

Emergenc(i)es in the fields: Affective composition and counter-camps against the exploitation of migrant farm labour in Italy

The practices I describe in this chapter refer to a heterogeneous and morphing militant network, currently going under the name 'Campagne in Lotta' ('fields of struggle'), of which I have been an active part since the summer of 2012, when it first organised a collective project in the province of Foggia, south-eastern Italy. Yet, deeper, multiple genealogies can be conjured that link its formation to previous experiences of collective organisation and mobilisation, as well as of spontaneous rebellion - some of which I will trace in order better to explore the rationale behind its evolving practice and political significance. Yet, whilst some such events were staged largely or exclusively by migrants, and more specifically by seasonal farm labourers, what I seek to describe here are not, strictly speaking, 'migrants' struggles'. Indeed, I propose to analyse these self-conscious militant practices in terms of *composition*, a process which the network itself actively seeks as one of its aims, alongside and through *self-organisation* and the breaching of the isolation in which seasonal migrant labourers in the agricultural sector are plunged, perhaps more than any other socio-economic subject, in present-day Italy and beyond.

A classic Marxist category, political composition (or re-composition) has been analysed from a number of perspectives, and most particularly within that strand of Marxist thought known as 'workerism', for which it designated the behaviour of the working class 'as a subject autonomous from the dictates of both the labour movement and capital' (Wright 2002: 3). However, here I approach composition from a different, if related, perspective, employing the characterisation that Colectivo Situaciones gave of this notion: for them, composition defines a militant practice that seeks to make 'the elements of a noncapitalist sociability more potent' (2007: 77), developing particular types of *relations* among members of a collective or movement. Following Spinoza, they think of composition as 'relations between bodies'. Composition, they argue, 'does not refer to agreements established at a

discursive level but to the multidimensional flows of affect and desire the relationship puts in motion' (Ibid.). Thus, it refers to the *creation of encounters* that can, in turn, *produce subjects*, where the stress is more on the *process* than on the product. What composition points to, therefore, is an overcoming of divisions, such as those between migrants and citizens, workers and activists, intellectual and manual labourers, but also those between women and men, or between migrants of different origins - with which Campagne in Lotta as a network is confronted over and again in its militant activities.

In order to understand how the network's practices might begin to overcome such disconnections with a compositional aim, it is first of all necessary to point to, and analyse, the specific lines of fracture that traverse its field of action. In particular, reflecting on the experience of the past year, I ask what kinds of spaces/places constitute such field, what kinds of power flows cross them, and then how Campagne in Lotta seeks to contrast them, inserting itself in their cracks and creating novel spaces for sociality and action. Not only are what I am describing here much more than, and different from, 'migrant farm workers' struggles', but in many ways they also exceed the national dimension and its sovereign boundaries. They are situated at the juncture of overlapping geographies and multiple borders. This reflects current dynamics of global dispossession and exploitation (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), but also, and for this very reason, it points to a potentially effective and in many ways innovative set of practices to resist them.

The reflections presented in this chapter, from the more matter-of-fact to the theoretically elaborate, were actively developed in dialogue with several members of the network, as well as with others, during the course of our activities and in ad-hoc interviews. The collective's own practices, in fact, include protracted, continuous and critical reflection and self-reflection, as a constituent component of action, which in some ways makes my contribution, if not redundant, one of enhancement, indeed of composition. If it may contain also traces of diminishment, these are unintended if not in a truly constructive spirit. In any

case, it is a voice among many, driven by a specific personal, intellectual, and existential trajectory, but certainly not a single-handed work of individual authorship. I want to express my deep gratitude to all those who shared their reflections and knowledge (and much more), and I hope to be able to render justice to them, at least partially, in what follows.

Precarity, exception and the camp

The continuously evolving, narrative history and identity of Campagne in Lotta has been developing since the summer of 2012, emerging from collectively authored articles, radio programs, and numerous public presentations of its activities. The 'Who we are' section of its website succinctly summarises it as follows:

A network of Italian and foreign workers, militants, collectives, researchers, fair-trade purchase groups, small producers and others, from different parts of Italy, decided to unite their trajectories of struggle - from the immigrant workers' riots of Rosarno (January 2010) and the subsequent birth of the Assembly of African Workers in Rome; to the 'roundabout strike' in the Caserta and Naples provinces (October 2010); and that of the farm labourers of Masseria Boncuri in Nardò, Lower Salento region (summer 2011). The common aim is that of unhinging the exploitation mechanisms that cross the entire labour market, starting from the agricultural sector. (www.campagneinlotta.org)

As we shall see, the stated aims of the network are arguably, and in some ways necessarily, exceeded by its actual practices.

Yet, to begin with I wish to highlight two of the main events that are identified by network members as founding its collective identity: the so-called 'Rosarno riots' of 2010 and the Nardò strike of 2011, contextualising them in the 'globalised' Italian countryside (Corrado and Colloca 2013). In both instances, outbursts of rage and rebellion were sparked off by seasonal farm workers, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, against the conditions of extreme

exploitation, and of general 'precarity', in which they find themselves as a result of intersecting histories, flows, and dispositifs of power and control. Here, I employ the notion of precarity as developed by a number of critical thinkers, to designate

all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons. But its reference also extends beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations (Neilson and Rossiter 2005, <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-022-from-precarity-to-precariousness-and-back-again-labour-life-and-unstable-networks/>)

The relationship between these different aspects of precarity is particularly important in connection with the network's methodology of action, as it will become apparent. But first of all it is necessary to specify how 'precarity' sketches the contours of the context in which Campagne in Lotta works.

As far as migrant farm labour in many parts of Italy (as elsewhere) is concerned, from north to south, extreme precarity is epitomised first and foremost by the absence of any form of labour guarantees, often regardless of immigrant workers' legal status: especially in the southern regions, characterised by a wider spread of 'informal' and 'illicit' economic activities and by more pronounced and generalised work precarity, in the majority of cases no contracts are granted for agricultural labour, or they are illegal. For migrants, and in some cases for Italians too, cash-in-hand salaries are, on average, less than half the minimum wage, and working hours far exceed those established by the sector employment agreements of each province, that also prescribe systematically violated extra-time pay increases.¹ It is

1 Given the extreme precarity I am describing here, and the irregular nature of much agricultural wage labour, it is extremely hard to provide reliable estimates of the number of

customary, especially in the case of the tomato harvest in the provinces of Foggia and Potenza, for agricultural producers to pay workers on a piece-rate, once again against labour regulations, or to demand free labour, for example in loading trucks with orange crates, as workers testify in relation to the case of Rosarno.

The absence of any contractual form, together with the presence of a large, seasonal and mobile 'reserve army' of potential workers in each agroindustrial area (a situation exacerbated by the economic crisis and the closure of factories in the northern regions), also implies no certainty as to the number of work days one can scrape together during the harvest seasons across most agribusiness areas: in the orange and clementine fields during the winter months, as in the case of Rosarno and the surrounding area, the Plain of Gioia Tauro (Calabria), and further north in the Sibari Plain (Cosenza); or in the tomato and watermelon farms of Nardò, Apulia, during the summer; in the Capitanata Plain, further north in the Apulia Region (Foggia Province), the area which contributes the largest industrial-tomato production in Italy; or the Vulture Region, a few kilometres to the west, in the Basilicata Region (Potenza Province), another industrial-tomato farming district. And, to a slightly less dreary extent, especially in relation to wages and the absence of contracts, the northern, richer Saluzzo area, Cuneo Province (Piedmont) - to name but those places where Campagne in Lotta has established a presence in the last years.

At least as far as the sub-Saharan African workforce goes, it is often the same workers who migrate seasonally between different harvesting areas, although one can also find more occasional labourers. In general, though, once in this circuit it is difficult to escape it, on account of the low pays and the absence of contracts, which make the renewal of permits increasingly arduous.² Further adding to workers' exploitation, many agricultural producers

workers involved. According to INEA (National Institute for Agrarian Economy), in 2010 190.000 non-nationals (a figure which includes migrants from both EU and non-EU countries) were employed in agriculture in Italy (Ibid. 2011)

² Of course, current immigration laws, in Italy as elsewhere, create an especially vulnerable migrant workforce by tying certain kinds of permits to the possession of a work

rely on gangmasters, or *caporali* ('*capi neri*', or black bosses, in migrant workers' parlance), to recruit and control their labour force: another illicit practice in the Italian agricultural sector, gangmastership entails the curtailment of parts of workers' already miserly wages for 'services' such as recruitment, supervision, transport, food and water provision. Cases of physical violence and threats are often reported. In many instances workers complain they did not receive any form of payment for their labour, and were often left with no legal or other recourse.

Furthermore, in the south documented migrants' benefit rights are often usurped by bogus Italian labourers, who may pay for employers to seal contracts in their name so they can have access to unemployment, pension and maternity subsidies in the place of those who actually work in the fields. Across the national territory, when valid contracts are in fact granted, payslips grossly underestimate the number of actual days worked, for employers to avoid tax and insurance payments. This also results in seasonal labourers' inability to claim unemployment benefits, which in agriculture are calculated according to the number of work days recorded in any given year, requiring a minimum of 51.

Predictably, precarity in these conditions extends also to the living and social spheres, as workers with such bleak prospects adapt to sleeping in abandoned and derelict houses, often with no running water or electricity; in self-constructed shacks or tents; or even in the open air if climate allows it. They may be subjected to roundups and raids by police, which force them to relocate and may consign those without valid documents to detention and perhaps deportation, or to arbitrary attacks and robberies by local gangs. Indeed, it was one such episode, the latest in a long series, that in January 2010 sparked the well-known riots in Rosarno - followed by heavy repression against the migrants and by their mass deportation.

contract; by making 'clandestine immigration' into a criminal offence; and more generally through the threat of detention and deportation (cf. De Genova 2002). In Italy, migrants often obviate to the difficulty of obtaining a regular work contract and to their consequent illegalisation by purchasing a fake one from willing employers, which however results impossibly onerous when salaries are as meagre as those received by agricultural labourers.

The following year, after the criminalising logic subtending to the government of poverty, and of the poor's migration (cf. Wacquant 2009) had exercised its full force, a governance apparatus made up not only of State institutions (and more specifically of *Protezione Civile*, the agency in charge of managing emergencies), but also of local administrations and charities, organised a further response to the (largely unchanged) situation of migrant workers, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa. This materialised in the form of a tent-camp, built on the outskirts of Rosarno, in the industrial area adjacent to the Port of Gioia Tauro - one of the largest container ports in Europe, as well as one of the main hubs for the import of Colombian cocaine and for the illegal arms trade managed by the *'ndrangheta* cartels.

The tent camp, of the sort employed to host displaced populations after natural disasters, paradoxically appeared to respond to the endemic precarity of migrant labourers by means of emergency measures that, through time, became themselves more and more permanent, *institutionalising precarity* and thus making manifest its structural nature, and indeed *blurring the distinction between exception and norm* (cf. Agamben 1998, 2005) - though, as we shall see, this conflation exceeds the domain of sovereignty and the law. In the late winter 2012, a second camp replaced the first, which in the meantime had become overcrowded and had consequently spilled into another ghetto, built with scrap materials by those who could not be accommodated in the 'official' tent structures. I shall return to this transition later in the chapter, for at this point in time the network had already established a presence in the informal side of the camp and supported its inhabitants' claims against police, state and local administrations.

Here, I want to point to the way in which the tent camp, and the government-by-emergency that gave birth to it (beginning from an institutionalisation of precarity in its wider, existential sense), had also the effect of fostering *abjection*, epitomised by the piles of garbage accumulating at every corner (a common sight on the streets and country roads of the wider area too). The tale of one of the camp's inhabitants is emblematic in this sense:

describing life conditions in such space, and particularly the food provided by the Evangelical organisation in charge of managing it, he vividly remembered the image of the cook, a man who, he kept repeating, was 'dirty, but really, really...dirty.' And food, it goes without saying, was disgusting, to the point that camp dwellers started making their own. A month after the beginning of the 2012 harvest season, the large, communal tent that served as a canteen and praying space (and that sported the motto *Gesù ti ama* - 'Jesus loves you' - on its side) was finally occupied by those who could not find accommodation in the regular tents.

Stories circulated among its inhabitants regarding the camp's management, who was accused of demanding payments for 'favours' such as the filing of applications for the renewal of documents, or access to other housing structures. Once again, exception ruled. In addition, the presence in the Gioia Tauro Plain of 'illicit' traffics, controlled by the organised mafia-like cartels known as *'ndrangheta* (whose involvement in the management of migration and of migrant farm labour has been partly documented by judicial inquiries, journalistic reports, grey literature and academic accounts), further reveals how a *normal exceptionality* (and the precarity it engenders) here governs not only the lives of migrant workers, but *life in general*. And this goes, to different degrees, for other areas where Campagne in Lotta has been establishing its presence, and especially for the Capitanata Plain, an area of influence of another powerful organisation, *Camorra*.

Here, I employ the notion of exception, in relation to those of precarity and emergency, to denote *symbolic and/as material apparatuses of governance*. Whilst one of the most sophisticated, influential and cited analyses of exception, Giorgio Agamben's, views it exclusively in terms of the sovereign (political-legal) power to suspend, and thereby establish, the norm, it is evident how in this case the 'exception' refers to a much more complex topography of power. As a first point to note, we are clearly witnessing a 'government through illegality' (cf. Foucault 1979; De Genova 2002) where the state and the mafia (together with local administrations, third-sector organisations, and capital) blur not so

much in legal as in *governmental*, and hence also *economic* and *administrative*, terms. It is also, or rather, a matter of capitalist governmentality, a form of non-sovereign rule which brutally controls and exploits flows of - often illegalised - commodities, including labour.

Critics of Agamben have indeed pointed out precisely how states of destitution, dispossession and displacement might be produced and maintained by a variegated set of powers other than the sovereign one (e.g. Butler and Spivak 2007: 10-11), and therefore how sovereignty no longer operates to support or vitalise the state, but rather represents a 'reanimated anachronism' (Butler 2004: 53), a lawless and prerogatory, 'rogue' power, in which governmentality (whose object is the management of populations) represents the condition for its new exercise, that establishes the law as a 'tactic' with an instrumental, rather than a binding value (Ibid.: 62, *passim*). A focus on the political-legal domain alone, and on 'bare life' as the central figure of this conceptual architecture, overlooks one of the core issues pertaining to the spaces I am concerned with here: that of labour, its control and exploitation in spaces that are, at one and the same time, larger and smaller than those delimited by the sovereign boundaries of the nation-state (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Ong 2006). Furthermore, it also writes off the productive side of the exception (cf. Boadzijev, Karakayali and Tsianos 2004; Hardt and Negri 2000).

A proliferation of different *camp-forms* shapes these power-ridden socio-geographical spaces. Yet, once again these are not, or not only places where certain kinds of subjects are deprived of their political prerogatives, included through their exclusion at the level of the symbolic, in Agambenian terms. In all the localities mentioned, several ghetto-like settlements have been developing since the early 1990s, alongside more institutionalised spaces for the segregation, containment and discipline of migrant labour and mobility - such as tent camps, container camps, lodges reserved to migrant workers, but also refugee centres and even immigrant detention centres. Should migrants have the 'privilege' of a contract (and hence of a valid permit), they can access labour camps or lodges with strict regulations

concerning time of occupancy (no staying during the day), payment (which, as in the case of the recently installed container camp in Saluzzo, can be demanded 'also in the form of community service work,' as stated by the municipality deliverance disciplining it) and rights of access (strictly reserved to *migrant* labourers, who cannot invite guests, unless properly authorised, and who in some cases may bring their families and partners, but only if they are able to provide valid marriage certificates).

What appears significant is the *contiguity* between the ghetto and the labour/tent/refugee/detention camp, where the latter often spills and morphs into the former, or vice-versa, in Rosarno as in Palazzo San Gervasio (Potenza), Saluzzo, Borgo Mezzanone (Foggia) but also across distant areas. In 2011, the NATO bombing of Libya and the reaction of Gheddafi's regime forced tens of thousands of sub-Saharan Africans out of the country where they had often lived and worked for years. Most of them landed on Italian shores after hazardous sea journeys, and the Italian government declared a 'Northern Africa Humanitarian Emergency'. Refugee status was denied to most of those displaced migrants, who for two years were left in a suspended state of near-abandonment, in which public money allocated for their maintenance in many cases was dissipated without providing proper accommodation, food, training or guidance of any kind, and only after much protesting a form of short-term humanitarian protection was granted, that would give migrants the right to stay and work. Since 2012, a large number of them ended up in ghettos and camps in Foggia, Rosarno, and Saluzzo, hoping to make ends meet and find some work as farm labourers or prostitutes.

Here, the legal and the illegal are increasingly indistinguishable, in the name and through the logic not so much, or not only, of a sovereign exception as of a (governmental) control of the pace of subjects' mobility, for their quality as potential labour-power that needs to be disciplined and controlled. Camps as ghettos are thus 'decompression chambers' (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), functioning to

contain a reserve army of labour that might become potentially destabilising for the system, as the revolt in Rosarno, the strike in Nardò, and the numerous protests staged by those expelled from Libya testify. Segregation and containment thus characterise this form of labour, located at socio-spatial junctures where structural and street-level racism converge to create vulnerable, deeply fragmented, ethnicised workforces.³

In a sense, the camp-form, whether in its institutional dress or in more 'informal' guises, seems to blur the boundaries between detention and work, where both are concerned with the pacing of mobility and the containment of potentially productive (but also subversive) bodies. Significantly, the shantytown and adjacent container camp, built next to the cattle market in Saluzzo, were named 'Guantanamo' by their inhabitants, brilliantly crystallising the prison-like nature of these spaces (but also suggesting how detention can function as a form of labour control). From human and social refuse to workforce and back again, according to the 'just-in-time' model of labour recruitment and migration regulation (Düvell 2004), migrant labourers' precarity follows specific temporalities and modes of living in abjection, which shape subjectivities and relations.

Within this analytical and ethnographic framework, it is on the attempted subsumption of the intersubjective, affective dimension of life by a form of capitalist accumulation that can be characterised as 'biopolitical', that I want to focus my attention. The ghetto, like the camp and the prison in their different manifestations, delineates a space where intersubjective relations become especially difficult, where affective attachments are rare,

3 In this respect, it is important to underline how ethnicisation, as well as different migration patterns (only partly attributable to dynamics of mobility and labour control), also determine differences in the conditions of workers of different national origins. What I am describing, at least as far as the development of large, more or less institutionalised settlements goes, applies mainly (though not exclusively) to the sub-Saharan African population, as well as to Romani gipsy communities, who however have not engaged, as far as I am aware, in any forms of open, direct protest or struggle - as opposed to, say, non-Roma eastern Europeans, who make up for the majority of agricultural labourers in some areas, and who at least in one case do live in a concentrated ghetto too, in the province of Foggia. These former groups usually undergo heavier forms of racism and segregation, though wages are comparable across the spectrum of migrant workers.

where suspicion and mutual exploitation are often the key to interpersonal exchanges (cf. Wacquant 2001). Perhaps the most evident instantiation of this tendency towards intersubjective anomie (or de-composition) is represented by the so-called Grand Ghetto near Rignano Garganico, Foggia, formerly known as 'New York' by virtue of its 'attractions' - namely, several bars and restaurants that also offer music, drugs, and the sexual services of several dozens prostitutes, mostly from Nigeria. Apart from sex and other reproductive services (such as food and board), living in the Ghetto often means having to pay also for hot water or to charge one's mobile phone. The shacks are often owned and managed by those same people who operate as gangmasters (or by their partners) and who recruit workmanship also according to workers' 'fidelity' to other services they sell. The Ghetto is thus a controlled space, where it is difficult to know who to trust and where many things, services, affects and relations have a price. Yet, of course, counter-tendencies are also identifiable, on which the militant practices of Campagne in Lotta attempt to graft themselves.

Against this background, the revolt in Rosarno and the strike in Nardò appear as two instances of rebellion against extreme forms of precarity that invest subjects in their totality, even and especially in their most intimate spheres. Whilst the riots of Rosarno might be interpreted as pre- or a-political outbursts of rage, by virtue of the absence of any clear agenda or demand, they can be read also as a demand for recognition of common humanity *through the exercise of violence*, which forced the acknowledgement of vulnerability as structuring each and every subject, regardless of their citizenship, skin colour, origin and background. By threatening the inhabitants of Rosarno and attacking their property, African migrants reminded them of their common humanity (understood here in terms of vulnerability), and obtained at least the cessation of physical attacks against them ever since. Judith Butler (2004, ch. 2, *passim*) has defined the unrecognised vulnerability of certain categories of humans in terms of 'precariousness,' which, unlike its cognate term, precarity, designates that fundamental characteristic of bodies as socially constituted, exposed and

attached to others. For Butler, recognising such vulnerability and mourning the injury that may result from it is precisely a step towards 'an insurrection at the level of ontology' (33) that would return 'the Other' to the sign of the human from which it is excluded. Yet, in this case it was not through a 'peaceful' act of mourning performed by public opinion or by civil society, but through acts of rebellion enacted by those Others in response to repeated attacks. However, beyond the plane of violence and the recognition it allowed, the riots gave rise to longer-term political projects, and particularly to the creation of the Africalabria association in Rosarno, that gathered African and Italian members with the aim of overcoming racism, exclusion and exploitation; and of the Assembly of Rosarno's African workers in Rome, following the deportation of hundreds of those more or less directly involved in the revolt, some of whom were hosted by an occupied social centre, CSOA ExSNIA, where their meetings took place for several months, before life trajectories parted their ways.

On the contrary, in Nardò it was because of an explicit labour issue - the demand for a fairer wage - that around 500 migrant workers revolted against gangmasters and landowners (something more immediately recognisable as 'political' action), and started a two-week long strike, the first of its kind in Italy. They obtained a pay rise, significant media visibility, the upgrading of gangmastership to a penal offence by Parliament, and the arrest of several people, whose trial is ongoing. Whilst in Rosarno migrants revolted spontaneously and unsupported, in Nardò the strike took shape within the protected space of Masseria Boncuri, a camp set up by two associations, a local and a national one, for workers to find 'dignified' living conditions, healthcare, legal support and language training regardless of their legal status, and to be informed of their basic labour rights.⁴ Once the strike started, activists also gathered monetary support for workers. In the words of one of the activists involved in this experience,

it was an attempt to create free spaces where self-organisation is possible...an open camp, a *counter-camp* [un 'contro-campo']...where there were sleeping places but anyone could come and pitch their tent and access services even if they didn't live there...whilst nobody ever dreamed of saying that we [activists] initiated the strike - ... I believe would have happened anyways -, the difference was that [in the Masseria] people found a place where they could carry on and build up [the labour protest]...the conditions were created for people to be able to organise.

During the strike, activists from across the country and beyond flocked to Nardò, and from these encounters and meetings the network took shape. The 'counter-camp' model had initially been experimented by one of the associations, *brigata di solidarietà attiva* ('active solidarity brigades') as an alternative to the heavily militarised, right-suspending, exceptional camp spaces set up in the aftermath of the earthquake that shook the area around the city of L'Aquila in 2009. It was then transposed to a context which, though different in some respects, shared some of the characteristics of a post-earthquake state of emergency, as I have argued above. It is this model that would become the main experimenting ground for the network's activities, whereby precarity is exploited for its creative potentials in terms of organisation, seeking

to accept and exploit the flexibility inherent in networked modes of sociality and production...In the exception, the rule becomes indistinguishable from its application, or, to put it another way, each event or action rewrites the grammar of the system. The innovative action is thus not simply a transgression that breaks the rules – a kind of avant-garde contestation of existing institutional arrangements. Rather, it is an action that involves an abrogation of rules, a fundamental recasting of grammatical propositions, and a consequent redefining of future generative possibilities. For all this, it is not a sovereign action (a kind of

4 For an account of the struggle in Nardò, from the perspective of the activists and

creatio ex nihilo that finds its apotheosis in the romantic ideal of the artist as god). Innovative action is necessarily intersubjective action, forged in the complex and unstable relations between brains and bodies. Its model is not the sovereign who decides on the exception but the language or form-of-life that changes through what might be called a non-sovereign decision, at once distributed and diffuse, or, if you like, an exception-from-below (Neilson and Rossiter 2005)

Contro-campi: Anthropological experiments

A bike workshop, a radio, and an Italian language school were the first activities set up by Campagne in Lotta in the Grand Ghetto, in the summer 2012. After a year of meetings, contact-building and field research, an open call for volunteers was circulated through social networks, mailing lists, and blogs to start a project that would build on the experience of Nardò. The strike had by no means brought positive changes alone: as many African migrants complained, it was impossible for them to find work there the following year, when employers preferred to hire eastern Europeans to avoid trouble and circumvent inspections and checks. The strike also created divisions among workers, which resulted in episodes of physical violence, whilst those activists who had been most exposed suffered threats and aggressions from those whose interests they were jeopardising. The confederate trade union (CGIL) that had somehow appropriated the mobilisation and its spokespersons (against the logic of self-organisation that animated the counter-camp) had also ratified an employment agreement in the province of Lecce that, for the first time in decades and after significant struggles for its abolition, reintroduced legitimate piece-work payment in agriculture. Fear of a dangerous overexposure on the part of militants and workers led to the decision to keep a 'low profile' in the Ghetto, which was understood to be a heavily controlled space because of the presence of gangmasters, some of whom were the same as in Nardò. Hence, rather than directly addressing the issue of exploitation, this was tackled sideways by means of activities

migrants involved, see *Brigate di Solidarietà Attiva et al. (2012); Sagnet (2012)*.

that could breach isolation, provide instruments for mutual encounters and understanding, and for self-organisation and emancipation from gangmasters.

Furthermore, according to some of its protagonists, the experience of Masseria Boncuri had also evidenced some limitations concerning the relationships between militants/volunteers and migrant workers, who were then clearly distinguished subjects - with militants in charge of managing the space, whilst at the same time seeking to minimise their intrusiveness. This, in a sense, reinforced their distance from workers, who were identified as the sole legitimate subjects of organisation.

If self-organisation is to be such, you cannot intervene and say 'You don't do it this way'. In that occasion [during the strike] we were perhaps too silent from that point of view, for fear of guiding, of directing, of...putting too much of our own in it, we stepped back too much, so we simply acted as buffers, with the guarantee that nothing would happen to us, because in a fight we would not be attacked, but we risked nonetheless... So then you ask yourself 'why am I doing this? What does this lead to if not to the destruction of the group of people that initially came together?' One must question one's goals. If the goal is that of bringing forward a certain kind of conflict, with precise political claims against labour exploitation, which then lead, for example, to the revision of the law against gangmastership as criminal offence, then the Nardò strike can certainly be considered a success, if you want...a first-timer for sure...but without detracting from the experience, from the point of view of a different kind of militancy from that of parliamentary debate or the relationship with institutions, which has a progressivist and legalistic outlook, what was the result? The result was awful, if you wish, because apart from perhaps a few remaining contacts...no group was created.

I: though the network was born...

Surely...and from the point of view of relationships, this shifted the attention to the issue of labour...and put in relation other groups, with other experiences, perhaps as powerful - if

different, like the Rosarno riots...they are reactions to the same system...and must enter in connection, and [this] created a different path...there is first of all no direct management of anything, of any structure [like it was with the Masseria]...which for us was...double-sided, on the one hand you lived in things all day every day, for three months, but on the other hand, as much as you place yourself in a dimension of egalitarian management, of co-management of spaces, they [workers] will always perceive you as someone who is managing them, or responsible for something...the difference is that the following experiences [with the network] were designed in a different way...a process was set in motion.

Thus, the network represented the evolution of practices first experimented elsewhere, towards a more horizontal and inclusive, *compositional* structure.

Rather unusually for a radical militant project, the activities in the Ghetto were organised within an already existing volunteer camp, run by Catholic missionaries, whose outlook seemed to be far enough from the mere provision of charity relief to be at least partly compatible with the aims of the network, and whose years-long experience on the ground proved crucial as a first introduction into such difficult terrain.⁵ Yet, the aims of their volunteer camp were partly at odds with those of the network, and certainly their languages were different: as stated on the project website, the goal of the camp is 'to offer seasonal migrants the chance of an encounter with young volunteers and Italian institutions for a more positive and constructive vision' through language training and information on services; sensitisation over rights and duties; and active commitment against 'discrimination, abuse, prejudice, exploitation, injustice, enslavement', and 'to allow youth to discover human being's natural diversity in its essence, in an increasingly multicultural society, for an intercultural relationship that respects alterity for mutual growth.'⁶

5 A collective account of this first experience was published in the journal *Gli Asini*: 11, august-september 2012, pp. 96-102.

6 www.iocisto.eu

Indeed, composition within the network has acquired unexpected shapes, being focused not only on establishing horizontal relations with migrant workers, but also with and between local organisations that often have rather different goals and methods. Thus, its first collective project saw volunteers, who often had radical political backgrounds and views, living and working side by side with missionaries, would-be priests, nuns, and scouts. Before being confronted with migrant workers, militants were faced with another kind of alterity, perhaps equally, if not more, distant in terms of experiences and outlooks. Whilst differences were never completely bridged (as indeed they never are within any collective, even where members come from similar political and existential backgrounds) many activists were positively impressed by catholics' curiosity and openness, which brought some of them to join the network and participate in general meetings and subsequent projects. Jokes and banter were the main vehicle for the establishment of relationships, together with the exchange of knowledge. Yet, political criticism by militants against catholics (rather than vice-versa) was often fierce and scathing, and left little to the imagination.

Here as elsewhere, a process of attempted composition, which is about *the creation of subjectivities out of encounters*, clashed with pre-constituted subject positions. Yet, whilst radical militant experience and religious subjectivities may diverge on a number of counts, they nonetheless share an 'internalisation of ideals' (Milanesi 2010: 28, *my translation*), whereby both militant politics and religion are processes of active subjectivation, and indeed it was precisely on this account that coexistence and collaboration had become possible in the first place. Both militants and catholics were engaging in a practice of active, creative, willful commitment, for personal as well as social change. Political battle is fought not only against opposing ideas and different views within one's own side, but also '*in interiore homine*, submitting the subject to a theoretical tension that finds a counterpart only in the shades of religious experience' (Ibid.). In this view, militancy as religion represent a constant, totalising type of commitment, that involve life in its entirety and in all its expressions, comprising the

public and the private dimensions (32). However, it is important to stress the processual, ever-incomplete character of such processes of subjectivation (and indeed of composition itself).

Whilst some of the network's members had a years- or decades-long history of political commitment, many of the volunteers who joined in the network's first and subsequent projects had little or no previous militant experience. But despite this caveat, it is fair to call those experiences (however brief and idiosyncratic) of full immersion into the reality of ghettos and camps, with a transformative purpose, 'militant' - precisely on account of their totalising character, of the fact that they absorbed the energies, desires, affects, time and work of their participants leaving little or no space for anything else, and that they engaged volunteers in creative practices aimed at transforming reality.

Already in 2010, the first year in Nardò, we talked about a 'farm workers' league', which...in our imagination was to be the answer to that kind of phenomenon [the exploitation and marginalization of farm labourers], a farm workers' organisation, foreigners and non-foreigners, precisely because there is a total lack of interest from confederate and grassroots trade unions in this phenomenon, because of forces, concern, political will. Hence, bottom-up self-organisation, but the real thing...After three years, now I see that this thing is beginning to be there, after a very long and thorough work, of a construction that if not day-by-day at least has been of total dedication.

These experiences of course evolved in time. The network's first project was only partly different from the experiment of Masseria Boncuri: whilst it did not directly manage a living space *for* (and to some extent *with*) migrant workers - which in some sense may be seen as a necessary step forward against the risks of establishing hierarchies and barriers, but in another represented an act of withdrawal - it could create only limited spaces for mutual, horizontal encounters. Among these, the 'pirate' radio was perhaps paramount, together with

film nights, a farewell party, and the myriad informal discussions and moments of sociality that were established in the Ghetto on the side of scheduled activities.

Above all, the 'volunteer-camp' model confined militants and catholics in an enclosed and isolated space: a former rehabilitation centre for people with drug addiction issues, turned into a shelter and open workshop space for health-related prevention and the promotion of 'social inclusion'. Some among the militant volunteers jokingly compared it to an asylum-seeker shelter or even a migrant detention centre. Whilst of course the differences are many and clearly evident, a sense of entrapment, institutionalisation and discipline did characterise the experience of living in such space, where life rhythms were paced rather strictly according to bans against smoking and drinking, gender-segregated sleeping spaces, cleaning and cooking shifts, scheduled training and discussion moments, and the time spent in the Ghetto. Rather than a counter-camp, at times it felt like a redoubling of the camp form itself. For many volunteers, the night was often the time when a freer sociality could be enacted, which often meant sacrificing precious sleeping time to chatting, laughing, drinking, getting to know each other.

Equally, in the Ghetto it was also by spending time in bars and restaurants that a sense of *proximity* with its inhabitants was forged, however precarious. Yet, unlike the volunteers' living space, in the Ghetto the radio tent and the space dedicated to the language school did in fact constitute an experiment for a counter-camp, through the establishment of communal, open spaces that should foster horizontal relationships of mutual exchange. However, given the centrality of relationships and proximity in the process of composition, it could be equally argued that *any trust relationship established was in an of itself a counter-camp*, regardless of the physical space where it could take place.

Thus, these experiences made evident the importance of physical presence and closeness in building relationships of trust and mutual understanding. Indeed, many workers remark exactly this aspect when describing the process whereby they progressively

approached militants and learnt to make distinctions between their position and attitude and those of the myriad journalists, unionists, researchers, charities and others that fleetingly transit through ghettos and camps, whose promises they had learnt to dismiss. Of course, the school, as the radio, also represented a privileged moment of encounter, an attempt by militants to understand dynamics of work, to encourage a horizontal type of practice where teachers and students, whites and blacks, workers and militants would work and learn together, and to provide useful tools (such as bicycles and the skills to be able to fix them, or legal advice) for workers to acquire strength vis-à-vis gangmasters and landowners - but also, more generally, better to navigate the hostile and alienating environment of a foreign country where structural racism heavily shapes migrants' everyday experiences.

The whole project, and subsequent ones even more, was in fact a sort of social, anthropological *experiment* - or 'experiencia,' as Colectivo Situaciones (2007) aptly condense in the Spanish word the sense of experimentation with that of experience. Indeed, as several members of Campagne in Lotta would later articulate it, the foundations for the construction of a new 'common language' were laid. Yet, *the possibility of a common language depends on something non-linguistic*, on a process of reciprocal contamination (where, of course, one has to 'choose what to be contaminated by', as someone put it) that operates at the affective, intersubjective, bodily level: 'the affirmation of the experience (as a weave and experiential constellation) that causes the word to be spoken' (Ibid.: 80). 'Composition defines relations between bodies. It does not refer to agreements established at a discursive level but to the multidimensional flows of affect and desire the relationship puts in motion' (77). It is accompanied and enveloped by feelings of '[f]alling in love or friendship' (92, *fn.* 23). Especially in interactions between people with disparate origins, backgrounds, languages, habits, and understandings of the world, of power relations and of possibilities for action - as they were made possible through the presence of the network in migrants' ghettos and camps - trust and understanding, friendship and love, had to be built through *physical proximity and*

presence. Such differences had to be somehow inserted in practices of translation that far exceeded the linguistic level, that did not rely on mediators, and that had the potential of undoing established identities to create an ever-changing, constitutively open collective subject, the creation of a radical strike for political possibility as a relation at the site of incommensurability (Sakai in Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, ch. 8). Butler and Spivak (2007: 62) also describe plural acts and speech in translation as the creation of 'a collectivity that comes to exercise its freedom in a language or a set of languages for which difference and translation are irreducible'. However, what I am pointing to here are *non-linguistic* practices of composition-in-difference, which in some way make those utterances possible.

The main result of the network's first collective project was the aggregation of a collective that, though continuously evolving in its makeup (indeed, composing and decomposing) and with varying degrees of individual participation and militancy, would continue pursuing a common project in the months to come. A general meeting; info and fundraising nights across Italy; the creation of a website and the naming of the network as 'Campagne in Lotta'; and a two-day self-training session followed. Then, alongside Italian militants a small group of African workers had started to gather, although at this stage a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them' was perceivable in the ways militants and workers referred to themselves and to each other, and *silence* often marked the presence of African workers in collective discussions. Common language was still far from articulate. It is only through a second intensive, collective experience that such distinctions and barriers began to become undone.

From the end of December 2012 until mid-March 2013, the network established a presence in Rosarno, in collaboration with local militants and the Africalabria association. This allowed the work of what was now Campagne in Lotta to start on a different footing, as African migrants and local militants met regularly to discuss issues to do with racism and exploitation and had thus created a ground for collective action across national/racial barriers.

Conditions were, to some extent, much harder in the tent-camp for militants to establish a counter-camp, as they lacked the structured logistical support of missionaries and the large number of volunteers that could be recruited during the summer months. But this was counterbalanced by more independence in action and in communal living arrangements. After a general introduction of the network and its aims to the camp dwellers, whose consent was sought, and the distribution of flyers that explained the nature and purpose of our presence, we set up two tents in the shantytown adjacent to the camp, where language classes, discussions, meetings with trade unionists, lawyers and others were organised, as well as film nights and open-mic music sessions. Volunteers were housed by local supporters and could enjoy a much more flexible, self-organised living and work arrangement, and shared leisure time with Africans and locals - which was, again, crucial in terms of group-building and creative action (though, of course, tensions were never missing).

It's about creating relationships, understanding each other's position and doing things together...there's not much need to say 'I am exploited too and therefore let's do things together', it's simply about establishing a relationship between two people, who know each other, know each other's positions and motivations and on that base do things together...this is key, if you share an experience with people or not. I don't want to emphasise human relations too much but that's the thing that stayed with me most since Rosarno, in the moment you establish a relationship if everything is in broad daylight it's easier to accept for both parties...A moment that stuck with me is when we were going to the tent camp in Rosarno, it was a saturday and we should have shown a movie, the weather was shit, it was horrible, hailing, very cold, if it had been for me I would have stayed home. In a situation like that, it would have been easier to stay, also because we were going every day, but I remember that the others were adamant we should go, we had committed to do this, we said we'd do it, so we went to the camp, began to fix the tarpaulin with Africans helping us, and until the hail was so strong it destroyed it we resisted...so it became clear that for us it wasn't like a holiday, an

African safari, as some migrants thought. There is a minimum of sacrifice...and also the fact that we did things together, like setting up the tents...

Another episode was with this 50-year old Tunisian man who lived in the camp, we had a connection also because I had been to Tunisia so we had things to talk about. He was owed benefits by the state, on which he had fantasised: he had already allocated different sums for different investments in his head. When we went to collect the sum he had shaved and dressed up, it was going to be his Big Day, but it turns out the sum he was entitled to was only 70 euros: a phenomenal blow, it was a moment when I began to understand that if they had told me this story...I mean, there was no pity from my part towards him, *it was actual disappointment, I was really upset myself*, but because it was something I was sharing with him in that moment, naturally as when something bad happens to a friend, you are not sad because it happened to you, it happened to him, but you don't say 'poor thing'...when one says 'ah, poor thing' you are saying that if it had happened to me, yes, it would have been bad, but it happened to him...that is, automatically you are saying you don't give a damn...but in that moment it was different...we could get there because...we had shared things in the previous days, we had got to know each other, there was a relationship, but this is not just to say I am happy I lived this nice experience of sharing, but that the way I was positioning myself vis-à-vis this situation was much more participating, 'why don't you do this, why can't you do that, have you thought about this', I mean, we were on it together, trying to understand what could be done, something which in the moment you say 'poor thing' you don't do, there is no such constructive side. And to broaden the issue this is valid in a more tangential sense, that maybe this isn't a situation you yourself are living, but *when you share things with people, facing anger, the desire to change, frustration, in a difficult moment, you face this...you participate in others' anger, and you cooperate and share it, it comes natural for you to make some steps forward*, something that...if you read an article of, say, a newspaper or anything, apart from a thought of injustice, 'what a situation', but it's not something you are sharing with someone, as if you are reading about an accident, four people die, and you say, 'oh my, what a tragedy', but

what you are saying is that if it had happened to me it would be a tragedy, but it happened to them.

Yet, it was one series of events that more than any other marked a significant turning point in terms of composition. After months of silence, in early February the mayor of San Ferdinando (the municipality on which the camp had been built) ordered the enforcement of a removal order that had been issued in December, after the shantytown had been erected. A new camp was ready a few hundred meters down the road to host both tent and shack dwellers, provided they paid 30 euros a month each for the Evangelical association to manage the structure, given that public funding was allegedly insufficient. At this point, resentment against the camp managers, and general frustration for the lack of work and for living conditions had mounted, and relationships between camp dwellers and militants had been strengthening. Thus, the camp's inhabitants had several meetings where they elected six representatives, one for each nationality present, and together with a couple of militants went to meet the mayor and police inspector in charge of the removal and relocation, in two separate occasions. Despite the paternalism and open racism with which they were met (the mayor spent most of the meeting with his eyes shut or his gaze turned), migrants finally obtained not to pay for a place in the tents.

Something I thought many times is that it's not necessary to find a definitive answer to the question what are our objectives, what are we doing, and if you find it, it's not necessarily a good sign...this is a manager-like approach, performance-based...one might need a direction but in a certain context and circumstances you feel you have to do certain things, you have to be there, go, do things that you think are important even if you don't really know what will come out...like in life, you can ask yourself both 'but what do I want to do, when I grow up' but then also understand what makes sense

doing at this time, seeing a direction without knowing where it's leading you, this is why I'm saying it's not necessarily a good sign to try setting concrete goals, that might impoverish what your presence in a place is...the background idea behind the concept of self-organisation is that people should be protagonists of all that concerns them, it's an idea that perhaps acts as a dial orienting all the activities...

In Rosarno, the transition to the new camp for me was important, because what happened is that face to this transfer that was decided behind closed doors between Prefecture, city council and the various camp-managing organisations, without even consulting with the Africans...the fact that then, *de facto* behind their back (because it was Italians that asked for a meeting), perhaps they expected to talk with someone they knew, and instead they find themselves facing six Africans...that was something that in its small way was great, also because it was obtained with a trick, it was actually a cunning move.

It struck me because sometimes, when one looks at things on a more microscopic level, it always looks as if you are facing a superior mind, who already knows everything even before you do it, you have a little sense of impotence, but in a context where you are present, active, integrated, participating, you know the cards on the table, you can make your move...this already struck me, as the fact we put Africans face to face with those that are called 'strong' powers, even if actually they are wretches...this generated a panic situation...something which went well beyond what might be 'diplomatic' difficulties on how to manage the situation...it was something that upset their ideas on how the world spins...and then...the fact that this thing was successful and they didn't have to pay those 30 euros...

Now the question is: is the goal of the network that Africans don't pay those 30 euros? No, but all in all that thing made me say this is a thing worth doing, that I want to carry on doing, that putting in place different strategies you break certain equilibria

and you get results that are very far from your utopia but they are concrete things. As far as I'm concerned I didn't have experience where I could be able to say I had contributed to change, allowing for events to take a certain direction instead of another in such a concrete manner...it doesn't depend on you only, it also depends on the events but it is important, even if you are frustrated for a long time, in the moment when a window opens, something happens, you are there. Also for this reason I'm saying it's important to keep doing things even though at first you don't know what they are...the moment you wrong-foot *them*...tac! You do shift the balance...that one was politics for me, that is you make the move that stuns them...they expected to find someone they knew with whom to chat, among Calabrian men, but you contribute to creating a situation that shakes things up.

After this collective success, one of the network's tents, the counter-camp within the camp, was moved to the new site by workers and activists together, and progressively equipped with cushions, carpets, heaters, posters for the school. It was used for classes, meetings, film screenings, and as a space of general sociability. More camp dwellers started coming to the Africalabria meetings in Rosarno, and by the end of the project a demonstration was organised in town to demand safer roads for (African) cyclists and pedestrians, who in more than one instance had lost their lives to reckless and even intentionally aggressive drivers. Once again, whilst this may appear as a small, even preposterous claim in the face of a situation of extreme precarity, like the meetings with the mayor and the police it was nonetheless another act whereby African migrants established their presence in Rosarno and their 'right to claim rights,' as well as another step towards the constitution of a collective voice underscored by a principle of equality (cf. Butler and Spivak 2007, after Arendt; Isin 2012). Victims were remembered and mourned, songs sung, humanity reclaimed once again. Furthermore, after the riots, and the aftermath of fear and

suspicion they had left behind (artfully manipulated by local media and politicians in more than one occasion, to find scapegoats and avoid protest), a peaceful demonstration of African workers in Rosarno was an authentic breakthrough.

In the following months, those workers who had got closer to the network continued to be in contact with militants, and after another general assembly and a self-training ('autoformazione') held in Foggia, three different projects were set up in Foggia, Saluzzo and Boreano (Potenza) in the summer. Here, the distinction between workers and militants was further collapsed, as some workers who had approached Campagne in Lotta in previous projects decided to join volunteers and actively commit to working with them. They were adamant that the paramount activity should be the spread of information among workers on basic labour rights, so that flyers were designed and distributed across the province of Foggia. A shack was built in the Ghetto to house the radio and provide sleeping space, while volunteers from different countries and continents shared the living space of a church a few kilometres uphill, on the Gargano mount. This experience allowed again a significant leap in compositional terms, as bonds of 'friendship and love' could be consolidated and cemented, knowledge exchanged and practices discussed and agreed on, on a continuous basis.

The most significant results of such projects were the numerous meetings held between militants and workers in Saluzzo, Boreano and across the Foggia province and its many ghettos, which, together with the information campaign, in Foggia led to the creation of a self-organised workers' committee and to the stepping up of demands on the workers' part, for institutional commitment to end the gross and blatant exploitation to which they are subjected. In Saluzzo, after a meeting workers and militants (who themselves lived in a tent in the shantytown) reclaimed water provision for Guantanamo, autonomously connecting a pipe from a fountain a few hundred metres away. Once this was cut off by the municipality a few days later, they enacted a spontaneous protest, occupying the streets and erecting barricades, that ended with a meeting in the mayor's office, and the promise that water supply

would be restored the following day. Once again, these acts represented affirmations of rights and moments of aggregation, and they are just another step in a process of ongoing affective composition, of creative translation in difference, the momentary establishments of counterpowers that have to be continually reasserted.

In this chapter, I have traced the emergence and evolution of a militant network by highlighting the processes of composition that underscored them, in relation to the fields of power in whose cracks they seek to insert themselves and to the claims and forms of representation such composition gave rise to. Emergence designates 'the introduction of incommensurability into social life' (Dave 2012: 652), where incommensurability in turn represents *affective potential* (Ibid.: 651). Affective composition as a matter of bodily proximity acts within already named and represented, structured yet always morphing subjectivities, to then lead to claims to rights and hence to the creation of new, if precarious, collective subjectivities. Discussing queer politics in India, Dave rightly points out that the constitutive ambivalence that characterises the emergence of a new social form - as enhancing existence, action, and expression, but also as closure through its commensuration to existing social forms - is in fact not a matter of categorical opposition, for 'closure is the condition of possibility for social invention and the emergence of new potential' (652). In the cases I discussed above, migrants' and/as militants' claims can all be seen as pointing to already existing social forms. Their demand to be considered as part of the human community, their pressing of authorities to augment checks and enforce laws, their desire for 'normal' housing or the need to access primary resources such as water can all be related to a desire to belong in something that is perceived to exclude them. And yet, by inserting themselves cunningly in those realms from which they are banned, migrants/militants already

transform such space and recalibrate the power struggles that shape it. The affective, as an eminently relational dimension, is crucial in this process of ontological insurrection as the potential immanent in the field of struggle.

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