Social Representations of Protest and Police after the Genoa G8 Summit: A Qualitative Analysis of Activist Accounts of Events[1]

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The Genoa G8 Summit of 2001 was marred by violence and conflicts between police and activists. Afterwards, these different groups constructed clashing discourses about the events. In turn, these discourses sustained different types of social representations about the nature of the conflict. Earlier analyses of hegemonic social representations examining the Italian press suggested that non-violent activists were subject to processes of delegitimisation and that they were identified with black bloc activists (Cristante, 2003; Juris, 2005; Zamperini & Botticini, 2006). Conversely, in this study we analyze activists' accounts of the protest and of the violent police repression. We examine a collection of published texts (N= 223) posted on a 'cyber-wall' online as part of a collaborative project

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from three Italian media outlets: Il Manifesto, Radio Popolare, Carta. These texts represent a form of 'counter-narrative' produced by a stigmatized group to contest the dominant discourse, creating a tripartite of relations between non-violent activists, police and the black bloc. The analysis of these texts shows that activists represent the protest as a battle between two groups. Activists describe police as coercive, incompetent, and as the enemy. While the black bloc was perceived to have damaged the protest, they were not depicted as the enemy. Cognitive, emotive and behavioural factors associated with these representations are highlighted and discussed, together with the implications for future intergroup relations between activists and the police.

The 2001 Genoa summit has become globally synonymous with violence and conflict. Ethnographic accounts have referred to events surrounding the international meeting as the 'battle of Genoa' (e.g., Juris, 2005). These reports describe violent confrontations between police and activists, and speak of thousands of people injured and of an equal number of activists arrested and kept under illegal custody (cf. della Porta & Reiter, 2006). In preparation for the events, Italian police collected information about activists and their strategies from a variety of sources. Although this information more often than not was unreliable, it underpinned the police's strategies to control the protest (della Porta & Retier, 2006) which started with tactics of persuasion centered on the modification of public spaces. Public space near the summit was subject to a clear demarcation between areas accessible to demonstration participants ('yellow' areas) and inaccessible areas ('red' areas). While this demarcation of the spaces was purportedly aimed at protecting the international delegates and safeguarding the national image of Italy in front of the rest of the nations, it also revealed the subordination of the freedom of protest to the issue of public security and a tendency on the part of the Italian authorities to associate activists with thugs and criminals who are to be kept at a distance from the most sensitive areas (cf. Mitchell, 2003). On the basis of this premise it is perhaps not surprising that police-activist encounters resulted in brutal repression during the days of the summit.

Numerous variables impact on the quality and consequences of police-activist encounters. Literature on the topic emphasizes factors such as how police frame the identity of the movement (e.g., see Gorringe & Rosie, 2008), the degree of legitimacy conferred on the movement (della

Porta & Reiter, 2006), and police expectations about confrontations with activists. More immediate variables have also been emphasized such as the local and contextual history of inter-group relations (Gorringe & Rosie, 2008) and how the police are able to foment processes of differentiation within the identity of the collective (Drury, Reicher & Stott, 2003; Reicher, Stott, Cronin & Adang, 2004), singling out the fringes more prone to violence as opposed to treating the crowd as a uniform mass of 'criminals'.

In this paper we focus on the outcomes of repression on peaceful demonstrators' social representations. Research has shown that one of the possible outcomes of police repression is radicalization of the movement, where the most peaceful demonstrators are discouraged from taking part in collective action, leaving room for more violence-oriented activists who actively seek confrontation with the police (della Porta & Fillieule, 2004; Goldstein, 1983). It is particularly on those activists who describe themselves as peaceful demonstrators that we concentrate our attention. Specifically, we investigate how activists that have been involved in clashes during the summit frame the protest and their view of the police. We do so by exploring a vast array of activist accounts collected by three left-wing Italian media sources: the Manifesto (a newspaper), Radio Popolare (a radio station) and Carta (a magazine).

THE BATTLE OF GENOA

Genoa G8 had been a theatre of furious disorder and incredible violence. Some numbers may give the reader an idea of the size of the conflict. In just a few days, 253 people were arrested, 606 injured and one killed. Police fired approximately 6,200 tear gas grenades and 20 live bullets. The clashes also resulted in 50 billion lire of damage (Parliamentary Commission, 2001). Since then, media outlets from around the world have described Genoa G8 in military terms (e.g., 'battle of Genoa' or 'urban war in Genoa'; see Zamperini & Menegatto, 2009).

Prior to the protest the urban fabric of Genoa was heavily modified in preparation for withstanding a possible siege. The city was divided in two areas. The area immediately near the buildings where the summit took place was called the 'red zone', and here access was forbidden to the activists and allowed only to authorized personnel (i.e., journalists and other staff). The 'yellow zone', instead, indicated areas where protesters were free to circulate. These two areas

were delimited through solid iron gratings about five metres tall and accessible only through gates kept under high surveillance. In many respects, this preparation was comparable to those usually adopted as precautionary measures against terrorist or military attacks. It gave the city the appearance of an armoured fortress, alluding to an imminent battle. Together with the constant emphasis on themes of violence, terrorism and public order by the mass media, these preparations contributed to raising tensions around the summit and had an impact on police attitudes towards the demonstrators (Cristante, 2003; della Porta & Reiter, 2006).

Indeed, given the global context in which the protest occurred, Genoa has been surrounded by a great deal of media attention. Accounts of the events started appearing in national and international newspapers about two months before the summit, accompanied the unfolding of the events during the summit and persisted long after the protests. These accounts set the context for the 'battle of Genoa'. Furthermore, they provided a repertoire of frames for the future interpretation of the events.

It is useful to divide the plethora of media attention into three phases. In the first phase, before the summit, preparations in the city came under considerable focus in Italian newspapers and television (Cristante, 2003). In this phase, the strategies that were adopted for managing public order and security at the event were made public and described in great detail. In the second phase, during the summit, media provided continuous coverage of the disorder that broke out in the streets of the city. The death of Carlo Giuliani became particularly salient. On July 20th in Piazza Alimonda, a policeman fired two shots killing the twenty-three year old man. The image of his death spread around the world and became a point of contention between those who advocated even more restrictive measures against the protesters and those who argued for the illegitimacy of the police actions (Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004). Finally, following the summit, news sources continued to debate about the G8 protests and its consequences. In this phase, a struggle for legitimacy emerged. On the one side, police attempted to justify repression in the name of public security. On the other, activists claimed their rights to protest and to be recognized as victims of brutal and unjust violence by the police (cf. Juris, 2005).

Despite ten years of major trials of both the police force and the activists, which have helped to shed light on the events, the summit remains an open wound in Italian society, which is still in a crisis of bringing together an ideal of democracy and civil order. Differences between

alternative accounts of the event still seem irreconcilable. Following Social Representations Theory, which highlights the function of social communication in shaping intergroup behaviour (Moscovici, 1976) and the role of different types of collective communication that are involved in the process of formation of social representations (Moliner, 2001), we analyze activists' representations of the conflict in order to investigate how they frame the events and the intergroup relations after the violence of the G8 summit. This investigation takes into account existing frames, frames utilized by opposing and third parties, and those developed over the course of the events, echoing features of the dynamic model of analyzing contentious political events (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2004).

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS APPROACH AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Moscovici (1973) defines social representations (SR) as systems of ideas, values and practices that both provide order and facilitate communication. Order 'will enable individuals to orient themselves in and master their material social world' while the communication element provides a community 'with a code for naming and classifying the various aspects of their world and their individual and world history' (Sotirakopoulou & Breakwell, 1992, p. 5). Thus, social representations provide a position or perspective from which an individual or a group can observe, interpret and cope with new events and unexpected situations (see also Wagner et al., 1999).

One of the most relevant characteristics of SRs concerns the fact that they are constituted by socially shared knowledge (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011). This is to be understood in two senses. First, 'socially shared' means that SRs pertain to knowledge of objects which are experienced at a collective level. SRs concern phenomena that touch upon the whole community of agents. Second, SRs emerge through implicit and explicit processes of communications that rely on pre-existing bodies of knowledge (which are also in turn culturally and collectively produced). SRs, therefore, do not reside within a single mind, but are products of the joint interactions of individuals (Wagner et al., 1999).

An important implication then is that individuals' behaviour is conditioned by the knowledge of what we think others think (cf. Mead, 1934). When faced with new situations,

individuals' actions are not only driven by their own intimate beliefs, but also by perceived expectations and perceptions of others' beliefs (i.e. meta-knowledge; Elcheroth et al., 2011). Individuals' expectations about others' reactions, or even the mere awareness that others have access to that knowledge, may suggest the appropriate situational norms and may shape individuals' actions so to increase the likelihood of certain events (echoing the notion of self-fulfilling prophecies; Jussim, 1986; Snyder, 1984). Meta-knowledge is thus a fundamental way through which individuals frame their understanding of the events.

But who contributes to shaping individuals' *Weltanschauung*? Not all knowledge is equally valid and individuals are not passive recipients of social information. Individuals' orientation towards particular representations is mediated by how they categorize themselves in relation to the groups which produce or are objects of the representations (Breakwell, 1993; see also Staerklé, Clémence & Spini, 2011; Reicher, Doise & Elcheroth, 2011). Social representations are therefore subject to group dynamics and organized around categories, which determine exposure to, acceptance of and usage of specific SRs (Breakwell, 1993; Elcheroth et al., 2011).

The connection between social representations and social categories is twofold. On the one side, social representations are rooted in the individuals' group membership. Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and its extension Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) posit that individuals' identity depends in part on their memberships in groups. Since these memberships involve self-definition, and since individuals strive for positive identity, people are motivated to favour their own group, thus biasing social comparisons (see also Hogg & Abrams, 1988). It follows that individuals' appraisal of social representations depends on the categories to which they belong. Social knowledge that is produced, shared and enacted by categories that contribute to self-definition is more easily assimilated to the self (Breakwell, 1993).

On the other side, social categories are themselves social objects and as such are subject to the same principles that govern the representations of other social objects. The way in which social categories are represented, and the content of the attributes associated with them, affects intergroup relations. Thus, SRs are at the same time modeled on social categories and furnish content to social categories. However, if SIT is principally concerned with understanding intra-

and inter-group dynamics, and does so through the aid of a specific set of cognitive and social/motivational factors (e.g., the need for positive self-esteem and certainty; Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg, 2000), social representations theory investigates the content of the discourse produced within and across groups and examines how these discourses constrain, liberate and shape intra- and inter-group interactions (Breakwell, 1993).

This strict conceptual connection between categories and social representations highlights the importance of considering the role of social dynamics in meaning-making processes. Arguably, one of the most important features of intergroup relations concerns the issue of legitimacy. At an intergroup level, legitimacy is defined as the perception that a group's position, status or actions are appropriate and just (Tyler, 2006). Perception of legitimacy facilitates influence and obedience, and groups viewed as legitimate can exercise power more easily (Tyler, 2006; see also French & Raven, 1959).

The socio-psychological literature shows that many factors contribute to determining the perception of group legitimacy (for a review see Tyler, 2006). In particular, legitimacy is associated with the notions of procedural justice, namely with the perception that the way in which things are enacted is fair (cf. also Tyler & Smith, 1998). Furthermore, group attributes, such as competence and warmth, also play a great role in determining perceived legitimacy (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002).

With regard to the issue of policing during the protest, the perceived degree of legitimacy of the movement contributes to determining the type of reactions put into place during the policing of the protest. Della Porta and Reiter (2006) note that some of the characteristics that surround the Global Justice Movement of which the Genoa G8 was a part (i.e., absence of clear leadership, strong focus on ideological claims, age, novelty of the movement, and presence of many different groups with incongruent strategies) interacted with the police's pre-existing representations of 'bad demonstrators', producing a negative image of the movement. In the view of the police, the movement lacked the necessary legitimacy to ensure dialogue and to maintain protest within the bounds of political action perceived as legitimate.

After the protest, the representation of 'bad demonstrators' was perpetuated by a media which continued depicting vandalism and violence by activists with particular emphasis on the presence of the black bloc (Zamperini & Botticini, 2006). However, images about brutal

repression of the police also started becoming available, contributing to the idea of the 'Battle of Genoa' (Juris, 2005). Confrontation with police, therefore, was displaced from the street to the discursive level. As noted by Elcheroth et al. (2011, p. 748): 'where physical violence adds to the means by which social and political realities are transformed […] much of the struggle is actually over the representation of the conflict itself – who are 'we' and who are 'they' – and how these definitions are related to our sense of right and wrong and the perceived legitimacy of different actors' (see also Howarth, 2002).

Some representations become official accounts of the events more easily, due to the social status of the source and to its privileged access to the public sphere (Howarth, 2006). Insofar as these representations are able to establish and impose a determined collection of attributes onto a group, they provide, *a posteriori*, a plausible explanation for the behaviour adopted during the conflict, which legitimizes practices and constrains the other group identity. For instance, Seron, Pereira and Kovath (2004) demonstrated that judgments about police misconduct are mitigated by the perception of civilian responses, so that civilians' confrontational/illegal behaviour legitimized the assessment of police misconduct. These findings seem to imply that framing activists as violent and deconstructing their protest claims as illegitimate may constitute readily available symbolic repertoires that justify specific actions.

Contrasting SRs can however be developed to challenge these main ideas. Indeed, in public spaces SRs change and clash with each other (Jovchelovitch, 2001). In particular, polemical representations have an important role in bringing about processes of social change, introducing a different view of reality. Moscovici (1984) identified three types of SRs. First, hegemonic representations are shared among highly structured groups and are uniform and coercive. Hegemonic representations have the power to impose themselves on other representations and to shape wider interpretations for the interests of the dominant group. Second, emancipated representations refer to those representations that have broken away from the interests of a minority social group and become widely accepted. Lastly, polemical representations are generated in the course of political conflict and are determined by antagonistic relations between groups. As argued by Murray (2002), this kind of social representation can be compared to the counter-narratives developed by minority groups in their attempts to challenge dominant narratives.

This article analyzes how activists contrast their polemical representations of events against hegemonic representations diffused by the media. The use of their polemical representations is associated with attempts to reshape their social identities and regain legitimacy for their protest. We investigate how, as an outcome of the 'battle of Genoa', activists represent the protest and intergroup relations during those days. We also illustrate the cognitive, motivational and behavioural factors associated with the representation of police. First, however, we turn to the issue of social representations of urban conflict and policing.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND URBAN CONFLICT

Mass protest can be seen as disruptive to urban social life. External observers are deeply struck by the violent impact of a crowd on the system of urban relations and different scientific accounts have been offered with regard to the behaviour of 'the masses' (Allport, 1924; Canetti, 1966; Le Bon, 1974; Freud, 1922; see Reicher, 1984). With some relevant exceptions, however, the public sphere is generally portrayed as representing the mindlessness of the 'angry' crowd. Recently, in an analysis of a series of contentious events which took place in London in the summer of 2011, Reicher and Stott (2011) have shown how public explanations of riots tend to revolve around three historically recurring arguments. First, rioters are presented as deviants and marginalized. According to this explanation, riots are classified as being merely a series of criminal acts carried out by 'broken individuals'. Second, the riots are attributed to a 'mad mob'. In this version, individuals are compared to the victims of a contagion. In other words, by merely being exposed to a crowd, otherwise reasonable people are deprived of their ability to handle emotions and information, and are led to behave violently. Finally, agitators and outsiders are blamed for taking advantage of the naivety of the crowd and for directing its violent actions. In spite of the lack of evidence and delineation between riots and mass protests, these opinions usually frame these contentious events and are used as a basis for intervention.

Importantly, when it comes to actuating policing measures during mass protest events such as those against the G8 summit, these representations of the crowd have an impact on how the relations between police forces and activists are managed. The conflict between protesters and police does not remain confined within the boundaries of the actual social action (Potter &

Reicher, 1987). It is primarily enacted and re-enacted through the social discourses that usually take place before, during and after riots (see Murdock, 1984; van Dijk, 1989). Through social discourses, participants offer different accounts of reality, different characterizations of the parties involved and, perhaps most relevant in this context, different readings of the objectives of the behaviours of those parties. In turn, these differences define the degree of acceptability of various practices. For instance, Potter and Reicher (1987; see also Reicher, 1984; Reicher & Potter, 1985) noticed that, during the 1980 St Pauls riot in Bristol, UK, whether the term 'community' was used to include only the rioters or also the police contributed to framing the events respectively as intergroup (delegitimization of the police's actions) or intragroup (legitimization of the police's actions) conflict.

This highlights that police-activist encounters are mediated by how the two groups frame the events and the identities of the parties involved (Gorringe & Rosie, 2008; Reicher et al., 2004). Relatedly, a line of research from Stott and colleagues (Stott & Reicher, 1998; Stott & Drury, 2004; Stott, Adang, Livingstone & Schreiber, 2007) shows that when the police obscure differences within the protesting crowd, assimilating the whole mass to a unique (criminal) identity, the strategies of repression eventually become self-fulfilling prophecies that create disorder, disruption and violence. These strategies, driven by the perception of the crowd as illegitimate or as an enemy, limit self-policing within the crowd and increase the likelihood that more extreme members take control of the situation to protect the identity of the threatened group.

During the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, dominant media discourses framed protest violence as a crime against society, as a grave threat to the prevailing moral order. Mass media appropriated and reinterpreted images of protest violence as 'senseless' and defined demonstrations as a social problem rather than a legitimate action (Juris, 2005). The activists were typically demonized and stigmatized as irrational and violent 'black bloc' (see Zamperini & Botticini, 2006). These representations impacted on the perception of the police and in turn on the reactions to the repression of protest in a form that attests to the dynamic analysis of framing. In this view, framing is not just a 'strategic tool of movement leaders' but 'involve[s] the interactive construction of disputes among challengers, their opponents, elements of the state, third parties, and the media' (McAdam et al., 2004, p. 44), and this goes on to impact the political

opportunities, resources, strategies, level of mobilization, and frames of future contentious events.

METHODOLOGY

The Internet as public space is both a means and object for researchers. Through the internet it is possible to reach a vast number of actors who would be hard to reach with traditional tools of investigation (cf. Reis & Gosling, 2010). This is particularly true when legal issues are involved as is the case for activists who participated in the 'Battle of Genoa', with many trials being conducted in the period of this research.

An initiative by a set of news media outlets provided us the means to investigate accounts produced by activists directly involved in Genoa. Three sections of the Italian media, Il Manifesto (a national left-wing newspaper), Radio Popolare (a private radio station), and Carta (a national left-wing magazine) solicited participants to provide accounts of their experiences during the summit, with the accounts sent via email to the media outlets. The accounts were then published on a public website (for a debate about the quality of data collected on the internet see Dandurand, Shultz & Onishi, 2008; Gosling et al., 2004; Joinson et al., 2007). Through this initiative, 316 pieces of text were collected between July 24th and October 2nd, 2001.

It should be noted that these data are by no means complete and carry with them a number of limitations. First, the activists did not have direct access to the website where the messages were eventually published. Each account has previously been filtered by the media, which took care to get rid of 'irrelevant' (in their judgment) messages. Although the political orientation of the media involved in this project was sympathetic to the activists, we cannot conclude that important pieces of text have not been selectively rejected on the basis of some unknown criteria. Second, the texts were published in an anonymous format and we did not have access to essential biographical information. This has prevented a more detailed analysis of the sample and we could not address how the framing of the events varied within the group (cf. Elcheroth et al., 2011). Reaching an adequate sampling frame is a problem in much of the research conducted on social movements, particularly for quantitative researchers (e.g., Klandermans & Smith, 2002). Often, specific populations are hard to reach and many legal issues surround social movements, which

may potentially lead to arrest, and ultimately can make it hard for researchers to conduct their investigation. However, we agree with Klandermans and Smith (2002) that research is still worth doing when the access to the specific subpopulation presents difficulties, with the precaution of taking into account the possible biases arising from a limited sample and the obvious caution in generalizing the results.

Despite these limitations, this collection of narratives is still valuable for research. They represent a first attempt at exploring how a social protest group constructs their polemical narrative of resistance and a rare way to reach these participants. Furthermore, these narratives were posted on the website and were made public. Therefore, they had the possibility of circulating widely among activists involved in the project and among other related social circles (e.g., those sympathizing with the movement). In this respect, from a SRs point of view, these texts represent a powerful attempt to construct an alternative interpretation of the facts of Genoa, which is opposed to the hegemonic representation offered by the mainstream media. Indeed, in this specific case, narrations are not only a way to know the 'truth' (Bruner, 1991), but also a form of political action (Klandermans, 1997), through which participants take the role of co-authoring a new social script (cf. Glaveanu, 2009) of the 'story' of what happened at Genoa. For these reasons, we believe that the texts have the potential to have an important impact on the identity of the activists, on new recruits, and on future encounters with police.

The objectives of the research can be summarized as follows: exploring the content of social representations of the conflict; outlining the main dimensions along which the field of representation is structured; and highlighting the anchors of social representation. We focused on individuals who were directly involved in the 'battle of Genoa' and who describe themselves as peaceful demonstrators. Given these aims, texts were classified on the basis of the different social groups who were present during the protest, namely 223 activists, 47 bystanders (Genoese citizens, activists' family members), 16 journalists, 2 medics, 28 not specified. These categories emerged through a preliminary exploration of the texts and were evinced by the self-presentations of the narrators. In twenty-eight texts, it was not possible to trace the individuals' identities. Therefore those texts were categorized as 'unknown'. Due to the scope of this research, texts which could not be attributed to activists were excluded from the analysis. That leaves a total of 223 texts, or 70% of the total amount.

The authors of these accounts are 251 activists (152 male, 96 female and 3 non-specified). The number of authors exceeds the number of texts because the signature posted in some of them referred to more than one person (i.e., families, spouses, friends, etc.). Unfortunately, it was not possible to calculate an average age, since only twenty-one authors reported it (these range from 15 to 70). The transcript narratives were analyzed with the help of *ATLAS.ti* (a qualitative analysis software tool) in three steps. As a first step, we read the whole corpus of text and started to identify the main themes that emerged. We determined that the majority of the texts provided descriptions of the events in Genoa (accounts of the protest), distinguished three groups (activists, the black bloc and the police), and described their relations (intergroup relations). Once these three main themes were identified we returned to the texts, and codified portions into sub-categories: the objective was to achieve a conceptual representation of the whole corpus of data. Finally, we verified the existence of co-occurrence patterns among codes within the same portions of text (*quotations*). We used the Query function in *ATLAS.ti* to allow us to interrogate the whole corpus of data and enable us to examine the relationship between codified extracts through logic operators (Boolean operators), semantic operators (which analyze and detect links among different domains of meaning), and proximity operators (which create spatial links between codified passages of a length pre-defined by the researchers). Texts, as well as categories and main themes, were analyzed and produced in Italian from which selected extracts and categories have been translated into English.

RESULTS

Accounts of the Protest

Genoa: A militarized city

As a likely consequence of the spatial organization of the urban context in Genoa, in the course of the summit, the main narrative about Genoa refers to it as a 'militarized city'. This category indicates that the preparation of Genoa was per se contrary to what we found to be the principles of peace and democracy that informed activists' intentions. For instance, that is how a young activist vents his frustration:

'This should have been a day of celebration … to express the desire for a better, new world rather than a march in a militarized city'.

The content expressed in this quote recurs in 726 fragments of the 223 texts, showing a considerable level of consensus among activists around this theme. The deployment of police units, the presence of the army and of snipers on the buildings, the helicopters hovering over the city, the absence of local people were all perceived by the activists as signs that the police did not want to merely maintain public order. Rather, activists express the thought that these tactics testify to the police force's anticipation of a conflict. These elements give rise to a field of representations which revolve around the idea of a military environment, where institutions responsible for security appear to 'plan the war'.

The battle

The second category refers to the idea of conflict and illustrates how activists, much in accord with the media representation of the events, perceive the demonstration as being in a 'battle', where they were being 'bombarded from behind' and faced with 'an army firing on the crowd'. The following quotes are examples of the recurrence of battle-related themes (the content expressed in this quote recurs in 176 fragments of the 223 texts):

'Over our heads, helicopters hovered at high altitudes. On the roofs of the buildings you can see policemen with cameras who are filming and photographing. One mile away, the battle endures. From Piazza Rossetti, thick plumes of black smoke rise into the sky'.

'The teargas that will take your breath away, the constant roar of helicopters, sirens screaming, the black skeletons of burned out cars, blood on the ground, thick, slippery, everywhere'.

Related to this category, some texts mentioned the feeling of being under a dictatorship. The nation is associated with a dictatorial regime where there are no rights for activists. Indeed,

the delegitimization of the nation is one of the potential outcomes of brutal repression (della Porta, 1995):

> 'I have to admit that I thought they were preparing a coup d'état. I thought of Chile full of soldiers or of the Greek military junta'.

The quotations show that, according to the activists, these days of protest are analogous to days of war. The city is perceived as a battlefield and the descriptions of the protest explicitly resemble those of a war. In this context it is therefore interesting to investigate how activists conceptualize their relation with the police and who the activists identify as their enemy.

Representations of Intergroup Relations

A central point of the conflict during the G8 at Genoa is the representation of the intergroup relations. In particular, two groups are salient in the activists' account of the events, namely the black bloc and the police.

The relationship with the black bloc

Activists describe the black bloc as a 'violent fringe', 'idiots', 'thugs' and 'subversives', distancing themselves from this group. While the activists present themselves as non-violent ('we are peaceful'), the black bloc is discredited and stigmatized. The black bloc appears as a particularly salient group. The term black bloc is present in 231 quotations of the 223 texts.

> 'I saw the so-called black bloc running around the streets of Genoa undisturbed. They were allowed to destroy everything, without the intervention of the police. I saw them preparing Molotov-cocktails right in front of me… without the police, who could easily have been informed by the helicopters hovering over us and who had actually been informed by us the pacifists, doing anything'.

The activists are prone to distance themselves from this group and to emphasize their violent methods. Despite the fact that the black bloc is represented as a different group, with

different objectives, it is not identified as the relevant enemy of the Battle of Genoa. Certainly, the black bloc is described as violating public security and damaging the prospects of achieving outcomes of a peaceful demonstration. They are not however the object of feelings (fear, hate, disgust) that characterizes the relationship with someone who is perceived as an enemy. Activists put in place 'coping strategies' (43 quotations), attempting to single the black bloc out from the parade, to exclude them symbolically from 'us', and at the same time, try to hold a dialogue with them.

'I see my daughter who speaks with one of them […] she's trying to reason with him saying that you cannot be violent […] suddenly the boy moves her aside with his arm and gets the rock my daughter was preventing him from getting'

'A dozen boys from the Black bloc have come forward, and we have created a peaceful blockade to stop them from going into the streets where other activists were coming back, to prevent them from bringing violence in the places where we wanted to demonstrate. Paradoxically, we were defending the red zone'.

What these occurrences show is that activists made attempts at self-policing and tried to stop the violence. It is possible to note a contraposition between 'us' (activists) and 'them' (black bloc) in these quotations. Police however did not take advantage of those attempts and carried out indiscriminate repression against the whole group of demonstrators.

The relationship with the police

The images of police in riot gear deployed in the context of Genoa restricted the possibility for activists to maintain a peaceful relationship with the authorities. Indeed, from the accounts, three interrelated types of representations of the police emerge. First, the police are represented as a purely coercive force; second, the police are seen as an incompetent security force, and finally the police are identified with the enemy. We shall look at the details of these three representations.

The police as a coercive force. The police are associated with the use of coercive

strategies (i.e., weapons and physical strength). The following quotes illustrate how the activists report the kinds of strategies the police are accused of using. In 223 texts, 390 occurrences of such illustrations were found:

> 'Throughout the day we have been chased through the streets and alleys, activists were isolated and frightened, beaten till they bled … and doctors, lawyers and journalists were not spared'.

> 'People of all ages fled in disorder (the elderly, children, girls) because they were attacked from all sides by police'.

The police as an incompetent security force. Of particular interest is the description of the police as incompetent. The police are accused of having lost control of the situation (a category that emerged in 137 quotations). The following quotes are an example of how the police are perceived as incompetent and unable to handle the protest:

> '[They are] the defenders of disorder'.

> 'We have participated in many events, yet we rarely have witnessed such inept management'.

The police as an enemy. The evidence cited above shows that management of the protest characterized by coercive action generates an interpretation of the police as a dangerous and antagonistic group. The police are no longer seen as serving the citizens, or as ensuring public order. Rather, they are framed as 'criminals', 'repressive forces' or 'murderers'. The following quotes express this representation:

> 'We keep seeing those who seem like 'death squads' throwing tear gas, charging the protesters, chasing them, beating them savagely'.

'[…] the [disaster] that struck [us], however, was not a natural disaster but a hoard of wild beasts in uniform'.

Activists' accounts thus represent the police in decidedly negative terms. This code emerges in 181 quotations of the 223 texts, which show how the representation of the police as an enemy is broadly shared by the demonstrators:

'I didn't expect to have to deal with enemies in front, behind and among us. I didn't expect the more unreasonable and dangerous enemy to be precisely on the wrong side, namely that of the institutions'.

Activists' Cognition, Emotions and Actions Versus the Enemy

In the following section we focus on the relations with the police. Specifically, we focus on cognitive, emotive and behavioural aspects of these relations as they emerge from the accounts of the 'Battle of Genoa'. Figure 1 schematically summarizes the content with regard to the representation of police as an enemy.
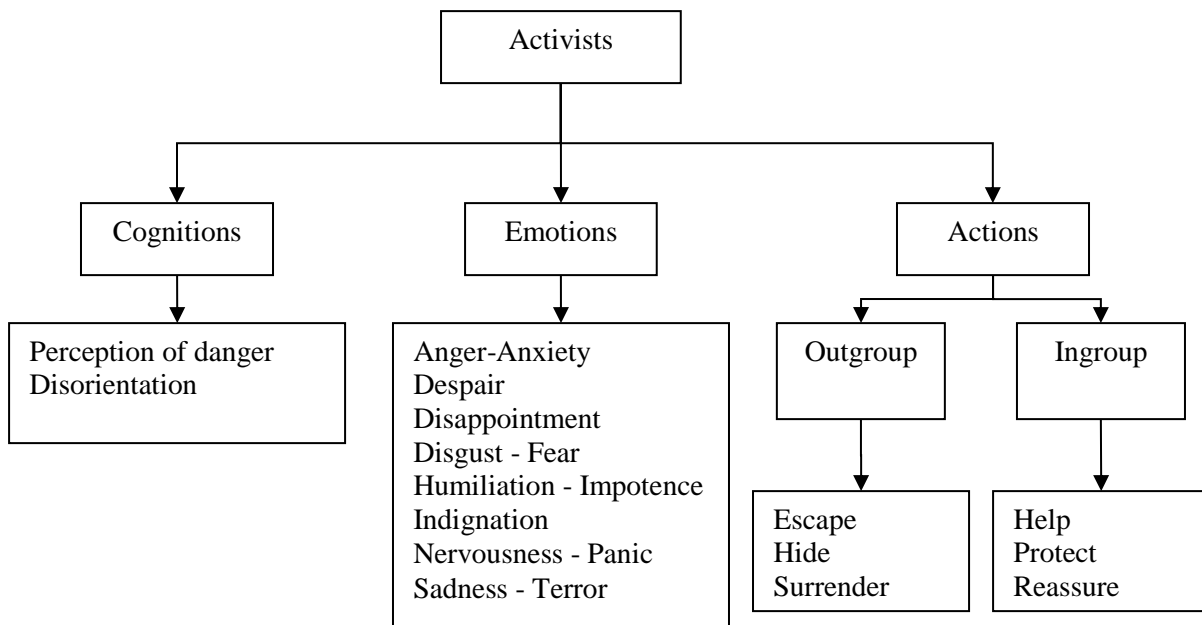

Figure 1. Cognitions, emotions and actions in protesters' social representations

Cognitive interpretations of the demonstrators revolve around the idea of danger and disorientation. Also, experienced activists who are used to these types of events and who have been in contact with the police before describe the events of Genoa as unusual. Activists experience a degree of danger that goes beyond the normal dynamics of riots and clashes. The association of the event with the idea of danger is emphasized by the fact that they do not expect to face what they saw as unsystematic and 'unreasonable' violence from the police in a democratic country. For instance:

'When the incidents began, I thought of the 'normal' dynamics of those situations: of some hooligans who confront the police. Even at the very beginning though, something did not fit. The police were overexcited, some of them to the point of madness'.

'At that moment I was in shock, I couldn't understand!!!???? I'm getting beaten when the only thing I've done wrong is to be here, to march in a demonstration procession'.

The second process relates to the sphere of emotions. The code 'negative emotions' was recorded 476 times in the 223 citation narratives. We should notice that, although both the police and the black bloc were described negatively, only the former group was associated with this array of negative emotions. Activists express emotions such as hate, rage and especially fear, as illustrated by the following quotes:

'The helicopters were lowered to disperse the crowd. Around me there was a mass of people dazed, disoriented, scared, terrified. There were people crying, screaming'.

'I saw two people in a wheelchair facing serious difficulties: an elderly lady from the crowd pressed against the wall crying, terrified and trying to cover her face, a child under ten years old who had lost contact with his family members, who,

blinded by tear gas, stopped crying but remained scared still unable to move. Meanwhile the police were threatening everyone with truncheons'.

'I'm scared. My body does not respond, I can't breathe. I'm scared. If I faint they will stomp on me. They will beat me if I fall'.

'There is just one feeling I have right now: hate. The hatred that you have in your heart when you see someone measure the strength of those who are certainly weaker'.

'Many hearts were filled with hatred, on both sides, and it is a hatred that will not heal in a day, because it is a hateful act of violence, beatings, threats, violations, exaggerations, a hatred that no one seems to be able to temper'.

'I was afraid; I felt discomfort in my ability to resist and my anger, a lot of anger, an inextinguishable anger because they set free my feelings of insecurity, helplessness and anxiety'.

The third process concerns the type of behaviour exhibited during the days of the protest. Coherent with the perception of danger and with those of negative emotions, activists report a number of different behavioural responses to the police ranging from the classic 'run and hide', as the first two of the following quotes illustrate, to the attempt to show their peaceful intentions (third quote):

'Everybody we meet is as scared as we are: the common opinion is to split up into small groups and hide'.

'People of all ages (the elderly, children, girls) fled in disorder'.

'I remember having raised my hands saying: 'Quiet. We did nothing, we are unarmed''.

Another important aspect concerns the solidarity that emerges among activists (71 quotes):

'I tried to stay calm and to reassure people who were around me, to remain together, to stay close. There was a girl who had seen her friends being hit and who couldn't find her friends. I remained with her and then I took her to where my friends were until she calmed down'.

'I saw ladies, who could have been my mother, falling. We tried to help them, not to step on them. Old men wept and clung to the young. Young people clung to older ones'.

CONCLUSION

During the Genoa G8, authorities implemented geographic control of the protest (Mitchell, 2003; Mitchell & Staheli, 2005), which originated from the desire to keep protesters within a delimited area and was based on the assumptions (obtained from unreliable sources) that activists were criminals. Genoa was thus transformed into a militarized city, an arena where the violent clashes between demonstrators and police occurred. Prior to the event, the Italian media reported and spread a social representation of the events of Genoa as 'urban warfare' (Cristante, 2003; Zamperini & Menegatto, 2009), identifying the activists with the black bloc and as a new enemy of civil society (Zamperini & Botticini, 2006). Indeed, social representation of the group relations polarized into the 'good vs. evil' dynamic, where 'good' referred to the police and 'evil' to the black bloc and protesters, creating a unique, confused and dangerous outgroup (Juris, 2005; cf. Reicher & Stott, 2011). This contributed to the shape of the actual group relations during the summit.

Demonstrators' narratives did not enjoy the same kind of social attention as that afforded to the hegemonic one. In this study, therefore, we focused on how activists, who described themselves as peaceful demonstrators, represented the days of Genoa, and their relations with

both the black bloc and the police within the context of existing frames. This study shows how the stigmatized groups who have been involved attempt to formulate their own account of the events. The analysis of the quotations suggests that activists put in place symbolic coping processes that allow them to relive the days of the G8 protests and to separate themselves from the image of the black bloc to which they were associated. Furthermore, it also shows that, in the wake of the protests, the image of the police comes out damaged. Although the black bloc is described as damaging the real spirit that should animate the protest, only the police are accused of incompetence and, most importantly, only the police are identified as an enemy. Fear, hate and anger are the main emotions that emerge from the activists' accounts with regard to the police force.

It is possible to identify two salient structures within the demonstrators' narrative. The first refers to a 'regressive narrative' (Gergen & Gergen, 1986), which recounts how progress is impeded. A tragic event destroys aspirations and dreams of a better world, changing the face of the public place, making it a battlefield where an oppressive power gets rid of inconvenient and alternative ideas. These themes are evident in the representations of the protest. The second structure concerns intergroup relations. Whereas the media assimilates and conflates the black bloc with all protesters, creating two antagonistic social groups (protesters vs. police), protesters have a tripartite representation of intergroup relations: police-black bloc, police–demonstrators, black bloc-demonstrators.

While the black bloc is kept separate and associated with violence but not seen as an enemy, with regard to the relationship between demonstrators and police three core types of representations emerge: police as a coercive force, referring to the irrationality of police strategies to control the protest; the police force as an incompetent defense force, referring to the police's aggression and indiscriminate use of force relative to previous encounters; and police as the enemy, referring to the police not merely as representing the authorities but as an opposing group in its own right. It is especially here that it is evident how the press defines social reality through their interpretation of the event, creating a symbolic reality that often is different from that which is subjectively experienced by a large segment of the actors directly involved. This divergence assumes even more importance when the conflict takes place in a democratic country where there are assumptions by citizens that institutions are devoted to order and the protection of

civilians. Moreover, this lack of legitimization can influence future attempts to establish dialogue between the groups and lead to further deterioration in relations between activists and police.

The continuous circulation of social representations through social communication (press, television, internet) – fuelled by the frequent recurrence of new violent street clashes (e.g., in the recent case of the No Tav movement) – contributes to keeping a series of social fractures among citizens and institutions of public order (Foot, 2009) within Italian society more than ten years after the events of Genoa. These narratives and social representations are intertwined in the collective memory of a country (see Halbwachs, 1992) that is still deeply divided over its recent past. However, as we have shown here, these representations are part of dynamic processes which are shaped and formed by the various groups surrounding the core issue as well as occupying peripheral positions in the public space, suggesting that possibilities exist for new social representations to reshape those collective memories and recharacterize the public landscape of contentious Italy. This study hopes to cast some light upon the characterizing elements of these representations in the dimness of our understandings of their constitutive factors.

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