgeois culture cannot incorporate its proletarian critique into its own symbolic reproduction, and even if capital were able to expose the violence of class relations as part of its reproduction, it would not be able to speak for labour. Furthermore,

The non-representation of the labour process inside the factory is the obverse of workers' resistance, or indifference outside the factory, to the representation of their own labour. (Roberts 2012)

For Roberts, the representation of the factory begins when the production of value is interrupted, during the process of being dismantled; the factory does not wait to be represented but dismantled.

The interruption of value production, entailing a dismantling process compatible with Roberts' description, was something that I was about to witness, something that would completely divert the path of my fieldwork, and open new avenues for the visual research. In fact, my fundamental encounter with Greca was followed by a dramatic turning point when, in early July, a sudden change in command took place: Marco Pucci left his position as the CEO of TK-AST, in favour of Lucia Morselli,<sup>4</sup> who had worked in the restructuring of TK subsidiary Berco in Northern Italy. The arrival of the new CEO presaged bad news: about a month after she took up her post, she issued a new industrial plan – described by the Unions as one of “blood and tears” – entailing 550 redundancies and the closure of one of the furnaces. This marked the beginning of a long period of labour unrest, and it meant that the factory that I had identified as the main site of my fieldwork research became totally inaccessible. But, as the work routine was suspended and the boundary between the protected sphere of production and public space collapsed, my network of informants grew exponentially, strongly affecting the whole research project.

In the next few months the workers established a picket line outside the gates and the AST industrial dispute rapidly gained prominence nationwide. The space just outside the gate became the core of the whole industrial action, the centre stage of labour mobilisation and collective action, turning into a “contested space” (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2007, p. 18) where the steelworkers transformed “the economic struggle into a political one” (Farocki 2002). This space became my new field site.

There, outside the factory gates, talking with the steelworkers and other participants and listening to different generations confronting each other, I perceived at times a subtle shift from living beings to concepts and inanimate objects. People became memories; episodes

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.umbria24.it/attualita/terni-marco-pucci-spiega-perche-lascia-la-tk-ast-vado-alla-ricerca-di-nuove-sfide-professionali> (accessed: 5 July 2014).

became places; present and past political actions became smoke stacks, bricks and coils of steel. To me, it seemed that the inhabitants of Terni had a kinship with the plant itself, its walls, history and labour production all being linked together, creating an almost eternal image of the plant. However, in the same space, while many interviewees contributed to building this idea of a solid community related to working-class identity, many others, both workers and non-workers, helped dismantle it. They advanced a construction of identity springing from the same political awareness that generated the factory kinship, but in an opposite direction. Emancipation from the economic industrial hegemony of the steelworks, environmental activism and anti-Unionism were just a few examples of a range of activities of social actors who engaged in the issues of conflict in a totally different way, shaping before my eyes the foreseeable end of steelmaking in Terni.

Greca and I decided to work together on filming the dispute and produce a documentary on the unfolding events, which could work as a follow up to *Lotta senza classe*, and enable us to capture the diverse opinions and contradictions born out of the dispute.

The strike, indeed, provided me with a wide range and diversified set of data, which strongly influenced the direction of the research project. I began to focus on the impact of labour outside production: on the steelworkers' reaction to the loss of their financial stability and how this affected the construction of their identity. Observing and reflecting on the ability of the steelworkers to halt production and temporarily shut down an entire town generated new research questions about the nature of workers' power: how do workers use it and who authors it? Does it entail the consciousness of belonging to a class of workers? What is left of the working class which has been the protagonist of the local social political and economic landscape in the last decades?

Consequently, the research became an effort to understand how and why workers mobilise, investigating the dynamics of class struggle ethnographically and through visual means, and to map the present-day workers' presence in the local socio-economic landscape.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

### **1.2.1 Changing industrial landscapes**

The steel industry has been strategic, both in developing modern national economies and in constituting unified national territories through the enhancement of infrastructure and urban expansion. These endeavours have required substantial investments, generated mass employment and entailed the commitment of nation-states to supporting the steel industry, which created purpose-built urbanisations known as 'company-towns' (Goddard and Narotzky 2015; Goddard 2017). These towns provided a model for the settlement, incorporation and disciplining of large workforces, encompassing workers' public and private lives, creating complex webs of reciprocities entailing employers, trade unions, workers and their families, and fostering new forms of sociality, identity and belonging (Goddard 2017, p. 3). The Terni steel plant, producing special quality steel with its Electric Arc Furnace (EAF), is inscribed in this scenario: it was built in 1884 as part of a state project, in the wake of what Bonelli (1975, p. 4) describes as "Italian steel industry-protectionist-development", established to develop the national defence sector. It consequently triggered the expansion of a vast industrial complex that turned a rural village into an industrial town and created a working class<sup>5</sup> which has shaped the

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<sup>5</sup> This thesis focuses only on steelworkers, as the largest part of the local working class, comprising 2,637 employees (see Chapter 4), and the main actor in the labour unrest that was the central object of my research.

economic, social and political life of Terni over the last 130 years in crucial ways (e.g. Covino et al. 1986; Portelli 1985, 2008).

European steelworkers born in contexts such as that of Terni, as well as in larger industrial clusters, became protagonists of the sphere of production from the First World War until the post-Second World War reconstruction. The landscape that emerged reflected paternalistic ideologies and practices, through which workers were included in the projects of capitalism and of the state, producing intertwined economic and political interests that resulted in strong intervention from the state to resolve the steel sector's crises. This gave the working classes considerable power, enabling them "to stop the whole national economy" while protesting for better wages and working conditions, as my older informants proudly claimed while recalling their past experiences of work and struggle in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, in the late 1960s, the world market (under US hegemony) was undermined by the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, and, from 1970 to 1980, a cost-cutting race in which "too many corporate structures 'chased' too few locations" (Arrighi 1990, p. 79).<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1970s as Goddard (2017, p.4) explains:

The recession and the oil crises [...], unsettled long-term projects, such as those embodied in the company town, as global conditions undermined the paternalistic relations that underpinned the company town model.

This process was followed by the embrace of a neoliberal economic model (see Harvey 2005, 2006). When the state-sponsored modernisation projects failed, the workers'

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<sup>6</sup> Arrighi partially parallels Wallerstein's world systems theory and division between core, periphery and semi-periphery states. As Silverman (2005, p. 305) summarises, the spread of capitalism turned hinterlands into dependent satellites of metropolitan centres which, by exploiting their satellites to propel their own development, created under development. The development of a critical debate on Dependency Theory within Anthropology is beyond the scope of this introduction (see Frank 1966, Wallerstein 1974, Wolf 1982 for main contributors and Silverman 2005 for a historical review of the debate).

reliance on the regulating power of the state gradually declined (Zolberg 1995). In particular, the 1970s saw the end of concessions to the workers' movement, which had sought to exorcise the spectre of revolution, and marked the transition from Fordist strategies of capital accumulation and mass production/consumption to a late capitalist regime of flexible accumulation and decentralised production – which implied the need to develop technical and organisational innovations to enhance profit and control workers, undercutting their bargaining power (Harvey 1989, p. 152).<sup>7</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, in the West in particular, large firms and steel companies engaged in rapid processes of privatisation and concentration, while states assumed the role of maintaining capital's conditions of reproduction (Bonanno and Constance, cited in Durrenberger 2012, p. 136).

As Goddard points out restructuring, and privatisation carried out under neoliberal reforms, heightened the vulnerability of plants and jobs to competition, cutbacks and closure (Goddard 2017, p.4). Over 65% of jobs were lost in Europe between 1975 and 1995 (ibid, p.19). In Terni, indeed, about 35% of jobs were lost across the entire industrial sector between 1981 and 1991 (Patalocco 2013, p. 69). The expansion of neoliberalism led scholars to analyse how processes of displacement and dispossession were experienced by workers in specific localities (Collins 2002), highlighting the need for reinterpretations of primitive accumulation. In *The New Imperialism*, following Luxemburg's theorisation of Marx's primitive accumulation as an ongoing characteristic of capital expansion, Harvey (2003) has elaborated the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' as a dialectical relationship between the expanded reproduction of capital and the violent process of dispossession that has shaped the historical geography of capitalism. In Harvey's view the process of dispossession rests on capitalism's ability to manufacture its own 'other', either outside, in non-capitalist social formations, or within

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<sup>7</sup> For neoliberalism as a consequence of the 1970s crisis of over-accumulation, see Harvey 2003, pp. 149-150.

itself, in sectors not yet proletarianised (ibid., pp. 141-142). In Harvey's view, the labour struggle within expanded reproduction has to be seen in a dialectical relationship with the struggle against accumulation by dispossession of social and anti-global movements (ibid., pp. 168-170). He identifies two types of labour and popular struggle: in the global North, the defensive potential of labour movements facing a loss of privileges; in the global South, the revolutionary, progressive potential of anti-global and social movements.

Anthropologists such as Kasmir and Carbonella (2008, 2014) have engaged critically with this approach. On the one hand, they consider accumulation by dispossession as a valuable foundation for understanding neoliberal globalisation. On the other, they believe that such north/south demarcation means that dispossession is imagined as a relatively bounded and divided process, or just the outcome of a given event, thus missing the crucial complexity of the experiences, and political responses, of the workers engaged in it. Furthermore, Harvey's dichotomy inhibits the remapping of past and present geographies of labour accumulation and "struggle that are urgently needed" (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014, p. 7). Processes of dispossession, displacement, reaction and the fragmentation of class consciousness are experienced differently in specific locations, due to the historical characteristics of the context (see in particular Collins' [2002] multi-sited ethnography of a factory relocation from the US to Mexico). In this light, Kasmir and Carbonella develop a more holistic notion of dispossession, which expressly refers to the varied acts of disorganisation, defeat and enclosure that are at once economic, social and cultural, and that create the conditions for a new set of social relations. At the centre of this relation lies labour, a concept that Kasmir and Carbonella (2014, p. 7) describe as follows:

[...] labor – rather than ‘livelihood’ as a collection of strategies for social reproduction, or “work” as a social activity, both of which are close companion concepts – is a pointedly political entity, whose social protests and quietude, organisations, and cultures reflect its multiple engagements with capital and state, as well as relationships with other workers locally, regionally, and globally.

This definition conveys several related ideas: first, following Wolf (1982), it includes myriads of ways of working within the temporal and spatial processes of capital accumulation; secondly, it refers to the power-laden processes of categorising, differentiating or unifying those labourers; thirdly, labour in a political sense allows the exploration of how states and other powerful institutions intervene in capitalist processes to facilitate or obstruct connections between working people, and leads to close examination of the creation of organisational forms such as trade unions and political parties (ibid., p. 8).

This thesis is aligned with this wide-ranging theorisation of labour and focuses on labour-related struggles to analyse the international industrial landscape changes and their consequences for my field-site, as well as the national steel industry as a whole, at the time of my research.

In fact, in September 2014, while Italy was in its third consecutive year of recession (with a GDP of -0.4 percent,<sup>8</sup> the only ‘negative’ country of the G7), Prime Minister Renzi, of the centre-Left PD (Partito Democratico, Democratic Party) gave a rather optimistic speech to the Chamber of Deputies, describing his *One-thousand-day programme*, a plan to guide Italy until the end of his tenure. The slogan was ‘Changing Italy in order to change Europe’, starting with the five areas that required the most extensive and most rapid ‘reform’: public administration, education, health, justice and labour. This latter one

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2014-09-16/csc-taglia-stima-pil-italia-04percento-2014-reagire-rilancio-competitivita-e-investimenti-130159.shtml?uuid=ABIIoFuB&refresh\\_ce=1](http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2014-09-16/csc-taglia-stima-pil-italia-04percento-2014-reagire-rilancio-competitivita-e-investimenti-130159.shtml?uuid=ABIIoFuB&refresh_ce=1) (accessed: 16 May 2016).

was very important for Renzi's government, and in his speech, he specifically addressed the situation of the steel industry:

We need an industrial policy, we need the courage to tell people that the *dorsale siderurgica* ['steel dorsal/ridge'] of this country goes from Genoa to Taranto, through Terni and Piombino. This won't be shut down, but rather opened up, spread out to international markets [...] We need the courage to go where companies are in crisis – and we are going there [...] the 'one thousand days' are the occasion to define a mission that has a very short time to be realised.<sup>9</sup>

The speech did not go into details about the 'short time' Renzi referred to, but this was uttered to imply the urgency with which the government had to resolve the diverse and critical conditions the national steel sector was experiencing. The PM's discourse was interesting for two reasons: first, it put the steel industry centre stage, and secondly underlined the importance of industrial workers to the national economy,<sup>10</sup> though in an international market, intending a broadly accepted truism that "what is good for capital is good for all" (see Kasmir and Carbonella 2014, p. 2) – which was precisely what the workers were contesting.

In Piombino (Central Italy), the Lucchini S.p.A. steel plant – formerly an Italian enterprise, now owned by the Russian steelmaking group Severstal – had been declared bankrupt in April that year and had shut down the blast furnace forever, which had been the life-blood of the 7km-long plant built a century before.<sup>11</sup> The plant was on the market and the only glimmer of hope came from the Algerian multinational corporation Cevital,

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<sup>9</sup> For a transcription of the speech, see: <http://www.camera.it/leg17/410?idSeduta=0291&tipo=stenografico> (accessed: 16 May 2016).

<sup>10</sup> As shown recently by the research collective Clash City Workers, in official statistics industrial workers occupy a marginal position. For instance: 73.4% of Italian GDP is produced in the tertiary sector, 18.6% in the secondary sector, 6% in construction and 2% in agriculture. The research has shown that, contrary to what may be evinced from the data, the labour outsourcing process does not parallel the deindustrialisation process, because what is growing in the tertiary sector is mainly jobs linked to the secondary sector; the phases of the productive process that have been externalised following companies' financialisation are counted as outsourced services but in reality they are processes integrated into the production phases, while the productivity increase of the tertiary sector is due to manufacturing rather than immaterial labour (Formenti 2016, p. 154).

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/04/19/si-spegne-laltoforno-di-piombino-cosi-i-politici-hanno-lasciato-morire-lacciaieria/954817> (accessed: 16 May 2016).

which proposed buying the plant and converting the outmoded rail-track production into EAF, making less polluting and less costly special steels, but nothing had been decided yet. Meanwhile, the 2,500 directly employed workers were dependent on a reduced salary paid by the CIG (Cassa Integrazione Guadagni - Earnings Supplement Fund).<sup>12</sup>

In Taranto (Southern Italy), the Ilva steel plant, employing 12,000 workers (including the supply chain), was partly shut down in 2012 because of non-compliance with the relevant permits and environmental legislation.<sup>13</sup> Over the years Taranto witnessed a number of state and EU interventions and was a site of trade union action protesting against job losses and the plant's partial closure. The Riva family, who owned the plant until the Italian government intervened, were found guilty of failing to prevent high levels of toxic emissions, and the plant was placed under 'extraordinary administration', in an attempt to resolve the environmental problems and bolster the plant's recovery from a series of losses (see Goddard 2017, p.19)

At Ilva in Genoa (Northern Italy), a small plant operating well under its capacity (producing 28,000 tonnes instead of 350,000 tonnes), 1,400 out of 1,700 workers were on 'solidarity contracts' (reduced working hours and pay)<sup>14</sup>; in September 2014, they were waiting for the contracts to be renewed.<sup>15</sup>

All these plants were characterised by site-specific, long-term labour unrest, which had, in turn, recently gained visibility in the national media. But in September 2014, when the trade unions of AST Terni started a long series of negotiations with the German owners,

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<sup>12</sup> For a full explanation of CIG, see Chapter 4.2.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/563471/IPOL\\_IDA\(2015\)563471\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/563471/IPOL_IDA(2015)563471_EN.pdf) (accessed: 16 May 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Solidarity contracts are company collective agreements with the trade unions at national levels provided to prevent or avoid the declaration of employee redundancies or multiple dismissals. They involve a reduction of working time and consequently wages of all the workers but maintaining their social security benefit entitlements. See: [www.labourlawnetwork.eu](http://www.labourlawnetwork.eu) (accessed: 18 May 2018)

<sup>15</sup> <http://genova.erasuperba.it/inchieste-genova/cornigliano-ilva-acciaieria> (accessed: 16 May 2016).

their battle soon turned into the longest strike Italy had experienced since the Fiat unrest in the 1980s. It became “the dispute of disputes”, as my informants called it, the spearhead of a period of labour unrest and political turmoil which partly obscured all other disputes.

When there seemed to be little hope for a revival of the national steel sector, Terni’s male working class, which dated back 130 years, experienced a period of profound uncertainty, in which political weakness, international economic conjunctures and multinational powers threatened their existence. Among the Italian steel factories, AST-Terni, acquired by ThyssenKrupp in the 1990s, was the one with the longest experience of foreign, multinational corporate ownership, and had already gone through - and fought against - downsizing and relocation of production. This factor, in alignment with ethnographic and structural studies evaluating the important impact of the accumulated experience of previous strikes (Chandavarkar 1994; King-Chin Chan 2010; Mandell 1995), played an important part in prompting AST steelworkers’ passionately taking to the street in protest against their dispossession. Coming together as a group inevitably made them question their class composition and discuss their work and class awareness.

In this light, through an ethnography of the AST dispute, the thesis aims to frame the making and unmaking of the workers’ class identity and consciousness during their struggle. Hence the title of this thesis, *Frames of Class Struggle*, aims to flag a dual significance: on the one hand, ‘frames’ are borrowed from cinematographic language and link to the thesis’s visual section comprising frames as images; on the other, the title provides the first keyword to define the thesis’s aim, that of trying ‘to frame’ an understanding of the local working class and its struggle.

### 1.2.2 Conflict, class and consciousness

The decline of the traditional Fordist male working class, the outcome of technological innovation (Bell 1973) and the failure of the working-class ideological projects and the consequent weakening of traditional institutions (parties and trade unions), has led authors such as Gorz (1980) to declare *Farewell to the Working Class* and Zolberg (1995) in *Response: Working-Class Dissolution* to call for its dissolution, identifying in the past achievements of workers and their allies an impediment to future rebellion (ibid., p. 32). As Therborn (2012) argues, the time when the highpoint of Western industrial capitalism empowered its chief opponent, the working class, has gone. This is also because the developed economies are deindustrialising, dividing and defeating the workers' movements, and the project of emancipation led by the proletariat is being replaced by a universal process of "middle-classification" (Therborn 2012; Edwards et al. 2012) – however, it seems less reasonable to believe that, as he claims, "the workers of the last century are banished from memory" (Therborn 2012, p. 5), as *La Terni in posa* well testifies.

In contrast to these, this thesis aligns itself with the stance advocated by Silver (2003) in her important book *Forces of Labor*. Here, the author has elaborated the relation between labour unrest and capital development, recasting labour studies in a historically long and geographically wide frame of analysis, to move away from the dominant approach in the Social Sciences since the 1980s – which assumed that labour and class-based mobilisations are a relic of the past (Zolberg 1995; Castells 1997). Opposing the view that the labour movement is in terminal crisis, and exploring its future trajectories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the author argues against the 'race-to-bottom thesis', according to which, in the face of globalisation, world economic forces push competition among workers worldwide, undermining working classes in core countries and preventing their

mobilisation in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. Silver theorises several types of ‘fixes’<sup>16</sup> adopted by capital in order to survive under the changing conditions of the globalised market. In order to reduce the complexity of a macro-historical study, Silver follows Katznelson and Zolberg’s (1986) study of the four-level division of working class formation. This division includes: structure of capitalist development, ways of life, disposition, and collective action. Silver is concerned with the interrelation between the first and fourth levels, and refrains from an analysis of the relationship between intense phases of labour militancy, and the presence or absence of working-class consciousness. Silver is open to a wide range of possibilities from which class consciousness may emerge, but, given the nature of her study, she does not investigate the way it emerges or its importance in workers’ struggles (Silver 2003 pp. 31-32).

Structural analyses of waves<sup>17</sup> of labour unrest, dealing with large bodies of data, serve the function of inserting labour conflicts into the broader picture of changing historical events and capital mobility. However, they neglect the point that, as Luxemburg (2008,

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<sup>16</sup> Restructuring actions such as outsourcing, just-in-time (JIT) production and plant closure are among the so-called ‘technological fixes’, aimed at radically changing working habits and setup according to flexible, yet greedy, principles (Silver 2003, p. 39). ‘Spatial fixes’ are those concerned with the relocation of production, and the fact that wherever capital is relocated, conflictual situations arise; this type of fix ultimately generalises the labour/capital conflict to a global level (Silver 2003, p. 41). Silver notes a ‘déjà-vu pattern’ involving the relocation of capital followed by the emergence and strengthening of new labour actions in each new location – which she calls a Marx-type labour unrest. The ‘financial fix’ shares the same principles as the spatial and technological fixes: just as capitalistic systems try to move businesses and productions to new geographical areas or new market sectors, capital is moved outside the scope of business/production, towards monetary and financial operations. This ‘financialisation’ of capital weakens the negotiation power of those industrial, ‘overcrowded’ activities from which capital had withdrawn (Silver 2003, p. 132).

<sup>17</sup> On a general note, studies of labour unrest interpret workers’ struggles according to two main tendencies. The first lies in relation to economic cycles – i.e. Kondratiev’s (1979 [1926]) cycles (expansion; stagnation; recession; see Screpanti 1987; Kelly 1998; Franzosi 1995) – linking insurgencies to the accumulation of social tension during expansion periods. This is opposed by the state and capitalist forces which foster the feeling of injustice perceived by workers changing the relations of power in favour of the latter, who trigger mobilisation through organisation and collective action. The second advocate, instead, for a de-synchronisation of the industrial cycle of conflict from capital expansion and recession, focusing instead on geographical relocations of production, phases of technical innovation and consequent resistance to the reorganisation of labour (Mandel 1995; Silver 2003). However, as Franzosi (1995, p. 349) notes, the institutional, economic, organisational and political factors are in constant evolution, and change according to the conflict. Historical processes do not evolve in a linear fashion, and it is impossible to look at industrial conflict as a dependent variable and at the institutional, economic, organisational and political factors as independent variables. This is because conflict itself produces effects in the institutional, economic, organisational and political fields. It changes and/or subverts existent relationships and creates new ones. The waves of strikes emerge as motors of socio-political change and are themselves cyclical phenomena which change according to economic cycle, the collective bargaining structure and the political position of labour in power structures (Franzosi 1995, p. 446).

p. 141) claimed, strikes – ‘the phenomenal form’ of proletarian struggle – are not a universal political tool or strategy, but rather a culturally and historically specific moment of political action and exploration. Thus, by attempting to bridge the gap between a long-term diachronic study on the forms of the local metalworkers’ grievance and the data gathered from present-day participants, the thesis will start by evaluating today’s workers’ fragmented mobilisation (see Chapter 2), relying on mainstream and visual ethnographic methodologies (see Chapter 3).

As Fantasia (1989) claims, in historical and ethnographic accounts of working-class consciousness, discontinuities and paradoxes emerge frequently, generating difficult yet rewarding problems. In his book *Cultures of Solidarity*, Fantasia (1989) fosters a critique of sociological survey research, precisely because it overlooks these paradoxes. Collective consciousness, in fact, as the sum of separate individual attitudes recorded at any given moment, turns out to be wholly different from the ‘consciousness’ expressed by the same respondents in the ‘praxis’ of collective action. ‘Cultures of solidarity’ for Fantasia (1989, pp. 17-19) are neither ideas of solidarity in the abstract nor bureaucratic trade union activity, but cultural formations that arise in the midst of collective action, creating and sustaining communal solidarity in opposition to the dominant individualistic hegemonic structure. This thesis will thus provide data which evaluates the praxis through which solidarity is generated, not only as something created *ex novo* during the struggle, as Fantasia (1995, pp. 279-280) proposes, but also as part of the tradition of solidarity and unrest which has characterised the Terni steelworkers’ community since its formation (see Chapter 2).

Nevertheless, Fantasia’s methodological standpoint is rather important and stems from the critique of works such as that of Goldthorpe et al. (1969), carried out in post-war Britain among car factory workers with high salaries and middle-class lifestyles. The

affluent worker individuated by Goldthorpe et al. was individualist and economically driven, far from the solidarity that characterises the world of working-class communities. This wide-ranging, industry-level approach to workers' consciousness stands in contrast to later ethnographic-oriented, sociological studies focusing on the heterogeneity of the workforce within the same factory (Beynon and Blackburn 1972; for this rationalisation, see Mollona 2009b, p. xiv). As Mollona (2009b, p. xiv) argues, against the culturalist framework of the affluent worker, sociologists of labour claim that workers' motivation is largely the effect of managerial indoctrination, mechanisation and shop-floor organisation (see respectively Lupton 1963,<sup>18</sup> Burawoy 1979, Beynon 1973); such scholars link working class decline to technological improvement and repressive industrial policies.

In the late 1990s, Mollona (2009a), in his shop-floor ethnography *Made in Sheffield*, documented the resilience of British steelworkers in the face of anti-labour policies by consecutive conservative governments and extensive subcontracting in the steel industry. These workers, subject to reorganisation based on flexible production, teamwork, multi-skilling and Total Quality Management, underwent class fragmentation in ways difficult to comprehend and control; they could hardly be described as middle-class, and were forced to implement their incomes through the informal economy (Mollona 2009a, pp. 168-169).

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<sup>18</sup> The Manchester School, especially Cunnison (1964) and Lupton (1963), evaluated strikes in relation to a wider social conflict, but saw them as generated by technologisation, automisation and workers' loss of control over production. Since the Manchester School aimed to study, for example, the economic and managerial structure of the factory in dynamic relation to the socio-economic context which hosted it, conflict was not to be exorcized, but studied in its relation to the wider social structure. Conflict was thus understood "in Gluckmanian terms, that is, [as] a structural element whose function was to ensure a certain social balance" (Papa 1999, p. 35). This was in contrast to previous studies of industrial labour by the Human Relations school and the Applied Anthropology school (see respectively Hyman 1991, p. 63, Holzberg and Giovannini 1981, p. 348), which studied labour in the context of a confined capitalistic sphere of production, where industrial peace was considered the norm and conflict pathological, generated by miscommunication between workforce and management.

Without indulging in the analysis of shop-floor ethnographies (which this thesis cannot be aligned with), I will mention the relevance of anthropological studies in defining the internal division and complexity of dialectical relationships within the working classes, overlooked by sociological studies (e.g. Beynon 1973; Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979), which, as Mollona (2009b, p. xvii) remarks, have discounted the relevance of cultural factors such as gender, ethnicity, age or religion that workers bring to the shop floor.

In this light, as Goddard (2017, p. 6) claims, I am aware that sectors of work historically associated with masculine identities as breadwinners have been affected by the scaling-down of heavy industry, breaking down the identification between working-class jobs and working-class men. I am also aware of ethnographic studies evaluating the features and identity of female workforces (D'Aloisio 2003, 2014), the meaning of gender on the shop floor as a fulcrum of struggle (Salzinger 2003; Ong 1987), and analysis of women workers as essential to the primitive accumulation of capital, which means that these divisions create further differences among the working classes. As Federici (cited in Kasmir and Carbonella 2014, p. 11) claims:

Primitive accumulation [...] was not simply an accumulation of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as 'race' and age, became constituent of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat.

However, as far as my ethnography is concerned, the main corpus of data comes from male workers who constitute almost the entirety of the workforce in AST; women are present only among the employees, and very seldom among contracted workers. The most important distinctions that I could record concerned generations and roles in the production process, although it was impossible for me to evaluate how the division of labour chaotically imposed by the market and planned by the management (Braverman

1974) characterised the workforce composition on the shop floor, as in Mollona's (2009a) ethnographic account of 'hot' and 'cold' department workers.

Nevertheless, I came across broader contractual divisions between people directly employed by AST and by contractor companies. These distinctions produced a perceived gerontocracy between the high and middle white-collar workers, generational gaps among the blue-collar workers, and further division between the 'aristocracy of labour' and the workers employed by contractor companies who cannot rely on the same safety net and high salary as the AST workers (see Chapter 4).

Anthropologists have studied the division between the aristocracy of labour (who have secure jobs in large state enterprises) and younger workforces, such as those often located in private sectors and free-trade zones in non-western countries (Ong 1987) – e.g. in China (see Pun 2005), in India (see Parry 1999) or in Egypt (see Makram-Ebeid 2014) – and within private corporations. The division is seen as a deliberate process to undercut workers' autonomy (Cooper 1992). However, as Parry (1999) points out, and as my data also suggest, 'privileged' workers too face difficulties when their job security is threatened, and they are confronted with growing inconsistencies between their salaries and needs or expectations.

Generational gaps were not as severe as those described by Beaud and Pialoux (2001) (see Chapter 4), but, as Goddard (2017, p. 4) points out, today's steel workers are very different from their fathers and grandfathers: credentialism, flexibilisation, multi-tasking and self-management bring the industrial steelworker closer to the 'new worker' of the 'new economy', facing flexibility in the factories, meaning short-term contracts and precarious living conditions.

Consequently, I find that the most appropriate analytical and theoretical approach to address the dialectic relationship between new workers and new economies is the concept of class. Anthropologists have recently underlined the continuing salience of class as both a social formation and an analytical tool for critical scholarship, highlighting its mutability as central to an adequate understanding of its continuing relevance (see Carrier and Kalb 2015; Durrenberger 2012; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014). Even when the language of class is not used explicitly, it is, especially during strikes, clear that patterns of worker unrest are highly permeated with a meaning of class interest or class division (Chan and Ngai 2009; King-Chi Chan 2010).

Carrier and Kalb's (2015) edited collection *Anthropologies of Class: Power, Practice, and Inequality* offers excellent ethnographic examples, showing the different ways that ideas of class are presently being used by anthropologists and highlighting the relevance of anthropology within contemporary capitalism. Class is described as a new anthropological 'holism', one of the key explanatory concepts of modern social thought, concerning the social and the structural as revealed in the relationship between the local and the global. Kalb (2015, p. 15) views class as both a concept and analytical tool for anthropological endeavours, and directs our attention to the volatility of the meaning of 'class positions' (such those derived for notions of Fordism, Taylorism and Weberian bureaucracy):

The volatility of positions, as well as of the systems of which they are a part, has increased in the recent decades of capitalist development, as suggested by Harvey's (1989) 'flexible accumulation' and Mingione's (1991) 'fragmented societies'.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> On this issue, see also the important point made in the same volume by Carrier (2015, pp. 32-33): because capitalism changes rapidly, the specific forms that classes take in capitalist societies will vary over time as capitalism changes, and they will vary across space, as different places occupy different positions in the larger economic system. This fluidity means that careful ethnographic research is especially important for describing and understanding classes as they exist in the specific place and time of fieldwork. In this light, anthropological research should not see places as relatively isolated and self-contained. Rather, it needs to identify the processes and relationships through which people produce and acquire what they need to survive and needs to attend to these relationships wherever they

Furthermore, class vocabulary, as Thompson (1968) was aware, does not emerge from a position, but from the struggle which precedes, chronologically and logically, the language of class; moreover, struggle in a capitalist context is initiated more often from above than from below (Thompson 1968, p. 16).

In this light, and building on the ethnographic data, the analysis in this thesis is based on Thompson's (1968) historical perspective, which has influenced anthropology significantly. For Thompson (1968, p. 9), class is a historically determined phenomenon which 'happens' in human relations. Its existence is related to consciousness:

Class, in its heuristic usage, is inseparable from the notion of 'class-struggle'. [...] far too much theoretical attention [...] has been paid to 'class', and far too little to 'class-struggle'. Indeed, class-struggle is the prior, as well as the more universal, concept. To put it bluntly: classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process. (Thompson 1978, p. 149)

Anthropological studies of workers' struggles have provided alternative approaches to class consciousness formation. Nash (1993 [1979]), in *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1993 [1979]) describes the indigenous culture of resistance of a mixed Aymara/Hispanic Bolivian tin miners' community, arguing that reliance on pre-capitalist culture fosters revolutionary class consciousness. On the other hand, she maintains that the class focus increases social fragmentation, advancing the idea that a separation of the workers from the sense of identity with the community is counterproductive to collective

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lead; in industrial and post-industrial societies in particular, research sites are not so much places as nodes in a network, and they cannot be described and understood without attention to their links to that network (see also Durrenberger 2012).

action (Nash 1993 [1979], p. 325). Similarly, Ong (1987), in *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*, reflects on the complex relationship between opposition and struggle in a context shaped by recent industrialisation, local culture and female working conditions. In trying to understand why Malaysian workers fall into a trance-like state while at work, as if possessed by a spirit, Ong interprets their ‘possession’ as a way to protest against labour conditions and the male-dominated exertion of power in an industrial context, although she does not reduce the possession itself to an act of class struggle.

However, this thesis follows a different theoretical approach, evaluating cultural traits of working-class struggle as embedded in the industrial context, generated from the memory of past struggle and syncretically enmeshed in the present socio-economic sphere of industrial labour. In doing so, the thesis elaborates on Durrenberger’s (2012, pp. 10-11) introduction to *The Anthropological Study of Class Consciousness*, whereby class and consciousness – people’s ways of thinking and acting – are linked:

Consciousness emerges from action in the social and material world – employing available resources to do things with other people to achieve substantive goals. As class systems constrain people’s actions in the world to provide a sense of structure, they also form people’s consciousness, their cultures, and their sense of both means and ends. [...] Thus, do people exercise agency, interacting with others to achieve their objectives, and thus does agency contribute to change. Agency is a function of goals that our modes of thinking or consciousness define as reasonable. Finally, experience shapes consciousness. Thus, we have a more or less transitive cascade of relationships from experience to consciousness, to goals, to actions in the world and on the world, and back to experience.

During periods of labour unrest in particular, as Kasmir (2005, p. 81) points out:

Breaks can come during strikes or other actions when new consciousness of collective goals can be formed. This new class identity (like the one it supplants) is uneven and contradictory, often combining oppositional meanings and aspirations [...] Class consciousness is thus not a given, and it is the anthropologist job to document the mutable

character of workers' identification and to determine the condition in which different identities are made.

Ethnographies of strikes (Bonilla 2011; Carbonella 2014; Chattarjee 2016; Kasmir 2005; King-Chin Chan 2010; Langford 1994; Narotzky 2015; Turner 1995; Werbner 2014) have indeed mapped the transformative potential of labour unrest, and its impact on workers' consciousness and identities. In particular, in Christena Turner's (1995) ethnography of Japanese camera factories, *Japanese Workers in Protest*, the rank-and-file solidarity in the industrial action is based on loyalty shown by workers, and the collective action itself is learned through praxis. During industrial actions, there is a very strong dialectical relationship between experience and consciousness, which defines how a personal sensibility must develop so that the struggle seems reasonable, feels right and matters – even as a moral obligation – to the individual worker (ibid., p. 63). The case study demonstrates an embeddedness of consciousness in practices of labour unrest, where demonstrations and other organised Union activities act as a transformative experience, merging practice and thought in a memorable way for the participants. Following this lead the thesis elaborate, on Durrenberger's claim (2012, pp. 136-137) that

If class consciousness is the awareness of classes and their positions in economic and political systems, 'Union consciousness' would be a similar awareness of Unions among Union members.

Durrenberger (1997) has shown that there is little empirical evidence on the relationships between class consciousness, Union consciousness and action, concluding that the way shop-floor stewards think about the Union is irrelevant to their level of activism. However, he reports strong evidence that Union consciousness is shaped by the everyday realities of power at work sites, which in turn are formed by national-level policies and power relations (see also Durrenberger and Erem 2005; Durrenberger 2007, p. 83). In this

light, Union consciousness in relation to action will also be an object of analysis of this thesis.

As Mollona (2009b, p. xiii) argues, the ‘old-fashioned’ world of industry and the working class has not disappeared, but rather has acquired a new spatial dimension and has been temporally reconfigured in the political landscape of late capitalism. With its historical, ethnographic and visual methodological approach to the study of working-class struggle, this thesis will hopefully contribute to describe this new spatial dimension, and will contribute to theories of class and labour, regional anthropological studies of workers and labour to studies on La Terni.

### **1.2.3 Anthropology and labour in Italy & studies about the Terni steelworks**

A seminal study for Italian anthropology is *Antropologia dell’Impresa (Anthropology of Enterprise)* by Cristina Papa (1999) on industrial baking and the construction of the ‘typicality’ of olive milling in Central Italy. Papa’s study provides a theoretical framework - beyond the substantivist approach - to investigate the interplay between the logic of the global market and local technical skills, cultural features and contexts. Its title derives from Selim’s (1991) *Ethnologie de l’entreprise*, which stands for a ‘multiform reality’, entailing material and immaterial production and exchange of commodities, knowledge and information.

In the book Papa (1999) identifies the absence of an earlier interest in enterprise and labour within Italian anthropology possibly ascribed to political and ideological reasons linked to the strong presence of workers’ movements and social unrest. This led to the

enterprise being characterised as the domain of conflict, and the working class as the bearer of innovation and as political subject, rather than object of study (ibid., p. 15).<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, drawing on the experience and research of French leftist intellectuals, young militants and intellectuals from the traditional parties PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano, Italian Communist Party) and PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano, Italian Socialist Party) – however not the party leaderships – created the first politically-oriented studies on the working class.. The most important works were published in the ground-breaking pages of *Quaderni Rossi* (*Red Notebooks*) and *Movimento operaio* (*Workers Movement*).

*Quaderni Rossi* was a journal published between 1961 and 1966, funded by the PSI intellectual Raniero Panzieri. The aim of the journal's research and dissemination was defined around the 'operaio massa' (mass worker), a new kind of worker subject to de-skilling and rapid technological progress. This was the first attempt at what was defined by its authors as a 'con-ricerca', a practical activity of research and knowledge. The *Quaderni Rossi* advocated against the mediating function of the Unions, through the non-ideological use of Marx – which became the methodological tool of the 'con-ricerca' – and was in opposition to the dominant ideologies of the period, fostering an idea that the working class was not 'integrated' into the production process but rather 'subjugated' to it, through violent forms of repression internal to the production process itself (Balestrini and Moroni 2005, p. 39). The journal, which saw the collaboration of scholars such as Tronti, Cacciari and Negri, became the cradle of *operaismo* ('workerism'), which promoted workers' refusal to work and theorized that capital constantly innovates itself into Gramscian hegemonic forms forced by class struggle. Production and bourgeois

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<sup>20</sup> All the sources in Italian, in this and subsequent chapters, have been translated by me, the author of the thesis.

consumption merge, and the whole of society becomes a factory that becomes invisible, turning the town's whole life into a moment of production (Tronti 1971).

*Movimento operaio*, published between 1949 and 1952 was funded by Gianni Bosio – also founder of the *Istituto de Martino* (de Martino Institute). The journal focused on the analysis of the Italian development of capitalism, and the hegemony of the city over the rural context through the subjective perceptions of exploited social actors (Papa 1999, p. 16). Bosio's work was based on the gathering of oral sources, reviewed the approach of the one of the founder of Italian anthropology Ernesto de Martino, to subaltern cultures in a Marxist sense, close to the workerists' agenda. The memories, subjective perceptions, labour and endeavours of workers, preserved within folkloric media such as *canti di lavoro* (work songs), emerging at a key moment of workers' alienation, were gathered in a structural approach to studying labour experience and the workers' movement outside the official historical accounts. However, Bosio's legacy was not followed by anthropologists (Papa 1999, p. 17), but by oral historians like Portelli (1991; 1985; 2008).

Moreover, PCI published *Rinascita (Reborn)* from 1944 until 1990s focusing on analyses about Italian capitalism, class and politics. In 1962 the CGIL union funded the ongoing *Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale (Syndical Review Notebooks)* which focuses on themes related to work and unionism and since 1971 established a collaboration with the magazine *Inchiesta (Report)* which publishes articles about socio-economic, pedagogy and psychology. These like *Quaderni Rossi* and *Movimento Operaio* were important experiences attempting at working across disciplinary boundaries, and dissolving the intellectual-worker divide, as well as exploring the organic intellectual role by working with trade unions.

Recent interpretations such as that of Dei (2011) maintain that the Italian working-class culture has been neglected by Italian anthropologists, who, after the 1950s, turned their scholarly interests to the most authentic of the subcultures, the agricultural one, thus relegating the workers to an inauthentic, banal, artificial, commodified and petty-bourgeois cultural domain, counterpoised to the ancient, noble in its poverty, alternative and anti-bourgeoisie peasant life. Working-class culture, in Dei's (2011, pp. 133-139) view, exists only as a synonym of class consciousness.

Even though a lot of the work was indeed concentrated on rural populations, in the last 30 years the Italian industrial context has offered a fruitful terrain for ethnographic research. Furthermore, it may be argued that the Gramscian-inspired subalternity framework shifted the focus away from the industrial working class towards the more marginal, precarious, informally employed or those relying on improvised livelihoods. To this light, in 1970s and 1980s anthropologists and sociologists attempted to capture the emergence of what it is now called post-Fordism focused on 'decentramento produttivo' (decentralization of industry).

This framework presaged the worldwide 'revolution' in flexibilisation, or small-scale industry in Italy and was the context of works such as that of Goddard (1996) *Gender, Family and Work in Naples*, Manlio Talamo and Clara de Marco (1976) *Lavoro Nero. Decentramento produttivo e lavoro a domicilio*. More contemporary works are that of Blim (1990) on the central Italy shoe manufacturing district and that of Yanagisako (2002) on Northern Italy's silk industry, which focuses on how kinship and gender provide a cultural framework to capital processes. More recently, artisanal clusters in Northern and Central Italy, the so-called 'industrial districts', have been the object of anthropological research (e.g. Ghezzi 2007, 2012).

The industrial context of car factories has provided fertile ground for the work of D'Aloisio (2003, 2014), who, over the course of a decade, has investigated the effect of global-scale transformations on female workers of the automobile FIAT SATA factory in Melfi, Southern Italy, founded in 1993. Established in a rural territory with no industrial tradition, the FIAT SATA was both a symbol of innovation and wage liberation as well as extreme exploitation, representing an actual example of 'the Italian path to post-Fordism', within which FIAT attempted to adapt Toyotism in its Melfi plant (D'Aloisio 2014, p. 49). Between D'Aloisio's *Donne in Tuta Amaranto (Women in Amaranth Overalls)* (2003) and *Vita di Fabbrica (Factory Life)* (2014), the factory has gone through the crisis of 2008 and FIAT's 2011 merger with American Chrysler to form the multinational corporation FCA. Reduction in work, decline in production and consequent layoffs have radically changed the working conditions, and the workers' perception of the future. As D'Aloisio (2015) has recently pointed out in the article '*Conflitto del Lavoro, Lavoro in Conflitto*', the existential turnaround of being hired by Fiat in 1993-1994 contrasts sharply with the recently increased uncertainty, precariousness and fear of job loss among the SATA-Melfi workers:

In this scenario, conflict should appear as already exceeded, or we simply have to rethink our idea of class conflict in the current era of manufacturing production as a new victory of the upper classes<sup>21</sup>. (ibid, p. 93)

D'Aloisio's latest work analyses a prolonged strike, a complex and important turning point in the experience of the interviewees, who are able to temporarily advance a collective cohesion and – the first time in the SATA history that the workers express themselves as class-for-itself (D'Aloisio 2014, p. 99) – to shed new light on Italian workers' subjective perception of industrial conflict and their capacity for building class

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<sup>21</sup> My translation.

consciousness. This further testifies to the need to recall that industrial conflict in Italy has constituted an ideological and ideal bond, based on the individual experience of the workers and the collective experience of the workers' movement, as well as the industrial relations themselves (Carusano 2008). In this light, this thesis also sets out to provide a contribution and an empirical ground for reflection within the literature about the Italian context and to expand the discussion on the Terni steelworks and working-class studies.

Throughout its life, La Terni has attracted many academics: historians, sociologists and labour studies scholars have studied the working class of Terni as an overarching category to describe value production, means of livelihood, reified identities and objectified juxtapositions between groups, both inside and outside the factory. Within the former, they have examined the historical-industrial context of the company town (e.g. Bonelli 1975; Covino 2005; Covino et al. 1980; Covino and Papuli 1998; Patalocco 2013; Vasio 1979); technical and industrial production (e.g. Covino and Gallo 2002; Papuli 2006); shop-floor organisation (Butera 1979); and syndicalism (Cristofori 2009, 2014; Fogliano 1984; Narciso 1998). Within the latter, they have examined memories, leisure time and activism (e.g. Canali 2004; Cristofori 2009, 2014; Portelli 1985, 1991, 2008; Raspadori 2004, 2006). This dichotomy has merged most evidently during the several industrial actions that have marked the factory's history, shaping local working-class identity. Historical evidence (Covino 2005; Covino and Papuli 1998; Giustinelli 2004; Papuli 2006; Patalocco 2013; Provantini 2014) shows how the Terni workers have intertwined intermittent processes of dispossession with complicated phases of labour unrest, which coincide with long process of privatisation since the early 1990s and the progressive withdrawal of the ECSC<sup>22</sup> from managing national steel production (Gibellieri 2004).

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<sup>22</sup> The European Coal and Steel Community: an international organisation of six European countries set up after WWII to unify their production of steel and coal, lasting from 1952 to 2002.

Most recent studies show how the entry of multinational companies into nation-state economies has strongly moulded the territorial economy to the international market, with important repercussions on how the steelworkers frame the labour/capital conflict.

Among these latest studies, Portelli's (2008) *Acciai Speciali Terni, la ThyssenKrupp, la globalizzazione (Acciai Speciali Terni, Thyssenkrup and Globalisation)*, on the 2004-2005 dispute, provides an important starting point for the present research, being a detailed analysis based on interviews with workers about their first struggle against a multinational company. The book expands from the strike to a wider analysis of industrial and social life in Terni in light of the industrial dispute that ended with the closure of the steelworks electric department. Portelli's work offers a compelling image of Terni in that period and makes a comparison between contexts of industrial work through a chapter about ThyssenKrupp in India. However, while it touches upon many arguments, it does not investigate in depth connections between the first dispute in 2004 and the second in 2005 and workers' reactions to them. Furthermore, the book is set before the transformation of the industrial landscape, the financial crisis and the crisis undergone by ThyssenKrupp (see Chapter 2.4; 2.5).

Another important text is the sociological study of the AST workers by Cristofori et al. (2009), *Operai Senza Classe (Classless Workers)*, later integrated into a comparison of Terni and the steel town Bilbao, *Terni e Bilbao. Città Europee dell'Acciaio (Terni and Bilbao: European Steel Towns)* (Cristofori 2014). I will focus on the original text, as the second text only reiterates the fundamental concepts laid out in the first edited volume. Following Bauman, Cristofori et al. place the steelworkers in a dimension where they belong much more to the 'liquid' society they live in than to the factory where they work, resulting in a constant perception of insecurity and sense of defeat, especially after the 2004-2005 dispute. The book depicts a postmodern worker who has lost his traditions and

pride in his work, and currently inhabits a precarious status: he relies on Unionism for personal protection in the workplace (i.e. legal advice, tax form compilation, change of department or shift, etc.), but has lost faith in the Unions' efficacy in representing their workers. Although very theoretically grounded, providing a solid structure of analysis, the book seems too keen to pursue its premise at any cost, especially in the introduction written by Cristofori. For the author, the workers are *classless* and have definitively lost their work consciousness. To a certain extent, the thesis findings go in the opposite direction, mapping a class of workers fighting against its own dispossession and aware of its own exploitation. Furthermore, the authors do not analyse in depth another important aspect: the ability of the trade unions to advance a job application and to help people be hired at the steel plant – as well as the consequences that this may entail (see Chapter 5). These last two works are inevitably a term of comparison for the 2014 unrest, which is the second major dispute against the German multinational ThyssenKrupp, and this thesis aims to overcome what I perceive to be their gaps.

### **1.3 TK-AST structure and workforce composition**

Before the industrial dispute, ThyssenKrupp Acciai Speciali Terni was composed of TK-AST – including of Centro di Finitura (Finishing Centre placed approximately 8km from the main plant), which made high-quality flat stainless-steel products, and its five subsidiaries: Aspasiel (information technology branch), Tubificio (producing a wide range of steel pipes – placed approximately 7km from the main plant), SdF (Società delle Fucine, forging steel ingots), Titania (titanium products) and Terninox (steel sales and distribution). Together, they employed a workforce of 2637 workers (2235 in AST; 218

in SDF; 157 in Tubificio; 63 in Aspasiel).<sup>23</sup> After the dispute, the workforce in AST was reduced to 1986 units, the first time in its history that it had fallen below 2000.

Furthermore, about 1200<sup>24</sup> other workers work at the plant, though not directly employed by TK-AST. They work for contractor and subcontractor companies which are awarded contracts by TK-AST and provide specific onsite services, such as industrial cleaning, raw material handling, waste disposal, etc. These companies' contracts with TK-AST are cyclically signed and renewed and may last from a few months to more than two decades, as in the case of ILSERV. They range from small, local family businesses relying on two or three employees, to bigger companies like ILSERV – a subsidiary of the multinational Harsco Corporation – which employs about 320 workers. These workers, employed either on temporary or permanent positions by contractors commonly called “ditte terzi” (third party companies) by the informants, will be referred to as “contractors' workers” in order to differentiate them from the workers who are directly employed by TK-AST and its subsidiaries.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

In light of the theoretical approach laid out above, the ethnographic data gathered during the industrial action provide the basis on which the present thesis and its visual output are elaborated. This thesis is both an exploration of the possibilities of visual anthropology to provide the tools to investigate and communicate a highly complex, crisis-ridden and fragmented contemporary industrial dispute, and also a contribution to the literature of the anthropology of labour, advancing our understanding of new forms of industrial

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<sup>23</sup> Data source available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9BO3Epy7nFWWISVmtymk10eGs/view> (accessed: 4 December 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Data source from ‘Confindustria Umbria’, quoted in *Corriere dell'Umbria*, 14 November 2014, p. 11, and *La Nazione*, 14 November 2014, p. 19 (accessed 10 July 2017).

conflict. Both the visual and written outcomes focus on the ways in which local people mobilise culturally distinctive capacities in order to make sense of their present struggles; the outcomes are set to respond to the following research questions:

- Can we think of a unitary working class and unifying class consciousness defined by the local industrial context?
- On what basis do groups of industrial workers mobilise today? How do they exert their power?
- How can an ethnographic film help interpret and represent the construction of working-class identity and at the same time be a valuable data-gathering tool for anthropological research?

### **1.5 Chapter outline**

The chapters are wide-ranging, in order to provide the reader with an encompassing understanding of the complexities of the struggle, histories and social relations for each topic under discussion.

The second chapter focuses on the history of the factory and its waves of labour unrest so as to provide historical, economical and socio-political contexts as a framework for the present industrial dispute and the present research. The chapter puts at centre stage the privatisation and looks at the workers' dispossession and their awareness of fighting a multinational corporation that is more powerful than the national state itself. In this light, it looks at the present nationalist narrative which, born out of the first dispute against ThyssenKrupp in 2004, has been used to create a sense of unity, broadening the space of conflict and renovating the bond between company and town. The chapter concludes by reviewing literature on mobilisation theory, arguing that the present labour unrest in Terni

is generated by the imperatives of capital – valorisation and competition – and its coercive nature, generating a sense of injustice in those exploited by it. Workers today make sense of their exploitation and react in the public arena by changing the terms in which class struggle is framed, reflecting the current Italian political situation.

The third chapter discusses the mixed methodological approach, and the motivation behind the filmed ethnography. The chapter reviews the existing literature on visual anthropology to evaluate the methodological approach of the research, and of the ethnographic film production. It also analyses how the spatial and temporal dimensions of the industrial action allowed for an engagement with methodological strategies, facilitating participation, on-field cooperation between anthropologist, filmmakers and participants, and their contribution in the making of the ethnographic film. The chapter analyses how visual anthropology can interpret and represent fieldwork experiences, and hence the role and meaning of visual ethnographic practice itself. The chapter concludes that ethnographic film may be considered a disciplinary approach to filming and that the visual output is an act of giving back to the community and participants who contributed to this research and made it possible.

The ethnographic film can either stand alone or be watched as an integral part of the thesis, as a ‘visual’ chapter which links Chapter 2, more oriented towards structural analysis, to the following ethnographic chapters, which draw on some of the social actors involved in the film.

The fourth chapter focuses on three different categories of workers: blue-collars AST workers, blue-collars contractors and white-collar workers. The chapter analyses how the different experience of labour in different departments has influenced the understanding and pursuit of the industrial action among the different groups of workers, and also among

those belonging to different generations. The various practices of unrest are a reflection of the division of labour in AST. The chapter relies on ethnographic data and draws on the personal life and work history of key informants, who may be considered as epitomising the groups described above. The chapter concludes by evaluating how the sense of class belonging and class consciousness, based on the informants' experiences, is influenced by labour conflict and can be used as a tool to analyse it.

The fifth chapter looks at trade unions and Unionism during the dispute. It focuses on Unions strategies of unrest, work stoppage and the search for visibility in relation to their ability to generate and coerce solidarity among the population and the workforce during the dispute. It investigates how participants perceive trade unionism in AST, especially through the story of a shop-floor stewards. The chapter also looks at the formation of movements which aimed to escape the Unions' lead both during and after the industrial action. The chapter focuses on two examples, looking at the desires and hopes of their leaders, and at how these experiences were destined to fail in light of the Unions' political power inside the plant. The chapter concludes by evaluating the role of the Unions inside the plant and how it affects the lives of their members.

## **1.6 Ethical concerns**

There has been extensive discussion of ethical concerns in relation to visual methods in anthropological research (Banks 2001, 2007; Pink 2007 [2001]), and, more specifically, in photography, film and television (Gross et al. 1988), documentary (Nichols 2001) and ethnographic film (Ruby 2000). These discussions share a common understanding that there is a serious responsibility towards the social actors who are not paid to perform their daily activities, and that the anthropologist and/or filmmaker has an obligation to

minimise the harm associated with the documentary representation.

However, both ethical concerns and the situations in which they arise are not static and definitive but are ever emergent. Therefore, an ethical code is only effective when it can be adjusted to each situation. As a response to the multiple layers of ethical responsibilities, many visual ethnographers have turned to collaboration as the only solution to making ethical visual representations (De Laat 2004). In relation to anthropology, the available codes of ethics focus only superficially on the issues related to visual data, and mainly involve the awareness that the participants should have about the data use (e.g. AAS [Australian Anthropological Society] 2012; AAA [American Anthropological Association] 2012). Only the ASA (the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth) (1999) mentions the ‘informant consent form’ as a device through which to obtain clearance from the informant.

For the present research, the informant consent form was used only for the video interview, as an agreement between anthropologists, filmmakers and participants, clearing the latter from the footage copyright and allowing the former to use the video recordings for research, filmmaking and both private and public screening purposes (including online platforms); every participant signed the form directly before or after the interview. To guarantee full anonymity to the participants, all names have been omitted in the visual output and most of them changed in the written output. At times, job roles and/or their Unions’ names have been changed or omitted. However, employers’ names, such as that of TK-AST or its subsidiaries (e.g. ASPASIEL) or its contractors (e.g. ILSERV), have been reported in the original form to create consistency with the references quoting them.

Real names have been used in the case of the filmmakers who collaborated on the video

project (Greca and Riccardo) because they were constantly aware of the research aims and are not quoted in the text in relation to particularly sensitive data. This last point was the reason why I didn't anonymise the name of Paolo, the archivist at the factory's archive.

The real name is also used in the case of Riccardo Marcelli, the FIM regional secretary in Chapter 5, because his comments are partly related to and drawn from his contribution in Cristofori's edited book *Operai Senza Classe* (referenced in the present research as Marcelli 2009). His real name was used to create a continuity between the two sets of data.

Furthermore, in the case of some participants who took part in the filmed ethnography, real names were also used. This was done to avoid attributing fictional names to research subjects whose faces and personalities were easily recognisable and linkable to the data concerning themselves in the written text. They are: Cesare, the father of Riccardo the filmmaker, the only retired worker in the video; Krishna and Pawan, the only two Indian immigrants interviewed; Monia, because of the relationship established with her thanks to the photographs she took during the strike, which were also used in the video; Marco, because of his involvement and leadership of the contractors' workers movement; Paolo, being the only employee interviewed who left and took the severance pay; Stefano, the FIOM union coordinator who became a symbol of the worker protest; Daniele, in Chapter 3, because no sensitive data is linked to what Daniele is saying and the vignette only serves the function of analysing a specific visual methodological approach to which Daniele greatly contributed. Any future reference to any other of Daniele's contributions for non-methodological purposes will be fully anonymised.

## **1.7 Concluding remarks**

The AST strike entailed unity and militancy through the contingent and divergent interrelations between social actors, involving different publicly displayed courses of actions. Their actions were carried out to gather forces, demand solidarity and build working-class power; because of their attendance, they overshadowed, at times, the strike's ultimate economic purpose, which to me seemed to unfold independently on a second and smaller stage, with a few spectators pushing for its quickest and most advantageous resolution.

This local class struggle revealed an overwhelming array of elements of working-class culture and was an invaluable environment for the research, functioning as a gatekeeper to the workers' lives and bringing to the fore the strong dialectical relationship that exists between experience and consciousness during labour unrest. Ultimately, this thesis is about the daily lives, aspirations, fears, collective action and class consciousness of certain steelworkers belonging to a workforce of nearly 3000 labourers, who were caught up in an industrial conflict which they did not know how to fight effectively, and which inevitably changed their future.

## Chapter 2 – Labour conflict in Terni

Acciauru,/pane dorge/pane amaru;  
servitu/a pranzu/come/che a cèna/  
legatu all'urlu/de 'na sirena,/ch'ha vistu/  
sèmpre/pe' 'na fornace/lunghe le lotte/  
e curta la pace. [...] <sup>25</sup>

(Spino Biancifiori, *Poema Operaio*, Tipolitografia Federici, Terni 2013,p.62)

### 2.1 Introduction

The steel plant and the steelworkers are the two main poles of the dialectical relation which has generated a labour movement that, until the present day, has only partially dissipated its strength. In order to analyse this relation, this chapter will critically investigate the history of the factory and workers' struggle, inscribed in the larger Italian historical context, to trace how the industrial experience in Terni has contributed to local working-class formation, which is further analysed in the following chapters.

This approach resonates with Durrenberger's (2012, p. 138) warning about losing sight of the factors that determine the condition of workers' lives and processes that are not visible in ethnographic studies but yet determine the causes of situations that are investigated ethnographically. With this in mind and in keeping with the theoretical approach to studies about the Terni steelworks framed earlier (see Chapter 1.2.3), the chapter is set to analyse the complexity of the history of labour unrest in the Terni steelworks, relying on both ethnographic data and relevant literature.

The chapter will also elaborate on Arrighi's (1995) periodisation of labour unrest in Italy, comprising three major waves of labour unrest: 1919-20, with the *Biennio Rosso*; 1945,

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<sup>25</sup> Steel/sweet bread/bitter bread/served/at lunch/just like/at dinner/bonded to the scream/of a siren/that saw/always for a furnace/long struggles/and short peace. Excerpt from 'Terra Nostra' (Our Land) by Spino Biancifiori a vernacular poet was a former metalworker made redundant during the 1953 layoffs.

during the Resistance against Nazi fascism; and 1968-69, with the 'Hot Autumn'. Each event was characterised by the involvement of large numbers of people, constituting a turning point in Italian industrial history: the end of the Giolitti era and the beginning of the fascist repression; the return to labour-capital relations under conditions of strong organisation and mobilisation of the workers; and the new breakdown of the market mechanism in regulating the labour-capital relation (Arrighi 1995, pp. 50-51). This periodisation will help to trace the differences in waves of unrest in Terni by juxtaposing the roles of the state and of workers' institutions, the plant's production history and the local labour struggle, from the factory's foundation to the present time. The chapter will place an emphasis on the 2004 strike, as a pivotal moment for the configuration of new forms of struggle under multinational ownership. Furthermore, it will evaluate the nationalistic sentiment voiced today in the public arena, as in the 2004-2005 strike, juxtaposing it to informants' present interpretation of labour dispossession.

The chapter will conclude by evaluating each wave of strikes in their own terms, showing how different forms of workers' protests followed different waves of capitalist restructuring. In so doing, it will frame the 2014 labour unrest patterns within current mobilisation theories, to highlight the specificity of the case study, lay the groundwork for the thesis, and help evaluate the dynamics of the contemporary workers' movement which the ethnographic work is based on.

## **2.2 The German flag**

During the night of 10/11 February 2015, two months after the dispute ended, the management hoisted a German flag on the main gates – or rather, removed the Italian one that was usually waving next to it – to welcome a delegation of ThyssenKrupp

stakeholders scheduled to arrive in the coming days from the German headquarters (see Fig. 2). The workers starting the 6:00am shift were the first to notice this, and promptly alerted the Unions, who interpreted the gesture as a provocation by the new CEO. That same morning, I found out about the incident in an online newspaper, and I went to the plant to see it with my own eyes. Once there, I came across Luca, one of my main gatekeepers, a shop-floor steward – commonly referred to as RSU (Rappresentanza Sindacale Unitaria - Unitary union representative body)<sup>26</sup> – about to leave for a Union meeting. “Did you see it?” he asked. “It is the latest display of the company’s power!”



Figure 2. German flag hoisted in front of the main gate during the visit of a TK stockholders’ delegation from Germany (source of left-hand image: [www.umbria24.it/attualita/tk-ast-in-viale-brin-sventola-solitaria-la-bandiera-tesca-tra-dubbi-e-polemiche](http://www.umbria24.it/attualita/tk-ast-in-viale-brin-sventola-solitaria-la-bandiera-tesca-tra-dubbi-e-polemiche); right-hand image: my photograph).

The Italian flag was promptly hoisted back up that very day, next to the German one, to avoid further conflict with the workforce. This was the last of a series of dubious actions and positions taken by the management during the industrial action, ranging from banning the Unions from holding meetings inside the factory to the reclaiming of sovereignty over

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<sup>26</sup> RSU is a term used to define the collective body which represents all the workers employed in the same company regardless of their union memberships. It is also a term used to address the full-time workers elected as shop-floor reps. Nominally they are autonomous, since they represent all the Union federations; in practice, however, they are elected from the lists of different federations and refer to the federation from which they are elected as a representative for that department. Shop-floor RSU represent all the workers employed in the specific department in which they are elected regardless of their colleagues’ union memberships; they also represent non- union members.

the land it occupies, described by the CEO Morselli as “German territory”.<sup>27</sup>

These displays of power, as Luca called them, enabled the metalworkers to appeal to the public consensus by unifying claims of industrial history and evoking fears of industrial colonialism,<sup>28</sup> which were particularly salient in the steel sector.<sup>29</sup> Both the reliance on a particular construction of tradition responding to the new situation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and the sense of belonging to an imagined community (Anderson 2006 [1983]), in opposition to that of the employer, nurtured a nationalistic sentiment entailing claims of economic sovereignty.

Indeed, a common view among my informants was that the European Parliament was “led” by the German government to be in favour of ThyssenKrupp; this view was often expressed by workers and Unions. An example was the first speech delivered by a Unionist, who strongly stated from the stage of the General Strike organised by the Unions in October 2014 that the Terni community will never kneel down to any of Germany’s bullying, suggesting the ThyssenKrupp management and Chancellor Merkel at the same time (see video min. 12:27).

This antagonistic sentiment, voiced in the public arena, was aimed at identifying a common ‘historical’ enemy for the workers and the town community. As the chapter will further elaborate and explain, the same an anti-German narrative was used in 2004-2005, during the last major dispute of La Terni (see chapter 2.4 below). In that occasion, as Portelli (2004; 2008) pointed out

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<sup>27</sup> See: <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2014/10/31/lucia-morselli-la-lady-del-ferro-che-spaventa-terni14.html>.

<sup>28</sup> On the risk of Italy becoming an industrial ‘colony’, see Gallino (2003), *La scomparsa dell’Italia industriale*.

<sup>29</sup> Within the steel market as recently analysed by Brancaccio and Romero in *Piatto d’acciaio* (2014) The German steel producers are improving their production quotas dumping on individual national European markets. In Italy this has been achieved by taking advantage of the need for foreign capital to make up for the lack of organisation in the national territory, made up of medium- and small-sized steel plants (the leading producer in 2011 was Riva, with 9.5 million tonnes) unable to compensate for the 2009 profit loss and those relative to the slow recovery that began in 2012 (Brancaccio and Romeo 2014). See also ‘Ensuring a future for steel in Europe’ (2013), [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-13-523\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-523_en.htm).

[T]he anti-German animosity was rooted in another, deeper memory: that of the Resistance against the German occupation in 1943-44. Terni still has a living memory of that struggle. (Portelli 2004, p. 58)

Similarly, in 2014 the resentment against the foreign owners of the plant was the foundation of a discourse which was able to unite the front, even politically, among the traditional working-class left, the right, and the new rising populist parties in Terni (see chapter 2.4 and 2.5 below). In fact, at the first meeting of MISE (Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico, Ministry of Industrial Development), among the banners displayed by the workers gathered outside, a spray-painted sheet read: “Government servant of Krauts!” (see Fig. 3).



Figure 3. The banner shown in front of MISE, reading: “GOVERNMENT SERVANT OF KRAUTS” (my photograph).

While commenting on the sign, an informant pointed out that:

The dispute has been presented to the public audience by blaming the economic crisis, but it is, instead, imputable to the incapability of Europe and the will of a company to protect its interests in its territory, which is Germany... Germany dominates the EU! (Franco, 45, AST)

The *basso continuo* of the protest was an increasingly salient appeal to a stronger position of the Italian government within the European Union – seen as the main culprit for their situation, having privatised the industry – to function as an intermediary between the workers and the company. Indeed, in November 2014, a delegation of employees, workers and Unionists went to Brussels by bus to the European Parliament to draw the attention of the Industrial Commission and the Italian members of the European Parliament to the AST industrial action. Even though the action did not bring any result, it testified to the ability of the workers to engage institutions in the defence of labour and the heritage of the company.

In order to shed light on the complex relationship between the steelworkers, the plant owners, the wider community, and the political institutions, the next section will investigate the centrality of steelworkers to the industrial landscape of Southern Umbria and the history of the factory since its foundation.

### **2.3 La Terni's history**

Over the years, the metalworkers acquired a determining weight in the creation of the local working class and its class awareness. Being the most solid presence in the industrial labour sector, they created the most effective labour institutions to represent themselves and manage several industrial conflicts, forming a labour hegemony in Southern Umbria's secondary sector and generating a very tangible presence in town.

In Terni, in fact, the history of the steel industry confronts visitors as soon as they arrive in town, just outside the train station. There, opposite the parking area, an impressive 12,000-tonne press (see Fig. 4), retired from service and turned into a monument in the

late 1990s, towers celebrating the importance of the steelwork for the town.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 4. The 12,000-tonne press opposite the bus and train station (my photographs).

The foundation of La Terni, sole heir of the entire Nera Valley's industrial history, represents the first in a long series of state interventions to generate a steel industry in the country, and a break with the *laissez-faire* economic model of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bonelli 1975; Zamagni 1993). Despite being far from the sea, which creates problems of supply, the Nera Valley was chosen to host the steelworks because the surrounding mountains provided a natural barricade, a protection from attacks during

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<sup>30</sup> The press installed in 1934 was one of the highest technological achievements reached by La Terni. Commonly called 'Mazinga' by my interlocutors, is one of the most important examples of industrial archaeology in Italy (see Papuli 2006; Portelli 2008, pp. 9-10).

wartime, the presence in situ of a small but skilled workforce and a significant amount of ready-to-use hydraulic power generated by the Marmore waterfalls (Bonelli 1975, pp.12-14; Covino and Papuli 1998, p. 20).<sup>31</sup>

On 10 March 1884, the partnership deed of SAFFAT (Società degli Alti forni, Fonderie e Acciaierie di Terni, The Blast Furnace Company, Foundry and Steelworks of Terni) was signed, establishing one of the largest productive centres of the country (Covino and Papuli 1998, p. 23; Bonelli 1975, pp. 14-16).<sup>32</sup> Soon, the steel plant had become the main actor in local socio-economic life, highlighting with its modernity the backwardness of the small town's rural hinterland, mainly employed in agriculture (e.g. Gallo 1983), revealing the 'colonial' attitude of national industrial capital towards the entire region (Covino et al. 1980, p. 658). Terni is said to have been born a second time, now with the appellation 'Manchester of the South' (Rossi, cited in Giustinelli 2004, p. 7). But, as the Chamber of Labour vice-president wrote in 1918, the factory appeared to be "hosted, and not owned" by the town (Covino et al. 1980, p. 656), showing the instability of the town's institutions, which, without compensation, were unable to cope with the crisis of salaries, unemployment and unusual overpopulation. In fact, from the late 1890s socio-political crisis, Italy turned into a land of emigrants, but, in contrast to the national socio-economic situation, the population of Terni grew from 15,773 inhabitants in 1881 to 29,361 in 1889 (Covino, Gallo and Tittarelli 1985, p. 409). The size of the workforce employed by the firm grew from 3,548 in 1900 to 6,329 in 1932 (Raspadori 2004, p. 306), with only 1,438 houses available for the 18,438 people living in the town centre, one for every 13 people (Covino and Gallo 1989, p. 108). A large portion of the workforce came from the

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<sup>31</sup> Consol Manio Curio Dentato dug a channel, Cavo Curiano, which allowed the Velino River to fall into the Nera River, creating the Marmore waterfalls (e.g. Vasio 1979).

<sup>32</sup> The plant included a wide melting shop, a rolling mill and a foundry with an imposing 108-tonne drop hammer. Between 1887 and 1901, Terni produced 62% of the raw steel, 80% of the rail steel and all the military material needed by the country (Covino et al. 1980, p. 666; see also Papuli 1980).

countryside and some of them still lived there, commuting for hours each day. For those living in the town, slowly and without meeting the real need for accommodation, the company started to build the first workers' houses from the moment of its foundation.<sup>33</sup> It is within these households and the factory that the first workers' associations and the workers' movement should be evaluated: sharing the same spaces, reading the same newspapers, having the same consumption patterns and marrying within the same class determined the collective life dynamics that permeated the workers' social relations. There, steelworkers and their families formed an aid network similar to that of the agricultural sharecropping world that they came from (Manelli 1984, p. 46).<sup>34</sup> Daily life was, indeed, a projection of the collective organisation of work; however, the workers employed at SAFFAT were still politically fragmented into Republican societies, Communists, and internationalist circles of Bakuninian inspiration, lacking general organisation among workers who had no power against the first layoffs (Manelli 1998, pp. 19-43).<sup>35</sup>

In the decade that followed, the metalworkers grew in number and, in 1901, founded the Chamber of Labour,<sup>36</sup> comprising nine workers' leagues, counting 4,810 associates. Of those, the Lega di Resistenza dei Metallurgi (Metalworkers Resistance League) was the strongest and most active, participating in the first FIOM (Italian Federation of Metalworkers) congress in 1901 (Covino 2005). Between 1888 and 1898, the company

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<sup>33</sup> The first was built in 1888, half a kilometre from the SAFFAT gates; the 'Palazzone' (Big Building), which still exists, hosted workers' families in 89 flats.

<sup>34</sup> This syncretic relation was evident in the 'Palazzone', which, from 1922, hosted the 'Cantamaggio', a ritual from agricultural circles, celebrated as a way to reassess the popular culture of the subaltern classes (ICSIM 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Between 1890 and the 1920, 'La Terni' was one of the few steel plants where the working day was longer than 10 hours, during this period the company was able to overcome the difficult period by suppressing salaries and increasing productivity, with the consequent souring of work conditions (Covino and Gallo 1989, p. 110).

<sup>36</sup> The Chambers of Labour, modelled on the French *Bourses du Travail*, were unitarian syndicate structures functioning as places for meeting and cooperation for unionised and non-unionised workers; they were created to promote all aspects of the defence of workers' lives (Viola 2000, p. 72) They later became the basis for the constitution of CGdL (Confederazione Generale del Lavoro), the largest union, formed in 1906, which became a clandestine trade union during Fascism and later formed the core of CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro) in 1950.

was listed on the stock market,<sup>37</sup> and became part of a trust managed by Scartezzini (a speculator), with Odero and Orlando (shipyard owners), and controlled by the BCI (Banca Commerciale Italiana, Italian Commercial Bank) (Bonelli 1975, pp. 69-89, Covino and Papuli 1998, pp. 24-25). The BCI replicated the ‘mixed bank’ German model, which linked financial capital to industrial development, whereby the risk of the investment was balanced by the acquisition of companies’ shares and access to strategic information (Felice 2015, pp. 133-134). However, the contradiction generated by the uncertain source of finance – as Italian banks had to find capital in the highly unstable international market – and the long-term need for state intervention in the form of rescues – a sort of ex-post financing by the state (Bonelli 1978, cited in Amatori 2000, p. 141) – allowed the crises of the finance sector to be reflected in the industrial sector and vice versa, with detrimental effects for early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian companies. This early stage of Italian capitalism was paralleled by exponentially increasing political turmoil, culminating in the first general strike in Italian history in 1904 (e.g. Viola 2000).

In 1905, La Terni proposed a series of new factory regulations, which were not welcomed by the metalworkers’ League, and a new regulation plan was presented in 1907, still without the prior agreement of or discussion with the workers’ representatives, who refused to sign the document and called a strike. The management reacted by firing the 24 workers who started the rebellion and by proclaiming a ‘Serrata’ (closure), which lasted 93 days (Covino et al. 1980, p. 700; Covino 2005). The Chamber of Labour leaders joined forces and started negotiating with the company, culminating in a victory for the workers, who obtained a new regulation including most of their requests on salary, sanctions and hiring rules. The 24 workers were not reinstated, but instead received a

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<sup>37</sup> On the convergence between the company and the banks’ interests and the use of company liquidity for stock market transaction, see Bonelli (1975, pp. 71-74).

handsome redundancy settlement (for a detailed chronology of these events, see Carnieri 2004).

A determining factor in the resolution of the dispute is to be found in the bonds of solidarity between workers and their families. The protest was partly carried out by workers' wives, who blocked the train station, fought the police alongside their husbands and forced the workers of smaller factories in town to join the struggle by impeding their access to their workplaces. The Serrata became the first instance in the history of La Terni of the workers becoming 'actors' in their own personal as well as professional destiny (Portelli 1985, p. 105); as Covino (2005) points out, to a certain extent this was because they became aware of their indispensability as a skilled workforce while employed in establishing Italy's military strength.

The super-production years of World War One were, indeed, fundamental to the metalworkers establishing themselves as the major economic and political force in the town (Covino et al. 1980, p. 720). Thanks to their militancy in the PCdI (Partito Comunista d'Italia, Italian Communist Party), born of the PSI's left-wing and youth elements, and the local activities of the 'Arditi del Popolo' (The People's Daring Ones), a militant anti-fascist group founded at the end of June 1921 to resist the rise of the Fascist Party and the violence of Mussolini's paramilitaries (see Antonelli 2011), Terni was the last town in Umbria to be controlled by the fascist squads.

It was only in September 1922, paradoxically, at the end of an unresolved three-month dispute at the steel plant, that a group of 3,500 fascists from Marche, Lazio and northern Umbria occupied the factory, and forced the management to end the industrial action in the workers' favour. It seemed that they had acted in the steelworkers' defence but in fact they had secretly reached an agreement with the firm. However, the fascist squads and the later-formed fascist Union, reclaiming autonomy in shaping the relations between the

workers and the management, had to submit to the economy policy of the steelworks' new director. The new General Director, Arturo Bocciardo, was the first real managerial figure, who re-founded SAFFAT, now named Terni Società per l'Industria e l'Elettricità (Society for Industry and Electricity), initiating a process that led the company to focus on three sectors: chemicals,<sup>38</sup> steel and electric power production. The complex conversion plan was implemented through a re-organisation of the workforce, implying new control methods, layoffs and salary cuts, promoted by the fascist regime (Bonelli 1975, pp. 135-139; Covino and Papuli 1998, pp. 25-26). The fascist regime emphasised national self-sufficiency in strategic goods, and the suppression of labour organisations was seen as a necessary operation to achieve this. Only direct state regulation and repression could simultaneously maintain industrial peace, full employment and wages low enough to allow for accumulation in an economy characterised by inefficient inter-sectoral allocation of resources (Arrighi 1985, p. 252).

From 1927, the company built 5000 workers' houses, and managed the local electricity network for the next 25 years (e.g. Bovini, Covino and Gallo 1990). This marked the beginning of the 'Total Factory' model desired by Mussolini. This socio-economic model aimed to control the totality of workers' social life and leisure time by building after-work recreational clubs, sport infrastructures and factory outlets (Covino 2005). Terni expanded rapidly, following the fascist model of autarchy. The urban setting was shaped according to the company's needs and the factory hierarchy became the basis of the organisation of new spaces. The new workers' housing complexes, built in the periphery and employing features such as orchards, contrasted with employees' buildings in the town centre (Covino et al. 1980, p. 706), which reproduced cultural forms and sociality,

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<sup>38</sup> On La Terni's chemical production, see the exhaustive text by Reto Bonifazi (2004), 'Le attività chimiche della Terni', in Marianeschi et al. (2004, pp. 271-308).

strongly influenced by a sense of class belonging shaped by the company workforce and employment management (Canali 2004, pp. 85-86). The scientific labour management and classist agenda of the establishment, rather than controlling the workforce and channelling a consensus, fuelled an underground resistance movement against the factory regime through numerous acts of sabotage and created a fertile ground for anti-fascist propaganda authored mainly by the PCdI, which had about 200 members in the town (Covino et al. 1980, p. 704).

In 1933, partly because of the absence of interested private buyers (Amatori 2000, p. 130), the IRI (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) was created to provide systematic, coordinated, long-term funding for key industries afflicted by chronic financial and economic problems (Arrighi 1985, p. 254). It did so by taking over all the industrial securities of the banks and by acting as a temporary super-holding company and by 1938 the IRI controlled 44% of all Italian capital stock, 77% of iron and 45% of steel production, and 80% of shipbuilding (ibid., p. 254). In 1937, La Terni became part of the IRI's sub-holding FINSIDER (Società Finanziaria Siderurgica S.p.A., Steelmaking Financial Company), created to manage the majority of shares of Ilva, Dalmac, Siac and Terni steel plants; Bocciardo became its director.

Almost 10 years after the fascist takeover of power, the working class was still almost immune to the regime's ideology, thanks to the militancy articulated around the local subversive political tradition of the Communist Party (PCI, formerly PCdI) and the hardships in which the workers and their families were forced to live. As it emerges from historical accounts (Canali 2004, pp. 60, 79-86), this subversive universe later played a crucial role in the Resistance against the German occupation in 1943-44 and in the Liberation movement. It was mainly steelworkers from Terni who organised the 'Antonio Gramsci' partisan brigade, which fought the Nazis in the hills between Umbria and Lazio

and freed the town before the arrival of the Allies. Furthermore, the steelworkers sabotaged the German troops which were plundering the town and dismantling the factories to remove the machines and take them to Germany (Portelli 2004, p. 55).

During the post-war years, the plant underwent a rapid reconstruction, made possible thanks to the multi-sector setting of La Terni; but within the progressive normalisation of the country, the autarchic nature of the company failed to respond to the changing socio-political conditions. Protectionist measures were abandoned in favour of a laissez-faire model financed with US capital and guided by the state-controlled financial and productive sectors, which deprived individual industrial entities of a specialised managerial framework (Covino et al. 1980, pp. 688-690). In 1945, Bocciardo, compromised by his relationship with the regime, was replaced at FINSIDER by Oscar Sinigaglia, and Tito Oro Nobili, PSI leader and former mayor in 1922, became the new company director, elected by the CLN (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale, the National Liberation Committee). Born in Terni, Nobili represented the first real connection between the company and the locality. Together with the Communist Corvo, the new FIOM secretary (see Narciso 1998), Nobili met the demands of a population suffering the consequences of the war, for whom the steel factory was the only possible source of livelihood. With 96% of the urban settlement destroyed and over 3,000 deaths among the population, the inhabitants started to mass in front of the factory gates asking for jobs. As a consequence, the company's workforce went from 11,092 units in 1944, to 20,896 in 1946 (Vasio 1979, p. 91). Nobili was able to avoid the first downsizing of the plant, requested by the IRI, by combining instances of the Italian post-war recovery: he linked reconstruction efforts to an employment plan, promoting the Consigli di Gestione (management boards), which allowed technicians and trade union representatives to become part of the board of directors so as to influence management decisions (Covino

et al. 1980, pp. 688-690; Covino and Papuli 1998, pp. 30).<sup>39</sup> At the end of the reconstruction phase, in 1948, the IRI's directorial board decided to focus on special-quality steels, capitalising on the company's know-how that had developed in the late 1920s (Bonelli 1975, pp. 249-251; Vasio 1979, p. 98). This decision was in accord with the 1948 'Oscar Sinigaglia plan', which aimed to move to integrated steel manufacture for commercial purposes, investing only in the easy-to-supply plants on the coast such as Piombino, Bagnoli and Cornigliano (Vasio 1979, p. 102).

The excessive number of workers tolerated during the previous years in order to counter mass unemployment became less and less sustainable. Their situation was worsened by a rupture among the anti-fascist parties within the CNL, which led to the Christian Democrats expelling the PCI and PSI from the government and to the defeat of the PCI in the 1948 election.<sup>40</sup> Nobili's strong opposition to the new 'layoffs therapy'<sup>41</sup> desired by Sinigaglia was unsuccessful and the former mayor left the management of the factory (Covino 2005; Vasio 1979, p. 107). While the Italian economy, driven by the 'economic miracle', increased industrialisation, Terni entered a slow process of de-industrialisation (Bonelli 1975, pp. 296-300; Vasio 1979, pp. 120-121). Thus, in 1952-53, after a fall in the steel price – which exposed the factory's economic instability and the workforce surplus – the layoffs therapy took place. As a consequence, the revolutionary culture of resistance was re-ignited, now coexisting with greater experience in organising the resistance and trade union representation (Covino 2005). The 1952-53 layoffs had severe

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<sup>39</sup> Instituted in 1947 during a rupture of collaboration between anti-fascist forces and capitalist restoration in the workplaces, their influence was always subordinated to FINSIDER decisions. The strikes against workforce 'lightening' denounced the lack of freedom of the Consigli, which would inevitably be suppressed in 1953 (Canali 2004, pp. 155, 159-168).

<sup>40</sup> The PCI obtained nearly 31%, becoming the second national party and it remained so until its end, as a major political force in opposition to the DC governments for the next 30 years. In Umbria, the FDP (PSI-PCI joint list) obtained 47.2% (Amyot 1981, p. 105).

<sup>41</sup> Translation of "terapia dei licenziamenti" phrased used by Bonelli (1975, p. 259) to describe achieving financial balance/ restructuration of La Terni by laying off a large number of workers.

socio-economic consequences.<sup>42</sup> First 739, then 1,634 workers were dismissed (Vasio 1979, p. 107), and the whole town reacted as one to what was perceived as an attack on the whole community. The workers engaged in three days of hand-to-hand fighting in the street with the police, which was only brought under control by the intervention of the FIOM. The event is often referred to as a “heroic defeat” (Raspadori 2006), and, as Portelli (2004, p. 50) describes it, a deep trauma for the whole community. The meaning of this rebellion is underlined by the creation of a symbolic martyr, the 21-year old Luigi Trastulli.<sup>43</sup> Trastulli, a worker at La Terni, had been killed by the police during an anti-NATO demonstration that had taken place four years earlier, but most narrators place his death in 1953, or tell the story in such a way as to establish a continuity between these two events (Portelli 2004, p. 50), thus stressing the emotional significance of that moment. The aftermath of this period saw a decline in labour unrest and a severe trend of downward mobility of workers, experienced through permanent unemployment, emigration, job de-skilling and misguided redundancy package investments. Many workers started small businesses with their redundancy pay; many failed, due to inexperience, but others thrived in the subsequent boom of the 1960s, so that, towards the end of the 1950s, there was one shop for every 40 inhabitants (Portelli 1985, pp. 304-318; 1991, p. 92).<sup>44</sup> But, as Portelli points out, this economic shift did not remove these individuals from their class-roots and political allegiance, and led instead to a blurring of class boundaries and the diminution of class homogeneity within the family unit. Workers were removed from the shop floor to cover administrative duties; merchants and entrepreneurs from the ranks of the laid-off

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<sup>42</sup> These events have been extensively analysed by local researchers either in their own terms (see Portelli 1991; ICSIM 2003; Provantini [1984]2014; Raspadori 2006), or within a wider historical context (e.g. Bonelli 1975; Canali 2004; Covino 1997, 1998, 2005; Portelli 1985, 2008; Vasio 1979).

<sup>43</sup> On the wall where Trastulli was killed, there is a plate in his memory, and his death is commemorated every year. On the symbolic, psychological and formal implication of Trastulli's death in relation to the 1950s redundancies, see Portelli (1991, p. 26).

<sup>44</sup> See also Bellini's (1966) study on La Terni steelworkers' job situation after the 1952 redundancies, which showed that only 5.7% of unskilled and 5.5% of the skilled workforce was rehired in the following decade.

workers became, in fact, components of a stratum of 'no longer manual workers' but 'not-yet middle-class citizens'. Furthermore, there was a partial break in the career paths of workers' children, who had formerly been encouraged by the company to follow their fathers' footsteps through the policy of hiring the son of a soon-to-retire worker. Consequently, these changed expectations added class overtones to the generational gap, as families were crossed by class and status lines, education being the most important factor of differentiation (Portelli 1991, p. 93). In the period 1946-1953, there was a total of 12,257 redundancies, out of a working population of around 26,000. The reduction of salary expenses, and the investment of 16 billion lire in modernising the machines, did not give the result needed to justify the socio-economic cost of the layoffs and failed as a valid alternative to the level of production reached during the war (Bonelli 1975, pp. 265-267).

From the second half of the 1960s, after losing the financial input that justified the multi-sector experience built by Boccardo, La Terni returned to being exclusively a steel plant, and became a new company, Società Siderurgica Terni (Terni Steel Company), producing only high-quality coils and supplying almost 90% of the national market. But the provisions made during the Italian 'economic miracle' clashed with internal demand during the years that followed. As internal demand declined, the difficulty of supplying raw materials and the distance from international trade routes resulted in a new wave of financial hardship. At the same time, the years 1968-1975 saw a growing rise in the trade union struggle and a new type of militant entered the plant. Younger and more educated workers, whose political and cultural formation was not built only through direct contact with the factory, were able to comprehend the new political and syndical environment and to interpret the new public company agenda at the end of the multi-sector experience.

The new Consigli di Fabbrica (Works Councils)<sup>45</sup> and the FLM (Metalworkers Federation) increased the trade unions' contractual power, helped to obtain better working conditions and established the Medicina del Lavoro (Labour Health Institute), an important organ designed to monitor health and safety in the workplace (Covino 2005). However, the 1968-9 contestation wave, characterised by the 'Students' Movement' and the 'Hot Autumn', complicated relations with the steelworkers in Terni. As Fogliano (1984, p. 25) claims, the 'Hot Autumn' passed tepidly in the Terni trade union without making significant changes. Due to the absence of a university in the town, the students' movement leaders in Terni were not the 'momentarily' renegade sons of the bourgeoisie, but workers' sons who were part of the FIGC (Federazione Italiana Giovani Comunisti, Italian Federation of Young Communists) and who thus responded to the PCI's ideological structure (Portelli 1985, p. 333). Tronti, one of the leaders of *operaismo* (workerism) (see Chapter 1), claims that during his militancy in Terni he was not able to establish a relationship with the steelworkers, due to the absence of young militants with no historical memory or with the ability to use new forms of struggle, like those present in the FIAT plants in the North of Italy (Portelli 1985, p. 331).

Between 1970 and 1974, part of the plant was refurbished and its productive capacity increased; however, a worsening national economic situation, a global steel crisis and the import/export limits imposed by the EU brought the Italian steel industry close to financial collapse. The following years were characterised by high indebtedness, negative balance and numerous layoffs (Dringoli 2000, p.28). In 1987 the Società Siderurgica Terni became a holding with the name TAS (Terni Acciai Speciali S.p.A., Terni Special Steel), comprising three spin-off companies which produced forged steel (SdF, Società

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<sup>45</sup> Deriving from the experience of the 'Commissione Interna' (Internal Commission), which used to be a trade union organ for dealing with the management, made up of union representatives (reps) democratically elected by all the workers, the Works Councils were instead formed of delegates of homogeneous group (lines, departments, machines) involved in the elected representatives' choices.

delle Fucine), titanium (Titania Spa) and steel pipes (Tubificio di Terni). In the same period, within the renewal plan for Italy's public steel industry, TAS transferred its plants to Ilva, which in the meantime had replaced FINSIDER to become a multi-division company called Area Laminati Piani Speciali (Special Flat Products Area), marking an epochal shift towards privatisation within Italy's national steel industry (Covino and Papuli 1998, p. 33; Assindustria Terni 1999, pp. 33-36). At the end of March 1988, after 16 days of pickets and road and rail blocks, 1000 steelworkers went to Rome and occupied the FINSIDER building to stop the acquisition process. Remembered as a heroic day by witnesses, the meeting did not result in a positive outcome for the workers. Instead, it ratified the de facto end of the 'formal' autonomy of the company within FINSIDER (Patalocco 2012, pp. 49-52). This episode was probably the most significant of the 1970s and 1980s, which saw a progressive downsizing of public steel companies. In this decade, threatened by a general crisis of the sector and the competition between public and private companies, trade unions had to safeguard above all the survival of the plant, sacrificing employment (Covino 2005).

The 1980s was also the decade that saw a slight decline in PCI's standing among the population of Terni, in favour of the PSI. This was due to a series of factors, including the 1970s steel crisis and the collapse of 'real Communism' with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the 1981-1991 decade, the number of people employed in the secondary sector in Terni decreased from 67% to 31%, resulting in 6,400 lost jobs (Patalocco 2013, p. 69). When the first deindustrialisation talks started towards the end of the 1980s, the Socialist Party was favoured by the 'emerging part' of the population that was not involved in steel and chemical production: the middle class, small and medium business owners and freelancers. Consequently, an important shift happened in 1989, when the PCI mayor, Porrazzini, was elected in the European Parliament and gave his seat to his deputy, Todini,

a member of the PSI. However, Todini's mandate was brief: together with other local politicians of the PSI (and ex-PCI), he was arrested in 1993 in the *Tangentopoli* enquiry and charged with bribery and corruption (Carlone 2014, pp. 137-142). Following this period, there was a prevailing feeling that, due to the crisis of the steelworks, the fall of Communism and the corruption charges, the town needed a fresh start, a new political cycle. For the first time in the history of Terni, the new mayor did not belong to any left-wing party: in fact, Ciaurro was elected by a civic party made up of middle-class members, radicals, progressives and ex-members of the Socialist and Communist parties, disappointed and outraged by the corruption charges. Well accepted among the population, Ciaurro gradually operated a centre-right-oriented policy, and unexpectedly sided with Berlusconi during his first government. He was elected for a second time in 1997, also thanks to a wave of anti-Communism expressed by many after so many years of 'red' government, as his civic party aimed to free the town from 'old Communists'. However, his mandate ended after two years, due to irreconcilable internal differences in the city council, which remained oriented towards the centre-left, and the structural weakness of the bourgeoisie, which was unable to maintain power in a fundamentally working-class town (Carlone 2014, pp. 147-161). The ascent of the right was paralleled by the steelworks' passage from public company to private enterprise.

This epochal shift in the local political landscape will be analysed in the following sections, together with another epochal shift: the steelworks privatisation. This was followed by the plant's departmental restructuring, opposed by the workers with an industrial action that generated the awareness of a mutated political landscape among its protagonists, provoking a rupture with the historical dimension of labour unrest.

## 2.4 Privatisation and the ‘Magnetico’ dispute

In Europe, as Gibellieri (2004, p. 40) has pointed out, first the European Economic Community and then the Single Market have progressively modified steel companies’ prospects. This move aimed at creating ‘European Champions’ to replace the ‘National Champions’ of the previous decades, in order to compete in the global market against US, Korean, Japanese and Chinese firms, and to strengthen their power relations with the big steel consumers (Gibellieri 2004, p. 40).<sup>46</sup>

Thus, in 1993, after the latest European steel crisis – the consequence of overcapacity, the aggressive trade policy of East European countries, a decrease in exports and reduction of world consumption – the IRI decided to privatise the steel sector, forming new corporate configurations: Ilva Laminati Piani (Taranto and Novi Ligure plants) and AST Acciai Speciali Terni (Terni and Torino plants) (Marcelli 2009, p. 68). In 1994, AST was bought by KAI ITALIA, a joint company with mixed capital, owned equally by the German Krupp and by FAR Acciai S.r.l. (an ad-hoc trust formed of three Italian entrepreneurs: Falck, Agarini and Riva). In 1995, Krupp became the major stockholder by acquiring Riva and Falck’s shares, and after their merger with Thyssen, ThyssenKrupp acquired the whole ownership in 2001, employing 4,603 units with a 2,554 billion lire turnover (Patalocco 2013, pp. 92-105; Assindustria Terni 1999, p. 38; Dringoli 2000, pp. 27-29).

In 2001, TK implemented a new compact strip production line both in stainless steel production and in the hot department; in 2002, the company name changed to

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<sup>46</sup> Following Dal Forno and Mollona (2015, p. 39), it is possible to identify a common causal structure, based on the retreat of states from direct involvement in steel production. States retain or take on new producers when global consumption shrinks and sell them to private companies when global consumption increases. In other words, when the steel industry is in crisis, states rescue bankrupt private capital, and when the crisis is over, private capital comes to buy the production capacity back, while the resulting *market-driven model* (MD) legitimises such property transfers.

‘ThyssenKrupp Acciai Speciali Terni S.p.A.’ and operated the division of the electrical steel department – now belonging to the ad-hoc subsidiary TKES-AST (ThyssenKrupp Electrical Steel-AST). TKES incorporated Isbergues (France) and the Bochum and Gelsen-Kirchen plants (Germany). The new company liquidated 10% of the stocks belonging to Agarini, and for the first time since the privatisation it operated without any Italian stockholders (Marcelli 2014, p. 68; Patalocco 2013, p. 128). This manoeuvre gave Thyssenkrupp total freedom to change its commercial strategy in accordance with the multinational context in which it was operating. As Blim (1992, p. 23) explains this of operating proper of multinational companies produced immobile localities in the face of an increasingly mobile, flexible and expansive capital foe.

On the political side, in 1999 Ciaurro lost to the centre-left candidate Raffaelli, who won the election with a striking result and became mayor. His campaign focused on re-opening the industrial question (previously overlooked by the centre-right) and re-qualifying the suburban areas. In his first mandate, he was very active in terms of urban redevelopment and local initiatives, including new courses offered by the local university. Riding the wave of success of Roberto Benigni’s film *La vita è bella*, filmed in Papigno, just outside Terni, the mayor promoted a project to turn Papigno into a film studio, almost a branch of *Cinecittà* (the Italian Hollywood), which, however, was very short-lived. Towards the end of his first mandate, Raffaelli was in the frontline in the battle between the town and the German management, which wished to restructure the plant, and this enormously strengthened the bond between the local administration and the workers. Following the 2004 dispute, explained in detail below, and a nation-wide crisis of the right, he was re-elected with a big majority (Carlone 2014, pp. 162-170).

On 29 January 2004, the CEO, Wolfgang Trommer, announced a reduction of production and the transfer of the electrical steel department to Germany, laying off 400 workers out

of a total of 2,400. The industrial action that followed, popularly known as the ‘Magnetico’<sup>47</sup> dispute, after the department at the centre of the contention, marked a significant demonstration of power by the multinational over the labour force, local institutions and the government.

During the Magnetico, I took part in the meetings, and Gianni Letta [the then vice-secretary of the Presidency of the Council] said that it was a private company and the government couldn’t do anything about it. (Stefano, 38, AST, FIOM coordinator)

They started by saying that CRIE, a kind of mineral used in the electric steel, wasn’t needed anymore, then reduced the volumes and started to move the first people. In January we understood that it wasn’t what they said [just reducing the workload] and in February the mess started. (Augusto, 32, AST)

As Portelli (2004, pp. 51-52) points out,

From the beginning the struggle took on a radical, desperate mood [...]. Although the actual weight of the working class and of the industrial sector in Terni’s demography and economy is much diminished since the ‘50s (and even the ‘70s), the town stood solid behind the workers.

The oral historian explains that historical memory played a crucial role in the struggle: the layoffs were felt as a direct attack not only against the workers, but against the whole town, as in 1953 (Portelli 2004, pp. 52-53)

In February, when the TK managers went to the town, labour unrest reached its peak, including blocked roads, rising tension and shops closed down in solidarity. Between 25,000 and 30,000 citizens went out into the streets, accompanied by the most important political figures of the country.<sup>48</sup> At the end of the same month, the ThyssenKrupp management announced the intention of not closing the factory and of renewing the younger

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Magnetico’ (magnetic) signifies ‘electrical’: the department of the factory dedicated to the production of electrical steel; from now on, I will use the term Magnetico to identify the dispute, and the term ‘electrical’ to refer to the production department.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.repubblica.it/2004/a/sezioni/economia/terniacciaio/mani/mani.html> (accessed: 14 May 2017).

workers' contracts, which were about to end.

It looked like the struggle had been won. Then, a month later, the company began to ease out workers, slowly, one by one, by failing to renew contracts, or to replace retirees. It's a long-term strategy that has the same aims as the shock therapy that failed in February and does not raise the same alarm and the same reaction. (Portelli 2004, p. 59).

Until December 2004, the electrical steel department was still operational, albeit with a lower production output, and about 200 workers were relocated or let go through the early retirement scheme. In 2005, ThyssenKrupp backtracked on its decision, unwilling to pursue a compromise between its financial agenda and the local institutions, which had promised infrastructural improvement in exchange for maintaining the same level of employment as before 2004. The new German CEO, Michael Rademacher, announced the closure of the electrical department and its transfer to Germany, in accordance with an industrial policy of centralising electrical production in the plants in Germany, which was favourably received by the German Chancellor.

As in 2004, the response of the workers was prompt but, unlike the previous dispute, this time they did not find support from the local community (which did not join in the general strike promoted by the Unions), nor was the strike covered by national media. Instead, they faced the aggressive response of the company, which first affirmed in national and local newspapers its will to avoid layoffs and to invest in situ, and then, when the struggle reached its peak with a goods stoppage, temporarily discharged about 90 workers (Portelli 2008, pp. 132-140).

With the Magnetico, there have been two general strikes. The first when the Thyssen managers came to town and wanted to close the electrical department: a big mess with road blocks where the tension was high, 30,000 people demonstrating, and the stores shut down in solidarity. The year after, when they closed the department for good, there was another general strike, but only 10,000 people came, and the stores didn't close. (Vinicio, 63, journalist)

After a short period of labour unrest, the company reached a new compromise with the Unions, committing to a 100 million euros investment in stainless steel production, and the relocation of part of the workforce to other departments of the plant, while 155 workers out of 600 accepted the early retirement scheme (Patalocco 2013, pp. 187-208). Deprived of the ‘know-how’ that had developed over the previous 30 years, AST was restructured and converted into a single-production plant, where all efforts converged on stainless steel production. Today’s informants maintain two opposing views on the conversion. Some judge it positively, as the choice was balanced by investments to improve the integrated steelworks, which allowed AST to be a landmark for stainless steel for the next 10 years.

Thanks to the investment in previous years, and because a part of a multinational industrial group is able to face losses, Thyssen has kept AST in its hegemonic position in the local economy, reaching 20% of the regional GDP, regardless of its faults, its contradictions, and the antipathy that the Germans have for the Terni workers. (Cristiano, 37, FIOM Unionist)

Others reacted negatively, blaming the Magnetico dispute for today’s situation and claiming that the electrical production could have balanced the profits, while stainless steel lost markets, thus reducing the present company’s losses. However, these different voices speak in unison when evaluating the workers’ struggle as a political and trade union defeat. For example, Luca commented:

Thyssen invested while it was convenient for them. However, after the Magnetico, the pacts with local politics have been ignored the ‘territorial pact’<sup>49</sup> meant that Thyssen had to invest, and the local government should have built the Terni-Civitavecchia motorway and a power station, but it didn’t. [...] I believe the Magnetico was a defeat for the Unions and partially I still feel that way. Because nobody really wanted to take responsibility and take our problems to the control room [Italian Parliament]. (Luca, 36, RSU AST)

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Patto del Territorio’, a special economic agreement with the regional and provincial political administration.

On the other hand, many informants identified in the unrest a resurgence of class consciousness, and an awakening of the spirit of resistance which had been dormant during the prolonged period of job and production security:

Before the Magnetico, the most frequent question was: when are we going to retire? Because it was a sure thing, AST was a happy island [...]. For me the Magnetico was constructive, a big push to be more socially aware. Because, you know, the workers had become too bourgeois. (Marco, 40, contract worker)

Cristofori's (2009) edited book, which relies on data collected between one and four years after the Magnetico, claims that the dispute did not reveal emergent traits of a new working-class subjectivity, but rather, as Carniani (2009, p. 171) points out, highlighted a synergy between a specific territorial identity and solidarity linked to the loss of income, and the failing of a historically consolidated certainty. Nonetheless, the 2004-2005 dispute gave the workers a socially recognisable presence, unpredictable and hard to control, especially in the media, thanks to slogans, banners and actions – particularly those carried out by the younger generations, who fostered an identity based on resistance, which did not consider any form of negotiation with the company (Carniani 2009, pp. 180-181).

Portelli (2004, pp. 55-57; 2008, pp. 99-138) talks about the re-discovery of a historically solid and extraordinary sense of unity between town and factory, which was interpreted through new forms of expression and tactics of unrest by the younger workers, who were less attuned to traditional working-class culture. These were based on sarcasm, provocations, verbal and physical violence, borrowed in some instances from football culture, contributing to the construction of the strike in terms of a national antagonism between Italy and Germany (see Fig. 5).

In 2004, the unity of all classes and political parties was achieved by defining the struggle in terms other than class. The most immediate unifying theme, in fact, was national resentment against the foreign owners of the plant. The Mayor spoke of “the German

chief executive,” the bishop blamed “the German management”, the unions attacked “the German multinational.” It wasn’t only the language of the institutions. A sign at Terni workers’ demonstration before the parliament house in Rome read: “Thyssen-Krupp is against Italy.” (Portelli 2004, p.55)

This anti-German sentiment voiced during the protest derived from World War Two partisan memory, re-positioned class discourse on “class maps” – that is a cultural image and “understanding of class that lasts longer than the actual class formation within capitalism” (Denning cited in Kasmir and Carbonella 2014, pp. 3-4) – built on the glorious Resistance against the German occupation in 1943-44.

Terni still has a living memory of that struggle. It was mainly the steelworkers from Terni that organised the Antonio Gramsci partisan brigade that fought the Germans and the Fascists [...] sabotaged German efforts to dismantle the factories and take the machines to Germany (a speaker at the strike rally reminded the demonstrators that ‘that factory [was] defended in every possible way during the years of the war’). (Portelli 2004, p.57)

In a way, as Portelli argues, the effort to prevent ThyssenKrupp from dismantling the electrical steel department could be seen as a continuation of that struggle, even though the workers were two generations removed from the partisan war and had no direct connection to that experience. Thus, while the anti-fascist tradition still lived among them, generating a latent undercurrent of anti-German feeling, the references to the World War Two period in slogans and banners were very ambiguous (Portelli 2004, pp. 56-57).

The radical attitude of the struggle was not the product of an eschatological elaboration of a social and territorial reality, but rather an elaboration of experiences matured in everyday life, which left the elders disappointed and the young more alienated (Carniani 2009, p. 184).



Figure 5. In the first picture, a sarcastic banner of an AST worker sodomising a Nazi soldier can be seen, as well as a young person raising his fist in the Communist salute, with his hand gloved with the local Ternana football team colours. In the second picture, the top banner reads: “Us – fired? You – cremated! – Resistance Inox [inoxidable, or stainless, steel]” (source: [http://archivio.fiom.cgil.it/siderurgia/thyssenkrupp/04\\_02\\_06-foto1.htm](http://archivio.fiom.cgil.it/siderurgia/thyssenkrupp/04_02_06-foto1.htm)).

This is a key point, because in 2004 the younger workers’ identification of the working-class culture of resistance was built on different forms of sociality, born outside the factory, and this newly formed dimension existed in a conflict-ridden relationship with more traditional forms of struggle. Furthermore, the dismissal of hundreds of workers

close to pension age who took advantage of early retirement schemes has left behind, on the one hand, a relatively young workforce, which has only lived through one major dispute, facing another similarly difficult time of dispossession today; on the other, it has created a new generational watershed with those hired after 2005, who cannot boast of the same cultural-historical luggage and are not equipped with the same lens to read the present-day unrest.

## **2.5 The 2014 labour unrest**

Together with Magnético, the passage of ownership from ThyssenKrupp to the Finnish steelmaking multinational Outokumpu is another moment in the factory's recent history that has influenced how the research participants make sense of the 2014 dispute.

Because of European overproduction and declining consumption, which underpinned the worst deficit in the history of ThyssenKrupp Group in 2008/2009 (Patalocco 2013, p. 276; see also Marcelli 2014, p. 71), the group introduced a new organisational structure as part of a restructuring project. According to this, the whole stainless-steel production business was channelled to the Stainless Global business area, including plants in Europe, the US, Mexico and Latin America. Following the closure of the Torino ThyssenKrupp subsidiary plant due to a fatal accident<sup>50</sup> and the unfulfilled economic expectations of new plants in the US and Brazil in 2011, the Stainless Global separation led to the creation of an independent entity named Inoxum, still owned by Thyssenkrupp and based in Germany but separated from ThyssenKrupp Group. This was done in order to facilitate the sale of the whole TK steel sector, since steel production was no longer ThyssenKrupp's core

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<sup>50</sup> On 6 December 2007, seven workers lost their lives at the TK Torino subsidiary of TK-AST (see Bobbio and Novelli 2008; Patalocco 2013, pp. 223-262), for which the former TK-AST CEO Harald Espenhahn was sentenced in Italy to 16½ years in prison on charges of "second-degree murder". See: <https://www.ft.com/content/a0c8967a-6917-11e0-9040-00144feab49a> (accessed: 10 May 2017).

business (Patalocco 2013, pp. 276-278; Marcelli 2014, p. 72). TK-AST did not exist anymore and was replaced by the new company ‘AST Ltd’, part of Inoxum.

In January 2012, an agreement on the fusion of Inoxum and the Finnish Outokumpu became official, and Marco Pucci, from Terni, became the new CEO. However, the European Community withheld its approval until November, because of a failure by Outokumpu to fulfil anti-trust law. Outokumpu could acquire Inoxum but had to sell the AST steel plant to avoid having a dominant position in the market (Marcelli 2014, p. 75). In 2012, the workers walked out in protest against Outokumpu’s failure to present a viable industrial plan, thus inaugurating a new season of unrest, a prelude to the 2014 unrest. On 29 November 2013, in fact, without any previous public statement, TK formalised its intention to re-acquire AST and all its subsidiaries. Thus, AST and its legal entities (Acciai Speciali Terni, Terninox, Aspasiel, Tubificio di Terni and Società delle Fucine), were divested to ThyssenKrupp in exchange for Outokumpu’s approximately 1.3-billion-euro loan note that ThyssenKrupp had granted to the Finnish company when it bought Inoxum.<sup>51</sup> Once again AST became the owner of AST and, in so doing cleared the Finnish company’s debt.

The merger with Inoxum, sale and reacquisition represent a structural change in the industry, which the workers address in retrospect as a “turning point”, when the real danger for the plant’s future began:

The dispute didn’t begin these last months, it’s already a year and a half that we are living from one day to the next. Outokumpu at first was seen as the saviour of Terni, which should have turned AST into the number one steelworks in Europe... whereas it was the opposite. When they said that we needed to be sold we couldn’t believe it, and so it began

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<sup>51</sup> The sell is well described in the Outokumpu’s own website, which explain that the passage of properties included also: the service centres in Germany (Willich), Spain (Barcelona), Turkey (Gebze) and France (Tours) and the VDM the high-performance alloy unit-business. See <http://www.outokumpu.com/en/news-events/press-release/Pages/Outokumpu-596674.aspx>; see also <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/impresa-e-territori/2013-11-30/outokumpu-vende-impianto-terni-thyssenkrupp-104609.shtml?uuid=ABoOIqg> (accessed: 10 May 2017).

a downward spiral [...] At first we waited to see if there was someone who could save us, and went on with this ‘ghost on our back’, but we remained strong because of the fact that crises in the steel market have always happened and because we came from 130 years of history, and nobody paid too much attention until the workers’ revolt in July.<sup>52</sup> Since then, an open clash has begun between institutions, Unions and the company on how exactly to manage the future of AST. (Marco, 40, contract worker)

The passage was widely discussed during the struggle and linked to what could be considered a general sense of defeat, a “game between multinationals”:

I can’t believe that Outokumpu’s CEO didn’t know about the anti-trust law, there has been a dodgy exchange of money there, and we’re caught in between in this mess. (Fabio, 38, AST)

The passage was perceived as driven by TK’s financial interests rather than the pursuit of an industrial agenda. Cristiano a FIOM unionist told me about the unlimited power of multinationals, which are able to reach an agreement among themselves, bypassing two years’ worth of negotiations with workers’ organisations, the government and the European Commission. He underlined how during “these two years of limbo” the passage was favoured both by the absence of a national industrial policy and by the power held by Germany in the European Parliament, which privileged its national economy and exposed the political weakness of Italy.

The change of ownership matured in a different political context to that of the Magnifico, as the new mayor, Di Girolamo, the PD (Partito Democratico, Democratic Party) candidate, had to face several issues: the evident failure of the project embarked on 15 years earlier of transforming Terni through the establishment of the ‘Papigno Studios’ from “the image of the factory” into a “factory of images” (Carlone 2014, p. 171); the consequences of the 2008 crisis; and a resurgence of attention towards the natural

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<sup>52</sup> For the event that marked the beginning of the dispute for the workers, see video (min. 2:00) and Chapter 5.

environment, both in terms of safeguarding and as a field of private and public economic investments and an alternative to the secondary sector. The steelworks had once again become the political fulcrum of Terni, although not as the main employer but as the main polluting agent in town (see Chapter 4.6) and the centre of a political debate advocating more ecologically sustainable steel production, as proposed by the newly formed political movement M5S (Movimento Cinque Stelle, Five Stars Movement).<sup>53</sup>

The millions of euros of debts accumulated during the two-year passage of ownership, without a clear investment and productivity plan, had worsened an already precarious situation. TK hired a new CEO, Morselli. On 17 July, the industrial plan was made public and Morselli's analysis, which was presented at MISE, showed that, due to the stagnation of the market, a constant drop in price since 2007 and the consequent growth in competition, the AST group had lost about 809 million euros worth of earnings (before interest and taxes) over the past five years, of which 150 million euros were lost in 2013/2014 alone.<sup>54</sup> The costs were estimated at: 20% labour costs; 27% energy; 18% contract labour; 13% materials; 13% financial charges; 9% other costs. The industrial plan sought to break even in four years. According to Morselli, this could be achieved through a workforce reduction of 550 units, a cut in AST workers' bonuses, a cut of 10% in labour costs in all departments, a renegotiation of the metalworkers' national contract and the closure of one of the two furnaces to reduce the hot rolled products output.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Five Star Movement is a Populist Party, founded in 2009 by the ex-comedian Beppe Grillo. During the 2013 general election it gained a large consensus, making it the most voted list after Prime Minister Renzi's Democratic Party.

<sup>54</sup> ThyssenKrupp has indeed lost its position as leader in the regional economy, from a turnover of 2,366,795,000 euros in the period 2012-2013 to take third place, with a turnover of 1,433,865,000 euros (Source: 'Annuario economico dell'Umbria 2012-2013', ESG89 group; 'Annuario economico dell'Umbria 2013-2014', ESG89 group.

<sup>55</sup> All the data are my elaboration of the slides presented at MISE on 17 July 2014 by the AST management, available at: <http://www.umbria24.it/attualita/tk-ast-per-i-sindacati-e-il-momento-di-chiudere-resta-aperto-il-problema-esuberanza-gli-impiegati>; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9BO3Epy7nIFWWISVmtYmK10eGs/view> (accessed: 4 December 2014)

The workers' reaction was immediate: they kept Morselli in her office, picketing the door, for 12 hours that very night, and the Unions jointly proclaimed an eight-hour strike, which turned into a rally the following day, unanimously rejecting the CEO's plan as "irricivevibile" (unacceptable).

The data gathered during my fieldwork show that almost all my informants believed and widely discussed the point that ThyssenKrupp had bought AST back for economic reasons, and that neither investments nor technical development were involved in the purchase. In their opinions, the German group needed to sell AST again since steel production was no longer viewed as its core business, and it needed to restructure the plant to make it profitable and find a suitable buyer. For many, the battle against the closure was just a first step, as they were certain that TK would sell AST again when restructured.

For my informants, the closure of one furnace would have jeopardised the hot and cold department's 'integrated cycle' from the stocking of raw materials to the finished product. The closure of one furnace would therefore have led to the closure of the second furnace, turning the steelworks into a finishing plant. Losing or reducing the hot department, which could produce and sell raw coils, would have meant a less efficient answer to the market's demands, at both national and international levels. Furthermore, the reduction of the workforce would have meant losing forever a know-how that is tied to the destiny of a single company. Many believed, and claimed repeatedly, that the labour costs impacted on only 5% of the total expenditure, whereas the largest expenditures were related to raw materials. These technical aspects were summed up in the public arena in their most prominent factor: redundancies. The Unions, and the steelworkers themselves, focused on identifying a communal and inclusive ground, fostering a discourse of labour dispossession revolving around the deprivation of dignity and of the town's history by a

foreign multinational, as well as a request for stronger intervention from the state. This will be analysed in the following sections.

## 2.6 Sovereignty

In order to delineate a common battlefield and form a unity with the inhabitants, who are becoming less and less involved in steel production, the steelworkers fostered a protest based on the strong public appeal of nationalistic sentiment, and asked for the state's intervention, in line with post-crisis advocacy of a return to Keynesianism.<sup>56</sup>

Echoing the steelworkers' concerns, the intervention of the state was sought also by all local parties and framed in political proposals.<sup>57</sup> The PD wanted the PD-led coalition government to intervene institutionally and declare an "area di crisi industriale complessa" (complex crisis of an industrial area) to allow public funding to be invested and take over part of the company. Following a more populist agenda, the M5S wanted the company to be put under the administration of an external commission because of environmental and health and safety reasons (comparing the harm to Terni public health caused by the steel plant to that of the Ilva steel and cast iron plant in Taranto). M5S proposed a 'commissariamento' months before the industrial action, and during the dispute was supported by local exponents of the populist Italian party FI (Forza Italia). RC (Rifondazione Comunista, Communist Refoundation Party) strongly advocated for the re-nationalisation of the factory. For the ranks of the far-left, during the dispute

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<sup>56</sup> On this aspect, see Friedman (2015), who argues against a return of Keynesianism. In his view, Keynesian solutions were ways not merely of taming the market but of avoiding serious class conflict. The alliance of state and capital in the Keynesian compromise was a means to ensure continued growth, with redistribution conceived not so much as a moral gesture, but as a necessary method of maintaining effective demand and social peace (ibid., p. 198).

<sup>57</sup> The PD Coalition won the 2015 city council elections with 46.88%, followed by the FI coalition with 20.21%. The M5S party came third with 18.45% a Civic List came fourth with 3,51% and RC was fifth, with 2.64%. Sources available at: <http://elezioni.comune.terni.it/2014/RisultatiAMM.asp>.

members of a movement close to part of the local football team's 'ultra' (hooligan) fandom formed a branch of a political movement named Socialismo Patriottico (Patriotic Socialism). This political party was led by an AST worker who had accepted the redundancy package and invested it in a public company that could theoretically, with the help of the Italian government, buy part of TK AST, if and when it was sold. The plan never succeeded, and when I returned to Terni in the summer of 2016, the party did not exist anymore.

Furthermore, none of the requests of the other political parties were taken into consideration by the then government. This is interesting for two reasons: it allows us to analyse relations between citizens, workers and politics at a moment of distress, and it testifies to the rise of populist parties and the presence of national-populist movements in a town with a long left-wing tradition that has undergone several mutations and a brief five years of right-wing administration in the mid-1990s.

Panizza (2005), in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, describes populism as an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies political space by symbolically dividing the politically constructed 'people' (as the underdogs) from its 'other', which prevents the people from achieving plenitude. The failure of existing social and political institutions to articulate proper political alternatives around the confrontation of distinctive socio-economic projects is at the centre of the articulation of antagonisms in moral terms (Panizza 2005; Mouffe 2005). However, populism is more than just a response to a political breakdown: it derives from the gap between leaders and the 'people', and the difficulties of political organisations in mediating between them and the crisis of representation (Panizza 2005, p. 14). It can emerge from different points of the socio-economic structure, including

political organisations, established political parties, trade unions and revolutionary movements (Laclau 2005, p. 44).

In this light, populism needs to be interpreted as a vehicle, rather than a category, of the politics of these organisations. It is the vehicle by which wider disenfranchised populations are labouring to make sense of their experiences, rather than the advance troops of a new European fascism (Kalb 2011, p. 6). In a thorough attempt to frame the rise of populism among the European working classes, Kalb (2011, p. 31) describes the nationalist connotation of populism as a displacement of experiences of dispossession, disenfranchisement and dislocation that are associated with the double crisis of labour and popular sovereignty produced by the latest round of capitalist globalisation. These are generated by different local trajectories and experiences, which are variously signified within discourses, alliances and sequences in national political arenas, in particular by the evolving class formations and configurations that drive them.

The decline of class discourse, together with the gains to be made by class conflict, parallels the emphasis on national sentiment (Ost 2015, pp. 70-75), and the rise of populism is the result of the slow decline of the authority maintained by the alliance such as that between political parties and Unions.

In Italy, in fact, the decline of class discourse is integral to weakening of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as well as the CGIL, traditionally the strongest Union. This is evident in the political agenda that is the Democratic Party, today's incarnation of the left, interested in a transversal electorate without any class connotation as well described by Formenti (2016, pp. 75-81). To instantiate this point, Blim (2011) shows how in the formerly highly artisanal, left-wing, shoe-making district of Umbria's neighbouring region Marche, the recent emergence of a strong protest vote for the right is linked to a

failure of the left. However, this was a left that, unlike in Terni, was not born in an industrial context and was therefore never particularly strong on the shop floor. Seeking to bargain for electoral consensus through alliance with the right and small capitalists, it gradually lost its prominence and failed to generate a new electoral base among the large immigrant groups. Instead, in Terni, as the previous sections have shown, the process of deindustrialisation that began in the 1980s allowed the political parties of both right and left to present alternatives to the diminishing economic role of the steelworks. Political parties did not succeed in the pursuit of economic alternatives to the factory and did not succeed in substituting its political role. On the contrary, they used the steel plant to gain political legitimacy for their own convenience at every moment of the steelworks' crisis.

This happened without the ideological apparatus which characterised the traditional left-wing parties and strongly affected contemporary workers' identification with political entities. Participants, indeed, were sceptical of political parties, and many considered them not only unable to heed their fears of losing their jobs in favour of a cheaper labour force,<sup>58</sup> but also unable to defend them against the multinational. Furthermore, informants spoke widely and negatively about the "possibilities" given to the multinational to move and invest; they referred to this capital mobility as a mistake generated by the current "economic models":

The financial capitalism and central powers incarnated by the Troika are crushing us and destroying the fruitful discussion that once existed between left- and right-wing parties. (Giuseppe, 50, AST)

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<sup>58</sup> In the public arena, I did not come across episodes of racism or of division based on ethnicity or geographic origin between workers, because the incidence and participation in collective action of immigrant workers was extremely low compared to the workers from Terni. The next chapter will analyse and evaluate how this is different in the workers' private sphere, where it was possible to detect a greater readiness to voice their fear of being replaced by "more exploitable" workers.

Recent interpretations describe contemporary firms as traded, split up and repackaged to be bought and sold through mergers and acquisitions, as if they were commodities (Standing 2011, p. 29). In line with this analysis, participants shared points of view that look beyond the local political framework and place responsibility for the current situation in the global steel market and the economic nature of multinationals. In this light, a few hours before the sheet reading “GOVERNMENT SERVANT OF KRAUT” was laid out, while on the bus to MISE, I assisted and recorded the workers talking about how the manufactured product is only secondary now, as today the economy is being made in the financial market (see video, min. 06:18-06:35).

The problem is that we have to move away from this provincial frame: we are not Terni anymore, we are a multinational, with a German flag and owners ‘X’. (Fabio, 38, AST)

You don’t live this situation because of Merkel, because of Morselli or the BCE, but because of the financial speculative system as a whole. (Enrico, 37, AST)

This awareness was also expressed within everyday language: the company’s industrial plan was referred to as “financial”; interviewees spoke of the fear that the restructuring was a “financial” manoeuvre and, again, of being sold to a “financial” group with no industrial agenda. Studies into the effects of the financial crisis on industrial communities (D’Aloisio and Ghezzi 2016; Jefferson 2013; Narotzky 2015)<sup>59</sup> show how people become involved in an expropriating and exploitative mechanism, which, as Narotzky (2015, p. 68) argues, is not conventional capitalist exploitation, as profit emerges in circulation rather than in production. The old relationship between labour and capital has become mediated by the relationship between credit and debt, in which people confront not employers, but financial institutions that are becoming the expression of an expropriative

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<sup>59</sup> Despite the growing interest of anthropology in finance in the last 10 years (see Maurer 2012), the growing literature on the agents and agency of the financial crisis (e.g. Hart and Ortiz 2008; Ho 2009; Miyazaki 2013) and, besides, the direct counteractions of militant groups, anthropologists have little investigated the domain where it has been popularly experienced and interpreted, especially in industrial contexts.

relation to financial capital, which directly affects livelihoods and undercuts people's ability to pay their debts and maintain their middle-class lifestyle. While, globally, the working class is simultaneously being exploited at the point of production through surplus value extraction and expropriated through the financial system at the point of consumption, locally the changing structure of production fragments workers as a class, while homogenising them as subjects of financial dispossession (Narotzky 2015, pp. 69-70).

In this light, participants often expressed their fear of having relied too much on the credit obtained through a stable wage, rather than the salary itself:

When I was hired 13 years ago, they made us believe that we didn't have anything to worry about, that it was better to buy a house rather than rent it, so 90% of the people here have a mortgage, mostly nearly re-paid, but in two or three years we'll all be homeless. Banks repossess your house in the last four, five years of mortgage, they're not taking it when you've got 15 or 20 years left! [...] We lived life according to what we earned till yesterday evening, and what if there's nothing left tomorrow? [...] The multinational is like this: the evening it's here and the next morning it's gone!<sup>60</sup> (Gianni, 45, ILSERV)

This sense of being fooled, and the threat to middle-class consumption possibilities through credit and autonomy through earned income, shows their awareness about how these opportunities are strongly dependent on their ability to sell labour power to a company that is operating in the global market and that is likely to relocate, leaving them jobless. Consequently, today's steelworkers are fully aware of financial capitalism and the impossibility of protesting against it, but they try to imagine and create this possibility

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<sup>60</sup> In the original Italian: "la sera c'è e la mattina dopo non c'è piú" – This expression wants to capture the feeling of insecurity that this informant has towards the factory and his job there, whereby the factory may be 'gone', that is sold or restructured, or downsized, or relocated by the owners, without notice to their employees.

for themselves by framing the protest in terms of nationalistic sentiment and by advocating the state's intervention.

Other workers' communities, like that described by Mollona (2009a, p. 175), have undergone massive deindustrialisation and focused on a partial struggle in a bounded context and atomised relations, becoming aware of broader capitalistic forces only in traumatic personal moments. Unlike them, the evidence shows that, first, the Terni workers are fully aware of how important it is to expand the space of conflict at the moment of their own crisis. Secondly, to an extent, a parallel can be traced with the new forms of mobilisation described by Narotzky (2016) in the post-financial-crisis industrial context of Ferrol, a Spanish town with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Here, the convergence of Union organisations and grassroots social movements has generated forms of revolt which:

[...] results from the structures of financial accumulation and the new enclosures, that is, from the process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2004). Those who participate in them express moral indignation at the unjust consequences of these processes, and they perceive increased inequality and social polarisation as the breakdown of the tacit agreement of liberal democracy. They understand inequality in moral terms, that is, in terms of injustice. (Narotzky 2016, pp. 86-87)

Statements such as “When they take your job away from you, they take your dignity too!” (see video, min. 18:00) are highly inclusive and interpret the conflict in the light of a shareable structure of feelings, common to those who are not directly affected by the steelworks' restructuring. As the next section will show, in order to frame the case study, a focus on injustice is crucial for understanding the complexities of the workers' unrest in relation to mobilisation theories.

## 2.7 New forms of mobilisation

In *Das Kapital*, Marx (1990[1976], pp. 440-448) argues that the starting point of capital production is a large number of workers working together at the same time in one place, stripping the fetters of their individualities in accordance with a plan. Through this cooperation, the command of capital develops from a requirement into a condition of production, and capitalists' command in the field of production becomes as indispensable as a general's command on the battlefield. The driving motive and determining purpose of capitalist production is its maximum self-valorisation, meaning the greatest possible production of surplus value and exploitation of labour power:

As the number of the co-operating workers increases, so too does their resistance to the domination of capital, and, necessarily, the pressure put on by capital to overcome this resistance. The control exercised by the capitalist is not only a special function arising from the nature of the social labour process and peculiar to that process but is at the same time a function of exploitation of a social labour process and is consequently conditioned by the unavoidable antagonism between the exploiter and the raw material of his exploitation. [...] the co-operation of wage-labourers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them. (Marx 1990[1976], p. 449)

This premise is at the basis of Silver's (2003, pp. 16-20) analysis of waves of labour unrest, which builds on Marx as well as Polanyi's concept of labour as a "fictitious commodity", whereby any effort in treating workers as commodities inevitably leads to opposition. However, the two authors' standpoints differ in the positioning of this fictitious nature: if Marx places it at the point of production, Polanyi argues that it is intrinsic to the creation of the market itself. For Polanyi, any expansion of unregulated markets brings forth a related "double movement", aimed at the protection and regulation of society; this kind of resistance is partly driven by the sense of injustice coming from the overturning of the previously established social grounds of livelihood. From a different perspective, Marx highlights injustice and power – a concept which is greatly

overlooked by Polanyi – as limiting factors for capital. In Marx's view, capitalism generates both suffering and strength within the working class, creating a cycle whereby workers resist exploitation at the level of production, and in turn capital attempts to overpower that resistance by continuously transforming production – impairing the older and established workers' movements, while creating and strengthening new movements, which become larger and more troublesome than the old ones.

Therefore, while Polanyi describes a pendular tendency, Marx argues for a succession of phases, whereby production and workers' actions are continuously altered. This leads to the categorisation of labour movements into Polanyi-type and Marx-type: the former outlines the struggle of recognised working classes that are being unmade and therefore trying to protect their status, while the latter describes the struggle of recently-born working classes, which see themselves growing and strengthening as a result of capital developments, even to the detriment of old working classes. A third category is also identified, although unnamed: that of workers who only have their labour power to offer, but are not in a position to do so, and find themselves excluded from the market.

More recently, Silver (2016) has reflected on the financialisation of capital, which results, on the one hand, in profit-driven regulations borrowed from financial markets (negatively affecting workers) and, on the other, in the increasing fragility of the international capitalist system. Silver (2016) highlights how the revolutions undergone by capital, especially since 2008, in order to weaken and annihilate workers' resistance, have resulted in the demise of old negotiation dynamics and the strengthening of newer, wider and more disruptive forms of struggle. It is within this frame that Terni steelworkers' development of new forms of response to capital accumulation should be interpreted.

In his seminal book *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, Kelly (1998, p. 64) claims that the

sense of injustice is the origin and *sine qua non* condition of workers' collective action. Leaders play a central role in activating particular social identities, leveraging emotions and transforming individuals into collective actors by attributing the cause of injustice to the employers (Kelly 1998, p. 35):

Injustice (or illegitimacy) frames are critical for collective organization and action because they begin the process of detaching subordinate group members from loyalty to ruling groups (or in Marx's 1847 terms converting a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself). The abstract ideologies that circulate within the labour movement — varieties of Marxism, Christian socialism, social partnership, etc. — are consequently of fundamental importance in understanding the concrete, day-to-day behaviours of workers. (Kelly 1998, p. 29)

Kelly's mobilisation theory has recently been critiqued by Atzeni (2009,2010), who, drawing on his study of Argentinian car plant occupations in the late 1990s and early 2000s, denies the validity of injustice as an objective basis for mobilisation and the leader-centred framework for action. This, he argues, may be useful for Unions organising, but it is far less valuable as a general theory of collective action and is framed within capital fetishism nonetheless. Atzeni (2010, pp. 15-33) thus proposes a theory of workers' collective action which avoids the individually-based explanation and highlights the centrality of the contradictions of the capitalist process, in which workers need to be constantly demystifying capital in their rediscovery of solidarity. For Atzeni, injustice does not exist on its own, and does not have an objective dimension, but is rather the result of individual perceptions framed within specific social and cultural models. Nevertheless, as individuals may perceive a specific situation as unjust, their sense of injustice and possible reactions tend to remain blocked by structural constraints – such as the need to keep their job because no alternative options are offered (Atzeni 2010, p. 89). Atzeni views collective action as rooted in the contradictions and crises generated by the capitalist labour process. These are the moments in which a system and set of values that

are taken for granted (for instance, management's right to manage, authority relations and bureaucratic control) become contested, and new spaces for the collectivisation of workers' interests are created. These are also moments that show how the participative and collective nature of work can generate solidarity, which in turn becomes central to attempting to organise the workers (Atzeni 2009, p. 16).

Atzeni thus calls for a general mobilisation theory that excludes injustice because it is "easily substituted by other moral value-based concepts performing a similar cohesive function (e.g. dignity, inequality or fairness)" (Atzeni 2010, p. 19). However, this argument fails to address the claims for a return to the moral economy of Keynesian capitalism, and the appeal to morality and dignity in new forms of struggles that are capable, as in Terni, of having 30,000 people take to the street in defence of a factory that employs less than 3,500 labourers. As Narotzky (2016, p. 87) claims, these struggles seek redress, at best, in the form of a return to the status quo ante, expressed in the short-lived European Social Market project or, at worst, in the creation of exclusionary spaces of privilege.

Furthermore, as D'Aloisio (2015, p. 95) claims that workers' conditions at the present time promise the birth of new forms of conflict, framed not by traditional Marxist labour-capital relations but rather by the dialectical dynamic that permeates the modification of present-day classes. Conflict is still embedded in the transformation of industrial work, but it is changing into a more subjective experience, into an existential conflict between work time, private time and family life. In workers' mobilisation, the shift in focus from class struggle to new interpretations and sentiments of dispossession are more evident than before. They affect the terms of the struggle, moving the focus from the political to the moral, cutting across different groups with distant political agendas, including church groups, Unions and antagonistic militants from the left, who all frame their public

advocacy in the same key word: ‘dignity’ (see Fig. 6).



Figure 6. The word ‘dignity’ next to the word ‘labour’ recurs in flyers printed by very different groups. Top left: Church group announcing that a group of AST workers will attend the Angelus in Vatican City on 31 August, “In Defence of the Terni Steelworkers’ Dignity”. Top right: Centro Sociale militants hosting a debate and concert in support of the steelworkers, “Struggle, Rights, Dignity in the Factory”. Bottom: CGIL Terni announcing the agenda and bus schedule to reach the CGIL national rally on 25 October, where the FIOM AST RSU coordinator will speak about the steelworks strike, “Work, Dignity, Equality to Change Italy”.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The chapter has considered La Terni’s history of labour unrest from its formation to the present time, in relation to both structural analysis and ethnographic data. As the chapter has demonstrated, the Terni metalworkers have been the most meaningful presence

among the local working class, and from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were able to resist long industrial conflicts through the creation of defence organs and family networks.

The historical account of labour unrest activities in the Terni steelworks shows how the 1907 ‘Serrata’ was characterised by defensive or “heroic” (Arrighi 1995) actions, implying a greater number of strikes, where the workers fought for basic rights, relying on family networks to build and coerce the town’s solidarity. They grew in number and strength, and the ‘Total Factory model’ – generating both identification and long-lasting conflictual dynamics with the regime – regarded them as the core labour force in Terni fascism, beginning the celebration of steelwork pride. As Arrighi (1985, p. 271) reminds us, fascism spread in the interwar years, providing a way out from the impasse created by a labour movement strong enough to disrupt accumulation but not strong enough to seize power through its organic elites or to resist political repression (see also Arrighi 1990).

As the chapter has explained, the anti-fascist movement was never defeated among the workforce, nurturing a political ferment which strongly contributed to the Resistance during World War Two. In the post-war reconstruction, this gave birth both to pioneering labour institutes to manage employment in the recovery of production and to a stout defence against restructuring and redundancies. In this phase, both Unions and the Communist Party were the stronghold of the workers, although their hegemonic position was later undermined during the belligerent climate following the 1952-1953 layoffs.

However, the post-war years consequently marked a shift to a modern form of strike, more concerned with the magnitude of labour unrest – the number of workers involved per strike – than its severity – the number of working days lost per worker involved (Bordogna e Provasi, cited in Arrighi 1995, p. 54). The late 1960s were marked by a younger working class with a longer formal education, generated for the first time outside

the “proletariats’ citadel” (Canali 2004, p.73) in contrast to the traditional revolutionary agenda of the post-war Unionists, who still held key roles. The industrial conflict of the 1970s not only improved working conditions and health and safety measures, but also helped to develop industrial plans that guaranteed the factory a strategic economic role in the national territory. Until the privatisation wave that swept away the public companies during the 1990s, the strength of militancy was able to draw on an accumulation of resistance from the previous historical period (see Mandel 1992, pp. 333-334), either as a result of political-economic national contingencies, or as a reaction to specific productive and economic deficiencies, or in defence of employment.

The ‘rebellious spirit’ (Portelli 1991, p. 133) associated with the anarchist movement, born before the steelworks, left an important trace in the Communist rank-and-file throughout the process of industrialisation. In the following years, the crisis of the Italian public steel industry forced the Terni metalworkers to compromise on employment to maintain productivity, and the conflicts that followed saw both workers (not used to strikes) and their institutions (unfamiliar with fighting outside the patriarchal agenda of the public company) engage in a confrontation with a powerful multinational, which created an important watershed in the local tradition of labour unrest.

Compared with the Magnetico dispute, the present labour unrest delineates a more worrisome contemporary landscape that is moving towards deindustrialisation, generating a need to renovate synergy and solidarity between steelworkers and town. Workers, fully aware of their precarious condition, have embraced and lived resistance as a search for visibility almost in messianic terms, as a venture to maintain the status quo ante. They have engaged in the struggle by framing it as an opposition between capitalistic forces, the financial market and multinationals’ power, where the traditional language of class is replaced by more inclusive words such as ‘dignity’ and ‘justice’. However, it

would be a mistake to exclude the reason why they came together in the first place, and what the mobilisation was built upon. In this light, the Terni steelworkers' struggle is placed between classic Marxist mobilisation through work stoppage and the search for a new language and a new visibility, voiced through populist claims. The concepts of working class formation and consciousness, which have been introduced in this chapter, will be dealt with in the ethnographic film through the interviewees' comments on class consciousness in relation to the unrest, and will be thoroughly addressed in the following chapters and the conclusions in relation to workers' memories of the industrial action, personal histories and Unionism.

## **Chapter 3 – Doing visual ethnography during an industrial dispute**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The following chapter focuses on the research methods, and the role of visual methods as a data-gathering tool. It analyses how the industrial dispute shaped the field-site, the collaborations with the research subjects and the phenomenological implications of the visual ethnography produced during fieldwork.

The first section will look at the specificities of the field-site and will show how a methodology intertwining mainstream and visual ethnographic practices helped to achieve consistent data in different contexts. The second section will look at the involvement of the participants, the collaboration between anthropologist and filmmakers in the production of an ethnographic film on the industrial action, and the construction of dialogue between the written and visual output. The latter, produced as an integral part of the research project, will be evaluated in terms of the theoretical and methodological processes of its production.

The chapter concludes by stating how the fieldwork influenced the research methodologies and took advantage, in a moment of intense media activism, of the possibility of representing labour outside the sphere of production.

### **3.2 The space-time dimension of the fieldwork**

The field research took place from November 2013 to March 2015. I carried out participant observation before, during and after the dispute, and gathered data through

about 50 formal and informal interviews, 39 of which were with actual and former steelworkers and employees; the rest of the interviewees were workers' relatives, militants and leaders of local political parties and trade unions. Most of the interviews were audio-recorded; only 12 were video-recorded, because the filmed interviews were meant to be part of the ethnographic film, and too many interviewees, too many voices, may have confused the viewers.

At the same time as the industrial dispute started, the fieldwork activities became more intense, and participant observation became the central method of the data gathering. The methodological endeavours that followed may be considered tributaries of the participant observation stream: they took divergent paths which became either reliable and navigable or very impractical, depending on the accessibility to places, to the participants' involvement and to the rapidly changing research context. In this light, this section will address the space and time dimensions of fieldwork that determined the research methodology.

The specificity of the labour unrest multiplied the research sites according to the aims of the diverse workers' actions, creating what Lefebvre (1991, p. 32) terms 'socially produced space', constituted by the intersection of *biological reproduction* (the family), *reproduction of labour power* (the working class) and *reproduction of social relations of production* (relations constitutive of capitalism increasingly sought and imposed as such).

Concerning the present research, these spaces can be divided in 'indoor' and 'outdoor' spaces. Within socially produced 'indoor spaces' (including houses, AST offices, political party and Union branches, education buildings, bars and restaurants), I carried out 20 audio-recorded and 12 video-recorded interviews. All of them were based on a written list of questions in order to compare different responses (Bernard 2011, p. 158), aimed both at interpreting the ongoing dispute and at tracing working/life stories and oral

histories concerning the factory (Bryman 2001, p. 316). All the video-recorded semi-structured interviews were carried out in participants' houses, except for three interviewees who, for different reasons, did not want to be interviewed at their homes. However, even in the protected sphere of the household, the presence of the camera generated degrees of uneasiness which often had to be overcome by first preparing the interviewees to the idea of talking in front of the camera. In this context, it was crucial to prepare questions that they were able to answer (Barbash and Taylor 1997, p. 342) and to use interviewing probing techniques (see Bernard 2011, pp. 162-166), such as 'photo elicitation', in order to prompt conversation and lower the degree of awareness of the camera presence. This very direct method of gaining insight helped lighten the overall feeling of the interview, creating a neutral zone for discussion. It consisted of showing photographs in order to provoke unplanned reactions, observations and memories, and to engage in conversation that goes beyond the arranged interview (e.g. Banks 2001; Chiozzi 1989). With Monia an employee in the data centre/IT service who was often present during the rallies with her camera, I used the vast number of photographs she took during the dispute. Showing her visual archive during the video interview helped her overcome a certain shyness while she was being interviewed. The data gathering through visual means was always carried out with the aid of Greca, who operated the camera. Later, we were joined by Riccardo, 32 years old, the son of a retired steelworker, another professional filmmaker from Terni, who worked as cameraman, sound person and editor. This allowed me to be more focused on the questions to ask and facilitated eye contact, for a more intimate encounter between informant and anthropologist (Pink 2006, p. 60).

In outdoor spaces, which can be divided in pickets, gatherings, and the protest actions the 'strategies' (de Certeau 1988) of workers' institutions, which relied on pre-established, dedicated spaces for demonstrations, blurred with workers' individual 'tactics' (de

Certeau 1988), which pushed the actions outside the dedicated spaces. Following de Certeau's (1988, p. 97) idea of the pedestrian who acts through "a process of appropriation of the topographical system", and in contrast to the authority of the policymaker, the freedom of movement of the workers in protest gave a different *embodied* (Low 2014) meaning to the spaces they occupied during the dispute. These spaces became, in fact, what Low & Lawrence-Zuniga (2007) describe as *contested*, concretising the fundamental and recurring, but otherwise unexamined, ideological and social frameworks that structure practice and socio-spatial modes of exclusion and inclusion (ibid, p. 18).

The pickets surrounding the factory (see Fig. 7), placed continuously from September to December 2014 to block the flow of goods, were organised with tents and tables. They offered the opportunity for semi-structured interviews as well as unstructured interviews, which have a much more freewheeling quality. Even though they can seem similar to a conversation (Bryman 2001, p. 314), they are still supported by a plan, and are characterised by a minimum control over people's responses (Bernard 2011, p. 157). since the interviewees could sit and talk for a longer time. Furthermore, this allowed for group interviews, intended to generate simultaneous comparison of different workers' opinions on their movement and on the working of the Unions, highlighting different work and life trajectories. At the pickets, more than anywhere else, it was possible to focus, with the participants' help, on a fruitful reconstruction of events, which, as Bryman (2001, p. 329) points out, cannot be accomplished by participant observation alone. Often, conversations and interviews started by focusing on a particularly hot topic of the day, as events during the strike were constantly evolving. This helped to reconstruct, as different voices remembered different details, a more encompassing understanding of the whole dispute, marked by a thorough chronology.



Figure 7. The pickets surrounding the factory in red, and the pickets in town in front of the Prefecture and the Town Hall.

The gatherings had the main function of keeping workers informed about developments in the industrial action, allowing workers to voice their opinions and vote on decisions. Most of them were audio-recorded, and in three instances also video-recorded, using the camera as an observational recording device (Pink 2006, p. 26) to provide a continuous stream of high-quality data and to anchor the events in the visual output chronologically. In these circumstances, the fixity of the place, the crowdedness, and the attention of the participants towards the various speakers made interaction difficult; physical movement was limited and listening to the speaker was crucial for planning the next methodological moves (as in the case of the spontaneous, unplanned decision to occupy the motorway, or the train station blockade). Audio-recording the speeches helped to shift the attention from the main speaker, capturing reactions and ‘phatic communion’ (Malinowski 1936)<sup>61</sup> among the audience; later, the recording helped compare the two kinds of data. Following

<sup>61</sup> Malinowski (1936, pp. 314-316) defines ‘phatic communion’ as “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words [...] They fulfil a social function and that is their principal aim, they are neither the result of intellectual reflection, nor do they necessarily arouse reflection in the listener [...] phatic communion serves to establish bonds of personal union between people.”

Mead's (2003, p. 9)<sup>62</sup> non-interventional approach, in the same fashion, the camcorder was operated by one of the filmmakers, or placed on a tripod, which allowed for large batches of material and information to be captured without the continuous self-consciousness of those being observed.

Furthermore, gatherings allowed to capitalise on the participants' desire to express their opinion on what they had just listened to; since the attendance was far greater than at the pickets, they helped widen the network and arrange future interviews.

The protest actions included: the general strike, attended by 20,000 people; night raids in town to a high-ranking manager's house; marches to awaken the inhabitants; occupations of the train station, the motorway and the central squares; and obstructing the traffic at busy junctions. These actions had the function of raising awareness and demand the community's involvement in the struggle, and also of reaching the national (television) audience to attract a wider interest in the TK-AST situation. Marches and rallies embodying the "act of walking", which de Certeau (1984, p. 97) claims to be "to the urban system, what the speech act is to language or statement uttered", were very helpful for their sociability, involving a physical co-presence emphasised by common movements (Lee and Ingold, cited in Pink 2007, p. 244). They allowed the construction of useful knowledge, and a personal perception of those industrial, rural and urban spaces that in Terni "form an uneasy continuum" (Portelli 1991, p. 87). While walking, the informants commented on buildings, streets, monuments and so on, which helped me to situate and link names, places and memories gathered in past interviews. Furthermore, marches and

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<sup>62</sup> However, the unawareness of the subjects towards our camera was achieved by it being one of the many camcorders capturing those assemblies, rather than by subjects' familiarity with the filmmakers and the device helping people forget being filmed (see Bateson and Mead 1942, p. 49; on the techniques and archival and scientific value of this material, see El Guindi 2004, pp. 64-67).

rallies provided a route into a sensorial experience of the field,<sup>63</sup> and informed the visual methodological trajectories.

The recent emphasis on sensorial anthropology (e.g. Ingold 2000; Grasseni 2004; Pink 2006, 2009) has focused on gaining knowledge through embodied practices, leading to a critique of ‘ocularcentrism’, a reformulation of the visualist paradigm and the consequent rediscovery of the full range of human senses (Grimshaw 2001, p. 5-6).<sup>64</sup> However, the potentialities that visual representation can offer in producing other sensory experiences in the viewer (e.g. Pink 2006; MacDougall 1997) can be considered the most valuable way to help communicate those sensory experiences, which normally disappear from anthropological writing (e.g. Schneider and Wright 2006, p. 13). For instance, during the ‘general strike’, the noise made by thousands of people amassed in *Piazza della Repubblica* made it impossible to establish verbal communication beyond a few brief verbal exchanges. The sensory-scape in which the participant observation was immersed could only be conveyed through the recording of ethnographic footage, which was later used to analyse the event and edited as part of the visual output. The danger of visual representation, however, is that the viewers may not have the right cultural knowledge to interpret these experiences (Pink 2007, p. 250). Pink suggests that this obstacle may be overcome by a multimedia/hypermedia project integrating visual and written text (ibid., p. 251). In this case, since the ethnographic footage was only collected for the twofold purpose of allowing a deeper analysis of the event and of creating a filmed output and a separated written thesis, the danger of not being able to communicate the sensory-scape to the audience remains.

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<sup>63</sup> I will not enter the debate on ‘walking’ as a marginal or central embodied sensory research method, as to me it was mainly a practical way to collect information in order to integrate previous interviews. On this point, see the dispute between Pink and Howes (2010).

<sup>64</sup> For a critique of the historical and cultural specificity of placing sight at the top of the hierarchy of sensorial interpretation, see Banks (2001) and Howes (1991, 2013).

The temporal dimension of the dispute was the second factor that shaped the methodology, and was strongly related to the sites, since the constant unfolding of events could render the same geographic locations favourable or unfavourable. In fact, during the dispute, daily working activities were suspended, and the workers lived in a long liminal period in which the social conventions of time produced by administrative policies (see Lefebvre 1991) were interrupted: the industrial dispute temporarily erased the separation between the domains of 'work' and 'life' (Thompson 1967, p. 93; see also Parry 1999).

The events produced a suspended reality, something 'unexpected', which, as Nahm (2015, p. 125) suggests, reconfigures time and creates productive ruptures where new inquiries can be made. Indeed, workers' spaces became more accessible as the dispute grew, and its evolution also affected the use of visual means. However, immediate shooting has the advantage of adding a certain freshness that is useful for the filmmaker to capture a heightened sense of awareness, which is likely to be lost later in the process (see Barbash and Taylor 1997; MacDougall and Taylor 1998). Filming was avoided initially, for two reasons. First, the film project was defined when fieldwork had already begun; secondly, the aim was to make a less intrusive entry into the community, avoiding the possible awkwardness of situations where the camera acts as an intrusive object, thus limiting the communication between the parts. In the initial stage of the dispute, the camera was used less frequently than during or after the dispute. In this phase, it was possible to video-record the most important interviews for the ethnographic film, as the participants were very deeply involved in the struggle and wanted to voice their opinions. However, in some occasions, it was not possible to film at the pickets, especially at night, due to the tension

of the situation.<sup>65</sup> There, the uneasiness of the camera work paralleled the degree of disclosure which it was possible to gain while doing participant observation without it; both approaches compensated for each other. Mainstream participant observation allowed to move freely and collect different sets of data in different spaces, to select what was important – or more accessible – to film, and to choose which participants to video-interview among the network that was rapidly developing.

### **3.3 Participation and collaboration**

The visual methodology benefited from the workers' search for visibility for their cause, which allowed the camera to enter not only the spaces in which they were protesting but also, as part of the same process, their homes and lives. The camera modifies and complicates the interaction between researcher and participants, so a good degree of intimacy and disclosure (necessary to introduce the camera) was reached by getting to know the research subjects through unstructured interviews or informal discourses, following the mainstream ethnographic model, in the different times and places of the dispute.

This helped to select the participants who were less reluctant to appear in front of the camera, and who could represent the categories of AST workers, contractors' workers and white-collars workers, since the ethnographic film could not contain all the research participants who were interviewed. Some rejections arose due to shyness about appearing on video or exposure to problematic situations (given the impossibility anonymising the informant), which could endanger their job position, as well as their personal and

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<sup>65</sup> A particular episode took place at the pickets at 2am, 18 October 2014, when the Union reps asked us to switch all the cameras off as the situation was tense, and presumably they did not want anybody filming the heightened reactions of the workers towards each other or the Unions.

professional ties with other workers and Union representatives. However, the long period over which the research was carried out helped the participants to become familiar with the focus of the research and the researcher's role, and to differentiate it from the work carried out by journalists, who crowded the scene during the more intense phases of the dispute.

In October 2014, after a long day at the pickets, Daniele, one of the participants present in the ethnographic film, and I went by car to his former neighbourhood, as he wanted to show me the place where he moved when he was 10 and where his family still lives. The neighbourhood of 'Santa Maria Maddalena' (see Fig. 8) is on a hill just above the old velodrome – featured in the opening scene of *Acciaio* (1933) – which has now been turned into a carpark for workers. On the way there, Daniele spoke extensively about his childhood spent in the neighbourhood, about his grandfather's and father's jobs at the plant, about all his friends who lived there and their career paths, which, in most cases, had led just down the hill.

We reached the hilltop facing the factory, now dotted with new three- and four-storey buildings. Daniele described how, in the early 1990s, this was still beautiful countryside, which made you forget about the factory and the urban centre; but, he went on, the uncontrolled construction industry had ruined Santa Maria Maddalena. Among the most visible traits of urbanisation, he underlined how the roads built at the beginning of the 21st century were unable to bear contemporary traffic, as we had to stop nearly every time a car was coming from the opposite direction to let it pass. As we stopped the car and started to walk around, Daniele told me about how the former orchards, which gave the 'metalmazzadri' their name,<sup>66</sup> had been turned into flower gardens, and he showed me the

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<sup>66</sup> Metalmezzadri is a neologism composed of 'metal', which stands for 'metalmecanico' (steelworker), and 'mezzardo' (sharecrop farmer).

old playground where he used to play, now abandoned and enclosed in a rusty metal fence. Since the walk was a very fruitful source of data, providing fundamental insights into local working-class formation and into consumption patterns, which will be addressed in the following chapters, I thought of repeating the experience using the camera as a data-gathering tool.

A similar methodological approach is described by Pink (2007) in *Walking with Video*, where the author relies on the representational power of audio-visual tools of investigation “to learn more or learn differently” (ibid., p. 251). Pink suggests that the camera can help to invite the research participant to define and represent his/her own embodied experiences and knowledge in ways that will benefit collaborative explorations. In the present case, however, a satisfactory exchange with Daniele already existed, and filming the walk was based on the idea that the footage could make up a very important part of the ethnographic film, expanding on one subject’s life to connect the larger urban landscape to the main story.

Greca, Riccardo and myself filmed the walk combining a mix of itinerant and standstill shots, in which Daniele answered my questions with a certain shyness, although he was willing to participate. For Greca, the result was not good, as the camera movements to avoid facing the sunlight made the whole endeavour technically awkward; moreover, in her opinion, Daniele looked as though he was forced to do something that only professionals, used to talking in front a moving camcorder, are able to do. Indeed, it was difficult to edit what Daniele was saying with an understandable and consistent flow, due to the various interruptions, pauses, and *ehms* and *aws*.

Greca and I talked about the use we could make of it within the ethnographic film, and agreed to leave it out entirely, ending up only with a shot in which Daniele looks at the

factory, to integrate his interview at home and to end the ethnographic film with a significant image for aesthetic purposes.



Figure 8. Santa Maria Maddalena neighbourhood, marked by the red oval, and snapshots of footage recorded in the neighbourhood with Daniele (my photographs).

Daniele was nervous in front of the camera, a condition hidden behind his eloquent will to participate in his political representation, likely generated by a strong moment of worker's engagement, and the unusually high level of news coverage and public audience

attention. Terni, indeed, doesn't often get the attention of national TV news and newspapers, and when this happens the subject is often the steel plant and its workers; to this light, the dispute triggered the social actors' involvement with media and media activism, especially hypermedia<sup>67</sup>. Workers were, indeed, very active on social media (especially FB) and constantly uploaded images and video of the industrial action.

This legitimated the research's use of visual means to tell and represent unexpected events and which, in the private sphere, contributed to a high level of participation with both the research subject and local filmmakers.

Further to this example, the involvement of people in the ethnographic film took two forms: direct participation, in which the informant interviewed by myself and Greca talked in front of the camcorder; and an indirect one in which the participants contributed to the data by sharing their own video and audio materials. The research took advantage of these new digital territories, where the contingency of actors and practices interact through a hybrid digital environment (see Postill 2015). The indirect inclusion of participants thus capitalised on social actors' use within the public political sphere of a wide array of visual means and screening platforms to represent, reproduce and share images of the protest.

During the dispute, the people who attended the protest produced a significant number of images, thanks to affordable cameras often embedded in mobiles or pads as supplementary media communication devices. These "poor images" (Steyerl 2009) have then been shared online, uploaded, downloaded, reformatted and reedited, transforming quality into accessibility. Through Facebook<sup>68</sup> pages, or through more anonymous online

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<sup>67</sup> That is documents comprising of written, images, audio and video contents accessible on the web, commonly referred to as 'interactive multimedia'.

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/biografiedilotta>.

sharing platforms, some participants sent their photographs or videos filmed during the dispute, helping to expand the empirical base for anthropological analysis, and allowing for a combination of multiple data forms within one format (El Guindi 2014, p. 447). Furthermore, I also personally requested and collected footage recorded by local online newspapers, integrating the final output with important passages that we did not film. On one occasion, I asked one of the content creators and filmmakers of 'terninrete.it', a popular local news website (led by a citizen-journalism approach), if we could use some videos he had shot; he agreed and became so interested in our work in progress that he video-interviewed me and uploaded the content onto his website.

The participants' images used in the ethnographic film are recognisable by the fact that the on-screen quality is lower than that of the footage produced by the professional camera, and by the video format in which the film is shot.

These visual contributions helped create a visual output that aims to be both a vehicle for and a producer of democratic spaces of observation, in order to put together a composite working-class image, like Farocki's (1992) *Videograms of a Revolution*,<sup>69</sup> in which various camera points of view are edited to look at the same event from multiple perspectives. The output embodies the necessity of the research to meet new methodological approaches, in order to analyse and explain what Canevacci (2008) defines as the passage from the industrial city to the communicational metropolis: "There is no longer an audience in the classic sense of a group of people that passively assists in an event. The urban subject is a participant observer like the anthropologist."

Furthermore, as Turner (1995, p. 104-105) claims, the participants' own self-

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<sup>69</sup> *Videograms of a Revolution* concerns the Romanian revolution of 1989: major moments in the story are presented from multiple perspectives, including amateur cameramen filming the crowd, pre-revolution national TV station broadcasts and Romanian Free Television footage (Privett 1999).

representation and self-objectification is always an integral aspect of the struggle, and peripheral social groups have recognised the political potential of the opportunity to reach a vast public, especially through accessible visual electronic media and the development of world-wide dissemination networks.

The series of footage acquired and viewed while doing fieldwork activities suggested that a popular iconography, drawing on TV-style documentary, could be a suitable way to integrate visual field data with the participants' images. Those images helped to fill possible gaps, as the documentary followed multiple events happening simultaneously; however, this complicated (especially in the editing phase) the process of selecting what to include in the final cut. This process, as well as all the other production phases, were carried out in collaboration with the other two filmmakers.

On the one hand, working with two local filmmakers had significant advantages. I was able, in fact, to rely on their ties to the workers' community. Greca and Riccardo introduced me to their friends working at the plant and assumed a gatekeeper role, helping to establish easier relationships between the research subjects and the camera. Furthermore, being respectively, the granddaughter and son of former steelworkers was fundamental to their passion and involvement in the project. Greca perceived a continuity between her job and her that of her grandfather, whereas many other cultural workers that she knows saw a rupture between the spheres of industrial and cultural production. This, together with her understanding of the complexity of the AST work environment and the social fabric of the town, as well as her experience in social documentaries based on oral history archive footage and interviews, helped to establish a collaboration between equals, sharing the same degree of responsibility for the project's outcome. Riccardo, educated in filmmaking to a degree level, like Greca, but with an MA in documentary from an English university, was able to provide a more observational look, both

theoretically and practically, which was reflected in his camera work.

On the other hand, following MacDougall (2011, p. 105), the collaboration of filmmakers and anthropologists on film production is marked by a constant overlap of intentions and duties, as the anthropologist tries to be a filmmaker and vice versa. The former wants, in fact, the film to be all-inclusive, to cover everything and avoid interpretation, believing that the viewers have no access to other sources of information. The latter, instead, is too focused on a conventional story-centric dramatic structure, feeling that, without it, the audience will lose interest.

This scenario did indeed characterise the relationship between myself and the filmmakers, especially between me and Greca. For instance, we had disagreements regarding my choice to interview so many subjects (without thinking of excluding anybody from the final cut), Greca's choices on where to place the camera (according to light conditions rather than involvement in the 'action'), and the different time schedule (as for me filming was a full-time practice, just like the fieldwork, whereas for them it was interspersed with other daily activities). Hence, the three of us had to constantly renegotiate our approaches and make sure that the others' perspective on the final project was explicit, while also giving ourselves specific roles to achieve a more technically proficient and aesthetically polished result, as the events we were filming were continuously evolving and the sites of interests multiplied quickly. Therefore, when it was possible to work together, I would assume the role of director, suggesting where and what to follow, negotiating on the spot with Greca, who operated the camera, followed by Riccardo with the sound recording equipment. If one of the two filmmakers was not present, I also assumed the role of sound person. I hardly ever operated the camera, although no footage was recorded when I was not present.

The difficulties of the collaboration did not end with the shooting phase. The subsequent

editing process involved the three of us, although we mainly worked in pairs. After filming, I took care to study the footage, log sequences and transcribe interviews, which helped me gain a good overview of the material and build a structure on paper in order to have a map to follow when editing the footage. However, the storyboard on paper had the limit of bearing a methodological approach, more suitable for written ethnography than a filmed one. Thus, while editing the film, the storyboard had to be ‘translated’ into a structure fit for images, this had the consequence of slowing down and further complicating the path towards an output that could embody our authorial critical points of view and satisfy our initial expectations.

Commentators have drawn on such examples of the complicated relation between visual and written data in ethnographic research to define films in anthropology as unsuitable “for the translation of analytical discourse” (Balicki 1988, p. 39), fostering comparisons between filming and writing (e.g. Asch 1972; MacDougall 2011; Rollwagen 2014 [1988]; Ruby 2000) and relegating the former to an ancillary position. However, as far as the present research goes, although, after four full days of non-stop editing, Greca said to me that those were “the 30 most difficult minutes” she had ever put together, our constant confrontation was pivotal to producing a visual ethnography that was not subordinated to ethnographic writing and that had a thought-through, precise stylistic and analytical purpose.

The next sections will analyse the interconnectedness between mainstream and visual methodological endeavours and will explore stylistic issues related to the aesthetic of the final visual output and their relation to ethnographic filmmaking.

### **3.4 ‘Ethnographic film’ as methodology**

Framing ethnographic films is a longstanding issue in anthropology, and the very definition of the term ‘ethnographic’ stands at the base of their uncertain position within the discipline, leading to the pigeonholing of the genre as “a specialised branch of anthropology or a documentary subgenre” (Weinberg 1992, p. 24).

The historical debate shows that the term has changed according to technical developments and to different theoretical approaches to filmmaking in anthropology (see de Brigard 2003; Pink 2006). Early commentators, such as Ruby (1975), Heider (2006) and Hockings (2003), focused on identifying and attributing sets of conventional rules to establish a scientific canon for films made by anthropologists, modelled on their written ethnographies. The documentary form, and the indexical nature of the cinematic sign of such films, was either employed to support their commentary and to motivate the use of footage as cultural evidence (Nichols 1981, pp. 238-239), or as a set of conventions in the absence of formal anthropological structures to address filmmaking (Ruby 1975, pp. 108-110).

Positivist approaches (Heider 2006; Ruby 1975), which intend visual outputs to be mainly an effective teaching tool (see, above all, Asch 1972) – building on Mead’s (2003) idea of the camera’s objectiveness – argued that social phenomena have to be represented in their ‘wholeness’, reducing any distortion that the anthropologist-filmmaker may impose on the observed culture, in order to replicate the scientific endeavour of ethnographic writing. The idea that the camera could record ‘objectively’ (Goldschmidt 1972) led to the erroneous assumption that the device could record unmodified human behaviour (Ruby 1975, p. 107). This was challenged by filmmakers such as MacDougall, who instead aimed to stimulate the ethnographic ‘event’ (e.g. Banks 1992) by filming people doing precisely what they would be doing with a camera crew there (Weinberger 1992, p.

45). This pivotal assumption stands at the basis of the hermeneutic strand, which questions the scientific endeavour of anthropology more broadly (e.g. Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986), reinterpreting the conceptual understanding of the camera as a passive recording medium and inscribing ethnographic films in a wider cinematic context (e.g. Rouch 2003; MacDougall 2003), thus moving definitively away from the scientific paradigm. Following on from this, contemporary critics define the ethnographic-ness of a film as a more encompassing term in relation to processes of production and dissemination. Banks (1992, p. 117) points out three main passages: *intention*, *event* and *reaction*. A film's ethnographic identity may thus be located in the intentions of the filmmaker, in the event filmed (including the event of filming) and in the reactions of audiences (Banks, cited in Basu 2008). In these respects, as MacDougall (2011, p. 100) affirms, anthropological filmmaking is not just a way of communicating the same kind of knowledge that can be conveyed through written ethnography, but is instead "a way of creating different knowledge", which follows a parallel creation process in gathering and processing data.<sup>70</sup> Following these considerations, and the fact that filmic ethnography requires as much 'local knowledge' as written ethnography (Taylor 1996, p. 77), ethnographic filming may be considered a disciplinary approach to the subject matter, rather than a genre or documentary sub-genre with set rules. It relies on long-term fieldwork activities that strike a balance between thoughts, descriptions, voices and gestures, and whose 'destiny' is the delayed observation by an audience (de France 1999). Starting from this assumption, the next section will look at how the ethnographic filmic endeavour was visually framed.

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<sup>70</sup> Lately, 'multimediality' has offered viable routes between filmed and written anthropology (Banks and Ruby 2012; Pink 2006) in order to overcome the dichotomy and propose a new dimension for a number of visual ethnographic practices. However, these are interactive learning experiences, involving a single person and a computer: matching the fruition of book reading, and losing the fruitful complexities generated by the shared visual experience of an – ethno – film audience.

### 3.5 The visual output

The ethnographic film, *Biographies of Struggle*, which was shot between July 2014 and February 2015, presents the events of the industrial action diachronically, accompanied by the narrations and interpretations of 11 interviewees employed in the steelworks. It combines arranged interviews and ethnographic footage<sup>71</sup> so as to build a visual representation of the workers as a political and subjective group, showing its internal composition and individualities. In order to better integrate the footage filmed by participants, and to make it more accessible to the research subjects and audience than its written counterpart, the film follows a cinematic visual structure, and conventions that make use of the local visual tradition and popular iconography, drawing on TV-style documentaries. It also relies on and intellectually engages with ‘observational style’ filmmaking methods, which are very influential for anthropological cinema.

The concept of Observational Cinema, introduced and formalised in the 1970s (Young 2003; MacDougall 2003), was an attempt to develop a practical filming approach which shares many of the features of note-taking. But, unlike the latter, which needs to be edited into writing, Observational Cinema can represent the original event or situation directly (Young 2003, pp. 100-101). Its style is typically empirical (Balicki 1988, p. 34), and involves a process of discovery grounded in the ethnographic encounter itself. It a style fundamentally cinematic and involves abandoning ethnographic interpretation such as explanation and argument in favour of filmic interpretative logic (Grimshaw and Ravtez 2009, p. 4). Observational films are – still – authored, but are less authoritative (Taylor 1996, p. 76); they aim to critique the omniscient Voice-of-God commentary, gaining directions from informants who have to express themselves through their own words and

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<sup>71</sup> An itinerant interview with a steelworker around the factory; three assemblies attended by trade unions and steelworkers; one assembly organised by a group of contract workers; two days at the pickets; two meetings at MISE; a party rally; an event at the Centro Sociale focusing on the dispute; the occupation of the motorway from Terni to Rome by the steelworkers; and the mass rally organised by the trade unions.

actions (Marshall 1993; Young 2003) in order for the filmmaker to engage morally in a representation which tells the ‘stories’ and the social experience that the subjects wish to tell (Hanley 2007; MacDougall and Taylor 1998).

MacDougall (2003, p. 129), in *Beyond Observational Cinema*, proposes a move away from the observational style, sketching a future for participatory cinema as a joint authorship between filmmakers and their subjects. He then advocates for a multiple-authorship and “*intertextual*” (his emphasis) cinema, which could allow for ethnographic films to be in a better position to address conflicting views of reality, in a world where observer and observed are less clearly separated, and in which mutual observation and exchange increasingly matter (ibid., pp. 129-130).

*Biographies of Struggle* borrows the non-interventional ‘fly-on-the-wall’ feature typical of Observational Cinema, including its absence of planning, staging, re-enacting (Nichols 2001, pp. 113-115) and narration; in doing so, it avoids the ‘vococentric’ hierarchy (Chion 1999, p. 5) imposed by the narrator. This aims to give spectators an active role, without a dogmatic and constricting commentary, thus making the film more demanding for the audience (e.g. MacDougall 1998; Rouch 2003). In this light, following Rouch’s (2003, p. 93) view, the use of extradiegetic music was also avoided, as it was considered a highly theatrical and outdated convention which envelops viewers or gives artificial rhythm to images. As an alternative to voiceover, fundamental information that could not be conveyed visually is explained through ‘cards’ (text on screen). This was necessary due to the nature of the topic, in order to provide some historical background and a list of points of the agreement that was reached, to let the viewer think through each point.

Nevertheless, *Biographies of Struggle* does not fit the norm, as it does not use typical ‘observational’ long takes and relies on interviews which allow subjects to reflect on their

lives and offer their perspective with an immediacy and clarity that is rare in observational films (Barbash and Taylor 1997, p. 413). The use of interviews, as Barbash and Taylor claim, pose two problems: first, they work through direct address, as in this case with an off-screen interviewer, which may risk subordinating the ‘actual’ footage; secondly, although interviews may seem to disperse authority in a way that narration-based exposition does not, they may offer an easy way to editorialise without appearing at all. The author(s) hides behind the interviewees’ voices but she or he remains the one who chooses whom to interview and how, and above all the one who cuts and pastes the interview during editing (Barbash and Taylor 1997, p. 413).

Editing is indeed the crucial end passage of film production: if the camera is often referred to as a ‘mechanical eye’, mimetically reproducing the human eye, montage would then be a procedure similar to a brain function, a kind of language which stimulates and reclaims cognitive processes (Vivod 2008, p. 4). Editing intervenes in space and time to create a cinematic reality and its exploration; however, the film does not presume to represent the real world. *Biographies of Struggle*, like a written ethnography, undergoes manipulations that are visible in three very distinctive instances: first, the assembly of fragments, for instance while using different sorts of footage to portray the general strike; secondly, the adding of extradiegetic shots to describe and to propose symbols, or for intellectual and aesthetic reasons, for instance when showing the town landscape from the mountain, or the juxtaposition of Italian and German flags being waved after the Unionist speech with Daniele’s final image, as explained in the vignette; thirdly, the use of cuts to avoid compromising continuity, and the adoption of a ‘sequence’ of straightforward chronological montage in order to build an indexical relation with the film narrative (Barbash and Taylor 1997, pp. 399-402; 381). These are not only stylistic choices, but also intellectual reasons imposed on the final output with consideration for

both the subject and audience, in order to remain faithful to the former while being explanatory to the latter, avoiding suggesting to the spectators that the subject matter has been exhausted within the film (Barbash and Taylor 1997, pp. 385-88).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how the fieldwork influenced the methodologies used to gather data and shaped the visual output. In this light, the dispute became a specific and political ‘space’ and ‘time’ of interaction, where the anthropologist, the filmmakers and the social actors involved in the labour unrest met, so as to take advantage both of their search for visibility in the public sphere and of the intimate encounter in the private sphere, to develop an analysis of the representation of the identities of workers involved in labour activism.

In order to represent labour outside the sphere of production the research relied on the collaboration of the research subjects and the filmmakers who helped to map the visual presences, facilitating access to people and places, and allowed coverage of different elements of the workers’ movement and of the dispute. It also relied and capitalised on the social actors’ hypermedia activism and their sharing of visual data (photos and video) among themselves and on social media platforms.

Finally, the chapter has shown how the resulting visual output, in the form of an ethnographic film, combines a documentary style close to the tradition of ethnographic cinema, and at the same time mirrors the aesthetic of contemporary TV documentaries, closer to the visual experience and local visual tradition of the informants. This approach aims to enhance the dissemination of understandings about the complexity of that industrial action, and politically represent – or make visible - the workers to a wide

audience outside academia.

Beyond the methodological approaches and rationale followed while filming and their implications for gathering the data (outlined in Chapter 1), *Biographies of Struggle* aims to show a political representation of the conflicting and contradictory processes through which people engage and try to make sense of the industrial dispute, of class struggle and, ultimately, of their lives.

The visual dimensions of this research and its output not only offer different forms of anthropological knowledge and a diverse sensorial involvement with the data gathered, they also provide the reader-turned-viewer with the tools to better experience the places and environments where the research was carried out, with a view to empathise with the social actors' structures of feeling. The film aims also to provide the audience with a contemporary 'image' of the industrial labourer and of class struggle, and to draw deeper connections between concrete and abstract understandings of class position, and between the articulation of individual and collective experiences of labour unrest. It thus seeks to produce a political image of the workers' struggle and to set the ground ethnographically for further analysis and interpretation of the community's sense of identity, and involvement in the workers' protest which the written research is set to elucidate. The image and the vignette below introducing the ethnographic film (see link p.129) are one of the best example of the dialogue which can be established between the visual and written data. Furthermore, the ethnographic film creates an archival memory, and, drawing on the symbolism of the exchange (Mauss [1950] 2002), it is something to give back to community which made the research possible.

## *Biographies of Struggle*



ME: I want to use some of your photographs in the film, but I also need something for the DVD cover, something that can summarise all the events and individualities...

Monia: Look at this, I think it could work. I was in going to a medical examination inside the plant a few weeks before the strike started, and I took this photograph. It gave me the idea of the fragmentation that was about to happen in the steel plant. You can see the BA<sup>72</sup> upside down, reflected in a puddle, with all the cracks in the pavement around it. It does render the whole idea of what's happening.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The BA, the tallest tower of the plant, where the cold millwork takes place, bears the symbol of AST Terni; when illuminated at night, it can be seen from a long way off.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Monia, 21 November 2014.

<https://vimeo.com/270350016>

## **Chapter 4 – Working in TK-AST**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Drawing on the ethnographic film this chapter will focus on the people who work at TK-AST and on how the dispute affected them. It will delineate how the divisions of the labour-force generated in the workplace were reproduced during the strike. Indeed, since the assembly on 2 August 2014, a tangible difference arose between the workers who made the steel, the diverse contractors employed in the production chain and the white-collar workers in the sales and administration departments. Furthermore, the workers' collective action, as the film helped to highlight, was characterised by an internal fragmentation based on the participants' agency and subjectivity, and influenced by their life and work stories, as well as their personal evaluations of the industrial action.

Building on the differences highlighted by the vignette in the first section, depicting an everyday life scene at the pickets, the chapter will elaborate three categories of labourers, divided by age-set groups and by their positions and job roles in the production process. Then, the chapter will focus on work and life stories, trajectories of unrest and the unionisation of specific informants among blue collars AST workers, contractors' workers, and white-collar workers. It will look at how these experiences influenced the interviewees' choices as to whether to leave their jobs – incentivised by the offer of a conspicuous redundancy package – or to continue working for the biggest employer in town – which has political and economic hegemony, preventing the development of other economic realities.

The chapter will conclude by reviewing the ethnographic data and relevant anthropological and sociological literature to define the distinctive traits of the Terni labour force on strike.

## 4.2 Informants and production process

The TK-AST production process is characterised by the possibility of working in an ‘integrated cycle’, with consecutive ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ production, whereby all of the many manufacturing phases are internal to the plant itself.<sup>74</sup> Amongst the several descriptions of the complex steelmaking process gathered from informants, this chapter, for the purpose of simplicity, will rely on the explanation given by Augusto, a young, hot-department worker, as it efficiently synthesises the main stages:

There’s the melting department that melts the raw material, iron and alloy, as well as chrome, nickel, lime and coal. The [EAF] furnace melts everything, and then there’s the whole refining process. The slab that comes out, a big thick thing, goes to the hot department that makes it into a hot coil, which then goes through two rollers which flatten it until it is the thickness required by the client. The sheet is rolled into a raw cold coil. The coil goes to the cold department, called PX, which makes it shiny. The coil can be sent to the client as it is through the shipping department, or it goes to the finishing centre, which makes it as the client wants it with different patterns, with borders, checks or strips, and then it is sent away by the shipping department. (Augusto, 32, AST)

The AST workers, whose words and life stories this chapter relies on predominantly, are employed in the cold department (see the following section) and in two different maintenance departments: turning and fluid distribution (see section 5.1).

The workers employed by ILSERV (see section 5.2) are employed in the main production cycle, but in external processes connected to it. They deal mainly with industrial waste collection and disposal, raw material stock and furnace supply, and transport of slabs and coils between departments. The other contract workers working in a small contracted firm are employed in industrial cleaning (see section 5.2).

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<sup>74</sup> A detailed breakdown of the production process is available at <http://www.acciaiterni.it/en/about-us/manufacturing-process/> (accessed: January 2017).

The white-collar workers are either employed directly in AST employed or in ASPASIEL (AST subsidiary). The latter is the data centre/IT service in charge of managing the body of data coming from the AST's own monitoring and testing of the quality of the steel, as well as AST's administrative data (see section 5.3).



Figure 9. (1) scrap yard; (2) malting shop; (3) slab continuous casting; (4) PIX 1 cold rolling; (5) bright annealing; (6) forging division; (7) PIX 2 cold rolling; (8) hot rolling mill; (9) IT service (source: <http://www.acciaiterni.it/en/about-us/plants/>)

### 4.3 Two groups of workers

The August assembly granted a short-term window on the labourers' divisions, but when the dispute entered a more radical phase, the workers started to set up heavy-duty gazeboes at the pickets outside the four gates of the plant, which became the core of both their unrest and fragmentation. The main ones were in Viale Brin, where the struggle lasted longer than anyone could expect, and tension reached peaks that the Unions were unable to control. It was from there that buses left for Rome and Brussels, to take the protest outside the region; it was there that the Unions held assemblies to communicate what they had learned at each meeting with the company and there that the labourers and their families gathered to share hopes and fears amidst the coming winter. Nevertheless, in my mind – filled with images from books and films of past grand workers' struggles –

everything about those strongholds was very different from what I thought a picket line would look like.

I was open to many possibilities, entailing dramatic dynamics that would involve police violence such as that used to quell the miners' strike in England, as McIlroy (1985) described in *Digging Deeper*, or battles between strikers and scabs, as in Kopple's famous documentary, *Harlan County USA* (1977). In a sense, I wished to find a setting for a labour struggle such as that hinging on a sharp juxtaposition between a North American heroic 'small Union' and a villainous, 'rabidly anti-Union state', as so well told by Durrenberger and Erem (2008) in *On the Global Waterfront: The Fight to Free the Charleston*.

What I was not expecting, however, was to find the gazeboes so well equipped with fridges, tables, barbecues, cooking appliances, white goods and TVs, which the workers had brought from home. They looked very similar to the stalls of countryside summer fairs, where local food specialities are served and consumed, sharing a spirit of conviviality, which some evenings one could feel also at the pickets. It was an atmosphere, however, that could be wiped out at any moment, especially when bad news came from the MISE, and too much drinking elevated the level of tension, leading to violence and vandalism, such as fist-fighting between workers or setting fire to garbage bins and office doors.

The pickets and the gazeboes were the home of this contemporary labour struggle. They were kept together and legitimised by solidarity and a culture of resistance, and composed of a teeming, entangled network of individualities. The people that composed the social landscape abided at the same time to populist speeches, and to left and right ideologies; and reclaimed at one time a communal sense dignity and individual economic safety. The

strongholds presented a milieu of well-spoken white-collar workers, vernacular blue helmets doing the same jobs as their great-grandfathers and unskilled workers born in Eastern Europe or India; mostly men and some women, employed in permanent as well as temporary contracts. It was there that I met most of my informants and, among several interviews at the pickets, I conducted two group interviews with two different groups of workers in two different gazeboes (AST and ILSERV), placed a few hundred metres apart, in Viale Brin (see Fig. 10).

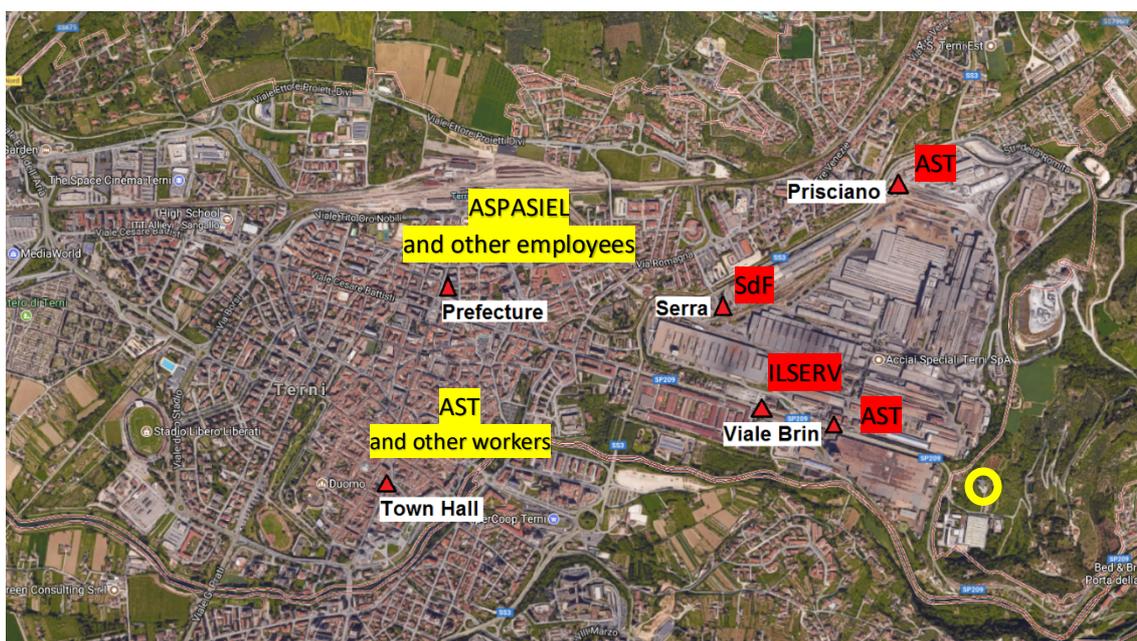


Figure 10. The designated labourers for each stronghold, although they freely travelled from one to another.

On the morning of 29 October, I walked into one of the gazeboes in Viale Brin while four young workers in fashionable clothing were playing a game of poker, smoking cigarettes and sipping grappa. If it had not been for the AST jackets resting on their chairs, it would have been hard to tell that that it was a picket and that the workers were on strike.

Pierluigi and Gianni, 33, and Giacomo, 36, had been directly employed by AST in the cold department, on a full-time, permanent basis, for less than eight years. Francesco, 25 years old, had instead spent the last five years working at the factory for small contractors

in temporary jobs. At the time of the interview, he was employed directly by AST, though still on a temporary contract that was due to end in six months. They all worked in 'Quarta Squadra', a four-team working rota, in which each team, made up of five workers, operates for four consecutive days from 6am to 2pm, followed by one day off, then another four consecutive days from 2pm to 10pm, followed by one day off, and then four consecutive nights from 10am to 6am, followed by two days off. Working weekends, night shifts and on civil and religious holidays increases the pay rate, making the 'Quarta Squadra' highly remunerative.

My entrance was welcomed with curiosity, although Gianni already knew who I was and knew about the documentary I was filming, despite me not having the camera with me. They were willing to be interviewed, but the group unanimously felt reluctant about the audio-recorder. As on other occasions at the beginning of the strike, even though I made clear that I was not a journalist, who could expose the informants to their colleagues' judgement by publishing an article on the same day, people were not at ease with my intrusions inside the gazebo, and the recorder made the situation worse. We agreed that I could take notes as long as I guaranteed their anonymity.

In order to avoid talking about the events of the day, thus binding the conversation to a few personal remarks on the critical junctures of the workers' militancy, I asked them what the word 'working class' meant, in their opinion. This unexpected question put an end to the poker game that they were still playing, and Giacomo, who took the lead in the conversation, answered:

There was a historical moment which characterised the working class, in which it was recognisable thanks to its consciousness and importance in the national economy. But this dates back to the 1960s, when the metalworkers were able to conquer all the working rights that are now oppressed and threatened by the capitalist system. (Giacomo, 36, AST)

They all agreed that the definition of the working class is indissolubly linked to labour, and that labour is a right, so whoever is part of the struggle to defend this right, working within the industrial context or as a precarious labourer in the tertiary sector, can be considered a member of the working class. In this light, they felt close to the German ThyssenKrupp steelworkers who had undergone a recent industrial dispute in Bochum, a town near the TK headquarters. Many participants reported several times that since ThyssenKrupp had re-acquired AST from Outokumpu, together with two plants in Germany, and since it was still committed to leaving the steel sector, it had planned to close the more obsolete Bochum plant; then, following the German Chancellor's veto, TK decided to restructure AST instead.<sup>75</sup>

Giacomo stressed the importance of the German metalworkers' union in the dispute and, while on the subject, Pierluigi expressed his negative view of the AST Unions and how they led the industrial action. He did not want to say which Union he was a member of, but claimed that he had lost much faith in it, both at local and national levels – this is a distinction that most interviewees made. However, he had faith in the individual local representatives carrying out the battle for the workers:

The person is worth more than the actual Union federation<sup>76</sup> which the delegates or the shop-floor stewards belong to! (Pierluigi, 33, AST)

The distinction between local and national is to be understood in a power relation that sees local Union representatives often mediating between national directives and workplace issues and trying to ease out conflicts between the parts when they arise and to capitalise on irreconcilable ruptures to their own advantage. For instance, Pierluigi did

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<sup>75</sup> As the informants reported it to me, in a few weeks the steelworkers' union had reached an agreement which avoided the planned layoffs and furnace dismissal. In reality, the dispute lasted about 15 months, and it was more complex than their descriptions, guaranteeing employment in the Bochum plant up to 2020. See <https://www.derwesten.de/staedte/duisburg/thyssen-betriebsrat-in-duisburg-jobs-bis-2020-gesichert-id9964346.html> (accessed: 3 December 2014).

<sup>76</sup> In the original Italian, 'sigla'.

not share the same ideology and political views as FIOM but considered Stefano – one of the most active FIOM RSUs – someone who deserved his trust, someone who devoted himself to the workers’ cause without reserve, and he was grateful to him, even though he was not his direct representative. Unlike Pierluigi, who considered himself to be politically leaning towards the right, the others’ political views were on the centre-left, though without a specific ideology.

For instance, as Giacomo explained:

I think that there are three bedrocks in life: one is the job you have, another is family, and then there is the State; it is thanks to the job I have that I could change my life and start a family. (Giacomo, 36, AST)

A few years ago, before getting married, Giacomo used to work in retail, earning about 1000euros a month. When he was given the possibility to work as an industrial cleaner at the steel plant for a small contractor firm, he left his former, less tiring job without looking back. In a few years, he worked his way up and entered AST’s ranks in the cold department, obtained a permanent contract, became a skilled worker, got married, took out a mortgage and had two children. Pierluigi and Gianni also shared a similar story: both were in a relationship but without children, stressing the economic difficulties faced when working in retail compared to the stability found in AST, with a monthly salary now averaging 1600euros.

They related the defence of their economic security to the defence, by and large, of the whole production site, and when asked about the redundancy package offered by Morselli, they all agreed that it would be a mistake to accept it. This was because, in their view, failing to defend the integrity of the production process could lead, in a few years, to the downsizing of the steelworks into a finishing plant with less than 1000 workers, unable to face future fights against restructuring. This was the reason that drove Francesco

to feel part of the struggle: he wanted to guarantee a future for the steel plant, even though his job there would probably end in six months. On the other hand, Francesco and, especially, Gianni considered that if the hot department were shut down, they would probably be forced to leave Terni. Moreover, Gianni provided the example of a friend living in London, who ‘climbed the ladder’ and went from barman to manager of three cafés, while earning a good salary, and he felt this could be a possible way out.

As we were talking, Gianni’s partner came into the gazebo, greeted us, dropped something off for him and left, saying that she had to rush to work “to make [earn] what he doesn’t make this month”. Gianni agreed with a half-smile and a resigned look; we chatted about the situation at home, but our conversation was abruptly interrupted by Giacomo looking at his phone. He told us in anger that some workmates protesting in Rome had been involved in a clash with the police, and some of them were injured. All of a sudden, the relatively calm situation became quite agitated: Giacomo joined the workers outside and shared the news. Everybody had a mobile phone on their hand. Other workers, who already knew what happened in Rome, confirmed the piece of news and other started to check their phones, sharing newspaper links and images of the clash with the police on social networks, and trying to get in touch with workmates and Unionists in Rome, texting them, and organising cars to get there. The gazebo and the picket line became a cradle for a contemporary way of striking, where information shared at high speed allow the many who hold and share it to influence, if not the actions, at least the opinions of other social actors involved in the struggle.



Figure 11. The mannequin in front of the ILSERV offices, next to the gazebo (source: <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/2014/12/17/termini-e-una-citta-che-non-esiste-senza-le-acciaierie>).

A few days after 4 November, I went to the other gazebo in Viale Brin and met an older group of five workers, between 40 and 45 years old, employed by ILSERV (the biggest contractor in terms of manpower operating for and within TK-AST). ILSERV and AST cannot operate without one another, and the work-stoppage forced its workers to be on strike. However, as they claimed, they would have stopped working in support of their fellow AST workers in any case.

The ILSERV gazebo was different from the AST one. It had more kitchen equipment, including a large fridge and a cupboard. Also, the ILSERV workers looked very different from their younger workmates: they were eating and chatting rather than playing cards; they wore less fashionable clothes; their phones had loud ringtones and they were constantly smoking cigarettes or e-pipes – as if quitting was out of question, but they had to make use of the money spent on the e-cigarettes.

The words of Cesare (Riccardo's father) came back to me while I was looking at them. A few days before, Cesare had told me that he could recognise retired steelworkers such as himself when passing through the town centre, without asking them if they had worked at the plant. Whether this is a "*mémoire ouvrière*", a "*mémoire du corps*" (Debouzy 1990), a transmission of techniques in the presence of tradition (Mauss 1973), properties of the system of relations (Ingold 1997) inscribed in a worker's body over time, the factory had moulded them into something closer to what I was expecting to find at a picket line.

I introduced myself, and despite some surprise at the intrusion, they showed a willingness to talk and had no problem with being audio-recorded. This was probably because they felt that their situation was not receiving the attention it deserved, being overshadowed by the AST dispute, and because they felt abandoned by both the government and their Unions, which, as they claimed, were not working enough towards a solution for the 20% cut sought by Morselli for all the contractors.

Their situation was liminal: ILSERV s.r.l. is a subsidiary of HARSCO<sup>77</sup> Corporation that has been operating in Terni since 1991; it failed to reach an agreement with ThyssenKrupp on the tenders, which were due to be renewed on 29 October 2014 – right in the middle of the industrial dispute – so HARSCO put the workers on CIGO (*Cassa Integrazione Guadagni Ordinaria*, the Earnings Supplement Fund – ESF).<sup>78</sup> The job that

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<sup>77</sup> HARSCO Metal and Minerals is a British multinational corporation operating in 35 countries with 12,300 employees. See: <http://harsco-m.com/> <http://www.harsco.com/> (accessed: 15 October 2016).

<sup>78</sup> Chronology of ILSERV's dispute with TK:

**14-10-2014** HARSCO refuses the 20% cut sought by TK in the tenders;

**30-10-2014** TK fails to renew seven out of 10 of HARSCO's contracts for managing waste and raw material; ILSERV puts 200 out of 318 of its workers on CIGO – Cassa Integrazione Guadagni Ordinaria, Earnings Supplement Fund (ESF). This is managed by the National Social Security Institute (INPS) and can be used only for temporary events not ascribable to the employer's will and only for 52 weeks in a two-year span; it corresponds to 80% of the salary, although it cannot be more than 971.71euros per month if the monthly salary is equal to or less than 2,102.24euros (see: <https://www.inps.it/NuovoportaleInps/default.aspx?itemdir=50599>; accessed: 6 July 2017). This applies to most of the ILSERV workers, who earn an average of 18,000euros per year.

**14-11-2014** TK extends ILSERV's contracts to December 2014 but fails to address the two main concerns of the contractor's management, that is, the relocation of the employers and the purchase of the machinery owned by HARSCO once the contracts end. In doing so, it also jeopardises the future of the other three already ensured contracts, and the collaboration between the two companies.

they regarded as a certainty, and on which they had built their entire future, was crumbling under their feet in those very days. They had worked for ILSERV for the past 15 to 20 years, and for all of them ILSERV had been their only employer. They all had families and wives with jobs, and almost all of them a mortgage, which they obtained easily because of the secure job and average monthly income of 1400euros to 1500euros. They feared that the 20% cut could affect their salary, and that a new contractor employing precarious migrant workers was about to replace ILSERV.

If I were a Romanian I could work for 1000euros a month, but I'm Italian, and it's just not enough money for the lifestyle we have. (Graziano, 42, ILSERV)

Graziano, the most talkative, had two children in school, a nearly fully repaid mortgage, and felt that he was at a very difficult age to find a new job or to work for less than he had planned his life around. He had calculated that at the end of the month there would be only 300euros in his payslip, as the ESF had not been issued yet. He was very worried, but at the same time highly conscious that the battle was primarily for AST, and only secondarily for the contractors. Just like Graziano, all the others had taken into account the possibility of losing some of their buying power forever, but they had not foreseen risking their jobs or being on 'mobility' (the common term used for ESF) with a reduced salary for years.

The cold wind that started to blow outside drove the people to find shelter inside the gazebo, which quickly became overcrowded. The main informants sat on their chairs and as they were talking to me, they were also talking to the newcomers, making jokes, opening fresh bottles of wine and answering their phones, which were constantly ringing.

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**28-11-2014** TK renews all the ILSERV contracts up to September 2015 and the workers are taken off the Earnings Supplement Fund. On July 2015, a call is issued for tender for part of the ILSERV contracts; some become part of AST and nearly 50 workers face layoffs. Of these, 26 laid-off workers will be directly employed in the department where the tenders were lost; 10 will be re-hired in AST and 15 in ILSERV; six will be laid off with a redundancy package. For these last events, see: <https://www.uglterni.it/2015/07/22/rinnovo-appalto-ilserv-in-tk-ast-terni/> (accessed: 15 October 2016).

It seemed that they wanted to create or impose a sense of conviviality and a certain easiness to the summer-festival-lookalike shelter, but their looks disguised their worries. Unlike the AST gazebo, where the informants seemed more prepared and ready to do something, being involved in the struggle, an atmosphere of resignation surrounded their older workmates. It seemed as though they were in a waiting room, waiting for a solution that would surely be detrimental for their future. Just outside the marquee, in front of the HARSCO office door, they had hung a mannequin wearing the ILSERV overall and put some white flowers at its feet, as a symbol of the death-like threat made by the company to their lives; as some commented on another occasion, it was a symbol of their defeat (see Fig. 11).

They said that whatever agreement HARSCO and ThyssenKrupp reached, they would be the ones to take the loss and risk the only job they could ever have in Terni. The possibility of working at the steelworks granted the possibility of living in Terni, an interdependency that was not easy to break and had been built over time, through the transformation of employment requirements mediated by diverse educational possibilities offered mainly by the company for its own development (see Crovetto 2016). In their opinion, Terni did not offer anything in terms of employment, but they felt much attached to that 20-mile radius territory, where all their friends and family networks are, and they did not consider leaving under any circumstances. As Graziano claimed:

We have everything deeply rooted here, we aren't 20-25 years old, we can't say: "Let's leave, let's try!" (Graziano, 42, ILSERV)

They claimed that, if they had been offered the redundancy pay negotiated by Morselli just for the AST workers, they would have taken it, left their job and invested the capital in the area. However, the fact that they had not been offered redundancy generated some friction with their AST workmates; when I asked them how they felt compared to them,

they had two different opinions. Graziano thought that they were ‘class B’ workers, earning 300euros a month less than those employed in AST with the same shift rotation and the same seniority, whilst Roberto replied by saying that they are all ‘class B’ workers, since AST has also been downgraded lately, although they still have a higher seniority pay rise than ILSERV.

Roberto, the oldest in the group, with a son at university and a wife with a nursing degree working at the hospital, led the discussion from this point. He explained how spending time at the pickets and having dinner together helped to recreate a sense of unity<sup>79</sup> between all the workers, something which had been “scientifically destroyed” in the workplace by the management. But as he went deeper into the discussion, stimulated by my questions, in trying to define the meaning of belonging to a working class determined by its ability to fight for its own rights, his judgement on the struggle became more radical, and hopeless:

We’ve sold it [the factory]! They are the bosses and can do whatever they want. The struggle is not like the 70s: now people get indignant<sup>80</sup> about the situation for a moment, and then everything goes back to normal. These are the years of do-goodism<sup>81</sup> and unlimited rights for everybody. Everybody is pissed off with their bosses, with the immigrants, with politicians, but nobody does anything! Today the struggle is done with posts on Facebook! (Roberto, 45, ILSERV)

The others agreed, and again the sense of struggle from which to draw a definition of class awareness was tied to an idea of the past, when the workers fought during a phase of capital expansion and, given their number and political weight, were able to strike better deals. After this last statement I left, and a few days later, when transcribing the

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<sup>79</sup> In the original Italian: “spirito di corpo”.

<sup>80</sup> In the original Italian: “ci si indigna un attimo”.

<sup>81</sup> In the original Italian: “buonismo”.

interview and drawing comparisons between the two groups, Roberto's words sounded like a perfect commentary on what I had witnessed at the AST gazebo a few days before.

This vignette offers a window on the differences in the workforce, based on age, seniority, duty and habitus, as well as a common element: a definition of the working class and class awareness that is traced back to the glorious era of the Italian workers' movement. The following sections will, first through classification of generational composition and then through the participants' work and life histories, investigate further the relationship between the struggle and class belonging among the participants.

#### **4.4 Generational configuration and the dispute**

Factories usually comprise three generations of workers: the older ones, repositories of knowledge and nearing retirement; the younger ones, with newly-formed families and decades of work ahead; and the apprentices, the new workforce that will soon replace the older one. All three generations have different cultural aspirations and social dispositions that sharply divide the older and younger workers – schooling being a factor separating the young from the elders' socio-political heritage (see Beuad and Pialoux 2001). In Terni, the industrial environment, which is described by the informants as “still communitarian, almost familial”, is made up of fathers and sons who have shared the same workplace, in some cases across five generations. This environment entangles old and new differences generated by past hiring waves through which new workers have entered the factory, creating significant generational ruptures. The most important can be identified in the passage from mechanised to computerised production, which involved the progressive isolation and abstraction of labour.

I was hired in 1978. I was 22, we were 1000 new-hires, all with a higher diploma, and at the time the shift-leader had only the elementary school diploma. The old workers knew that if you studied you could become ‘head of the department’, and didn’t understand why we, with a higher diploma, were working as [un-skilled] workers, and below them. We came with a breath of fresh air; for example, we used to read the newspapers, and political journals in the morning, something that people weren’t used to doing before. At the time, there were still those who came from the closed mines, imagine! [...] The elders accepted us, but when La Terni bought the first computers, they trained only the newcomers like us, the elders never got used to them. [...] In the 80s, we were about 8000, even though there wasn’t a real need for that entire workforce. The first groups retired at the age of 50, with 30 years of employment; they used 10 years of the early retirement scheme, little by little, without making too much fuss, through an agreement with INPS.<sup>82</sup> They invested in new production lines, and with mechanisation, less people were needed, and the factory didn’t hire anymore. (Luciano, 58, former Unionist and AST worker)

Successive generational watersheds occurred in the late 1990s, with the granting of early retirement to workers exposed to asbestos, and in 2005, with the closure of the electrical department (Portelli 2008, p. 78). In these two phases, many workers with high contractual power and long service bonuses, whose presence was last acknowledged by informants during the Magnetico, left the steel plant.

More recently, Cristofori (2009, pp. 29-35), in the light of a new hiring wave in 2008, following the natural generational change in the workforce, has identified three age-set groups: a) ‘young ones’, born in the 80s, whose individual sense of identity escapes the fading modern logic of the workers’ citadel; b) the ‘adults’, born in the 70s, who, since the Magnetico defeat, have experienced an unprecedented sense of fear of losing their job; c) the ‘elders’, born in the 50s and now nearing retirement, who experienced the whole privatisation period and had listened to stories about the WWII Resistance and the Hot Autumn from older workmates.

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<sup>82</sup> Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale (Social Security Service).

This age-set categorisation today needs to be rethought, as the young workers are now adults and many elders have retired:

The average age has lowered a lot in recent years, the majority of the early retirements took place during the Magnetico, then little by little other people retired, and today there will be 150 people who could retire through the mobility [ESF]; now we all are between 30 and 40 years old. (Augusto, 32 AST)

The 39 informants employed at the steelworks who were formally and informally interviewed can be divided into three age-set groups. This categorisation provides the first important feature through which working-class fragmentation is analysed in relation to the dispute.

- Three belonged to the age-set group of 20-29 years old. They had never taken part in any industrial action before.
- 32 belonged to the age-set group of 30-50 years old, 60% of which was below 40. This group was the most numerous and the main author of the dispute.
- Four belonged to the age-set group of over 50 years old. Reduced by progressive retirement, the elders were, generally speaking, the smallest group.

The younger group showed excitement, rage and engagement, but because they had not experienced the Magnetico dispute, they were perceived by the older workers as able to potentially jeopardise the strike, because of their lack of experience in properly following the rules of a game established by a tradition of resistance. Older informants justified this judgement by saying that their young workmates were considered too consumerist, with a scant sense of class identity and intellectual engagement and were thought to have found “everything ready”, such as labour rights and a good salary, for which the older generations had fought in the past.

However, the young ones, like David (27 years old) and Francesco (see section 4.2 supra), were proud to be part of the struggle. David described his work at AST and the permanent contract as “winning the lottery”, as it had fundamentally contributed to his economic stability. He felt very lucky compared to older members of his extended family who work for smaller industrial firms in the local supply chain and earn a considerably lower wage (on average 1100euros per month, compared to his 1600euros monthly salary). Furthermore, in contrast to the older informants’ perception of younger workmates, he claimed:

Since I changed job, I have felt part of the working-class struggle; I’ve changed my way of thinking very much, my social thinking. I do feel a worker, I’m not ashamed of saying it, and I feel proud of being part of a struggle that is making history. (David, 27, AST)

The middle group experienced a prolonged industrial action in the period 2004-2005 – the only moment during which the tradition of the protest of the 70s was handed down – so they were the core of the dispute (see video, min. 19:52). As Atzeni (2010, p. 25) claims, workers who experience first-hand processes of struggle and mobilisation return to normal life as different, more conscious people (Atzeni 201, p.25). That is, with greater consciousness of struggle and their place in society (see also d’Aloisio 2014, pp. 97-100). Furthermore, the struggle fosters a more democratically-oriented leadership, and the formation and establishment of new grassroots forms of organisation, thus promoting more militant and more active participation.

The last group mainly encouraged the younger forces in the public arena from the Union stage and to be present as organisers, especially those with longstanding experience in the trade unions as members and delegates. A recurrent topic of conversation with the

members of this group was the post-2008 financial crisis austerity ‘*Fornero*’ reform,<sup>83</sup> which postponed their retirement, adding to worries about layoffs.

The next section will focus on the middle group, as it is the most numerous. To better investigate its internal differences, the section will expand on the participants’ lives, highlighting their work history and unionisation, and considering their future outlook in relation to the unrest. In doing so, the section will trace their individualities, aiming to connect them to a wider conceptualisation of working-class identity in the context analysed.

## **4.5 Work and life histories**

### **4.5.1 AST workers**

The AST workers, including those in SdF and Tubificio, were considered – and at times described themselves as – “a working-class aristocracy”. Their guaranteed salary ranges from 1400euros to 1750euros per month, without considering the variable six-month productivity target bonus.

Among all the workers in the plant and low- to middle-ranking employees, those with the highest seniority generally have the highest salary. The AST blue-collar workers can also access the CLT (Circolo Lavoratori Terni, Terni Workers’ Centre) sport and leisure facilities at a discounted price and can use the company’s health insurance scheme; at the time of the research, almost all of them were unionised. Since the restructuring was

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<sup>83</sup> During the Monti government (2011-2012), in order to tackle the problems of the pension system, the then-minister of Labour and Social Policy introduced a legislative decree (D.L. 201/2011) which changed the requirements for receiving the state pension: workers must have worked for at least 20 years and must be at least 62 in 2012, which then increased to 65 in 2015 and 66 in 2018. This raising of the average retirement age from the previous level of 60 years of age impacted significantly on the 55-64 age-set group: only one-third of it was actively employed in 2007, whereas five years later the figure had risen to over 40% (Nanetti and Leonardi 2015, p. 427). An example is Lucio (55 years old, with 32 years of employment), who was supposed to retire in two years: with the new law, he now has six left instead.

mainly aimed at diminishing their number and downgrading their salaries, they constituted the largest part of the workers' mobilisation.

Of course, there were exceptions: some workers did not participate at all; others showed up only during assemblies. An example is one of the interviewees in the documentary (see video, min. 16:08), who spent his time working in his fields – a common practice among workers who are also small landowners. Others made use of that spare time by performing family duties while their wives were at work. Others could not join the protest because they had to work at the plant as 'comandati' (on duty) to guarantee the technical safety and basic running of the electric and plumbing systems, which could not be shut down completely.

Enrico, 37 years old, was among this last group. Hired in 1999 after his high school diploma, working in AST is the only job he has ever done. He comes from a family with a tradition of political militancy in the PCI; his father is a former steelworker who took institutional roles in the local administration back in the 1990s. At the time of the fieldwork, he was single and lived on the bottom floor of his parents' house. This family interdependency is very common in Terni, as in the whole of Central Italy, where the nuclear family shares the same space until sons and daughters get married, and often after the marriage too, in order to maintain economic status and rely on mutual assistance.

Enrico and I were introduced by Greca one evening at the pickets when he had just finished his shift as 'comandato' and had come out into the cold to join his workmates in the struggle. Since his youth, he has been very politically active, with experience in the local '*Giovani Comunisti*' (Communist Youth) group and later as an RC militant. Despite being forced to work, he was a constant presence at the pickets. Furthermore, as a natural

speaker, he attended events organised by left militant groups in Centri Sociali,<sup>84</sup> both in Terni and in the neighbouring province of Perugia, to speak about the situation at the steelworks. He also published very well-written articles in online magazines edited by autonomist left groups about the workers' condition in AST, as well as critiques of Italian politics. His ideological positions were the lenses through which he judged the present struggle. We spent endless evenings at my sublet council flat next to the plant talking about politics and his job, and, on several occasions, he reiterated his belief that today, ideology has disappeared from class struggle, and people only fight to guarantee themselves a pension. During the months of the dispute, he advocated for a radicalisation of the struggle through the occupation of the factory and put his faith into the re-creation of what he saw as the spark of a working-class movement's resurgence, led by the Unions:

This is a re-creation of some sort of labour identity [...] we struggle for the future of the company, for the possibility of retiring from this company but 'real' class consciousness... is no more.

If you speak with the workers, just a few of them say that they fight because this community needs the steel plant, because the country needs the steel industry, because we are the subaltern class and these people [the management] are still proposing dynamics which are 100 years old. Nobody tells you that capital, finance and bourgeoisie, especially in these last years of crisis, earned 40% and increased their pre-crisis wealth. Nobody tells you that these people are taking back the bread they have left on the table since after the war [WWII]. Nobody tells you that they're doing the class struggle, and the working class has now forgotten.

The Unions made a big mistake by not joining the disputes with Taranto and Piombino. Because in doing so, they didn't create class consciousness; you don't have power if you don't create a united front; you have less power to negotiate with the company, with the government. The only actor that should re-create this class consciousness is the Union.

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<sup>84</sup> From now on I will only use the term Centro Sociale: a squat/self-administered social centre led by left/far left activists and used for political activities, rally gatherings, concerts, etc.

In the months that followed the dispute, he maintained this idea, and slowly grew less attached to the Union FIOM, which was historically closer to his political views and to whose radical wing he had subscribed since he was hired. Believing FIOM to be incapable of fighting the management, he finally revoked his membership, and went on to join a new-born, independent, radical left-wing Union. His always lucid and critically progressive stands on the workers' struggle were, however, framed by his ideological commitment and left-wing militancy.

Besides the job, which by his admission was only sometimes very hard, he mostly did not feel comfortable with sharing his political views with his “de-politicised” colleagues, and even outside the factory, his friendship network did not include many workers. Once, while we were having dinner at my place, he told me about a new tattoo he wanted to get:

This time it's going to be a red triangle like the one the Nazis sewed on political prisoners' jackets, and underneath I want my worker ID number [...] We're like prisoners in the factory! If they increase the redundancy package, I'll take the money and leave.

The alternative to his alienation, just as for other interviewees, involved enjoying the natural environment surrounding the plant. On many occasions, he told me about his love for the Nera Valley, about the course training organised by local associations of volunteers he attended, ranging from speleology to hiking and orienteering, where he learnt how to recognise edible mushrooms and herbs. Enrico, his dog, Riccardo, and I went hiking together several times, and he usually picked up herbs and brought them home, adding them to homebrewed spirits or other recipes. Enrico's knowledge of the natural environment, local history and tradition was astonishing: for him, nature was a kind of liberation from the factory, the place which had formed him politically and economically, enabling him to build his knowledge, giving him free time to pursue his passions.

The very unusual position of the factory itself, so anachronistically set between a too-near town and a beautiful natural landscape, could be the reason behind the inhabitants' attachment to the territory, their relationship with the natural surroundings and the common exploitation of natural resources by the workers. From mushrooms to truffle-picking, from fishing and hunting to farming, workers are involved in a range of activities which can both contribute to their income and provide an alternative to factory work.

This is also the case with Moreno (44 years old). When he was hired by AST, he had already worked as a turner for 13 years from 1987 to 2000, reaching the fifth level of seniority and a relatively good salary. He became an AST worker through the proposition and intercession of a Unionist he had contacted to help him resolve a payment issue with his former employer. In exchange for a secure job in AST, he had agreed to join the Union and work for less money, starting from the second level. In the following years, he got married and rented a pleasant little house in Prisciano, a green and hilly neighbourhood adjoining the steelworks' waste collection department. However, when he realised the pollution level of the area, he left and moved further away from the factory. When Berlusconi's government signed with all the Unions except CGIL the '*Patto per l'Italia*' (Pact for Italy), which legalised and promoted precarious job contracts, he left his Union to join FIOM.

I met Moreno for the first time at Terni's 'CSA (Centro Sociale Autogestito) Germinal Cimarelli', during an event in support of the steelworkers. At the time, he had just left FIOM, due to political and personal divergences with some Unionists, and was very politically active at a grassroots level. He had been deeply involved in the workers' struggle in the last 10 years, since when during the Magnetico, he had created a short-lived 'spontaneous' (on the use of the term, see Chapter 5.7) movement, formed of about

15 left-wing workers who advocated forms of struggle outside the joint Unions' strategies.

In our last interview, he told me that had decided not to take the redundancy package but to keep his job, because it would be too difficult to find another job at his age in Terni and he did not want to be forced to emigrate somewhere in the north of Italy, where he could have been more easily employed thanks to his skills as turner. He told me how he was attached to the territory, both for emotional and for financial reasons: at the time we spoke, he owned some fields in the countryside, a portion of woodland and a house (which used to be a customs post of the Papal State) that he had inherited from his father, a former worker in the chemical industry in town, who had died of cancer a few years before, at the age of 67.

When he was younger, and before entering AST, Moreno loved his job and hated working the land, but now he felt the exact opposite. The physical work never bothered him, but in the factory, he found the mental stress induced by the work environment to be very challenging:

In order to live well inside the plant, one has to annihilate oneself and every pretension one may have, adapt and always say 'yes'.

The failure of successful negotiation after months of unrest aggravated Moreno's sense of isolation in the workplace and his negative judgement of the Unions' operations.

I used to curse the work on the land, until my father died. Now, eight years later, that's where I put all my trust for what a future could be. I'm doing some innovative cultivation, hopefully it will go well. Anyway, I'm an apprentice farmer, like when I was 17 years old and I had just started working as turner.

However, thanks to the remunerative salary and the free time allowed by his shift rotation, he has been able to dedicate himself to the niche, risky and unpredictable cultivation of

saffron, in which he has maintained a meticulous track record, and for which he has designed customised packaging with a view to selling the product. Working the land has made him feel outside the capitalist logic of production:

In the countryside where I have the land, I only barter. I give someone [neighbouring farmers] hay, he gives me meat. My cousin is a bricklayer, I give him same hay in exchange for some building jobs. Money does not circulate among us.

Because of the '*Fornero*' reform, he will have to work until the age of 70, and he claimed that if, in the near future, the bonus was to go up to about 100,000euros, he would take it, leave and become a full-time farmer.

#### **4.5.2 Contractors' workers**

The most privileged contractors' workers were those employed by ILSERV, whose salary, job security and unionisation was almost comparable to the AST workers. However, as the vignette has shown, they were living through a complicated situation, risking losing their job without any redundancy pay.

However, if they saw themselves as 'class B' workers, the others employed in smaller companies referred to themselves as 'class C' workers. The smaller employers, just like ILSERV, were unable to work but, unlike ILSERV, they could not use the social safety net because of their activities and employment capacity, and underwent great difficulties in paying salaries, especially in October and November. Furthermore, as some of their employees told me, the tools and moveable machinery of the small companies – which do not only work for AST only – were held inside the plant and could not be used elsewhere if necessary.

The smaller contractors' employment agreements ranged from short-term renewable contracts of three to six months – sometimes up to four years – to permanent ones, with variable working hours. Most of the workers were not unionised and had no shop stewards to appeal to in case of confrontations with the company, so were easily blackmailed, fearing that they would not have their contracts renewed, and were at mercy of the main employer – who, in turn, was always seeking to bargain for the most convenient tender, and consequently renege on working time and wages.

The data gathered suggest (and this was confirmed by Stefano RSU coordinator) that, particularly after the financial crisis and the subsequent measures adopted by the Berlusconi government, small contractors were forced to cut down on time and workforce (i.e. a small firm which used to work 100 hours with 100 people now does the same job in 50 hours with about 20 people). This became a particular concern for the unionist and shop-floor stewards who were actively involved in making the small firms respect health and safety rules, especially during the '*fermata*' (the summer maintenance break), when most of the AST workforce were on holiday and there were more contracted companies operating within the plant's perimeter.

As the vignette showed, the contract workers from Terni were very preoccupied with the "unfair competition" from unskilled immigrant workers. They feared that small firms, by relying on a cheaper workforce and by parcelling the production processes, could replace big contractors like ILSERV, proposing more convenient bids to AST.

Marco, a contractor's worker, described the immigrant as "used to" working more hours for less money and ready to compromise on health and safety. When I first interviewed him, on 9 January 2015, it was exactly 20 years since he had first been hired. His

grandfather, father and brother are all former and actual blue-collar workers, and he claimed to have obtained his job through the Unions.

However, from the beginning, he had been very critical of the strike and had terminated his Union membership during the dispute. He went on to form CWO (Contractors' Workers Organised) (see video, min. 34:06-34:50), a movement seeking to generate a critical mass of contract workers that could control the Unions' power and put themselves forward as an alternative political subject inside the plant (see Chapter 5). When I went to visit his beautiful house on one of the hills around Terni to learn more about the CWO movement, whose aim was to gather the instances of all the contractors' workers, Marco was sceptical about the inclusion of immigrant workers, even though they constitute a significant number in the contractors' workforce.

Non-Italian workers coming from countries with more disastrous situation than the Italian one, have already renounced their rights as workers [...]. This is like a cancer which attacks the healthy cells and the will for rights that there is in each one of us [...], levelling working rights towards the bottom. Because, in fear of being fired, I myself have to lower my rights standards to theirs [...] I don't consider them as not worthy of having a job, but as people who have already chosen the path of acceptance [...] and who could affect those who work next to them. No racism towards them, but towards their capitalistic way of thinking, which has become known to us only in recent times. (Marco, 40, contractors' worker)

Marco's point of view needs to be juxtaposed with those of migrant workers like Pawan and Krishna, who came to Italy to find economic stability and to provide for their families both in Italy and in their home country, through remittances.

Pawan and Krishna involvement in the struggle was very marginal for three reasons: they felt that since they were employees of a small contractor they had almost no decisional power; they had almost no involvement with the Unions; they wished for the strike to end as soon as possible because the precarious economic situation in which they live – relying

only on their salary, without the safety nets of institutions and families which Italian workers can count on – couldn't be sustained without a regular monthly salary.

Pawan, 32 years old, is an Indian immigrant who came to Italy in 2004 after marrying his wife, who was already living in Terni. After some precarious jobs as a woodworker, he was hired in 2006 through an employment agency by a small multi-service company (industrial cleaning and logistics) that operated in AST, employing about 30 workers, mainly migrants from India and Eastern Europe. At the time, he had a permanent contract, but the working hours were decided weekly together with the employer (an average of 40 hours per week), and he earned a 1100euros monthly salary, with the 13<sup>th</sup> monthly wage split throughout the year, reaching a total of not more than 1300euros per month.

Krishna, 36 years old, his closest friend and colleague, was hired on the same day by the same company and with the same contract. Krishna came to Italy in 2005 to follow his brother, and during our first interview he showed me some photos of his town in Bihar using Google maps, and showed how far it is from Kolkata, where Pawan comes from. They met in Terni, but their families had known each other before, through Pawan's father-in-law and his brother. When Krishna spoke about India, he often became nostalgic, since the only time he had gone back was to meet his wife a few days before their arranged marriage. After the wedding, they had come back to Italy together and had a daughter, who was now 4 years old.

He described what he would do if he had capital to invest, such as the possibility of taking redundancy:

If I now won 100,000euros, or if there was the possibility of getting redundancy, I would take it. I would go back to India and live a good life, maybe open a restaurant.

Pawan, on the other hand, claimed that in India he would find a job rather quickly.

However, as he explained:

Italy has changed my 'mentality'. In India it is easy to find a job, but the salary is probably less than 100euros. Here I smoke a pack of cigarettes a day, so half of the money I could earn in a day would go on cigarettes, then what would I eat? My mentality has changed.

Italy's expensive standards of living would not be compatible with Indian wages, and if he had money, he would invest it in a small shop in Terni. Also, his 10-year-old son, born in Italy, would find a sudden return to India quite problematic.

They told me that they were both part of the Hindu community and sometimes went to play cricket, of which they were huge fans. At the same time, they helped in the kitchen of the summer festival in San Gemini, a village near Terni where Krishna used to live when he first arrived in Italy, and supported the local football team, something that they have "picked up" while working at AST:

Terni is in our body, when Ternana [the local football team] plays, we want it to win! It comes automatically, this sort of will. Imagine, in 10 years there are 3650 days, and in all this time I have been in India not even 100 days. (Pawan, 32, contractor's worker)

This influenced the way they perceived the industrial action:

From what I read, and heard, Terni was born with the steelworks and will die with it. It's called the steel town for this reason. (Krishna, 36, contractor's worker)

They were Union members only because the Union helped them with the visa and tax return, and the only encounter they had with the expression of the local workers' mobilisation was when some colleagues showed them YouTube videos of the Magnetico demonstration. I never saw them at the pickets but only at the assemblies and the motorway occupation, and both felt that the dispute did not concern them at all; Pawan in

particular felt that he had no say in the agreement, as it was a bargain between owners only.

When the struggle intensified, and the strike was far from ending, they were financially in difficult situations, being the only bread-winners in their families – as Pawan’s wife only worked part-time in a restaurant, and Krishna’s wife was unemployed and still struggling with the Italian language. They were therefore actively looking for a part-time job during the strike. Furthermore, their main fear was that the first to be let go would be small firms like the one they work for, and the AST and ILSERV workers would be saved and employed instead of them, leaving them jobless. This was exactly what Marco and the ILSERV workers (see section 3 in this chapter) were worried about, though in reverse. When the dispute finally ended, the company kept them in the workforce with a lower salary. When I finished fieldwork in April, since they had not received any salary for two months and could not rely on the ESF or family members who could help them during the strike, they were undergoing financial hardship and still owed a month’s rent to their landlords.

#### **4.5.3 White-collar workers**

During the dispute, the old rivalry between white- and blue-collar workers emerged vividly. Both openly and covertly, white-collar workers would refer to blue-collar workers as “ignorant” and “bumpkins”, while blue-collar workers would refer to white-collar workers as “scabs” and “able only to deal with documents”.

AST and contractors’ blue-collar workers alike shared the common idea that there were too many white-collar workers, and commonly thought that their number should be reduced:

We are a parking lot... we have four managers in a sub-company of 400 people. In a company with same workforce, the ratio is seven workers to two employees, something like this; we are way over that. After 2008, everything changed: more and more workers became employees and we didn't know how to cover shifts on the shop floor. I'm not saying that they have to fire them, but take them down from the offices and bring them back onto the shop floor. (Lucio, 55, SDF)

Even those who thought that the restructuring was necessary to improve efficiency said that it should have been aimed at the employees in the first place:

The restructuring was necessary – at POSCO<sup>85</sup> they make 21 million tonnes and are 6500; we make 1, 5 million tonnes and are 2300. We are too many,<sup>86</sup> but the thing that bothers me is that they hit us [blue-collar workers] first. They should have started with the 'employees'<sup>87</sup> instead. Because there are many who are there not because they deserve the position but because of nepotism... you need the employees to sell the steel, but the steel is made by the workers. They earn more than us, but we can make the steel without them easily! (Fabio, 38, AST)

The workers mainly feared that the compactness that they had achieved in their front could be breached by white-collar workers wanting to go back to work. On the one hand, it is indeed true that some of them were pushing for the strike to end as soon as possible, and this was also in the agenda of CISL-FIM, a Union traditionally more present among the white-collar workers than CIGIL-FIOM – considered by the white-collar workers to bear an anachronistic antagonism with the company, employing more radical forms of struggle. This generated dissent between the blue- and white-collar workers. The latter often highlighted the inability of the former to struggle – having built “summer festivals” at the pickets – and their limited space for action against the multinational. On the other hand, some of the employees were very active, spending a considerable amount of time

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<sup>85</sup> POSCO is a multinational steel-making company headquartered in Pohang, South Korea.

<sup>86</sup> In the original Ternano dialect: “non ce stamo co li nummeri”.

<sup>87</sup> I.e. ‘white-collar workers’.

at the pickets in front of the prefecture, and they recognised that the workers were the ones who risked most. Monia was one of these.

After the first time at MISE, the number of people waiting outside the building in the following 10 meetings fell considerably. The Unions did not organise buses, and the labourers had to rely on public transport or private cars to get there. I met Monia on one of these occasions, when the rain and the tedium of the wait had defeated most people's willpower; she was there with a small group of colleagues on the other side of the Ministry's main door, which was guarded by three workers with blue helmets, eager to have first-hand news to share with their workmates in Terni.

The daughter of a retired steelworker, Monia, 44 years old, was selected by the company 24 years ago from the best final-year students at her technical college to do an internship at La Terni. She was later hired in a full-time position and has worked at the steel plant ever since. When we met, she was employed by ASPASIEL, the subsidiary company managing the data centre/IT service. She felt much attached to her work, which had made it possible for her to secure her financial position and buy a house.

When I went to visit Monia at her workplace, it felt that what they did had nothing to do with making steel. The modern building is located on a small hill outside the plant (see Fig. 9, and 10 in the yellow circle). Its triangular shape, painted blue, with big windows along two sides and surrounded by trees, looks like the technologically advanced small control room of a gigantic old machine lying underneath it (the initial scene of the ethnographic film showing the steelworks was filmed just above the ASPASIEL parking lot). The majority of the space is occupied by servers, and one of the corners of the triangle hosts an open space with the employees' desks.

The quiet work environment contrasted strongly with the tales workers gave me of the shop-floor, where “our working culture is doing things fast and cursing and swearing God”, which made me realise that, at least for that department, the involvement in the dispute could easily have assumed much milder tones, also because they were the least affected (ASPASIEL needed only five redundancies out of a workforce of about 60 units). But Monia was a strong supporter of the workers’ cause, and, as she claimed, “the fact of not having family or children to take care of” allowed her to commit herself to the collective action and pushed her “to be there also for those who couldn’t”.

She joined the workers in the assembly that went to Brussels and Rome, and was part of initiatives to raise awareness, such as bringing a banner to the top of the mountain of the Terni valley, visible when entering the town, to attract news coverage. Even though their forms of protest may not be considered as radical as others (see Chapter 5), their presence was noticeable. However, Monia lamented the lack of involvement of women during the actions: when they went to Brussels, there were only two women on the three buses.

Those women at the pickets are employees, there aren’t women workers, otherwise they would have said something different, but they are all employees, and are tired of staying at home, and they are tired of fighting for those who stay at home; they want to go back to work, and don’t look at the bigger picture.

Women are indeed present only among the employees, and during the fieldwork I was able to interview only three of them. Among these there was Chiara who, unlike Monia, worked more in contact with the steel production, being employed directly in AST. Even though the data related to the second case relied only on one interview, the juxtaposition of their points of view is valuable for understanding how female employees made sense both of the dispute and of their jobs.

I met Chiara in a bar after she had dropped her son off at school; she agreed to talk to me after a friend in common had introduced us and ensured her that I was trustworthy. When we sat at the bar she chose for our meeting, I had the impression that she was willing to talk to me but at the same time did not feel at ease. She kept looking around, checking the customers entering the bar and lowering her voice according to the sensitivity of the information she was giving me. She had just taken the redundancy, but a person close to her was still an AST worker, and she feared that his job could have been put at risk because of what she said.

Chiara did not have the same link with the steelworks that ran through the generations as Monia had. She entered the factory with an internship promoted by a local institution and was later hired in the early 2000s through someone who personally handed in her CV to the Human Resources department. After two years of temporary contracts, she became a permanent employee. Even though she had helped to develop the department where she was working, the career advancement she was hoping for was given to someone else, and she found herself de-skilled and relocated to another department. She left voluntarily after almost 10 years because her career was not advancing. However, she claimed to have learnt a lot by working in an old-fashioned steel industry, where being a young and competent woman cast her in a negative light with the management:

The company doesn't train you for the tasks you're assigned to do. There's no formative approach [...] that leads to a professional placement [...]. One day you are in one department, the next day in another one [...] I've always worked under someone's command, underpaid, and my monthly salary of 1500euros is less than my [omissis], who is a worker there. 'You're a number, you're worth nothing and this is something which they [the management] inculcate in you, you have to be grateful for the job you have there, because outside there are no jobs, and we [the management] keep you even though you are worth nothing, and since we do you this favour, don't ask for anything, and don't bother us.'

We discussed a book I was reading, *Impiegate alla Società Terni* (Women employees at the Terni Company), by Arconte (2010), where the author reports through archival sources the everyday difficulties of white-collar women working at La Terni in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, as Chiara pointed out, things have of course changed; however, there were only three women in the senior management besides Morselli. In her opinion, almost more than gender, age was an important discriminating factor. She was, indeed, hired with a group of recent graduates with a rather low salary, and, after going through the first two years without seeing any career progression, even the most hard-working ones were absorbed by a system that “didn’t value them”, and started to rely on stratagem, shirking and favours to customers and contractors to informally increase their pay.

I used to call it the black hole, I wouldn’t want to end up there at all, but I did end up there. It’s a black hole where everything is sucked in and it bears the defects of both a public and a private company: they exploit you like in the private sector, and don’t value you like in the public one [...]. Anyone who works here will never tell you that they feel part of a team, nobody thinks of making a difference with his own work, because, in fact, it is not like this.

This feeling was also echoed by blue-collar workers like Fabio, who, while talking about his resentment towards the shirking employees (see supra), said:

Until some years ago, I used to believe in it. You spend nights and days there, and it becomes like a family, you make friends, you fight; however, with what is happening lately and all the favouritism that I’ve seen, my attachment to the company has faded; I do my job as usual, but I do it without the enthusiasm that I used to have. (Fabio, 38, AST)

Chiara’s words reminded me of when I went to video-interview Cesare, together with Greca and his son Riccardo, at his place in the countryside. The retired worker had already prepared his old tools and other memorabilia of his time at La Terni. He had displayed his blue overalls on a couple of wooden boxes to make our filming easier; he showed us

his ID badges, all with the same identification number, and the red helmet he used to wear, with the same ID number hand-painted on one side.

When they hired us, they gave us an ID number, like a car number-plate [...] as if we weren't human beings. (Cesare, 66, retired steelworker)

Even though this was an intergenerational, intra-departmental common point of view between white and blue collars, Chiara spoke of an “absolutely insolvable dichotomy” between herself and the average unionised worker and blamed the Unions for this. As soon as she was hired, she had become a Union member (like many of her white-collar colleagues) but thought that the Unions were the reason why workers and employees did not know each other's situation. In her opinion, for instance, workers do not know that a large number of white-collar workers earn less than them, and there is not, as there never has been, any cohesion between the two sections of the labour force. This is because the latter are more unaware of the dynamics that regulate the Unions; there is a different cultural level; the workers are less forward-looking because they have always thought the plant would last forever.

In this light a factory is not only a place of capitalist exploitation but also an arena in which economic power is dealt with politically; white- and blue-collar workers feel exploited; they feel like numbers, undergoing the same alienation. However, the white-collar workers were those who left more reluctantly: in January 2015, after the agreement was signed and the number of redundancies planned for the white-collar workers was achieved, 30 of them were still failing to reach the target aimed for by the company, and many risked being de-skilled and becoming workers. The next section will further analyse the reasons behind people's choice about leaving or continuing to work at the steel plant.

#### **4.6 Redundancy pay**

The feeling of being trapped in a job which, as Enrico described, was “like a prison” was part of the reason behind the blue-collar workers’ decision to take the redundancy package and leave. As they felt that there was no future at the steelworks for them, the redundancy pay was the exit door that they were waiting for, or at least a safe landing, in view of the fact that they would be fired anyway after the dispute had died down. Like Chiara, Paolo, a white-collar worker who took the redundancy package, spoke about his feeling that there was no space for the company to be competitive in the market and that he never felt valued enough in the work environment. With a degree in computer engineering, work experience abroad and a set of skills that made him highly employable in different work contexts, he welcomed this opportunity. In order to avoid being trapped in a place where he claimed not to see any future for himself, and after an old contact of his offered him a position as project manager in a company operating across Europe, he left ASPASIEL, took the redundancy package and began working for the new company at its branches all over Central Europe.

The possibilities for the workers to build a stable future for themselves by investing the 60,000euros offered by the company were much more uncertain than for those who, like Paolo, could rely on a more applicable set of knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, almost 300 workers left during the dispute, most of them aged between 30 and 40. The few I talked to intended to invest in retail and catering, having had past experience in these fields. Older workers believed that redundancy was not a viable solution, because they feared they would not find jobs in the area which would allow them to work until retirement.

Generally, commentators who did not choose to leave thought that the decision to take the redundancy was born out of fear of an unknown future, since losing their job in AST

was not expected for many years, and 60,000euros was too little money to start a new business – especially for those workers who did not have any experience in managing such a big sum and were not financial savvy enough to make the capital increase by investing it.

When I finished fieldwork, it was too soon to check how the workers who took the voluntary redundancy invested their money. In a similar context, Noble and Schofield (1993, pp. 231-255) have investigated how former British car factory workers relied on redundancies packages up to five years after the closure of their plant near Oxford. The research showed that most respondents who took voluntary redundancies had to rely on it, since they could not easily be absorbed into employment in the Oxford area, facing wage reduction and deskilling. The survey data did not fit the stereotype of mismanagement of redundancy pay; instead, there were impressive efforts to stretch it to its limit, through investments and paying off all official commitments in the interest of future security, and the experience of the redundancy itself was traumatic in many cases. Given the predominance of the industrial sector in that area of Oxford, as in the province of Terni, it may be plausible that a similar scenario could appear in a few years' time.

In this light, among those who decided to stay, there were those who thought that the remuneration of the '*Quarta Squadra*' was not to be bartered for a redundancy package worth only three years of their salary. Others, like Augusto, felt that they had no way out:

There is nothing here, and I can do nothing else other than melting steel, I can't do anything else. As soon as I finished the school [at the age of 18], I started to work there.  
(Augusto, 32, AST)

Augusto's claim summarises well some of the factors behind the choice to stay; the data gathered show that refusing the redundancy package can be rationalised through three main reasons. First, there was unwillingness or inability to cope with job insecurity –

before the dispute, the possibility of losing the job at the plant was not contemplated – together with a lack of knowledge and skills except for industrial steelmaking. Secondly, for many, the redundancy package was not enough to guarantee an investment which could have the same profit and provide the stability of the job at the steelworks. Thirdly, there was a reluctance to leave Terni, with its networks of family and friends, together with the claim of not having any other opportunity in Terni outside the steelworks.

Furthermore, problems were created by the redundancies inside the plant, which stemmed from the lack of selection among those willing to leave, with no distinction between roles, duties or expertise. This exponentially aggravated the feeling of hatred towards the redundancy plan, since it risked leaving entire departments understaffed and without basic safe working conditions for those who remained. This, all things considered, was probably the reason why it was very difficult to get in touch with workers who had taken the redundancy package and left.

The next section will analyse this last, important, aspect further, in relation to the narrative of the defence of the factory's entire production process. It will highlight how the steelworks represent an economic and political power in town, making it more comprehensible how difficult it was to decide whether to leave or stay.

#### **4.7 Industrialism**

Safeguarding the entire production process was part of a discourse which claimed that the quality of the stainless steel produced in Terni was the best in the world and its workforce among the most skilled, as many informants underlined while stressing the underutilised potential of the plant and suggesting the possibility of employing an even bigger workforce than the present one.

Countering this dominant narrative and workers' "general idea that the steelworks will last forever" (Chiara, 34, AST), informants spoke of an endemic and atavistic inefficiency and waste of materials, and of illicit activities<sup>88</sup> that had worsened over the past four years, as the passage of ownership and the consequent lack of control by the management had created a critical situation.

For instance, some of the ILSERV workers explained their company's inefficiency to me in terms I could understand: "Imagine you have a car that leaks oil, and instead of trying to understand why and where the leak comes from, you constantly keep refilling the oil." This phenomenon was not confined to production but also, they believe, to the administration, where the management had granted too many seniority-pay increases.<sup>89</sup>

ILSERV was born as a small company to make the boss eat, then the vice-boss, the suppliers and the Unions, and it gave the workers a decent salary. It was born like this, then it became bigger, it took over entire departments, became part of a multinational, but it kept operating like that small company of 10 people which has to make the boss eat, the vice-boss eat, etc. (Roberto 45, ILSERV)

As further elaborated by other informants, Roberto's word "eat" means to gain a profit that is not confined to the economic sphere, but also guarantees salaries to workers and their loyalty to the firm. These words, in fact, add a further dimension to Chiara's description of her workplace as "a black hole, sucking everything in". The alienation towards her job is down to the economic and political hegemony of La Terni over Terni. Just as for other informants, working at the steel plant allows a certain economic stability, but agreeing to work there implicitly means abiding by the narrative of its indispensability

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<sup>88</sup> A few weeks before I left the field, seven people both directly employed in AST and by contractors were arrested and found guilty of the theft of about 80 tonnes of steel, worth about 100,000euros, carried out over several months through a well-planned system. See: [http://ilmessaggero.it/umbria/ast\\_furto\\_ferro-875131.html](http://ilmessaggero.it/umbria/ast_furto_ferro-875131.html) (accessed: 20 February 2015).

<sup>89</sup> Every seniority advance is approximately a 120euros pay rise.

to the town's future, of Terni's unquestionable industrial vocation and of the consequent impact on the natural environment.

Giulio, 45, a white-collar worker whom I saw very often at the Serra picket, told me that, for him, working for AST was an unavoidable choice. He was hired as a worker at someone's intercession, and after six months he had become shift-leader. Before that, he had worked as a woodworker and still did some restoration jobs now and then; he was also a trained boatman, and had operated briefly on the nearby Piediluco, where the rivers Nera and Velino form a particularly beautiful lake, on whose east shore stands a picturesque little village. He loved the prospect of working on a boat on the lake, but the project of developing tourism in Piediluco failed through "those fucking Communists' fault", as he put it. In another interview Luciano, a former unionist who had worked during the crucial privatisation phase in the 80s and the 90s, also talked about Piediluco and further elaborated on the subject. He explained me how, since 1945, the PCI and the PSI had always been in power and La Terni workers were a pool of votes and could not be touched.

Because of La Terni, you have destroyed the potential of a place like Piediluco, which could have had an enormous tourist potential. But the majority of the people living there worked at La Terni, and when they did the 'Quarta Squadra' they slept on Sundays and didn't want to hear any noise in the village: the municipality supported them because they meant votes for the PCI or PSI. This trend has been maintained, and if the industrial experience ends, we will be left with only the clothes we stand up in [...]. When I was hired, the parties put their jewels in the crown of the plant, to make them known to others, and later introduced them as political candidates. (Luciano, 58, former Unionist and AST worker)

Besides the difficulties of financing projects that require a combination of private and public investment in the current Italian economic situation,<sup>90</sup> alternative sources of income are hardly accepted, for two reasons: they bring new political and economic actors into the town; and they occupy physical space, seeking to turn into public leisure that same natural environment which the steelworkers consider private (some of them being also small landowners). Furthermore, the possibility of overcoming industrialism, especially with a greener economy, is seen as endangering the factory's future.

The debate on economic alternatives, and the overcoming<sup>91</sup> of the factory as the main employer, is proposed by many who think that the factory can be considered already gone. And this is the main danger. They say: 'the need to overcome industrialism', but I define it just as 'industrialisation', and this brings the danger that there will be an excess in the other sense, in terms of the defence of the steel industry. You have to place the development of economic alternatives side by side with the factory, because you cannot substitute it. (Vinicio, 63, journalist)

Nevertheless, the blue- and white-collar workers who did not leave because they felt that their job at the steelworks was the only one they could get in Terni also felt subject to a double blackmail. In fact, the factory does not only affect the economic and political domain: its impact on the natural environment is another leading concern for those who would like to see it replaced with alternative, more environmentally-friendly forms of production.

When we needed some footage to create a visual frame for those interviewees who spoke about the natural environment, Greca brought me to Prisciano, a neighbourhood that is adjacent to the steelworks' waste disposal department, although it lies deep in the countryside and was once famous for its peach orchard (see Fig. 10 for the group of

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<sup>90</sup> On this point, see the work of India (2013) on the reconversion of the deindustrialised area formerly occupied by a FIAT factory in Sicily.

<sup>91</sup> In the original Italian: "superamento".

houses opposite Prisciano's stronghold). Once a small village whose bucolic scenery astonished 19<sup>th</sup>-century Grand Tour travellers like Hans Christian Andersen, Goethe, Lord Byron and Marquis de Sade, it became infamous just before the dispute. Two months earlier, in fact, the national news reported the *ARPA*<sup>92</sup> and *SENTIERI*<sup>93</sup> results – whose tests had been conducted from 2009 to 2014 – which proved a high level of pollution and an excess of hospitalisation from respiratory diseases in Terni. In the reports, Prisciano figured as the most polluted neighbourhood, with chrome levels in the soil 100 times over the limit, alongside the nearby village of Papigno, contaminated by the poisoned inheritance of Terni's partially closed chemical industry.

This is due to the fact that the factory is practically an urban extension of the houses, which are incredibly close to the steelworks, and pollution levels have been an issue since its foundation. However, responsibility is always placed somewhere above the self, as remarked by Moreno, who has lived in that area for many years:

A little while after my wife and I moved to Prisciano, I realised that there was a lot of dust [...]. There, the pollution is due to the emptying of the melting pot<sup>94</sup> [...]. I didn't want my daughter to grow up there [...]. We moved out in 2004. There is a lot of dross, it looks like it is snowing! There is a pollution control unit, but I think it never worked, because otherwise you would have had to close down the entire neighbourhood. They took a big risk, allowing people to live there. First of all, there shouldn't be such industrial pollution, but if it cannot be avoided, then you have to evacuate. The public [municipal] administrators took the responsibility of letting people live there and not protecting them. (Moreno, 44, AST)

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<sup>92</sup> Regional Agency for Environmental Safeguarding.

<sup>93</sup> Epidemiological Study of Residents in National Priority Contaminated Sites: Mortality, Cancer Incidence and Hospital Discharge.

<sup>94</sup> Another informant explained me in detail what this meant: "The refuse left after metal has been smelted from ore and metal scraps and the noble part. The refuse is liquid; it is separated from the noble part and goes in containers called 'paiole' [pots], which are flipped over. While doing this, the liquid solidifies and inside the containers it creates a layer of dust containing chrome, carbon, lime. ILSERV deals with the refuse and brings it to the waste disposal department, which borders Prisciano" (Stefano, AST, FIOM coordinator).

The steel plant is only one of main polluting agents in town: there are also two incinerators, car fumes and the massive dump just outside the factory perimeter, which is used by both AST and the municipality for solid urban waste. Recent official pollution bulletins have therefore given life to a new wave of environmentalist groups, mainly amongst the younger generations, who have loose relations with the factory. Today, the leading role in shaping the environmental struggle in the town is played by M5S, associations such as GS (Green Society) and grassroots movements such as STOP INC. (Stop Incinerators).<sup>95</sup> These movements may be considered in light of an understanding of environmentalism as an excuse to close factories and replace working-class activism with middle-class environmentalism.

I attended meetings with GS members, where a white-collar worker in AST told me about the level of pollution they are subjected to at the plant. However, he did not want to be interviewed or recorded because he feared being mobbed and losing his job.

Undoubtedly, the factory is harmful for the environment, but the complex interrelation between industrial contamination of the environment and other sources of pollution in the town requires an analysis that is beyond the scope and aim of this chapter and would require a significant amount of space. In brief, GS and M5S alike propose a conversion of the plant's production within a technological optimistic view. Workers like Enrico, who experiences the risky working environment every day, share an oppositional, prudent and pessimistic point of view, linking workplace health and safety to a matter of class consciousness, generated at the level of production:

[30] years ago the first exhaust abatement system was built after quarrels with the public ownership. The workers decided to offer part of their salary, and the company made a contribution. This makes you understand what sort of class consciousness there was

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<sup>95</sup> GS and STOP INC. are both fictional names.

among the workers, and the Unions constructed this class consciousness [...]. Today, the workers themselves, to save some time in the production process, don't use the abatement systems. (Enrico, 37, AST)

Former workers spoke about the first efforts to make the work environment healthier:

The control board was inside a cabinet made of thin metal sheets, we battled a lot in the 1980s to obtain soundproof cabinets, the abatement of smokes and studies on what the material and substances we used were and where they ended up. It goes on polluting, but it pollutes less. (Luciano, 58, former Unionist and AST worker)

Health and safety consciousness is, indeed, a fundamental dimension of class consciousness and, as Mollona (2009c, p. 654) claims in reference to his shop-floor ethnography in Sheffield, the traditional labour movement, with its narrow and materialistic struggle against wealth inequality, underplayed the importance of working-class health – both physical and psychological.

However, a feature of the Italian working class is the “awareness of environmental health as a shared bodily experience among workers and locals” (Barca 2012, p. 72), leading to several struggles from the 1970s to this day.<sup>96</sup> What has marked the Italian experience is a link between the new environmentalists and the labour movement, Unions in particular, which makes it appropriate to speak of a ‘working-class environmentalism’, construed as the daily struggle of workers to defend health and safety conditions in their working and living environments (Barca 2012, 2014).

However, after the crisis in the late 1970s, Unions took a step back from their involvement with workers’ health conditions, and the environmental struggles led by the workers’

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<sup>96</sup> Environmentalism in Italy was generated in the cultural context of the 1960s and 1970s, marked by the strong hegemony of left-wing parties and the labour movement, but also by student protests and new political movements pressing for radical changes in the organisation of social life. This new Italian environmentalism was also crucially influenced by the spread of a new international environmental movement (Luzzi 2009), much less devoted to conservation than in the past, and more concerned with the toxicity of industrial production, especially petrochemicals (see Barca 2012).

movement tended to be taken up at a community level. Furthermore, from the workers' perspective, the essence of their environmental activism may become blurred by their feeling almost responsible for their own condition, as if it was a deal they had to reach in order to make a living.

Taking as an example the Ilva Taranto steelworks plant (to which AST has recently been compared, inappropriately, in the news), in light of its actual closure for non-compliance with legislation on pollution, Barca and Leonardi (2016) described how in Taranto “environmental injustices” are generated through symbolic violence. These violence span from silencing critical voices to foster a view that a closure of the steel plant would be utterly detrimental for the town's employment. This last view is internalised by the victims of these injustices producing in them a mental closure towards imagining economic alternatives to the plant:

In Foucauldian terms: a *cognitively dissonant worker* was the subjective outcome of the specific form of industrial/environmental governmentality deployed in Taranto. In that sense, it could be said that, in bodily experiencing the separation between his social status (the working class) and his spatiotemporal situatedness (the surrounding environment), such a worker was split between *occupational euphoria* (Ilva guarantees jobs and development) and *communitarian fear* (Ilva is undermining Taranto's basic liveability). (Barca and Leonardi 2016, p 66)

Although the Taranto case differs from that of Terni – where the EAF production process from scrap metal is less polluting than that at Taranto, which uses minerals melted in blast furnaces to produce cast iron – similarities may be detected. Following Barca and Leonardi (2016), by internalising the job blackmail as an inevitable horizon, communities tacitly accept a situation in which they depend materially and symbolically on the wealth created by the steel plant. This tight identification between local community and company may in fact take the form of *loyalty* and may thus entail a contradictory – ultimately

passivising— reduction of social conflicts and, at least potentially, an increase in productivity (Barca and Leonardi 2016, pp. 66-67).

In this light, for those directly involved in making steel, caught between the tight fabric of labour militancy and the defence of productivity, the rationalisation of the steelworks' economic hegemony resulted in a dissonant mix of gratitude and regret. What La Terni was able to offer in terms of employment was opposed to the view that the plant represented an obstacle to other kinds of economic development in the whole region and a threat to the environment of Terni's workers and citizens.

#### **4.8 Conclusions**

The evolution of industrial work regimes, Braverman (1974: ch. 4) argues, is above all the evolution of tighter systems of control, advanced through the 'scientific management' movement since the 1890s. Parry (2012, p.151) points out that the problem, as Taylor identified it, was that workers knew too much about how long it took to perform a given task, about shortcuts and about how to appear to be working when they were 'soldiering' (taking their time). The solution was to break jobs down into smaller, timed tasks to allow capital to control the intensity of labour so that it would run at a pace determined by the management. This allowed capital to replace skilled workers with unskilled, relatively inexpensive ones. The result was a cheapening of labour, a progressive de-skilling and a growing distance between the conceptualisation and planning of work (a function of management), and its mindless execution. Following Goddard (2017), the division of the labour force developed opportunistically to produce categories of workers, and differentiated regimes of value (of labour, persons and places) intersect with the fragmentation generated by hiring practices such as outsourcing and relocation.

As this chapter has highlighted, this fragmentation was reproduced outside the production sphere while the workers went on strike. The organisation of the pickets mirrored the shift rotation in the plant, and the diverse groups were separated according to their 'place' in the production chain. Different forms of relations between workers stemmed from their different positions in the production process, and their coming together as class was undermined by this division internal to labour, which expanded and entailed age, personal histories and origin.

The chapter has underlined how the workers' aristocracy of labour is not only determined by the benefits it receives in the workplace and its consumerist behaviour, but also by its ability to engage in the struggle, which stems from having the family network to rely on financially while on strike, as well as the possibility of investing in alternative economic endeavours, for instance the agricultural sector. This was also the case for the contractors' workers that come from Terni, who, besides the aspects identified above, showed the same attachment to the territory as AST workers, doubly linked to the factory and territory, being sons, brothers and nephews of generations of former workers. However, their link with the traditional male working class was more complicated than that of the AST workers: they had to deal with two multinational companies, which doubled their fear of losing their job, pushing them to represent their own condition as a 'hanged mannequin'. Also, they felt the threat of the 'new Ternani', immigrant workers who, in their opinion, were willing to work for lower wages. In turn, immigrant workers, who are slowly and syncretically becoming part of the Terni community, felt the threat to their working and life conditions for the same reasons. Even if they felt part of the community, they did not feel part of the struggle; they did not feel part of the steelworks' embodiment of the industrialism on which the community had relied for so long, but rather felt as if

they are easy to discard to make room for those who can claim their belonging to the traditional local working class.

White-collar workers seemed more detached from the blue-collar workers' world. However, it was possible to identify how the traditional link with the factory shaped not only their militancy but also their identification with the workers' struggle. What they shared the most, and what separated them the most, was both a mutual unawareness of each other's working conditions and their framing of their experience of alienation. For Marx, alienation was a general condition of capitalism; for Braverman, it is a process created and re-created by capitalist management. Carrier (1992, pp. 551-553) looks at the development of alienation in production, pinpointing the alienation generated by less need to rely on one another. Basic economic survival comes to depend more and more on transactions with impersonal bureaucratic structures; economy becomes separated from society; and relationships at work become more and more alienated from interpersonal ones. Carrier describes how production, and the commodities produced, gradually become more alienated from producers, highlighting how there is an impersonal self on one hand (a periphery, an autonomous entity linked by external necessity to impersonal institutions like the state and the firm) and, on the other, the inner self (a core, a relational entity linked and defined by personal others). Carrier's definition of alienation as a progressive divergence in workers' personality frames the condition of both blue- and white-collar workers. However, as the chapter has demonstrated, the blue-collar workers saw in the return of the moral economy an escape in the natural environment as a way out from factory work, through alternative means of livelihood and leisure activities – which are also carried out by the white-collar workers. Parry (1999, p. 136) shows empirically that Thompson's contrast between working in the fields and working in the factory romanticises the former while ignoring the variable nature of public and private sector in

the latter. The Indian steelworkers studied by Parry show that, agricultural work is not conceived as more desirable than working in the factory, whether public or private (Parry 1999, p. 119). Working in the steel plant has alienated these neophyte proletarians from agriculture.

As this chapter has outlined, returning to work the land is one way out from alienation. The white-collar workers instead see a way out in developing their career and see in the redundancy an opportunity to find a more suitable working environment for their aspirations. The white-collar workers, who have more re-employable skills, are most critical of the synergetic relationship between factory and town. As Newman (1988) points out because blue-collar workers have been subject to layoffs and recalls throughout their lives, they know that a layoff has nothing to do with them personally. If the plant is closing or laying off workers, they know it is because of something to do with the management, not with them; perhaps the plant is moving to another country. In contrast, white-collar workers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century expected more or less continual employment with the same employer. Their ideology of meritocratic individualism was based on their schooling, which made it clear that achievement was a function of individual effort and talent: the more meritorious one's behaviour was, the higher one would rise in the ranks of the corporation. When these people were laid off due to downsizing, they thought that it must have been because of something they had done. Blue-collar workers experienced no such disorientation when they were laid off (see Durrenberger 2011, p.8).

The reproduction of alienation and the division of labour outside the production process produced contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, there was a renewed short-term working-class consciousness. On the other, interlocutors recognised that the working class is something of the past, and described the past working-class as more homogeneous, more united, and with higher chances of winning its battles than the present one.

The workers attributed the pivotal role in expressing this renewed working-class consciousness to the Unions' ability to direct the workers' movement against the capitalist forces of dispossession and class fragmentation. This will be the topic of the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5 – Trade unions and ‘spontaneous’ movements**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will examine the dispute by focusing on the Unions and their strategies to reach an agreement with the company. Their leading role as mediators generated contrasts both during the strikes and in the months that followed, which translated into the shaping of new political identities and into the creation of non-Unionised groups that the workers referred to as ‘spontaneous movements’ so as to identify that their actions were not organised in advance or led by the trade unions themselves.

The first two sections will provide a theoretical approach to assess the Unions’ power in an anthropological frame of analysis. First, an explanation will be provided of the structure of the trade unions and their divisions within the steel plant, while the second section will describe the historical background of each Union federation. The third and fourth sections will look at the Unions’ strategies during the unrest and at how participants perceived and commented on them, elaborating on their power and position inside the plant. This will be followed by an ethnographic account of the personal experience of a shop-floor steward, drawing on his interpretation of the labour unrest to further elaborate on trade unionism in AST.

The chapter will then evaluate how the Unions acted on the workforce by imposing their lead, after which there will be an ethnographic analysis of two specific examples of spontaneous movements: SCU, a grassroots activist group formed by two workers in open contrast with the Unions, advocating for what can be considered ‘community unionism’; and CWO, established by contractors who were in total disagreement with the deal signed by the Unions.

The chapter will conclude by evaluating the Unions' power, which consists in the defence of members on the shop floor by helping them find roles more suitable to their needs in the production process, as well as in finding jobs at the steelworks for future members or members' relatives. The conclusion will argue that this is seen as implicit blackmail, which became very problematic during the dispute and its resolution.

## **5.2 Trade union power: theoretical framework**

As Durrenberger (2007 p. 75) claims, the chief goal of the Union movement is to organise workers for concerted actions in support of their interests, in order to redress the power imbalance between those who provide labour and those who control the conditions of its use through their ownership or management of productive resources. Because workers and owners of capital do not share interests, this relationship is necessarily adversarial. Therefore, the logic of Unions is collective, even if the practice is not. Individual workers in complex orders have virtually no agency or power apart from what the process of selling their labour confers on them (Durrenberger and Reichart 2010, pp. 10-11). As Durrenberger (2007) further shows, there is still no unified theoretical or methodological approach to analysing the Unions' logic of action: collective action theory, social movement theory, political ecology and practice theory are all valid avenues.

In the light of adversarial relationships such as that which emerged during fieldwork research, the chapter will follow an analytical framework that relates labour power, understood as collective action, to the Unions' ability to organise workers in a strategic position in a key industrial sector.

In her work on the effects of working-class power on the interests of capital, Wright (2000, p. 962) identifies two sources of 'labour power': 'associational' and 'structural'.

The former consists in “the various forms of power that result from the collective organisation of workers”, while the latter results simply from the location of workers within the economic system – the power of workers as individuals that stems directly from tight labour markets, or from the strategic location of a particular group of workers within a key industrial sector.

As Silver (2003, p.14) argues, ‘associational power’ has historically been embedded in national legal frameworks that have guaranteed such points as the right to form trade unions and the obligation of employers to bargain collectively with trade unions. Further subdivisions of the ‘structural power’ proposed by Wright are identified by Silver (2003, p. 13): ‘marketplace bargaining power’, resulting directly from tight labour markets; and ‘workplace bargaining power’, which is the power that results from the strategic location of a particular group of workers within a key industrial sector. The first is attributed to the possession of scarce skills demanded by employers, low unemployment and the ability of workers to pull out of the labour market entirely and survive on nonwage sources of income. This also includes the degree of Union and collective control over hiring, firing, formalising contracts, subcontracting practices and so on. The second increases when workers work in integrated production processes, and a single, localised work stoppage can cause wider disruptions on a much wider scale than the stoppage itself. However, globalisation and the weakening of state sovereignty have weakened marketplace bargaining power and created a vicious circle, in which a weakening marketplace bargaining power undermines associational power and vice versa, thus delegitimising existing trade unions by making it increasingly difficult for these organisations to deliver benefits to their members.

Roca and Rodriguez (2014, pp. 62-63), in their ethnographic study of workers’ organisational capacity and trade union struggle in a medium-sized iron and steel

company in Spain, further divide ‘associational power’ into: ‘social power’ (formal and informal family and friendship relationships among Union members and workers, providing strong cohesion among the staff); ‘ideological power’ (related to shared cultural values, ideas and beliefs that reinforce class consciousness and resistance; it can influence the two forms of power previously mentioned); and ‘trade union power’ (deriving from the workers’ strong collective organisation). This last form of power is the strongest, as it combines both the associative and the structural; it depends on a great variety of factors, including: the number of organisers, members and sympathisers in the firm, work-centre and local area; the cooperative or competitive presence of other trade unions; the creation of solidarity funds; and the skills, training and commitment of members and organisers. Furthermore, ‘trade union power’ within the firm is strongly connected with the power of labour organisations in the area and the industry.

Indeed, the Unions’ focal position in both associational and structural power relations is in direct proportion to their facilitation of practices of labour unrest. Dixon, Roscigno and Hodson (2004, p. 23) show how workers in highly organised industries are more likely to engage in militant action, which is partly due to the organisational ability of Unions and the resources they provide. Workplaces without Unions and a legacy of collective mobilisation are, on average, 70-80% less likely to experience strike activity.

In this light, the following sections will evaluate the ‘associational power of trade unions’ vis-à-vis the workers’ reactions to them and their interpretations of how to pursue their goals, as well as the management’s strategies to curb their power. As Roca and Rodriguez (2014, pp. 66-68) argue, management behaviours, like employees’ collective action, are always situated between two ideal types, negotiation and conflict, although employers’ strategies – both in the structural and associational domains – are largely based on ‘dividing’ (and ruling) the workers’ front.

This general theoretical framework needs to be related to the particularity of the local context in order to be used as the ground of analysis for the ethnographic data. This will be the object of the next section.

### **5.3 The structure of the trade unions**

In Italy there are three major politically aligned Unions, CGIL, CISL and UIL, which are divided into industry federations according to business sector. CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro, Italian General Confederation of Labour) was born in June 1944 out of a deal between Socialists, Communists and Christian Democrats. In 1950, the Christian Democrats and Socialists split from CGIL and created, respectively, CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori, Italian Confederation of Trade unions) and UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro, Italian Union of Labour). The three Unions had historical bonds with political parties until the early 1990s: CGIL was associated with the Communist Party, CISL with the left wing of the Christian Democrats and UIL with the Socialists, Social Democrats and Republicans. As the old party system collapsed, all these direct connections faded, although the Unions have preserved their political orientations: CGIL supports PD, with a faction following the heirs of the Communist Party; CISL leans towards the Christian democratic centre; UIL maintains its republican stance.

CGIL, CISL and UIL now count 12.5 million members, mainly in the public sector. It is worth noting that, although almost half of this figure represents retired members, CGIL and UIL recorded a significant growth in membership in 2011. Despite losing members due to cuts in manufacturing, CGIL is still the strongest one within industry. Over the years, the three federations have increased their membership by 80% and Union density by over 50% and have managed to increase wages in order to match rises in inflation.

Their greatest accomplishment, however, is the 1970 ‘Statuto dei Lavoratori’, which still constitutes the legal basis for workers’ rights. In 1980, the metalworkers’ Unions lost an important battle when engineers and other skilled workers from Fiat withdrew their support. This affected the Unions’ strength throughout that decade, in the very period when companies started decentralising and splitting workplaces up into smaller entities, often as suppliers, which thus destabilised the Union protections imposed by the Statuto. Another defining moment was, in 1993, the first ever agreement between the Unions, employers and the government, whose outcome included the introduction of a new representation system in the workplace, the RSU, and the option of settling workplace agreements.

Between 2009 and 2011, the Unions were presented with several opportunities to demonstrate, after the measures taken by the Berlusconi government (including a reform of the collective bargaining system), the fall of the government followed by the nomination of Mario Monti and the adoption of austerity policies. Indeed, the three main Unions organised protests and rallies, which, although they failed to change the government’s choices, had some positive outcomes: first, they proved that the Unions could still work together; secondly, unlike past actions, they included larger portions of the population, stretching beyond the boundaries of the labour market.<sup>97</sup>

At the Terni steelworks, besides CGIL, CISL and UIL, there are two more unions, UGL and FISMIC. UGL (Unione Generale del Lavoro, General Labour Union) is a national organisation, which has been closely associated with the neo-Fascist party MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano, Italian Social Movement) and with the parties that followed, including Berlusconi’s Forza Italia. FISMIC (Federazione Italiana Sindacati

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<sup>97</sup> This brief historical account of the Italian trade union formations relies on Molina and Barranco (2016) and Namuth (2013). The latter is available online: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09590.pdf> (accessed: May 2017). For a wider and deeper history of Italian trade unions, see Valluri (2008).

Metalmeccanici e Industrie Collegate, Autonomous Metalworkers and Linked Industries Union) is a national, autonomous trade union specifically for metalworkers, born out of a separation from CISL; FISMIC has always avoided any political attachment. At TK-AST, the Unions are present with their metalworkers' specific federations. FIOM has been representing workers since 1901 (see CRACE 2001), while FIM and UILM have been active since the aftermath of WWII (see Osbat 2011); FISMIC and UGL are the most recent, the latter being present since the Ciaurro administration in the late 1990s.

The largest Union is CISL-FIM (Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici, Italian Federation of Metalworkers), with 12 representatives; the second largest is CGIL-FIOM (Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici, Metal Workers and Employees Federation), with nine representatives, followed by UIL-UILM (Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici, Italian Metalworkers Union), with six; FISMIC has four; the smallest is UGL-METALMECCANICI (Metalworkers), with one representative. They are divided by subsidiary as follows:

	<b>FIM</b>	<b>FIOM</b>	<b>UILM</b>	<b>FISMIC</b>	<b>UGL</b>
<b>AST</b>	9	6	5	2	1
<b>SdF</b>	1	1	1	0	0
<b>Tubificio</b>	1	1	0	1	0
<b>ASPASIEL</b>	1	1	0	1	0

Table 1. RSU in TK-AST divided by subsidiaries. Results of 2014 election

The main division exists between FIOM and FIM: the former is stronger in the hot department, while the latter is stronger among the white-collar workers. However, membership within each federation is relatively heterogeneous; for instance, in FIOM:

At the internal assemblies you have people ranging from those who firmly support Renzi to those who want to engage in an armed struggle. (Augusto, 32, AST)

Among members it was possible to capture two highly distinct reactions to the actions, especially during the unrest. These two views incarnated the ‘reformist’ and ‘revolutionary’ agendas of FIM and FIOM respectively. The latter blamed the lack of radicalisation – this was especially common among Communist Party militants, who wanted a united front with Taranto and Piombino – while the other campaigned against any form of radicalisation and was more open to a dialogue with the company. Indeed, FIM had been pushing to become part of the decision-making process on the company board since the 90s, when the company was still partially owned by the state:

Around the mid-1990s, I took part in one of the last strikes, in which we broke the Union front. We were negotiating the supplementary salary. We asked for the control of production because the supplement to the wage, the benefit, was linked to production targets and sales. At FIM we said that we wanted to become part of the public company board, because we knew the production process, but we didn’t know the economic side, and wanted to check if they made faulty decisions. Part of CGIL didn’t want to because it represented, and still represents, this Union/employer split: ‘I want something, if you, the employer, don’t give it to me, I strike until I obtain it.’ We understood the Unions in a more participative way. That time we reached an agreement, but we didn’t obtain a majority at the Factory Council. (Luciano, 58, former Unionist and AST worker)

This view is also supported by the current CISL-FIM regional secretary, who has longstanding experience as a unionist, having been elected as RSU in 2000:

I like the ‘German model’<sup>98</sup> with representatives on the company board, we could do it here too – there is an article in the Italian Constitution that allows that. But the company

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<sup>98</sup>This point of view was also shared with me by another FIM representative: the unionist who said the Terni will not kneel down to any of Germany’s bullying (see Ch. 2.2). In spite of his passionate speech, he once told me about his

and some Unions are not interested in this... but this is also a cultural matter: in Germany there is only one Union for each sector, whereas in Italy there is this fragmentation. A critique which I can make in respect of my experience as Unionist... when you take part in a meeting and there is just one the representative of IG Metall [the dominant metalworkers' Union in Germany], we go there with the local, regional and national representatives. They have one delegate who speaks, we are maybe five people, who can say five different things. And this is one of the limits of today's Unions in Italy. Besides, the Germans are Calvinists, and if there is a decision to make, for example, that a plant must be closed for the benefit of the whole company, the Union goes to the workers and says: 'We have to close for the benefit of the company.' Here this is not possible. (Riccardo, FIM regional secretary)

By contrast, FIOM representatives propose reasons why the defence of the workers must come first; in response to criticisms that regard CIGL as pursuing an atavist workforce/employer antagonism, they make arguments like the following:

In our rallies we try to involve, as well as the workers, students too, and that whole world of the precariousness of labour that today has no voice, because in our opinion that is the future of Italy. [...] people critique FIOM saying that it is still the same as in the 1800s... to me we are instead those who are more aware that the world of labour today is not a stable one, but instead is made of precarious, short-term contracts etc... (Stefano, 38, AST, FIOM coordinator)

Furthermore, an important point of view shared by many informants is that of Luca, who argues that the 'German Model' will never work in Italy because of insurmountable cultural differences:

If you take the 'German Model' and bring it to in Italy... the way Italian workers think is different from the way German workers think, I don't know who is best. But in terms of the Unions – they have the Unions on the company's board. In Italy, if you did the same thing, the Unions would start to eat like a pig<sup>99</sup> [be greedy and take advantage of the situation economically and politically] and we see this in many domains [...] because the

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work trip to a TK branch in Germany, praised the plant's efficiency and asserted how positive it would have been for Terni to embark on a radical rethinking of the Union system on the "Modell Deutschland", based on shared decision making and trade union involvement in the company's business strategies.

<sup>99</sup> In the original Italian: "mangiare a quattro ganasce" (eating with four jaws).

Italians are like this, and with the Unions on the stockholders' board you would want to obtain the same result that they obtain in Germany. (Luca, 36, AST RSU)

Despite this, as the FIM secretary claimed, these divisions are more of a concern to the national representatives and, at the steelworks, the different federations try to maintain dialogue and close relationships for the sake of the workers, which seems to work well.

Further to the divisions between unions, there are important distinctions between different categories of unionist within the same federation: shop-floor stewards (also known as representatives, reps, delegates or more commonly as RSU.<sup>100</sup>); coordinators; and regional and/or provincial secretaries. The shop-floor stewards are full-time workers who perform syndical activities on the shop floor and are divided by department, one each department. Above them, there are the full-time coordinators, who direct all the representatives of a specific Union in the factory, and above them there are the specific Union full-time regional, and/or provincial, secretaries.

Although differences between Unions and their representatives are certainly important, during the dispute it seemed that the delegates fought together for the greater good, at least at the local level. In this light, the following sections, except where specified, will follow a narrative in which all the different Unions acted at unison, as they were cooperating on one front during the dispute.

#### **5.4 Unions' strategies**

The Unions' strategies for bargaining the best possible agreement, as highlighted also in the ethnographic film, entailed a search for visibility and a goods stoppage carried out under the traditional labour conflict slogan "one day longer" (see Collins 2012, p. 6),

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<sup>100</sup> See footnote 23



Unions and they had not pre-advertised as they usually would by handing out flyers to the citizens. A few passers-by joined in, and the several hundred people gathered in front of a small stage that had been purpose-built that morning in Piazza della Repubblica. Carlo, a FIOM secretary, was the first to speak, and after a brief explanation of the industrial plan, he introduced the town's mayor. In the previous rally, a few months before the passage from Outokumpu to TK, during a clash between the police and steelworkers who wanted to occupy the train station, the mayor rushed to ease the situation, and was accidentally hit by the police. Photos and videos of his bleeding head were broadcast nationally, drawing a significant level of attention to the steelworkers' situation. When the mayor gained centre stage, trying to capitalise on the consensus about the previous accident, he wore a distinctive blue AST worker helmet:

This is not to recall that awful event that occurred last year, but rather to say that we will face this dispute together, with the helmet on, ready to fight!

The crowd did not appreciate the symbolism, and whistles covered part of his speech. The tension increased, and when a FIM Unionist was about to speak, a small group of workers tried to climb up and take the microphone. Some of them were members of *Freak Brothers*, the local football team ultras, among whom there are many steelworkers. This small display of violence was promptly controlled by Stefano, the six-foot-ten FIOM coordinator, who separated the ultras group from the rest of the crowd and scolded them, saying that they were counteracting all the Unions' efforts to make a peaceful manifestation of dissent for the good both of the steelworkers and of the town. The last speech was given by the national FIM secretary, who spoke about the meeting where the industrial plan was presented, which had been attended by Limbergh, the German Director, the new CEO Morselli, and national and regional representatives of the Union. He said:

The German chiefs speak only in English, and they told us: ‘Goals are defined, we can discuss the details with you.’

He translated the sentence into Italian and, raising his voice, called on the workers to fight for their rights, saying that nothing was decided. As he was concluding his speech, the sun reached its noon zenith; it was too hot to continue, and the rally was called off. It had looked as though this moment could mark the beginning of the industrial action, but in retrospect it was just an ineffective, semi-informative direct response by the Unions. In this period, the two actions that gained more attention were the ‘spontaneous’ ones, which, though not coordinated by the Unions, gathered some regional media coverage. The first was a road block on the A1 motorway to Rome and the second involved confining the CEO to her offices for 12 hours. Commentators praised the ability of the Unions to maintain order on this last occasion but, at the same time, more radical views remarked on their inefficiency in seizing the moment and using the workers’ wave of emotion to propose similarly strong actions in the days that followed.

In August, the Unions became the main actors, taking the role of a designated channel of communication between the company and workers, and managing the protests – especially during the ‘Fermata’, when workers took their holiday and the plant closed for a month-long maintenance. They held assemblies inside the plant and kept a high level of attention among the inhabitants by setting up gazebos in Piazza Europa.

With the first meeting at MISE in September, the dispute gained its official status. As is customary, and in response to the pressing need for visibility, three busloads of workers accompanied the Union reps from Terni to Rome. I joined the workers in one of the buses. When we arrived at MISE, the narrow street in front of the main door was already filled with journalists, workers and trade unionists, shouting and insulting Morselli whilst posing for the photographers and giving interviews. There, the divisions based on political

affiliations and Union memberships became clear as groups of people gathered around their Unions' flags, showing a very distinct heterogeneity. But as the day went on, people started to move around, the groups formed a more homogeneous mass, and the shouting and whistling against the CEO and the government stopped. The workers were not as numerous as one might expect; this was because, as a FIOM Unionist explained to me, the factory was not on strike. In his opinion, one of the reasons was that calling a strike for that day could have been counterproductive and too many people could have amassed in front of MISE, with the risk of getting bored and thus starting to create confusion and difficult situations. In fact, drinking beer was a common practice of the workers while waiting for news from inside the Ministry. In this respect, the only information came around midnight, when Stefano, who was attending the meeting upstairs, came downstairs to explain – to the scorn of those few left – that the Unions had not yet met the CEO. The words “Goals are defined, we can discuss details with you”, which had been uttered months before by the FIM secretary, now acquired a practical dimension. In the whole month, five other meetings took place without any major consequences: no decision was made.

October was the most complex period: the CEO proposed the redundancy package, but at the same time the negotiation was interrupted several times and, as a consequence, clashes with the company became more frequent. The protest was marked by an intensification of the mobilisation at the pickets set up the previous month and was led both by the instinctive reactions of individuals and by the Union leadership, which declared the work stoppage. This meant a series of occupations of public land and the interruption of municipal works. The most important event during this period was the general strike, which attracted the interest of the national press and unified the front between workers and citizens through a request for and enforcement of solidarity. On 17 October, Terni

town centre woke up in an agitated state. Piazza della Repubblica, about to host the stage for the general strike, was full of workers fervidly building part of the stage, TV crews setting up their tripods, street cleaners cleaning the streets and municipal policemen preparing traffic blockades. The human presence on the narrow streets leading to the factory was scarce and the soundscape was oddly flat; however, one could feel the silent excitement that led the steps of the people walking towards the factory. By contrast, Viale Brin was full of flags, people of all ages, voices, music and Union vans; journalists with cameras and video-recorders of every sort had already flooded the street. The throngs of attendees, the participants' excitement and the workers busily creating cordons around the Union vans were all parts of a labour ritual that was accompanied by refrains such as "We are the steel town! We are the steel town!" chanted by the workers, like ultras before a football game. When the march towards the stage started (see black arrow in Fig. 12), a group of FIOM workers suddenly broke the line about one kilometre from the gates and moved towards a bar that was still open because the owner, at least for the morning, had decided not to close his business – as almost all other shopkeepers had done that day, in solidarity with the steelworkers. The 'sin' was promptly washed down with the use of petty violence, workers shouted insults to the bar owner and banged on the door while he was trying to close down. More serious consequences were avoided by the intervention of Stefano, who managed to cool the situation down by pushing the workers away while ordering the bar owner to shut the door and lock himself inside. A FIM, delivered the first speech from the stage, drawing applause from the crowd, especially when attacking the 'German' company (see Chapter 2.2). After a carousel of Unionists and workers from other factories voicing their solidarity for Terni, the last speech was given by Susanna Camusso, the national CGIL representative. Despite the traditionally close political

affiliation, RC militants protested loudly against her, joined by Centro Sociale activists. Among them was Enrico, standing on a small van and shouting at Camusso:

You sold yourselves! You sold yourselves! You have come to terms with the government about the Article 18 reform!<sup>101</sup>

The days that followed were characterised by four crucial moments: the occupation of the station; the interruption of the municipal works; the beginning of the strike; and the CEO's unexpected visit to the pickets. In this phase the Unions, in the person of Carlo, a FIOM secretary who gradually became the main public speaker of the RSU, pushed the workers to bring the dispute in front of Parliament rather than MISE, saying that the industrial action should become a symbol for all the other disputes in the country. They declared the official start of the goods stoppage and asked the workforce to be united and share the same points of view, to avoid playing the company's game, because this was a dispute that did not just concern layoffs, but the end of Terni's industrial history.

The march to occupy the station was silent, like the factory the workers had left behind, which was now almost completely stopped. At the station gates there were no police; the situation was very calm, and it was clear that everything was planned; however, it looked as though it could explode into something bigger at any moment. Here, the informants spoke about the dispute being worse than the Magnifico and commented on the possibility of a factory occupation. This test of the strength and compactness of the workforce yielded the desired results: the Unions were able to manage the whole rally and claimed to have hit the target by causing a four-hour delay in the entire Italian rail system.

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<sup>101</sup> Italy approved significant but controversial reforms to Article 18 of its Workers' Statute of 1970 in an attempt to combat soaring unemployment, currently 42% among workers under the age of 29 and 12.8% overall, and to facilitate growth in an otherwise stagnant economy. The reforms, referred to as the 'Jobs Act', were implemented by several legislative decrees and based upon the guidelines provided by Law no. 183 in December 2014. In broad terms the Jobs Act seeks to improve the economy through establishing a more flexible labour market by making dismissals less costly and burdensome to employers, by enticing employers to hire new employees and by providing more employment opportunities and benefits to unemployed workers. The reforms do not apply to public sector employees, religious institutions, non-entrepreneurial entities or employees hired before 1 January 2015. Source: <http://www.crossborderemployer.com> (accessed: 16 June 2016).

However, a few days later, when a public town council assembly was held at the ex-Bosco workshop (a former iron factory, refurbished and transformed into a modern conference room), workers and shop-floor stewards interrupted the meeting, holding a joint Union banner reading “DON’T COUNT US IN FOR DISMANTLING THE TERNI STEELWORKS”, with the aim of prompting stronger intervention from local institutional figures to open a dialogue with the government. The parade entered the room, receiving the applause of the people already there. Following a presentation, the mayor started his speech, creating a turmoil which was followed by a verbal fight consisting of accusations between Union secretaries and M5S militants. On this occasion, it was evident that the Unions were unable to manage and quell the animosity between workers, institutions and the party militants gravitating towards the protests. A very important moment was marked by the speech given by an AST worker. Before he had even begun to talk, someone in the audience asked him to introduce himself: it was only when he said that he was a worker of the cold department that they let him start, saying, “Oh, ok, you can talk.” For the first time, the degree of legitimation that was necessary to be part of the struggle was evident: unlike the inclusiveness proclaimed by the Unions, individual workers felt that only steelworker colleagues were legitimated to talk on their behalf. Commenting on this episode, Enrico remarked on the steelworkers’ lack of interest in the smaller-scale industrial disputes involving TK-AST subcontractors or other companies in town facing a similar fate of dispossession, which contrasted with their plea for solidarity from the whole community when AST was facing hardship.

A striking analysis can be drawn by comparing the two slogans chanted during the strike action. The chant “We are the steel town, we are the steel town” was the leitmotiv of the general strike, a warming, all-encompassing motto which implies that it is possible to win against the firm, but only if the community sticks together. On the other hand, when the

Unions were leading unofficial rallies (especially at night through the city centre), they used more aggressive refrains such as “Terni, wake up!” and “If we shut down, you all shut down!”, highlighting the importance of the factory as a source of livelihood for the entire community and implicitly claiming the right to coerce the community into solidarity. This last aspect intensified when the Unions called the work stoppage and consequent total strike.

On the night of 15 October, the road was blocked with wheeled rubbish bins, and workers were preparing for another march towards the city centre. There was strong attendance, and the tension was higher than on other days. There was a sense of anticipation; some people set some bins on fire. Due to the failed agreement, the Unions announced a strike until the coming Friday: everyone took out their phones to update their workmates at home, letting them know that the fight was still going on. The day after, the situation collapsed: TK sealed the ‘agreement without change’; the original industrial plan had sustained no changes despite the ongoing negotiation, while 103 workers had already taken the redundancy package. The following day, workers occupied the prefecture, the council and positioned themselves outside the factory gates.

On 23 October, Morselli went to the pickets to speak to the strikers. The situation was highly chaotic: workers were angry and asked her many questions; a few metres away from the group that formed around her, Stefano shouted on the megaphone not to listen to what she had to say, and then confronted her by asking her to leave. She was impassive and explained that the plant needed to be restructured to be profitable, until the police came to ease the situation and escort her away from the crowd.

Three nights later, at the pickets, while reflecting on this critical event, workers debated how the CEO, through a brave and cunning move, had managed to position herself as the sole or most authoritative point of contact between the company and the workers,

bypassing even the Unions and, ultimately, delegitimising them. On that occasion, at around 1am, the night guards posted a sign to the wall: it was a declaration by Morselli, saying that the negotiation was coming to an end and that there would be investments for the steel plant. Two FIOM members, astonished by this move, explained to the few people covering the night shift at the picket how she had planned all this carefully, that she was well ahead of them, but that this message was a fake and did not mean anything. They called Stefano, their direct coordinator, to make sure that the negotiation terms were still on the table: he did not know anything about it, so they took a picture with their phones and sent it to him via text.

Reflecting on the episode, The workers reiterated, and feared, that the dispute would end as the Magnetico, with a univocal decision taken by the management, but (unlike ten years before) with no investments in the plant to compensate the layoffs, and consequently detrimental effects on their working conditions.

The real turning point occurred a week later. As the FIM provincial secretary told me, even though this was the longest dispute in the past 30 years in terms of number of days of strike – and was thus able to present the labour issue in a new light – what attracted the media coverage and audience the most was the clash with the police when the workers tried to go to MISE while the Ministry was discussing another dispute.

November began with this unexpected apex of visibility, and the national media began to cover the AST dispute very often. The Unions pushed for a hastening of the resolution between government and company and agreed to let in 200 employees to pay salaries and do some administrative paperwork, which roused the anger of the workers, who thought that their efforts were being nullified – seeing this as a concession to Morselli. At that point, the company declared that the negotiation had ended and proposed imminent layoffs. At the same time, many workers were coming to find the dispute hard to cope

with financially, and the Unions lost most of their authority to manage people at the pickets and to curb potentially harmful initiatives. The ILSERV workers saw their position worsening due to the expired tender and single contracts for workers (see Chapter 4). One night, exasperated by the situation, they set fire to their offices where they had placed a 'dead mannequin' (see Fig.11).

The assembly that followed Morselli's communication saw the Unions unable to control the crowd wanted demonstrative action. In this instance, it seemed that an occupation of the factory, proposed several times by individuals' shouts during the assembly, was indeed about to happen. Instead, the workers, in a spontaneous action, went to occupy the nearby motorway linking Florence to Rome. When I arrived with Enrico, the police were already there waiting for the workers, and TV crews were running towards a small group who had already trespassed the tool gate. The optimistic feeling among the workers, heightened by the solidarity of truck drivers honking their horns while stuck in the queue, was slowly dispersed by the long wait. For more than four hours, under drizzling rain, the workers asked themselves how this occupation (which turned into a bivouac on the tarmac) would end. At this point, informants were sceptical that the Unions could resolve the situation. However, at dusk they finally announced that the company had returned to the negotiating table and scheduled a meeting in Rome for the next day. The workers left in cheerful spirits, complimenting themselves on the result of this action.

The Unions were able to capitalise on this last action, and when they came back from the penultimate meeting at MISE, they proposed a re-modulation of the strike, to let some goods out and show some good faith to the company. The workforce's reaction was negative, but at least the Unions were able to gain time and prevent any spontaneous initiative, while the workers were "left to decide among themselves", as Carlo put it, about what to do about the goods stoppage. However, the workers did not have time to decide

about the re-modulation, because a few days later they held a reunion of all the RSU and decided to call off the strike without any ballot or further legitimation by the workforce. The following night, the tension at the picket was very high: fights erupted at every minute, and even Stefano – the most respected among all the Unionists because of his commitment and constant presence at all the gazebos – was unable to calm the workers down. The goods stoppage was suspended and instead the Unions called a ‘rolling strike’, that is, a series of strikes in different departments organised on an eight-hour rotation.

The consequence of these latest actions was a schism between FIOM and the other federations, especially FIM, with respect to how this last part of the dispute was to be handled, even though all decisions were, apparently, taken together. CGIL-FIOM held an assembly in a hotel conference room for members only, which ratified the internal division between the Unions. I went there when the assembly was about to start; the journalists waiting for Landini – the national FIOM secretary, well-known for speaking in public in defence of workers and often attacking the Renzi government on TV – were asked to leave; people checked membership cards; and there was an air of secrecy and policing all around. One of the eldest FIOM members recognised me; at first, he said that the assembly was for members only, then he let me in with a pat on the shoulder. The provincial secretary started by explaining why the assembly had not pushed for a more radical stance, justifying their actions and blaming those of the other Unions. The few speakers that followed proceeded to praise FIOM’s operation and that of its national secretary Landini, neglecting all the other Unions. Landini declared in a statement that this kind of openness could only make them stronger, giving the workers total control over the entrance and exit of goods, while at the same time living outside the gazebo and attending the pickets. But despite Landini’s encouraging words, for many the battle was lost with the concession of the rolling strike, and they did not return to the pickets

anymore. The last picket attended was that at the Prisciano gate, in front of the raw material supply parking lot, where a few workers still picketed after the others were abandoned.

In December, the dispute was settled and ratified with the workers' referendum, and a final agreement was reached between the CEO and Unions. The 20% cut for the subcontractors was accepted; the pay cut for AST workers was agreed at around 100euros a month; and two more years were given to the furnace before a decision was to be taken about its future. New investments were also planned: 20 million euros and a new production line from Turin, called 'the death line'.<sup>102</sup>

In light of these events, the 'associational power' of the trade unions (resting on the long-standing presence of a great number of committed organisers at the steelworks and their ability to involve local politicians) fits the general theorisation presented in the theoretical framework. However, its strategies during the unrest were determined by a few distinctive factors which, for the purpose of analysis, can be summarised as follows.

First, the Unions showed a close relationship with local politicians, seeking to bring them into the discourse so as to rely on them as interlocutors with the government.

Secondly, they acted as leaders of the protest, keeping the workforce informed of its progress through official statements and unofficial information shared through social networks and text messages. Furthermore, they tried to manage and control violent behaviour.

Thirdly, when the workforce demanded strong demonstrations or embarked on spontaneous actions, such as the traffic block on the motorway, they supported them and

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<sup>102</sup> The 'death line' had been stopped by the police until a few months previously because a fatal accident occurred in 2005 (see Chapter 2.5).

tried to maintain order whenever possible, benefiting from the workers' successful actions and the media visibility they attracted.

They also showed commitment to the workers' struggle, especially through the constant presence and involvement of shop-floor stewards, the Unionists traditionally closest to the workers' problems inside the factory.

Finally, however, they found themselves unprepared for the CEO's counter-action, whereby she posed as the best mediator between workers and company; this had the effect of breaking their apparent united front and revealing that their historical divisions were their main weakness.

The next section will elaborate on this rationalisation, juxtaposing it with the different interpretations participants had of the Unions' operations and with recent relevant literature concerning the AST Unions.

### **5.5 Participants' views on the trade unions**

Recent studies of the Terni steelworkers' Unions and Unionisation, such as that of Rinaldi (2009, pp. 97-110), published in Cristofori's edited book *Operai senza classe*, show how Unions have been perceived as an institution retained for the sake of custom and necessity, but, at times, when acting in accordance with the company to comply with its needs, they have also been perceived as antagonistic towards the workers. Especially in the 2004-2005 dispute, workers blamed the Unions for the failure of the Magnetico, and even considered them the main obstacle to spontaneous actions. In this light, Rinaldi contends that Terni steelworkers have lost their traditions and work pride, live in a precarious state and have lost faith in the Unions' efficiency in representing them as a group.

As a FIM Unionist, who contributed to Cristofori's volume a chapter on the plant's history (quoted in this thesis as Marcelli 2009), said:

The research I had the honour to take part in showed that the new generations didn't share a strong sense of identity either with politics or with the Unions; however, this is still a very important element here, and it is demonstrated by the high level of unionisation among the workforce. (Riccardo, FIM regional secretary)

In the same edited book, Carniani (2009, pp. 171-187) further elaborates that the Unionists lament that the workforce, especially its younger part, do not partake in Unions' activities and life, which has led to them not being willing or able to understand the complexities of the relationship between Union and company. The Unionists further complain about the workers being too individualist towards their issues as a workforce. This, as Carniani (2009, p. 178) explains, has led the Unions to undergo changes and seek legitimacy by offering 'services' to the workers.

Indeed, both authors highlight the fact that most workers have Union membership because they rely on the Unions for assistance with tax returns and other bureaucratic paperwork, personal protection in the workplace and the resolution of problems with shifts and changing department. These 'services' are based on a mix of concessions by the company and rights gained by workers' institutions over time (Rinaldi 2009, p. 101; Carniani 2009, p. 178). The present research also verifies this trend:

Since the factory has changed, the workers' way of thinking has also changed. We have about 700 members here in Fiom, but only 300, I think, really believe in the Unions, the ones that have a sense of belonging. The others are workers who became members because this is a federation that matters but they don't believe in the same principles I believe in. When I do Union activities, negotiations, mediations, etc... I try to always pursue the way that I consider to be the most right, and also respectful of my ideas and beliefs. They [the members] should be the ones who tell me if I'm doing something wrong, but too many [workers] think about their interests only. The problems are not only the shifts, the work environments, but rather the fact that we are losing our rights! But

there aren't many who are interested in this, and only a few come to work... who have seen the news, read the newspapers. (Stefano, 38, AST, FIOM coordinator)

Older interlocutors found that the loss of Unions' legitimacy was due to the fact that most Unionists did not share the same working experiences as those who they represented (see also section 6):

The Union lost credibility when lots of unionists became full-time representatives, like sort of professionals, without working at the plant. If someone is a unionist and also works, he feels and sees the problems. I did it while working: it is one thing for you to spend every day at the plant, breathe those smells, hear those noises, but it is another thing to go there for just 10 minutes and people tell you their problems. (Luciano, 58, former Unionist and AST worker)

Legitimacy was indeed gained through offering services, but Cristofori et al. (2009) do not analyse in depth the ability not only to provide protection in the workplace, but also (as most of the workers interviewed were hired through the intercession of the Unions) to provide a job – an ability that could possibly excuse, or conceal, their inefficiency.

The Unions are just outside the factory. The reps, if you ever need them, are at the bar outside the gates. There you can find them. You have a factory with a loss of 100euros million euros per year, for six years in a row. What do they think it would keep it running? And they didn't do anything about this. The only battles the Unions have done concerned the canteen, or what kind of snack the workers should have in their lunchbox. But nobody gets rid of the membership because the Unions are like a company. If workers don't have the membership and have a problem with the employer, or they are suspended, there is no reintegration; they are given redundancy and that's it: you are not hired again. If you don't have the membership, they don't lift a finger, because they are a hiring agency, a job centre. (Chiara, 34, AST).

On the one hand, this generates a sort of compliance with the factory's unwritten rule (see video, min. 34:27) that undermines the political stance of the Union and generates disbelief and de-Unionisation.

As far as I'm concerned, I had a problem at the department, I asked my Union for help, and they didn't even know who I was, so I just didn't renew my membership; that was 2009. (Fabio, 38, AST)

Nevertheless, during the dispute the local Unionists found fertile ground for self-legitimation since they constituted the only avenue for communication between the workers and the company. In this light, Unions were the object of renewed involvement and the centre of critical discussion:

The Union is the only actor able to create class consciousness, the only one able to make people take to the street with a big rally, the only one which has the potential to do so – but it doesn't want to. (Enrico, 37, AST)

Indeed, the general strike provides an instructive example of the trade unions' leading role in authoring the protest and managing the workers' front. This showed most of the aspects that characterised the relationship between the Unions and the workforce (especially in the days that followed), such as the ability to organise a demonstration that would bring the community together. This also fits Turner's (1995, p. 54) claim that demonstrations are both a vehicle for the experience of relationships of social inequality and a compelling force that pushes many participants to reflect on and discuss their relationships with one another, to define, and sometimes to challenge, hierarchies and arrangements of power (Davis 1986, p. 106).

In this light, workers were often critical of the Unions' strategies. Indeed, blame was apportioned from all sides: from those who saw no real effort on the part of the Unions to win the struggle and who advocated the occupation of the factory; from those who claimed that they "didn't see" the Unionists among the workers when they were most needed; and from those (see Chapter 4.5.1) who, by contrast, either thought that they had to start with a more moderate negotiation or believed the strike itself to be anachronistic.

Right from the declaration of the industrial plan they should have started creating a dialogue, beginning with a more moderate struggle and then a stronger one. We started from the end, with barricades. [...] Moreover, when Morselli came to the pickets, they [the Unions] had a talk with her, only they had to talk to her, not the poor lad with a wife, children and mortgage, who asked: ‘Are you shutting down the plant?’ and she said, ‘Of course not!’ ... what else did she have to say?! If this had happened in the 70s she wouldn’t have showed up, otherwise she wouldn’t have got out of there! (Fabio, 38, AST)

To fight the multinationals the Unions should file a lawsuit. If there is a contract that is not respected by a business partner, the multinational calls their lawyers, and so should the Unions. A full-frontal assault, that’s what they should do, but they haven’t done it for 20 years. Striking makes no sense anymore. [...] If a multinational doesn’t respect the contract it signed with the workers, the Unions simply have to take legal action. (Marco, 40, contractor’s worker)

On the other hand, veteran Unionists often stressed, both in public and during the assemblies, the difficulties of dealing with such a long period of labour unrest. However, a fruitful insight came from a neophyte FIOM-RSU, Paolo, who had been elected just a month before the dispute:

For some major decisions the directive came from above and were carried out [by the local Unionists] then the RSU were left to take some minor decision, the chain of command was superseded. We, as ASPASIEL, have no influence at all, we represented the white-collars, we had a minor role in the meetings, and were seen as the privileged ones, those who risked less. (Paolo, 42, ASPASIEL former employee)

This highlights the distance between local and national Union delegates. Stefano stressed the fact that he spent himself so much because his behaviour “had to be an example”. Indeed, the local Unionists, especially the coordinators and shop-floor stewards, were those who were closest to the workforce, unlike regional and national secretaries.

The local ones did really commit during the dispute, always between the hammer and the anvil, and I have to really thank some of them. They exposed themselves at the very front.<sup>103</sup> Regarding national representatives I have something different to say, because they knew things way in advance, way before the shop-floor stewards, and maintained a

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<sup>103</sup> In the original Italian: “metterci la faccia”.

sort of mystery around the negotiations by saying things like ‘We’ll see, let’s wait to know what happens if we do this, etc...’ I felt like they wanted to misguide us. (Alessandro, 34, AST)

Their experience and points of view reflected precisely what can be described as ‘Union consciousness’ (Durrenberger 2002; 2012), that is, the political awareness of Unions among Union members. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of Unions, Durrenberger (2002, pp. 95-101) shows how representatives of workers in US hospitals thought that the Union was irrelevant to their level of activism. Union consciousness seemed instead to be more related to features of the structure of work, the realities of power and organisation and, perhaps, histories of recent events. There is a disjuncture between thought and reality: on the one hand, Union members want their dues in return for paying for services, rather than seeking broader structural changes to benefit labour movement as whole; on the other hand, shop-floor stewards agree that organising everyone in their industry would help them obtain better contracts, but they have to live with reality. Durrenberger concludes that everyday realities are more powerful in determining patterns of thought than vice versa.

This proves to be especially true in the context of a strike, where the shop-floor stewards’ commitment is challenged by everyday reality, the Union members’ demands and the hierarchical structure of power that shapes Unionists’ ‘consciousness’ and praxis. Building on this, and to better frame the interviewees’ comments on the dispute and the Unions at large, the next section will analyse the dispute through the experience of a committed shop-floor steward.

## 5.6 Being a shop-floor steward during the strike

One August morning, I was in Piazza della Repubblica, the small central square by the town hall, at the gazebo the RSU had set up to inform citizens about the dispute. As passers-by crossed the square, from time to time, they would stop under the marquee, mainly to take shelter from the scorching sun. Still, the Unionists sitting behind the tables piled with stacks of flyers promptly would explain what was going on at the steelworks and ask the attendees to go on a petition website to support the workers' cause.

I had been there for a couple of hours, recording a conversation between three interlocutors – Mauro (27, AST) and Giovanni (45, AST), both Union members, and Luca (36, AST) a shop-floor steward. In response to my question about what could help their unrest and solve the dispute, they stressed the importance of intervention from the Italian state. They all agreed that returning to a government-owned company was unlikely, but strongly advocated for the state to purchase some AST stocks, a 'golden share' that would enable state control over the multinational's reduction in employment – something that had never happened for the AST steelworks. Luca said:

It is the only way to safeguard our jobs [...] If you lose industry, you become like a third-world nation. You know, beneath the industrialised world, there's the third world, if they want us to become the third world of Europe, why don't they just tell us?!

He continued by highlighting Italy's political weakness within the European Parliament, ruled by the European Central Bank and the interests of economically stronger states. At that moment, a bald, tanned man in his late 70s, freshly shaved, with a spotless white shirt and expensive Wayfarer sunglasses, interrupted the conversation. "Do you work at the steel factory?" he asked all of us. He did not wait for the almost obvious answer and said: "I worked there for 40 years, as head of services..." After this brief introduction, Marcello

– that was his name – started to voice his complaints about the way the present industrial conflict was being carried out.

When we were on strike we used to storm the offices and drag those white-collars down to join us in the fight, it was the ‘Hot Autumn’, you know?!

The other three workers joked that this was somehow connected to my interview, so I turned to him and asked him to explain to me his point of view. Instead, Marcello told me of his work story, starting from when his father retired early because of tuberculosis and he had to take his place at the age of 17; he told me how he worked his way up from unskilled workman to head of a technical department – not an uncommon career progression in the biographies of retired employees. “I didn’t like spending time cooking sausages,<sup>104</sup> I took a high school diploma, and became a white-collar.<sup>105</sup> I had a career,” he said proudly. When he spotted my voice-recorder, he stopped and continued only when I ensured him that I would guarantee his anonymity; the others confirmed that I was “just a student”, and “not a journalist”. However, he wanted to start afresh with a new ‘officially’ recorded interview, and began again:

Today I don’t see any real involvement of the workers and ‘employees’<sup>106</sup> in the fight. Now everything is too peaceful, there is no real effort from the institutional side, nor from the trade unionists. These are people who don’t know the factory; when they privatised the factory and sold it together with Taranto [when part of Ilva; see Chapter 2.4], we contracted Taranto’s debt, but we were making 100 billion lire of profit. The government sold the company off to Krupp and the Italian entrepreneurs, but Agarini (see Chapter 2.4), the last one, sold it as he liked [to ThyssenKrupp]. And these are problems which still have consequences today, that everybody should know about, especially the Unionists. Today they’re not taking the struggle seriously enough<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> Workers used to cook and consume meals in the factory, especially grilled meat (which Marcello refers to). On cooking and sharing the meal as indicative of workers’ sociality, of class-building practice and, for some interlocutors, of slackness and shirking in the workplace, see Portelli (1991). The practice, as witnessed by many interviewees, is no longer in use in AST, and is formally opposed by company policy.

<sup>105</sup> The historical partition between white- and blue-collar workers was abolished in the 1970s when the national steel contract created a unified career ladder for both categories (Portelli 1991, p. 91).

<sup>106</sup> That is, white-collar workers.

<sup>107</sup> Marcello used the term “leggerezza” (lightness). In the original Italian: “C’è troppa leggerezza nella lotta”.

In his opinion, the privatisation was the beginning of all the problems, which linked back to the conversation I was having with the workers before his arrival. I wanted to continue along those lines, but he started to complain about the online signing system, how impersonal and useless it was, and how the strike was more inclusive in his days:

We had more closed ranks, we were more united, and we were able to stop the whole national economy!

He praised the times when the whole town lived and functioned around the factory, as compared to the contemporary loss of the link between the community and the steelworkers, as well as their inability to strike. However, the focal point of the discourse was about something else, and the climax was reached when Marcello claimed that once most of the trade unionists fought for their own rights because they were also workers and maintained this dual role for their entire working life. In his opinion, at present, shop-floor stewards had become full-time Union delegates and obtained the post “by lineage”, as he phrased it, after having worked only a few days as rank-and-files. “[...] and then they become delegates and don’t do shit, right?” he concluded, addressing the small audience which was listening to our conversation. “No, it isn’t!” Luca answered sharply. I could see that he felt personally offended by Marcello’s comment, but he did his best not to heat the conversation up and sat placidly in his chair. Stressing his commitment both as a worker and a trade unionist, he said,

There are still trade unionists who also work. I worked all night, had pretty much no rest and came here as a shop-floor steward to hand out flyers.

At that point we were joined by another ‘worker-turned-employee’, a friend of Marcello, who retired in the late 1990s. Marcello seized the moment to avoid a confrontation with Luca and introduced me to his friend, asking him to tell me stories of the strikes of the 1960s. The man laughed knowingly as he recalled the past, and we moved just outside the gazebo. I started to interview him and, as if he had listened to my conversation with

Marcello, he repeated almost the exact same things, stressing the inability of the Unions to carry out effective industrial action. While I was talking to my new interlocutor, behind me the discussion between Marcello and Luca went on for several minutes. I could hear Luca repeating several times that he did not care how his representatives became full-time unionists, as long as they did their job well.

After Marcello left, I asked Luca to help me understand his point of view.

Today the old methods don't work anymore, because we work for a multinational company, there is no longer the idea of belonging to a class; the world is changing, and we Unionists are using methods and actions that are 100 years old! Are they really useful?! [...] It's a double-edged sword: going on strike means not delivering the products and services to the clients who pay for them... but then you lose them [...]. To scare off the white-collars is useless; we need them on our side [...]. The actions we do, such as occupying the motorway, serve the purpose of reaching national TV coverage, to make people aware that there is a problem in Terni: when there are a lot of people that know this... when it is not only AST, but also Taranto, and ALCOA,<sup>108</sup> the state has to intervene.

Luca was one of my main informants (see Chapter 2.2), and through his point of view, as a shop-floor steward with formal trade union training, I could make better sense of the Unions' action. In his descriptions, the Unions began the struggle without knowing how it would end, especially in the first stage. For instance, FIOM voiced the idea of occupying the factory, but in the internal assembly there was always someone who did not want to do it, fearing police intervention. I attended most of the assemblies and actions with him, trying to gain his insights whenever possible, and he was very knowledgeable about strategies of unrest, predicting and explaining to me the RSUs' moves. However, he constantly swung between what he really thought about the Unions' action – his

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<sup>108</sup> ALCOA is a branch of Alcoa Inc., the largest US aluminium maker, employing 1000 workers in its Sardinian factory in 2017 but still in an ongoing dispute against its closure, which was announced in 2012. See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-alcoa-italy-idUSBRE88C0XM20120913> (accessed: 16 May 2017).

personal impression about the dispute – and what I felt he ‘had to say’ as a shop-floor steward reporting the official version of Fiom, especially when audio-recorded.

Luca was hired in 1999 when he was 21 years old; he had attended a university in Rome, which he left a year later before going on to do a few temporary jobs in the tertiary sector. He followed his soon-to-retire father’s footsteps and, following an initial period of training and a few years in another department (after its restructuring and downsizing), he moved to a stable job in one of the cold lines, where he worked in a ‘Quarta Squadra’ rotation – which gave him a relatively high salary, something he did not consider bargaining for the redundancy package. He had recently got married and had no children.

He obtained his job through the Union’s intercession; consequently, as he explained: “You become a member of the Union that helps you be hired.” He considered himself lucky to share the political view of the Union he had to join. Luca spent almost eight years as a Union member before becoming involved in its activism; when the shop-floor steward in his department left his position, he started to become more and more involved in trade unionism; he presented his candidacy and was elected in the last election of 2014. During the strike, he also commented that his Union was the only one that embodied the real sentiment, honesty and pride of the workers’ struggle; as he told me, this was something that was confirmed to him during the strike. In this respect, he judged other Union reps, who were leaning towards a fast resolution that implied layoffs without compensation, very negatively. When a Fim rep told him that it would be a victory if they could reach an agreement with half the job cuts without compensation, because they would thereby save all the others, he responded, “If they fire one guy, it’s like they’re firing me” (echoing the popular workers’ motto: “An injury to one is an injury to all”).

During one of our first chats, however, he admitted that when he was first hired he was a “duro e puro” (strong and tough, out-and-out), as he defined himself, but that now he had

“grown a thicker skin” and was keen on compromise as the only weapon to reach an agreement. This was not a particularly common trait among non-reformist union reps like him:

After 14 years of factory work, Unionism and political militancy, I grew hair on my chest: 14 years ago I would have felt disgusted when Di Maio [Vice President of the Chamber of Deputies in the Italian Parliament since 2013, member of M5S] came to speak in favour of AST, today I tell you that this is normal, I don't like this either, but as Mao Tse-tung said: 'I don't care about what colour the cat is, as long as there are no mice.' I don't care if the PD, Forza Italia, the Five Star Movement or Rifondazione [RC] solve the problem. I care about the problem being solved. But apart from the dispute, I'm changing my point of view [...]. It is true that you can have an idea of a communist society, but it is anachronistic to look at society through the lens with which you looked at the society of the 60s. In '45 Fascism fell, in '89 Communism fell. Today there is nothing! Is it convenient to keep going with nothing, or to look for something different? I don't know. I know, though, that I was born as a communist, and I don't know if I will die like one... Anyway, I'm not saying like a 'non-communist', but very likely as someone who's not part of today's Communist parties, or even today's so-called left-wing ones.

He was extremely committed and spent an average of 16-18 hours at the pickets – he once told me jokingly that if he had been paid for all the hours he spent at the pickets, he would have been rich. But the more the days passed, the more his sense of commitment became a growing preoccupation, since he was not receiving any salary and was the only one with a permanent job in the family.

A month after the agreement, when he was less busy, and the situation had calmed down, I asked him to record an interview to sum up all the events, to have something on tape to go back to when writing up the data. He agreed and told me that in his opinion, the “escalation” of the Unions' actions were carried out with the right timing, and he praised the choice not to begin with the work stoppage straight after the first confrontations with the company, even though, as RSU, they already knew this would happen. In the interview, he claimed to have always been in accord with his Union's decisions and

agreed that what they had obtained was the maximum. He stated that, given the lack of commitment from the institutional side, the local and national political parties, and the stubborn position of the CEO, other choices and other actions carried out by the RSU would not have resulted in anything more, or anything different. Nevertheless, he admitted that there were “passages” that he did not understand, especially the assembly before the re-modulation. In that occasion the Unions leads had allowed the workers a few days to think about the re-modulation and make a decision, but then the Unions had decided to go ahead and re-modulate without consulting the workers. He thought that the decision was right but that the method with which it was carried out was wrong: the people should have been brought on the Unions’ side and it should have been explained that re-modulation was the only viable option for a swift resolution.

The night when the strike plan was undemocratically changed by the RSU, I was with Luca at the pickets. We spent most of the night there, and I saw him talking with the workers. He tried to reason with some of them, but others accused the RSU of not having respected the democratic decision taken by the audience during the November assembly; the conversation became very heated. I did not intervene in the discussion as the situation was quite intense, but when Luca offered to give me a lift home in his car, he said he had “lost” two members who had told him they did not intend to renew their membership. One was a long-term friend, and he thought that their friendship might also be at stake. He was very depressed and told me that he did not agree with the decision to re-modulate the strike, a decision, he confessed, which came directly from the national representatives, who saw no point in further negotiations, and which was imposed on the local RSU. Although he did not agree with it and did not want to sign it, he was somehow forced into it.

When I first met him, Luca was politically committed and enjoyed his role as Unionist, and to an extent he liked his job, but the dispute changed his view on the company, the Unions, politics and the logic of their interrelationship. On the positive side, the strike allowed him to meet many people he did not know, who helped him understand the problems of their departments: it was a good occasion to improve his skills as an RSU and acquire a general view of the recurring problems inside the plant.

On the negative side, he was very disappointed by politics, both at national and local levels. This was consistent with his oft-repeated claim: “You cannot do a political struggle during a dispute; the two things are different.” In fact, a few days after the general strike, while we were having coffee in a bar in the town centre, a friend of his whom I saw sometimes at the Centro Sociale greeted him and straightaway started to complain about the fact that some RC representatives and Centro Sociale militants wanted to speak on the stage of the general strike to confront Camusso on Article 18, but the local CGIL representatives did not let them. Luca stubbornly defended the trade union and told him that they needed the help of everybody.

When I was about to leave, the dispute had been closed for three months. We went out to three different pubs in Terni and Luca had dinner in all three, showing an attitude to consumption common to the ‘aristocracy of the working class’, something I noticed on other occasions among the steelworkers. That night he opened up: despite having many friends amongst his workmates, he told me he felt much more comfortable around engineers and white-collar heads of the department. Months before, he had spoken positively about how political “identities” are flattened out on the shop floor. I could see this when we were at MISE and he met one of his workmates, a UGL member who raised his hand in a sort of fascist salute; Luca laughed and responded with the communist salute, telling me how common this was on the shop floor. He justified his friend by saying that

he was a good guy born into a left-wing family, but who did not have much formal education; as a result, he had not asked himself the right questions to deepen his understanding of politics and ideology, and ultimately questioned his family's political tradition and became right-wing.

By contrast, when at the pub, he framed his detachment from the rank-and-file in terms of class awareness, which he partly blamed for the failure of the workers' mobilisation:

Working-class consciousness is no more, ignorance and individuality have replaced it. I don't talk about women, hunting and football, I'm reading a book on physics, and some make fun of me in the canteen, as if I wanted to prove something.

He also told me about his dislike for RC (for which he was a militant), whose extremist political stance at both local and national levels made it impossible to intervene effectively in the dispute, something he saw instead accomplished by PD, even though he did not like the local leadership. But most importantly, he saw the same 'extremist' position in the Union, which had made a number of mistakes and should have been more open to the compromise; their position brought the negotiation to a standstill – which was resolved through the undemocratic decision to cease the work stoppage.

It was really like trying to correct a mistake with another mistake, go 'all-in' like in a poker game... let's see how it goes.

Before I left fieldwork, Luca told me that he had not renewed his membership of RC; I asked him why he did not leave the Union too, and he replied that it would have meant losing a safety net in the workplace and all the advantages of being a member. Besides, his wife is employed in a temporary contract in the administration at his Union and his membership could also guarantee her job. If the management had raised the redundancy package to something more than 60,000euros, such as 100,000euros, he would have taken it and left AST.

The Unions' hegemonic leadership generated resistance from their representatives, as it did from members who refused to comply with the way they were carrying out negotiations. Such members capitalised on the possibilities to expand the workers' struggle to the wider citizenship through grassroots movements such as SCU and went on creating group workers to limit the Unions power such as the CWO (already mentioned in Chapter 4.5.2). These not unionised 'spontaneous' movements will be the object of analysis of the next section.

## **5.7 Spontaneous movements**

### **5.7.1 SCU (Steelworkers and Citizens United)**

SCU was founded by two AST workers, Giulio (39) and Andrea (36). Giulio, in disagreement with the Unions' way of operating, cancelled his FIOM membership during the dispute. His idea was to make citizens participate in the dispute and "to bring the struggle from the pickets to the town". Andrea, an RC militant, had joined him and in this spirit, they had organised an initial extemporaneous assembly at the town hall in October, including a committee of workers, citizens and shopkeepers, to talk about the dispute and to create a movement of political struggle independent of the Unions. Enrico was a strong supporter of SCU and described the first meeting as:

"[...] aimed at expanding the struggle with the workers at the pickets on one side and the people in the town on the other. We thought about something like Occupy, with tents in the square, moments of sharing and an open assembly where the citizens could speak. This was done to create consciousness and common paths, firstly about the dispute, and then to make the citizens talk about the problems that concern the whole citizenship and labourers: problems concerning work or like the problems due to the pollution from the incinerators. This created an arena for discussion and debate that in this town has been missing for years. We brought politics into the discussion, but not party-politics. (Enrico, 37, AST)

Enrico, the two founders and other workers involved had common political leanings linked to RC, as Giulio said:

I did burn my FIOM Union membership, but anyway I'm part of that [left-wing] political faction, and I won't abandon the communist imprinting, which relies on assemblies and votes. (Giulio, 39, AST)

Franco, another SCU militant, further commented:

Besides our political views we are trying to invite, citizens, shopkeepers, etcetera to create solidarity, we need solidarity and we want the citizens to be united ... beyond the flags ... we all have a political idea, but we put it aside [...]. The AST dispute could be a beacon for a wider project of grass-root activism. (Franco, 45, AST)

The 30 or so people involved were AST workers, contract workers, professionals, young workers in temporary contracts employed in the tertiary sector wanting to discuss problems related to Article 18, a representative of high school students (engaged in a protest at the art high school which was seeking to close the building to due poor architectural conditions and to relocate all the students to another institute with no facilities and equipment for art practice), and other Centro Sociale, RC and left-wing militants.

In October I attended the second assembly that SCU organised, held at the town hall. I joined the group of some 35 people outside the building, and together we went upstairs to the main room, which was used as town council's seat and had been occupied by the steelworkers for almost a month. We headed for the room but a council employee stopped us on our way in, and explained to us that even though the political activities had been interrupted, the bureaucratic practices concerning the citizens had to continue. She explained that the occupying workers were also leaving and that we could not use the main room (Sala Conciliare) for our assembly. She therefore escorted us to a smaller room opposite the main one, with similar circular benches and a kind of small arena in the

middle. The situation seemed surreal: opposite our room, a wedding was being celebrated; we could hear the person officiating the ceremony, and the applause to cheer the newly-married couple interrupted the first round of talks – while the two workers explained the intentions of SCU and the progress of the negotiations in the dispute. After they had talked, the floor was open to discussions of new ideas, coming mainly from left-wing militants; some proposed setting up tents in the middle of the main square, which soon proved unfeasible for bureaucratic reasons. What appeared most significant was the lack of that political openness advocated in the first assemblies. What I could perceive instead was a growing will to develop the struggle and broaden the participation – though without any practical and viable proposition – and a firm rejection of the trade unions’ strategies, which were deemed incapable of radicalising the struggle as they were entrenched in an excessively institutionalised mediating position. However, the focus was on trying to intervene somehow in the dispute and help the workers.

The most interesting speech was by a public-sector employee, a member of the USB<sup>109</sup> trade union, who asked what kind of mandate the SCU had from the workers in order to actually sit at the ‘negotiating table’ and influence the joint trade unions in their decision. She also asked if they had, like the Unions, constituted themselves as an association with a legal back-up. Giulio replied that they had no mandate, and the discussion was diverted from what they actually could do to what they were entitled to do. Among speeches proposing pacific revolution, the discussion continued, and the debate was quite lively and fruitful – attracting comments from the workers who were in the corridor between the two rooms, waiting for the wedding celebration to end and go back to their

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<sup>109</sup> The USB (Unione Sindacale di Base) is a union born in 2010 from a merger between different base and autonomous unions. The USB also has a regular national structure, with some full-time staff and around 250,000 members. It is especially active in the public sector, with a wide white-collar constituency and membership; more recently it has joined industrial struggles, such as that of Ilva-Taranto and Terni. It has also recently joined activists in struggles for the right to housing (through the tenants’ union ASIA USB) and for migrants’ rights.

‘occupation’. The USB representative’s question highlighted the impossibility of having a real impact on the Unions’ decisions. Even though this was not the primary aim of SCU, as the day went on, the assembly at the town hall revealed that this was an important point on their agenda.

However, the committee, especially Giulio and Andrea, was very active and pragmatic. After gathering the main concerns of the workers, they met with the president of a charitable private organisation (linked to a bank in town and mainly concerned with funding scientific research, art exhibitions and public health, and supporting local schools with equipment and books), who promised to help the steelworkers by donating food and financial aid.

They also met the director of another major bank in town where many workers had an account, to ask for a freeze of their mortgage instalments, which were due in the coming weeks, until the dispute was resolved. The director seemed welcoming and asserted that since there was no general rule, every case would be treated individually, but he was willing to help the steelworkers and speed up the bureaucratic processes.

The committee sent out a bulletin through a mailing list, to keep all the participants up to date. Despite its positive tone and mentions about making progress, Andrea told me he felt out of place when meeting the director of the bank in that historic central building adorned with old paintings:

[...] there wasn’t a good atmosphere, and we felt treated a bit like beggars [...]. They told us that they had already thought about freezing all the mortgages and let us go. (Andrea, 36, AST)

At the other assemblies I attended, there were fewer and fewer participants. At the last one, in December, held in a youth centre not far from the town hall, there was only Giulio, another AST worker, one RC militant, the USB representative and a few high school

students. The workers explained the agreement that had been reached to the students and proposed to help them organise an event in solidarity with the ongoing school occupation. It seemed that the SCU experience had reached an end without stimulating the critical mass which the participants had wished for at the beginning. As Franco pointed out:

The SCU was born with an honest and bipartisan spirit, but then it has been contaminated by an old Left-wing rhetoric by the usual unemployed of the local politics who manipulated to their own ends. (Franco, 45, AST)

In the last communication that I received via email in late December, Giulio wrote about the rejection of the agreement signed between the company and trade unions and the need to continue the struggle. For this, he invited the SCU members to attend an assembly to be held a few days later by CWO in front of the Serra picket, to talk about the situation of the contract workers after the agreement.

At the CWO assembly I did not meet Giulio, but Andrea was there, and told me that “everything was stranded”: after further negotiations, the mortgage-freezing operation seemed a certainty, and they issued an ‘official’ statement saying that those workers holding accounts at the major bank could have their instalments suspended. However, when the workers went to the bank to regulate their mortgage and financial position, they were told that unless there was a clause in the original mortgage contract that allowed them to skip one instalment, there was nothing that the bank could do. They would have issued another statement to clarify the matter, but those in charge of doing it (the RC and left-wing militants) were too busy with the high school occupation at the time.

### **5.7.2 CWO (Contractors’ Workers Organised)**

In December I was contacted via Facebook by Cristian, a contractor’s worker I met while filming at the pickets, who invited me to assist and film, if I was interested, the first

assembly of a new apolitical/non-syndical organisation created by a colleague of his, whose aim was to gather all the contractors' workers to create an 'association' of all those who felt excluded from the agreement.

Greca, Riccardo and myself went to the parking lot in front of the Serra picket, where the assembly was about to be held. As soon as we arrived, the worker who had contacted us introduced me to Marco, the mind behind the CWO and the main author of the gathering. He told me that they had circulated flyers and spoken with colleagues in the department, but we had to wait a little longer before starting. The organisers had wisely chosen to hold the assembly there at 2:30pm, so that the workers doing the first shift (6am-2pm) would exit the gates and pick up their cars, see the group of people – of whom there were about 40 at that moment – and join them. Among them, besides SCU members, there were also RC militants, two or three AST workers. One of these was Moreno, who expressed a high regard for the contractors and especially the ILSERV workers' efforts to organise themselves:

The ILSERV workers are the ones that also during the Magnetico were the most radical in the struggle and have always distinguished themselves. This time too... until they were abandoned. Because we began together, and we had to finish together, but they've been abandoned. (Moreno, 44, AST)

While the other members of the film crew were setting up the equipment, I began talking to Marco to gain a better insight of what he had in mind. After a few minutes, a local journalist interrupted us and rather arrogantly pointed out that there were not many people. Then he asked Marco what the assembly was all about, although he seemed not to have any interest in understanding his reasons; he was, instead, very adamant in asking what Union he was part of, but Marco refused to answer and only stated that he had been a Union member but had left the previous month. The journalist told him that it would take him about five phone calls to find out. Firm in his position, Marco told him to go on

and make those calls then and went on and explained that he had called RSU and sent a flyer to the mayor's office, but the former were not interested and the mayor had not responded, although the workers who were interested would come – we just needed to wait a little longer. After another five minutes of conversation with the journalist he seemed annoyed by him, cut it short, asked me if we were ready to film and announced the beginning of the assembly.

Marco took a megaphone out of the boot of his car, and started by thanking everyone for being there, while people gathered around him in a semicircle. He did not seem intimidated by the crowd and began explaining the reasons of the assembly. The agreement signed between the Unions and the company made no mention of the 20% reduction for the contractors' tenders sought by AST; the only mention of the contractors' workers' agreement was Article 9 of the CCNL (Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro' dei Metalmeccanici, National Metalworkers' Contract), which Marco said was "copied and pasted in the agreement". It was literally reported word by word, and this was the only clause concerning the contracted companies and labourers – which states that contracted companies and their employees are subject to the same contractual norms and health and safety regulations as the main company, which has to ensure that these rules are respected.

The organisers of the assembly felt that the trade unions had failed to protect the contract workers, and since the last "strategic retreat", as Marco phrased it, the Unions had proved themselves unworthy of the workers' trust. Although he did not ask the participants to abandon their Union memberships if they had them, he did ask them to stop seeking "protection" from trade unionists. In this light, Marco said that CWO was not proposing itself as a substitute for the RSU and the Unions in general inside the factory but was seeking instead to unite all the "minorities" (from those employed in the smallest up to

the biggest contracted company inside the steel plant) under one organisation, stressing the difference between them and the AST workers. For Marco they should not “become like a Union”; rather, the CWO should “control”, or “supervise” the Unions (I will return to this problematic point below). Moreover, Marco added that if they went on strike or organised a rally as single entities, as workers belonging to single companies, they would not have any chances. However, if they did so as CWO, he claimed: “we [would] have another weight, we are 1200 people; we can count more”.

After his long speech, corroborated by other contractors’ workers who spoke after him, the reception of the audience was genuinely appreciative of Marco’s effort, and apart from some polemical comments (that the Unions had already decided the contract workers’ fate and that there was nothing they could do), the response was positive. During the first assembly it was stated that CWO was a democratic organisation in which every individual had the same right to speak and make propositions; Marco in particular stressed the importance of differentiating themselves from the “oligarchic model of the Unions”. The CWO had to be more democratic, but with a proper structure, something to be discussed in the next assemblies. Since the contractors’ workers (mainly those employed by ILSERV) work from Monday to Friday, the other three assemblies which I attended between December 2014 and February 2015 were held on Saturdays, always at the parking lot opposite the Serra gate.

The second assembly, which the CWO members called the “constituent” assembly, was attended by only about 20 people. Marco was always the first to open up the discussion and explained that the organisation needed distinct roles, which could be changed through periodic elections, for instance every year, but if some complained about those in charge, an election could be called earlier to remove them from the position. On this occasion, only an RC representative and Andrea were present.

In contrast to SCU, CWO had quite a rigid structure from the beginning: Marco thought about the roles to be assigned and suggested an election system by a show of hands on the spot if the attendees agreed. All the participants were Marco's colleagues; they elected him as President, and another volunteer as Vice-president. Marco compared CWO to the first Zapatistas, who went from a small group to a large structure of militants and warriors that was able to launch a revolution, prompting applause from the small audience; then he moved on to read aloud the statute he had written some days before, which he would later post on the CWO Facebook page. Marco explained that CWO was born to gather and coordinate all the contractors' workers so as to give voice to a "professional minority" in TK-AST. CWO did not seek to substitute for the trade unions, but it had to work as "a monitoring body" that the rules agreed between workers and company were respected; if there was something wrong, they would raise the matter with the Unions. Cristian asked him why there were no shop-floor stewards at the assembly; Marco looked at me and told him to ask me because, as an external observer, I could be more impartial. I claimed that, to me, it was quite obvious, and Marco finished my sentence: "they simply don't care!"

We were soon to find out that this was not entirely true: about two weeks later, when Marco and other CWO members were handing out flyers at the Serra gate to inform workers of the next CWO assembly, a FIOM rep charged up to the militants and exhorted them to leave, asking what kind of permission they had "to express their ideas about the AST dispute", as Marco phrased it.

I was not present on this occasion, but CWO spoke about it when we met the following Saturday, and it was the main object of discussion of the third assembly. Marco was very surprised, probably sarcastically, that a member of the trade unions – supposedly on the workers' side – was trying to deny them the freedom to express their opinions, an inalienable right, the stronghold of workers' struggle against capitalist logics.

In the third assembly there were only contract workers (mainly ILSERV). Cristian was elected cashier and a young worker was put in charge of printing the propaganda material; he was the only one involved in handing out flyers outside the gates. The organisation was soon defining itself as something between a neighbourhood watch and a working men's club, but, most importantly, the militants were not sure of CWO's real aim, and Marco felt the need to post in writing on CWO's own Facebook page:

Considering that one of our greatest faults was the inability to clarify the reason why we emerged, and considering that it is also our fault if others haven't understood that we don't want to take the Unions' place nor adopt the same modus operandi as them, we declare the following: First of all, this is not a syndical acronym, CWO is an independent organisation, without affiliation to any party, Unions or faith, therefore we do not wish to represent the rights of any worker or group of workers. [...] Our aim is to raise awareness among our members, regardless of their Union affiliation, so that they will require clarity and honest intentions from those who claim to be bastions of labour. We want to make sure that the policymakers apply their regulations word by word, rejecting any form of corruption or nepotism. We cannot and, more importantly, we do not intend to take the place of those who see themselves as managing workers' power, those who call all the shots in terms of workers' movements. As CWO, our dream is to recognise the end of the workers' need to have a representative that looks after their rights. [...] As long as the need for protection stands, the will to delegate is going to increase, creating a sense of indifference mixed with shallowness, worthy of the cruellest oligarchies. That is why we disseminate information and awareness, because a conscious world does not delegate the management of its own ambitions. We don't go beyond the sense of representation, we want to offer cultural and social independence!<sup>110</sup>

The last assembly I attended was held a month later, at the end of February: there were only 10 workers, Moreno and myself. Moreno, who was part of the 'Movimento Spontaneo Operaio' during the Magnetico and who had experience in propaganda for autonomous movements, warned Marco that handing out flyers had to be reported to the police and that the flyers themselves had to include the word 'self-printed' in order to be

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<sup>110</sup> CWO Facebook page (accessed: 29 January 2015).

legal. Furthermore, since the others were complaining about the cold weather, he advised Marco to stop holding the assembly in the parking lot and hold the next one with an event, such as a dinner, to finance the organisation. The proposition was well-received, and Marco commented that this could gain some sort of solidarity. But the real problem, as it also emerged in the other assemblies, was that outside the now closed circle of militants, people still did not understand what CWO was, and genuinely thought that it wanted to replace the Unions.

Marco wanted to stress the difference between CWO and the Union he came from but fell into the trap of organising CWO as a Union, with similar hierarchies, rules and roles.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has evaluated the historical division of Union federations in relation to strategies of action in defence of their members – a division that became important in the rationalisation of the various Union leaderships’ decision-making processes against the apparent unity at the local level.

The chapter then showed how Unions’ organisational capacity depends on the federations’ ability to rely on associational power. This rests on the Unions’ historically central role in the steel industry at the national level, as well as at the Terni steel plant. The core of this kind of ‘trade union power’ is kinship ties and shared cultural values, political orientations and ideology, which seem to reinforce or create an awareness of being part of an organisation fighting for workers’ rights. The unrest made more visible and enabled the research subject to both exalt and question such ties and patterns. But, most importantly the unrest helped to highlighted how the Unions implicitly and explicitly exerted ‘workplace bargaining power’, that is, their control over hiring, firing

and contract formalisation. As perceived by some of the informants quoted in this chapter this sort of power to a certain extent became during the dispute a way of the union leaderships through which implicitly forcing assent of their members to the decisions.

‘Trade union power’ has been evaluated through the dichotomy between local and national representatives, to assess how the vertical structure of the Unions acted on the decision-making process leaving local Unionists with little room for manoeuvre, especially shop-floor stewards. Through the story of Luca, the chapter has analysed these figures’ consciousness as workers’ representatives and shown how they engage in activism. The strike changed Luca’s political views and his commitment as a steward, forced him to follow guidelines he did not agree with, endangered his relations with friends and workmates, and made him question the role of his Union. However, he did not leave the Union, as he still sought to benefit from its protection and to secure an (albeit temporary) job for his wife.

The chapter has also shown how, during the strike, a critique of ‘trade union power’ generated spontaneous movements. SCU established itself by looking for allies beyond the factory walls, while trying to expand their labour struggle in defence of their job to other social actors who were only partially affected. In doing so, it mirrored patterns of inclusion characteristic of social Unionism (Willis 2001; Collins 2012), whereby Unions seek to operate together with the community and to involve community organisations in their fights. Nevertheless, unlike social Unionism, SCU was a response not to a post-neoliberal fall in trade union membership, but to the Unions’ power, which was legitimised by its many followers. However, it was too disorganised and could not speak for workers in official settings. Furthermore, it failed to move away from the shop-floor relation and everyday experience, and thus failed to see the situation from the perspective

of others, which is one of the problems with implementing social Unionism (Mollona 2009c, p. 660).

This was also the issue encountered by Marco when he structured CWO vertically, like a Union organisation, which confused its members about the real aim of the contractors' activist group. Marco's experience and activism in the Union ranks had narrowed his ability so that he ended up creating an organisation with entrenched power relations and centralised decision-making – like the one he wanted to fight, but without offering the same protection.

To conclude, the AST trade unions – although blamed for their inability to lead the protest, which was limited by their chain of command and hierarchical structure – were the main instrument used by the workers to protest in order to guarantee themselves protection beyond the spatial and temporal dimensions of the labour unrest.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusions

### 6.1 “‘Working class’ is a beautiful word”

The last night I spent at the Prisciano gate, while the company and Unions were signing the agreement at MISE, the few workers remaining at the last stronghold were cooking sausages on a barbecue, waiting for news from Rome. When Franco announced that the agreement was signed, the faces of the few people left struggling in that cold night showed signs of defeat. However, some seemed somehow relieved; the most common comment was: “We tried!” Pats on the shoulder, hugs and comments on the insults to Morselli (that some of them had written on the factory walls) were signs that everything was over.

After that moment, I asked my participants what would happen next, and most replied by referring to the first part of the Magnetico in 2004, when the ‘real’ dispute began as soon as the parties signed the agreement. The interviewees thought that the company would try to take advantage of the eased situation by letting some months pass to pursue its agenda, which meant laying off more people and halving the production.

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels (1993 [1845], p. 226) describes the evolution of reactions to capital exploitation, from sabotage to trade unionism, and the use of strikes as a form of struggle. Asserting that the history of Unions is a long series of defeats of working men, interrupted by a few isolated victories, and that strikes end disastrously for the workers, largely because manufacturers are obliged to avoid all useless reduction in their own interests, Engels (1993 [1845], p. 227) asks:

Why, then, do the workers strike in such cases, when the uselessness of such measures is so evident? Simply because they must protest against every reduction, even if it is dictated by necessity [of market competition between employers].

The words that Engels wrote almost 170 years ago resonated in my head as I observed and participated in the unfolding of the most explicit example of workers' 'force' wielded against employers and its ability to stop capital and temporarily shut down an entire town. Elaborating on questions such as that of Engels on the usefulness of the strike the research moved towards an understanding of whether, and how, the working class becomes visible during the strike. Furthermore, whether during this process it undergoes a transformation from 'class-in-itself' to 'class-for-itself', as described by Marx, and whether or this transformation takes place.

In this light, a crucial issue was to frame what the participants meant by class consciousness, their awareness of being part of an exploited social class. What the ethnographic data show is that workers' consciousness varies according to age, personal background and location in the production process. However, one generalisation that seems safe to argue is that for many informants during the struggle, class consciousness had a twofold interpretation: it was both something that they could see recreated at the moment of their grievance and something from the past generated at a precise moment in time, the decade between the 1960s and 1970s, which was directly proportional to the conquest of work rights, now irremediably undermined.

'Working class' is a beautiful word, but we have got back to when we had the 'Statuto dei Lavoratori'<sup>111</sup>: everything we have today is the result of the struggle of those who were here before us [...]. There has been a generational change, and class awareness is not for everybody [...]. The thing that could change this trend would be to lose the battles. I know it doesn't sound good but when you're on your ass, you are going to change something! (Stefano, 38, AST, FIOM coordinator)

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<sup>111</sup> Workers' statute: the name given to Law No. 300 of 20 May 1970, containing "rules on the protection of the freedom and dignity of workers and of trade union freedom and union activity in the workplace, and rules on the public employment service".

As Narotzky (2011, 2014) suggests, workers' present-day claims, strategies and practices of unrest are framed and enacted by revisiting memories of past struggle, selecting from past successes and failures and reconfiguring them to define projects of the future. These memories and future outlooks draw on past industrial conflicts, often narrated *a posteriori* as a force-creating political involvement (Massey and Wainwright 1985, p. 166) and political change – even if they were in fact carried out with scant political vision, mainly against job insecurity and wage instability (on this point, see Beynon 1973, pp. 153-184). This is because, during periods of strong working-class activism, strikes can become landmarks around which memories of the past are articulated and remembered as a climax that gave the workers a great sense of power (Debouzy 1990, p. 62). This kind of working-class collective memory should be understood as a social phenomenon which, produced and stimulated from the complex web of relationships (Halbwachs 1992) between individual workers, is essential to guarantee the integrity and survival of the group over time (Assman and Czaplicka 1995). It is transmitted and reproduced over generations, through education, commemorative and embodied practices, repetitions and rituals (Connerton 1989), influencing the local process through which the mutual understanding of a particular shared past allows people to build their own identities (Pine et al. 2004). But, most importantly, workers' institutions create continuity between struggles so that they appear in a linear time of progress, by suppressing contradictions and conflicts which make up this consciousness. In so doing, they build or impose an entire labour mythology (Debouzy 1990, pp. 64-66).

The fearless blue-collar workers whom Cesare (66, retired steelworker) described as an “extinct tribe”, capable of coercing involvement and toppling a government, are immanent to a narration of the past which transmits working-class culture to the next generations as an essential stronghold against labour exploitation. Over time, this has

become an almost ‘tangible’ token of progress and change – as tangible and symbolic as the monumental hydraulic press in front of the station. However, this narrative produces internal contradictions. For instance, when recalling the last dispute experienced in 2004-5, workers stressed that the generation of elders was the real leader of the struggle, since they knew what it meant to strike, gave advice on closing ranks (see video, min. 20:08) and drew comparisons with past struggles:

In the 1970s there was much more participation in the class struggle [...]. Today there aren't the old ones, at the Unions it was frighteningly clear [...]. The company sent official messages, while the Unions sent messages through WhatsApp, as if they had something to hide. This is not the way to carry out the struggle. (Fabio, 38, AST)

These are workers without class. The awareness of belonging to a class makes you defend that class, when you don't have it you don't fight, and assume that everything must be given to you. The possibility of buying things in instalments has made you believe that you belong to the same class as those who can afford them without instalments. (Marco, 40, contract worker)

On the other hand, these memories were also taken as the starting point from which the present workforce framed their commitment to the struggle:

I don't know what else we have to demonstrate to them [the elders]: we have seized the CEO for hours! I don't think here, anybody has ever done something like this. (Augusto, 32, AST)

The renewed sense of unity of the workforce-on-strike could draw on and select from the past, to imagine a broader battleground, include more participants and overcome the capitalist-determined condition of exploited workers, transforming a traditional economic struggle into a contemporary political one. It produced what Gramsci (2014 [1975]) defines as “historical consciousness”. To reach autonomy in a historical initiative, Gramsci proposes that the new historical consciousness should not reject everything *a priori* but should recognise what is an objective necessity formed in the past, avoiding both the relativism that produces scepticism and the fatalism that justifies naturalist

ideologies. However, the majority of people are not aware of this actuality, determined historically, and considers their way of thinking eternal and immutable (Gramsci 2014 [1975], pp. 1874-1878). The autonomous historical consciousness is constituted in the initiative and conflict in light of change, and in order to assume directive aims (political, cultural, moral) it needs to gain objectivity through a critical detachment from the existing condition (Miegge 2004, pp. 165-169).

As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, the Terni steelworkers are placed precisely at this impasse, in a simultaneous *a posteriori* construction and deconstruction of past and present events. The knowledge and tactics substantiated by the historical hegemonic sedimentation of the workers' community memory impose on the present conflict the pursuit of forms of unrest that are based on the reinterpreted tradition of labour conflict – such as goods stoppage, walkouts and strikes – which need to be inscribed in the contemporary context, as does their awareness of being part of an exploited class.

With this in mind, the next section will examine how the thesis answers the research questions posed in the introduction and its contribution to relevant literature, as well as the possibility of departing into future lines of research.

## **6.2 Answers to research questions, contribution to anthropological literature and future research**

The thesis has shown how workers' struggle, and in particular an industrial action and strike replicate capitalist relations and labour divisions. Within this analysis, this thesis has aimed to answer the questions posed in the introduction by following a theoretical approach that takes class as a dynamic historical process affected by wider economic and political circumstances, shaped by the tradition of struggle and in a dialectic relation with

the capitalist mode of production. In this light, class consciousness has been interpreted as formed by memory, ideology and sense of belonging to a working community and as subject to change in a prolonged period of labour unrest and collective mobilisation.

Consequently, is it possible to think of a unitary working class and unifying class consciousness defined by the local industrial context? On what basis do groups of industrial workers mobilise today? How do they exert their power?

As Chapters 2 and 4, and the ethnographic film, showed, the fragmentation of class is complex and intricate, affected by ideology and unionism, as well as positions in the production process and age. However, labourers inscribed in the traditional division of labour in the secondary sector (white-collar and blue-collar workers) undergo the same exploitation and labour-capital relation. As Chapter 2 and 5 exposed, the way workers fought against the inherited contradiction in the relationship between capital and labour evoked the traditional Terni working-class ‘spirit of rebellion’ and transformation described by Portelli (1991, 2004, 2008; see also Canali 2004). But it also generated the present-day labour struggle, conveyed through populism, where more inclusive words such as ‘dignity’ and ‘justice’ have been introduced into the traditional language of class.

Those interviewees who recognised in the dispute the potential to rebuild class consciousness imputed its dissipation to the Unions, which were able to organise the workers’ protest, foster their demands and “make people take the street”, but proved unable to channel the recently recreated class action into rediscovered class consciousness. Unions, indeed, were always in a liminal position: they were either the workers’ weapon on the battlefield or an enemy to fight against, as well as the gradient through which their members measured self-identification and power relations.

The power through which workers claimed consent was a twofold praxis: on one hand it

determined the creation and transmission of labour unrest and its significance, on the other hand it embodied the challenge to fit new power configurations and power struggles. Consequently, this praxis generated tensions, comparisons and gaps between diverse groups of workers, while adapting their modus operandi to new socioeconomic circumstances.

Thus, how can an ethnographic film help to interpret and represent the construction of working-class identity while at the same time functioning as a valuable data-gathering tool for anthropological research?

In *Towards a Class-struggle Anthropology*, a thorough review of the history of Marxist anthropology, Marcus and Menzies (2007) point the way towards a ‘class-struggle anthropology’, with the ultimate aim of achieving social justice and the elimination of a class-based society. The authors conclude with a call for those anthropologists who have only the tiniest connection to the physical power of the working class to side with workers to organise together against the bourgeoisie:

We cannot shut down a city the way transit workers can. We cannot stop a war the way soldiers, dockworkers, and weapons factory workers can, but even the most marginal, sessional instructors amongst our cohort has a public platform for exerting some small influence on the consciousness of the world working class. (Marcus and Menzies 2007, p. 33)

Although beyond the scope of this project, this is an appealing call for those who study working-class struggle, and an ethnographic film of workers’ unrest can interpret a multifaceted working class through ethnographic methodologies and give a new dimension to anthropological writing. First and foremost, it can constitute a visual analysis whose validity lasts longer than the videos made in a moment of heightened media activism, and so it may serve as a pedagogical tool and archive material for those

interested in workers' movements both inside and outside academia. Furthermore, public screening – such as that organised in Terni for the steelworkers and inhabitants a month before this thesis was completed – can create a public platform, if not for exerting some small influence on the consciousness of working classes, at least for raising critical debate about it.

Finally, this thesis has argued for and, hopefully, demonstrated the need to rethink, in light of the latest mobilisation, recent studies (Cristofori et al. 2009) which portray the Terni steelworker as inscribed in a society where the barycentre is moved towards individualism, in which relatively young workforces are seen as atomised, unaware of past workers' struggles – which won them the rights they benefit from today – and lacking reference to the working class and working-class solidarity of the past. Of course, precarisation and the transformation of socioeconomic dimensions of labour market have had a strong impact on how these workers live and work. However, analysis that seeks to remove them from the 'modern' collective domain of a factory where they work, locating them only in the 'liquid' individualist contemporary society where they live, seems to foster an excessively sharp division, which disappeared when the town came to the defence of its main factory. As Portelli (1985, 1991, 2008) has pointedly demonstrated, these two contexts permeate and influence each other, and they do so in a way, as this thesis argued, that was much more visible during the unrest than in 'normal working conditions', where there is less space for working-class solidarity (see Fantasia 1988).

Future contributions in anthropological and sociological literature may depart from this study in order to analyse what remains of the working-class consciousness re-created during the dispute in 2014 and how this has affected workers' visions of the future of their own movement. Furthermore, the thesis suggests the need to carry out further long-term

research focusing on the deskilling and “re-shuffling” (Arrighi 1990) of the AST workforce; as often happens, and as well documented by Richardson (2010), buyouts may bring in temporary workers to replace the departed ones. Although recent news coverage seems to praise the work of the CEO in restructuring the steelworks and achieving a positive budgetary balance<sup>112</sup> for the first time in eight years, the redundancies have had a significant impact on both the production processes and experiences of labour, production and management. Moreover, important data can be gathered in the long run regarding those who left with capital to invest – as previous research did 10 years after the 1952-1953 layoffs (see Bellini 1966). However, short-term results would be ideal to investigate how people invested their redundancies, the issues they faced, and how not working at the steelworks changed their lives, aspirations and sense of belonging to a steel company town.

The attention to the steel industry in national contexts within the current anthropological literature (Mollona 2009; Narotzky and Goddard 2015, 2017) requires future research to investigate how steelworkers fight to maintain their jobs and what they demand in one of the central industries of the secondary sector. The thesis has hopefully proved to be a contribution to this kind of research, as well as to recent studies of class and labour (Carrier and Kalb 2015; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014) and to the anthropology of enterprise in Italy (Papa 1999; D’Aloisio 2003, 2014).

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<sup>112</sup> See: <http://www.umbriaon.it/bilancio-ast-in-attivo-dallanno-prossimo/>; <http://www.umbriadomani.it/politica-umbria/acciai-speciali-terni-record-per-il-bilancio-2016-chiusura-in-positivo-dopo-8-anni-di-segno-meno-risparmi-su-personale-premi-di-produzione-e-cassa-integrazione-domani-al-mise-116667/>; [http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/impresa-e-territori/2016-02-18/volumi-crescita-terni-063546.shtml?uud=ACCMn3WC&refresh\\_ce=1](http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/impresa-e-territori/2016-02-18/volumi-crescita-terni-063546.shtml?uud=ACCMn3WC&refresh_ce=1) (accessed: December 2016).

## Appendix: Timeline of the TK-AST industrial dispute

- 3 July 2014** Lucia Morselli is appointed CEO.
- 17 July** The industrial plan is presented, with cuts of 100 million euros per year.  
First one-day strike.
- 28 July** The highway is blocked.
- 31 July** The A1 motorway is blocked.  
Occupation of Morselli's office.
- 1 August** Non-stop strike.  
Suspension of mobility.
- 2 August** Strike is suspended.
- 25 August** The factory opens after the summer break.
- 4 September** First meeting at MISE.
- 5 September** Withdrawal of industrial plan (withdrawal of mobility; cut of salary bonuses remains valid; agreement to be reached by 4 October).
- 8 September** Morselli suggests the same industrial plan again and officially declares that she does not want to sell the steelworks.
- 13 September** Meetings at the prefecture: the company confirms industrial plan.
- 19 September** Second meeting at MISE: nothing is accomplished.
- 23 September** Third meeting at MISE: nothing is accomplished.
- 25 September** Fourth meeting at MISE: nothing is accomplished.
- 30 September** Fifth meeting at MISE: opening of new phase of negotiations.
- 1 October** Redundancies are reduced to 290. Offer of the redundancy package is set (80,000€ until 2 December; 50,000€ until 29 December).
- 7 October** Sixth meeting at MISE: interrupted during the afternoon.
- 9 October** New agreement called 'Accordo Quadro' with 537 layoffs, rejected by the parties.  
  
Strike is announced, station is occupied for a day.

Trilateral negotiation between the government, Unions and management is interrupted by Morselli.

- 10 October** Unions proclaim that the strike continues until 13 October.
- 14 October** Protests by the now-dismissed Bosco factory and by Confindustria.
- 15 October** ILSERV does not accept the 20% cut on tenders.
- 16 October** Landini's brief visit to the picket.  
Stoppage of goods coming into AST.
- 17 October** General strike.
- 18 October** The plant resumes its activity.
- 19 October** Minister Boldrini meets the workers in Assisi.
- 22 October** Meeting between company's and workers' representatives, held in the plant. Shifts are reduced due to workers leaving with redundancy package (103 people).  
Non-stop strike, occupation of town hall and prefecture.
- 23 October** CEO Morselli shows up at the pickets.
- 25 October** CGIL rally in Rome.
- 26 October** Meeting with PM Renzi at Leopolda Station.
- 29 October** Eighth meeting at MISE: clash with police in Rome.
- 30 October** 140 people leave with the redundancy package.
- 31 October** Part of highway E45 is blocked. The company does not pay salaries.
- 2 November** Assembly in Viale Brin.
- 3 November** Workers delegation goes to Brussels.
- 6 November** Ninth meeting at MISE.  
Protests against Landini.  
200 employees enter AST to process salary payments.
- 10 November** 10<sup>th</sup> meeting at MISE.

- 11 November** Morselli stops negotiations. The next meeting at MISE is scheduled for 18 November.
- 12 November** The motorway A1 is blocked at Orte. The meeting is rescheduled for 13 November.
- 13 November** 11<sup>th</sup> meeting at MISE.
- 14 November** Assembly at ILSERV: the contracts have expired, and no one knows whether they will be renewed.
- 18 November** 12<sup>th</sup> meeting at MISE.
- 20 November** Assembly prior to strike re-modulation. There are 125 redundancies left.
- 23 November** Strike is re-modulated, following an alternate eight hours of strike/eight hours of work for each department.
- 27/28 November** 13<sup>th</sup> meeting at MISE.
- 165 people leave with the redundancy package.
- Morselli pushes for a quick re-opening.
- The ILSERV contracts are renewed until September 2015.
- 1 December** Goods are being dispatched from the factory.
- 17 December** 80% of the workers vote on the agreement: 1520 out of 1951 vote in favour.

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