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Precarious Workers' Unions in Greece and Italy

A comparative study of their organizational characteristics and their movement repertoire

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Examining Board

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Dedication

The thesis is dedicated to: (a) my two Teachers: Donatella della Porta and Nikos Serdedakis; (b) the people who tricked me into undertaking this project: Eva Kalpourtzi and Myrssini Antoniou; (c) two physical locations of the utmost importance: Bar Pigmalione in Rome and Bar Athinaion in Exarchia; and (d) the comrades I'll follow to the end of time: Eirini, Matsas, George Buddha, George the Englishman and Nikalexis.

What follows is a squatted Allen Ginsberg poem - an ACKNOWLEDGMENT of the contemporary academia's dramatic situation, as well as the holiness of all the kind people who, one way or another, contributed to this project. I invite them to raise their glasses and *'drink to our own glory, that our grandchildren and their children may say that there were once people who were not ashamed of comradeship, and who never betrayed each other'*.

Acknowledgments

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness.

What sphinx of Methodologies and Citation Counts bashed open our skulls and ate up our brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Research Questions and unobtainable Data! Students screaming under the stairways! Post-docs sobbing under their desks! Professors Emeriti weeping in the libraries!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of scholarly merits!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of competition! Moloch the stunned Advisor Boards!

Moloch whose mind is pure Impact Factor! Moloch whose blood is running Google Scholar! Moloch whose fingers are ten "no-shows" to conferences! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal bureaucracy! Moloch whose ear is smoking in the library!

Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind reviewers! Moloch whose porters stand in the long corridors like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose laptops dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose unfounded hypotheses crown the cities!

Moloch whose love is endless competition and anxiety! Moloch whose soul is delirium and conformism! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of white male professors! Moloch whose name is the Academia!

Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream Angels! Crazy in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I cannot abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky!

Moloch! Moloch! Robot departmental assistants! Invisible colleagues! Skeleton professors! Blind students! Demonic applications! Spectral deadlines! Invincible madhouses! Granite books! Monstrous 500-word abstracts!

We broke our backs lifting Moloch to Heaven! Resumes, CVs, cover letters, tons! Lifting the University to Heaven which exists and is everywhere about us!

Visions! Omens! Hallucinations! Miracles! Ecstasies! Gone down the global river!

Dreams! Adorations! Illuminations! Religions! The whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!

Breakthroughs! Over the river! PhDs and crucifixions! Gone down the flood! Highs! Epiphanies! Despairs! Four years' animal screams and suicides! Minds! New loves! Mad generation! Down on the rocks of Time!

Real holy laughter in the river! We saw it all! The wild eyes! The holy yells! We bade farewell! We jumped off the roof! To solitude! Waving! Carrying flowers! Down to the river! Into the street!

***

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!

The word is holy! The sentence is holy! The paragraph is holy! The section is holy! The chapter and tome and book and collection holy!

The laptop is holy the paper is holy the PowerPoint is holy the audience is holy the ecstasy is holy!

Holy Pietro holy Caterina holy Zamponi holy Virginia holy Katharina holy Alice holy Frankie holy Helge holy the unknown buggered and suffering beggars holy the hideous human angels!

Holy my flat mates in Campo di Marte's insane asylum! Holy the cocks of the grandfathers of CPA!

Holy the solitudes of universities and social centers! Holy the EUI cafeteria filled with the minions! Holy the mysterious rivers of tears under the streets!

Holy the lone juggernaut! Holy the vast lamb of the middleclass! Holy Prezzemoli, the crazy shepherds of rebellion! Who digs Florence IS Florence!

Holy Exarchia Holy Rome Holy Basilicata Holy Monte Carlo Holy Bremen Holy Aldini Holy Cacofonia Europeana!

Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!

Abstract

This thesis is the outcome of a six-year-long research, aiming at understanding how the flexibility-era South European workers unionize and engage in collective action. Its empirical material derives from the employment of a qualitative methodology techniques' triangulation: archive research, participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

I define as Precarious Workers' Unions (PWUs) labor collectives the members of which (a) are subjected to atypical labor relations; (b) lack adequate access to the welfare state structures; (c) have developed a collective conscience of belonging to a post-Fordist labor force. The PWUs' main characteristics put under scrutiny are: member recruitment, decision-making procedures, services offered, industrial and movement action undertaken. Determinants which I consider as having a significant impact on the above include each country's labor legislation, formal trade union structure, social movement environment and tradition, as well as each PWU's population make-up. A dual comparison is employed. On the one hand, similarities and differences are sought between the Italian PWUs and their Greek counterparts. On the other hand, an internal comparison is conducted between each country's organizations, in order to locate and explain potential divergences from the national model.

Despite the fact that the first unionizing initiatives in Greece and Italy were facing similar socio-economic structural conditions, their mobilization developed in a diversified way. Lately, a re-convergence between the two countries' PWUs is to be noted: Mixed inside-outside the workplace interventions, a resurgence of mutualist practices and the inability to integrate in the formal trade union structure, combined with a relevant role in the broader social movement activities, are its main characteristics. Furthermore, as derives from the empirical data, attributing a unique class status to the expanding population of precarious workers may lead to erroneous assumptions. The precarious condition is a transversal, passing through the various social strata and is experienced in many different ways. The above is demonstrated not only by the significant impact of the PWUs' population make-up on their organizational forms and activities, but also by the fact that, even inside organized labor

entities, pre-existing inequalities are neither reversed nor dampened. Finally, the –partly eclectic, partly innovative- character of the PWUs is leading to the assumption that they are not only challenging the notion of precarity as perceived up to date, but also the very idea of what a union is and how it is supposed to operate. Whether this re-negotiation is to provide an answer to the 30-year-old "unions in crisis/union revitalization" riddle is not only a matter of the PWUs' strategic choices. It is also dependent on the socio-economic context. Future research shall have to examine to what extent the post-2008 economic crisis acts as an accelerator of the tendencies identified, an obstacle – or a diversion, which shall lead the PWUs to new, unexplored territories.

Disclaimer

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. A dual purpose

This thesis was written by accident. I suppose that might be the case with many theses, but in my case it certainly feels serendipitous. Back in 2008, I was working – as usual – as a call-center operator for an Athens-based internet provider. In an attempt to spice up our miserable working day, some colleagues and I decided we would set up a company-based primary union. We were a somewhat peculiar collection of characters, this motley crew of "union founders": an anarchist, a PhD candidate in Political Theory, a (30-year-old) boy scout, a hooligan supporter of the *AEK Athens* football team, a member of the Marxist-Leninist party *NAR* and an Albanian migrant. Despite our diverse backgrounds, we did have two traits in common: (a) we hated our jobs and (b) we had absolutely no idea what it meant to be a trade unionist. These rather trivial characteristics proved to be of the utmost importance when, within a month of collecting the necessary membership signatures and filing the paperwork, our employer announced that the company was going bankrupt and all employees would be fired without receiving any remuneration. First, the fact that we despised working at the call-center made us completely immune to any co-optation or bullying attempts on behalf of the employer. Second, our total lack of any syndicalist experience and know-how, made us behave in a peculiar and occasionally innovative way.

In fact, "peculiar" is perhaps too modest a word to describe what happened when we invited our colleagues, some 250 of them, to the first union's General Assembly. Managers,

network technicians, programmers, marketing experts, HR officials, all the "big shots" one finds in the telecommunications' companies, were looking with wild eyes at a bunch of youths from the technical service call-center inviting them to contribute to a relentless labor struggle which would, undoubtedly, lead them to triumph.

Some would call this daring appeal to our co-workers an Aristotelian *praxis*. Some others would simply call it madness. I tend to agree with the latter. It was madness – but with a method. And that *method* (which constitutes the central theme of the thesis) actually granted us the triumph we had promised to our colleagues. After 6 months of strikes, and then the occupation of the call-center, followed by the occupation of the company's headquarters, and then the occupation of all the group of companies' buildings, after 6 long months of weekly assemblies, endless meetings, blockades, protests, radio interviews, we reached a rather favorable agreement with the employers. Those who wanted to keep their jobs would be re-hired in the other companies of the group. The rest would receive full remuneration for the 6 months the labor struggle lasted, as well as whatever else the labor legislation provided for.

I found myself with the outrageously high sum of 4,000 euros at hand. I was rich. And, not knowing what to do with all this money, I decided to move to Rethymnon, Crete, for 6 months, in order to finish a Master's Degree that had been pending for some years.

Upon my arrival there, a committee of Professors was invoked.

"Mr. Vogiatzoglou. Now that you're here, it's time that you plan your Master's thesis. What do you want to write about?" asked a Professor.

"I don't have a clue, Sir", I replied.

"Then, what *could* you write about?" insisted the Professor.

"Well… I could write about the *unions of the precarious…*"

And that's exactly what I did.

***

After this series of events, I moved to Italy in 2010. As this was the first time I had worked and studied "abroad", I was largely unaware of the socio-political developments outside the small and isolated EU corner that my home country constitutes. I was carrying along, though, the romantic legacies of the Italian workerist movement of the post-war period, as well as the – equally romanticized – stories from the early precarious mobilization in Italy; the iconic patron saint *San Precario*, the EuroMayDay, and so on. The first surprise came upon realizing how similar the context in which the Italian precarious workers mobilized was to Greece. I had expected to encounter a large and concentrated old-school industrial workers' population, yet as the de-industrialization process of the Italian productive model had already been enacted in previous decades, the labor market characteristics of the two countries were interestingly similar (see section 1.2 and Chapter 2). Second, I was astonished to witness the tremendous differences in terms of the reasoning, means, and organizational formats that the two respective countries' precarious workers had developed in order to engage in collective action. The combination of the two observations gave rise to a, sort of, *comparative* curiosity about the precarious activists' *modus operandi*; and this laid the foundations for what would become, several years later, the thesis that you are reading today.

***

The reason I wrote all the above is to make clear – from the very beginning – that my research project is characterized by an inevitable duality with regard to its purpose. The questions the thesis is bringing forward are, primarily, academic: to what extent and in which way is the expanding precarious labor force altering the way workers unionize in Southern Europe? What are the main characteristics of the collectives populated by precarious laborers? To what extent are these organizational traits dependent on the broader societal and labor market environment? How are the precarious workers' unions of Greece and Italy related to the social movement organizations operating in the same milieu?

Amongst the lines of these academic questions, however, one should look for the unavoidable socio-political connotations. It's not merely the project's social relevance that I'm referring to, at least not in the generic sense: "*we're social scientists; this is why we care about*

our work's social relevance". Prior to examining the second purpose of this thesis, however, perhaps it would be worthwhile to provide some background data on the field where the research took place.

1.2.   The post-industrial labor market and welfare state in Greece and Italy

The post-1973 era of labor relations witnessed significant changes in workplace organization, working schedules, hiring and firing procedures as well as types of employment contracts signed. In 1984, Atkinson provided a typology of these changes, placing them under the umbrella-term flexibilization. Soon enough, a long debate, characterized by "bitterness and ideological divisiveness" (Treu, 2007: 498), commenced. Some scholars rushed into bidding "farewell" to the term, claiming that "there is little evidence of a serious commitment [among managers] to implement" flexible policies (Hyman, 1991: 259) and that the "growth of atypical employment in the 1980s has been less than dramatic" (ibid.: 260). Others acknowledged the prevalence of the new paradigm (Burchell 2001), or at least the momentum it has gained (Vallas 1999), either aspiring that workplace flexibilization could potentially prove to be a potential source of new rights for workers (Delcourt 1985), or condemning it as a dangerous trap, since "a portion of non-permanent workers run the substantial risk of long periods of temporary jobs", facing, thus, significant human cost due to their inability to support themselves and gain access to various well-being services (Pedaci, 2010: 256-6). Whilst the vast scholarly literature dealing with globalization issues identified flexibilization as a symptom (or consequence) of a general social and economic relations' restructuring (see, for example, Castells, 2000; Dicken, 2003), other social scientists convincingly argued that labor insecurity and instability is a prevalent pattern of

capitalism, the short Fordist "Citizen-worker" era being merely an exception to the general rule (Neilson & Rossiter 2008).

For the purpose of analyzing how various types of flexible labor relations have developed in recent times, I shall expand on Atkinson's categorization (1984) (see Chapter 2, section 2.2). Although recent contributions have presented more elaborated classifications of flexible production's organizational types, and have presented empirical data which disprove Atkinson's accompanying hypotheses, (see, for example, Skorstad, 2009), when the discussion is narrowed down to employment terms, Atkinson's rationale remains valid and relevant, as his categories include virtually all the atypical employment forms encountered in contemporary labor markets. He identifies four dimensions of flexibility: a) external numerical, which refers to facilitating hiring and firing procedures and includes temporary and fixed-term contracts; b) internal numerical, referring to regulation of the working time distribution among the personnel and includes part-time contracts, work in shifts and workplace rotation; c) functional, which in our case is the outsourcing procedure, namely the allocation of a part of the production to external contractors; and, finally, d) wage flexibility, the employer's ability to negotiate on an individual basis the workers' salary or even re-negotiate in accordance to productivity. Pay-per-item contracts fall into this category.

It had been noted that at the micro- (organizational) level it is rather rare to encounter only one of the above types, as employers tend to re-structure the production process applying a broader human resource management scheme, thus pushing forward various types of flexibilization. Although this observation is valid, things change once the perspective turns to the meso-level (region or country). As we shall observe in the next pages, there is significant variation when identifying prevalent types of flexibility, even amongst the European Union states (the labor market of which is partly regulated by common EU directives). This should not only be attributed to differences between the countries' economies and corporate cultures, but also to specific policy choices: the labor market's flexibilization requires its deregulation (and its subsequent re-regulation), which in real-life terms means changes in labor legislation and the abolition of protective norms in favor of the workers (Lodovici 2000). The latter became particularly visible under the austerity measures imposed on several European countries in recent years.

In accordance with the above, it has been argued that flexibility should be addressed using two different perspectives, the internal being changes in contracts, part-time vs. full-time and subcontracting, and the external taking into account state or regional-level policies. As Wallace notes, flexibility can also be "assumed from external variables. That is, it is assumed that if there is less regulation, people will be more flexible" (2003: 773; emphasis added). I tend to agree with the above distinction, although "less regulation" is, perhaps, an oversimplifying way to describe the multitude of policies and their contradictory outcomes. When, for example, a labor legislation adjusts the firing compensation sum paid to the worker in accordance to the warning period offered by the employee, where longer warning periods equal to less compensation, a dual consequence is to be noted: on the one hand, firing employees becomes cheaper for the employers (thus, a higher level of external numerical flexibility is achieved), yet on the other, it is impossible to speak about "less regulation", as the regulatory nexus becomes even thicker than before. The above example was part of a labor regulation reform imposed in Greece in 2011, and it is interesting to note that none of the two sides affected by the adjustment (employers and trade unions) was happy with it: the employers complained about the complexity of the procedure, whilst unionists, as one would expect, strongly criticized the facilitation of dismissals.

At the same time as the flexibilization processes were advancing, scholars commencing from various observation points identified and attempted to explain the decline that had been noted in union membership, strike activity and percentage of the labor population covered by collective agreements (Clyde 1982; Edwards et al. 1986; Mellor 1990). Ebbinghaus and Visser (2000), in an excellent longitudinal study covering 16 Western European countries over the years from 1950 to 1995, argued that the "cyclical models" developed to explain this *Crisis* were insufficient. They instead proposed an explanatory model which would take into account institutional factors, such as "the access of unions to representation in the workplace; the availability of a selective incentive in the form of a union-administered unemployment scheme; recognition of employers through nationwide and sectorial corporatist institutions; and closed-shop arrangements for forced membership" (ibid.: 135). Jacint confirmed the above in her project, which examined the case of Spain. She discovered that democratic consolidation procedures actually reinforced union participation, contrary to the trends in other parts of Europe

(Jacint 1996). Schnabel and Wagner (2005), using data from the European Social Survey, identified several key variables which strongly affect union density in a cross-national level; namely the personal attitudes of the workers (towards their job and the workplace), and the employees' belief (or lack thereof) that a strong union is necessary to better serve their interests, but, perhaps most importantly the workplace characteristics. Amongst the institutional setting, individual traits and workplace characteristics that were recognized as playing a key role to this union crisis, many scholars acknowledged the unions' inability to recruit and mobilize the unprotected flexible labor force (Ebbinghaus & Visser 2000; Martin & Ross 1999; Waddington & Hoffmann 2000).

Potential solutions to this and other problems identified constitute yet another literature corpus, proposing *ways out* of the union crisis. This "Union Revitalization" literature, developed during the '90s and '00s, focused on weaknesses and challenges unions were unable to cope with, and discussed potential loopholes (for a summary of the existing literature, see Behrens, Hamann, and Hudd 2004). A set of approaches, drawing from Kelly's "long waves of mobilization" presented a, historically informed, long-term trajectory of the labor movement in a trans-national scale, aiming to identify the key points which may serve as indicators for major shifts in the ways workers organize and engage in collective action (Kelly 1998). Other researchers suggested changes to be implemented in the internal union organizational schemes, pointing out case study-level successes when the unions adopted a more flexible approach towards the on-the-spot presence of union representatives and shop stewards (Charlwood 2004; Clawson & Clawson 1999; Fairbrother et al. 2007). Others recommended a more "inclusive" and open-minded policy on behalf of the unions, with regard to recruiting new members, especially low-wage, discriminated and flexible laborers (Fitzgerald & Hardy 2010; Oxenbridge 2000). The above could be summarized in the broader discussion with respect to the *organizing* (as opposed to *servicing*) trade union organizational model.

Moving on to a parallel literature strand, several scholars observed (and/or suggested) an increased collaboration and cross-fertilization of trade unions and non-workplace Social Movement Organizations (SMOs). Fitzgerald and Hardy stressed "the importance of new linkages locally, regionally, nationally and internationally in organizing these new labor market entrants [migrants and flexible workers]" (Fitzgerald & Hardy 2010: 131); Waterman (2004) and his

colleagues proposed the model of an International Social Movement Unionism, where the desired connection between the SMOs and the unions is so strong (even at the international level), that the limits between the two are hard to distinguish (Waterman & Wills 2001). Others took on the example of community Labor Centers, which developed in the US in the late 1990s and early 2000s, assuming, amongst other advantages they identified, that a community-based solidarity network can compensate for the difficult task of organizing workers of small and very small companies (Fine 2006; Fine 2005; Turner 2007; Turner 2004). In the introduction to the comparative, cross-national research project "Varieties of Unionism", coordinated by Frege and Kelly, Lowell Turner summarizes all the above theoretical proposals as follows: "The most significant revitalization strategies identified in our country cases are organizing, labor-management partnership, political action, reform of union structures, coalition-building and international solidarity" (2004: 4). It is interesting to note that Turner presents the above as real-life strategies already being adopted by unions.

What is more, important questions were raised by scholars on how the post-industrial labor market field is altering the ways in which flexibilized workers collectively perceive, identify and label their working life experience. Drawing on Erving Goffman's seminal work on *framing* (Goffman 1981; Goffman 1974), researchers had identified collective action frames as "an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Benford & Snow 2000, p.614). As Benford put it, collective action framing is:

> "[…] particularly fundamental to the issues of grievance construction and interpretation, attributions of blame/causality, movement participation, the mobilization of popular support for a movement cause, resource acquisition, strategic interaction, and the selection of movement tactics and targets" (Benford 1997, p.410).

The contentious part of the definition offered above lies in the fact that the collective self-identification of those concerned may directly or indirectly challenge super-imposed and/or pre-existing frames of their experience. This element is particularly relevant when it comes to workers subjected to flexible labor relations. Counteracting the positive narrative of freedom and independence which was embedded in some perceptions of the flexibilization process (Barbier

2008), the early precarious workers' mobilizations explicitly aimed to frame their participants' experience in a diverse manner, highlighting the flexibility's negative aspects (Eurogeneration Insurgent 2004; EuroMayDay Network 2010) and the potentially unifying elements of a "new" workers' collective identity (Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014b). Scholarly literature on the issue has focused on the dynamics of the transition from the "old" workers' identity to a newer one (Armano & Murgia 2012; Murgia 2010), as well as the specific practices through which the precarious workers' framing of themselves and their collective action was performed (Mattoni 2009; Mattoni & Doerr 2007; Bruni & Murgia 2007).

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In Italy, flexibilization was promoted through legislative initiatives, the main purpose of which was the de-regulation of the Fordist labor market configuration and the introduction of new types of employment contracts. The four most important legislative interventions were voted and implemented during the decade from 1993 to 2003 (Gallino 2007). The provisions included a wide array of non-typical employment contracts, but not many substantial changes in the working conditions of the people who were already employed under open-ended agreements. In Greece, the promotion of labor market flexibility long preceded the financial crisis of the 2010s. From 1990, the year in which part-time employment was introduced in the labor relations' system, to 2009, at least eight legislative packages made reference to flexible labor, deregulated certain aspects of the labor market and/or re-regulated others in accordance to international standards (Milo, 2009).

All these legislative changes had a concrete impact on various aspects of the two countries' labor market. According to the OECD, the overall level of strictness of employment protection had significantly decreased in Italy and Greece, from 3.06 and 3.46 (out of a maximum of 5 points) in 2000, respectively, to 2.38 and 2.81 in 2010 (OECD 2014). The time span of the introduction and diffusion of use of fixed-term contracts played a key-role for the above changes. In Italy, the development is somewhat linear: the share of temporary employment was around 7% in 1995, increasing steadily to reach a 12.8% in 2010 (ibid.). In Greece, fixed-term contracts represented 10.5% of the total contracts in 1995, only slightly increasing to 12% in 2010. Yet this situation is

rapidly changing, as almost two thirds of the contracts signed since 2010 are fixed-term, part-time, or both (INE-GSEE 2013). With regard to part-time contracts, in Italy, the percentage – as a share of total employment – rose from 13.5% in 2000 to 17.4% in 2010. In Greece, it rose from 6.4% to 10%. Furthermore, data shows an important rise of *involuntary* part-timers' in Italy during the last decade (from 17% to 32%) (OECD 2014). In Greece the change was even more dramatic, as from 2000 to 2009 the percentage had only risen from 28% to 32%, to explode during the following two years to 50.5% and 57.1%, respectively (INE-GSEE 2011, p.241). Finally, it is important to note that, during the same period, wage flexibility has developed in the two countries. The degree of wage flexibility in a labor market is measured with two indicators: the labor markets' collective agreement coverage and the union density. The higher the labor force participation in unions, the higher the possibility of union representation in the workplace, hence requesting direct collective bargaining to take place (Kahn 2010). Both Greece and Italy presented a rather stable percentage of union density from 2000 to 2010, slightly higher than the OECD countries' average. Yet there are significant variations when examining the difference between coverage rates of collective agreements and the trade union density. The latest data available are for 2005; Greece's difference between union density and collective agreement coverage stands at a mere 32%, whilst Italy's difference is 53% (source: OECD 2014). It would be reasonable to assume that the obligatory extension of collective agreements to all workers of each particular sector or region (even if they have not participated or were represented in the bargaining process) is significantly higher for Italy, than for its Eastern neighbor.

In both countries under scrutiny, what characterized the welfare state of the last two or three decades was the non-implementation of any serious reforms, but rather a simple cutting down of benefits and the beneficiaries' numbers. This comes in sharp contrast with the gradual changes in the labor market, as described above. The basic structure of the welfare system remained unchanged, yet new employees' and, more broadly, population categories emerged. This procedure was described as the "process of dualization", where "policies increasingly differentiate rights, entitlements, and services provided to different categories of recipients" (Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2012: 10). The silence and inaction of the legislator with regard to social protection contributed to the marginality of flexible workers who

were slowly, but progressively, increasing in numbers in the respective societies. In Italy, labor market flexibility was not coupled with changes in the level of the welfare state system and social protection policies are still solely concerned with and directed to open-ended workers (Pedaci 2010; Bronzini 2002). This contributed to increasing divisions within the Italian workforce. Also in Greece, the flexibilisation of labor relations was not accompanied by a change in the welfare state system. Commencing from a traditionally weak social protection nexus (at least in comparison to the Northern European countries), and despite the ambitious declarations of the various lawmakers (see, for example, AlphaBank, 2005; The Parliament of Greece, 2010), no specific provisions were implemented for the new entrants in the labor market, producing, thus, a part of the labor population seriously lacking access to the welfare state mechanisms (for a thorough investigation of the matter, see the analyses of the GSEE research institute, namely INE-GSEE 2009, 2011, 2013).

In sum, the combined impact of these two different procedures was the creation of a workforce that was ever expanding, flexible, and inadequately covered by the welfare state – which I shall define as the *precarious* workforce in chapters 2 & 3. The latter was not only over-exploited, but also unorganized, either due to the fact that the job posts of the precarious involved new professions, where the mere idea of unionizing needed to be constructed and circulated from scratch, or because (in the case of pre-existing professions) in the productive sectors where flexible labor prevails, both countries' unions had, traditionally, a weak presence. Therefore, when the first mobilizations of the precarious emerged, the workers who were invited to populate and strengthen them were relatively weaker than their "typical" counterparts, more marginalized in terms of their socio-economic status, and lacking a clear set of allies and were rarely organized.

This weak, marginal, isolated part of the workforce of Italy and Greece is the subject of my thesis.

1.3. "Burning questions of our movement"

The reader should not be misled by the fact that the commencing lines of this text make reference to a *victory* in a labor struggle. The cases to be examined during the course of the chapters that will follow are not (necessarily) about victories. Rather, on the contrary, for every successful organizing or collective action effort, one may encounter numerous others that failed, occasionally in a dramatic way. And not only is the weakness or marginality of the precarious workers to blame for the, rarely successful, results. For more than 30 years, a whole literature corpus has been developed examining the *Unions in Crisis*. The *crisis* social scientists made reference to was primarily a series of bitter defeats for the workers and their unions, all over Europe. Simply put, the contemporary European labor movement is weaker than it used to be. Given the fact, therefore, that the modes of production have dramatically changed in the course of the last decades and that the modes of organizing and acting in a collective way, during the same time span, have failed us, a question almost inevitably arises: *What is to be done?*

This question, perhaps predictably, is present everywhere among the lines of this thesis. An answer, on the contrary, is nowhere to be found, at least not in an explicit, normative, or deontological way. We shall examine what happened, what is actually happening in the field, which tricks have worked, and why others have not. Why the Greek and the Italian precarious workers chose this mobilizing and organizing path over the others will also be explored. A roadmap to current and past developments shall be offered. And if, tomorrow, or the day after that, a group of unhappy call-center workers aspiring to set up a union of their own, do find something useful for their project within this thesis, then I may consider that my purpose has been fulfilled.

1.4. A roadmap to the thesis

The thesis is divided into ten chapters, including the present one (Chapter 1: Introduction). The aim of Chapter 2 is to provide an accurate and inclusive definition of the *Precarious Worker*. In order to do so, I examine three aspects of the precarity phenomenon. First, the flexibilisation of labor relations in the South European countries is addressed. A typology of flexibility is

provided and accompanied by the relevant statistical data, documenting the extent of flexible labor in the countries under scrutiny. Second, I highlight the diffusion of insecurity and instability in the individual's everyday life, mainly attributing it to the flexible workers' inadequate access to welfare state structures. Third, the way the anti-precarity movements have attempted to construct elements of the precarious workers' collective identity is examined. The chapter concludes that in order to understand the precarity phenomenon, these three aspects need to be analytically distinguished, yet examined in a synthetic way.

In Chapter 3, the unit of analysis (the Precarious Workers' Union - PWU) is framed and contextualized, through a thorough review of contemporary social scientific literature on labor organizations. The usefulness and limitations of applying the Social Movement Studies' analytical and methodological toolkit are also examined.

In Chapter 4, the key determinants are identified and operationalized. The thesis' research questions are brought forward, accompanied by a discussion on the main determinants' selection rationale, as well as the respective hypotheses brought forward, when applicable. Then the logic and reasoning of the cross-national and internal comparisons are examined. The case selection rationale, in terms of both the country case and the organizations' case selection is presented. Finally, the specific research methods and techniques chosen and utilized, as well as a description of the main empirical data sources constitute the methodology section.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical section. First, an assessment of the main dependent variables' values (which shall be investigated across all the following chapters) is presented. An important set of precarious mobilization determinants (the trade union system structure) is brought forward and its impact on the organizational traits and movement repertoire of the Precarious Workers' Unions is investigated. The chapter develops along three lines of reasoning. The first one is the relation between the institutional trade union structure and the political militancy of the PWUs in Greece and Italy. Second, the question of why in some cases the focus was on inside-the-workplace interventions, whilst in others the contrary was true, is addressed – as are the consequences this choice bears for the anti-precarity movement. Finally, the optimal

degree of institutionalization for the PWUs is considered and emphasis is placed on identifying the structural and environmental characteristics affecting this choice.

In Chapter 6, the focus turns to the impact of determinants pertinent to each country's labor legislative provisions, as well as the framework of forms of flexibility that the former construct. The initial divergence in the organizational forms and types of activity undertaken, between the Italian and the Greek PWUs, is pointed out and analyzed. Contract-based precarity is distinguished from production-based precarity and the different strategies the PWUs are using to counter each are highlighted. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and some remarks on the dynamics along which the precarious' mobilization developed.

Welfare state-related issues are the central theme of Chapter 7. The flexible workers' inadequate access to the traditional welfare structures is documented and identified as one of the "founding acts" of precarity. The responses developed by the PWUs are then classified in two broad categories: (a) claims and proposals directed to institutional actors and (b) self-organized projects. The latter are considered to constitute a radical shift with regard to the previous trade union practices.

In Chapter 8, the relation between the PWUs and the broader social movement environment is studied, through the in-depth examination of a pivotal case of synergy, the *December Riots* of 2008, which took place in Greece. Utilizing the theoretical framework of the "eventful protest", the impact of the contentious episode on the (already active in 2008) PWUs is sketched. Then, I analyze how the incentives for the activists to engage in labor-related projects were raised on the blazing streets of Athens, despite the fact that labor-related claims were completely absent from the demonstrations. Finally, the impact of the eventful protest on the networking activities of the PWUs is discussed.

The PWUs networks are also the object of Chapter 9. Yet, there the focus is on the trans-national networking efforts between the Greek and the Italian PWUs. A classification of the various types of trans-national networks is provided, followed by a case study analysis for each type. The complex, mutual-exchange *collaborative* relation matrices are identified as the most difficult to construct, yet bearing the most chances for a successful outcome. Chapter 9 is followed by the

Conclusions, where, apart from summing up the points raised in all the previous sections, some thoughts and suggestions are highlighted with regard to a future social scientific research agenda on the precarious workers and their organizations.

Chapter 2: Defining precarity and the precarious worker

2.1. Introduction – definition of the Precarious Worker

This chapter's purpose is to provide a definition of the precarity concept, which was studied extensively at the end of the 1990s and during the first years of the 21st century. Within the alter-globalization movement, groups of activists – but also researchers closely connected to the social movements of the time – brought the focus back to immaterial labor, the "new proletariat", and post-industrial capitalism, expressly aiming at assigning meaning to what Dale Carrico described as "an ongoing *casualisation* of the terms of employment under which ever more people labor to survive in today's world" (Carrico 2007). Meanwhile, the term was introduced in the institutional political agenda of various European countries, occasionally being referred to, explicitly or implicitly, as a social *problem* requiring some sort of intervention.

But, is this the case of precarity – being defined as a social problem requiring state policies to counter-balance the negative consequences on workers' lives? And if so, what are the sources of the phenomenon? How can one distinguish between the various types of precariousness, taking into account the fact that there are obvious differences in terms of income, job satisfaction, social status and general quality of life when comparing e.g. a female, migrant cleaner to a native male, PhD holder, freelance programmer – both working in a flexible labor environment? Finally, how precarious is a precarious worker who does not acknowledge him/herself as such, who claims that his/her precariousness is a necessary introductory step towards the safe haven of the nine to five, Monday to Friday contract?

The scientific community has long acknowledged the above-mentioned problems. And although significant progress has been made towards the production of a clear definition of what

precarity actually *is*, the scholars dealing with the matter generally tend to focus on specific aspects of the phenomenon. One can identify three broad categories researchers on precarity are centering on. First, some are pointing to the employment terms as the decisive parameter of precariousness (Appay 1997; De Cuyper et al. 2008; Doerr 2010; Gill & Pratt 2008; Kalleberg 2009; Meilland 2005; Pedaci 2010; Razavi & Staab 2010). In the past, the focus was on immaterial labor (creative workers, artists, programmers and so on), considering its examination as the royal road towards "delivering a diagnosis of the present contradictions of production" (Tsianos & Papadopoulos, 2004: 2). This oversimplifying argument, however, was abandoned at a later stage, as empirical data from the field and the ongoing changes to labor relations forced scholars to further elaborate their positions (Tsianos & Papadopoulos 2006; Ross 2008). Then, there is a large literature corpus approaching precarity as an issue not solely belonging to the workplace. According to this approach, precariousness is closely connected to other aspects of the individuals' everyday life, might they be structural characteristics of their social identity (Mitropoulos 2005; Nobil Ahmad 2008; Peitler 2009) or an extension of labor insecurity outside the workplace (Herrmann & van Der Maesen 2008; Neilson & Rossiter 2005; Vishmidt 2005). The above perspective has produced significant contributions, especially when it comes to linking labor relations with migration (Kambouri & Zavos 2010; Landolt & Goldring 2010) and gender issues (Fantone 2006; Murgia 2007). Finally, an interesting point of view is the one addressing the creation of a *precarious subject* collective identity, that is precarious workers conceiving themselves as such, either on an individual basis, or through the process of identifying a distinct social group or class; namely, the "precariat" (Brophy 2006; Mabruki 2007; Mattoni & Doerr 2007; Standing 2011). Unsurprisingly, social movement organizations dealing with precarity have provided useful insights on that, as for them it is also a matter of self-definition (Eurogeneration Insurgent 2004; EuroMayDay Network 2010).

The definition of the precarious worker proposed by and utilized throughout this thesis is a synthesis along the three axes mentioned above. Namely, I define the *Precarious Worker* as the dependent employee who is subject to flexible labor relations, lacks or has inadequate access to welfare state provisions and has the consciousness of belonging to a social group, the social and

employment conditions of which are not, and shall never again be structured in accordance with the Fordist era standards.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the main arguments of each strand in a way that clarifies why I consider a synthetic approach to be necessary in order to adequately grasp and conceptualize the precarity phenomenon. The text is structured as follows. First, the types of flexible labor are identified. Theoretical analysis and, where available, statistical data are provided on the format and extent of the flexibilization procedures taking place in the two countries under scrutiny. Then, the focus turns to the diffusion of the flexibility consequences in the everyday life of the precarious workers. The two aspects highlighted are, on the one hand, the inadequacy of welfare state configurations concerning flexible employees and, on the other hand, the psychological and social impact of precariousness. Subsequently, the attempts to construct a collective identity of the precarious worker are pointed out, the focal point being the discourse-production movement efforts during the early stages of the anti-precarity mobilization. Finally, previous instances where a definition of the precarity term was sketched are critically examined. In the concluding paragraphs of the chapter all the previous strands are synthesized and the precarious worker is defined as the one who is (a) subject to flexible labor relations, (b) lacks or has inadequate access to welfare state provisions and (c) has the consciousness of belonging to a social group, the social and employment conditions of which are not, and shall never again be structured in accordance with the Fordist era standards. In what follows, the types of flexibility in Southern European countries will be examined; in Section 2.2, employment terms will be considered, whilst the focus shall turn to policies and external variables in section 2.3.

2.2. The flexibilization of labor relations in the post-fordist era of Southern European countries

2.2.1. External numerical flexibility

The contract types falling under the external numerical category of flexibility are perhaps the most widespread amongst the Southern European economies. External numerical flexibility refers to the ability of the employer to regulate the balance between workers' inflows from and outflows to the labor market (Atkinson, 1984). Jonsson (2007) terms the same phenomenon *employment* flexibility (being the opposite of employment stability) and explains it, from the employers' point of view, as the ability to "get rid of employees quickly and cheaply, when, due to the decreasing production volume or increasing productivity, they are not needed anymore. Conversely, if labor laws make it difficult for employers to terminate employment relations, employees may see this as contributing to employment stability, whereas employers may see these laws as causing employment inflexibility" (ibid.: 38). The above excerpt implies the two ways external numerical flexibilization is achieved: either through specific policies that facilitate dismissals (see the example raised in the previous paragraph), or through the introduction of fixed-term contracts. The fixed-term contract (in contrast with the open-ended one) has a specific duration and, at its end, it may be either renewed or terminated, the worker being unable to raise a claim for remuneration. It is usual that labor legislation sets limits to the number of times a fixed-term contract can be renewed; for example, in various EU institutions, a fixed-term should last less than twelve months, and could not be renewed more than five times in a row: otherwise, it is considered a *de facto* open-ended one. Yet employers may find ways to bypass these preventive measures.

According to OECD measurements, the overall level of strictness of employment protection had significantly decreased both in Italy and Greece, especially with regard to the temporary contract holders (Table 1). Concerning Greece, employment protection had decreased from 2.80 in 1994 (out of a maximum of 5) to 2.12 in 2013 with regard to regular contract holders, while temporary contract workers witnessed a dramatic decrease of employment protection from 4.75

to 2.25 in the same period. The respective numbers for Italy were 2.76 and 4.75 in 1994, going down to 2.51 and 2.00 in 2013. As is obvious, the time span of the introduction and diffusion of use of fixed-term contracts played a key-role to the above changes (OECD 2013).

Table 2.1: Strictness of employment protection in Italy and Greece, 1994-2013

Strictness of employment protection (max=5)						
Temporary contracts						
	Italy	Greece	Spain	Portugal	Germany	United Kingdom
1994	4.75	4.75	3.75	3.38	3.25	0.25
2003	2.00	4.75	3.25	2.81	1.50	0.25
2013	2.00	2.25	2.56	1.81	1.13	0.38
Strictness of employment protection (max=5)						
Regular contracts						
	Italy	Greece	Spain	Portugal	Germany	United Kingdom
1994	2.76	2.80	3.54	4.58	2.58	1.03
2003	2.76	2.80	2.76	4.09	2.94	1.68
2013	2.51	2.12	2.28	2.68	2.78	1.61

SOURCE: OECD Statextracts (extracted September 2015)

http://stats.oecd.org/

According to the OECD statistics, similar trends are to be noted with respect to two other Southern European labor markets – Spain and Portugal; whilst an interesting differentiation

occurs upon examining two large non-Southern labor markets of the EU: Germany and United Kingdom. The protection of their temporary contract-holders follows a similar path to the one of their Southern partners. Contrarily, an *increase* over time has been recorded with respect to the protection of regular contracts, bringing both countries closer to Southern Europe's averages.

The extent of fixed-term contracts' diffusion in Southern European countries varies in accordance to the national labor market structure, but is also very sensitive to regulatory policies. In Italy, the development is rather linear: the share of temporary employment was around 6% in 1994, steadily increasing to reach 13.8% in 2012. In Greece, fixed-term contracts represented 10.5% of total contracts in 1994, only slightly increasing to 12% in 2010 and then decreasing to 10% in 2012 (Table 2.2). It is interesting to note that this decrease took place despite the fact that almost two thirds of the contracts signed in Greece since 2010 have been fixed-term, part-time, or both (INE-GSEE 2013). The explanation to this, seemingly, contradictory phenomenon lies in the rapid rise of unemployment in Greece (from 7.8% in December 2008 to 27.7% in December 2013) (OECD 2014). During the crisis years, those employed under a fixed-term contract were the *cheapest* ones to dismiss when job cuts were imposed by the employers.

Table 2.2: Share of temporary employment

Share of temporary employment						
All persons						
	Italy	Greece	Portugal	Spain	Germany	United Kingdom
1994	6.0%	10.4%	9.4%	33.7%	10.4%	6.5%
2003	9.9%	11.1%	20.5%	31.9%	12.2%	6.1%
2012	13.8%	10.0%	20.5%	23.4%	13.7%	6.3%
SOURCE: OECD Statextracts (September 2015)						
http://stats.oecd.org/						

The sensitivity of temporary employment to national regulatory policies is confirmed by the data emerging from the other countries put under scrutiny: Portugal presented a large increase in the temporary employment's share, Germany a modest one, whilst the share of temporary employment in the UK and Spain actually decreased from 1994 to 2012. (Table 2.2). Phenomenically, no clear pattern can be drawn by these developments; an in-depth cross-examination of the data compared with the respective legislative initiatives would be required, but such a comparison falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

2.2.2. Internal numerical flexibility

Internal numerical flexibility refers to the ability of the employer to adjust the total working hours of his/her personnel in accordance to the production needs. In terms of employment contracts, this is the case of part-time workers. Part-time labor has significantly increased in both countries under examination during the last two decades. In Italy, the percentage of part-time contracts as a portion of total employment rose from 10.9% in 1994 to 11.7% in 2003 and 17.9% in 2012 (latest data available). In Greece, the respective percentages are 7.8%, 5.6% and, finally, 9.7% in 2012.

An important distinction needs to be made at this point. As many authors acknowledge, part-time labor could also be a conscious choice of the worker herself, as it might better suit her needs at the specific point when the contract is signed (Jeffrey Hill et al. 2008; Kahn 2010; Karlsson 2007). The OECD has integrated an interesting indicator in its employment and labor relations' measurements, the incidence of *involuntary* part-time workers, namely employees who would prefer to work full-time but are unable to find a suitable job and are therefore obliged to work fewer hours per week. Data shows an important rise of the involuntary part-timers' percentage in Italy during the last twenty years (from 38% in 1994 to 57% in 2012) (OECD 2014); in Greece the change was equally remarkable, as from 2003 to 2012 the percentage rose from 42% to 62% (Table 3). The increase is also evident in the other two Southern European countries, Portugal and

Spain. Contrarily, the percentages of involuntary part-time workers in Germany and the United Kingdom are significantly lower. These findings might point in the direction of a Southern European pattern in this indicator. In any case, the dramatic increase of involuntary part-time employment in the austerity-ridden countries confirm that contemporary Southern Europe is a rapidly changing labor relations' field, due to the austerity measures accompanying the public debt crisis.

Table 2.3: Incidence of Full Time/Part Time employment

Incidence of Full Time/Part Time employment

Common definition

	Italy	Greece	Portugal	Spain	Germany	United Kingdom
1994	10.0%	7.8%	9.5%	6.4%	13.5%	22.4%
2003	11.7%	5.6%	9.9%	7.8%	19.6%	23.5%
2012	17.9%	9.7%	12.2%	13.8%	22.1%	24.9%

Incidence of Full Time/Part Time employment

Share of involuntary part-timers as % of part-time employment

	Italy	Greece	Portugal	Spain	Germany	United Kingdom
1994	38.1%	40.6%	19.4%	18.7%	9.4%	13.8%
2003	30.4%	41.9%	18.9%	19.4%	14.4%	8.2%
2012	57.1%	62.4%	34.9%	63.0%	14.8%	18.3%

SOURCE: OECD Statextracts (extracted July 2014)

http://stats.oecd.org/

2.2.3. Functional flexibility

Functional flexibility in general terms is the ability of the employer to apply job rotation in various ways, which might mean appointing different tasks in different time periods to the same employee, moving him/her from one job post to another and so on. In Atkinson's classification, an important sub-category of functional flexibility is outsourcing specific duties to sub-contractors or "associates". Other scholars, though, either ignore outsourcing when conceptualizing flexibility (Jonsson 2007) or classify it into broad categories as a phenomenon of secondary importance (Jeffrey Hill et al. 2008). This choice may reveal a lot with regard to their ideological perspective, yet it underestimates not only the extent, but also the importance of the outsourcing activities in undermining the typical employment relations. The trait of outsourcing, which is of utmost importance to this project, occurs when outsourcing is used in order to conceal *dependent* employment – more specifically, when the employer uses either project-based contracts or sub-contracting to hire staff, avoiding, thus, the obligations and additional costs that labor legislation imposes. Evidence from the field indicates that "it is likely that there has been an increase in forms of work in the gray zone between self-employment and normal employment. In particular this zone includes contractors who work in a dependent relationship with just one enterprise and who have little or no more autonomy than employees although they are classified as self-employed" (Muehlberger, 2004: 30). Muehlberger was rightfully warning that the indicators used to measure the size of this "grey zone" were inadequate, offering only "scarce knowledge" (ibid.: 31). Unfortunately, researchers are still facing this problem.

OECD employment data, for example, include a variable for self-employment, but fail to distinguish between dependent and independent self-employment. As Hippel et al. point out, even the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the USA is unable to provide anything more than estimates, with regard to the total number of contingent employees. Three different estimates are provided, the numbers varying significantly according to the definition used (von Hippel et al., 2006: 32-33). It is true that the issue is foremost a conceptual one, especially when attempting to quantify data, since drawing a line between the dependent and independent self-employed is a difficult operation; even when conducting research on the field, similar methodological challenges

emerged. In a previous research project, I was trying to understand what proportion of Greek telecommunications grassroots unions' members were dependent contractors. The unions had decided to recruit them as members, since they acknowledged their concealed dependent employment status. Yet, the union officials were responding that they do not have, nor wish to gather, the relevant data, since, according to them, a distinction between dependent self-employed and employees would be ideologically wrong and counter-productive (Vogiatzoglou 2010).

Another important sub-division of outsourcing is employee leasing (Stone 2006). As Kelloway, Gallagher, & Barling note, "unlike traditional employer-employee relationships, the nature of the contractual arrangement for workers employed through temporary help firms is more triangular in form"(Kelloway et al. 2004) – the triangle consisting of the employee, the client company and the leasing company, or "temporary help firm", as the authors above prefer to name it. The leased employees are appointed to specific tasks inside the user corporation, and, quoting Stone "once a specific job is done, they are assigned to work at another client company" (ibid.: 3). Due to this structural deficit and the lack of a regulatory legislative corpus noted in many European countries, fixed-terms contracts are commonly signed; the workers are quite often subject to exploitation and mistreatment (Michon 2006). R., a Greek call-center worker and member of the "No dial zone" call-center workers' collective, described the difficulties she faced when she was hired by a human resource company and appointed to work for a multinational telecommunications corporation:

> *"I was obliged to sign weekly contracts, sometimes even daily ones; they were telling me, if you perform better we might make you permanent. We also had problems with the official corporate trade union, they would not recognize us as colleagues, and would not subscribe us as members. It was craziness, we were working next to them every day, in neighboring call-center booths, receive the same calls, yet we were considered inferior" (Interview with R., December 2011)*

In 2010, the Greek parliament voted in a new legislation, in order to regulate what the Minister of Employment himself had called "the black hole of employment" (Kokkaliari 2010). According to this law, the leasing of an employee in the same client company for a consecutive

18 months would result in the de facto recognition that the employee should be transferred directly to the payroll of the client company, maintaining the same wage and rights she had whilst leased. The human resource companies responded in a rather predictable way. As N., a technical support leased employee explains:

> *"I was already working for more than a year in the same company. The day the law was voted in I was told that I was being relieved of duty. That's the term they used. I went home, and they called again. 'You are re-hired, starting from the beginning of the next month'. In this way, they by-passed the legal preventions" (Interview with N., January 2012).*

Similar to the dependent self-employed workers, the number of leased employees is difficult to quantify due to cross-national differences in the definitions used. Michon provides an indicative table for the years 1999-2004 (2006: 276-277), according to which temporary agency work was on the rise in the majority of European countries (this includes Italy, but there are no data available for Greece).

2.2.4. Wage flexibility

Wage flexibility may refer to the employer's ability to negotiate the wage paid to the worker on an individual basis, without collective bargaining taking place or collective agreements being obligatorily applied to the specific industry (Kahn 2010). According to others, it is the extent of the employer's capacity of reducing "wages to compensate for changes in business conditions that reduce profitability" (Jonsson, 2007: 39). The degree of wage flexibility in a labor market is measured with two indicators: on the one hand, the labor markets' collective agreement coverage, i.e. the percentage of workers covered by a collective agreement that defines a minimum wage for each job post, as well as the union density; on the other hand, the union density: higher labor force participation in unions, means that there is a higher possibility that a union representation is present in the workplace, requesting thus *direct* collective bargaining to take place. Both Greece and Italy presented a rather stable percentage of union density during the last decade, slightly higher than the OECD countries' average (Table 4). Yet significant variation is to be noted when examining the *difference* between coverage rates of collective agreements and the trade union density; the latter is a very useful indicator for measuring the

extent of externally imposed wage flexibilization of the labor market. The latest data available are for 2005; Greece presents a mere 32%, whilst Italy's difference is 53% (source: OECD, 2014). All in all, it would be reasonable to assume that the obligatory extension of collective agreements to all workers of each particular sector or region (even if they have not participated or were represented in the bargaining process) is significantly higher in Italy than in its Eastern neighbor.

Table 2.4: Trade Union Density

Trade Union Density		
	Italy	Greece
1994	38.70%	33.30%
2003	33.70%	25.30%
2012	35.60%	25.40%
SOURCE: OECD Statextracts (extracted July 2014)		
http://stats.oecd.org/		

Another definition of wage flexibility is through result-measuring or performance-based payment (Wilthagen et al. 2003). This would include the relative wage to bonuses balance of the employees' remuneration, but also encompasses pay-per-item remuneration practices. For example, in Greece, the insurance companies, as well as companies which conduct polls and surveys, hire their employees signing pay-per-item contracts; in Italy, the pizza delivery profession is also commonly remunerated in the same way; finally, courier postal services employees' wage in several countries is calculated on a pay-per-item basis. It is interesting that all the examples brought forward refer to *service* sector industries, where the "item" that the workers' payment is calculated upon is subject to the employer's definition. This creates a conceptual and legislative gap – the pay-per-item labor market is relatively unregulated and practically immeasurable, since

the passage from the fixed wage to the pay-per-item remuneration, whilst not altering the dependence level of the employee, transforms in legal terms the employment relation to an "associates'" one. Thus, it is of no surprise that there are no aggregated data available to present in the country or regional level. Estimates can only be made with regard to the extent of the phenomenon.

2.3. The diffusion of workplace insecurity in the individuals' everyday life

This sub-section turns the focus to the collateral impact of flexible labor relations, in terms of welfare state coverage, as well as the broader impact of precariousness on the individuals' social life and leisure. In paragraph 2.3.1 below, the "flexicurity" debate is presented alongside empirical data which confirm that for the majority of EU countries (and, more specifically, the two country-cases under this thesis' scrutiny) labor relations' flexibilization was not accompanied by an, equally drastic, welfare state reform which would provide adequate coverage to the flexibilized labor population. In paragraph 2.3.2, the literature on psychological and, more broadly, beyond-workplace consequences of precarity is examined. A special focus is placed on societal groups that are facing multiple structural conditions that could further increase their marginalization. It is assumed that migrants (especially non-regular ones), female workers, and single parents are facing increased risks of being exposed to "multiple precariousness" – where each challenging element of their social status is reinforcing the negative impact of the others.

2.3.1. Elements of the post-industrial welfare state and inequality in Southern Europe.

As the restructured labor market in all European countries was becoming an ever more prevalent pattern, the abolishing of pro-worker regulations imposed during the Fordist period produced new challenges for scholars and policy makers. The main question was how to tackle the instability caused by the expanding a-typical workforce (Murray & Gollmitzer 2011), whilst

retaining the maximum flexibility – the latter being considered as a potential cure for the high unemployment rates experienced during the '80s (Wallace 2003). At the EU level, a combination of flexibility with protective policies was proposed as a potential solution (Meilland 2005: 49-51; Mission for Flexicurity 2008; see also Ross 2008, for a critical overview of the process). This new concept was named *flexicurity* (a neologism combining *flexibility* and *security*) and was actively promoted in the academic institutions as well as among policy makers. Finally, in 2007, flexicurity became an official EU policy (EurActiv 2008). As Maselli wrote, flexicurity can be described as the combination of four sets of policies applied simultaneously, namely "[a]] flexible and reliable contractual arrangements (from the perspective of the employer and the employee, of 'insiders' and 'outsiders') through modern labour laws, collective agreements and work organisation; [b]] Comprehensive lifelong learning (LLL) strategies to ensure the continual adaptability and employability of workers, particularly those most vulnerable; [c]] Effective active labour market policies (ALMP) that can help people cope with rapid change, reduce unemployment spells and ease transitions to new jobs; [d]] Modern social security systems that provide adequate income support, encourage employment and facilitate labour market mobility. This includes broad coverage of social protection provisions (unemployment benefits, pensions and health care) that help people combine work with private and family responsibilities, such as child care" (Maselli 2010: 2-3, numbering added).

Various research projects conclude that the simultaneous promoting of the four pillars produced significant results in countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands (Golsch 2004; Wilthagen et al. 2003), yet others insist that in the E.U. scale, a part of the workforce still remains unprotected or only has access to limited protection (Herrmann 2008; Landolt & Goldring 2010). The unprotected flexible workers' rate varies from country to country, yet this phenomenon is particularly evident in South European economies. This has been attributed to two main reasons: the relative weakness of the welfare state and/or cooperative mechanisms between the social partners (see, for example, Flaquer & Escobedo 2009; I.L.O. 2005); and, most recently, labor market deregulating measures taken as a response to the financial crisis (Lang et al. 2013; Kretsos 2014).

With regard to the former, the lack of a strong welfare state tradition had as a result the promotion of the first flexicurity pillar only, whilst the other three remained either weak or nonexistent (in Greece, for example, pillar (d) never became a governmental priority, despite significant EU funds received in this direction; see INE-GSEE 2013; INE-GSEE 2011).The recent austerity measures imposed in all Southern European countries after the explosion of the public debt crisis further worsened the situation. In Italy, taxes were increased both in property and income, public spending was cut down, whilst most hiring procedures in the public sector were frozen (Angeline Benoit 2012; Deidda & Tedeschi 2012). In Greece, which was the first country to feel the social impact of the austerity policies, five years of internal devaluation and recession have resulted in a plunge of the median household income at around 30%, the explosion of the unemployment rate to 27.7% as per December 2013 (OECD 2013) and youth unemployment surpassing 60% (INE-GSEE 2013). According to Eurostat, in 2007 both countries' income inequality rate, as "reflected in the S80/S20 ratio, which indicates the relative position of the bottom income quintile with regard to that of the top income quintile", was higher than the EU-27 median, reaching 5.4 for Italy and 6 for Greece (Eurostat 2009). In 2012, the situation had worsened: 5.5 for Italy, 6.6 for Greece (Eurostat 2014). Finally, poverty rates are significantly higher in Southern Europe than in the rest of the EU. According to the latest data available, 19.5% of the Greek population was "severely materially deprived" in 2012 – a sharp rise from 2009's 11%. The respective percentages for Italy were 7% in 2009, and 14.5% in 2012 (Eurostat, 2014).

To sum up, with regard to both Italy and Greece, the simultaneous promotion of flexible labor policies, combined with the weakness and further weakening of welfare state provisions for the poorer members of the respective societies, has left a significant part of the population, and especially lower-wage earners, unprotected or under-protected, at least according to the European standards.

2.3.2. External variables: Psychological and social impact of precariousness. The structural sources of precarity.

Up to this point, we have examined two aspects of precariousness, the flexible employment terms and the lack of or limited access to welfare state protection. We shall now focus on the

simultaneous effects of the two to the individual's everyday life. It is nowadays a conventional wisdom to admit that insecurity from the workplace level (Kalleberg 2009) i.e. employment, income, representation and labor market insecurity, amongst others (Burchell 2001: 63) also has an effect on broader aspects of the worker's social life (Murgia 2007). In 2008, De Cyuper et al. cross-examined various research projects and measuring techniques in an attempt to provide a "conceptual model" for the "psychological impact of temporary employment" (2008: 25). They acknowledged that, despite inconsistencies in the available results, flexible labor should be accounted for when researching workers' behavior and more generally their well-being (ibid: 29-34). Hermann and his colleagues attempted to re-define the notion of social quality, taking into account conditional, constitutional and normative factors (Herrmann 2008; Herrmann & van Der Maesen 2008). They framed social precarity as the "lack of people's ability to participate in the social-economic, cultural, juridical and political life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potentials for contributing to societal development as well" (Herrmann & van Der Maesen, 2008: 13). Golsch convincingly argued that the periods of unemployment that follow temporary contracts tend to drastically reduce the consequent job tenure period (Golsch 2004: 51). This highlights the reproducing character of the phenomenon, which aggregates the negative consequences on those affected. Pedaci (2010) offers a more elaborated rationale. According to him, the precarious worker is forced to deal with a "living condition in which autonomy and self-determination are threatened by the unstable inclusion in social integration systems and in resources distribution" (ibid.: 246). Furthermore, she is subjected to a violent re-formulation of power relations both inside and outside the workplace; following this strand of thinking, precarity should be perceived as a "disciplinary mechanism" (ibid.: 255-256). The disciplining function of precarity should not only be perceived as a set of formally applied constraints (such as lack of representativeness, impossibility of collective bargaining and so on) but rather as a combination of the former with a series of self-imposed limitations.

However, not every scholar agrees on the above perception of precarity, as a constraint and a disciplinary mechanism. Laura Fantone argues that the phenomenon, despite its obvious negative effect on people's lives, due to "the exploitation and erosion of basic rights" (2006: 2)

should be disentangled from its current neo-liberal content in order to be properly analyzed. According to her, feminist groups had already raised voices of criticism against the Fordist state and the subsequent employment security, as producing and promoting high levels of gender inequality (ibid.). Precarity could also be considered as an opportunity to break the bonds of the traditional patriarchal society.

This perspective brings forward another interesting strand of thought with regard to the external variables that should be taken into account when addressing precariousness. This literature focuses on the *structural characteristics* of societal groups, placing their population in a position that is more vulnerable or susceptible to discrimination and exploitation. Research has focused on migrant and female workers, as almost ideal-typical representations of the intertwinement between socially attributed roles and the diffusion of precarity in the laborer's everyday life. Fantone focused on the Italian and Spanish cases, where the patriarchal traditions of the catholic societies are facing the new precarity challenge. As the Italian group "la rete prec@s" note:

> "If we (younger female precarious) are asked to be flexible, ready to change and avoid planning anything in the long-term, why should everyone or everything else in society impose heavy pressures on us to maintain stable families, stable jobs and reproduce gender divisions of labor?" (la rete prec@s, quoted in Fantone, 2006: 8).

Vishmidt (2005), on the other hand, added to the debate the issue of female housework. According to her, the unpaid domestic worker is illustrating yet another way traces of precarity can be found in everyday life, this time presenting itself as the lack of income stability and security, through the absolute dependence of the female upon income produced by her husband. Once again, the issue of the multiple layers of precarity and the challenges it bears for scholars is pointed out; Vishmidt wisely makes a clear distinction between the various categories of precariousness – and urges her colleagues to develop a clear analytical framework, through which the term may be elucidated.

Finally, some research has been produced taking into account the combination of gender issues with other social identities increasing the vulnerability of the individual. Kambouri and

Zavos (2010) examined the case of Konstantina Kouneva, an immigrant female cleaner and trade unionist in Greece, who fell victim to an unusually violent attack with acid, almost died and is still facing serious health problems[1]. A strong wave of solidarity and condemnation of the attack was immediately launched, and the incident sparked a massive, by Greek standards, grassroots mobilization demanding a radical change in labor relations in the cleaning sector. The two authors convincingly argue that the extraordinary character of the attack brought to surface the usually

"invisible, silent and victimized cleaner and brought to the spotlight strong, active and determined women labour unionists, able to challenge not only bosses and state institutions, but also the all-male leadership of the largest labour unions" (ibid: 150).

Without questioning the accuracy of this statement, it is important to add that other unionists claimed that the fact that the attack was met with such a widespread feeling of solidarity could also be attributed to the specific socio-political environment of the time (the incident happened only a few days after the Athenian revolt of December 2008), and that many other similarevents were met with indifference (Vogiatzoglou 2010: 33-40). In accordance with the above, the claim made by the people I interviewed in 2010 was that despite the fact that strong, active and determined women were spearheading the cleaners' union, their structural position both inside the union organizational schemes and in the society in general was relatively weak, at least weaker than their male, indigenous colleagues.

In other works focusing on similar phenomena, Landolt and Goldring (2010) analyzed the effect of non-citizenship at the workplace. They assessed that the "life and work patterns associated with an insecure quadrant of the work-status matrix" (ibid.: 3) create a combination that, almost inevitably leads to precarity, poverty and social exclusion. Nawyn et al. (2012) pointed out the importance of speaking the local language for social capital, the inability to do so increasing the precariousness of the worker. Finally, many others have examined case studies where migrants are subjected to flexible labor relations (Mimis 2005; Nobil Ahmad 2008; Razavi

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[1] Konstantina Kouneva was elected Member of the Euro-parliament in the Euro elections of May 2014.

& Staab 2010); their findings and conclusions confirm our initial hypothesis: immigrants are structurally more susceptible to precarity than native workers.

2.4. Movements on precarity: the attempts to construct a collective identity of a "precarious worker".

A rather widely-circulated assumption invoked in the precarity-related debates is that the notion, as we understand it now, appeared *prior* to the demands for the re-organization of the labor market which included the flexibilization process of labor relations (see, for example, Mitropoulos 2005). It has also been argued that what we later termed as "precariousness", was present, in a preliminary form, in the denial-to-work ideas, which were quite popular among the autonomous Marxist circles of the late '70s, in Italy and elsewhere (Frassanito-network 2005). An even more extreme version of the above arguments is that the employers' demands for restructuring the production was nothing but a response to the young workers' unwillingness to conform with the 8 hours per day, 5 days per week working schedule, as well as the increase in the number and intensity of industrial conflicts during the '60s and the '70s (this theoretical strand has been presented and properly challenged in Neilson & Rossiter 2005).

I could not possibly agree with the above arguments. Firstly, the term had appeared in French as early as in 1963 (Bourdieu 1963: 360-363). Many scholars have convincingly argued that the flexibilization process was, and still is, just *a* part of the general reconstruction of the productive procedure, which includes the construction of global production (Gereffi et al. 2005) and commodity chains (Henderson et al. 2002), as well as informative and communicational networks of various kinds (Castells 2000; Dicken 2003). Attributing all of the above to the intense labor struggles of the '70s does not seem very convincing. Furthermore, despite the fact that the term "precarity" had been used prior to "flexibility", it is quite obvious that the way we perceive

the notion, after three decades of the above restructuring having taken place, is radically different.

There is another time lapse worth noting in this debate: the movements on precarity sprang up in continental Europe during the early '00s, inside and around the alter-globalization mobilizations. Their activity peak can be traced to the mid-2000s; yet the majority of scholarly work on precarity only appeared *after* this peak, in the aftermath of the large EuroMayDay protests (see below). Neilson and Rossiter consider this delay as a normal consequence of the way social scientific knowledge is produced – analysis and evaluation requires temporal distance from the events (2008). Yet an implication that should be taken into account is that when the scholars arrived in the field, the key notions of the phenomenon were already symbolically charged (in terms of content and connotations) by the movements and the discourse the latter had produced.

The mobilization that was traditionally spearheading the movement activities against precarity at a pan-European level is EuroMayDay, a protest taking place each first of May in various European cities. The event was organized for the first time in 2001, in Milan, Italy, as the MayDay Parade and from 2004 on it spread outside Italy, the prefix "Euro" being added to the event title. In 2006, more than 300,000 people, in 20 European cities, participated (Mattoni 2009). In 2010, the EuroMayDay parade took place in 13 cities, the majority of which belong to the axis that unites Milan with Hamburg, Germany (EuroMayDay Network 2010). In Greece, an attempt was made in 2005 and 2006 with the purpose of launching a, somewhat similar to EuroMayDay, protest. The events were organized by anti-authoritarian and anarchist collectives and were hosted in Thessaloniki. The protests were not considered very successful and, thus, the experiment was abandoned.

The EuroMayDay belongs to the general tradition of "parades", that is public celebratory events that take place on a fixed date every year, mostly aiming at producing, preserving or re-adjusting a set of collective mnemonic constructions, rather than reacting to an external stimulus provided by current events (Armstrong & Crage 2006). The organization "Precarity Webring" and the EuroMayDay organizing assembly have also participated in various events of the alter-

globalization movement[2]. Other collectives have organized protests and activist happenings in fashion shows and international expositions, flash mobs in stores, offices and supermarkets (Mattoni 2008). The collective "San Precario" is still relatively active in Italy and abroad, combining a rich production of texts and analyses on precarity with direct action and participation in labor-related mobilizations.

The organizational framework of the movements making reference to precarity presents some interesting characteristics: the inter-organizational communication and co-ordination is based on horizontal networks. No hierarchical structure is evident. The intra-organizational relations (between members) are based on assemblies; again, if hierarchies exist, they are atypical and concealed. The use of digital technologies and web-based applications for co-ordination is common, physical proximity and contact are desired, yet not mandatory (De Sario 2007).

With regard to their movement repertoire, one could sum up a set of commonalities, as they are represented in the texts of both the collectives themselves, as well as scholars' who conducted research on them (see, amongst many others, the following: Blackout 2006; Blaumachen 2006; Fantone 2006; Kolinko 2003; Mattoni 2009; Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014a; Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014b; Tarri & Vanni 2005).

First, the movements on precarity labor-related events are characterized by a partial rupture with the traditional models of union mobilization. Apart from the attempts to renovate the scheme "gathering – protesting in the streets – picketing", the way the movements perceive the industrial conflict is not only through the bipolar scheme "to strike or not to strike?" On the contrary, innovative means are proposed, such as small-scale sabotages and disruption of the production procedures, in order to smooth down the everyday workplace pressure of being productive. Second, the movements tend to rely on alternative, social, and open-publication

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2   Amongst others, they have participated in the People's Global Action events taking place in parallel to the European Social Forum of 2004, where they produced their manifesto – the "Middlesex declaration for the European Precariat" (Eurogeneration Insurgent 2004); in the anti-G8 protests in Rostock, Germany (2007), in the Aachen protests against the Merkel-Sarkozy summit in 2008, and so on (EuroMayDay Network, 2010).

media to propagate their activities and present their ideological framework. They discredit or tend to ignore institutionalized, mainstream media, both digital and print. Then, they place an emphasis on the international aspect of their activities and the cross-national exchange of information, know-how and experiences. The demand for horizontal organizing beyond each country's border is expressed and, in this sense, it is not surprising that migration issues and the criticism of "Fortress Europe" occupy a principal position on their agendas. Finally, the graphic design and aesthetics of their desktop publishing productions, as well as the design of their websites, clearly illustrate an attempt to use innovative symbolic representations and combination. This should not be considered as irrelevant to the collective identity construction process.

Therefore, what we are dealing with is an innovative, international, euro-centric movement, the center of activity of which is located in Germany and Italy. Its course was intertwined with the brief (yet impressive) course of the alter-globalization movements. Its population mostly consists of flexible workers, but also students and activists (A. Mattoni, 2009). It is a non-institutionalized movement, in the sense that it is rarely collaborating with any established organizations of the political or trade union scene. Yet, an important distinction needs to be made. The movements that make reference to or address the issue of precarity are not the *only* precarious workers' movements. The majority of the organizations, all over Europe, consisting of unprotected flexible workers do not use the "precarity" terminology, nor do they analyze the structural conditions of their members utilizing the same interpretative tools as the former. We shall examine this issue in detail in the following chapters. For the moment, it will suffice to note that the major contribution of the movements on precarity is their explicit attempt to create, define, and promote the idea of a precarious individual's *collective identity*. What they propose is a *narrative*, where a unifying web of interests, experiences, lifestyles and employment patterns provides the cultural and existential basis for what Guy Standing (2011) termed as "the new dangerous class": The *Precariat*.

2.5. Conclusion: conceptualizing the precarious worker

Up to now, I have presented in brief the pieces of the puzzle. It is now time to put them in order. The reference, made in the concluding sentence of the previous paragraph, to Guy Standings' "precariat" was made on purpose. Prior to his contribution the definitions available for precarity were rather vague and of little analytical value. As mentioned above, Dale Carrico framed it as the "casualization of everyday life" (2007). Louise Waite, despite the fact that in her interesting article she presents practically all aspects of precariousness, following a line of thought similar to the one presented in this chapter, concludes by perceiving the phenomenon as "something rather contextually specific in contemporary times that emanates primarily from labor market experiences" (2009: 416). Ettlinger presents precarity "as a condition of vulnerability relative to contingency and the inability to predict"(2007: 320). Murgia distinguishes Butler's "*precariousness*, defined as an ontological and existential category that characterizes contemporary subjective and social vulnerability and fragility" from "the concept of work 'precarity'", which refers only to employment issues (2007: 3). Finally, Neilson and Rossiter conclude that "precarity cannot be grounded. In other words, precarity is not an empirical object that can be presupposed as stable and contained" (2008: 63).

Guy Standing's perception of the precariat is a major breakthrough in the theorizing attempts made by social scientists. He terms the precariat as a "class-in-formation", a distinct social group consisting of people who lack several forms of labor-related security (Standing 2011). The security forms he considers as relevant are as follows: labor market, employment, job, work, skill reproduction, income and representation security (ibid.: 10). Especially with regard to income security, he clarifies that "social income" includes not only work remuneration, but also welfare state benefits, the possibility of family support, private benefits deriving from investment and self-production of several goods. He concludes that a characteristic of the precariat is that it lacks "work-based identity. When employed, they [the members of the precariat] are in career-less jobs, without traditions of social memory, a feeling they belong to an occupational community steeped in stable practices, codes of ethics and norms of behavior, reciprocity and fraternity" (ibid.: 12). This excellent argumentation goes directly to the point. Indeed, precarity is a complex

phenomenon encompassing aspects of labor security, welfare state coverage, access to solidarity networks in the family, neighborhood and societal level, as well as the common sense of belonging to a group of workers whose life and career is by default unstable and insecure.

The assumption Guy Standing derives from the above is that the "precariat" is a *class-in-the-making* – as opposed to the Marxist *class-in-itself*, i.e. a group which shares a common relation with objective factors, such as the means of production, a common collective identity and social relations which derive from a common lifestyle, set of interests and so on (Standing 2013). This "precariat" class, according to him, finds its place in social stratification between the "shrinking core of manual employees, the essence of the "old working class", and the "army of unemployed and a detached group of socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society" (Standing 2011: 8).

Moving back to the issue of defining the precarious worker, a problem that arises is how to categorize, if one opts for utilizing Standing's class classification, professions and groups of employees that are hard to define as "underdogs", although they fulfill all the other criteria mentioned above. What I'm referring to is groups such as PhD holders in informatics, artists, graphic designers and many others who do not seem to be subjected poverty and social misery – in some cases, rather the contrary.

In order to resolve this puzzling dilemma, what I propose is to conceptually disentangle the precarity *phenomenon* from the *class* it produces. My argument is that precarity is transversal across the various social strata. Precarity may, indeed, be referring to a contingent, "shadow" workforce the members of which are constantly feeling the threat and negative impact of insecurity, poverty, instability both in their workplace and outside it; at the same time, though, it does concern groups consisting of the young, highly skilled middle-class of labor, who enjoy the flexibility of their working schedule and their social, spatial and temporal mobility. The latter may also feel the *threat*, but have not (yet) been subjected to the aforementioned negative consequences of flexibilization and welfare state inadequate coverage.

Standing rightfully argues that today's welfare state is inadequate, as it was built in order to serve a different form of labor division; but exactly the same process is taking place when it

comes to the trade unions. As the precarious workforce is expanding, the potential clientele for the unions is diminishing. The weakening of the unions' strength, both in numbers and bargaining capacity, was properly depicted in the "Unions in Crisis" scholarly literature of the '80s. In the following chapter, I shall analyze the changes taking place in the trade union sphere due to the invasion of precarious workers on the scene, and sketch the path through which this project will attempt to prove that precarity is radically changing the field. The focus and aim is to understand the common trajectories of this new type of union, notwithstanding the multitude of forms precarity takes; and at the same time, to illustrate and explain how this multitude is creating varieties of precarious workers' unions.

Chapter 3: Defining the Precarious Workers' Union

3.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the thesis' unit of analysis – the Precarious Workers' Union. I define it as a labor organization populated by precarious workers. Having defined the *Precarious Worker* in Chapter 2, I draw from Crouch's conceptualization of the *Trade Union*, as presented in his seminal 1982 work "Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action". In this book, he defines the trade union as "an organization of employees who have combined together to improve their returns from and conditions at work" (1982: 13). This inclusive approach allows the examination of *informal* workers' organizations, alongside more established union entities. Yet, two challenges lie ahead: first, clarifying why studying the PWUs is relevant in theoretical terms; second, explaining why examining the PWUs through the social movement studies' analytical lens is valid – and in which ways this approach sets the general framework (and limits) of the overall research project.

To this purpose, what I suggest is to examine the PWU in the light of the recent theoretical advances with regard to trade union revitalization. The models of unionism proposed for the precarity era not only elucidate the main traits of the PWU, they also hint towards specific characteristics worth examining in a comparative perspective, in order to respond to the thesis' research questions.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, John Kelly's "Long Waves of Mobilization" theory is examined, with the objective of highlighting the importance of the precarious workers' collective identification processes. Then, the focus turns to the organizations' member recruitment and collective action repertoire, as delineated in the servicing vs. organizing model debate. Paragraph 3.2.3 summarizes the literature on Social Movement Unionism, as well as its

international aspects. Community-based labor organizations are the object of the following paragraph – their relevance will be confirmed in chapters 7 and 9 of this thesis. The chapter closes with a discussion on the usefulness (and limits) of social movements studies' theoretical and methodological toolkit.

3.2. Models of unionism in the post-fordist era

3.2.1. Long Waves of Mobilization

In John Kelly's seminal work, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves* (Kelly 1998) the author utilizes the concept of long waves of workers' mobilization, the trajectory of which could be traced in parallel with the broad developments in the capitalist production process. Each upward-turning point of these long waves, he argues, is accompanied by a "collective interest definition" (ibid., p. 127), the attribution of the workers' problems to their respective employer (or the state) and the strengthening of their collective identity (Edwards & McCarthy 2004) – a process which in social movement studies is usually called framing (Benford & Snow 2000). Collective interest definition, he continues,

> *"…provides the basis for collective organization and mobilization. The transformation of a set of individuals into a collective actor is normally the work of a small but critical mass of activists […]. A key part of such work involves promoting a sense of grievance amongst workers by persuading them that what they have hitherto considered 'normal' or 'acceptable' is in fact unjust"* (Kelly 1998, p.127)*.*

The most interesting of Kelly's contributions is that his approach is moving beyond the common sense pessimism which prognoses the end of the labor movement as-we-know-it, given the notable changes in capitalist production models that have taken place in the last decades. Rather on the contrary, he not only suggests that activity peaks and declines are expected steps in a, more or less, cyclical pattern of labor contention, but also proposes ways in which scholars

could identify the key turning points – a major one being intensive framing processes in which workers engage.

Despite the undoubted usefulness of Kelly's approach, the fact that it is based on longitudinal and multi-country data should not be ignored. When moving back to a meso-level examination, notable variations are to be encountered. I shall use an example from my own country cases to make my point. With respect to the precarious workers' mobilization in Italy, a significant literature body is to be found, confirming Kelly's approach. Several scholars portrayed the early mobilization of Italian precarious workers as characterized by an intensive effort to break the public opinion's positive view of flexibility, to construct and disseminate a common understanding of the precarious workers' interests and identity, to create, in sum, a new subject for the post-industrial labor realm (see, for example, the contributions of Frassanito-network, 2005; A. Mattoni, 2009; Murgia, 2007).

Yet, when moving to the Greek case, no traces of such a process may be identified, at least when it comes to the early mobilization stages (late 1990s – early 2000). On the contrary, as shall be examined in chapters 6 and 9, the discursive production of the Greek Precarious Workers' Unions was characterized by its lack of theoretical refinement, its adherence to a traditional labor rights discourse and the seldom made, if at all, references to the concept of *precarity* itself (Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014b; Vogiatzoglou 2010).

If this is the case, and if "collective interest definition" is required for collective organization and mobilization to build upon, then how did these people manage to organize, mobilize and produce the most interesting instances of labor struggles in Greece during the last two decades? My argument is that in order to grasp the whole picture of the PWUs' mobilization, the introduction of a further set of determinants is required. More specifically, in the following chapter I shall propose examining, among others, the impact of (a) the structural context of each country's trade union system; (b) the ways in which precarious workers and activists perceive their relation with the institutional trade union organizations; and (c) the ways in which precarious' movements cross-fertilize each other in a transnational scale, by constructing solidarity networks. What I argue hereby is that the variation in factors such as the above could

not only explain why mobilizations emerge in settings where critical preconditions are missing, but could also be used in order to understand how movements based in very similar labor market settings and being populated by similar employees' categories, end up following diverse trajectories.

3.2.2. Servicing/Organizing model

The debate on the servicing vs. organizing trade union organization models was first launched in the US, in the aftermath of the 1995 election of the so-called "New Voice" leadership of AFL-CIO's[3]. Sweeney, Trumka, and Chavez-Thompson, the (then) leaders of America's largest union, proposed a radical reform of the ways in which the unions would intervene in the workplace's everyday activity. As Milkman and Voss put it, the main lines of the new model were as follows:

> *"Unions must fundamentally alter their internal organizational practices to direct staff resources to organizing […]. This means shifting priorities away from servicing current members and toward unionizing new ones - creating more organizer positions on the staff; developing programs to teach current members how to handle the tasks involved in resolving shopfloor grievances, so that existing staff are freed up to work on external organizing; and building programs that train members to participate fully in the work of external organizing. Such a reorientation entails redefining the very meaning of union membership from a relatively passive stance toward one of continuous active engagement"* (Milkman & Voss 2004: 7).

The tone of the above excerpt ("Unions *must*…") is telling. US, as well as Europe-based scholars focused on the new scheme proposed and actively engaged in exploring its potentials, as well as its limitations (de Turberville 2004; Fitzgerald & Hardy 2010; Milkman & Voss 2004; Fantasia & Stepan-Norris 2006; Charlwood 2004). The new model, promptly entitled as organizing, was contrasted to the old-school servicing one, the latter being considered partly

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[3] The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) is a national trade union center and the largest federation of unions in the United States.

responsible for the membership and power crisis unions were facing worldwide. De Turberville highlighted the two models' main differences. According to him, the organizing one:

"[...] is a proactive bottom-up model of collective organization in which members constantly use innovative techniques to empower themselves within employment and wider social relationships. In contrast, the servicing model was conceived as a reactive top-down model of unionism in which full-time-officials rely on legislative and employer procedures to regulate an inert membership within the employment relationship" (de Turberville 2004: 777)*.*

In the servicing model, union officials concentrate their efforts on providing supplementary services to members who approach them (Kelly 1996; Vandenberg 2006: 172), whilst unions classified under the organizing model focus on promoting the involvement of "members in problem solving in group process or collective action" (de Turberville 2004: 777). Obviously, the servicing model has been linked to more bureaucratic organizational patterns (Fairbrother et al. 2007). The organizing model had been promoted in the past as a potential solution to the unions' crisis (Campbell 2010), although the validity of this expectation has been contested by others (de Turberville, 2004). As an AFL-CIO activist put it:

"Instead of lowering the definition of what it means to be a union member—cheap benefits, another credit card—we are saying that what we have is so valuable that it commands greater commitment" (quoted in Voss & Fantasia 2004: 128) .

It is important to clarify that the servicing-organizing model debate does not directly refer to types of collective action employed by the workers' organization (to what extent a trade union behaves in a militant or moderate way). Although it is reasonable to expect that an organizing trade union would be more prone to engage in militant action than a servicing one, empirical evidence from my research points at two issues worth taking into consideration: first, cases are to be encountered where a workers' group which has fully adopted an organizing perspective, might never resort to strike or other industrial action. Second, the unions put under scrutiny tend to present characteristics belonging to both models, in a simultaneous manner. For these reasons, in the chapters that follow I've categorized the Italian and Greek organizations to be examined alongside two complementary axes *(see Figure 3.1)*: the Organizing/Servicing one is referring to

organizational patterns, whilst the Militancy/Moderation to models of collective action, the movement repertoire and frequency of actions over time (Kelly 1996; Frege & Kelly 2004).

The "servicing-organizing" axis refers to the different approaches regarding the unions' organization, in terms of member recruitment and decision-making processes (Oxenbridge 2000).
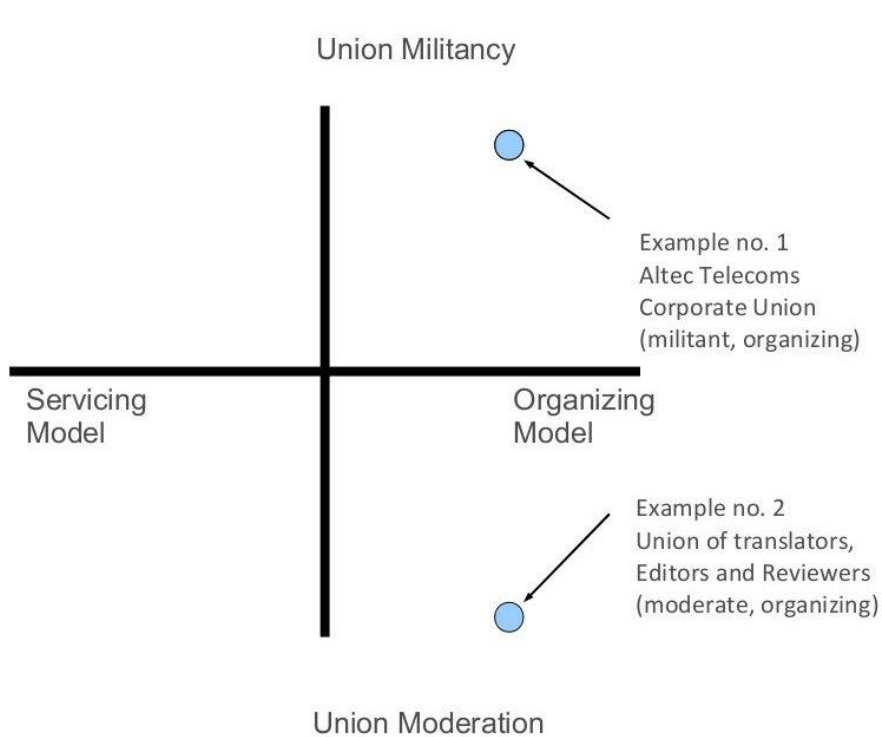
Figure 1: The double axis of "servicing-organizing" and "militant-moderate" model

The combination of the two axes provides us with four ideal types of unions: the "moderate-organizing", the "moderate-servicing", the "militant-organizing", and the "militant-servicing" types. This classification, although quite schematic (purely contentious or partnership-oriented unions are merely ideal type constructions, since most workers' organizations utilize a combination[4] of

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4   A case study of the SUD-Rail union in France showed that workers mobilized mainly for two reasons: the legal assistance offered by union officials (servicing model) as well as the "protection" received by becoming union representatives, which acted as an incentive in getting more involved in everyday union activities (organizing model) (Connolly 2010; Connolly & Darlington 2012). The same goes for the case of the Immigrants' Union of Athens, an informal, non-hierarchical organization, mostly populated by illegal immigrants. A significant amount (and variety) of services is offered to union members such as legal advice, translation services, etc. (Vogiatzoglou 2010).

approaches and tactics that varies over time), it is of great analytical value to this project, since it provides a road map of structural and movement activity characteristics that one should take into account when conducting in-depth research using the *union* as a unit of analysis. It also serves the useful purpose of providing a clear and operationalizable classification of the union's characteristics, which will be examined during the whole project.

In sum, as shall be examined in the chapters to follow, a further elaboration of the organizing-servicing model will be needed for two main reasons. In order (a) to better explain the phenomenon of mixed servicing and organizing components in the unions' organizational models, and (b) to better understand and classify internal variations of the organizing model, as unprotected flexible workers' unions refine their strategies to counterbalance the flexibility challenges.

3.2.3. The turn towards "Social Movement Unionism"

The turn towards what has been termed as Social Movement Unionism is rooted in a dual process: on the one hand, a theoretical reconsideration of the (formerly) well-established cleavage between "new" and "old" social movements; on the other hand, the need to assess and interpret an empirically confirmed approach between trade unions and social movement organizations.

Drawing on Melucci's work (1980), scholars from both sides of the Atlantic have worked in the direction of introducing symbolic and cultural protest elements in the study of social movements (Polletta & Jasper 2001). The shift reflected the need to widen the analytical scope of the aforementioned field, as well as concrete changes taking place in the composition of the 1960's and 1970's protests (Benford & Snow 2000). Among many others, feminist, peace, and environmental movements were populated by new compositions of individuals, groups and organizations struggling to improve their lives beyond the traditional labor issues (Melucci 1985). Sometimes labeled as post-materialistic movements, they were no longer based on class cleavages – rendering it easier for militants and protest participants to recognize common and shared belongings. As della Porta and Diani put it:

"[…] unlike the workers' movement, new social movements do not, in Melucci's view, limit themselves to seeking material gain, but challenge the diffuse notions of politics and of society themselves" (della Porta & Diani 2006: 9)*.*

New social movement approaches did not focus on labor movements. On the contrary, they suggested that new social movements developing in the 1960s and in the 1970s were far away from the traditional workers' movements, whose class division-based conflicts had been overcome by the broader struggles of the broader middle-class. About 30 years later, however, conflicts in the labor realm also began to change with the massive diffusion of temporary forms of contracts both in the Global North and the Global South. Once easy to divide into rather homogeneous groups – the white collars, the unemployed, the metalworkers etc. – the national and global workforces became more and more fragmented as a consequence of labor market flexibility (Georgakopoulou & Kouzis 1996; Psimmenos 1999). Whilst in the past workers' struggles could count on a similar daily work experience, rooted in the spatial and temporal homogeneity of the factory or the office, today, those working in the same place – and undertaking the same tasks – often develop a different perception of their jobs as they are employed under different types of contracts and varying terms (Zamponi & Vogiatzoglou 2015; Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014b). The fragmentation of workers' collective identification processes, as well as the return of materialistic claims in the post-2008 agenda of anti-austerity protesters (della Porta 2015), required questioning the extent to which the "new" vs. "old" distinction was still valid (Goodwin & Hertland 2009; Crossley 2003).

In the meanwhile, researchers of labor and trade unions drew attention to new empirical findings, which, in their view, confirm a re-approach of trade unions and social movement organizations, both in terms of strategic alliances (Waterman 2004) and diffusion of actual practices and organizational models (Turner 2007; Fantasia & Voss 2004). As Baccaro, Hamman and Turner noted:

[…] unions everywhere respond to the pressures of global capitalism by recasting themselves and deepening their efforts as political actors, beyond more limited traditional roles as labor market intermediaries (Baccaro et al. 2003: 126)*.*

Although by no means a "new" phenomenon in the long history of the labor movement (Pizzolato 2011), the contemporary wave of cross-fertilization between SMOs and trade was hailed as a revitalization strategy, the potentials of which are worth exploring. Sometimes under the label of Social Movement Unionism (Vandenberg 2006), (New) Social Unionism (Waterman 1999; Ross 2007), or Radical Political Unionism (Denis 2012; Gordon & Upchurch 2012; Connolly & Darlington 2012), the quest for a new vocabulary, able to adequately grasp the situation, did not remain solely a scholarly issue. In October 2014, trade unionists and activists from all over Europe, as well as internationally renowned social scientists, among which David Harvey, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, met in Passignano, Italy, in an explicit attempt to provide a concrete definition of what they term as Social Unionism (Hardt 2014).

It is important to note that many of the contributions mentioned above featured an international perspective on the cases examined. The international element is grounded on two observations: first, the globalized nature of contemporary capitalism (Dicken 2003; Castells 2000; Henderson et al. 2002; Gereffi et al. 2005) is considered to require trade union responses expanding beyond national borders (Waterman 2004; Fairbrother et al. 2007; McIlroy 2012). Second, the transnational turn of protest and other relevant social movement activity during the alter-globalization movement (della Porta & Tarrow 2005; della Porta & Kriesi 1998; Bennett et al. 2004) provided opportunities for both local and international trade unions to collaborate with other SMOS and contribute to a reconfiguration of contentious politics in the globalization era; the opportunities were, at least to some extent, grasped by the workers' organizations (Ramsay 1997; Bieler 2012; Waterman 2001).

3.2.4. Community-based organizations (CBOs)

Finally, a useful addition to the precarity-era workers' organizational models is the one introduced by Janice Fine when examining community-based labor organizations in the US (Fine 2006). Those are "modest-sized community-based organizations of low-wage workers that, through a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing, focus on issues of work and wages" (Fine 2005: 153). Sullivan considers them to belong in "the space between unions" (2010: 793).

Yet, in accordance with the definitions provided, my research treats them as unions *per se*, in a similar way to Fine's conceptual toolkit (2005). The empirical data to be presented in the following chapters confirm the expansion, in both Greece and Italy, of community-based organizations. Their role and characteristics are directly relevant to the purposes of this project. Italian and Greek CBOs introduced to the public debate previously under-explored issues concerning the spatiality of contemporary capitalist production (Zamponi & Vogiatzoglou 2015). They directly engaged with the unemployed and social solidarity structures, operating as vehicles for a new workers' mutualism (see Chapter 7). Finally, they occasionally contributed to building cross-national solidarity networks, an aim shared by several PWUs in both countries (Chapter 9, see also Vogiatzoglou 2015).

3.3. The usefulness (and limitations) of utilizing Social Movements' Studies tools to examine contemporary trade unions

In a 2006 article, Fantasia and Stepan-Norris identified two reasons why trade unions were disregarded for a long time by social movement scholars. The first was that many among the former did not behave until lately as Social Movement Organizations[5]. The second is, as they put it, that:

> *"[…] scholars have oftentimes been predisposed by their own autobiographical experiences of social movement activism to study those movements that are similar to those in which they have worked, or those that have played a role in the development of their own intellectual stance and career trajectory, as well as those movements that embody their own political values"* (Fantasia & Stepan-Norris 2006: 556).

Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the recent upsurge of trade union activism would produce a renewed interest in examining unions under the analytical lens (and employing the methodological toolkit) of Social Movement Studies (SMS). Indeed, all the models examined across this chapter draw heavily from well-established concepts present in social

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[5] The authors explicitly refer to the US labor movement, but I think that the observation is also valid for many European countries.

movement literature. Kelly's approach utilized the collective identification process – usually termed as "framing" in SMS (Benford & Snow 2000) – as an indicator of major shifts in workers' organizing. His reasoning is also influenced by the literature on "cycles of contention" (Tarrow 1993; Gamson & Tarrow 1999). Second, the examination of the servicing and organizing models, requires adopting concepts on member recruitment (Bosi & della Porta 2012) and the collective action repertoire (della Porta 2008b), as has already been done, just to offer an example, in Biggert's (1997) and Thomas's (2013) case study projects. There is no need to add much with regard to the turn towards social movement unionism; the concepts used speak for themselves. Finally, hybrid organizations such as the CBOs are to be found at the crossroads between social movements and (traditional) trade unions and, as such, require an inter-disciplinary approach for an in-depth examination of their characteristics and contribution.

That said, some precautions need to be taken. As Fantasia and Stepan-Norris put it:

"[…] labor movement is based on a set of practices and is embedded in a set of institutional relationships that may sometimes require a different analytical lens than is normally provided by social movement theoretical frameworks" (2006: 556)*.*

The authors make explicit reference to two characteristics posing obstacles to the introduction of a social movement studies' perspective on trade unions. On the one hand, the "heavily institutionalized character" (ibid.) of several trade union formations needs to be taken into account. On the other hand, due to the particular position of the labor movement, which bridges the roles of an intermediary of workers' demands and a contentious actor, it is hard to employ a traditional political opportunities approach (ibid.: 560), especially with regard to the social production of the labor bureaucrat.

The good news, when it comes to this thesis, is that none of the entities put under scrutiny run the risk of being considered as heavily institutionalized – rather to the contrary. On the other hand, taking into account the limitations mentioned above, I have tried to avoid utilizing the political opportunities approach, in order to avoid arriving at potentially erroneous assumptions.

Chapter 4: The research project – research design and methodology

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research project's research design, research questions and methodology in the light of the concepts and the recent theoretical contributions which were examined and developed in chapters 2 and 3. In Section 4.2, the key concepts are operationalized: I propose the examination of two categories of PWUs' characteristics, their organizational format and their collective action repertoire. Then, in 4.3, the project's research questions are introduced, accompanied by a discussion of the reasoning behind them. The organizational and movement characteristics, which had been pointed out in the previous section are now contextualized, in accordance with the relevant literature.

Then, the project's methodology is developed in Sections 4.4 – 4.6. This part commences with an analysis of the dual (internal and cross-national) comparison on which the project is based (Section 4.4.). The rationale for the case selection (both at the country and at the organization level) follows, with a special focus on establishing solid grounds of comparison, as well as providing the background information on the two countries' societies and labor markets, which is necessary for a thorough understanding of the processes and events that will be examined in the chapters to follow. The organizations that became part of the research are presented in a comprehensive table, including some of their basic characteristics (Section 4.5). Finally, the specific techniques that were utilized for data gathering are analyzed. Emphasis is placed on the specific purpose of each technique, as well as the way the triangulation was sought for and conducted. Each data gathering technique presentation is followed by a brief summary of the

kind of data that were gathered and how they are related to the research questions and the hypotheses (Section 4.6).

4.2. Operationalizing the key concepts: Organizational aspects and movement repertoire

I have defined the Precarious Worker as the dependent employee who is subject to flexible labor relations, lacks or has inadequate access to welfare state provisions and has the consciousness of belonging to a social group, the social and employment conditions of which are not, and shall never again be structured in accordance with the Fordist era standards. During the last decade, this previously "invisible" (in terms of collective action) workforce began organizing, either through the populating of traditional, pre-existing union structures, following union officials' initiatives, or by creating new, grassroots organizational entities (see, among many others, the projects researched by Benner 2003; Bodnar 2006; EuroMayDay Network 2010; Mattoni and Vogiatzoglou 2014; Mattoni 2009; Mongeau, Neill, and Le Bourdais 2001; Vogiatzoglou 2014; Wilsdon and Gaspaire 2003). Regarding these unionization procedures, all scholars working on the field have estimated that significant differentiations in union strategies are to be noted, when precarious workers undertake unionizing initiatives (Choi & Mattoni 2010; Fantasia & Voss 2004; Turner 2007; Waterman 2004). The variations expand to all aspects of the activities, and include both the repertoires and the organizing models. Choi and Mattoni argue that in the Italian case, groups of self-organized precarious workers are "based on direct commitment and action instead of [...] political mediation and delegation" (2010: 218). Campbell (2010) notes that unions in Australia have turned towards a more flexible and open recruitment model, where precarious employment is on the rise. In a previous research project I had conducted in Greece, the empirical findings suggested that the majority of unprotected flexible labor organizations are operating on an assembly-based decision-making process and refuse hierarchical models of union leadership (Vogiatzoglou 2010). In 2008, twenty-eight corporate and branch unions (most of them were precarious workers' unions) formed a horizontal network of

cooperation, bypassing the official Union Confederation[6]. Finally, in cases such as the French cultural industry precarious workers' 1992 Avignon demonstration, the latter proved to be an "important turning point in the industry's history, particularly given the strategies employed by striking workers" (Bodnar 2006: 686).

The dimensions to be analyzed in order to examine the PWUs are, on the one hand, their organizational structures, and on the other their movement activities, especially their collective action repertoire, as well as the frequency of their actions. One would expect the majority of precarious workers' unions to belong to the *organizing* part of the axis presented above. Yet, the possibility of, at least, components of the servicing model appearing in the organizational patterns of those unions should not be excluded and needs to be examined. Scholarly literature provides us with case studies of grassroots organizations that are providing various individual-level services to their members, due to their discriminated status (Hanley & Shragge 2009; Zorn 2010). It would be reasonable to assume that this would be the case of PWUs that are mostly populated by minority group or discriminated members, such as immigrants or female workers. With regard to union *militancy*, significant variation is expected regarding the placement of PWUs on this axis.

More specifically, in relation to the organizational structures, the data gathered includes information on the following:

- *Formation and member recruitment*: In the servicing model, workers willing to subscribe to the union should approach union officials, whereas in the organizing model, recruitment is based on workplace representatives' initiatives. The latter is considered to encourage participation in union affairs (Waddington & Hoffmann 2000: 65). The distinction provides us with a useful asset in determining differentiations in union structure, especially in the Spanish and Italian cases, where large entities'

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6   Although the network was formed in the aftermath of the assault against Konstantina Kouneva (see Chapter 2), it is still active and its reputation, and the public support it has received, has risen significantly over the last years. During the general strikes in Greece (24 days of general strikes have been recorded during the last two years, that is 1 general strike day per month) the network's call for a strike demonstration mobilizes tens of thousands of participants, whilst at the official unions' gathering less than ten thousand people are present.

representatives operate at all levels of union organization. In Greece, wherever representatives do not have everyday presence in the workplace, there is no recruitment *at all* (Kretsos 2011).

- *Decision-making processes:* Most unions utilize a combination of member assemblies and – closed – leadership meetings, in order to design their strategies and formulate decisions. The relative proportion of the assemblies to board meetings, as provisioned in the union statute, is an indicator of how internal democracy works in the workplace. Furthermore, the members' perception regarding their participation in decision-making must be taken into account. For example, Greek corporate unions' statute defines the number of monthly or yearly formal meetings of all types, yet the actual implementation of the statutory provisions differs from case to case. A qualitative examination of the processes' implementation should also include voting and election procedures, and the distribution of financial and auditing responsibilities amongst members.

- *Services offered*: This parameter should not only bring forward the *types* of services offered to the union members, but also the *paths* through which servicing is provided. Are the services provided by the union officials directly, or are they based on the unions' networks of affiliations[7]?

In relation to the collective action repertoire and the frequency of activities over time, the data gathered includes information on the following:

- *Industrial action taken*: A more or less typical way to measure union activity (see, for example, Tracy 1986), strikes and other production-blocking activities need to be quantified and qualitatively evaluated.

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7 An interesting example that illustrates the complexity of the servicing issue, is the Immigrants' union in Athens, the case of which was also addressed above: one of the services offered to union members is the legal support for residence permit issues. Since the union did not have sufficient resources to recruit lawyers, it contacted *both* high-ranking union officials and anti-racist solidarity groups, asking for their lawyers to provide help. By establishing an informal communication link between SMOs that, officially, are in conflict, the union filled a "structural hole" in the Athenian SMOs' network, augmenting thus its political status.

- *Formally declared threats of industrial action*: This parameter also needs qualitative evaluation. Threatening to strike is generally considered a weapon in the union's repertoire as well as a bargaining tool (Moene 1988), yet the inability to realize the threat might imply either weakness or aligning with an affiliate union's more moderate approach.

- *Participation in strikes declared by other entities*, such as solidarity strikes, branch or nation-wide strikes.

- *Innovative actions*: This category includes activities that develop outside the traditional union repertoire. Some of those innovations are actually a "recycling" of legacies that had faded in time (e.g. squatting at the workplace, sabotage), whilst others are even more radical and unconventional. In 2008, for example, the Altec Telecoms workers (Athens, Greece) hacked the CCTV system of their corporation, managing thus to monitor the company administration's movements during their 6-month strike (Vogiatzoglou 2011).

- *Organization and/or participation in movement events*, such as demonstrations regarding local, national, and international issues. This factor is crucial for the research for numerous reasons. First, as shall be depicted in what follows, many of the organizations put under scrutiny are *hybrids* between trade unions and traditional SMOs, in the sense that their activity and organizational model is strongly influenced by both. Second, data on movement activity offers an insight into the networks formed between the PWUs and other SMOs. Moreover, affiliations and strategic alliances of this kind are indicators of an ongoing convergence between labor and the new social movements, an assumption several scholars have argued for (Fine 2006; Turner 2007; Waterman 2004).

- *Discursive production and dissemination*. Examining the PWUs discourse, as brought forward through their texts, announcements and other documents, offers a privileged point of view to observe the theoretical debates taking place among their members and leadership. Furthermore, it allows for an assessment of the collective identification

processes taking place in the field. Even a potential lack of focus on theoretical arguments (as is the case with Greece during the early stages of mobilization) might serve as an indicator for specific dynamics taking place among the precarious' organizations. The discursive production was also useful to grasp the PWUs members and leaders' perception of the official trade union system, revealing the tensions between the two sides, as well as the extent to which the precarious' organizations draw their *modus operandi* from their respective country's broader labor movement.

4.3. Research Questions and hypotheses

In accordance with the above, the first, descriptive research question of the project is the following:

1. **Which are the main characteristics of the Greek and Italian Precarious Workers' Unions, in terms of their organizational patterns and movement repertoire?**

And the second, explanatory research question could be formulated as follows:

2. **Which are the key determinants that affect organization and collective action in workplaces where flexible labor prevails?**

Following the strand of thought of the previous chapters, and taking into account the relevant literature and previous research findings, I selected four broad categories of structural determinants that I expected to have a significant influence on PWUs' repertoire and organizational patterns. I hereby present them as sub-questions of research question (2), followed by a discussion of my rationale and (when applicable) some initial hypotheses, as they derive from the relevant literature.

Question 2a: Trade union system structure - To what extent and in which direction does the trade union system structure of each country affect the PWUs' organization and collective action?

In Chapter 2, we defined labor flexibility as one of the "founding acts" of precarity. In contemporary democracies, it is common wisdom to assume that the most prominent player in labor-related issues - at least when it comes to workers' organizing - is the formal trade union system of each country. Yet, as a quick examination of the relevant literature shows (see, among many others, Mattoni 2009; Mattoni & Doerr 2007; Mabruki 2007; Fine 2006; Bodnar 2006; Benner 2003), ever since the early days of precarious' mobilization, seldom did organizing and collective action take place exclusively through established trade union formations.

It would be erroneous, however, to hypothesize that the trade union system is irrelevant with the mobilization of the atypical workers. Even when the precarious workers' organizations were completely detached from the trade unions, their everyday activity was in a constant dialogue with the respective unions' one. First of all, because the broader structure of the trade union system provides the formal terrain where organized workers' action is supposed to take place, as well as a framework of social partnership, i.e. a formal structure of bargaining channels between the workers, the employers, and the state. The access to collective bargaining is limited to institutionalized organizations. In Greece, collective bargaining is conducted directly through the pluralistic, hierarchical General Confederation's structure (Kouzis 2007; Kouzis 2006), whilst in Italy the Confederations' representatives participate autonomously in tripartite and bipartite talks, their relative strength being in accordance with the respective results of union elections (Calmfors et al. 2001). Therefore, in order to secure an efficient inside-the-workplace presence, able to implement and extend workers' rights, the PWUs' claims and proposals would at least need to be conveyed through some sort of trade union representation.

The debate on how (and to what degree) a PWU should institutionalize, has important implications not only for whether it would secure an everyday presence in the workplace, but also on the organizational format options it has. In Greece, the union's organizational scheme is defined in legal texts and is *obligatory*, thus all unions that wish to be officially recognized have

no option but to conform (Ioannou 2000). Moreover, as is the case in Italy, the relevant labor law provisions permit or restrict various types of country-level organizational schemes (for example, the ways in which corporate or branch unions might unite to form a federation). Workers' organizations might choose to institutionalize in order to delimit employers' intervention, gain access to bargaining resources and provide a wider set of services to their members. Yet some do not wish to or are unable to conform, widening, on the one hand, the array of organizational choices, but on the other limiting their options in bargaining and services offered to members.

If we assume that one shall encounter cases of precarious workers' organizing *beyond* the official trade union system (as is, in fact, the case in both Greece and Italy), the question of how the relations between these new organizations and their institutional counterparts are structured becomes of the utmost importance. The trade union system's openness to new actors, modes of action and organizational formats is relevant, as are the perceptions precarious workers have of the trade unions' role, influence and adequacy in representing their rights.

Question 2b: Types of flexible contracts and other labor law provisions - To what extent does variation in precarious workers' employment status affect union organization and collective action?

Fantone (2006) distinguishes precarity from labor flexibility, arguing that the former is a complicated phenomenon that involves various inferential mechanisms operating between the individuals' employment and social life. For some, precarity can be an unwanted yet unavoidable consequence of job market flexibilization (Herrmann & van Der Maesen 2008), whilst for others it might be an employment choice fully compatible to their social life patterns (see, for example, Brophy 2006 for a study on highly-skilled professionals' collective action in the United States). Should we transfer this argumentation on the unionizing level, it is reasonable to assume that variation in the types of flexibility the legislator introduced (see 2.2 for an initial classification), the position of employees in the company hierarchy, the extent to which employment flexibility is related to new professions or is the outcome of previously stable labor contracts' deregulation, the extent to which combinations of flexible labor are adopted in each sector of the job market,

and would have an impact on the organizations' constituency, resulting in different organizational formats and/or repertoires of actions being adopted.

Question 2c: Welfare state - To what extent can internal and cross-national variation in PWUs' organization and repertoire be attributed to the welfare state services that are available (or are not available) to their members?

A series of publications have linked the precarity phenomenon with transformations in the broader sphere of the individuals' social life. More specifically, the issue of social rights (such as health, education, housing, family assistance) and the precarious workers' access to provisions related to them has been pointed out as a significant parameter in order to understand the ways in which labor flexibilization affects the lives of those subjected to it (Wilthagen et al. 2003; Kalleberg 2009; Murgia 2007; Vishmidt 2005; Fantone 2006; Herrmann & van Der Maesen 2008; Golsch 2004; Jonsson 2007; De Cuyper et al. 2008; Landolt & Goldring 2010; Pedaci 2010; Neilson & Rossiter 2005; Tsianos & Papadopoulos 2006; Mitropoulos 2005). It has been pointed out that the labor market reconfigurations in post-fordist capitalism were not accompanied by a simultaneous readjustment of welfare state provisions, in order to adequately cover the new, contingent labor population (Emmenegger et al. 2012; Appay 1997). As shall be depicted in Chapter 6, this is also the case with Greece and Italy – two countries that were in any case characterized by a relatively weak welfare state (when compared to the central and northern European countries). Given that any claim-making organization's agenda is supposed to reflect its members' social and material needs, it is reasonable to assume that the precarious workers' unions would include the above issues in their reasoning, discourse, demands and argumentation. What is more, the financial crisis of 2008 and the austerity measures that were implemented in all Southern European countries, posed new challenges for the atypical workforce, already inadequately covered by welfare services. The question brought forward is to what extent the PWUs' response to welfare state inadequacy expanded beyond their agenda-making and in which ways the welfare state specificities of each country had an impact in this expansion.

Moving beyond the general provisions of the welfare regime, though, one should not forget what shall later be defined as the "super-precarious", i.e. the workers' categories who, due to

characteristics related to the individuals' social role and position (rather than merely their employment status) are subjected to multiple layers of precarization. Tsianos and Papadopoulos note that state interventionism had established "a hierarchical order of labour". On the lowest level of this hierarchy was female and migrant 'dirty work'" (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2004:12). Yet the influence on the PWUs of members belonging to the "bottom of hierarchy" is still unclear. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some feminist scholars had argued that for female workers, precarity should not only be considered as a threat, but also an opportunity to break the bonds of patriarchal family (Fantone 2006; Vishmidt 2005). Furthermore, Greece and Italy are amongst the main migration gateways of "Fortress Europe". During the last decade, immigrant labor organizations have emerged, struggling in an extremely hostile environment to ameliorate the working conditions of their members (Kambouri & Zavos 2010; Mabruki 2007; Nobil Ahmad 2008). An additional handicap to be taken into consideration is the legal status of union members. Lack of residence permits further complicates the actor's decision to get involved in industrial action (Landolt & Goldring 2010). It is reasonable to assume that unions populated by individuals belonging to the "bottom of labor hierarchy" would need to devise more flexible strategies in order to achieve their goals – as well as having to rely more on external solidarity, in order to balance their members' relatively weaker positions in the labor market.

Question 2d: Social movement environment - To what extent and in which direction does the broader social movement environment affect the PWUs' organization and collective action?

In Chapter 3, the usefulness of the Social Movement Studies' analytical lens was documented, in order to conceptualize the Precarious Workers' Union. Several contributions have employed a similar approach (see, for example, Choi & Mattoni 2010; Mattoni & Doerr 2007), whilst a large literature corpus asserts that contemporary trade unions increasingly resemble (or behave as) social movement organizations (Waterman 2004; Vandenberg 2006; Ross 2007; Connolly & Darlington 2012; Baccaro et al. 2003; Milkman & Voss 2004; Fantasia & Stepan-Norris 2006).

The question of how PWUs interact with and draw from their broader social movement environment is continuously posed and examined throughout this thesis. What is more, two specific instances of this process – which are certainly worth a more extended examination, in future research endeavors – are presented in chapters 8 and 9. First, I present a case study on the impact of the December (2008) riots on the Greek PWUs, in order to assess the relevance of the *eventful protest* concept (della Porta 2008a) in the study of the precarious workers' mobilization. Second, the efforts towards cross-national networking of the Greek and Italian PWUs are pointed out in Chapter 9. The assumption made is that the PWUs, like most major European social movements in the aftermath of the alter-globalization protests, are particularly prone to engaging in cross-national collaboration and alliances. It was not a minor pleasure for the author to discover that, occasionally, PWUs may prove not only willing, but also quite efficient in constructing networks beyond their own country's frontiers.

4.4. Dual comparison: cross-national and internal comparative analysis

Working on the above-mentioned research field and key concepts, a double comparison was carried out:

Cross-National: In this level of comparison similarities and differences between the Greek PWUs and their Italian counterparts were identified. Its purpose was to control the influence of environmental factors. These included each country's labor law (Chapter 6), the ways PWUs interact with each country's welfare state (Chapter 7) the movement and union structure and tradition (chapters 5, 8 and 9), as well as the general movement dynamics (chapters 8 and 9). The investigation focused on the PWUs' formation and activity patterns.

A second aspect of the cross-national comparison is to examine the shifts in the patterns of the precarious organizations' models and forms of mobilization. A significant shift was noted since the early stages of the precarious' mobilization. As shall be depicted in chapters 5, 6 and 7, the Italian and Greek movements were characterized by an early divergence in their organizational

forms, levels of intervention, discursive production and collective action repertoire. The early divergence was later reversed; the cross-national comparison proved useful not only in the purpose of documenting the late re-convergence, but also to examine which (and to what extent) environmental parameters were the crucial ones in provoking this shift.

Internal: Here we look at the degree of homogeneity in the organizational patterns and the repertoire of the PWUs. The frame of reference I introduce includes the employment types (Chapter 6) and the population make-up (Chapter 7) of the unions under scrutiny. Since the case selection provided some variation in the union members' socio-economic status, and each union is rather homogeneous both in what concerns the labor relations of its members and the population make-up, the purpose of this comparison was to control for variations in organizational patterns and collective action repertoires that cannot be attributed to nation-level differentiations.

Another part of the Internal Comparison was devoted to cross-temporal research, to control for changes taking place between the early (2000 – 2006) and more recent (2006 – 2011) stages of the precarious' mobilization. As was noted above, the early divergence between the Italian and Greek precarious' movements was replaced by a reconvergence at a later stage. The purpose of the cross-temporal, internal comparison was to document the changes and highlight their main aspects.

4.5. Case selection rationale

4.5.1. Country case selection

My focus is on Southern Europe, which presents significant differentiations from the US field, where some research on the structural characteristics of "alternative" or new forms of unionism has already been conducted (see, e.g., Clawson and Clawson 1999; Sullivan 2010; Wilton and Cranford 2002). In Southern Europe, the implementation of flexible labor policies became a controversial issue. Scholars presumed that the relative weakness of welfare states would further boost inequalities in the job market and produce an unprotected labor force (Flaquer & Escobedo

2009; International Institute For Labour Studies 2008; INE-GSEE 2008; Triantafyllou 2008). As Zambarloukou had noted, "while Southern Europe follows the general trend towards service employment, employment growth is biased towards the lower end of services that are not very demanding in terms of skills and depend to a large extent on low pay and precarious job security" (Zambarloukou 2007: 425). The relevance of the Southern European field was highlighted in recent years, as the austerity measures imposed on most of the region's countries had a direct impact on their labor markets, the levels of wages and unemployment, as well as the amount of welfare state provisions available and their distribution. Amongst South European countries, I chose Greece and Italy as research fields for two main reasons: firstly, they are almost ideotypical examples of job market deregulation in weak welfare states, and secondly because the similarities in the respective economic and political background as well as the process of flexibilization in all the socio-political fields provide solid ground for cross-national comparison.

The typical central-European model of capitalist integration could be fully applied neither to Greece nor to Italy. Naturally, Italy has a more complex financial history than Greece, owing to its bigger size and to the differentiated peripheral models of development.

In both countries one finds a remarkable percentage of flexible labor relations of every kind. In the previous chapter, we examined the outcomes of the flexibilization procedures of the two countries' labor markets, as they developed in the last two decades. At the legislative level, the procedure was gradual and long-lasting. In the European setting, commencing from the late 1970s and based on a theoretical analysis of the labor market's "rigidity" as a potential cause of the post-1973 economic crisis (Atkinson 1984; Wallace 2003), various countries began adopting types of employment contracts which diverted from the typical, open-ended, 9-to-5 Fordist-era model. Both Greece and Italy arrived late in the game. As Ioannou (2000) argues, the Greek labor relations system followed a static path in the post-World War II period, maintaining until the early 1990s a more-or-less Fordist structure. In the post-1945 setting, the vast majority of the Greek workers – at least those who did not migrate to Western Europe or the US – were being employed either by the (quickly expanding) State apparatuses (Tsoukalas 1987) or by small and very small companies. The prevalence of open-ended contracts, a small, yet relatively steady, rise of the

workers' income, and the introduction of some collective bargaining tools[8] were some of the labor market characteristics of the period. With regard to Italy, the presence of a strong workers' movement, backed by the firm alliances of the union confederations with the parliamentary parties (Bedani 1995: ch. 7 & 10), as well as the constitutional provisions (Presidenza del consiglio dei Ministri 2013) which, in 1970, were integrated and further developed in the so-called *statuto dei lavoratori* (Worker's Statute)[9] produced counter-incentives towards and complicated any abrupt changes in the labor market regulation. Yet, the labor market's relative competitiveness discourse during the 1990s was far too strong to resist for the two countries, which were both struggling with stagnation and less-than-acceptable macroeconomic performance.

The flexibilization procedure in Italy was distributed in four different legislative initiatives, which were voted and implemented in the decade from 1993 to 2003 (Gallino 2007). The provisions included a wide array of non-typical employment contracts, but not many substantial changes in the working conditions of the people who were already working under open-ended agreements. In Greece, the promotion of labor market flexibility long preceded the financial crisis of the 2010s. From 1990, the year when part-time employment was introduced in the labor relations' system, to 2009, at least eight legislative packages made reference to flexible labor, deregulated certain aspects of the labor market and/or re-regulated others in accordance to international standards (Milo 2009).

Both in Greece and Italy, the labor market flexibilization matched with the non-implementation of any serious reform in the welfare state. Rather, the simple cutting down of benefits and the beneficiaries' numbers (Bronzini 2002; Pedaci 2010; INE-GSEE 2013; INE-GSEE

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[8] It is important to note that these tools were introduced in an oppressive and restrictive political environment, imposed by the victorious anti-communist forces of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). Therefore, it is important for the reader to keep in mind that any "social contracts" or pacts of the period mentioned above would have *a priori* excluded a significant part of the Greek workforce – the one associated with the civil war losers, the Greek Communist Party members and affiliates, who amounted to an important part of the total population (at least equally significant to the Italian Communist Party supporters).

[9] The Workers' statute is the fundamental Italian labor legislative text, where, as most authors acknowledge, "the workers' rights are its central concern. The rights and duties of unions are firmly conditional on those of the workers" (Bedani 1995: 165).

2011) occurred. The basic welfare state structure remained unchanged despite the increase in numbers of precarious workers, leading to a "process of dualization", where "policies increasingly differentiate rights, entitlements, and services provided to different categories of recipients" (Emmenegger et al. 2012: 10).

Finally, a parallel that can be drawn between the two countries is that both are gateways for immigrants from Asia and Africa (Eurostat 2009; Psimmenos 1999). The presence of a large pool of cheap immigrant labor begets important shifts in the composition of the job market and in the dynamics of labor relations, as well as on the level of governmental policies. Moreover, the objectively disadvantageous socio-political position of the immigrant population creates a series of entirely new challenges for each country's Social Movement Organizations (SMOs).

4.5.2. Organizations' case selection

In relation to the specific case selection of PWUs in each country, the main criterion is the employment terms of the union members. My research design is based on a nested-analysis approach (Lieberman 2005). The large-n part included the PWUs that operate in the metropolitan centers of Greece and Italy. This would be cities with a population that exceeds 1,000,000 inhabitants. Five cities meet this criterion; Thessaloniki and Athens in Greece, and Rome, Milan and Naples in Italy. The small-n part of the design included an in-depth case examination of the most interesting cases. The main characteristic of the unions that were studied is that the majority of their members were unprotected flexible workers. The proportion of precarious workers in the union should be decisive for its strategic choices, regarding both its structure and movement activity. A suitable percentage would be equal to or exceed 80% of the total union population.

As to the *official* status of the unions under scrutiny, it was of no interest here, at least regarding the case selection. Some worker's organizations do not have access to institutionalization paths (e.g. the *Migrants' Union of Athens*, a general non-regularized immigrants' union operating in Athens, the agricultural workers organizations in Puglia, Italy and Manolada, Greece, or the *Assembly of Fishing-boat Workers*, operating in Thessaloniki, Greece and consisting of illegal Egyptian workers – the latter undertook, in 2011, an impressive strike

which lasted more than two months). Other organizations do not wish to participate in the official union structures, due to their political views (e.g. the *Delivery Boys' Grassroots Union*, the call center workers' *No Dial Zone*, both operating in Athens, Greece or the *San Precario* in Milan, Italy). The above are consistent with recent trends in the literature. As labor issues are currently topping the agenda of various activist networks and Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) (see, for example, Eurogeneration Insurgent 2004; Frassanito-network 2005; Mattoni 2009; Tarri and Vanni 2005 for a broader perspective on activist involvement in labor issues), some have gone as far as to suggest that relevant research designs should include organizations that do not fit in the traditional trade union definition. This would be the case of community-based labor groups that have emerged in the United States (Fine 2006; Sullivan 2010). Table 4.1 presents all the organizations that were taken into consideration with regard to this thesis. In what concerns Greece, the list includes practically all the PWUs that were active during the last decade in Athens and Thessaloniki. Due to the larger country's size, as well as the practical constraints of the PhD research project, the Italian organizations taken into consideration are an indicative sample of the ones operating in the above mentioned cities; the sample includes all the major organizations, though, as well as those which had an active role in the last decade's anti-precarity struggle.

The table includes the PWUs' name, abbreviation (where applicable), its base of operations (noted as *national* in the case where the organization does not refer to a specific city, but rather the country as a whole), as well as some initial data regarding its basic characteristics:

(a) *Organizational format*: I have categorized as *Formal Unions* those which are officially recognized as such by each country's trade union system (and legislative framework); as *Informal Unions* those which operate as such, but do not hold any official status; *Coordination of Unions* refers to second-level structures, members of which are primary unions (rather than individuals); general-purpose organizations are classified under the generic label *Collective*, whilst the *Social Center* and *Cooperative* labels are self-explanatory.

(b) *Type of intervention*: refers to the focus of PWUs' actions: on a specific *Company*, a productive *Sector* (or profession), a *Territory*, or *Generic* – when no specific focus could be traced.

(c) Level of Intervention: addresses the question of whether the PWUs mostly operate outside their workplace of reference, inside it, or both. Our empirical data showed that a reorientation of the PWUs' focus bears important consequences in both their organizational models and their collective action repertoire – the reorientation itself being an outcome of a multi-dimensional environmental influence (see 4.7, as well as Chapters 5-7).

A final note that needs to be made is that I have added to the following list a handful of organizations that do not fall into the population criteria of the PWU definition (such as the social centers Cantiere in Italy and Nosotros and Micropolis in Greece); their activity, however, is directly relevant to the purposes of this project and, as such, they were included in the empirical data retrieval.

Name	Abbreviation	City	Country	Organizational Format	Type of Intervention	Level of Intervention
Altec Telecoms Workers' Union	AT	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Athens Labor Center	ALC	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Territorial	Mixed
Cleaning Personnel Union of Attica	PEKOP	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Diakoptes	n/a	Athens	Greece	Collective	Sector	Mixed
Efimerida ton Syntakton	EtS	Athens	Greece	Cooperative	Generic	n/a
EMPROS	n/a	Athens	Greece	Social Center	Generic	Mixed

Migrants' Union of Athens	MUA	Athens	Greece	Union (informal)	Territorial	Mixed
Motorcycle Drivers' Union	SVEOD	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Nea Smyrni Workers' Club	NSWC	Athens	Greece	Social Center	Territorial	Outside workplace
Nosotros	n/a	Athens	Greece	Social Center	Generic	Outside workplace
Peristeri Workers' Club	n/a	Athens	Greece	Social Center	Territorial	Outside workplace
Primary Unions' Coordination Athens	PUC - Athens	Athens	Greece	Coordination of Unions	Territorial	Mixed
Proledialers	n/a	Athens	Greece	Collective	Sector	Inside workplace
Unemployed and Subcontracted Journalists' assembly	Katalip si ESIEA	Athens	Greece	Collective	Sector	Mixed
Union of Tourist Catering Workers in Athens and suburbs	n/a	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Union of Translators,	SMED	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace

Editors and Reviewers						
Union of workers in the OTE call centers	n/a	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Wage Earner Technician's Union Athens	SMT	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Mixed
Waiters and Chefs' Union of Athens	n/a	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Workers in Publishing and Bookselling Industry Union	SYBXA	Athens	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Lesvos Workers' Club	n/a	Lesvos	Greece	Social Center	Territorial	Outside workplace
ACS Union	ACS	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
DHL Employee's Union	DHL	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
ERT Fixed-contract workers' Union	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Grassroots Union of Workers in the Audiovisual Sector	SYVATEKT	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace

No Dial Zone	n/a	National	Greece	Collective	Sector	Mixed
NOKIA-SIEMENS Workers' Union	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Occupied ERT	n/a	National	Greece	Cooperative (informal)	Company	Inside workplace
Panhellenic Association of Infote Workers	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Panhellenic Association of Workers in Subcontracting Companies	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Union of Workers in Telecommunications and Informatics	SETIP	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Sevach Union of Food Plus workers	Sevach	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Speedex workers' Union	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Union of Teachers working in Private Educational Institutions	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace

Vodafone Telecommunications' Union	n/a	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Wind Telecommunications Union	PASETIM	National	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Primary Unions' Coordination Patras	PUC - Patras	Patras	Greece	Coordination of Unions	Territorial	Mixed
Agricultural workers' union of Manolada	n/a	Peloponese	Greece	Union (informal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Assembly of Fishing-Boat Workers	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Union (informal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Blaumachen	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
Chefs, Waiters and Catering Personnel Union of Thessaloniki	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
ERT Fixed-contract workers' Union (Thessaloniki)	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Fabrika Yfanet	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Social Center	Generic	Outside workplace
Micropolis	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Social Center	Generic	Outside workplace

Union of workers in the OTE call centers (Thessaloniki)	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
VIOME	VIOME	Thessaloniki	Greece	Cooperative	Company	Inside workplace
Wage Earner Technician's Union Thessaloniki	SMT - Thessaloniki	Thessaloniki	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Workers' in Publishing and Bookselling Industry Union (Thessaloniki)	n/a	Thessaloniki	Greece	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Corrente Alternata	n/a	Florence	Italy	Collective	Territorial	Outside workplace
Precarity Webring	n/a	International	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
Assembly of Precarious Researchers	n/a	Milan	Italy	Union (informal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Centro Sociale Cantiere	CANTIERE	Milan	Italy	Social Center	Territorial	Outside workplace
ex-RiMaFlow	n/a	Milan	Italy	Cooperative	Company	Inside workplace
San Precario	n/a	Milan	Italy	Collective	Generic	Mixed
Serpica Naro	n/a	Milan	Italy	Collective	Sector	Inside workplace

Spazio Mutuo Soccorso	SMS	Milan	Italy	Social Center	Territorial	Outside workplace
Spazio Ufficio Condiviso	SUC	Milan	Italy	Cooperative	Territorial	Inside workplace
Precari United	PU	Naples	Italy	Union (informal)	Generic	Mixed
Basic Income Network Italia	BIN - Italia	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
CGIL-NIDIL	n/a	National	Italy	Union (formal)	Generic	Mixed
Clash City Workers	CCW	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Mixed
COBAS Scuola	n/a	National	Italy	Union (formal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Co-ordination of the University-based Precarious	n/a	National	Italy	Union (informal)	Sector	Inside workplace
Errori di Stampa	n/a	National	Italy	Union (informal)	Sector	Mixed
EuroMayDay Organizing Assembly	n/a	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
EuroNomade	n/a	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
Precarious Strike organizing assembly	n/a	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace

Quinto Stato	n/a	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
Social Strike organizing assembly	n/a	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Outside workplace
Stop Precarity Now!	n/a	National	Italy	Collective	Generic	Mixed
USB	n/a	National	Italy	Union (formal)	Generic	Mixed
Assemblea Metropolitana	n/a	Rome	Italy	Collective	Territorial	Outside workplace
Coordination of Precarious Workers	CLAP	Rome	Italy	Union (informal)	Territorial	Mixed
Communia	n/a	Rome	Italy	Social Center	Generic	Outside workplace
ex-RSI	n/a	Rome	Italy	Cooperative	Company	Inside workplace
Officine Zero	OZ	Rome	Italy	Cooperative	Company	Inside workplace
Precari Atesia	n/a	Rome	Italy	Union (formal)	Company	Inside workplace
Teatro Vale	n/a	Rome	Italy	Social Center	Generic	Mixed

4.6. Qualitative Research design – techniques used and data retrieved

The specific techniques that were used for data collection were interviews (guided and semi-structured) with the PWUs' members, leaders and founders, archive research in the organizations' online and printed archives and, finally, extensive fieldwork the field notes of which

derive from the author's participation and then participant observation in trade union and social movement events and activities, in Greece and Italy. I employed a between-methods triangulation to increase the validity of the data (Bryman 2003). Triangulation is considered to increase the findings' validity, the logic behind it given that:

"by utilizing multiple methods, data sources, theories, and/or observations, scholars can better account for and overcome the limits and biases inherent in studies that employ a single method [or] data source […]" (Ayoub et al. 2014: 67) .

In what follows, I describe the logic, usefulness, and relevance of each data collection technique, as well as the ways in which each empirical data source complemented the others.

4.6.1. Interviews with organizations' members, founders, and leaders

Interviews are a well-established data-collection technique of qualitative research designs, having often been used for both social movement and trade union research. As della Porta notes:

"Interviews are, and continue to constitute, a fundamental research method in the social sciences. In both qualitative and quantitative methods, interviews are the most widely used technique for gathering information of different types. Indeed, it has often been observed that we live in a world of interviews—which means that partners can be expected to have previous experience of this type of situation" (della Porta 2014: 228)*.*

Creswell considers that data collection through interviews provides the relative advantage of participants being able to provide information with respect to their past activity, as well as insights on events which could not be observed by the researcher; furthermore, the interviewer "exercises control over the line of questioning" (Creswell 2013: 191). Some caution is required though, given that the researchers' presence may add to the natural degree of bias which derives from the filtering of information through the interviewee's viewpoint (Kyriazi 1999). Finally, given that we do live "in a world of interviews", it is useful to keep in mind the warning issued by Borer and Fontana, regarding the blurring of:

"The boundaries between, and respective roles of, interviewer and interviewee […] as the traditional relationship between the two is no longer seen as natural and is criticized for reproducing societal power dynamics" (Borer & Fontana 2012: 46-47)

The guided interviews' technique was applied to the large-n part of the research. According to Morce (2012), guided interviews are useful when the field is only partially known, and may be used for qualitatively-driven research designs. When possible, an interview/informal discussion was conducted per each organization, using a custom-made questionnaire. The interview was based on a fixed 50-question sample (see Appendix – ITEM 1), with maximum 10 questions selected for each interview, on a case-by-case basis. The purpose behind this choice was to identify the cases to be sampled in the small-n part, also data gathering regarding the union structure, number of participants, role and responsibility assignment, networking with other unions and SMOs. An unexpected issue that arose during the data collection of the structured interviews of the Greek case, was that the GSEE officials banned the author from participating, as an observer/researcher, in their 2013 General Congress, as a retaliation for a series of opinion articles I published that criticized the Confederation's leadership (see: Vogiatzoglou 2013 for the article that caused the "scandal"). The problem was that in this exact Congress (which takes place every four years) questionnaires were supposed to be distributed and completed by the PWU leaders who had gathered for the electoral procedures of the GSEE. Therefore, alternative tactics (such as conducting interviews over the phone or having informal discussions instead of recorded interviews) had to be invented and implemented, in order to collect the necessary data.

A second set of semi-structured, in-depth interviews was conducted with union members, union leaders, and some non-unionized workers, during the small-n part of the research. Johnson and Rowlands note that:

"[…] in-depth interviewing seeks "deep" information and understanding. The word deep has several meanings in this context. First, deep understandings are held by the real-life members of, or participants in, some everyday activity, event, or place. The interviewer seeks to achieve the same deep level of knowledge and understanding as the members or participants. If the interviewer is not a current or former member or participant in what is being

investigated, he or she might use in-depth interviewing as a way to learn the meanings of participants' actions"(Johnson & Rowlands 2012: 101)

Whilst della Porta argues that in-depth interviews are particularly useful:

"where the researcher is aiming to make a detailed description: attention is paid to the process and interest taken in the interpretations interviewees give of the process itself. Not only do in-depth interviews provide information about (and from) rank-and-file activists, on which few other sources are available, but they are of fundamental importance for the study of motives, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as the identities and emotions of movement activists"(della Porta 2014: 229)

The sampling technique I used is a combination of key-informant interviewing and snowball sampling. Spotting the key-informants required extensive field mapping, but interviewing them has proved very productive in terms of data gathering, therefore all in all it was a time-saving process. Snowball sampling was useful in the case of informal or atypical organizations, or when the unions under scrutiny had chosen a horizontal, direct democratic organizational model and their members were unwilling to identify those who could act as key-informants. It was also useful for cross-checking the findings retrieved from interviews with union leaders. The large-n sample questionnaire was also used in this part of interview collection, albeit in a more flexible manner. Twenty-eight individual interviews were recorded in total; the usable audio material collected exceeded 12 hours of recording. Another two focus-group interviews were taken. In the first case, the discussion included three different members of the same union (SMT – Wage Earner Technician's Union), providing diverse points of view on the union's activity. In the second case, three members of the board of the same union (Altec Telecoms Workers' Union) engaged in an in-depth discussion of their organizations' actions, strategies and network of affiliates.

Summarizing the data collected, the interviews were firstly utilized in order to map the field and identify the cases to be examined in depth at a later stage. Then, data was gathered regarding the union structure, number of participants, role and responsibility assignment, networking with other unions and SMOs. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews provided material relevant to all the research questions and proved especially useful in combining the various determinants that were considered relevant to the hypotheses brought forward in the course of the thesis.

4.6.2. Archive research at unions' archives, electronic and printed media.

Archive and document research is considered a valid method for studying organizations, as is the case with this thesis (Bryman 1989). Written documents allow the researcher to grasp the vocabulary and frame that the participants have adopted, as well as to obtain information on issues the organizations under scrutiny have placed particular focus on (Creswell 2013). "In most instances", mentions Lindsay Prior, "researchers focus on the contents of the documents, and use the data as a resource that 'tell us what is going on' in the organization" (Prior 2010: 96). This was also the case with my thesis.

Unions' archival material included their statutes, when existing/available (large-n), proceedings of assemblies and boards (when publicly accessible), and records of press releases and announcements (small-n). Through this technique, evidence was gathered regarding the organizational structure, the number of participants, the union's composition (nationality, gender, socio-economic background of the members), their political standpoint and scheduled activities.

The data collection of printed and online media material was not systematic (as, to give an example, in protest event analysis) but rather served in order to document specific events, clarify details regarding dates and places (when the interviewees could not confirm these or did not remember), provide numbers and grounds of comparison concerning the participation in protest events (such as strike demonstrations) as well as information regarding violent episodes or other instances of civil disobedience. With regard to the printed media, the online editions of *La Reppublica* and *Il Manifesto* served as a source for Italy, whilst *Eleftherotypia* and, later, *Efimerida ton Syntakton* were utilized for Greece[10].

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[10] *Il Manifesto* and *Efimerida ton Syntakton* are left-leaning newspapers (the former close to the leftist formation *L'altra Europa con Tsipras*, whilst the latter is close to the leftist party *SYRIZA*). The two others are more traditional center-left newspapers, close to *Partito Democratico* and *PASOK*, respectively. With regard to the

In sum, with regard to archive research in printed and electronic media, the data collection served the purpose of documenting specific events, clarifying details regarding dates and places (when the interviewees could not confirm these or did not remember), providing numbers and grounds of comparison concerning the participation in protest events (such as strike demonstrations) as well as information regarding violent episodes or other instances of civil disobedience. Research in union's online and offline archives evidence was used in order to identify the organizational structure, the number of participants, the union's composition (nationality, gender, socio-economic background of the members), their political standpoint and scheduled activities.

4.6.3. Social Network Analysis

Social Network Analysis (SNA) was only used for the collection of the empirical material of Chapter 8, in order to chart the affiliations and alliances' networks of the Altec Telecoms Union and examining the extent of external and internal co-operation between the union and the various SMOs.

The term "Social Network" was used for the first time in 1954 (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 10). Yet, elements of what would later become Social Network Analysis can be traced back to the texts and thought of Social Sciences' classics, such as Durkheim and the British anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (Scott 1991b). Network analysis is elaborated in a variety of ways and addresses a wide array of issues (Marsden 1990). These include social support, family and personal relationships, economic sociology and the organizational culture of corporations (see, for example, Scott 1991a), social movements (see, for example, Diani and Bison 2004), trade unions (see, for example, Cornwell and Harrison 2004) and virtual networks, such as those of Internet-based organizations (see, for example Ahuja and Carley 1999), only to name a few. Nowadays,

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digital media, the unions' blogs and other labor-related web-pages were consulted, as well as alternative news sites.

SNA is considered a valid and relevant methodological tool for all kinds of research designs, when the focus of the researcher is on the relational data and not on individual attributes of the actors.

Social Network Analysis scholars have established their method as a valid tool for studying social movements and contentious politics. The renewed interest on social movements by the end of the '60s, motivated some researchers into examining how personal networks are influencing mobilization and participation in civic societies (see, for example Babchuk and Booth 1969). Organization networks were also examined, in terms of resource exchange (Baldassarri & Diani 2007), the formation of collective identities (Diani & Bison 2004), and spatial diffusion of contentious practices (Hedstrom et al. 2000; Hedstrom 1994). SNA tools are being used to investigate most of the issues that traditional Social Movement research is addressing, quite often resulting in impressive and ground-breaking insights (see, for example, the tome on Social Movements and Networks edited by Diani and McAdam 2003). Kavada (2003) argues that Social Network Analysis successfully tackles two issues that were underestimated in the traditional Social Movement theory. The first is that Social Movement Organizations' boundaries are much more informal than those of institutional political organizations. Potential members are relatively free to join a movement, then join another or retreat to their private life's sphere. This makes the mapping of the terrain a much more complicated procedure than one would anticipate. And the second is that "the importance of interaction and communication for the production of movement identities" had not been properly estimated by Social Movement scholars (ibid.: 7-8). Saunders goes one step further arguing that what we are witnessing is a paradigmatic shift from the traditional independent-dependent variable scheme, to a relational approach to causality, where the "network relations are not seen as answers in themselves but as patterns requiring interpretation" (Saunders 2007: 13).

A dual-level network analysis is conducted in Chapter 8: the first level is based on the personal affiliations of the Altec Telecoms union founders and leaders. The sampling units in this case are the union leaders; the typology of relational forms and contents includes boundary penetration relations, which means ties consisting of "membership in two or more social formations" (Knoke and Yang 2008: 16). The network that was formed is a simple egocentric network, a positional strategy was used for data gathering (Scott 1991b), and the empirical

material derived from the interviews and the participant observation. The assumption underlying the network was that each organization has by default a "natural" allies' network: this is the overlapping memberships' network of the union founders or leaders. Should a union leader participate in other political organizations as well, there is a high chance that the political organization would offer support to the union, in the case where a labor dispute occurs. This can be justified by three reasons:

a) Overlapping membership provides actors with an always-open communication channel, as well as a set of personal relations based on mutual trust.

b) It makes sense that the political or trade union organization whose member is also a union leader, would expect to achieve a certain degree of political profits by assisting its member during a labor struggle.

c) It is also reasonable that the union leaders, when dealing with a threat and in need of support, would firstly approach organizations they have direct contacts with.

In the second network the focus was on inter-organizational relations: the nodes (actors) are the unions and SMOs, the typology of ties included transaction, communication and instrumental relations (Wasserman & Faust 1994). Once again, the network's level of analysis was egocentric, yet data gathering followed an event-based strategy, examining specific events where other actors were involved apart from the union under scrutiny. Thus, news reports and archive documents – apart from the participant observation – provided the empirical material. Interviews with the union's key informants were also used for clarification as well as for recording non-public events. Apart from the mapping of the union's networking and co-operational activities recorded in the second network, the density and cohesion comparison between Network 2 and Network 1 directly provided us with a useful insight: the level of autonomous (beyond founders and/or leaders' individual contacts) networking performed by the organization itself.

In sum, Social Network Analysis was utilized in order to confirm the links between the "eventful protests" (della Porta 2008a) of December 2008 and the networking strategies undertaken by the Greek PWUs. As noted above, this required mapping the affiliations and

alliances' networks of the union under scrutiny and examining the extent of external and internal co-operation between the union and the various SMOs.

4.6.4. Fieldwork: Participation and participant observation

Finally, the most important (and, perhaps, largest amount of) empirical material derived from the participation in union entities and participant observation [or, *complete participation* and *participation as observer*, to use an alternative terminology (Creswell 2013)] that I have been conducting since 2008. Prior to working as an academic, I served as a call-center worker and a trade unionist in the telecommunications' sector. In Greece, I co-founded a company-based grassroots union and a productive-sector-based workers' collective, acting as president of the former for several months. Throughout this previous stage of my professional life, I was involved in various labor struggles, student movements, and political campaigns of all sorts. All these experiences, as well as the life course-changing 6-month labor struggle of Altec Telecoms, which found me in the first ranks of the 250-people strong trade union, provided an excellent knowledge of the field, useful contacts with trade union officials and activists, as well as a non-systematically collected set of field notes.

Field note collection became more systematic in 2009 and 2010, when I was writing my Master's thesis, "Precarious Workers' Unions in the Greek syndicalist movement" (Vogiatzoglou 2010). Then, after September 2010, having moved to Italy, I immediately engaged with the political and social spaces associated with the anti-precarity mobilizations. For some four years, I roamed around the country participating in events and assemblies, getting in touch with the various projects, collectives, and experiments that constitute the core of the Italian PWUs. I delivered contributions and made interventions in dozens of events in Florence, Rome, Milan, Pisa, Padua, Turin, Bergamo, Senigallia, Siena and elsewhere. I spent weeks in Naples, Milan and Rome, wandering around in the cities' social centers. I accompanied the Greek workers of the Occupied Factory of VIOME in two different week-long tours in Italy, serving as a translator and acting as a link between the Italian and the Greek reality. Those were, indeed, the best of times.

And it is exactly during these endless trips in the *Tristes Tropiques* of labor, that the ideas which I present in this thesis were conceived, developed, refined and tested.

The usefulness of participant observation in social movement studies is documented in a large literature corpus (see, among many others, Volo & Schatz 2004; Klandermans & Staggenborg 2002; della Porta 2014). Furthermore, scholars who have engaged in fieldwork whilst examining trade unions have produced enlightening, content-rich scientific outputs (Fantasia 1989; Milkman & Voss 2004; Fine 2006). As Balsiger and Lambelet note:

> *Participant observation and ethnography are not the most common methods in social movement studies. But, quite curiously, it is probably because early social movement scholars observed and especially because they took part in social movements that this field of research has seen its main paradigm changes. […] Doing fieldwork and participant observation is useful when one is interested in what people do and in understanding the meaning they give to their actions"* (Balsiger & Lambelet 2014: 144)*.

In general, fieldwork data are considered to have high validity, but low external reliability (Fielding 2006). The researcher is considered to gain from the first-hand contact with the organizations and their members that she studies, as well as being able to document and record, on the spot, the events as they develop (Creswell 2013).

In sum, through the participant observation it became possible (a) to accurately map the field and (b) to carry out an in-depth study of the imperceptible intra-organizational and inter-organizational relationships, events and decisions of the unions that never became public, as well as the organizational models and activities of organizations that did not have an official structure, and did not keep, thus, an official archive of their activities, and/or received less attention by the media.

Chapter 5: Trade union structure

5.1. Introduction to the empirical part of the thesis: A cross-temporal typology of the PWUs' organizational characteristics and movement repertoire

The first set of determinants to be examined in the course of this thesis fall under a broad category of structural parameters, as they derive from the trade union system structure (ch. 5), the types of flexible contracts available in the job market and the way legislative provisions are applied in the workplace (ch. 6), as well as the various welfare state provisions concerning the precarious workers and other systemic aspects which affect the population categories under scrutiny (migrants' rights, citizenship issues, etc.) (ch. 7). It is important to note that these parameters are not treated as "independent variables", but rather as mechanisms, linking the activists' perceptions of the context in which their action unfolds with their organizational and collective action repertoire options.

Prior to proceeding to the presentation of the empirical data and the analysis of the findings, perhaps it would be useful for the reader to find hereby, in a summarized format, the main characteristics of the Precarious Workers' Unions in Greece and Italy, during the early and contemporary stages of their mobilization. The characteristics have been placed in their respective tables, following the order in which they shall be examined later on. The purpose of the presentation is to demonstrate what I shall define later as "early divergence" and "late re-convergence", as well as to guide the reader through the argument of each chapter and the structural parameters' section as a whole.

First, with regard to the Greek case, during the early stage of mobilization, the precarious workers organized almost exclusively in grassroots union entities, operating inside the workplace. The unions had a mixed approach towards the formal trade union system, occasional conflicts

with the trade union elites being balanced with instances of collaboration, whilst the probability of the PWUs undertaking their own, parallel to the institutional trade unions' course was significant. Their population mostly consisted of contract-based precarious workers (see 6.4), mostly employed in workplaces where external numerical flexibility prevailed. Their agenda and repertoire of action was traditional, drawing heavily from the broader Greek labor movement's experience. Welfare state issues were not a top priority for the precarious workers during this period.

After 2006 – and in a more visible manner after the eruption of the financial crisis and the December Riots of 2008, new types of actors emerged, such as cooperatives, self-managed companies and social centers; grassroots unions also increased in numbers, though, maintaining thus their central role as organizational vehicles for the precarious. Hostility towards the union elites increased, despite the fact that the possibility of being integrated in the trade union system remained intact, at least when it comes to the formal unions. The PWUs' activity expanded beyond the workplace, and included the expansion of (welfare) services offered to their members, participation in protests and other social movement events and a partially innovative spirit in terms of means utilized (at least when compared with the previous period). Their agenda, though, remained focused on traditional labor rights (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Main Characteristics of the Greek PWUs

GREECE	Early Stage of Mobilization (2000-2006)	Contemporary Stage (post 2006)
Trade Union System (Chapter 5)		
Main Actors	Grassroots Unions	Mixed
Perception of union system	Mixed	Negative
Integration opportunity	Yes	Yes
Level of Intervention	Inside workplace	Mixed
Types of Flexibility (Chapter 6)		

Population make-up (Contract Status)	External Numerical, some Functional	Functional and External Numerical
Population make-up (Contract vs. Production)	Contract-Based	Both
Repertoire of action	Industrial action	Services, industrial action, protest
Innovative means	No	Yes
Agenda	Traditional labor rights	Traditional labor rights
Welfare provisions (Chapter 7)		
Demands towards institutions	No	No
Self-organized (services/income)	No	Yes

With respect to the Italian PWUs, during the early stages of the protest the main actors were political collectives, seldom (if ever) operating inside the workplace. Throughout the whole period that my research covers, and given that no integration opportunities in the Italian trade union system are to be found, the PWU members' relation with the system remained hostile: at the rhetoric level the perception of the institutional trade unions was (and still is) very negative, whilst the few instances of collaboration with federations belonging in the ranks of the CGIL, as well as the smaller, leftist Confederations USB and COBAS, were merely the exceptions to a general rule of parallel courses and occasional competition. As time went by, the population make-up of the unions expanded to include contract-based precarious workers, as well as people employed in external numerical flexibility workplaces. The repertoire of action also expanded to include services offered to their members, as well as support to, and undertaking of, industrial action. During the early stages of mobilization, a PWUs' main goal was to introduce the precarity notion in the public debate, in a way as to reinforce the collective identification process of their constituency. Finally, a significant increase is to be noted lately, with regard to the number and variety of self-organized welfare services projects (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Main characteristics of the Italian PWUs

ITALY	Early Stage of Mobilization	Contemporary Stage (post 2006)
Trade Union System (Chapter 5)		
Main Actors	Political Collectives	Mixed
Perception of union system	Negative	Negative
Integration opportunity	No	No
Level of Intervention	Outside workplace	Mixed
Types of Flexibility (Chapter 6)		
Population make-up (Contract Status)	Functional, some External Numerical	Functional and External Numerical
Population make-up (Contract vs. Production)	Production-based	Both
Repertoire of action	Protest	Services, industrial action, protest
Innovative means	Yes	Yes
Agenda	Establishing collective identity of precarious worker	Mixed
Welfare provisions (Chapter 7)		
Demands towards institutions	Yes	Yes
Self-organized (services/income)	Some	Yes

Let us return to focus, now, on the determinants to be examined in this chapter. It is no more than conventional wisdom to state that, at the country level, the legislation concerning the labor issues defines the potential organizational formats that are available for the workers' collectives. Commencing from the primary forms of workplace-based organizations and local intervention-oriented collectives and up to the major trade union confederations which

undertake representation duties at the national level, the spectrum of potential options available to the precarious workers' unionizing initiatives are not only correlated to the organizational forms the latter will take, but also, indirectly, delineate the possible strategies the unions might adopt when it comes to industrial action, as well as forms of social movement activity, addressing the society as a whole. Labor law, indeed, provides the terrain where *legitimate* union activity takes place, as well as a framework of social partnership, i.e. a formal structure of bargaining channels between the unions, the employers and the state. The access to this formal bargaining structure is, as one would expect, limited to institutionally recognized organizations. Perhaps it would be more accurate (and more useful analytically) to reverse the argument: what we consider today as an *institutionally recognized* labor organization is the one that has been granted the right to participate in the collective bargaining procedures. Furthermore, labor law defines the limit of employers' intervention in unionizing activities (see Fantasia & Voss, 2004 for an analysis of how employers' practices are directly affected by legal restrictions; also Kupferberg, 1985: 709).

Workers' organizations might choose official recognition in order to delimit employers' intervention, gain access to bargaining resources and provide more complex services to their members (Calmfors et al., 2001: 47-61). Yet some do not wish or are unable to conform, widening, on the one hand, the array of organizational choices, but on the other limiting their options in bargaining and services offered to members. If they do not choose, or are unable to attain official recognition, one would expect that they'd be obliged to form alternative coalition networks to compensate for the limited opportunities' handicap. This was the case, for example, of the Community Labor Centers in the US, which undertook the role of representing and organizing the non-regulated migrant working population of various major US cities (J. Fine, 2005; 2006).

Moreover, labor law provisions strongly influence the country's union structure as a whole, permitting or restricting various types of country-level organizational schemes – e.g., the ways in which corporate or branch unions might unite to form a federation (see, for example, the wide array of configurations examined in Visser, 2006). In Greece, collective bargaining is conducted directly through the pluralistic, hierarchical General Confederation's structure (Kouzis 2007), whilst in Italy the multiple Confederations' representatives participate autonomously in tripartite and bipartite talks, their relative strength being in accordance to the respective results

of union elections and presence. It is important to note that the Greek collective bargaining system, which had remained practically unchanged since 1982, was –to some extent- deregulated in 2012, when the obligatory extension of productive sector-or industry-level collective agreements was abolished. The new system retained the universal coverage of the national collective agreement (signed by the Confederation). The objective of the reform was to increase the number of company-level collective agreements, as well as individual ones (Kouzis 2012).

Section 5.2 is devoted to examining how the trade union system works in the two countries under scrutiny.

5.2. The trade union structure in Greece and Italy and its perception by the PWUs

Let us commence the analysis of the trade union system in Greece and Italy and the ways it affects the formation and activity of the PWUs from a rather peculiar perspective: despite the fact that this thesis' subject is the *grassroots* entities (the "base" of the system), the initial focus will be on the pyramid's apex, that is the major, national-level trade union confederations. Contrary to what one might expect at a first glance, the number of the confederations operating in each country and their internal organizational procedures has a significant impact on the PWUs, both directly and indirectly.

5.2.1. Trade unions in Italy

The Italian system of confederated unions is a rather complex one, very similar to those in the majority of the South European countries, such as Spain, France and Portugal (Ebbinghaus & Visser 2000). The four main confederations are the center-left CGIL, with 5,775,962 subscribed members in 2011 (CGIL 2012), the catholic CISL, with 4,485,383 members in 2011 (CISL 2012), the center-right UIL, with 2,196,442 members in 2011 (UIL 2012) and the right-wing UGL, which in 2010 claimed to have 2,377,529 subscribed members (Confederazione Sindacati Autonomi Lavoratori 2010). Alongside the more politicized confederations, one may find coalitions of the

so-called "autonomous"[11] unions, operating in specific productive sectors or representing distinct professional categories. Among these, one may find CISAL, with 1,700,000 members, and CONFSAL, which in 2010 claimed to represent 1,800,000 members (Fulton 2011).

The numbers mentioned above also include pensioners, and are hard to confirm as they are provided by the organizations themselves. Indeed, it seems that there is a wide controversy amongst both scholars and trade unionists as to the extent to which these figures are representing a true image of the union density in Italy (see, for example, Confederazione Sindacati Autonomi Lavoratori, 2010; Secolo d' Italia, 2012). According to the OECD, Italy's union density (excluding the retired employees) stood at 35.1% of the total working population in 2011, having remained relatively stable since 1999 (OECD 2014). As reported by other sources, though, a decline in active membership is to be noted since 1980, as a significant part of the inscribed members went into retirement, the unions being unable to replace the latter with new entrants of the labor market (EIRO 2010).

Apart from the above, a true constellation of smaller confederations, autonomous professional or productive sector federations and the so-called "grassroots confederations", are operating in the Italian trade union system. Amongst the latter, two are relevant to this project, as, due to their political stance and ideology, they have been closely monitoring and acting against the precarity issues. The first one is the USB with 250,000 members (Globalproject 2010), whilst the other is called COBAS (no membership data available). V.S., a precarious researcher, considers that:

> *"…their strength is very variable and sector-dependent; it is not possible to opt for each of them at every workplace, they have a fragmented strength along the human and physical geography of Italy." [Interview with V.S., 2013]*

It is interesting to note that both have placed in the top slots of their agenda the battle against precarity, the USB stating, in its founding text in 2010, that it wishes to represent the

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[11] Not to be confused with the post-marxist current of political thought and action; these unions' "autonomy" reflects their self-proclaimed lack of attachment to any political area, party or ideology.

subjects of a "new generation: the precarious, the migrants, the unemployed and all those who have no income or housing" (Globalproject 2010). As L.B., a journalist who has participated in various precarious collectives explains:

> *"These grassroots or radical unions come from the '68 movement. They were, at that point, criticizing the union model, so they did not attempt to build a [nation-wide] union confederation. In the '80s and then in the '90s, some of these initial experiments began organizing themselves in larger entities. The most relevant at that time was the COBAS. [...] Between the '80s and the '90s there were dozens of these initiatives, but they remained very small in size. A couple of years ago, the USB was formed, which is the first, you know, not-too-small grassroots confederations. It's not very big, but it's too big to pass unnoticed. […] All these types of unions are traditionally linked to the radical left."* [Interview with L.B., 2013]

The collective bargaining system of Italy is also complex; no national collective agreement is signed (neither is a national minimum wage set). Michaela Namuth summarizes the levels and main issues of collective bargaining as follows:

> *"Collective bargaining takes place at two levels in Italy: sector and workplace (and sometimes also local industrial districts grouping together smaller companies). Sectoral negotiations concern wage rises and keeping up with expected price inflation, as well as questions of working hours, work organisation and consultation."* (Namuth 2013: 3)

The main confederations' organizational pattern is based on two "dualities": the *dual organization* and the *dual affiliation*. Regarding the former, L.A., a precarious researcher, explains that the confederations consist of:

> *"productive sector federations mostly built on [similar] political identities [of their members], but they also have the "Camera di Lavoro" [the Workers' Chamber] – which we inherited from the French model of unionization – local union headquarters where all workers coming from different federations can join each other"* [Interview with L.A., 2012]

The dual organization is therefore based on (a) political identification and (b) spatial proximity. The dual affiliation, on the other hand, consists of individual workers being simultaneously members of the productive sector federation *and* the confederation which the

former supports (CGIL 2012). Once again, the pattern of political identification with the confederation's ideology can be noted.

The grassroots unions' confederations are following, with minor changes, the same organizational logic. As the USB introductory text on their webpage states:

> *"USB has a confederal structure based on the national, regional, regional and provincial territorial distinctions; and a flexible and practical organizational form, based on two inter-categorical macro-areas (the public and the private sector), a model which has already been applied in various European countries, such as Germany and Greece.* (USB 2013)

When it comes to issues related with precarity, three out of the four large confederations (CGIL, CISL and UIL) have founded trade union structures, the purpose of which is to remedy the hardships "atypical workers" are facing. The most relevant to our project is the *NIdil* (*Nuove Identitá di Lavoro* – New Labor Identities) of CGIL, which offers a range of services to its members. It also represents the workers hired from temporary employment agencies, signing the respective collective agreements at the national, regional and local level (CGIL – NIdiL 2015).

Finally, with respect to the Italian unions' socio-political influence, conflicting opinions are to be found. Namuth presents a rather optimist argument, stating that positive perceptions of trade unions are on the rise – following a different trajectory to the political parties' one:

> *"With respect to their public acceptance, the unions clearly profit from the ongoing general disenchantment with Italian party politics, as well as from the numerous political protests of recent years that have demonstrated a strong mobilisation potential and earned them a greater media presence. As a survey by market research institute IPR in May 2012 demonstrates, the unions are currently a good deal more popular than the political parties: 34 percent of Italians trust the unions, and only 8 percent the parties. Until ten years ago it was the other way round"* (Namuth 2013: 7)*.*

In their – more elaborate – contribution "Why don't governments need trade unions anymore?", Culpepper and Regan argue that mistrust towards Italian unions has been consistently high since the late 1990s (Culpepper & Regan 2014). According to them, Italian

unions "have been reduced to the role of being a narrow interest group like any other" (ibid.: 19), due to the decline of:

> *"[…] two parallel capacities: striking fear into government and the ability to solve government problems through mobilizing support for politically difficult reform packages"* (ibid.: 19).

The author, as well as all the anti-precarity activists with whom the opportunity arose to discuss the issue, tend to agree with the latter opinion.

5.2.2. Trade unions in Greece

In Greece, two complementary trade union Confederations are to be found: *GSEE* representing the workers of the private sector and *ADEDY* representing public officials. Although, as will be demonstrated in what follows, ADEDY is actually contributing the largest proportion of registered trade union members (Seferiades 1999), its role in mobilizing the workers is less significant. This is due to the fact that, in accordance with the Greek labor legislation, no collective bargaining takes place in the Greek public sector (the State unilaterally defines the wage system and regulates all other aspects of the labor relations) (Ioannou 2000). The – strictly defined[12] – public sector unions that constitute ADEDY would normally consider themselves as having neither the incentives nor the opportunities to lead any *broad* trade union mobilizations. Traditionally, ADEDY merely follows GSEE in the latter's mobilization decisions, restricting itself in single-sector campaigns. This practice was maintained during the crisis years, despite the repeated public officers' wage cuts and the dismissal of several thousands of State employees.

GSEE, the Greek General Confederation of Trade Unions, represents some 2,000,000 workers (GSEE 2013), i.e. 44.7% of the working population according to the OECD statistics of 2011 (OECD 2014). The above numbers should not be considered as a union density indicator for the private sector. GSEE *represents*, indeed, all those people, in the sense that the national collective agreement it signs is obligatorily applied to all the (individual) employment contracts

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[12] The semi-public, privatized and public infra-structure companies which belong to the State are part of the GSEE.

not covered by any other collective agreement, signed at corporate or productive sector level. Yet, in terms of participation, even the most optimistic estimations do not account for more than 30% of the Greek workforce being subscribed to a union (EIRO 2010). This union density, as the EIRO report states, is achieved thanks to "the public sector enterprises and public utilities and services [where] it ranges from 80 to 98 per cent. In the private it is very low, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises" (ibid.). OECD estimated the Greek union density at 25.4% for 2011 (OECD 2013), whilst other sources presented dramatically low figures, such as 12.4% for 2003 (Schnabel & Wagner 2005).

The structure of GSEE is threefold. At the base one finds the *primary unions* (corporate, productive sector and professional ones) (Fakiolas 1985). The corporate unions' activity is limited to a company installation, a whole company or a group of companies belonging to the same owner. The professional unions are organizing workers holding similar skills and job posts, whilst the productive branch ones are subscribing employees of a specific sector, regardless of their profession or job post. In each company, profession, and productive branch, only one trade union may represent the respective workers. In case of inter-union conflicts or ambiguities, the civic courts are to decide on which union is the representative one, upon examining the number of people who voted during the last unions' elections. The union with the higher number of voters, is proclaimed as representative (Kouzis 2006).

The second level of organization consists of the Labor Centers[13] and the productive sector Federations. Whilst members of the primary unions are individuals, the secondary level unions are solely populated by organizations (Moschonas 2003). The Federations are productive branch coalitions of primary unions and the Labor Centers are locally-oriented which are based in the capital of each region of the Greek territory (Moschonas, 2003).

The third organizational level consists of the GSEE Administration Board, its Audit Committee, its General Council and several Secretariats (GSEE 2013). GSEE is the highest level

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[13] Those are the equivalent of the Italian *Camere di Lavoro*, and are based in the capital city of each prefecture.

apparatus of the private sector workers. GSEE's administrative board is elected during its general convention, by representatives of the 157 second-level organizations (Zambarloukou 1997).

All three levels of the trade union movement structure in Greece are characterized by a relative pluralism; although in general the unions are politicized and affiliated with parties, the majorities and minorities formed co-exist inside the same organization. The secondary and tertiary level unions are funded through an obligatory employees' and employers' contribution, collected through the social security system, whilst the primary unions depend on voluntary contributions by their members (Kassimati 1997).

This is exactly one of the important differences between the Greek and the Italian case: the GSEE's structures, by default pluralist in political terms, are populated by representatives whose political beliefs range from the extra-parliamentary left to the extreme right. The current composition of its Administrative Board[14] is shown in the table below:

Table 5.3: Union Fractions of the Greek Trade Union System (Source: GSEE Press Release (unnumbered), 24/03/2013)

Union Fractions	Political Affiliation	Votes	Seats
ASKE	PASOK (Social-democrat)	146	19
DAKE	ND (right-wing)	103	11
DAS-PAME	KKE (Communist)	94	10
AP	SYRIZA (Radical Left)	44	5
EMEIS	None (Moderate Left)	32	3
Other	Extra-parliamentary radical left	4	0
Total		**423**	**45**

The union fractions which are affiliated with the governing parties of PASOK and ND hold a clear, absolute majority of 30 out of 45 seats. The GSEE decision-making procedures involve some degree of deliberation with the minority fractions, yet the political strategy of the Confederation is, ultimately, decided on a majoritarian basis. It is important to note hereby that the primary and

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[14] In accordance with the results of the GSEE latest General Congress (March 2013).

second-level unions are not obliged to conform to the decisions made by the GSEE. A union may mobilize at any given point of time, without asking for the GSEE consent or assistance. This relative degree of autonomy is well established in the Greek labor movement tradition.

In accordance with the Greek labor legislation, the union representatives participating in the GSEE Congress (voting, thus, for the Confederation's board) are being elected during each primary union's Board elections. Given the fact that the primary union elections *do not coincide* with the Congress, one might encounter cases of representatives who have been elected 2, 3 or even 4 years before the Confederation's Congress. In normal times, this particular characteristic of the Greek trade union system would only slightly affect the outcome. Yet, as tectonic changes have taken place in the post-2010 Greek political scene, the public opinion shifts are not adequately reflected on the GSEE Board composition. Re-examining the data presented in the table above, one cannot fail to notice that the union fraction affiliated with the social-democrat PASOK holds some 42% of the seats, whilst early 2014 polls predict PASOK's electoral score ranging from 3.5% to 5.5%. Contrarily, the AP Fraction (affiliated with the radical left-wing party SYRIZA) holds a mere 11% of the seats, despite the fact that SYRIZA scored an impressive 27% in the 2012 national elections. This particular trait of the trade union system is considered to have increased the, already significant, distance between the union elites and the labor organizations' rank-and-file.

These pre-existing tendencies were strengthened in the light of recent developments and the political consequences of the socio-economic crisis the country is experiencing. When, in April 2010, the Greek social-democrat government announced the so-called "Memorandum of Cooperation" signed by itself and the troika of creditors (ECB – EC – IMF), it became immediately evident that the first round of austerity measures the deal called for would target the working population. The unions did, indeed, respond, employing a traditional, for the Greek standards, repertoire of action. The main tactic used was the nation-wide *24-hour General Strike* called by the GSEE (and supported by ADEDY). The first such strike was called for the 5th of May, 2010; 11 more would follow in the course of that year. The number exploded in 2011-2012, when more than 30 days of general strike were called. All in all, fifty-two 24-hour general strikes have been called up to date. During the strike days, tens of thousands (occasionally, hundreds of thousands)

of protesters would march in the streets of Athens and the other major Greek cities, clashes with the police and other violent action being a frequent phenomenon. The concrete achievements of these impressive mobilizations were minimal: facing an opponent that had mobilized all resources available, and was basing its actions on a very clear political strategy and was assisted by a strong propaganda mechanism launched by the mainstream media, the unions failed to block any of the proposed measures. Indeed, every single legislative package which included austerity provisions was voted by the Parliament, even though the Greek government collapsed twice in four years and one of the two main parties of the (previously bipolar) Greek political system was wiped from the political map.

As if the above were not enough, the trade union officials had to cope with a widespread public accusation that their response was insufficient and/or irrelevant to the occasion. In a 2013 opinion poll, an impressive 95.2% of the respondents considered that the unions did "very few things or nothing" to block the austerity tempest (Lykavitos 2013).

The explanation of the above, seemingly contradictory, dynamic lies in the union elites' social discredit and the trade unions' organizational deficit which long precede the crisis. By the Greek working population's standards, the 24-hour General Strike holds more of a symbolic than a practical usefulness. Indeed, even in times of relative labor peace, it would be common to encounter 2 or 3 General Strikes per year. The quantitative change during the crisis years was deemed both insufficient and indicative of the GSEE inability to renew their repertoire. On the other hand, the alternative proposed by many radical grassroots unions, that is, an *open-ended* nation-wide General Strike, was impossible to employ, not only because of the unwillingness of the trade union elites to engage in "the mother of all battles", but also due to the mere fact that the trade union movement did not
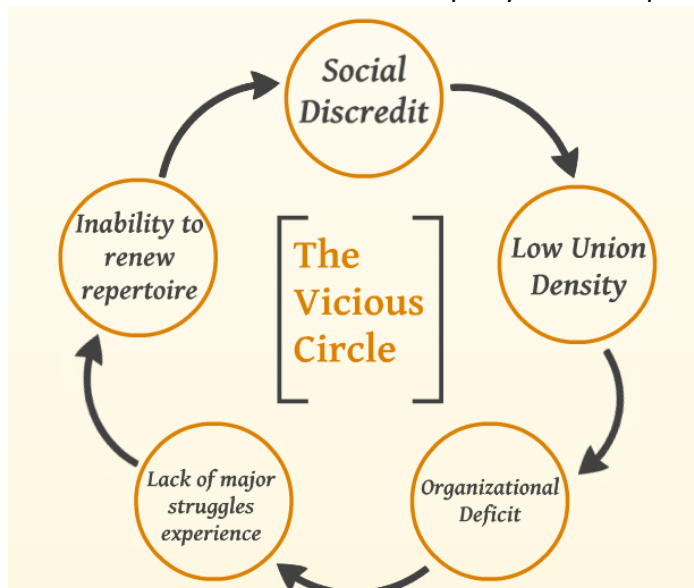
Image 5.1

have the organizational capacities to sustain such a resource-intensive mobilization. Apart from the above-mentioned low union density, the Greek unions lacked the experience of major labor struggles. The last recorded long-lasting, multi-sector labor actions took place in the '80s and early '90s (Ioannou 2000; Koukoules & Tzanetakos 1986), a period when the unions were much stronger than today. Since then, the macro-level union activity was confined to representing the workers in the so-called "social dialogue" structures (Daskalakis 1995). The occasional scuffles that broke out seldom went beyond the symbolic level. Furthermore, the society itself was very hostile towards the union elites, providing, thus, disincentives towards a mobilization that would require high levels of societal support. In a 2011 opinion poll, only 7% of the respondents affirmed their confidence in the trade unionists, all the rest stating that they had "little or no" confidence in them (Laoutaris 2011).

To cut a long story short, what the leaders of GSEE failed to perceive was that, in the radically changed socio-political context of the crisis years, a qualitative – rather than quantitative – shift of industrial action repertoire and organizational structures was required (Image 5.1).

The PWUs' response to this vicious circle was to distance themselves from the Confederation. Thanks to their close link with other (non-labor-related) SMOs, they managed, at least in some extent, to play a role somewhat more relevant than the GSEE, when the anti-austerity movement emerged. One of the most important tools the PWUs had at hand, when the need for an alternative to the GSEE protests emerged, was the *Primary Unions' Co-ordination* (PUC) (*Syntonismos Protovathmion Somation*). The PUC was founded after the assault on the migrant trade unionist in the cleaning sector Konstantina Kouneva (see Chapter 7 for more details), initially acting as a network of collaboration and a mobilization hub for solidarity actions in support of Kouneva. After the social-democratic party's victory in the 2009 elections, and as the country was slowly leaning towards the IMF intervention, this sort of coordination effort sprang up as an urgency. The Athenian Coordination example was followed in other Greek cities; those were the first major efforts, in decades, of workers' organizing beyond the GSEE structures. The grassroots unions' rationale was, on the one hand, that this way they might avoid being obliged to conform with the more conservative elements of the Federations, Labor Centers and the General Confederation (GSEE), and on the other hand that it would be easier for them to form

horizontal networks of collaboration and joint action, avoiding the time-consuming, bureaucratic structures of the typical, institutionalized labor movement.

On the 25th of April, 2010, more than 30 unions held a joint assembly in the Polytechnic School of Athens, issued a common announcement and scheduled actions against the newly-announced austerity measures. The Athenian PUC undertook the responsibility of organizing the large unions' assembly and launched a separate from the GSEE call (and a separate meeting point) for the General Strike demonstrations that would follow (aformi 2010).

The message conveyed to the potential protesters was that one may participate in the anti-austerity protest without identifying with the Confederation, considered as "government-friendly" and ineffective. As K.V., a primary union leader participating in the Coordination's assemblies recalls:

> *"The Primary Unions' Coordination has an experience of labor struggles which extends, nowadays, to more than 5 years. During these years, it had a distinct and decisive presence in all the big struggles of the period – this includes its participation in all the general strikes, as well as the occupation of Syntagma Square, in Athens. Therefore, it is now widely recognized amongst the workers as a "Third Pole", distinct both from the employer-friendly and bureaucratic unionism of GSEE and the party-centered logic of PAME[15]."* [Interview with K.V., 2013]

The call was soon embraced by many other organizations, including small left-wing parties, student unions and even NGOs. The outcome was astonishing: whilst the PWUs gathered tens, occasionally hundreds of thousands of protesters at their meeting point – spearheading, thus, all

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[15] PAME is a GSEE fraction affiliated with the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). The PAME officials always issue separate demonstration calls (and meeting points), yet their participation in the anti-austerity movement was marginal and passed largely unnoticed.

the anti-austerity marches[16], the GSEE never managed to assemble more than ten thousand participants in the square they had designated as their starting point.

On the other hand, the PWU members soon populated the non-labor-related movement actions, offering their expertise and technical skills to the movement's services. Examples include the audiovisual workers' collective *Diakoptes*, which played a key role in setting up the Syntagma Square media team. Freelance programmers and network technicians from the telecommunications' unions provided the internet infrastructure of the occupied square. The *Waiters and Chefs' Union* of Athens was the first to set up a "strike soup kitchen", in 2010 – soon to be followed by dozens of other collectives which provide, today, free meals to the impoverished population. Finally, it is not a surprise that among the activists who populate the *experimental laboratories* of workers' organizing (to be examined in Chapter 7) many PWU members, leaders and founders are to be encountered.

5.2.3. Criticism of the trade union system by the PWU members.

Contrary to the Italian case, the Greek grassroots union entities (factory, company or sector-based unions) are not obliged to conform to the political strategy of the GSEE *majority*. The latter, as shown in the above table, consists of the PASKE and DAKE fractions, which are linked to the governing parties of PASOK (Social Democrats) and New Democracy (ND – right wing). Yet, at the grassroots level, the political and syndicalist line can be totally different than the one expressed by the majority. Especially when it comes to Greek PWUs, the opinions of their leadership range from a simple political opposition to a total defiance of the Confederation strategies and *modus operandi*. K.B., a board member of the Athens-based SMT, states:

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[16] Diani and Kousis (2014) recorded 9 general strike marches that attracted more than 100.000 people in the period 2010-2012; in all of these instances, the Coordinations' call gathered the vast majority of the participants, whilst the GSEE's meeting point attracted far less people.

"*Our relationship with the GSEE is bad, and we are somewhat snobbish towards them. Yet we participate in their structures, because if you have a representative at the board of a local Labor Center or a Federation, your representative has the legal right to intervene in the industrial disputes, for example when someone has been fired*" [Interview with K.B., 2010].

G.S., the vice-president of the Altec Telecommunications' grassroots union, is even harsher towards the Confederation:

"*[…] listen, what I think – and what I saw when the time of [labor] battle came, is that the institutional trade unionism, as represented by the GSEE and all its sub-structure, is dead. Literally dead. It's not the people who populate the structures, for example Stavy [Saloufakou, the president of the Athens Labor Center] and the others, they might be ok, but the structures themselves, they are offering nothing, absolutely nothing. (Interview with G.S., 2010)*".

Yet, and despite its leadership's fierce criticism towards the GSEE, the Altec grassroots union also participated in the Confederations' structures. This contradictory phenomenon can be attributed to various factors (and shall be further examined in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3); for the moment it will suffice to say that the Greek PWUs are not bound by any "political identification" obligation towards their Confederation – but, still, the option of participating in it is an option they have at any stage of their formation and existence. The availability of this option bears significant consequences on their activity and organizational patterns, especially when compared with the Italian case, where a potential PWU's allegiance to a Confederate Union places a definitive political approach label on the organization itself. This doesn't mean, of course, that the Italian PWUs relation with the Confederations is simple. One would expect to encounter a "polar question", where the only two options available are either full or zero participation and engagement. As A.G., a Milanese precarious worker explains, the situation can get very complicated. A.G. explains how her precarious researchers' collective dealt with the CGIL, during the Onda (the Wave) University mobilization of 2008-2009:

"*Some of us tried to work with the CGIL, together with the CGIL, because, you know, when the struggle is at the national level and you are not part of a nation-wide Confederation, then things become extremely more difficult. Some of us joined the CGIL and the "sportelo*

precari"[info point for precarious workers], in order to offer this service, as well as to try to organize people, to sensibilize people." [Interview with A.G., 2013]

But even in this collective, which stands amongst the PWUs who are the least hostile towards CGIL, one encounters a clear disappointment with institutional unionism, as well as a fierce criticism against the trade unions' relation and role with regard to the social-democratic Partito Democratico (PD) and the government priorities. A.G. continues:

"In a time when the political left was collapsing, the CGIL and especially the FIOM really was the point of reference for the Left wing. […] CGIL is a big union, highly bureaucratized and has difficulties representing the precarious workers with their different contracts, needs, and so on. Also, most of the times, they have already been disappointed with the CGIL, they ... don't trust CGIL basically. That's why they leave in massive numbers, even in the "strongholds" of the unions, such as in the public school. […] We referred to CGIL, but they were really not able to deal with the issue, because in our case, you cannot just bargain with "a boss", you have to bargain with the state, and this is something different, especially when the PD is participating in the government." [Interview with A.G., 2013]

5.3. Political militancy and the trade union structure

Turning the focus back to the link between the PWUs organizational models and the trade union movement structure, we can identify two broad categories:

First, the Greek unions are almost never (apart from specific cases which present a somewhat particular population make-up – and shall be examined later) obliged to choose between moderating their political discourse, stance and activity and fully engaging in collective bargaining. A union of any sort – which meets the general criteria of representativeness, as described by the labor law - cannot be excluded from the signing of a collective agreement . The President of the Athens Labor Center, Stavy Saloufakou explains:

"Our [the Labor Center's] basic position is that the [political] opinions expressed by the primary unions should be absolutely respected, and this respect should extend to all sides, employers and state included. This is what the labor legislation guarantees, and should be

acknowledged by everyone who works on the field, whatever position might she hold."
[Interview with St. Saloufakou, 2010].

This comes in sharp contrast with the situation in Italy. As L.A. delineates:

"The problem is that there is no law on union representation at the private sector. The employer's unions can sign a collective agreement but, due to this lack of legislation, who is supposed to sign the agreement on behalf of the workers is not established by the law. So it happens to some sectors that employers' organizations sign a contract with the more moderate unions and despite the fact that CGIL (the biggest union) does not sign it, the employers can say "who cares", and then apply it. This complicates the situation incredibly. The reason for this is that the legislation on collective bargaining was built when there was only one union confederation, and now, with the union pluralism, the law is outdated." *[Interview with L.A., 2013]*

Thus, the possibility available to the employer to "pick" amongst "friendly" and "non-friendly" entities as negotiation partners alters completely the labor relations' field. When it comes to the union's decision-making processes, this introduces a factor that is very difficult to ignore. As we shall also see in the following chapters, the availability of potential services to be offered from the union to its members is an issue of the utmost importance for their leadership. And the more the labor organizations turn their analytical focus and activity perspective to the *workplace* (as is, indeed, the case both in Greece and Italy, lately), the more the "how to secure our presence in the table of collective bargaining" issue will rise in the unions' agenda.

Secondly, in the Greek case, the political representation's fragmentation at the top levels of the organizational structure tends to reflect a similar process at the grassroots level; in Italy, one encounters the exact contrary. Members of political collectives, parties (mainly of the Left) and the numerous organizations that constitute the constellation of the left-wing political spectrum (extending from the institutional SYRIZA and KKE parties to the radical anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist groups), compete on a daily basis to formulate a majoritarian approval of their ideas inside the union they participate.

There are two types of exceptions in this general rule: (a) Some of the very small organizational entities, which are founded and administered by a specific political group, and (b) some of the unions which are close to the Greek Communist Party (KKE), admission to which presupposes a certain proximity to the KKE's ideas and practices. The latter, just to bring an example, would be the case of the branch union SETIP (Syndicate of Attica Workers in Informatics and Telecommunications). The latter is a relatively small union, in terms of population, that is closely associated to KKE, but is fully populated by precarious workers and has engaged in significant movement activity during the last two years, as it enjoys the support of PAME (All-workers' Struggle Front) a major union organization connected to the Communist Party. SETIP has some presence, through workers' committees operating in the workplace, in big telecommunications and informatics companies, such as HOL, Intracom, Teleperformance and the, former public telecommunications company, OTE. It participates in all PAME's strike activities (which lately more or less coincide with the GSEE ones), but it also covers (being a branch union) company-level strikes, in order to minimize the possibility of them being considered by the courts as illegal and abusive. An advantage it has over other similar unions is that during the industrial action it undertakes, a large number of solidarity representatives are mobilized, and one of its preferred tactics is the blockade of the company headquarters' entrance, in order to achieve 100% participation in the strike. Although framed in accordance to its political affiliation, SETIP is consistent in the approach mentioned above, where intense but spatially and temporally limited mobilization of affiliated SMOs and other unions is utilized in order to achieve impressive outcomes, in installations where the number of internal participants would not be sufficient to fully implement the industrial action plan. As K.A., a member of SETIP states:

> "This is why in our organizational model we prefer the branch unions over the corporate ones. And by that I don't mean that when there is a corporate union we won't participate. We will, but still propagate the need of strengthening the branch union, SETIP. When you have a strong, politicized branch union, acting in accordance to the class interests of the people, of the workers, you minimize the risk of the unions becoming puppets in the hands of the employers, and multiply your strength by bonding together workers from many different companies into the common goal" [Interview with K.A., 2012].

Apart from the above, SETIP also has an everyday presence in the workplaces where it has a number of representatives. Its members are quite often facing the repression of employers, threats of being fired or mono-lateral negative changes of the employment relation. Just to bring an example, SETIP members working in the HOL Telecommunications company, despite being highly-skilled technicians, were gradually downgraded from the prestigious network operations department, to the technical support call-center, and then to the sales call-center, which is rightfully considered the "black hole" of every workplace due to hard, badly paid work conducted in harsh conditions.

In sum, out of the 28 Greek unions which were included in our initial sample, only two fall into the first exceptional category[17], whilst only SETIP falls into the second. All the other unions' cases confirm the above assumption.

Moving at the collective identity level, it is interesting to examine the complex relation between political identification and union membership. In the Italian case, the response to my direct question on this issue was rather transversal: the politicized interviewees responded, more or less, in the same way as G.A., a member of the CGIL and a precarious researchers' collective:

> "I am a member of my Confederation, which means I agree with its strategy and purposes. Yet, this does not mean that we can afford to fail to take into account the specificities, the everyday reality of the workplace and our colleagues" [interview with G.A., 2013].

With regard to Greece, the same direct question ("Do you first feel a member of your grassroots union, or the political collective you participate in?"), produced some unexpected results. The vast majority of the interviewees refused to answer or claimed they were incapable of responding, or diverted the discussion to other issues. As we shall explain in the following paragraphs, prioritizing the union member or the political organization member identity is a

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[17] The Motorcycle Drivers' Union (SVEOD), which was founded by workers close to the anti-authoritarian political space and is still presenting a similar allegiance, as well as the *Diakoptes* Unionizing Initiative, which was later (2011-2012) transformed into the *Grassroots Union of Workers in the Audiovisual Sector*, exactly in order to open up the space for participation to potential members who do not share the founders' ideological position.

complex and dynamic procedure, the outcome of which is re-determined almost on a daily basis. The only exception to that came from the members of the Communist Party (KKE) I spoke to, who clearly wished to express that their political allegiance delineates (and delimits, one should add) their daily presence and political activity in their workers' collective. The reason for that is that, in accordance to the KKE's political ideology, unions are perceived as "conveyor belts" between the party and the society.

First of all, one should not fall into the erroneous assumption of conceiving the politicized members which constitute the union's majority as a mere "conveyor belt" of his party (or political collective) ideology to the union. The situation, as described by our interviewees, is a rather complex procedure of repeated negotiation and re-negotiation of the labor organization's political stance, affiliations, decision-making processes and industrial activity. This repetitive internal bargaining is conducted both by individuals and organized fractions inside the union; and takes place (or, more accurately, *reaches the surface*) during the organization's assembly (or the administrative board, depending on the union's institutional status and organizational model). A.N., a technician and a member of the Vodafone Telecommunications' Union operating in Athens and Thessaloniki, describes how their decision-making process is influenced by the various party stances:

> *"In the Board and the Assembly, one may encounter "political formations" which compete over the union's political strategy. There are at least two such formations. Both formations are present in the Board, as well, as they present two different electoral lists in the union's elections. There are the communists and the "others". […] When I'm talking about the "others", I mean the radical left, extending from SYRIZA to the anarchists, but the majority are radical, extra – parliamentary left, people who you 'd describe… I don't know, I guess they'd vote for ANTARSYA or something like that. The union does have a political basis, a clear and specific political basis! The political line – well, I'm not sure if this is an accurate term – the political line of the Union emerges from specific people who are active both inside and outside the board. And this sort of emergence has a transversal effect all over the union's members"* [Interview with A.N., 2012].

It is interesting to note in A.N's narration that he considers the union's political strategy as deriving only from the "will of the majority". My own experience working with the Greek unions does not confirm the above assumption. I argue that, despite all unions' adherence (at least, in theory) to a model resembling as much as possible a direct-democratic one, there's a great deal of behind-closed-doors negotiations on these issues taking place in the everyday union activity. The small size of the organizations, the strong personal relations between the union leaders and officials and the need to preserve some sort of unity, at least when facing the employer or the state apparatuses, might be considered as some of the factors which explain the above. N.A., belonging to the unions' rank-and-file, has access only to the internal disputes' "tip of the iceberg". As K.V., a member of the extreme-left Board majority of SMT puts it:

"We want the Communists [the minority] to participate in the Union's activities; therefore we are obliged to respect their sensitivities. Let me put it this way: The union, for example, would never, never issue a press release against the KKE, criticizing the Communist Party. It is not our job to do so, and we don't do it. The Union's rationale derives from the discussions that are taking place inside each [internal] political formation, as well as between the various political formations. Obviously, the conclusions each political formation will arrive to, is linked to the discussions taking place inside the [external] political organizations each formation adheres to. We, the rationale we adopted is that the Assembly should function as follows: We want the non-organized people to be able to subvert the decisions that the political formations are proposing. I don't know to what extent we are successful in achieving this, but it is our belief and we try to realize it" [Interview with K.V., 2010].

O.K., a minority (KKE-influenced) board member of the Athens-based Wind Telecommunications Union, agrees:

"We might be a minority, but it occurred many times that we managed to change the majority's proposal to the Assembly, not only because we were correct, we always are (laughs), but because what we proposed was much, much closer to the "spirit" of the Assembly, that they realized it would be better to accept our position that to lose. This has happened, by the way, several times, the assembly rejecting the Board majority proposal, either to accept ours, or even voting for some independent member's alternative" [Interview with OK, 2012].

As K.V. hinted a few lines above, these small-scale tactical moves, the elite-level bargaining and the constant attempts of the, more or less, organized groups to control the unions' decision-making, do not pass unnoticed by the rank-and-file, neither are they perceived as a positive aspect of the union's internal procedures. As N.A., a call-center worker and member of two different unions (a corporate one and SMT, which is sector-based), affirms,

"When these things occur, there's great discontent expressed from the base, from the assembly, you directly see how the people below respond. And it's not pleasant for anyone. It seems a waste of time and their pre-made decisions imposed on us" [Interview with NA, 2012].

The trade union members, thus, interpret as a dual hassle the scuffles that occasionally erupt between the various politicized fractions inside their union. These heated debates can be attributed to the politicization itself, in the sense that ideological choices are inevitably influencing the unions' decision-making procedure. Yet, discussions based on political hostilities which are, simultaneously, largely irrelevant to the union's activity are considered as non-productive and tiring, when entering the assembly's agenda. Secondly, the rank-and-file are scared of being overcome by the more organized groups when it comes to decision-making. In a sense, they consider the organized fraction activity as a threat against internal democracy. The union leaderships are aware of these criticisms and are defending themselves in two ways: on the one hand, arguing that in order to maintain the openness of the assembly's debate, one has to reassure that no interventions could possibly be censured (not even those who seem to be "politically oriented" to specific directions). On the other hand, though, they admit that long political debates are stalling the union's work and are looking for alternative ways to divert the attention from the usual micro-political confrontations to more productive discussions. As K.V. explains:

"First of all, let me remind you that the majority of our Union members have had an experience of assemblies in the Polytechnic or Technical Universities. Therefore, they are really experienced in endless fights amongst political groups (laughs). On the other hand, though, the issue you mentioned is a real one and has sparked lively debates amongst us, on how to confront it. The solution could not be to ban people from speaking on politics. Based on what criteria could one propose such a thing? Neither are we always willing to avoid giving a political

answer to issues that arise and are entangled to political questions. The most efficient response
to the problem, according to me, is to encourage workers who have participated in some sort
of labor struggle in the recent past, to share, during the assembly, their experience from this
exact struggle. When this happens, the character of the whole assembly is radically changing".
[Interview with KV, 2013]

There is an important insight to draw from all of the above. The PWUs, both in Greece and Italy, have inherited from their respective trade union system a rationale and a *modus operandi* with regard to the limits of the political debate taking place inside their apparatuses. Whilst the Italian organizations present a more concrete internal ideological position, the Greek ones are more prone to political pluralism and internal debate, notwithstanding the problems that arise from this stance. I am confident that this macro-micro equivalence is not coincidental. In some peculiar way, the grassroots unions seem to have inherited the political tradition of their confederations. This may, on the one hand, be attributed to the fact that specific structures facilitate the circulation of specific ideas on how an assembly should be conducted or a union be operated. On the other hand, this inheritance is an indicator that even the unions which are most alienated from the formal, institutionalized trade union system, are somehow carrying along (both in time and in space) the basic ideas upon which each respective country's trade union movement is built upon.

Let us close this paragraph by posing to the trade unionists the following question: how many confederations are required to sustain a trade union system? We shall turn the focus on the assessments the PWU members and officials are making, with regard to their respective trade union tradition. Firstly, here's what V.S., a member and co-founder of a precarious workers' collective operating in various cities in Italy, thinks on the issue:

"The union system that you describe as fragmented describes itself in the public and
private discourses as a strongly democratic and pluralist system of labor representation. That
means that in theory each worker has a plurality of ideological and practical choices in terms
of representation. That discourse is in my opinion a fiction, at the same degree in which political
representation in the parliament is a fiction of real democracy. You must consider that the
three major unions CGIL-CISL and UIL were representing the main forces in the traditional

republican ideological landscape (respectively post-communist, christian conservatives and social-democratic), which, at least from the beginning of the '90s, had settled a system of mediation called "concertazione". This was a pact of cooperation and conflict management with the State and the representatives of industries [Confindustria]. They overcame their presumed political and ideological differences and restricted the real freedom of choice of workers. Then there are plenty of other choices for the workers, the small unions beyond these three – but I think that the problems lay in the representation and the democracy, or lack of, at the workplace and not directly in fragmentation. In my opinion fewer organizations in the Italian situation would not necessary mean more unity but rather more control and co-optation." [Interview with V.S., 2013]

As we see in this long excerpt, V.S. starts by explaining that the Italian confederations' fragmentation is irrelevant to the workers' movement (as, in the end, they tend to ally in order to support anti-workers' policies), but in the course of his thought he adds that more unity in the top-level of union hierarchies would end up in producing "more control and co-optation". Some of his Greek counterparts seem to move in the same direction. In a text written by the SMT, the author portrays the role of the Primary Unions' Coordination (of which the SMT was a co-founder) as follows:

"The Primary Unions' Coordination has an experience of labor struggles which extends, nowadays, to more than 5 years. During this time, it has a distinct and decisive presence in all the big struggles of the period – this includes participation in all general strikes, as well as the occupation of the Syntagma Square, in Athens. Therefore, it is now widely recognized amongst the workers as a "Third Pole", distinct both from the employer-friendly and bureaucratic unionism of GSEE and the party-centered logic of PAME[18] (Papadatos-Anagnostopoulos & Vogiatzoglou 2013)*".*

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[18] The PAME is a union coalition consisting of KKE-friendly labor organizations of all kinds and levels. It operates *inside* the GSEE. In their own words: "PAME is a Union Front. […] It has nation-wide characteristics and its focus is on every working space and every productive sector, with no exceptions" (PAME 2010). It was founded in 1999, in order to promote the semi-explicit goal of the Communist Party in creating a split inside the GSEE, between the "working class-oriented" unions (i.e., the ones allied to the Party) and all the others. Although its creation facilitated some sort of cross-sector collaboration between grassroots unions, in all its other initiatives it was not too successful. For a critical assessment of the PAME's activity, see also Vogiatzoglou, 2013.

It is clear that what the SMT considers as a "Third Pole" is an expression of the aspiration for *another* Union Confederation, which will promote a radically different agenda. As we noted above, some of the PWU members have proclaimed the institutional unionism "dead". Others, maintaining their critical stance, prefer to collaborate with the respective Confederations on practical issues, or utilize their infrastructure in order to increase the number of services offered to their members. Some wish for more radical options available with regard to the Confederation system, whilst others consider that, either way, the co-optation and misrepresentation of the workers is nothing but a structural characteristic of trade unionism. How can one make sense out of such contradictory statements? I believe that in order to answer this question, we need to change our perspective; leaving aside for a moment the Confederations' issue, let's try to approach the PWUs from the exact opposite side of their activity: the various public intervention options they have (both inside and outside the workplace), and the responses they give to a crucial question: is there a *sectio divina* in the degree of institutionalization the labor organizations should follow – and if so, which is the equation that produces it? I shall dedicate the following paragraphs to exploring these issues.

5.4. Insiders and outsiders: levels of intervention and their implications to the unionization models.

As mentioned above, the *intervention levels* I am referring to are the specific spatial points where the unions make their public appearance; the instances of everyday life where they focus their energy and resources in order to run their campaigns and promote their claims. The choice made by the unionists on the latter is an *intermediate* variable, in the sense that it is made (a) under the strong influence of the union system structure, as defined by the labor legislation, and (b) it bears important consequences, primarily on the movement repertoire the unions employ, but also, to some extent, on their organizational patterns.

Let me remind, at this point, that the union definition I am using is the Colin Crouch one, where the union is defined as "an organization of employees who have combined together to improve their returns from and conditions at work" (1982: 13). This definition does not specify how and – most importantly – *where* the union activity is taking place. The most obvious threshold lies between union activity performed inside and/or outside the workplace. But even this assumption is a second-level one, self-evident presuppositions aside. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Sign of Four", written some 120 years ago, Sherlock Holmes is investigating a crime committed by some obscure US-based masonry organization. As the story evolves, the reader realizes that the supposed "criminals" are nothing more than a proto-union organization based in some mining fields in Colorado. What is inconceivable for us, is that this peculiar labor organization (portrayed by the conservative Conan Doyle as a bunch of assassins), is obliged, due to legal restrictions, to remain *outside* the public sphere with regard to its full set of activities. The setting is so diverse today that the inconceivable has become the exact contrary. The trade unions, considered for more than 60 years as legitimate actors in the social and political scenery of Europe, have developed a culture of purely public activity, in the sense that even their internal procedures are rightfully considered to be relevant to their interaction with external actors, such as the State, the employers and other Social Movement Organizations.

5.4.1. The Italian case

Although no complete work has been published to account for the Italian mobilization against precarity in the years that precede our research, there is more than sufficient empirical material published and assessed both by scholars (Mattoni & Doerr 2007; Mattoni 2009; Choi & Mattoni 2010; Treu 2010; Di Nunzio 2012) as well as movement's publications (EuroMayDay Network 2010; Fantone 2006). The first generation of workers identifying themselves as precarious, were the school teachers in the early '90s. What was peculiar about their case was that, despite the "concorsi" (public contests) they were subjected to prior to being hired by the regional educational systems, they remained in a "grey zone" between regular employment, part-time employment, and unemployment for a significant period of time. Today, abuses such as these do not seem so exceptional or outrageous (in Greece, just to offer an example, some 10,000

teachers who were hired in the 2008 public contest still remain unemployed) but for that period, it was rather extraordinary. As L.Z., a Venetian precarious journalist remembers:

"These were the years of the COBAS Scuola and other powerful autonomous unions in school (even right-wing). The precarious, at that time, were the precarious in school". [Interview with L.Z., 2012]

Since 1993 and with the adoption of legislative measures promoting flexibility (see ch. 6 for details), precarity began expanding to other sectors of the production. It was then that a more generalized response on behalf of the labor movement appeared. I will list here the most important types of reactions, not in a chronological order, but in a way as to build on my argument.

Firstly, let's see how the Confederations reacted. All my interviewees (even those who *work* for traditional trade unions) are quite straightforward on the issue: the unions and especially CGIL, the expectations from which were quite higher, were accused of complacency and failure to perceive the core elements of the problem. As V.S. says:

"…in the traditional and majoritarian trade unions precarity was not an issue simply because they had decided and accepted to introduce it in the Italian labor system together with the government, aligning themselves to the neoliberal agenda". [Interview with V.S., 2013]

Yet, as Mattoni and Choi (2010) have eloquently described, there was, indeed, some reaction at a later stage, albeit insufficient. By the end of the '90s, the CGIL took the initiative to found a federation to represent the precarious workers, acknowledging, thus, the syndicalist representation problem which existed amongst them.

"The mainstream unions started to address the issue in the end '90s, focusing on what they called the "atipici", the atypical workers, with the CGIL founding the CGIL – NIDIL. It's not a Federation like the others, but rather like an "office" representing these kind of things. This new "office" was perceived like an instrument, as the Federation didn't know how to deal with this issues and to study the laws and to think how to react to it, and to organize the people" [Interview with L.A., 2012].

Please note that the CGIL – NIDIL, as described by L.A., is by no means an "organizing" union, but rather closer to the "servicing" ideal type of unionism, as described in Chapter 3. This point will re-emerge in the following paragraphs.

Then, one encounters the campaigns that were organized by the left-wing party Rifondazione Comunista and other radical left elements of the Italian political scene. The most important amongst them was the significant discussion they launched in the years they participated in the government coalition with the Partito Democratico (from 2006 to 2008), in order to cancel the infamous "Legge Biagi" (Biagi legislative package), known in Italy as "Legge 30" (Law 30) of 2003, which had introduced various forms of flexible labor. For an account of the events – and of Rifondazione Comunista's failure to produce any concrete results out of their campaign, see Persio (2011).

The third and most important category of anti-precarity mobilizations, was the one led by San Precario and many other political organizations which focused on the construction of a precarious identity and the promotion of the term as an alternative to – the positively connoted in the Italian society – "flexibility". As Alice Mattoni wrote on the most important of these identity-building protests, the EuroMayDay:

> *"The Mayday Parade and some related protest events had an important role in creating new imageries on precarious workers. First organised on May First 2001 in Milan, it aimed at gathering the varied universe of precarious workers in a parade that re-appropriated the day traditionally devoted to labour issues. In its call for actions, activists underlined that they were invisible and had no voice* (Mattoni & Doerr 2007) *and interviews with some of the organisers of the parade (Mattoni 2012) pointed out the need to redefine the very ideas of 'flexible workers' and 'flexibility'"* (Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014a).

We shall examine in depth the identity formation process, as well as the eventful potentials of protests such as the EuroMayDay in Chapter 8. For the moment, suffice to mention that apart from several small and medium scale struggles in specific workplaces, which were characterized by grassroots unions taking the initiative to bring together precarious workers and political allies, through very intensive networking campaigns, the vast majority of initiatives taken during the

first period of precarious workers' mobilization (which can be broadly defined as extending from the end of the '90s until 2005-2006) were conducted outside the workplace. As L.C. mentions, with regard to that period:

> *"Then, the grassroots unions in the public sector helped coordinate the precarious workers in various struggles, and then there were some coordinations, coordinative attempts at the company level, where they managed to build a strong struggle and sometimes to win, for example in Atesia, a huge call center in Rome. They organized a big coordination of all the workers, without the participation of the unions, totally independent. […] There is also, in some sectors, the coordination of the precarious workers, sometimes linked with unions, sometimes not. The national coordination of precarious researchers, for example, is independent from any union, despite the fact that they have good relations with the FLC-CGIL. The same occurs with the coordinations of precarious journalists. In some regions they are allied with the unions, in some not, and so on". [Interview with L.C., 2012]*

Some have commented that this was merely an initial stage of the Italian precarious workers' mobilization, the movement having proceeded ever since to differentiate their repertoire of action. Shortly after the collapse of the EuroMayDay project, due to internal disputes but also *thanks to a victory* the movements achieved, i.e. to impose the precarity term in the public discourse of Italy, a wide debate was launched, suggesting a shift to workplace-based collectives. This transition, which some of our interviewees coined as "a second phase of precarious mobilization" [Interview with V.G., 2013], is considered to be the response to the growth of the movement, rather than its weakening. As L.A. and L.C. note:

> *"From my point of view, it's the result of what I'd call the "growth time". Because at first the expression of precarity was something small, related to a small population. The previous organizational scheme was not able to represent precarity as a mass phenomenon". [Interview with L.A., 2012]*

> *"Even though they never managed to widely mobilize all the precarious workers, this [first period of the movement] was important; they did succeed in many things and most of all to diffuse the discourse on precarity. They achieved a lot of things". [Interview with L.C., 2012]*

On the other hand, several observers pointed out the role of institutional trade unions in this shift. As time was going by and the Confederations missed the opportunity to establish themselves as relevant players in the precarious workers' representation scene, other actors had to jump in and cover the gap. V.S. explains how the institutional trade unions proved unable to contribute to the struggle, as well as how this is interlinked with the transformations inside the other elements of the movement:

> *"This shift took place for two main reasons that are linked: in the traditional and majoritarian trade unions precarity was not an issue simply because they had decided and accepted to introduce it in the Italian labor system together with the government, aligning themselves to the neoliberal agenda. Then because of a difference of age between the 50-year-old traditional trade unionist members, rooted in public workplaces in big industrial complexes; and the 20-30 young and new precarious workers mostly bearing with a high cognitive profile, especially in the first phase of precarization. This first wave of precarization of the '90s soon extended to other public and private sectors, especially due the labor reform of 2003, the so-called "legge Biagi" and began to hit also other age and status groups. Its outcomes were that we had in Italy a great ideological and militant mobilization and production of analysis – but little organization of workers in terms of numbers and power relations." [Interview with V.S., 2013]*

And the Milanese precarious researcher L.B. affirms:

> *"The EuroMayDay may have collapsed. Mobilization against precarity though did not collapse. Now more and more and more people speak about precarity. Also there is the linking with the narrative of the crisis. […] A lot of mobilization on precarity has taken place in the last years, and organizations like the San Precario have played a significant role in it. They are less visible than in the past, but I would not say that they are weaker. The ideas on a precarious strike, that's an interesting idea. Yet you have to define first what a precarious strike is." [Interview with L.B., 2012]*

What L.B. is referring to as the "precarious strike" is an initiative undertaken by people who were close to the San Precario organizations in Milan. In 2011, they launched a nation-wide campaign promoting the idea of a strike referring specifically to the precarious workers (Sciopero Precario 2011). The core of the idea was to explore the possibilities of transforming the most

traditional industrial action tool, the strike activity, into a movement means that will be able to address the specific needs and challenges the precarious workers are facing inside their workplace. There are more than enough complications in this project. It is obviously hard to persuade a dependent employee who is considered an "associate" or an outsourced worker whose fixed-term contract is expiring and getting renewed every month to engage in a direct confrontation with the employer. Perhaps there lies the reason why the Precarious Strike initiative was never fully realized – apart from several local strikes in the area of Lombardia (this is the region the capital of which is Milan). These local Precarious Strikes were characterized more by a MayDay-style mobilization, with the colorful demonstrations, the music trucks, and so on, than by mass participation on behalf of the precarious workers.

On the other hand, though, it is understandable why exploring the potential of re-appropriating the traditional labor movement means a rupture with the past, in itself. The Sciopero Precario people are quite explicit on that point:

> *"And yet ... and yet, we want to regain the right to strike. It's time to move on to the attack, in order to demonstrate that precarity can hurt not only those who suffer from it, but also those who profit by it. The precarious strike, for the first time, will attack the profits of the companies which exploit and precarize us, worsening every day our living conditions. The precarious strike will be the moment in which the intelligence, knowledge, tricks and guts of the insecure and the precarious will turn against those who precarize them. It will be the strike of the precarious but especially a strike that was born inside precarity and turns against it. We want to let the country know that we can hurt, attack the profits, create a problem for those who take advantage of us. We demand to be heard and we want to regain the future"* (Sciopero Precario 2011).

I believe it is relevant, at this point, to narrate an informal discussion I had with a friend and fellow researcher. It occurred during the presentation of the excellent book "Mappe della Precarietá", edited by Annalisa Murgia and Emiliana Armano. The presentation had finished and the audience was contributing with some rather long and boring interventions, mostly addressing the issues of their own dreadful working conditions and how bad precarity is for everyone. It was then that my friend turned to me and, very frustrated, whispered in my ear: "Look at all those

people, it's been 10 years we've been discussing precarity and they haven't moved an inch from where we were standing in 2001. They are whining and complaining and expressing their eagerness to defend some eternal rights which are long gone, but not one of them feels the need to come up with some productive idea, none of them wants to stop defending and, instead, pass to the attack".

It is, perhaps, to these sorts of criticisms – which, needless to mention, I do not endorse – that the Sciopero Precario initiative responds. What has made their initiative very relevant, although it has not yet arrived at a concrete outcome, is the fact that they directly challenged a distinction which is considered by many as self-evident: that the industrial action tools were designed for a previous generation of labor relations, whilst the new one, the atypical workers, are obliged to re-invent their movement repertoire *from scratch*. Through the idea of a precarious strike, not only are the PWUs obliged to re-think how to do it, in a way that makes sense to the participants and produces some concrete results, but also to re-consider what kind of claims could accompany the action itself. I remain confident that these kinds of *risky operations* are the ones pushing forward the precarious' movement in opening its path in history.

5.4.2. The situation in Greece

Let us now turn the focus back to Greece where, contrary to the Italian case, the passage to the precarity era was not accompanied by an extended reference to the precarity term and the accompanying analytical exploration.

The flexibilisation discourse was harshly criticized, of course, both by the institutional labor entities, in official trade unions' texts (see, for example, INE-GSEE, 2008, 2011; SMED, 2011), as well as by scholars working on the labor relations field (e.g.Kouzis, 2006). The thread of criticism developed around the major lines of the international-level challenging of flexibility: the political objectives of flexibilisation were pointed out, and examples of flexible labor markets failing to promote employment and reduce income inequality were brought forward. Furthermore, several authors questioned the flexicurity paradigm, a set of policies proposed by the EU to

simultaneously promote labor market flexibility and workers' security (EurActiv 2008; Wilthagen et al. 2003). It was argued that the lack of any pre-existing protective legislature provisions in the weak welfare states of the European South, would cancel the policy makers' aspirations of a balanced joint development of the flexicurity's two axes (Triantafyllou 2008).

Yet, precarity remained a relatively unexplored notion. The few publications on it were promoted by far-left and anarchist movement circles, holding weak, or even non-existent, direct links with the labor movement. In 2006, the Athens-based autonomous group Blaumachen published a special issue of their review devoted to precarity (Blaumachen 2006). This same year, the anti-capitalist magazine BlackOut issued a series of texts (Blackout 2006) which included both original contributions and translations of foreign classics (especially from the Italian scene, which is well respected in the Greek autonomous milieu). In 2005, an attempt to create a San Precario-style happening in the city of Thessaloniki failed, as passersby did not realize that the promotion stand of the supposed human resource management company called "Adeho" (which stands for "I can stand it" in Greek) was a hoax. They were approaching the stand asking for a job and left disappointed when the anti-precarity activists would explain them that the event was not what it seemed (Athens.indymedia 2006).

As the time went by, though, and the unions were obliged to face the increasing share of flexible employment contracts amongst their members, two strategies were developed: the first one was an attempt to elaborate the traditional "labor rights" discourse in order to meet the new standards, whilst the second was the implementation of an innovative alliances strategy, which included not only the "usual suspects" (i.e. unions of the neighboring sectors and political allies), but also other labor organizations, and – most importantly – a wide array of SMOs.

The newly-formed precarious workers' unions undertook a series of initiatives to tackle the negative consequences of their members' precarization. The specific tactics' arsenal to be utilized varied significantly, from the – more moderate – introducing of new types of claims in the collective bargaining procedures to militant direct action. In all cases, where the traditional labor movement repertoire was not an option, due to the particular working status of the union members, or proved insufficient, alternative approaches to industrial action were adopted. In

2004, the Wage-Earner Technicians' Union (SMT) succeeded in including in a collective agreement signed with employers the extension of the agreements' provisions to technicians who were not formally holding the dependent employee status, but were rather considered as "associates" or "free-lancers" (Vogiatzoglou 2010). During the whole decade of 2000s, the Cleaning Personnel union of Attica (PEKOP) staged a campaign against the mafia-style companies operating in the field, exposing the exploitation and their illegal practices. The price the union paid for its involvement was high: Konstantina Kouneva, a high-profile activist was attacked by the employers' henchmen with acid, an assault which almost cost her her life and left her severely injured (indy.gr 2008). The Chefs, Waiters and Catering Personnel Union of Thessaloniki chose a different path towards limiting the "black market" exploitation: they staged a series of protests, pickets and blockades outside bars and restaurants where accusations of illegal practices were raised. This practice was successful, in the sense that employers faced both negative publicity and direct economic damage, and was then imitated by the respective union of Athens (Vogiatzoglou, 2011: 16). Finally, one may find several examples of extreme radicalization of the labor struggle, as a response to liminal cases of employer violence. Shortly after the assassination attempt on Kouneva, a waitress in an Athenian bar was brutally beaten by her boss' henchmen, and was left unconscious in a trash-bin. The precarious workers' unions called for a protest, during which several groups of demonstrators attacked and set on fire two of the employers' bars (ibid.). This practice, which of course does not belong to the traditional unions' repertoire, nor was advocated by them, is a sign of the diversification in the union agendas, discourses and practices which can be only partly attributed to the new solidarity networks that have emerged in the Greek trade union scene.

To sum up, the mobilization, in all its diversity, was spearheaded by grassroots unions operating *directly in the workplace* – and lacking the theoretical refinement of their Italian counterparts. As N.A., a grassroots trade union member clarified, referring to a 6-month strike his union became engaged in, in late 2008-2009:

> "If you hadn't explained to me [prior to the interview] what your project is about, I wouldn't even know what a precarious worker is! (Laughing) We didn't know that you have to

be precarious worker to mobilize, we just thought that what is happening is unfair – and went

forward with the strike!" (Interview with N.A., 2011)

The above quotation points out two aspects. Firstly, contrary to the Italian workers, no visibility campaigns based on the notion of precarity were attempted by their Greek counterparts.

Secondly, in the Greek case, the symbolic content precarious workers build upon in order to organize their struggle was linked to the specific characteristics of the social movement organizations they participated in; namely, the grassroots trade unions. This also set limits and constraints on the struggle's symbolic content. Just to provide an example: in two whole years of lively activity (2009 and 2010), the – ideotypically precarious – Cleaners' Union of Attica made not one reference to the term "precarity", either directly or indirectly. Their whole announcements and texts' archive from that period consists of information on various labor disputes, generic labor claims, anti-government press-releases and briefings on internal union issues (PEKOP 2013). Since the organizations were operating in a mixed environment and addressed a mixed audience, consisting of both precarious and non-precarious workers, the obvious choice would have been and, indeed, was to embed the flexible-labor oriented claims and demands into the more general setting of working class struggle. As R., a call-center workers' collective member notes:

"The most important [amongst the collective's activities] for me is the texts we produce. Because there, we can go more in depth into the issues, the issues of precarity. The problem there is when you distribute the pamphlets, the person who might receive it may understand nothing! Or consider that what we're saying is irrelevant to her. That's why we always try to combine the call-center workers' demands into a broader perspective. We do this all the time." (interview with R., 2010)

The collective identification process of the Greek flexible worker, thus, focused more on the 'worker' part than on the 'flexible' one.

It is only lately that the first attempts to unionize *outside* the workplace began taking place in Greece. In Athens, one may encounter four "Worker's clubs", small social centers focused on labor, which operate in a neighborhood basis. Their activity is dual: on the one hand, they try to sensibilize the local community, focusing on offering a diverse set of services (which, quite often,

is not even related to labor issues). On the other hand, they attempt to intervene in small-scale labor struggles, for example in small local businesses, which could not possibly be covered by any union activity. As a member of the Nea Smyrni Worker's Club says:

The Workers' Club wants to become a "city union", which will complement, not substitute, the working class unionism inside the labor space. At the same time, it shall unite in the struggle the workers and the unemployed in the field of the city. [Interview with WCNS, 2013]

The founding of the Workers' Clubs is, as our interviewee explicitly stated, linked to the sharp rise of unemployment in Greece during the last few years. Yet, it is a phenomenon worth taking into account, as this sort of territorial organization had no previous tradition to draw from, at least when it comes to the post-Second World War era.

It is interesting to note the similarities between the Workers' Clubs in Greece and the Labor Centers' experience in the United States. As Janice Fine has eloquently described, US-based Centers, commencing from a different necessity (the need to organize and involve the migrant communities), proceeded with a community-oriented approach, similar to the Greeks, and proved quite successful, as their contribution in the 2005-2006 residence permit campaign showed (Fine 2006; Fine 2005). Although I considered it obvious that the Greek Workers' Clubs were aware of their North American counterparts' experience, I was proved wrong. When I had the opportunity to visit two of these local social centers and upon discussing the issue with the people present, they expressed their surprise that an equivalent experiment had also taken place in another so-called "developed" country and asked for informative material. In a strange way, Professor Fine's findings reached an unexpected audience, so many thousand kilometers away from where they were published. Further discussions on the issue with other trade unionists and movement activists confirmed – and expanded – this observation: not only Fine's insights, but also other fundamental publications on contemporary labor union theory are missing from the theoretical arsenal of the activists. This can be attributed to the weak link between the GSEE's research institute and the syndicalists it is supposed to serve, as well as the lack of Greek-language translations of the contemporary literature corpus.

The founding of local workers' centers is bringing us back to the Sherlock Holmes example, evoked a few paragraphs above. This is a second conclusion to be drawn from the levels of intervention debate. As L.C. explained in what concerns Italy, "it is now a transitional phase, the old recipes do not seem to work, whilst the new ones are still in formation" [Interview with L.C., 2012]. Once again we encounter proto-union structures, originating in an era prior to the official recognition and institutionalization of the union's role. As we shall examine in the following chapters, experimenting and opening the precarity issue in various fields of social life, is also trending in Italy. L.C. continues:

> *"There is the Quinto Stato attempt by Beppe Allegri and others, there is the mutualism experiment, building co-working places, and so on. All these are interesting experiments; they are still small, but worth noting for the future" [Interview with L.C., 2012].*

This deep problematization on the role and spectrum of activity of contemporary unions is a constant pattern encountered in the course of this research project, revealing the difficulties the unionists are facing with regard to their fundamental choices.

A concluding remark for this section should be that all the above delineate a re-convergence of the Italian and Greek precarious workers' unions in recent years, at least in the sense that both movements are now more eager to explore a multi-level intervention in the various societal fields. Whilst, as we described, during the late '90s and until the middle 2000s, the Greek and Italian PWUs followed a very diverse course (the Greeks focusing their efforts in the workplace, whilst the Italians in identity-building through political organizations), by the end of the 2000s in Italy a strong criticism was raised against the absence of PWUs from the physical space of labor, whilst in Greece, the overtly traditional discourse developed by the PWUs was – rightfully – considered as a limit that should be exceeded. We shall revisit this interesting re-convergence when heading towards the end of this thesis.

5.5. To institutionalize oneself or not to institutionalize? That is the question.

I shall conclude this chapter turning the focus to the institutionalization question. Is there a desirable degree of institutionalization for the PWUs, and if so, which could it be? For the Greek unions, this question takes the form of a painful dilemma. Institutionalization means the possibility of participating in collective bargaining procedures, whilst non-institutionalization leads to an obligatory abstention from any direct intervention in the workplace. In previous research, we had identified three types of relations developed between the Greek PWUs and the traditional trade union mechanism. We examined examples of *collaboration*, *tracing a parallel course* (without directly collaborating) and *conflict* (Vogiatzoglou 2010). During the crisis years and as the discontent towards the Union Movement leadership rose sharply, the first two relational types are weakened, whilst confrontation, conflict and even physical challenges against the trade union leaders seem to prevail. Furthermore, as the collective negotiation mechanisms have been partly dismantled, as was requested by the country's creditors in the bail-out agreements, one would expect that the incentives for the unions to proceed towards their official recognition would be significantly fewer. Yet, the responses received from the interviewees are indicative of a cautious stance and an unwillingness to reject potential perspectives for the future. K.G., a member of the audiovisual technicians' assembly "Diakoptes", explained how this delicate issue was provoking tensions inside their union:

> *"There's a lot of controversy and conflicts on this issue. My position is that some of us, at least some, should participate in [the official audiovisual productive sector trade union] ETEKT and attempt to subvert the internal balances of the union, to change the regime. If we can do it, we should do it. Others say that we should have no contact with this useless union. Well… when you argue that we should work beyond party politics, this means we need to move beyond our ideological presumptions, that's my opinion". [Interview with K.G., 2010]*

And what about the possibility of founding *their own* union? Here is how K.G. responded to the question:

> *"I suppose that this group… because at some point we were considering opening up to other people, inviting others to participate… if at some point there are people who are*

interested in moving in this direction, we shall examine the necessities and the conditions of this specific time, we will have to see how it goes. We will take a decision then. It is not our goal at this point. Our goal is to be active in the workplace, to confirm our presence inside the workplace". [Interview with K.G., 2010]

Less than a year later, K.G.'s former assembly had split and the majority of the members had, indeed, founded a grassroots union, called "Grassroots Assembly of Cinema and Television Technicians" (SYVATEKT). The cautious K.G. is one of its founders and a core member of the assembly. The SYVATEKT union is not only trying to intervene inside the workplaces where its members are employed, but is also participating in all sorts of anti-austerity mobilizations and other movement initiatives, such as the occupation and re-opening of the "EMPROS" theater in Athens, an experiment similar – mutatis mutandis – to the Occupied Valle Theater in Rome, Italy (SYVATEKT 2013).

In another under-represented field, the telecommunications sector, characterized by the presence of large call-centers employing more than 10,000 workers in conditions of extreme exploitation, the unionization desire is more clearly and explicitly expressed by the interviewees. O.K., a technician, considers that the reason of union absence is the lack of syndicalist culture of those employed in the telecommunications' companies:

"The telecommunications branch is a new one, it was launched in the early '90s, at least when it comes to the private sector. And this means that the technicians hired there, were in their vast majority very young, recently graduated from the Polytechnic and other Universities. And this means that the workers had no trade union experience, and that the branch itself has no experience of the presence of a union. This meant that we had to start from scratch." [Interview with O.K., 2012]

Despite the difficult initial conditions, the telecommunications' field has witnessed some unionization initiatives. O.K. herself is a very active member of both the productive branch union SETIP and the corporate union WIND. Another telecommunications' worker, co-founder of the No Dial Zone call-center workers initiative, explains how the unionization procedure should be conducted, in order to provide fruitful outcomes:

"What I would like is: whatever is to happen needs to derive from the will of the people, let's say, if we 're planning to found a union, to organize an assembly that will launch the procedures, not to have ourselves gathered and say "OK, now let's make now a union". What is important is to have a steady presence in many workplaces. And from that point, if the participants want this thing to have another type of legalization beyond an informal assembly, that would be good. […] We should explore the possibility to have a collective and a procedure that supports itself utilizing the means that the labor movement has used in the past. The conditions are changing; therefore what a union is needs to change, as well as its structure." [Interview with RNDZ, 2011]

Let us now examine what the high-ranking trade unionists say on the issue. Contrary to what one might expect, the Greek Confederation's leaders are eager to promote a further institutionalization of the PWUs – regardless of the potential challenge to their authority. Panos Kouloumparitsis, a member of the GSEE and the EKA administration, explains why:

"I'd love us to have some of their [the PWUs'] militancy. I'd love us to have some of their capacity in going out on the street to protest with just an evening of preparations. I'd also want them, though, to have the willingness to sit around a table and discuss with us. To tell us "this is what we want. These are our arguments, that's how we see the world. Our ideas are better than yours. […] What is the path that will lead them to what they are asking, how will they realize their claim? How will they manage to get a raise, to force the employer to pay social contributions for them, how are they going to achieve that? You cannot achieve that if you are talking to no one. […] They need to speak with the GSEE, to express themselves inside its structures. And your opinion might tomorrow be majoritarian. If we are as bad as representatives as they claim, why do they leave the representation in our hands?" [Interview with Panayotis Kouloumparitsis, 2010]

I hope that it is evident, from this long interview excerpt, that what really worries the GSEE officials is *not* how they will widen their base of reference, but rather how they will reconstruct a public profile that includes some elements of social movement unionism. On whether they are sincere in considering the possibility of losing the majority in the GSEE administration, I am very doubtful, but since this question would need a separate tome to be negotiated in depth, I shall

leave it open and proceed in examining the Italian case, which is much more complex than the Greek one.

What one encounters in Italy are multiple attempts, on behalf of the PWUs, to advance their position in the public sphere with regard to defending the precarious workers' rights. Most of them, to date, are local and profession-based initiatives. To begin with, there have been serious attempts to create wider co-ordinations out of local professional collectives. The precarious researchers in Italian universities have created the Coordinamento Precari Universitá (Co-ordination of the University-based Precarious) (for more information, see Coordinamento Precari Universitá, 2013), whilst the various local collectives of precarious journalists, are trying to expand their collaboration in the national scale through the – initially based in Rome – umbrella organization "Errori di Stampa" (see, for example, their Manifesto of the Precarious Journalists, in Errori di Stampa, 2013).

Other initiatives, apart – of course – from the activists' participation of the members in the RSUs (see chapters 4 and 5.1), where this option is available, include the co-ordination with "open-minded" municipal authorities in providing welfare assistance to the residents. As V.S. confirms, explaining how "Precari United", a collective of Naples and other Italian cities are operating:

> *"On various occasions we sit at a negotiation table with local authorities and the mayor*
> *to discuss the local initiatives for job and income creation for the unemployed and precarious*
> *workers." [Interview with V.S., 2012]*

Summing up, it is noteworthy how the institutionalization question is connected to the ones examined in sections 4.1 and 4.2, i.e. regarding the relations between the Confederation and the PWUs. More institutionalization would inevitably signify (a) conforming with the organizational standards the labor legislation imposes and (b) in order to secure this conformism, a more direct involvement in the Confederations' affairs and internal organization. This is an outcome both countries' PWUs would prefer to avoid – each of them for different reasons. On the one hand, the Italians would be obliged to adhere to a political strategy they neither share nor endorse. The Greeks, on the other hand, who might enjoy the relative political autonomy the GSEE structure

allows for, would face a dual peril: first, being confronted with the (rising) social discredit and scorn directed towards the Confederation – which has increased during the austerity years. Second, devoting their scarce resources and their activity towards a workplace-only intervention, at a time when society (and their own membership base) calls for wider interventions, in order to compensate for the exploding unemployment and the humanitarian crisis austerity has provoked. These are the disincentives. Regarding the advantages of such a move, it is clear that more institutionalization would directly enhance the PWUs capacity of offering services to their members. This is particularly relevant with regard to Italy, where the PWUs are under pressure to become more directly involved with workplace issues. Theoretically speaking, a precarious workers' collective that transforms itself into a (formal) union could move towards both sides of the "servicing-organizing" axis; the problem here is that this choice may not be made interchangeably.

Another important issue for both countries' activists is how the institutionalization procedure will affect their relations with the trade union hierarchies. A fear being expressed is that a non-coordinated institutionalization might end up with the large Federations absorbing the smaller, grassroots union and choking their voice. The members of the Workers' Club of Nea Smyrni (a structure which, anyway, goes beyond the traditional model of how a union should work), are considering that institutionalizing without clearly distinguishing oneself from the labor movement hierarchies can prove more problematic than no institutionalization at all. Their counter-proposal is that the newly formed PWUs should coordinate themselves using local structures such as the "Camere di Lavoro" in Italy and the Labor Centers in Greece[19]. The name they have given to their proposal is "Workers' Struggle Headquarters":

> *"Another important issue is the absence of a "Workers' Struggle Headquarters" (which*
> *would be populated by grassroots unions, militant committees, etc.), forming a contentious*
> *framework with respect to the official GSEE structures. All in all, the inability to overcome and*
> *go beyond the traditional framework of the labor struggle is something very negative, it is*

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[19] It is important not to confuse the Worker's Centers such as the Nea Smyrni one, which operate in the neighborhood level and their members are individuals, with the (officially recognized) Labor Centers which are second-level units based in the capitals of each province of Greece – and their members are primary unions.

leaving a negative imprint on all the developments. Yet, we are confident that this will change, soon enough". [Interview with WCNS member, 2013]

Turning the focus on the Italian side of the Ionian Sea, it is important to note that none of the interviewees expressed even a distant aspiration of founding a new, nation-wide Confederation to represent the precarious workers. Despite the fact that such an evolution would literally explode the negotiating capacities of the Italian PWUs, the fear of becoming yet another part of the institutional mechanism, on the one hand, as well as the immense organizational resources, on the other, required to proceed with such a project, is not allowing the activists to commit themselves to it.

5.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I employed a cross-national comparison in order to examine the impact of the trade union system of the countries under scrutiny on the PWUs' organizational formats and repertoire of action. Italy has a multi-confederation trade union structure, each confederation adopting a fixed political line and strategy. In Greece, one may find only one, pluralist in political terms, confederation for the workers of the private sector. The latter is facing huge social legitimization problems, which have been aggravated during recent years.

Both countries' PWUs, partly due to their members and leaders criticism towards the union elites, partly because of the fact that they perceived the inefficiency of the trade union strategies in tackling precarity and other major social issues, have distanced themselves from the confederations since their very appearance in each country's labor movement scene. Yet, this distancing process did not occur in the same way: the Italians focused more on developing, refining and imposing the notion of precarity on the public discourse agenda; this operation was carried out by political collectives intervening mostly outside the workplace. Their movement activity moved more in the direction of national and regional protests, renewing the traditional protest repertoire of actions. The Greeks, on the other hand, founded grassroots primary unions, which undertook traditional labor action inside the workplace. This set of activities was not

accompanied by an extensive discursive production, rather a revamp of an "old school" labor rights' discourse.

With regard to decision-making procedures, the influence of the trade union system to each country's PWUs is evident. Despite their preference for assembly-based, directly democratic decision making, the Italian PWUs usually do have a fixed political line (at least when it comes to the external observers), whilst in the Greek ones the presence of different party strategies and union fractions within the ranks of the same PWU are a common phenomenon.

At a later stage, a re-convergence process between the two countries' PWUs is to be noted. This coincided with and was accelerated by the weakening of the EuroMayDay protest in Italy (after 2006) and the austerity tempest in Greece (after 2008). This process may be attributed to the delimitations that a solely-inside or –outside the workplace intervention entails, as well as the changing socio-political field and the rise of new challenges the unions had to cope with. Both countries' organizations widened their scope of activities, introducing innovative organizational formats and actions, on the one hand, being confronted, on the other, with the painful dilemma of accepting a higher degree of institutionalization, i.e. transforming themselves into parts of the official trade union system, one way or another. Both options (institutionalizing or placing oneself at the margins of the system) would entail risks and sacrifices, the lack of any widely accepted innovative idea further fragmenting the various entities' response. Our empirical data confirm that the institutionalization question is tightly linked with the PWUs' willingness and capacity of offering a variety of services to their members. The latest developments, in Greece and Italy, are clearly depicting the unions' commitment in extending their array of services, even in fields which were previously unexplored. The way this extension shall be performed remains an open issue.

In our initial hypotheses, we had assumed that the PWUs should move closer to the *organizing* edge of the "organizing-servicing" axis and closer to the *militant* edge of the "militant-moderate" one. This is partly true, in the sense that all PWUs are adopting social movement unionist strategies and opt for direct democracy rather than hierarchical forms of representation. Yet, it is undeniable that the services' extension effort, as well as the compromises this choice entails (such as the negotiations with local authorities, or the founding of a company to hire

precarious researchers), are elements that push in the exact opposite direction of the scheme, i.e. towards a "moderate-servicing" union ideal type. This antinomy poses a, perhaps, lethal threat to the dual axes explanatory capacity. If what one encounters, when going in the field, is the simultaneous presence of movement in two opposite directions, then what is the analytical usefulness of this model? We shall revisit this question in chapters 7 and 8, where we will explore the social solidarity initiatives of the PWUs and their movement activity's links to eventful temporality, respectively.

Chapter 6: Typologies of flexibility and labor law provisions

6.1. Introduction

Labor law provisions also define the constituency of the *precariat*, in the sense that the flexible employment contracts available in the labor market are by default transmitting specific characteristics to the employees who sign them. Although, as was described in Chapter 2, the array of flexibility is well-defined and, perhaps, uniform in a global scale, the specific choices made by each country's legislators, incentivizing certain forms of employment whilst dis-incentivizing others, regulating a specific flexible employment field or leaving some parts of the labor market non-regulated, have a huge impact on the working population as well as the possibilities of collective bargaining in the various productive sectors. Scholarly literature has documented that the various types of flexibility are usually introduced in a simultaneous manner in the regulatory framework of each country (Appay 1997; Chung et al. 2007; Hudson 2001). Yet, some degree of cross-national differentiation has been noted with regard to the prevailing forms of atypical work, after the legislative intervention (Golsch 2004; Karlsson 2007). Furthermore, there is a wide debate on whether the latest developments in the contemporary South European labor markets constitute a transition to a productive environment characterized by material labor. Finally, an important issue this chapter deals with is to what extent the flexibility theory's employment contract categorization can be useful in distinguishing respective types of collective action, mobilizing and union activity. Our empirical data show that a direct transfer of the flexibility vocabulary is counter-productive; I propose, thus, an alternative classification centered on the distinction between contract-based and production-based precarity.

The chapter is devoted to exploring the relation between the various employment contract types available in the labor market and other labor law provisions and the ways the precarious workers' mobilization developed in Greece and Italy. Given the lack of any previous substantial research on the issue (i.e. going beyond theoretical explorations and based on empirical data), it proved necessary to experiment with various terminologies, which went beyond the initial classifications I had in mind upon undertaking this research project. Terminologies, in this setting, also signify conceptual categories that, in turn, have important implications for the research outcomes. Truth is, the people I interacted with in the course of this endeavor contributed a lot to dismantling the inceptive hypotheses. This occurred as my interviewees, members and founders of precarious workers' collectives were themselves puzzled about how to categorize their own working experience and how to relate it with their participation in collective action. The Milanese precarious researcher A.G. used the following words upon starting our interview:

"I think that precarity is a term which is politically dangerous, now, in Italy". [Interview with A.G., 2012]

I must admit I felt astonished. Having introduced my theoretical framework to dozens of interviewees and during innumerous informal chats with people ranging from migrant cleaning ladies in the metro stations of Athens and call-center workers to university professors and architects holding a PhD in their field, the last thing I expected to hear during my brief visit to Milan was that the core term of my research was "dangerous" to the politically engaged activists. I asked A.G. to continue her reasoning:

"I am skeptical about defining the "precarious political subject" as such, because I'm afraid that this generic definition does not take into account the class differences [amongst the various categories of precarious workers]."

The above quote made things clearer. A.G. brought forward a crucial matter of concern: the class structure and potential divisions amongst the precarious workers. Although the purpose of this thesis is clearly not to provide a new typology of class structure, it is difficult to ignore the issue as it keeps recurring both in the activists' narrations and in the observations we have recorded. What we have identified in chapters 4 and 5 (and will also encounter in Chapter 6), is

that no evident common line of interests can be automatically traced amongst the precarious workers. If that is the case, then how might one expect the precarious mobilization to emerge? And, more importantly, *why* did it emerge in both the countries under scrutiny? That is not an easy question to answer.

Firstly, it seems that the basic distinction between those who own the means of production and those who are subjected to dependent labor is still valid. Even during the golden years of flexible optimism and contrary to the neoliberal aspirations of Thatcher and Co., no such thing as the "popular capitalism", where workers and stock owners would have merged into one another, producing a sort of uni-corporatism [in the literal sense], appeared on the horizon. Secondly, the precarious workers and their collectives invested a serious amount of resources and effort in order to reconstruct what could be a joint agenda going beyond the obvious class differentiations amongst them. This required moving away from the traditional labor rights discourse, into broader fields of individual and collective social existence.

Taking into account all of the above, I tried to homogenize, refine, and further develop the conceptualizations proposed. The result is as follows:

To begin with, the types of flexibility introduced in Greece and Italy are examined and the categories of precarious workers they produce are identified. Then, three different precarious workers' classifications are proposed and their impact on the mobilization forms and intensity is examined. The first one is the distinction between material and immaterial labor. The second typology is based on Atkinson's traditional classification (1984) of the types – or dimensions – of flexibility. Third, the concept of *contract-based* vs. *production-based* precarization is introduced. It is suggested that whilst the latter is driven by concrete changes in the productive procedures, the former is merely reflecting the abusive use of flexible contracts in order to diminish the employer's labor cost. These analytical tools are utilized to explain the cross-time development of each country's movement as well to compare the two cases in a cross-country manner. The emphasis is given, on the one hand, on the organizational formats the anti-precarity activists chose as vehicles for their mobilization. On the other hand, on their collective action repertoire and the extent to which new claims were introduced to their agenda as time went by. The chapter

concludes revisiting the three typologies introduced and assessing the explanatory potential of each categorization to the Italian and Greek precarious laborers' mobilization. Although the classifications employed are not mutually exclusive and could be used interchangeably, as we shall witness they do have a different impact level on our dependent variable (the intensity and form of precarious mobilization). Whilst flexibility types are more relevant to the initial stages of mobilization in Italy, they seemingly losing their importance when the case of Greece is introduced and as time goes by and the precarious workers' organizations stabilize their position in the political and social scene of each respective country. The second and third categorizations are more useful in providing insights on the precarious laborers' mobilization.

6.2. The legislative framework constituting precarity

It is common wisdom nowadays to acknowledge that without the implementation of legislative measures promoting the labor market's flexibilization, the *precarity* term could not possibly exist. The flexibilization procedure was gradual and long-lasting. Commencing from the late 1970s and based on a theoretical analysis of the labor market's "rigidness" as a potential cause of the post-1973 economic crisis (Atkinson 1984; Wallace 2003), various countries began adopting employment contracts which departed from the typical, open-ended, 9-to-5 Fordist-era model. Both Greece and Italy (Heckman 2002) arrived late in the game. As Ioannou (2000) argues, the Greek labor relations system followed a static path in the post-World War two period, maintaining until the early 1990s a more-or-less Fordist structure. This was mostly the consequence of internal reasons of the productive model. Greece traditionally had a weak industrial basis, the majority of new job-posts being created in the Service Sector, mainly tourism and public administration. In the post-World War II setting, the vast majority of the Greek workers – at least those who did not migrate to Western Europe – were being employed either by the (quickly expanding) Greek State (Tsoukalas, 1987), or by small or very small companies. The prevalence of open-ended contracts, a small, yet relatively steady, rise of the workers' income, and the introduction of some collective bargaining tools were some of the labor market

characteristics of the period. Therefore, the labor market configuration lacked the refinement and diversity which one may encounter in countries with a more fragmented productive system (Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014b).

With regard to Italy, the presence of a strong workers' movement, backed by the alliances of union confederations with the parliamentary parties (Bedani, 1995: ch. 7 & 10), as well as the constitutional provisions ["Italy is a democratic republic, founded on Labor", is the explicit declaration of art.1 of the Italian Constitution (Presidenza del consiglio dei Ministri 2013)], which, in 1970, were integrated and further developed in the so-called *statuto dei lavoratori* (Worker's Statute), produced counter-incentives towards and complicated any abrupt changes in the labor market regulation – especially since the flexibilization procedures were rightfully considered to place the workers' interests under threat.

Yet, to use Bob Dylan's words, "the waters around [the two countries] had grown, and soon they were drenched to the bone"[20]. The labor market's relative competitiveness discourse during the '90s was far too strong to resist for the two countries, which were struggling with stagnation and less-than-acceptable macro-economic factors' performance. The de-regulating interventions that took place during that period occurred in a simultaneous way, in a similar temporal frame in both countries, leaving, however (and this factor is of crucial importance and shall be examined in the next chapter) the welfare state untouched. To cut a long story short, whilst legislative initiative created a new type of worker (the atypical one), the welfare state did not recognize her existence.

The flexibilization procedure in Italy took place through five legislative initiatives, which were voted and implemented in the decade from 1993 to 2012. The three most important initiatives are the so-called "Treu Packet" of 1997, the "Biagi Law" of 2003 and the "Fornero Reform" of 2012. L.C. describes some of the particularities and conflicting outcomes of the de-regulatory initiatives:

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[20] Bob Dylan, "The times they are a changin'", 1964.

"This is what has been called as "co.co.co." [collaborazione coordinata continuativa (Continuous Coordinated Collaboration)], founded in the Treu legislative package [see Forum Precari Universita' di Pisa, 2008 for more details], it means you are collaborating with a company, you are supposed to be an independent worker, but it was the first and worst form of exploitation, it meant you had no rights, no minimum wage, no national contract. It was a hybrid way of dealing with the issue. This was then cancelled by the Biagi legislation, and substituted with the "contratto progetto" (project - based contract), which was not that scandalous, but also quite bad." [Interview with L.C., ibid.]

The flexibilization process had produced, in 2012, 21 types of contracts available to the employer, which resulted in "48 atypical forms of employment" (Rymkevich, 2013: 1) for the employer to choose from! It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the provisions made included a wide array of non-typical employment contracts for the employers to use, there were not many substantial changes in the working conditions of the people who were already working under open-ended agreements (Demekas 1995). The reason for that is the existence of the article 18 of the Workers' Statute (Statuto dei Lavoratori), which does not permit the firing of workers without invoking some explicit and legitimate reason for the employer's action. As A.Lex explains:

"The article 18, therefore, does not call into question whether the employer has the authority of firing an employee. This has and does remain as it is: If there are valid reasons, the employer may always fire the worker. On the contrary, the article 18 has the scope of protecting the workers from an employer's illegitimate behavior and it does so in a very strong way. The worker of a medium-large company (since the article 18 does not apply to companies that employ less than 15 workers) has [had[21]] the right to return to her job post in the same way as she had left it and will receive the wages that she should have received in the period between the illegal firing and the return to work or choose to receive an important financial retribution, up to 15 wages" (A.Lex 2012).

In Greece, the promotion of labor market flexibility on the level of policy-making and legislative initiatives long preceded the financial crisis of the 2010s. From 1990, the year when

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[21] The past tense is used here since the Monti government, in 2012, voted some alterations to the article, which render more difficult the justification of a worker's claim to return to work.

part-time employment was introduced in the labor relations' system, to 2009, at least eight legislative packages made reference to flexible labor, deregulated certain aspects of the labor market and/or re-regulated others in accordance to international standards (Milo 2009). The last initiative took place a few weeks prior to the 2010 bail-out agreement between the Greek government and its creditors and included various regulations on leased employees and a new configuration of the human resource management companies' status (Vogiatzoglou 2010). After the so-called troika's arrival in Greece, a series of reforms were implemented which heavily de-regulated the labor market and boosted the flexible labor increase (Kouzis 2012). Yet, contrary to the Italian case, the Greek labor market was never characterized by an increased protection for open-ended employment contract holders. To make things worse, the arrival of the crisis in 2010 brought along a new round of deregulatory policies. In a recent contribution, Gialis et al. note that: "the Greek labour market, already marked by high flexibility and poor job security and social benefits, recent regulatory reforms increasing flexibilization have deteriorated labour and devalued atypical employment" (Gialis et al. 2015: 1). Broadly speaking, the main fields of conflict which arose were not so much founded on the contract termination issue, but rather on the questions regarding the salary, the access to welfare state provisions and the specific workers' rights embedded in the contract (holiday, maternity leave, organizing the payment of contributions to the social welfare system and so on).

To sum up, it is important to retain from the above the following key elements:

a) The flexibilization of the labor market in Greece and Italy, although commencing from different structural starting points, followed a similar course and took place in the same temporal frame, which extends during the whole range of the 1990s and 2000s decades.

b) The flexibilization procedures in both countries had as an explicit scope the introduction of employment contract types that were not previously available. Both processes left untouched the working conditions of open-ended contract workers.

c) Due to Italy's specific context-related labor market characteristics, the generational gap between the "old" and the "new" workers was much more evident than in Greece.

6.3.   The shift towards immaterial labor

Fantone (2006) distinguishes precarity from labor flexibility, arguing that the former is a complicated phenomenon that involves various inferential mechanisms operating between the individuals' employment and social life. For some, precarity can be an unwanted yet unavoidable consequence of job market flexibilization (Herrmann & van Der Maesen 2008), whilst for others it might be an employment choice fully compatible to their social life patterns (see, for example, Brophy, 2006 for a study on highly-skilled professionals' collective action in the United States). Should we transfer this argumentation on the mobilization level, one could expect that the various types of flexibility and the position of employees in the company hierarchy would provide their unions with different bargaining tools and repertoire options.

During the early 2000s, there was a wide debate with regard to the creation of a new generation of workers, whose main feature was that they were handling and disseminating informational data in creative industries or producing and handling knowledge. The term used to describe them was "knowledge workers". In Italy, due to the fact that the "knowledge workers" were at the first line of mobilization against precarity, the analysis conducted on their role and potential contribution to the movement was extensive (Gill & Pratt 2008; Tarri & Vanni 2005; Tsianos & Papadopoulos 2004). More elements were added to this research strand through important theoretical and empirical contributions (see, for example, Betancourt, 2010). In their well-known book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri provide a definition of immaterial labor, which, among others, "involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact, labor in the bodily mode" (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 293). Some arrived to a point as to recognize in them the potential for a new type of working class (the "cognitariat"), which would lead from the anti-precarity mobilization to a generalized struggle against capitalism (for a critical perspective towards this conceptualization, see Fantone, 2006; Mitropoulos, 2005; Waite, 2009). As a university researcher, A.G., explains:

> *"Especially for cultural workers, a part of precarious workers began to use the idea of cognitariat, the idea that flexibility is not a bad thing and we have to make the best of it."* [Interview with A.G., 2012]

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Indeed, a quick search at the Italian precarious' movement archives of the early 2000s reveals such opinions being, at least, present in the debate of that time (see, for example, Alice Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou, 2014; Mitropoulos, 2005; Peitler, 2009; Tarri & Vanni, 2005; Vishmidt, 2005). Nowadays, few among those who had participated in the early stages of the mobilization maintain this point of view. The "rise of the cognitariat" aspirations were soon proved fraudulent and the main theoretical insights constituting the immaterial labor theory received heavy criticism, both at the epistemological and ideological level (see, for example, Aufheben, 2006).

It is to be noted, though, that the cognitariat discourse did "contaminate" the Italian movement in a way as to contribute in the production of what we have termed as the "initial divergence" between the Greek and the Italian precarious workers' organizations. This process was evident in various levels. First, on the symbolic and discursive production of the Italian movement (see Mattoni and Doerr 2007; Mattoni and Vogiatzoglou 2014a; Mattoni 2008). Second, on the resources available for mobilizing: whilst the Italian knowledge workers were backed up in their mobilizing effort by an extensive literature and refined theories, their Greek counterparts held only in their discursive arsenal a labor rights agenda that was considered by many as antiquated. Third and fourth, as shall be presented below, in what concerns the respective movements' organizational formats and claim-making procedures.

6.4. Contract-based vs. Production-based Precarity

When the pro-flexibility academic discourse was still an acceptable trend, its advocates' argument was founded on the fact that flexibilization corresponded to unavoidable changes under way in several productive sectors (see, for example, Delcourt, 1985). It would be erroneous, of course, to claim that the above argument was totally false. Indeed, new kinds of professions emerged and others underwent a radical change in the way they are performed. Yet, what the optimists had not anticipated was that flexible labor could be utilized by employers in order to merely diminish the labor cost of their business, regardless of any transformation of production. Social scientists and economists haven't managed to adequately grasp the phenomenon: no

adequate measurement tools are available to distinguish between the production-based flexibility (i.e., the one which is driven by changes in the productive procedures) and the contract-based one (i.e. the abusive use of flexible contracts in order to diminish the employer's labor cost). Even the most complete and detailed databases, such as the OECD one, fall short when accounting for various contract-based flexibility employment relations (see, for example, OECD 2014).

It is interesting that many of our interviewees were fully aware of this methodological issue. L.C., an Italian precarious worker and member of various organizations dealing with precarity, notes:

> *"I always say that there are two different precarities, one is the production precarity, and the other is the juridical precarity. There are jobs that are actually different from the past; there are others that are different only in the sense of the contracts signed between employer and employee. And I would say that the latter is the highest proportion". [Interview with L.C., 2012]*

This diversion brings us to a secondary question – which is, however, of significant importance. Would it be possible to "cancel" precarity, at least for those who are subjected to flexible labor relations, not due to the peculiarities of their job post, but because of an abusive interpretation of the legislation on behalf of the employer? And if so, what type of intervention or struggle would this require? L.C. believes that an evolution such as this would indeed be possible: "

> *"Some lawyers and scholars in the movement say that if we, lawyers and unions, had access to the project-based contracts database, we could sue all employers simultaneously on the project-based contract. We would have inevitably won, as the vast majority of the contracts are fundamentally illegal, and this would cancel precarity immediately. (Interview with L.C., 2012)*

Some amongst the Greek precarious workers, on the other hand, are more pessimistic. A.M., a member of the Unemployed and Subcontracted Journalists' assembly (Katalipsi ESIEA) is

totally negative about concentrating the movements' resources in attempting to reverse the flexible labor legislation:

"For me, this would be a waste of time. It is structurally simply not possible to make something disappear that has already been offered to the bosses, not unless you start a revolution [laughs]". (Interview with A.M., 2012)

In Greece, one may identify cases such as the Wage Earner Technicians' Union (SMT), which did make an attempt to create a different framework of labor relations in their branch. The branch-level union SMT was founded in 1999 in Athens. It has some 2200 members all over Greece. It is difficult to identify the exact number of precarious workers amongst them, as – and this is the most interesting part of their way of perceiving union membership – the union statute forbids the distinction between those who are officially considered as dependent employees, and those who are considered as "associates", yet are subject to a dependent labor relation. Namely, as is written on article 5, par. 1 of the statute:

"Members of the union can become all technicians of all educational levels, mainly working as dependent employees, regardless of the way their remuneration is calculated […], regardless of the typical characterization of the labor relation[…], regardless of their social security status, age, religion, nationality and country of origin" (Wage Earner Technicians' Union 2007).

This rather original stance of SMT against the separation of workers in accordance to the typical characterization of their employment contract is making its case exceptionally important. The union spent years trying – and finally achieving – the signing of a collective agreement for the Engineers' profession. This agreement practically repeats the non-distinction provision of the union's statute.

K.V., a member of the SMT board, comments:

"It was the first collective agreement which included both those who are paid through invoice and the dependent employees, regardless of the way they receive their remuneration. The agreement is actually accepting the legislative provisions. The innovation here is that it

was the first time that the legislation was implemented in a collective agreement". [Interview with K.V., 2010]

SMT's collective contract – which had caused so much turbulence and problematization – was finally unilaterally cancelled (!) in 2012, in accordance to the bail-out agreement signed by the Greek government which practically blocked all productive sector-level collective negotiation.

In Italy, the Milanese activists of San Precario have been quite active in organizing practical assistance services to their precarious colleagues who are facing problems with employers' abuse of flexible contracts:

"San Precario helps the precarious workers self-organize. They have lots of attorneys; they can therefore intervene in labor disputes but also in collective bargaining. This way, they have become a node of reference for precarious workers. […] Usually what happens is that people who began to feel they are mistreated, or get fired, or whatever, look for legal representation. Instead of referring to CGIL, they refer to San Precario" [Interview with A.G., 2013]

The anti-precarity activists of the *CLAP*, in Rome, have engaged in similar activities. *CLAP*, as described by one of its members, N.N., is a hybrid attempt to combine elements and characteristics from the political collectives which led the struggle against precarity in the early 2000s and the, more traditional, trade union organizational formats:

"From this year on, we tried to bring together these experiences, through CLAP, a peculiar sort of grassroots union that begins its operations exactly from these info-points. The info-points will continue to exist, in various social spaces and in a decentralized way, but every Monday, we have established a convergence point, for all these experiments, in the factory of Officine Zero, where the activists, the lawyers and others will meet to organize their mobilizations and interventions" [Interview with N.N., 2014].

The info-points that N.N. is referring to are a relatively common practice of the Italian movement. This practice is an adaptation of the left-wing Italian trade union federation *CGIL-NIDIL*'s "precarious office" [Sportello Precari], which is offering legal and practical assistance to non-organized precarious workers, in case of a labor dispute.

6.5. Organizational formats of the anti-precarity struggle

In Table 6.1, the main developments of the early mobilization period, with respect to the organizational forms the anti-precarity struggle adopted, are summarized. Whilst in Italy the main actors were political collectives, operating mostly outside the physical labor space, in Greece traditional grassroots union entities mostly intervened in workplace struggles.

Table 6.1: Early (2000-2006) organizational formats of the anti-precarity struggle

Early Organizational Formats	Italy	Greece
Main Actors	Political Collectives	Grassroots unions
Level of Intervention	Outside the Workplace	Inside the Workplace
Population make-up (1) (Contract status)	Functional, some External Numerical	External Numerical, some Functional
Population make-up (2) (Contract vs. Production)	Production-based	Contract-based

As, L.A., an Italian precarious journalist, notes:

*"[It was] the **political collectives** [which] were representing more the independent workers and cognitive workers, people who said "ok, we have new types of jobs, we want new types of rights"- not merely an open-ended contract". [Interview with LA, 2012, emphasis added]*

This quote not only demonstrates the impact of the cognitariat debate on the claims the Italian movement brought forward, it also hints at one of the reasons why in Italy it was "political collectives" which led the initial struggles against precarity – in a sharp contrast with Greece, as we shall examine in the following paragraphs. The independent and cognitive workers develop, by default, an atypical relation to their workplace. One may assume that the main difference with regard to the past is that an "independent" employee may produce wherever (at home, at her

own office, at a shared co-working space), yet she receives the remuneration for her product, negotiates her employment terms, launches and terminates her employment status at a fixed site – the employer's offices. This dichotomization produces a dual alienation from the outcome of production, the one pertaining to the traditional Marxian approach (Gouldner, 1980: 183-188), the second deriving from the detachment of the production process from the production site. It would be at least extraordinary, therefore, to expect that this workers' constituency would unionize in a traditional way.

Contrarily, in Greece, mobilization was spearheaded by grassroots unions operating directly in the workplace and without the theoretical refinement of the Italian counterparts. The first Precarious Workers' Union (PWU) was formed in the end of the 90s – it was the *ACS* courier services company union. The *ACS Union* was founded in 1992, yet it remained practically inactive until 1997 (Boubouka 2008). At that point, three ACS employees were sacked, and the employees were alarmed by the rising debts of the company and the circulating rumors that an imminent shut-down of its activities should be expected (Rizospastis 1997). The union was re-activated and the workers engaged in industrial action. As members of the Union noted in a letter to the newspaper *Labor Left* [*Ergatiki Aristera*]:

> "The most important moment of our Union's History was during May 1997. […] The same day, after having proclaimed a 24-hour strike, all the union members gathered outside the company's headquarters and demanded the immediate re-hiring of the fired colleagues. The ACS management, terrified by our decisive action, was obliged to recall the sackings. After that day, nothing was the same." (Yabouranis 2007).

The ACS Union is still active today, co-operating with the other organizations of the sector. It is recognized by its employer and signing a corporate collective agreement.

This is not the case with another early precarious workers' union the *Sevach* union of *Food Plus*, the company which manages the trademarks of *Pizza Hut* and *KFC* for Greece. *Sevach* was secretly founded in mid-2002, was officially recognized by the Greek state in early 2003 and directly found itself amidst a fierce political and judicial battle. The employer fired one of the

founding members[22], sued the organizers of the strike that was organized in protest and undertook a series of intimidating and oppressive activities (O IOS 2003). The union responded issuing a public call for solidarity (Indymedia Athens 2003). Using to its advantage the new potentials offered by the diffusion of the internet for movement use, the union managed to raise the issue among various SMOs, collectives and individuals who had shown an interest in labor-related problems. The latter organized (in collaboration with *Sebach*) a mobilization that included negative publications and posts against the company, pickets and blockades outside its stores in Athens and strikes. The union developed quickly and gained some prominence through this labor struggle, yet it was weakened at a later point, mainly due to the secession of the founding members (see the editor's introduction in Mabruki 2007).

These were the first attempts to construct PWUs in Greece. Their characteristics and the main choices made by the unions' founders and leaders, at this initial stage, were indicative of what would follow in the early 2000s.

What derives from the above is a clear correlation between the population make-up of the organizations, in terms of contractual status of their members and the organizational formats adopted by the respective actors. In Greece, the majority of PWUs emerged from the workplaces where the *external* numerical flexibility prevailed. Relevant examples include the telecommunications' unions, those which arose in the catering services' sector as well as the courier post services. In Italy, the respective pattern mostly involved the mobilization of *functionally* flexible workers, for example through the designers, artists and researchers' collectives. It is important to note that the above-mentioned patterns are not uniform; there is no "national model" of precarity unionizing: exceptions include the school teachers in Italy (through the mobilization of which the precarity term was revived during the '90s), as well as the call-center unions (such as the one in Atesia, in Rome). These cases are clearly ones of external numerical flexibility. In a parallel manner, the activity of engineers, architects and other "associates" in Greece, as well as unions such as the Translators and Editors' union (SMED), the

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22 The Greek Labor law clearly states that a recognized union's founding member cannot be sacked for 6 months after the unions' formation.

members of which are also considered external collaborators of the publishing houses (rather than employees), are evident cases of mobilization against the *functional* flexibility.

It is, therefore, also necessary to introduce contract vs. production based precarity as an additional explanatory factor of the initial divergence between the two movements. Whilst in Greece the mobilization sprang up from workplaces populated by people whose ambition was mainly to ameliorate their working conditions, in Italy the activist core of the anti-precarity mobilizations' first wave belonged to the *production-based* precarity labor force. As was demonstrated above, unions populated mostly by contract-based precarious members are more eager to engage in small- and medium- scale labor disputes, in order to reverse the flexible employment of their consistency, whilst the production-based precarious collectives focused on examining the deeper content of their members' precarity. In this sense, the initial divergence between the Italian and the Greek movement could be partly attributed to the fact that, whilst the early Greek mobilization was rooted in contract-based precarious workplaces, the pioneer Italian anti-precarity activists were mostly subjected to production-based precarity.

Table 6.2: Contemporary (post-2006) organizational formats of the anti-precarity struggle

Contemporary Organizational Formats	Italy	Greece
Main Actors	Mixed	Mixed
Level of Intervention	Both inside and outside	Both inside and outside
Population make-up (1) (Contract status)	Functional and External Numerical	Functional and External Numerical
Population make-up (2) (Contract or Production)	Both	Both

Table 6.2 confirms the relevance of the above determinants. In contemporary anti-precarity struggles in Greece and Italy, the organizational formats of anti-precarious collectives have been significantly diversified. One may encounter cases such as the *CLAP* project, in Rome, Italy, which was mentioned above, co-existing and collaborating, to some extent, with "traditional" as well as

"new" political organizations, such as the nation-wide *Clash City Workers*. Similarly, in Greece, the PWUs are complemented in their activities by the *Workers' Clubs* – hybrid neighborhood-based, labor-related social centers – and a whole constellation of co-operativist experiments, such as the *Micropolis* and *Nosotros* social centers, the *VIOME* occupied factory, and the media co-operatives *Occupied ERT* and *Efimerida ton Syntakton* (for a more detailed reference to the above, see Vogiatzoglou 2014).

It is no coincidence that the organizational diversification was preceded by a simultaneous membership expansion of all precarity types in the labor market and the simultaneous weakening of the distinction between them, in terms of how workers themselves perceive their own employment conditions.

6.6. Agenda-setting and collective action repertoire of mobilizations against precarity

With regard to the precarious workers unions' collective action repertoire, the situation was rather uniform at the country level, during the early stages of mobilization (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Early agenda and movement repertoire of the anti-precarity mobilizations

	Italy	Greece
Repertoire of action	Mainly protest	Mainly industrial action
Tendency towards innovation	Yes	No
Agenda	Establishing collective identity of precarious worker	Traditional labor rights
Reference to immaterial labor	Yes	No
Population make-up (1) (Contract status)	Functional, some External Numerical	External Numerical, some Functional

Population make-up (2)	Production-based	Contract-based
(Contract vs. Production)		

In Greece, the typical movement repertoire of the early 2000s included workplace blockades, strike activity, solidarity pickets and publicizing the unions' presence in the productive sector (the latter was a dual-purpose action, as it both mobilizes the existing members and serves as a recruitment strategy). Towards the end of the same decade (Table 6.4), the activities' arsenal had shifted towards a more diversified set of actions, which included large amounts of resources invested in networking with SMOs and neighboring PWUs, engaging in mutualist activities, occupying workspaces and mobilizing in the wide context of the anti-austerity movement – that is, widening the scope of the PWUs activity. This shift is to be identified both in the *functional* precarious workers' collectives and the *external numerical* ones.

In the case of Italy, most mobilizations were related to (or made their presence public through) mega-protests against precarity (both at the national and the local/regional level) (Table 3). Simultaneously, the (few) *external numerical* precarious workers' unions engaged in more traditional labor struggles, whilst the *functional* ones moved towards renovating the long-established workers' repertoire – as we have portrayed in the previous paragraphs. This would be the case of the Atesia call-center strike and mobilization in 2005-06 (Mattoni 2009; Clash City Workers 2009). Both tendencies were weakened as time went by: whilst some traditional industrial action is still undertaken by newly precarized labor collectives (such as the logistics' workers in Emilia Romagna), a large number of established precarious workers' collectives and activists are, similarly to Greece, moving towards co-operativist and mutualist experiments, services' provision to their members and colleagues and joining forces with other SMOs (e.g. the Housing Struggle Movement and the NO TAV protesters) in mixed protests which combine the anti-precarity discourse with other claims and grievances (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Contemporary agenda and movement repertoire of the anti-precarity mobilizations

	Italy	Greece

Repertoire of action	Mixed, including offer of services to members	Mixed, including offer of services to members
Tendency towards innovation	Yes	Yes
Agenda	Mixed	Traditional labor rights
Reference to immaterial labor	Yes	No
Population make-up (1) (Contract status)	Functional and External Numerical	Functional and External Numerical
Population make-up (2) (Contract vs. Production)	Both	Both

The most recent efforts in Italy are focused on the concept of "social strike" [*sciopero sociale*], a coordinated set of diversified actions against not only the workplace precarization, but also the one expanding towards the everyday life of the flexible worker. The "social strike" should not be confused with the traditional industrial strike (although abstention from work is part of the action set), as it incorporates a much wider protest repertoire – symbolic blockades, interventions in institutional events, e-campaigns and so on. Furthermore, potential participants also include students, self-employed and the unemployed. As the participants in the Strike Meeting in Rome (September 2014) pointed out in the meeting's concluding statement, the platform of the social strike:

> *"[…] cannot but include instances marking the world of labor and education, the world of non-employment and social cooperation [mutualism]"* (DinamoPress 2014).

It is noteworthy that the comparison of *early* with *contemporary* mobilizations, in terms of agenda and movement repertoire, reflects a similar dynamic to the one developed in the case of *organizational formats*. There is an important difference to identify, though: despite the fact that in every other aspect the re-convergence between the Italian precarious workers and their Greek counterparts is evident, this is not the case when examining the respective movements' *agendas*. Whilst the Italians moved to a diversified agenda, from a previous one mostly aiming at

constructing and disseminating the precarious worker's collective identity, the Greeks persisted, in a somewhat static way, in their traditional labor rights claim-making. A potential explanation of the above phenomenon might be found in the ways in which the "transition to immaterial labor" discourse was (or was not) present in the two movements' discursive production.

First, and contrary to the situation of Italian workers, at the initial stages of mobilization, few or no visibility campaigns based on the notion of immaterial labor, or even precarity were attempted by their Greek counterparts. Only a few articles on the issue appeared in academic or movement publications (Mimis 2005; Blackout 2006; Blaumachen 2006; Mabruki 2007) – these authors' theoretical approach was largely *imported* from the Italian scholarly and movement theoretical production. Second, in the Greek case, the symbolic content that precarious workers built upon in order to organize their struggle was linked to the specific characteristics of the social movement organizations involved, namely the grassroots trade unions. This also set limits and constraints on the struggle's symbolic content. For example, the emblematic Cleaners' Union of Attica – that represented precarious workers – did not make one reference to the term "precarity," either directly or indirectly, over a two-year period (2009 and 2010). The union's announcements and texts from that period consist of information on various labor disputes, denunciations, anti-government press releases, and briefings on internal union issues (PEKOP 2013). As opposed to the Italian collectives, the Greek PWUs were operating in a working environment consisting both of precarious and non-precarious employees and addressed an equally mixed audience. Therefore, the obvious choice would have been and, indeed, was to embed the flexible labor-oriented claims and demands into the more general setting of working class struggles. As R., a call center workers' collective member, notes:

> *"The most important activities for me are the texts we produce. […] The problem is that when you distribute the pamphlets, the person who might receive it may not understand anything, or consider that what we're saying is irrelevant to him/her! That's why we always try to set the call center workers' demands into a broader perspective." [Interview with R., 2010].*

6.7. Summary of the findings and concluding remarks

The main argument of this chapter is that the variety of labor law provisions de-regulating traditional labor relations and re-regulating atypical employment contracts does have an impact on the anti-precarity mobilizations in structurally similar countries. Both Greece and Italy present few differentiations regarding their labor market (and welfare state) configuration and followed a similar path towards introducing flexibility in the labor sphere. Yet, the two countries' movements emerged in very different forms and initially developed in diverse ways, only to converge at a later stage. We examined the respective organizations and their activity through the analytical lens of three distinct typologies and conceptual categorizations of flexible labor, in order to distinguish and identify explanatory factors of the initial mobilization divergence as well the late re-convergence.

First, the extent to which the precarious workers introduced in their reasoning a perceived move towards an era of immaterial – or, according to some readings of the situation, *cognitive* – labor constitutes a rupture with the past, had a significant influence on the way the mobilization developed. In the late 1990s in Italy, theoretically informed activists predicted the emergence of a new type of worker – the immaterial or cognitive one – and invested their scarce resources in organizing anti-precarity political collectives, mostly operating outside the workplace with the explicit purpose of producing the collective identity of the new subject they had identified. In Greece, the lack of a profound analysis of the production transformations left little space for such developments. The anti-precarity mobilization emerged inside the workplace and took a form compatible with the pre-existing unionization/trade union action schemes already present in the country.

The second classification derives from Atkinson's dimensions of flexibility (1984). Whilst flexibility types are more relevant to explaining why and how the initial stages of mobilization developed in Italy, they seemingly lose value when the case of Greece is introduced. Similarly, as time goes by and the precarious workers' organizations stabilize their position in the political and social scene of each respective country, the multiplication of resistance hubs and the move

towards a mixed inside-outside the workplace organizing model renders the types of flexibility less useful for the researcher's analytical purposes.

The third categorical axis was between the contract-based and the production-based precarity. The empirical findings confirm that, in both countries and in a dynamic perspective, the precarious workers who were subjected to contract-based precarity tended towards placing their efforts in the struggle to reverse their employment status. A logical consequence of the above is that those workers were more prone to adhere to a traditional labor rights discourse. The production-based contract holders tend to follow an innovation-oriented approach with regard to their mobilization agenda. The latter contributes to establishing an explanatory path towards the late re-convergence of the anti-precarity mobilizations in the two countries under scrutiny.

Chapter 7: Welfare state provisions, workers' mutualism and other parameters.

7.1. Introduction: The lack of access to welfare state as a founding act of precarity

The relation between welfare state adaptation to the new population of contingent workers and the precarious' mobilization is the object of this chapter. As in the previous one (Chapter 6), our reasoning shall commence with an interesting observation made by the Milanese researcher A.G., back in 2012.

> *The 20-something [year-old] precarious worker is very different from the 50-something precarious worker. That's something that everyone understands. I think that people who struggle against precarity today, are not struggling for more open-ended contracts – in any case, even if you do have an open-ended contract today, who can reassure you that you 're not going to be fired tomorrow morning – but rather for the welfare reform. I think that's how the Basic Income idea has emerged lately in the precarious workers' discourse". [Interview with A.G., 2012]*

In both countries under scrutiny, what characterized the welfare state of the last two or three decades was the non-implementation of any serious reforms, but rather a simple cutting down of benefits and the beneficiaries' numbers. This comes in sharp contrast with the gradual changes in the labor market, as described in chapters 2 and 6. The basic structure of the welfare system remained unchanged, yet new employees' and, more broadly, population categories emerged. This procedure was described as the "process of dualization", where "policies increasingly differentiate rights, entitlements, and services provided to different categories of recipients" (Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2012: 10). The silence and inaction of the legislator with regard to social protection contributed to the marginality of

precarious workers who slowly, but progressively, were increasing in numbers in the respective societies. In Italy, labor market flexibility was not coupled with changes at the level of the welfare state system and social protection policies are still solely concerned with and directed to open-ended workers (Pedaci 2010; Bronzini 2002). This contributed to increasing divides within the Italian workforce. Also in Greece, the flexibilisation of labor relations was coupled with a lack of change in the welfare state system. Commencing from a traditionally weak social protection nexus (at least in comparison to the Northern European countries), and despite the ambitious declarations of the various lawmakers (see, for example, AlphaBank, 2005; The Parliament of Greece, 2010), no specific provisions were implemented for the new entrants in the labor market, producing, thus, a part of the labor population seriously lacking access to the welfare state mechanisms (for a thorough investigation of the matter, see the analyses of the GSEE research institute, namely INE-GSEE 2009, 2011, 2013). It had correctly been noted that the Greek welfare state's "capacity to mitigate the social impact of the crisis was already seriously compromised before the onset of the crisis" (Matsaganis 2014: 65). As G.B. put it:

> *"I think that precarity is connected to insecurity, in the larger sense. The problem is not the open-ended contract, or the lack of it, but the fact that you have no welfare access, no basic income and so on." [Interview with G.B., 2012]*

The above insufficiencies of welfare state adjustments have created three broad sub-categories of population which fall into this thesis' research interest:

a) The precarious workers, who would normally have full access to the benefits the welfare state provides to full-time, open-ended workers, but due to their flexible working status, are no more eligible (see, for example, Baccaro 2003; Herrmann and van Der Maesen 2008; Herrmann 2008; Kahn 2010).

b) The migrant precarious workers who, in addition to point (a), are obliged to confront the difficulties that derive from the linguistic gap and their doubtful position in South European societies – that are hostile to providing residence permits and regularizing their eligibility to work (see, for example, Doerr 2010; Kambouri and Zavos 2010; Landolt and Goldring 2010; Nobil Ahmad 2008).

c) The female precarious workers who, in addition to point (a), are obliged to cope with the patriarchal South European family structure, as well as a persistently gender-unequal labor market (Fantone 2006; Stasi Episfaleias 2009; Murgia 2007; Kambouri & Zavos 2010).

The fourth category, which derives from the labor flexibilization, is practically a *whole generation* that consists of people under 30 years old. As L.A. noted in an interview he gave us in 2012:

> *"Well if you count it up, there's the certainty, in our generation, that due to precarious labor, we'll get no pension at all, or a very-very low pension."* [Interview with L.A., 2012]

This generation, due to its fragmented employment, black market employment, extended stay in the educational system, as well as high unemployment amongst youths, has not been contributing or is under-contributing to the pension system. As time goes by and flexible labor relations expand instead of being stabilized in a systemic balance point, more and more generations will be added up to the so-called "Pension time-bomb" phenomenon, which will inevitably need to be tackled in the years to follow.

This issue has been part of the precarious workers debates, at least at the individual level. L.B. perceives the "Pension Time-Bomb" as a potential weapon in favor of the workers, in their struggle against precarity:

> *"There are some ways to deal with precarity. For example, one could make the contributions of precarious workers so much higher than stable ones, that they would be inconvenient for the employers. This would also help the precarious gather the pension contribution, as they have low salaries and no continuity in their pension contribution. This is a vicious circle, and there's a huge debate, everyone, from the Left and the Right, knows well that something needs to be done, this is an emergency."* [Interview with L.B., 2012]

Yet, both the generational issue and the pension reform question expand beyond the scope of this thesis (and beyond the argumentation and claim-making of the PWUs), we shall therefore focus solely on the three first population categories.

The Precarious Workers' Unions responses to the variety of challenges which emerged from their members' inadequate access to welfare state provisions may be classified in two broad categories. Firstly, one encounters the institutional ones (section 7.2). These are claims and proposals which are directed to institutions and require the intervention of state or other governmental apparatuses in order to be achieved and administered. The second category consists of the self-organized projects (section 7.3). These, rather than constituting claims to authorities or proposals towards a future reform of the welfare state, are more oriented towards providing, in a present time and space, services and/or income to the precarious workers (paragraph 7.3.1). In paragraph 7.3.2, the specific initiatives focusing on vulnerable precarious workers' groups, namely the migrants and the female workers, are examined. One important aspect of the self-organized projects is to be found in the way the PWUs are re-negotiating the use of space. The occupation of workspaces and the re-appropriation and re-use of abandoned factories, cultural centers and other metropolitan areas, are examined in section 7.4. Finally, the combination of the following phenomena: (a) the South European states restricting access to the welfare state to large (and ever growing) numbers of their own citizens; (b) the emergence of grassroots, radical projects suggesting a re-configuration of the productive relations and a re-imagining the content of the term "welfare"; (c) the institutional unions' inability, inside the crisis setting, to perform their role as participants in the so-called "social dialogue" procedures, has led some to assume that the current state of the workers' movement bears some resemblance to the early days of trade unionism (Concluding Notes).

7.2. The unions' response (1): Claims to institutions and the state in the PWUs' agenda

In this sub-section, I shall examine the PWUs responses to welfare state insufficiencies which are directed towards institutional actors, namely the state, and elements in the local administration which manage the distribution of welfare state resources. The most important among them are proposals towards the establishment of a Basic Income and the application of a

Minimum Wage at the European level. Both ideas originate from Italy – in Greece, they remain under-developed, for reasons that will be depicted below.

The proposal for the establishment of a Basic Income based on citizenship occupies a prominent position in the late PWUs claim agenda. The Basic Income idea is an old one, but in its current form it re-appeared in the beginning of 2000s, through two large umbrella organizations in Europe (Basic Income Earth Network) and the US (The U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Organization)(Parijs 2000). In Italy it was introduced through the local branch Basic Income Network Italia (Basic Income Network Italia 2013) and, at a later stage, through initiatives such as the *Il Quinto Stato* (see: Quinto Stato 2012). As M.G., a political scientist from Rome volunteering for various activities of the ESC social center explains:

> *"[…] the Basic Income is part of the welfare, in the sense that it will replace measures such as the unemployment benefit, the maternity benefits and so on. That is why the Basic Income is extremely relevant to the precarious workers, in the previous configuration of the welfare state they would never have access to this kind of benefits, due to never meeting the eligibility criteria."* [Interview with M.G., 2014].

In Italy, the demand for a Basic Income gained momentum during and because of the crisis, as it is considered a financially sustainable and socially just way for a welfare reform, not only in the national level, but also in the European Union. N.N., a Roman activist, explains the rationale of the transition from the national to the supra-national level of intervention.

> *"[…] those who were speaking on the Basic Income issue, are now speaking on a European-level Basic Income. The reasoning behind this is as follows. Our life, the whole of our social existence, not only the working time, is becoming part of exploitation and accumulation on behalf of the capital. The fact that this accumulation is taking place at the European level – for example, through the peripheral countries producing skilled workforce moving to work at the center of Europe – then this re-appropriation that we are proposing [the Basic Income] should also take place at the European level"* [Interview with N.N., 2014]

Yet, the promoters of Basic Income need to confront two perils that might endanger their project. The first lies at the core of the argument. If the sum is distributed based on *citizenship*, then there's a potential risk of leaving out people who have no citizenship rights; namely, the

illegal migrants residing for years in an EU country without having access to legalization procedures. Second, there is the possibility that the minimum guaranteed idea will be used as an extreme form of monetarization of the welfare state, i.e. substituting (instead of complementing) the existing welfare state structures. This is the case of Greece, for example, where every proposal for a minimum guaranteed income has come from the right-wing of the political spectrum, in the sense that it will provide a basic amount of money to the individual, with which he or she will be able to literally buy the social services of his or her choice. Whilst in the past these questions remained unanswered, more recent approaches by the PWUs are taking them into account and exploring ways to successfully respond to them (see, for example, the call published by Il Quinto Stato, 2012).

For the reasons depicted above, the Basic Income demand never became widespread in Greece, neither was it promoted by the PWUs. Yet there are other similar experiments promoted by specific unions and collectives. Examples include the "Unemployment Technicians' Card" issued by SMT and a set of proposals produced by the Union of Translators and Editors, containing changes they consider necessary to the structure of their profession. Turning back the focus to Italy, one may encounter various local and national welfare reform demands emerging from various organizations, large sets of initiatives tackling unemployment, lack of access to medical care, and so on.

Finally, a relatively new development is the adoption of the European Minimum Wage demand from some Italian organizations and collectives dealing with the precarity issue. The European Minimum Wage is not a new idea. In the recent past, it had been introduced in the public debate both by labor relations' scholars (in the broader context of the flexicurity discourse) and by the institutional trade unions (see Eldring and Alsos 2012; also Schulten and Watt 2007; Schulten 2008). What constitutes a rupture with the past is the argumentation brought forward by the PWUs, as depicted in the following excerpt by N.N.:

> *"Throughout the years, two different main views have arisen. Two different discourses, and it's interesting how the crisis is producing a recomposition of both debates and, perhaps, the introduction of the two arguments into one, unified, discourse and argumentation. The two*

are, on the one hand, the Basic Income, and on the other hand, the Guaranteed Minimum Wage. [...] Through several struggles of the period and due to the fact of the mass unemployment and the demolition of the workers' rights, with thousands of workers, such as in the EXPO of Milan [which will take place in 2015] and in the case of Electrolux, being requested to work for free, totally for free, those who in the past were speaking for the Minimum European Wage, are now also including the Basic Income in their agenda - and vice versa!" [Interview with N.N., 2014].

7.3. The unions' response (2): Self-organized proposals

This sub-section focuses on welfare-state related projects directly implemented by the PWUs, rather than being directed (in forms of claims or campaigns) towards institutional actors. Social solidarity projects, such as the info-points in Italy and the health assistance in many Greek cities have been implemented during the last few years. Income-producing initiatives, some prominent examples being the founding of cooperatives and the occupation of abandoned factories aim to cover – to some extent, at least – the lack of adequate unemployment protection for precarious workers, in both countries. Finally, the sub-section examines the PWUs responses to the precarious population sub-categories mentioned in 7.1, which I hereby define as the *super-precarious*.

7.3.1. Social solidarity and income-producing initiatives

The self-organized PWUs proposals are equally, if not more interesting than the demands to institutional actors. The Milanese activists of San Precario have been quite active in organizing practical assistance services to their precarious colleagues:

"San Precario helps the precarious workers self-organize. They have lots of attorneys; they can therefore intervene in labor disputes but also in collective bargaining. This way, they have become a node of reference for precarious workers. The option they chose, in order to negotiate with the bosses, is through legal work. They participate in many small battles. We are talking about both individual and collective cases, but mostly collective. Usually what

happens is that people who began to feel they are mistreated, or get fired, or whatever, look for legal representation. Instead of referring to CGIL, they refer to San Precario. […] In call centers, for instance, in small publishing houses, in the fashion industry, in sectors such as these, you encounter lots of small, self-organized groups, which try to bargain with the boss – and simultaneously try to do political work." [Interview with A.G., 2013]

The anti-precarity activists of the *CLAP* PWU, in Rome, have engaged in similar activities. *CLAP*, as described by one of its members, N.N., is a hybrid attempt to combine elements and characteristics from the political collectives which led the struggle against precarity in the early 2000s and the, more traditional, trade union organizational formats (see also Chapter 5, section 5.5, on the *institutionalization* question):

"From this year on, we tried to bring together these experiences, through CLAP, a peculiar sort of grassroots union that begins its operations exactly from these info-points. The info-points will continue to exist, in various social spaces and in a decentralized way, but every Monday, we have established a convergence point, for all these experiments, in the factory of Officine Zero, where the activists, the lawyers and others will meet to organize their mobilizations and interventions" [Interview with N.N., 2014].

The info-points that N.N. is referring to are a relatively common practice of the Italian movement.

"Our group, for some years now, going beyond the production of political discourse and mobilization, and through the so-called "sportelli di autotutela legale" [info-point for legal counseling self-defence] in various social spaces. Those are working in order to assist the precarious workers with individual, but also collective labor issues and problems they are facing and support the workers, beyond the unions, in their struggles to retain their rights and the remuneration of their work" [Interview with N.N., 2014].

This practice is an adaptation of the CGIL-NIDIL's "precarious office" [Sportello Precari], which was supposed to be offering legal and practical assistance to non-organized precarious workers, in case of a labor dispute. Once again we encounter the blurring of the thin lines between the institutional trade union practices and the more informal PWU ones. L.C., a fierce critic of CGIL's stance in all other aspects, admits the usefulness of their *Sportello*:

"For example in the last congress of the CGIL, the left fraction was proposing to abolish the NIDIL, considering that NIDIL forms something like a "ghetto" and they should be represented by their industry unions. I agree with them, although I can see how the "office" can be useful. It has never been useful in terms of mobilization, but it has been useful in the level of single companies, single factories especially because most of precarious contracts in Italy are illegal. They would go and accompany individual workers in small companies, even where no mobilization could ever arise, and so on." [Interview with L.C., 2012]

The precarious researchers of Milan's State University have taken their line of reasoning one step further. In accordance to the 2010 law on education, the Universities may only consider the applications for researchers' positions amongst those who are *already* members of the University's community. Considering this provision as highly unfair, the researchers who are already working for the State University have devised the following solution: they will form an association, a co-operative which can bid for the positions in the research projects and then subcontract the work to other individuals, regardless of their working status. G.A., a member of the collective explains their rationale:

"We also reflected a lot on mutualism. We thought about associations of precarious workers, which can find jobs, re-distribute jobs to people who, at that precise moment, cannot find a job." [Interview with G.A., 2012]

The peculiar point of this proposal is that in order to create a social solidarity structure, the precarious researcher needs to be transformed into a sort of "employer" and "subcontractor" for other precarious researchers! It will be interesting to see how the Milanese activists will cope with the obvious contradiction that their dual role entails.

In Greece, despite the fact that no mutualism tradition exists for social movement organizations to draw upon, the economic crisis and the austerity measures led social actors to experiment with new forms of solidarity and cooperation, moving beyond a more contentious repertoire (Sotiropoulos 2013; Kantzara 2014). Some examples include: the "Unemployment Technicians' Card" issued by the Wage earners Technicians' Union, which aimed at providing its unemployed members with free training courses as well as a set of discounts and free access to basic goods. Then, there are the soup kitchens organized by the Workers' Clubs and many other

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precarious workers' organizations. Another example is the self-organized primary health assistance clinics founded by unemployed and precarious doctors all over Greece (more than 50 were operating in mid-2013), in order to provide medical coverage to the huge numbers of people who lost access to the official Public Health System, due to unemployment and/or inability to pay their contributions.

The most important among the above are the projects I term as *experimental laboratories*. Their most interesting characteristic is that, instead of debating whether one or the other trade union activity is more suitable to the emergency situation in which the Greek society has found itself, they seem to re-negotiate *as a whole* the content of trade unionism – questioning, for example, self-evident notions such as the workplace or the power relations inside it, as well as proposing radical transformations of the *workers' organization* format and content.

The first and, perhaps, most prominent amongst the experimental laboratories, is the so-called "Workers' Clubs" (*Ergatikes Leshes*), which have sprang up lately in various neighborhoods of Athens. In a similar way to the US-based Workers Centers' experience of the mid-1990s (Fine 2006), the Workers' Clubs aim at extending the labor struggle beyond the limits of the workplace. Their flexible structure and local focus allows them to approach two population categories which would remain unreachable for the traditional trade unions: the workers of very small companies and the unemployed, who are invited to participate in the various activities taking place in the clubs. As a member of the Nea Smyrni Workers' Club (WCNS) explained:

"The Workers' Club wants to become a "city union", which will complement, not substitute, the working class unionism inside the labor space. At the same time, it shall unite in the struggle the workers and the unemployed in the field of the city". [Interview with WCNS, 2012]

Then, one encounters the occupied and recuperated companies. The most important projects are the factory of VIOME in Thessaloniki and the Public Television and Radio (ERT) in various cities of Greece. Both companies were shut down by their respective employer but re-launched their activity under workers' control. The VIOME recently announced that they will found a cooperative in order to legally distribute their product, whilst the ERT employees

continue to broadcast their radio and TV program from many studios around Greece, despite the eviction of their headquarters in Athens. Of course, the self-managed factory does not constitute a new idea at the international level (given the Latin American experience of the early 2000s), but it is important to keep in mind that such advanced proposals were never present in the Greek labor movement's debate. Makis Anagnostou, a VIOME worker, describes how their self-managed factory is organized:

> *"We took a decision of full equality among workers, equal wage to all, regardless of the type of work one is doing. What we said is: one factory stock per worker, one vote per worker. [...] Finally, we decided that the factory management may be recalled at any time. The same goes for the trade union's board. This is what we call a cooperative enterprise under workers' control."* (in Papadatos-Anagnostopoulos & Vogiatzoglou 2013)

Finally, the dozens of cooperatives that have been founded lately should not be ignored. They provide a wide range of products and services, from agricultural products to computer repairs and from courier services to bars and restaurants. Once again, the lack of any previous cooperativism experience should be noted with regard to the Greek case. In a similar manner, the Greeks are unaware of the cooperatives' transformation, in cases such as the Spanish and the Italian, into mechanisms of labor exploitation and tax evasion. The contribution of the cooperatives and the occupied factories is that they re-initiated the, long-lost debate on industrial democracy and ownership of the productive means.

Although the field has provided us with some inspiring empirical insights, it is unlikely that any of the, above mentioned, proposals and experimental projects could prove, in the form they have today, to be a long-term recipe for the revitalization of the Greek labor movement. The traditional trade unions have long exhausted their innovative potential and proved unable to conform to the urgent demands of a rapidly changing era. Although high-ranking trade union officials comprehend how the new conditions pose challenges to the union structure, they are reluctant to endorse the demand for a drastic structural change (see, for example the analysis of Lanara, 2012. Lanara is the International Relations officer of the GSEE). The grassroots union entities are facing difficulties in approaching the unemployed and are susceptible to external pressure, given the hostile labor environment. The Workers' Clubs are still few and perceive

themselves as complementary to other union structures. Given the international experience, it is highly probable that, even if the occupied companies and cooperatives survive, they will remain in the margins of the productive system.

It is important to keep in mind that many of the projects mentioned are informal, in the sense that their legal form and activity is not recognized by the labor legislation. Therefore, when talking about reforming the Greek trade union system it is not only a "bottom-up" issue: legislative initiatives will also be required, in order to unblock the frozen traditional trade union structures and integrate the most interesting experiments in a coherent and productive way. I consider it as highly unlikely that the official trade union structures will become obsolete to the degree of facing extinction. No major actor would opt for that development, certainly not the government or the employers. A weak trade union system is preferable to the turmoil that no official representation at all would bring. Yet, given the combined (a) presence of the "vicious circle" (see Chapter 5) and (b) absence of the social dialogue structures which defined the Greek labor field during the last few decades, there seem to be just two ways forward: either the trade unions will fall back into an even less relevant role in the societal processes, or the necessary structural changes will be designed and implemented. These changes will have to take place in an environment where the intertwinement between trade unions and social movements is characterized by multi-faceted processes and a high degree of complexity.

Prior to closing this paragraph, it is important to make reference to the specific actions undertaken by both the Greek and the Italian anti-precarity activists, focusing on specific population groups, such as migrants and female workers.

7.3.2. The super-precarious: Migrant and female workers

In Italy, from the very early days of anti-precarity mobilization, a special focus was placed on the ways women and migrant workers are influenced by the labor relations' flexibilization. In a text published in 2006, the national organization "Stop Precarity Now!" (*Stop Precarietá Ora*!) summarizes the point:

The women are the most stricken by the processes of labor precarization, by the dismantling and the privatization of the public systems of personal assistance. The struggle against precarity is part of the self-determination struggle. The migrant condition concentrates in itself on all issues of the precarious life, for the female workers, the male workers and their families. The struggle for rights' equality for migrants, for the termination of their persecution, for the closure of the detention camps, to end the slavery that entails the fact that residence permit is linked to the tenure of a job post, are part of the anti-precarity struggle, as well as the one on the universal citizenship rights (Stop Precarietá Ora! 2006)*.*

The Milanese organization San Precario examined in depth the links between the migrant condition and precarity, in all three of their "General State of Precarity" (*Stati Generali di Precarietá*) conferences. Their reports included a useful distinction between the *migrant precarity* (*precarietá migrante*), which reflects the broader social status of migrants, and the *migrants in precarity* (*migranti in precarietá*), i.e. the ways migrants are embedded in a precarious labor relations' context (see, for example, San Precario 2011).

The Italians' mobilization in support of migrant workers evolved along three main axes: first, numerous solidarity actions and co-organization (alongside migrant's collectives) of activities in the direction of securing the migrant population's rights (see, for example, Radio Onda d' Urto 2015; Global Project 2012). Second, active support whenever migrant workers engaged in strike activity or other types of industrial action (Strike Meeting 2015). The most prominent struggle during the last decade is perhaps the central-northern Italy logistics and IKEA workers' struggle, which, ever since 2008, periodically erupts in contentious episodes (Clash City Workers 2014). Finally, concrete action is undertaken to facilitate migrant's access to welfare state provisions, or, when no such provisions are available, to offer the services in a self-organized manner (Tobbia 2010). Many precarious workers' organizations maintain info-points, providing advice to migrants on how to access the Italian public health system. In some cities, such as Florence or Milan, the info-points are accompanied by on-the-spot primary health assistance to non-regularized migrants who have no access, or are too scared to dare to visit to the public hospitals. What is more, anti-precarity activists participate *en masse* in the national organization "Housing Struggle Movement" (*Movimento di Lotta per la Casa*), as well as its local branches. The Movement has

undertaken a series of impressive actions in the last decade, occupying abandoned buildings and sheltering, among others, migrant workers' families.

With regard to female workers, the various feminist currents of thought encountered, from very early on, the intellectual endeavors of those aiming to conceptualize and understand precarity. As has been noted in Chapter 2, not all approaches were fully hostile toward precarity. In 2006, Laura Fantone wrote that precarity and flexibility "are not solely negative phenomena for the generation of women in their twenties and thirties" (Fantone 2006: 2). Precarity, she continues:

> *"[…] makes suddenly clear to all European men and women the mechanisms that perpetuate vicious cycles of exploitation in a post- industrial context, in which the weight of social and affective labor rests mainly on women's shoulders, and, even worse, is unevenly distributed between elder women, young women and migrant women. Therefore the younger women's experience of instability requires new strategies and tools for struggle. This approach intends to be an attempt to reframe the precarity movement as a struggle which requires solidarity and networking across genders, generations and ethnicities, rather than a simple defense of old rights through legal battles"* (ibid.).

This optimistic, albeit understandable, in the context of the post-autonomous thought, point of view receded to some extent, as time went by. As of today, a constellation of collectives and organizations, based in most Italian cities, are actively working to combine theoretical analysis on gender and precarity with concrete action to reduce the negative impact of labor flexibilization on female workers. The efforts along these lines have been reinforced in the context of the crisis and the austerity cuts imposed on the Italian welfare state system. As the members of the Roman social center "Communia" note:

> *"Today more than ever, the struggle of women, lesbians, gays, transsexuals and intersexuals must become protagonistic, they cannot be detached from the fights for a new welfare model. A new welfare model which can no longer be based on an anachronistic idea of the family, and must derive from the opposition to the dismantling of rights and dignity of labor, and the total refusal of the Austerity policies" (Communia 2014).*

Anna-Lisa Murgia suggests that a political project of such an extent should commence from a radically new approach on what constitutes the labor sphere today:

> *"This shift of attention may help extend the confines and meanings of work and working to the sphere of sociality and the practices that translate this sociality as a whole (Bruni, Murgia, 2007). This requires not only taking account of life spheres other than work but also considering the concept of precarity as a dimension which extends in many directions. […] As regards the interpretation of contemporary work in particular, there is a desire to innovate the approach, focusing not on the labour market but on the world of work: that is, its conditions of existence, and whose space and value are measured by a plurality of relations and interweavings"* (Murgia 2007: 3) .

With regard to the Greek case, and with the notable exception of the solidarity campaign to Konstantina Kouneva (see Chapter 5), gender issues never became central in the problematization of Greek anti-precarity activists. This reflects, on the one hand, the relative weakness of the country's feminist movement, as well as the more "traditional" approach of the Greek PWUs on labor rights issues, at least during the early stages of mobilization. The Kouneva incident, however, did produce some useful reflections and contributions on the intertwinement of gender and precarity in the Greek labor market (Kambouri & Zavos 2010; Solidarity Assembly to Konstantina Kouneva 2009).

On the contrary, when it comes to migrant organizing, the Greek PWUs have been far more productive – and, occasionally, successful. In Athens, Thessaloniki, and several countryside regions where a significant migrant population lives and works, one encounters organizations such as the Athens' Union of Immigrants, as well as collectives which developed on a thematic basis (that is, a specific labor dispute which required collective action on behalf of the workers), such as the *Fishermen's collective of Michaniona* and the *Agricultural workers' union of Manolada*. The latter did not manage to transform their tentative organizational structure into a more permanent one, as the labor dispute ended, and faded shortly after.

The most important union mostly populated by migrants is the Athenian *PEKOP* (Attica Union of cleaning and house services personnel). Although the number of members of *PEKOP* is

not particularly high (in the last union board elections, only some 150 workers participated), the organization has a long history of successful interventions in the workplaces, and its prominence has dramatically risen after the assassination attempt against Kouneva, who was one of its board members. Kouneva, who after the attempt is perceived publicly as the ideal figure of a discriminated, and yet courageous and independent trade unionist, is summarizing at the individual level all the characteristics of the union she belonged to before she was attacked[23]. She is an immigrant from Bulgaria, the holder of university degree and a single mother, who found work as a cleaner after her arrival in Greece. She was working for a subcontractor of the Athenian Metro, *IKOMET*, yet another "black hole" of illegal labor relations and exploitation. She engaged in intensive activity in her workplace, organizing her colleagues and getting involved in industrial action, which was suddenly stopped in December 2008 when she was subjected to a mafia-style attack – allegedly by her bosses' henchmen (indy.gr 2008).

Today, PEKOP is still very active both in the workplaces and in immigrant communities. Its members and officials are propagating the need for immigrants' collective action at their work, and stage campaigns against racism and labor legislation violations.

PWUs operating in the telecommunications' sector often encounter the issue of organizing the migrant workers (first or second generation) who are working in the call-centers of their companies. O.K. explains the situation, with regard to the Wind Telecommunications Union and the productive-sector union SETIP:

> *"There are several migrants, many being second generation ones… but also first generation [amongst those working in the call centers]. The SETIP union also tries to have a presence and to work inside the foreign-speaking call-centers, which are populated exclusively with migrant workers."* [Interview with O.K., 2012]

The unions' intervention is usually based on non-discriminatory grounds. In an interview conducted in 2011, N.A., whose origins are from Albania and is an active member of two unions

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[23] In the 2014 euroelections, Kouneva was triumphantly elected as a Member of the Europarliament, running in the ranks of the left-wing party SYRIZA.

– Wind Telecommunications and the sector SMT – explains the difficulties migrants are facing when participating in union activities:

> "I am a migrant myself; I crossed the Albania-Greece Border Mountains when I was 11 years old. Did I ever feel isolated, weaker than the others, is that your question? Well… yes and no. Yes, in the sense that there are factors you need to take into account, for example what would be the consequences if I get arrested during a picketing or a demonstration? But, on the other hand, no, as the union I'm participating in does not seem to care about my nationality, my official one, I mean. They don't seem to notice." [Interview with N.A., 2011]

There are some notable exceptions to this non-discrimination general rule, though. As K.G., from the audiovisual sector collective "Diakoptes" confirms, one of their main points of conflict with the formal trade union of their sector was on work permit issues:

> "[The institutional trade union] had called for an assembly which focused on people who are working in our field without a work permit. We are obviously absolutely opposed to such a political reasoning. Because what they are trying to do, is to "barricade" our working space, to allow only for the people who were working until now, excluding several others. But who are "we"? And who are the "others"? That's masonry logic. Our project is solidarity, to the people who work in this productive sector, regardless of whether they possess a working permit or not." [Interview with K.G., 2010]

Finally, the unions operating in the catering field ("Waiters and Chefs Union of Athens", "Motorcycle Drivers' Union" – which also covers delivery boys), have undertaken a series of solidarity actions, in order to support individual workers' claims in small and very small companies of their sector (Yabouranis 2007). This included several actions to protect migrant workers, either regularized or not, the employers of whom had refused to cover social security contributions. One of the most impressive series of actions of the last decade was the campaign against the bakery chain "Choriatiko", which was revealed at a later stage to be a covert trafficking and forced prostitution (!) operation. The trial against its owners is still ongoing, while I am writing these lines.

It is important to note that, despite the efforts made, the Greek PWUs have not managed to adequately integrate migrant laborers among their ranks. Migrant anti-precarity organizations

(such as PEKOP or the Athens Union of Migrants) are still the exception to a general rule of collectives mostly populated by Greeks. O.K. summarizes the problems and challenges that lie ahead:

> "The level of coordination and organization of the Greeks is as low as that of the migrants. The difference is that the migrants are usually working all together in specific working spaces. In this sense, it is easier to organize a massive action there. In another sense, though, it is more difficult, since opening a means of communication with these "small ghettoes" is a hard task to accomplish." [Interview with O.K., 2012]

7.4. The use of space in self-organized PWU projects.

The PWUs' attempt to provide a new repertoire of activities and services to their members is often complemented with the occupation of buildings, might they be direct action-style actions, or the re-appropriation of their working space itself, such as was in the case of the VIOME and the ERT in Athens. An example of the former is the wave of theatre occupations towards the end of 2000s and early 2010s in several Italian cities, the most prominent of which was the Teatro Valle in Rome. In this case, a contentious activity – the occupation of abandoned buildings – was instrumental for precarious workers in the cultural industry that could have a working space attempting at the same time to produce income for themselves and to defend a common good available to all, cultural production. In a similar manner, the theater EMPROS was occupied in Athens. The EMPROS assembly identifies, in their "manifesto", the organizations which provided the initial mobilizing critical mass:

> "The theater EMPROS, a historic building and important theater of the Athens center, remained closed and inactive for years. It was revived in November 2011, thanks to an initiative to occupy and activate the space led by the "Kinisi Mavili" [an assembly consisting of precarious artists and designers], the participation and support of the "Kinisi Katikon Psiri" [a self-organized resident's assembly of the theater's neighborhood] and many artists, theorists of performative arts, music and fine arts" (Theater EMPROS Assembly 2012).

Another relevant example along these lines is the creation of common work spaces for precarious workers – but also those who are temporarily unemployed – who do not have even have a proper work space in the company that employs them as "associates". The activists who manage, beyond the logic of profit, these co-working spaces also aim at creating connections between otherwise isolated precarious freelance workers, recognizing the importance of sharing the same workspace to create mutual trust, exchange experiences and possibly decide to engage in collective action to improve the working and living conditions. As N.N. explains:

> *"The idea of co-working commences with the observation that there is a large number of qualified, skilled workers who are asked to work from home. We consider that if they go out of their home, of their isolation, it will be easier for them to organize, to act together. Secondly, when you work isolated, it is not possible to share your knowledge and experience. Co-working provides an element of exchange and reciprocal development. That is why we made available to all of the above a physical space, where the workers meet, work together, improve their social relations and, ultimately, their lives."* [Interview with N.N., 2014]

This is the aim of SUC – Spazio Ufficio Condiviso – in Milan, which was born out of the collaboration between the Network of Precarious Editors and the Piano Terra, an occupied activist space in the Isola neighborhood. Another interesting experience in this direction is Officine Zero. In this case, a factory that was shut down in 2008 was occupied by its 33 former workers. The occupation was supported by neighborhood activist groups who assisted the workers in the conversion of the factory into a multifunctional space which would provide services to the local community: a small self-managed student house; a co-working space for precarious and autonomous workers; and the "chamber for autonomous and precarious labour". As one of the first official declarations of Officine Zero suggests, this experience combines "[...] mutualism and cooperation between those subjects who most suffer from the austerity blackmails" (Officine Zero 2014). According to some, the PWU-organized co-working spaces are also providing opportunities for the movement, as a whole, to develop and "exploit", in a fruitful way, the precarious professionals' know-how and technological skills. As N.N. states:

> *"The other important thing is that bringing together these various categories of professionals, this facilitates the possibility of inventing projects and creating outputs that are*

beneficial for the movement as well. For example, for the communications campaign of the Officine Zero, the fact that we have together journalists and graphic designers, this creates a synergy which can produce very interesting outcomes. In sum, the co-existence of the various workers, the various professionals, can produce new forms of social collaboration". [Interview with N.N., 2014]

In Greece, and in a similar way to the Italian case, issues related to the space where the contentious activity takes place were central to the debate developed amongst the precarious workers. Occupying one's workspace, a practice well-known to the PWUs in the previous period[24], was further developed as a contentious tool, in the sense that it would now include the physical space's *recuperation*. These experiments include the, mentioned above, occupied theatre EMPROS in Athens. Then, small co-operatives have been founded inside pre-existing social centers. Examples are the Nosotros social center in Athens and the Micropolis social center in Thessaloniki. These co-operatives undertook the self-organized restaurant/soup kitchens that were hosted in the social centers, offering low budget (or free to those in need) lunches. It is noteworthy that this decision was met with hostility, if not with scorn, by other elements of the Greek social movement. In an informal discussion I had with a Thessaloniki lawyer, himself a member of a lawyers' cooperative, he was strongly criticizing the fact that the Nosotros and Micropolis members had taken this choice. He insisted that income production for the precarious is a totally legitimate objective, yet it should be clearly distinguished, if not physically separated from the movement activity social centers are supposed to be undertaking.

Finally, the most important experiment of space renegotiation is the occupied factory of VIOME in Thessaloniki, which served as an archetype for how self-organized, horizontal workers' control can be put in practice and signaled a radical change in the perception of the dilemma – explored in Chapter 4 – of whether precarious workers' activity should focus *inside or outside* the workplace. The Officine Zero in Rome, apart from the co-working spaces, are hosting a carpenter's

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[24] See, for example, the 6-month occupation of the Altec Telecoms call-center, the 1-week occupation of all the Altec offices in Athens by their workers, the blockades of the Wind and Vodafone Telecommunications' companies during strikes and the blockades of Pizza Hut stores as early as in the beginning of the 2000s (Vogiatzoglou 2010; Vogiatzoglou 2011).

workshop and a tapestry workshop, which are operated by the workers of the late *RSI* (Rail Services International). This company was the owner of the factory where Officine Zero is based. M.G. explains how the participants in this experiment identify themselves with the project:

> *"The idea of occupying the factory is closely linked with the idea of re-appropriating the modes of production. It's not only about changing the way labor relations are configured, but also to be able to produce ecological products, society-friendly products, this kind of thing. This is a step forward from the simple demand for an income, or a job for the workers. Of course, these projects are still at the beginning, they present an experimental character, they are, as one could say, ambitious, in the sense that they are exploring uncharted territories, but all the people who are involved in the project are optimists, we have agreed that this is the way we want to move forward."* [Interview with N.N., 2014]

In the case of the *ex-RSI*, and in a similar way to the *VIOME* case of Greece, the workers returned to the abandoned, by the owner, working space and re-launched the production under workers' control.

7.5. Concluding notes: *Radical shifts* and *images from the future*.

> *"During the Onda, we undertook many self-inquiries, self-interviews, collaborative research, self-research and participant observation. In Italy, there's a tradition of the above among feminist, precarious, squatting movements, and others. One very interesting question that emerged from this period was "What do you need from the union?". Because it is somehow clear that we need a union, but what we need the union for, it's not too simple"* [Interview with A.G., 2013].

In this chapter, we examined how the PWUs widened their agenda in order to include an argumentation on the welfare state's non-reform as one of the founding acts of precarity. This agenda expansion is qualitatively different than the one promoted, during the Fordist and early post-Fordist era, by the entities belonging to the institutional spectrum of the labor movement. Those were the periods during which the unions participated in neo-corporatist, tri-partite structures (composed by the unions, the employers' associations and the State) compiling

proposals for the welfare state reforms to be implemented by the government. This time, things are *different*, in the sense that even the demands addressed to institutional actors require a radical shift in the current political balance of power, in order to be implemented. This *radical shift* promise, inherent in the PWUs demands, is not only related to the way these entities are being organized or act in the precarious labor field, it also constitutes part of the collective identity construction procedure for the precarious workers. Let us take a careful look on the way L.B. constructs his reasoning as per the impact the Italian PWUs' shift towards a more radical approach to welfare demands had on his organization's members:

> *"Self-organization is better than institutionalized organization. And mutualism is better than re-distribution. Furthermore, through this process we made people realize that we are also workers. And that's not something self-evident for the University, you know? We proved, firstly, that we are a subject, and then that we are a working subject. And this was not simple at all. The idea that you are a worker is something that we finally realized"* [Interview with L.B., 2013].

Yet, one should not rush into concluding that the PWUs reject as a whole the state and its apparatuses. As we also encountered in Chapter 4, when referring to the Greek organizations and the issue of institutionalization, the Italian ones also present mixed approaches to the issue, carefully looking to maintain a balance. As N.N. notes:

> *"Obviously, being against the state does not mean being against every institution! There are institutions which derive exactly from the struggles of the past, are a response of the state to these struggles. For example, the social housing institutions are a direct outcome of the social mutualism associations of the 19th century workers. Therefore, our anti-state position should not be erroneously perceived as a nihilist position, being against every possible institution"*. [Interview with N.N., 2014]

And, during the same interview, just five minutes later, N.N. does not forget to mention:

> *The idea of creating new forms of mutualism is fascinating, but can prove dangerous in the end. Because, the state might actually exploit these new forms of workers coming together and assisting each other, by drawing itself back from the obligation of providing services to the citizens.* [Interview with N.N., 2014]

This contradictory, multi-faceted image of the state as an enemy, potential ally (at least for some institutions among its ranks) and peril for the PWUs, in the sense of a mechanism of co-optation, is present everywhere among the activists and union members I encountered, during the research in Greece and Italy. M.A., a worker from the occupied factory of VIOME, responded to a question on the political dangers the factory is facing and the necessary steps its workers would have to take in order to protect it, with the following words:

"The only thing that could help us in order for the project not to lose its particular character [its self-organized and anti-hierarchical management of the production, distribution and relations among workers], is having the social movement next to us, constantly, so that no specific political party or the State end up "guiding" the project." [Interview with M.A., 2013]

Things are also different, in the sense that the self-organized and self-managed experiments constitute "*images coming from the future*" [Interview with N.A., 2012], either obliged to eternally remain in the margins of the current societal configuration – or, eventually, prevail, transforming themselves into a revolutionary potential.

The need to collectively escape from the marginality, which is imposed on the precarious worker both individually and collectively – as a member of her own social stratum and her PWU, is expressed in the reasoning the Officine Zero Activist developed with regard to the need that led to the project being prioritized and implemented:

"There was already an expressed need, several actors were tending towards aggregating themselves to a higher level, and on this they found an important convergence. [...] In some sense, they have had a capacity to produce a political discourse, mobilizations, even at the level of the imaginary discourse, but despite the vast numbers which mobilized throughout the years, the results were, with regard to the organization of the labor force, scarce. I do not want to diminish the importance of all these, yes, there were some results here and there, many collectives worked well, there were important struggles, but at the level of organization inside the working spaces, and despite the important political work that had taken place, we cannot be satisfied with the outcome" [Interview with N.N., 2014].

M.A., from VIOME, goes one step further, mentioning also the necessities regarding the future (in order for their factory to survive and act as an example for future experiments). Quite

evidently, both his points call for a revolutionary transformation of the societal and productive relations:

> *"We would need at least a part of the market to be supported by other [than the capitalist] ways of organizing the economy, in a way as to secure first of all the survival of the workers. Then, we would require a flexible production [on behalf of VIOME], which would take into account the changing needs of the people"* [Interview with M.A., 2013].

Finally, these small and, up to now, isolated experiments are obliging the scholar to reconsider what a *union* is in the contemporary political and social life – and what is the role it performs or could possibly perform. There is no easy answer to that question – our interviewees, in their moments of self-reflection, admitted the vacuum of self-evident, universally accepted Truths, inside which their organizations are obliged to operate. G.A. considers that:

> *"…with regard to the future, I think you'll have local unions, also single-company unions and then you will have different kinds of organizations addressing not only a sector, but a similar life condition. I think these different levels of unions are what we'll have in the future"* [Interview with G.A., 2013].

And M.A., responding to the question of whether more occupied factories is an achievable expectation:

> *"Achievable? Not only achievable! It is necessary, it is urgent, and it is the only realist perspective if we want the workers who get mixed up to situations such as this [the VIOME one] to survive"* [Interview with M.A., 2013].

I hope that the melancholic tone of M.A.'s response is evident, even in the transcribed version of his interview. I would dare comment that this unstable condition brings to mind the first steps of unionism, since in the same way as it occurred in the mid-19th century, many paths are open for the unions to follow and many external factors might prove to have a crucial effect in the final outcome. Let us close this section with the words of G.A.:

> *"In Italy, there has been an attempt [for the workers] to be unified around territory, an attempt to be unified around precarity, and an attempt to be unified in a traditional way. These experiments have been unsuccessful so far. I think we have to reconsider what the union means*

and what the job means. Because it is very difficult to unionize by sectors, as the working conditions vary from job-post to job-post. It is also very difficult to unionize by contracts. What should you unionize for, then? What is the similarity that could bring people together? This is also my question" [Interview with G.A., 2013].

Chapter 8: The mobilization of the precarious in the context of an eventful protest

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, what shall be examined is how the general movement environment affects the activity of the PWUs. Rather than simply focusing on confirming the assumption that the PWUs are more permeable than traditional unions with regard to the influence exercised by their movement environment, my efforts shall be concentrated on exploring how this mechanism takes place in real life, through the examination of an exceptional case that took in place in Greece, in 2008. The analytical tool employed here shall be the concept of "eventful temporality", as developed initially by Sewell (1996, 2008) and then elaborated by della Porta (2008), in the concept of the *eventful protest*. The argument raised is that due to the PWUs' relevance in contemporary movement developments, they managed to successfully re-appropriate the potentials created by an eventful protest.

Eventful Sociology is the buzzword used by William H. Sewell Jr., in order to describe his methodological approach. The term was first used in Sewell's influential article *Three temporalities: toward an eventful sociology* (1996). In this paper, the prominent historian recounts several possible ways to perceive temporality: in a *teleological* way, such as in Tilly's work (see, for example, Tilly 1978, 2004, 2005), in an *experimental* way, such as in Skocpol's revolution theory (1979) and, finally, in an *eventful* way, assuming that "*social relations are characterized by path dependency, temporally heterogeneous causalities, and global contingencies*" (Sewell 1996, p.263) *Eventful sociology* consists of the study of either the self-reinforcing sequences of events (e.g. institutions that keep reproducing themselves) or – more importantly – reactive sequences of events, that have a temporal and causal connection to one

another. Thus, events have the power of transforming the way history unfolds, in a contingent and open-ended way. Sewell defines events as a "*relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transform structure*" (Sewell, 1996, quoted in della Porta, 2008: 3).

Della Porta, in her 2008 paper *Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts*, further elaborates on Sewell's insights, in an attempt to bridge the eventful temporality notion with the more traditional social movement theory. She focuses on the protests' "*cognitive, affective and relational impacts*" (ibid.: 3) on movements, and argues that *"some forms of action or specific campaigns tend to have a particularly high degree of 'eventfulness'" (ibid.: 4)*. Della Porta raises two important issues; the first being that a protest campaign's characteristics might oblige the social scientist to position it in his/her analytical scheme as the *independent* variable (contrary to traditional social movement research, where the main question is how a protest is formed, that is the protest event being positioned as the *dependent* variable). The second is the identification of the cognitive, relational, and emotional mechanisms set in motion exactly during these eventful protests. This identification can lead to further insights on how movements appear, develop, and operate.

There is an inherent problem in Sewell's eventful, path-dependent, contingent sociological project, associated with the definition of what an *event* is. It is practically puzzling how to frame the *event* under scrutiny, in terms of starting point, ending point, sub-events constituting the major event, actors involved, and their roles. Apart from the, so to say, fixed or pre-organized movement appointments (such as the anti-globalization or alter-globalization protests in the beginning of the '00s), all the other eventful protests are either spontaneous, or triggered by an unexpected initiative or external occurrence, or, even worse, framed *a posteriori*, reconstructed at a later point, when separate movement instances got grouped together to form a "whole", during the process of the movement's *mnemonic construction*[25]. The December Riots clearly

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25   A very interesting explanation of how the mnemonic construction mechanisms operate is depicted in Armstrong and Crage's 'The making of the Stonewall Myth' (2006) . In this excellent article, the authors argue that the Stonewall riots, a legendary turning point of the Gay Movement, was given the prominence it has today only when the gay activists recognized the necessity of identifying and promoting a symbolic milestone for their movement.

belong to one of the latter categories, as I have already noted above. Yet, they still fit in della Porta's definition of what an eventful protest is, as cognitive, relational and emotional mechanisms were, indeed, set in motion.

What I am proposing in this chapter is to utilize the *event* and the *eventful protest* not as an analytical term, neither as an independent nor a dependent variable, but rather as a prominent *observation point* for social scientific research. In this conceptualization of how eventful protests could be implemented in a research design, the researcher needs not address the EuroMayDay protest, for example, in a direct way, but rather efforts to illustrate how the protests' cognitive, relational and emotional mechanisms influenced the movement as a whole, transforming, thus, the mobilization in an *eventful* one. What the researcher is trying to understand is *which* observation point would prove valid and relevant to the movement procedures she is trying to analyze. If that is the case, then the social scientist does not need an a priori definition of what the eventful protest was. She rather follows the clues and references, either explicit or implicit, provided by the research subjects, in a sort of 'reverse engineering' process, in an attempt to reconstruct the eventful protest as the subjects themselves, the movement activists, the participants and the organizational actors framed it.

In order to make my point, I will move to the extreme edge of this rationale. In the sections that follow I shall demonstrate how the December Riots directly influenced the organizational, movement repertoire and tactical choices made by the Greek PWUs.

Then, in section 8.3, how the specific characteristics of the Italian PWUs ended up transforming an anti-precarity protest into an eventful one will be described. Finally, in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter, I will carefully examine to what extent the "cognitive, relational and emotional" mechanisms of these eventful protests operated in action.

8.2. The December Riots

The evening of 6th December, 2008, was a perfect Saturday evening to venture out on, especially if you were a sociologist living in Athens, conducting research on flexible workers' trade unions. Union activity is usually strictly limited between Monday and Friday, the winter in Greece is mild, plus the 6th of December is St. Nicholas day, therefore there was a high possibility that one of your friends would have organized a name-day celebration. I was, indeed, invited to one of these small parties: a left-wing activist (named Nicholas) had invited his left-wing friend, as well as a sociologist (that's me!) to a traditional Greek restaurant, some 20kms out of Athens. There would be live music by the sea, good quality food, and endless quantities of red wine. A perfect opportunity to combine participant observation with pure pleasure, I thought to myself, and jumped in one of the cars that would take us to the restaurant.

The night went on smoothly, until the point when some of the participants' mobiles started ringing simultaneously. The laconic mass SMS was: '(tonight, we) SMASH, BURN AND DESTROY'. It was no farce; we soon found out what had happened. Two police officers were patrolling around the notorious left-wing Athenian neighborhood of Exarchia. All of a sudden, and for no obvious reason, they parked the police car, got out, entered the neighborhood on foot, found a group of youngsters sitting by a street corner, and engaged in a verbal confrontation with them. Then, one of the officers took out his gun and fired twice. The bullet ricocheted and struck a 15-year-old pupil, Alexis Grigoropoulos, in the heart. The boy died instantly. The mass SMS that was being circulated, was a call to participate in a spontaneous demonstration, formed on the murder spot by passersby and people who were having their night out in Exarchia. And more than that, it was a call to a violent retaliation for the boy's death.

At our party, the music stopped and the joyous atmosphere was replaced by a worrying silence. One after the other, the party guests would take their cars and return to the – already barricaded – Exarchia. They would spend the following days protesting, marching in the streets, occupying government buildings and the downtown universities. Some would even "smash, burn and destroy".

This is how the contentious episode, hereby referred to as the "December Riots", started. How or when it ended, still remains unclear. Interviewing activists in Greece, I came up with all sorts of answers regarding the time frame of the events. Some would claim that the "December Riots" lasted only for the three days when the police had lost control of the demonstrations. Others extended the events' duration to the first two weeks, when the Exarchia neighborhood was totally overrun by angry youths and barricaded. Whilst some others argued that the December Riots lasted for a couple of months, as the December-inspired public space occupations made a direct reference to the protest cycle's continuum. In July 2011, two and a half years after the event, the head of the Greek police made an interesting reference to it during a speech addressed to the Greek Parliament members:

> "There is an increase in violent events in the Greek society, ever since the assassination of Grigoropoulos. There is a tendency amongst young people towards radicalization. [...] The groups adopting violent behavior have renewed their tactics, as well as their arsenal. They have upgraded their operational capabilities, in terms of repertoire and means used. We have also witnessed a diffusion of various tactics among the population, especially after the Keratea incidents[26]". (http://policenet.gr 2011)

It is interesting that even the terminology used by the Police chief points in the direction of acknowledging that the *December Riots* were, indeed, an "eventful protest". In the paragraphs that follow, the impact of these events on the Greek PWUs shall be highlighted.

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[26] The Police Chief is referring to a contentious episode in the village of Keratea, which occurred at the end of 2010. The residents protested for more than 4 months against the construction of a dump near the village. The protest soon turned violent, and the Greek society witnessed a repetition of December Riots, in terms of repertoire and means used – only this time the actors were not the 'usual suspects' (left-wing and anarchist activists), but the peaceful residents of a conservative village. For a brief chronicle of the Keratea events (from a social movement point of view), please visit the website: http://en.contrainfo.espiv.net/2011/03/28/the-social-struggle-in-keratea-lavreotiki/ (website in English)

8.3. Labor issues and the workers' movement participation in the December Riots.

The *December* demonstrators pointed out a series of issues and made a number of claims regarding a variety of problems and pathogeneses of the Greek society. Their discourse lacked any clear and immediate political demands, yet it was by no means non-political. The graffiti which appeared at that time on the walls of Athens, illustrating the movement's slogans and priorities, were full of references to – amongst others – grief for the young person who had died, hatred against the police and the political system as a whole, territorial appropriation claims, anti-consumerism, gender issues, and even more general philosophical and emotional considerations. Yet the claims made regarding labor relations, working conditions, the issues addressed towards the trade union organizations, were quite marginal. The only labor-related action that took place during the December days, was the 4-day occupation of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GSEE) headquarters. The occupation was mostly populated by anarchist and left-wing activists and produced some interesting texts[27], but ended quite ingloriously, due to internal disputes. In a study I conducted a few weeks after the December outburst, I counted 109 December-related political graffiti daubs on the walls of the Athenian neighborhood of Exarchia; not a single one of them referred to labor, either directly or indirectly (Vogiatzoglou 2011).

Likewise, the mainstream trade union organizations did not consider the December Riots an issue that was part of their agenda, nor did they participate in any of the mobilizations[28]. On the contrary, they attempted to disentangle themselves from any potential association with the young protesters. The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GSEE) had proclaimed a general strike for the 10th of December. The proclamation had been made prior to the killing of the young

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[27] A translation of the Squatted GSEE Building's first announcement can be found here:
http://gseefreezone.blogspot.com/2008/12/blog-post_7278.html

[28] The only exception being the Primary School Teachers and High School Professors' Unions, which went on strike for 24-hours and 3 days respectively, protesting against the killing of the pupil. The educators' unions are significant and strong entities in the Greek trade union scene, but their reaction was more or less expected, since the assassinated person was a high-school student.

man[29]. After the killing, the trade union officials even considered canceling the strike, in order to avoid angry youths "infiltrating" the strike demonstration, but decided, finally, to go ahead with the strike, canceling the strike march and organizing just a gathering outside the Parliament. Their 500-people gathering was finally "infiltrated" by some 30,000 angry youths and members of grassroots unions, and downtown Athens was transformed into a war-zone for yet another day.

Contrary to the union elite's choice to abstain from the mobilization, the vast majority of the then-existing PWUs' activists found themselves on the streets, protesting and organizing the various events, occupations, public space reclamations and so on which characterized these feverish months. For this chapters' purposes, I shall divide the PWUs into two categories: (a) those which were formed after the December Riots and (b) the pre-existing ones. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall present two cases from each category. The interviewees from the two "post-December" unions discuss the issue of how the December Riots served both as a meeting point for young, non-unionized workers and as a node, where incentives and resources for further mobilization could be produced and circulated. The pre-existing PWUs' activists argue that the events had an important influence for their unions' networking and movement strategies. The data that one of the latter unions provided, allows us to reconstruct its inter-organizational network of relations and allies, before and after December 2008. In total, the data gathered not only confirm that the December Riots were indeed an eventful protest, but also assist the researcher in understanding how these activists frame their precariousness.

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[29] This general strike is a sort of "conventional" strike proclaimed once per year, to coincide with the discussion of the next year's State Budget in the Greek Parliament.

8.4. PWUs formed after the December Riots: The case of the Translators, Editors and Reviewers' Union. The case of Diakoptes.

The Translators, Editors and Reviewers' Union (SMED) was under formation in March 2009, when I interviewed M.M., a founding member. It was granted official union status from the Greek Courts in December 2009. It is a professional union, the vast majority of its members not being considered as regular employees, but rather as "associates" or subcontractors, which means that Labor Law provisions do not apply and the employer-employee contract terms are decided on an individual basis. It is an active union operating in a deregulated field, where

> "specialized translators are often hired as office clerks, whilst others are working on a permanent 9 to 5 basis, yet being considered [by employers] as subcontractors. There is no collective agreement regarding our professions, and this has the effect that one would expect on our labor status" [interview with M.M., 2009].

M.M. was very straightforward regarding how the idea of forming a union to represent these specific professionals came up:

> *"The people that formed the initial assembly actually met each other during the December rebellion" [ibid.].*

What the activist stresses, is that the December demonstrations served as a meeting point for young employees, worried about the effects of the economic crisis that had just landed in Greece. It was a node, where people could exchange their grievances and experiences. M.M. continues:

> *"We weren't there for worker's rights or anything, still we thought, come on, we need to do something which has... a perspective, we have so many things in common." [ibid.]*

M.M. confirms here our initial argument: the participants in the demonstrations did not directly address labor issues. Yet the lack of any clear political demands obliged the most active amongst them to look for a "perspective", which meant to go beyond the anti-police slogans and retaliation actions, to move forward towards a more permanent engagement in social movement activity. The key notion hereby is the "things [that demonstrators] have in common". M.M.

assumes that the individual-level networking conducted during the protests was mainly a cognitive procedure, an identification and mutual evaluation process of the demonstrators' common working and everyday life characteristics. These shared grievances, problems and experiences, were a movement resource *per se*, not only providing incentives for further mobilization, but also pointing out the ways in which these interests in common could be served.

K.G., an activist and founding member of the *Diakoptes* unionizing initiative, agrees with MM:

> *"...Somehow we managed to find each other in the streets of Athens, during December, or actually by the end of December, a group of libertarians and anarchists, that were all working in the audiovisual industry, the media and so on. And that's how we called for this initiative." [Interview with K.G., 2010]*

Diakoptes is a very interesting case of grassroots unionizing outside of the official channels. The organization consists of workers in the audiovisual sector and technicians of the show business industry. Its only organizational structure is the members' assembly, decision-making is based on direct-democratic procedures, no leadership can be identified, and the majority of its activities follow the traditions of direct action activism and coordination with other political entities, including both similar unions as well as other Social Movement Organizations .

The most important contribution of K.G. is his assessment of the organization's formation, "a group of libertarians and anarchists" who found "each other in the streets of Athens". This statement is obviously partially *false*. The Greek libertarians and anarchists, although more numerous than in other European countries, are not as many as it takes to believe that a group of Athenian colleagues working in a relatively small industry and sharing common political ideas and beliefs, did not know each other prior to the December Riots. K.G. clarifies this issue as follows:

> *"...No... no... it's not like this. We... I... some were my friends already, you know, we were working together, we had participated in demonstrations (laughs). But it's not the same, the idea came up to our minds [during December], we wanted, sort of, the rebellion to continue. We got fucked of course, but, now we have something, something to work on..." [ibid.]*

What K.G. is actually assuming is that they "found each other" during the December Riots, in a way that was by no means comparable to the past. Once again the commonalities' identification pattern arises, as well as the mobilization incentives, provided directly by the process of participating in what is perceived as a rebellion, which the participants want "to continue", in a way that offers them "a perspective", something to "work on".

8.5. Pre-existing Unions: The case of the Wage-earner Technicians' Union (SMT) and the Konstantina Kouneva incident. The case of the Altec Telecoms union and its alliances' network.

The productive branch union Wage-earner Technician's Union (SMT) was founded in 1999 in Athens. It has more than 2,200 members all over Greece, yet its activities are mostly focused on Athens, where the majority of the members reside. It accepts membership applications from Engineers and Technicians working in various workplaces. A characteristic of this union is that it avoids making a distinction between employees working under typical labor terms and those who are considered as "associates" or subcontractors from their employers. After many years of struggle and protests, the union finally managed to sign a collective agreement that would also include the "associate" status workers. It was a major step towards the official recognition that many dependent employment workers are actually being deprived of the rights provided by Labor Law, and a major blow to the construction and engineering companies, which immediately began a legal procedure to have the agreement withdrawn. Finally, the union won, and this victory further boosted its prominence amongst trade union officials and activists.

The SMT was perhaps the larger and stronger PWU that participated in the formation of the Primary Unions' Coordination (PUC). As mentioned in Chapter 4, the *PUC* was the grassroots unions' response to an assassination attempt against Konstantina Kouneva (currently a member of the EuroParliament). Kouneva is an ideal-typical case of precarious activist: she is a well-educated immigrant, and was working as a cleaning lady in a corporation that was "renting" groups of Cleanerscleaners to public services, such as hospitals, the train and metro companies,

universities, and so on. This kind of subcontractor companies are the "black hole" of Greek labor relations: labor disputes are "resolved" in mafia-style ways and the employees, usually immigrant workers, are often subject to extreme exploitation (Kambouri & Zavos 2010). Kouneva was a founding member and a board member of *PEKOP*, the Attica Union of Cleaners and House Personnel. On December 26th, 2008, three men stopped her outside her house and threw acid at her. Horribly disfigured, and facing an imminent danger of death, she was transferred to a hospital where she remained for more than 6 months. The attack was clearly associated with Kouneva's political and syndicalist activity and it occurred just 20 days after the killing of Grigoropoulos, when the political climate was still very tense.

Surprisingly enough, the high-ranking trade union officials refused to respond to the social movement activists' call for an immediate response to the assault. The reasons for their inactivity are irrelevant to our inquiry, yet the point of interest here is that some trade unions did, finally, respond to the Kouneva incident, only this time the response came from a bottom-up initiative. The SMT issued a call for grassroots unions' coordination, the *PUC* was formed and they organized a protest against "employer terrorism" which proved to be a major success (more than 10,000 people participated in a working day demonstration, despite the lack of any parliamentary party or major union support). The next day, groups of anarchists gathered outside the Kouneva employers' headquarters, chased away the riot police who was guarding it, stormed the building, and completely wrecked it. Then, a few days later, grassroots unions occupied the metro company headquarters (HSAP), where Kouneva was working as a rented employee. I asked V.A., a member of the SMT board and the *PUC* assembly to explain to me how they managed to mobilize so quickly and effectively. Here is his reply:

> "You know, these were weird days...the movement in general was in a sort of "red alert",
> I mean both the political entities, political parties [of the Left], and the people. The mechanism
> is that, when there is some sort of intense mobilization, the people, regardless of their degree
> of politicization, tend to participate in collective procedures. How could I explain it? We... we
> witnessed the December episode as a full-scale rebellion [...], and this raised our consciousness
> regardless of the [mobilization] subject" [Interview with V.A., 2010].

The point made by the activist is that the December Riots somehow produced abundant movement resources for the various SMOs to harvest. During an eventful protest, people find it easier to "participate in collective procedures": it's up to the organizations to exploit the momentum and persuade them to maintain their mobilization level.

Regarding the inter-organizational networking activity, V.A. considers it a "natural" procedure:

> *"I wouldn't call it "networking". I don' t like the term. It's like... it's like some people meeting in a secret room and making decisions. It was not like that. Many of us had established [during the December Riots] an "open channel" of communication. That was because we had to organize ourselves for the protests. Not the unions, because we wouldn't go on the street as a union, but through our political entities, you know, I am not a full-time syndicalist, there are other things in life as well. It came like this, it came naturally." [ibid.]*

This statement depicts yet another level of the eventful protests' *relational* impact. In a similar way to the inter-personal networking of non-unionized precarious workers, the unionized ones utilized the communication channels that the organizational needs of the December protests had established, and relocated them to their own inter-organizational network. This innovative "hijacking" could also be perceived in a different way, the communication channels available to activists being a movement *resource* produced and circulated during the December Riots.

The PWUs' networking activities under the influence of the December protests are clearly portrayed in the case of the Altec Telecoms corporate union (AT). The AT union was formed in May 2008 and its activities lasted for 8 months approximately, until January 2009, when the company went bankrupt and the union was dissolved. Signs of the forthcoming Altec Telecoms bankruptcy were revealed to the employees during the summer of 2008. During the following months, an intense labor struggle was carried out by the union and its members in order to ascertain the full compensation of the employees that were to be fired, and the recruitment of all workers that wanted to keep their jobs in other companies of the same corporate group. The labor dispute peaked in December 2008, when the union managed to simultaneously occupy all

the corporate group's office buildings. The employer was then obliged to accept negotiations, which ended up in an agreement that satisfied all the employee's demands (Vogiatzoglou 2010). The AT union was mostly populated (at a percentage exceeding 80% of the total population) by call center workers. Some were highly-skilled technicians whilst others were low-skill salesmen/women. All of these workers were paid on a basic salary basis, and had a working schedule of 24/7 rolling shifts. A minority of them (about 20%) had fixed-term contracts.

The peak of the confrontation between the union and the employer coincided with the outbreak of the December Riots. The union leaders lacked any political or syndicalist experience, yet they managed to wage a victorious struggle. G.S., the vice-president at that time of AT, explains why:

> "We were not experienced trade unionists, we made many mistakes, there was no know-how, no previous experience... but this in the end proved to be an advantage. When we decided to squat, they [the Administration] didn't know what to do, how to react. It was ten days after December, if I remember well, they couldn't even call the cops.
>
> [...] Remember what happened the day of the squat? A cop came from the Police Department [The local Police Department was right next to the occupied building], we sent two union members, properly dressed... with suits and briefcases and everything, they explained... "we are doing an occupation". And he says, "ok, do what you want but make it orderly, don't make a fuss"... the cops were scared, our bosses were scared, everyone was shitting their pants (laughs). We had a hundred people outside the building at 5 o' clock in the morning, what could they do?" [Interview with G.S., 2010]

G.S. explains here that the reaction from the part of the employers (and the police) was more tolerant than one might expect under different circumstances. Moreover, it was easier for the radical activists to persuade the union members to add to the unions' repertoire the squatting option. N.A., an AT union member, describes how the decision was taken in the union's assembly:

> "We were saying that we should go on with the strike. And then I said...I supported... anyway, I proposed we should close down all the buildings. I mean, I felt like I could say something, express my opinion, and that was what happened. Everyone started shouting, let's do it now, everyone around was doing it, so why couldn't we? We had support from the SMT...

support from unions, M. said he would bring the anarchists (laughs)... it was a democratic procedure. We succeeded on that [creating democratic procedures]." [Interview with N. A., 2010].

Perhaps the description given by NA is a little exaggerated, but it is true that the AT union managed to mobilize a strong network of supporters and allies during the crucial days of their struggle, during and shortly after the December Riots. Based on the empirical data gathered during the labor dispute of AT unions, I recreated its network of allied organizations, firstly at the beginning of the struggle (September 2008) (Figure 8.1) and consequently at its end, in January 2009 (Figure 8.2).

8.6. The Altec Telecoms' Union network of allies and collaborators.

My starting point is that it would be reasonable to assume that each organization has by default a "natural" allies' network: this is the overlapping memberships' network of the union founders or leaders. Should a union leader participate in other political organizations as well, there is a high chance that the political organization would offer support to the union, in the case where a labor dispute occurs. This can be justified by three reasons: a) overlapping membership provides actors with an always-open communication channel, as well as a set of personal relations based on mutual trust; b) it makes sense that the political or trade union organization whose member is also a union leader, would expect to achieve a certain degree of political gains by assisting its member during a labor struggle; c) it is also reasonable that the union leaders, when dealing with a threat and in need of support, would firstly approach organizations they have direct contacts with.
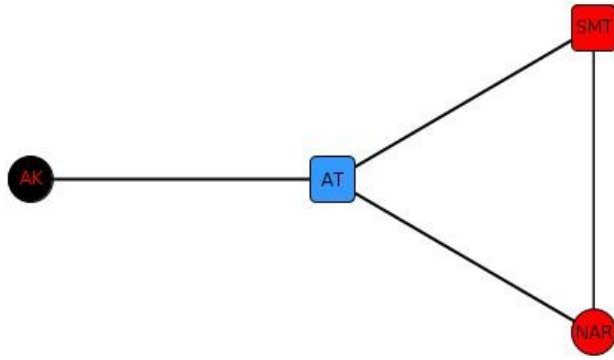
Figure 8.1: The "natural" allies' network of the Altec Telecoms Union. The nodes are political organizations and trade unions, whilst the ties represent overlapping memberships of union board members.

In our case, the AT union, the union founders and leaders were not very well networked with other political or syndicalist entities. Amongst the 7 board members, only two were participating in other organizations as well. One of them participated in an anarchist group (AK) (for a full list of abbreviations and organizations' descriptions, please see the *Appendix: Abbreviations*), whilst the other was a member of both the left-wing branch union SMT and a left-wing non-parliamentary party (NAR). The unions "natural" allies' network is portrayed in *Figure 8.1.*

The *Figure 8.1* network is obviously an ego-centric one. Trade union entities are represented by square boxes, political organizations by circles. AT union's (ego) color is blue, left-wing organizations' is red, whilst the anarchist organizations are represented in black.

After sketching this preliminary network, I created a second one, where the actual affiliations (joint organization of two or more events that took place between December 2008 and January 2009) were represented. This produced a much denser network (*Figure 8.2*), which
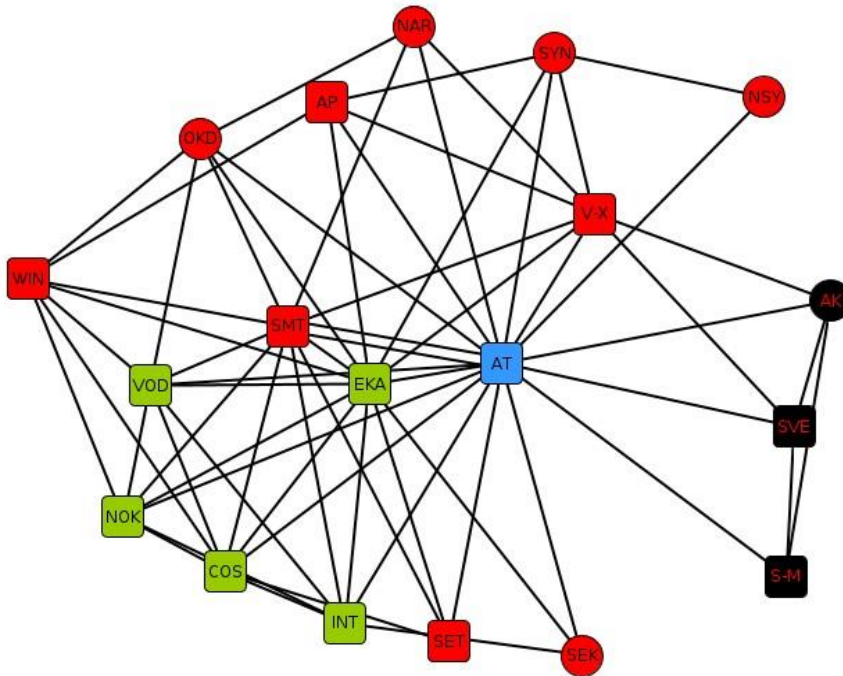

Figure 8.2: The allies' network of the Altec Telecoms Union.

facilitated the extraction of interesting findings. The huge difference in density between *Figure 8.1* and *8.2* reveals that the union's networking activity was clearly an organizational attribute, not based on initiatives individually taken by members or leaders. In this network, the green color has been added to represent trade union organizations of pluralist leadership, i.e. without a particular tendency towards a specific political standpoint. This is attributed to mixed boards, no specific party having absolute control over the union's decisions. The pluralist unions are quite often obliged to conduct internal negotiations prior to positioning themselves over an issue, in order for internal alliances to be formed and the union to be able to publicly present itself in a coherent and coordinated way.

Half of the unions present in the network (6 out of 12) are precarious workers' unions (PWUs), the rest being "traditional" ones. Also, half of the unions are operating in the Telecommunications sector. One third of the unions (4 out of 12) were also participating in the *PUC*. With regard to the political organizations and parties, 2 are parliamentary; the other 4 are

non-parliamentary and belong to the extreme left of the political spectrum. The main findings of the network's visual analysis are as follows:

1. The AT union engaged in extensive and intensive networking activity during and after the December Riots. This can be partially attributed to the emergency situation the union was facing, yet the latter does not sufficiently explain why the other organizations were eager to contribute to its struggle, especially during an intensive mobilization period.

2. Apart from the AT union, two other entities are connected to many other actors, thus being close to the network center: the left-wing branch union SMT, and the Athens' Labor Center (EKA). This is not much of a surprise for the latter, due to its size and its central position in the Greek Trade Unions' official structure, but regarding the former, it reveals the important role of the SMT on the Athens' union scene.

3. All but one of the Telecommunications Unions (WIN, NOK, VOD, COS, INT and AT) are forming a very cohesive network cluster. AT union had taken the initiative of calling the other unions of the telecommunications' branch in forming a Telecommunications Unions' Coordinating Committee (a small-scale version of the 'Coordination' mentioned above). This Committee proved to be very productive, and continued its operation even after the AT union stopped existing.

4. AT union acted as an intermediary between the (relatively isolated) anarchist organizations and the rest. This could partly be attributed to the overlapping membership of one AT union board member. It is interesting to note that the only other tie between the anarchists and the rest is directed towards the V-X union, which has a strong anarchist representation in its assembly. The overlapping memberships' factor also seems to be relevant in that case.

5. The high proportion of PWUs over the total union population can partially be attributed to the specific productive sectors' labor relations. But it is also related to the procedures V.A. explained above: "The movement in general was in a sort of 'red alert', I mean both

the political entities, political parties [of the Left], and the people. [...] we witnessed the December episode as a full-scale rebellion [...], and this raised our consciousness regardless of the [mobilization] subject."

8.7. Concluding remarks

All the interviewees (as well as the Police Chief) agreed that the *December Riots* were an eventful protest. In their perception, the feverish days of December 2008 did act as a set of occurrences that "significantly changed structure". To some, the events produced initiatives and incentives in terms of getting to know their politically active colleagues, sharing their common problems, grievances, and every-day life challenges. They discovered they needed the rebellion to "go on", to have a "perspective", and the way to accomplish this was through the point where their commonalities met: a union, dealing with the workplace problems. To others, the *December Riots* produced movement resources their organizations were able to harvest in order to intensify their activities. The price that had to be paid was that the organizations themselves were obliged to adapt to the new environment: they added new tactics to their movement repertoire, brought forward more direct-democratic decision-making schemes in order to respond to their members' pressure for participation, engaged in intensive and extensive networking activity to more efficiently push their claims. It seems that della Porta's "cognitive, relational and emotional" mechanisms (2008) were indeed set in motion.

Furthermore, the December Riots provided us with a sturdy empirical presentation on how the framing process of a precarious worker's identity is completed. Undoubtedly, the employment terms' part of the equation is significant. Yet, the claim made by the precarious activists who participated in the research, was that the workplace procedures were not enough. The precariousness phenomenon is too complex to be depicted solely in employment contract terms. What the precarious worker would normally perceive as an *individual's* lifestyle, employment type, feeling of insecurity or instability, proved, in the case of the Athenian riots during December '08, to be a *collective* experience, worth being analyzed, narrated, shared, and most importantly, worth "doing something about". In the previous chapters, I argued that the

PWUs tend to associate themselves more extensively with other (non-labor related) SMOs than the traditional unions. I had attributed this fact to the relatively weak position of the flexible workers' unions, due to the extra challenges their members are facing: the unions would seek alliances and external support to compensate for this weakness. It seems there are more pieces of the puzzle to be put in place. What the *December Riots* showed us is that the *individual* precarious worker also tends to closely associate with the Movement as a whole, forming extensive inter-personal networks, in an attempt to transform his personal experience into a collective one; in an attempt to create a precarious worker identity.

These procedures, of course, are not limited to extreme times, such as that of the eventful protests. Yet the eventful protest, with its huge "cognitive, affective and relational" impact on social movement structure and activity, is a privileged observation point for the social scientific researcher; useful both for productive thinking and theory testing. It is the ground zero of the movements, where all processes are accelerated. Rephrasing Sewell, the eventful protests might prove to be a relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transform *theory*.

Chapter 9: The PWUs' efforts to build transnational networks.

9.1. Introduction

Italy and Greece share a long tradition of cross-national movement networking. Ever since the military coup and dictatorship of 1967, Italy became a favorite destination for exiled or self-exiled Greek activists, who constructed personal and inter-organizational links with their Italian counterparts. The Italian autonomy was a major source of practical inspiration and theoretical refinement for the newly born anarchist political space of Greece during the '70s and the '80s. More recently, apart from the alleged collaboration of "armed struggle" groups on both sides of the Ionian Sea (Kathimerini 2012), the Italian left has shown a great interest in the developments in Greece – Italian activists frequently visit Athens and other cities re-enforcing their contacts, whilst Greeks belonging to all parts of the left-wing spectrum are invited to deliver updates on their situation and perspectives. Yet, only lately has this political networking field expanded to include labor issues or labor-related organizations. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the development of PWUs' transnational labor networks between the two countries and explain why some of the attempts managed to produce concrete results, whilst others were not met with success.

The chapter' starting point is the identification of three types of inter-movement networks: (a) coordination, where organizations choose a given point in time and/or space to jointly perform their collective action; (b) resource transfer, i.e. the transfer of material and immaterial resources from one entity to another; (c) collaboration, where the organizations actively engage in a mutual exchange of resources, know-how, and experience.

Subsequently, specific instances of labor networking are examined. First, the large Italian and Greek union confederations' attempt to coordinate their actions, on the occasion of the

European Days of Action, is revisited. Then, the focus turns to the case of precarious workers'
mobilization. In 2005-2006, several Greek activist groups worked together with Italian anti-
precarity organizations in order to introduce the EuroMayDay protest to the Greek political scene,
as well as to refine and reinforce the debate on what precarity is. Finally, I examine the recent
efforts bringing together the occupied factories' experience, in order to build strong collaboration
networks and construct a common discourse on alternative economic practices. Whilst the two
former attempts did not manage to produce solid outcomes, the latter has already fertilized the
grounds of collaboration and stabilized cross-national channels of communication.

The chapter concludes by assessing collaborative networks as the strongest and most
productive among the three. It is argued that cross-national structural similarities should not be
considered as a sufficient condition for labor collaboration; the discursive context of each country
needs to be taken into account. Finally, transnational action attempts stand a higher chance of
producing concrete outcomes, when their immediate goals are tangible and rooted in real-life
experiences, rather than more generic declarations.

9.2. A typology of cross-national, inter-movement networking

In the early 2000s, when the perspective of a brand new, *globalized* trans-national
movement seemed closer than ever, scholars engaged in an extensive analysis of the modes
through which national and local Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) interrelate with one
another in order to construct cross-national networks of collective action (Della Porta 2008; Diani
& McAdam 2003). Some of these endeavors went as far as to argue that new, cross-national
collective activist identities were being formed as an outcome of the, above mentioned, process
(della Porta 2005). Almost simultaneously, social scientific literature focusing on labor highlighted
similar efforts taking place in the workers' movement field (see, for example, Ghigliani, 2005;
Lambert & Webster, 2001; Waterman & Wills, 2001). Cross-national labor networking had never
disappeared from the union activists' agendas, of course; as Pizzolato eloquently put it, the
exchange of theories, ideas, practices and organizational formats is *transversal*, crossing the

whole history of the labor movement, sometimes taking unexpected forms and/or appearing in settings where this seemed highly unlikely (Pizzolato 2011).

Some conceptual clarifications are required prior to examining the typology, to be presented below, which derives from this large literature body. On the one hand, our focus is not on a classification of social movement's trans-nationalization processes, (as developed, for example, in della Porta & Tarrow 2005: 3-5), but rather on the processes' outcome, i.e. the types of relations established among the actors and the respective practices exercised by them. On the other hand, whilst the typology corresponds to transnational networks, as the empirical focus of the article is only on two specific country-cases (and the links developed among them), when referring to the specific networks developed between the two, the term cross-national is preferred over the former. The international concept (as well as its derivatives) has purposely been avoided, as it is usually associated with more explicit, ambitious and long-term political projects (Featherstone 2012: 2–12), traces of which are not to be found in any of the instances examined.

Moving back to the network types: the first one – and the simplest to perform – is the *coordination* of activities. Coordination may occur in three different ways: First, two (or more) SMOs may choose a given point in time to simultaneously perform their – locally based – protest. Perhaps the most spectacular recent example of such practice is the Feb. 15th, 2003 global day against the war in Iraq; when countless millions of people demonstrated against the forthcoming invasion, in more than 600 cities worldwide (see, for example, Diani, 2009). A second form of coordination, more rarely encountered, is spatial: Organizations jointly decide the location of their protest (a place which should provide a symbolic or practical added value), dispersing their actions in time in order to increase the visibility and magnitude of the protest, or simply harass the opponent. An example of the above can be found in the Syntagma square occupation in Athens (May-September 2011), where the daily protest, scheduled at 18:00, was followed by the popular assembly and cultural events, organized by the more "politicized" entities present at the square. Commonly enough, these cultural and artistic events would culminate in a second round of protest, which could last until late at night (Sergi & Vogiatzoglou 2013). Finally, the most advanced type of protest is the one that combines both elements: organizations set an

appointment at a given point of space and time, emerging at the protest simultaneously and en masse. The so-called alter-globalization movement was built in accordance with this basic principle of coordination.

The second type of networking is the *resource transfer networking,* i.e. the direct or indirect transfer of resources from one organizational entity to another, in order to serve the recipient's political goals. When referring to resources, one should not only consider the material ones. Visibility, information dissemination, know-how exchanges, a "helping hand" in practicalities, assistance in building a critical mass, even a mere public statement of a shared stance on an issue, may become movement resources, if treated wisely by the recipient.

Two types of resource transfer networking may be identified. The first one is the inter-organizational solidarity. Solidarity is a widely debated notion and is interpreted in multiple ways, in accordance with the scientific field and specific viewpoint of each contribution. The relevant literature on labor studies is vast; solidarity has been examined both as an inter-personal and inter-organizational procedure, in a historical perspective (Dixon et al. 2004; Ansell 2001) and as a victim of globalization and the restructuring of the production procedures (Hyman, 2005: 29). Recent contributions have centered on the potentials of re-defining solidarity in relation with the new means, subjects and social strata deriving from the post-Fordist workplace configurations (Fine 2005; Ross 2008; Fantasia & Voss 2004; Turner 2007). The second type of resource transfer networking is related to what Oikonomakis and Roos have termed as cross-national movement "resonance". Being an *instance* of the "non-linear, vibrating patterns of [movement practices'] dispersion resembling sound waves" (Oikonomakis & Roos, 2013: 5), the transfer of resources requires the previous establishment of direct links between the recipient and the sender, as well as the sharing of a common political goal, the promotion of which the resource transfer is supposed to serve. A point that needs to be made is that any given resource transfer action, especially in a cross-national context, is obligatorily single-directional – no expectation of immediate/direct compensation for the sender is raised.

The third networking category is *collaboration*. Collaborative efforts differ from the above definition of solidarity expression, in the sense that they necessarily involve a *mutual* exchange

of resources, know-how, and experiences. Personal contacts and strong bonds between the activists are required for the collaboration to be fruitful. Commonly, coordinative efforts are also made, in the sense that jointly organized events are the most efficient manner for strengthening inter-personal relations and exchanging ideas and know-how. Yet, as is obvious, collaboration requires the simultaneous existence of both a shared purpose and sufficient resources from all sides, in order to take place (Table 1).

Table 9.1: Characteristics of the three types of networking

	Common Political Objective	Direction of relation	Strength of relation	Resources required
Coordination	Not necessary	One- or Two-way	Weak	Few
Resource transfer	Necessary	One-way	Weak or Strong	None (recipient) / Significant (sender)
Active Collaboration	Necessary	Two-way	Strong	Significant

In what follows, we shall examine three instances where cross-national coordination, expression of solidarity and collaboration developed, respectively, between entities of the Greek and the Italian labor movement. The first instance took place in the November 2012, when the union elites of the GSEE General Trade Union Confederation, in Greece and the CGIL center-left confederation, in Italy, announced their participation in the European Day of Action called by the European Trade Union Confederation. The second draws us back to 2006, when the calls by Italian precarious workers for a Europeanization of the Mayday Parade they had been organizing since 2001 were heard by radical grassroots trade unions and anti-precarity activists in Greece. The third is the most recent one: Since 2013, the occupied factories of *VIOME* in Thessaloniki, Ri-MaFlow in Milan and ex-RSI in Thessaloniki, have developed a very strong collaborative network which includes supporters, social centers and activists in various cities of Italy and Greece.

9.3. Union elites' coordination: The European Day of Action experience

Prior to examining the first instance itself, it is useful to provide some background information on the anti-austerity campaigns that took place in Greece and Italy, as well as the trade unions' participation in them. As will become evident in what follows, the weak response of the Greek and Italian Trade Union Confederations to the austerity challenge proved an insurmountable obstacle for the cross-national coordination to produce any concrete outcomes.

The countries put under scrutiny in this chapter share several common points: the economic crisis had a heavy impact on both; austerity and the consequent recession was the solution proposed to remedy their problematic public and financial sectors; and the two countries were soon confronted with political turmoil. In Italy, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi resigned in November 2011, delivering the office to a short-lived technocrat government, led by Mario Monti. In the 2013 general election, the two main parties of Italy's previously bipolar system were significantly weakened, whilst Beppe Grillo's populist and anti-EUI "Five Star Movement" attracted an impressive 25.55% of the votes. The coalition government formed by the social-democrats and the center-right staggered for several months, due to intra- and inter-party disputes. In February 2014, yet another prime minister resigned, handing over his position to 40-year-old social-democrat leader, Matteo Renzi. In Greece, the social-democrat government led by PASOK, elected in 2009 thanks to the support of more than 45% of the electorate, collapsed under international pressure in June 2011. The technocrat Prime Minister Loukas Papademos was soon forced to call for national elections, due to widespread social unrest. Two rounds of elections (in May and June) were needed for a new government to be formulated, as the PASOK was practically pushed to the margins of the political map, suffering losses up to 32% of the electoral body, whilst the radical left party SYRIZA exploded to 27% from 5%, where it was in 2009.

As is clear from the above, trade unions in the two countries could find both incentives and political opportunities to upgrade their presence in the socio-political setting of the two neighboring countries. Yet, they did not manage to do so. When the austerity tempest reached

South Europe, its labor organizations' presence was weaker than ever with regard to blocking austerity measures and negative changes in the labor legislation, as well as protecting their members' rights and living standards (Heyes 2013; Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou 2014b).

The biggest trade union in Italy, CGIL, not only failed to block the reform of the infamous article 18 of the Italian Worker's statute[30], it also failed to mobilize its members in protest against the proposed reform. In 2002, a similar proposal by then-Prime Minister Berlusconi was put on hold, after an unprecedented protest of 3,000,000 people in Rome (Nicola 2002). Ten years later, the mobilization was almost invisible, due to the CGIL leadership's ambivalence towards retaining its alliance with the co-governing Democratic Party (PD) and maintaining its pro-article 18 position. In Greece, the trade unions participated in all the anti-austerity mobilizations that evolved in the country during the crisis' years. The main tactic employed by the nation-wide unions was the nation-wide *24-hour General Strike*. More than fifty 24-hour general strikes were called in the period 2009-2013. During the strike days, tens of thousands of protesters would march in the streets of Athens and the other major Greek cities, clashes with the police and other violent action being a frequent phenomenon. The concrete achievements of these impressive mobilizations were minimal. Every single legislative package which included austerity provisions was voted by the Parliament and, as if the above were not enough, several opinion polls showed that the union elites were mistrusted by the rank-and-file, accused of being government- and employer-friendly; their response was considered as inadequate to the critical situation the country was facing (Laoutaris 2011). In sum, the Greek unions shall exit the crisis even more socially discredited and isolated than in the pre-2008 period.

It was during this turbulent period, in November 2012, when the ETUC decided to organize the so-called European Day of Action, which included, among other activities, "strikes in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. For the first time in its history, an ETUC day of action [would] include simultaneous strikes in four countries" (ETUC 2012). Aspirations for a massive mobilization that

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[30] Art. 18 of the Workers' Statute (*Statuto dei Lavoratori*) obliges the employer to provide lawful reasoning in order to dismiss an employee (A.Lex 2012). Whilst the original proposal of the Monti government was to completely abolish this provision, after months of negotiations among the coalition parties, the article was only *partially* reformed – yet another indication of the political deadlock Italy was experiencing.

would boost coordinative efforts in various countries soon proved fraudulent, at least with regard to the two countries under examination.

In Greece, the participation in the international strike was announced several months before the given date. On the 14th of November, the country was to be paralyzed, due to a simultaneous 24-hour General Strike of both employees of the private sector and public officials. Yet, the timing and the general context forced the Trade Unions' leadership to alter their plans radically and the European day of Action passed completely unnoticed. As mentioned before, the summer of 2012 found Greece with a newly sworn in, troika-friendly minister's cabinet. The coalition government enjoyed a large parliamentary support (174 out of 300 parliament members). In early November 2012, a renewed bail-out agreement between the country and its creditors was brought to the Parliament. It included the usual round of austerity measures. As always, the pressure on trade union elites to mobilize was irresistible. Indeed, a 48-hour general strike was immediately called, for the 6th and 7th of November. All professional branches entered in a strike frenzy, which included a total blockade of public transport, the country's courts and medical services being shut down, a strike of merchants and artisans, and so on.

The expectations were high, as the strike was perceived as the first real confrontation between the new government and the societal forces opposing austerity. Unfortunately for the latter, the outcome was not impressive. Participation in the strike and the number of protesters on the streets of Athens was lower than usual. No major clashes or riots occurred, and the austerity package was voted, as predicted, without major losses for the governing majority. The reason for the above is twofold: on the one hand, there was a certain level of disappointment among the population – and disillusionment, with regard to the probability of reversing the power balance through social movement means – due to the recent electoral result. On the other hand, the majority of the (already significantly weakened, after almost three years of continuous mobilization) available movement resources had been appointed to purposes other than the direct confrontation with austerity politics. Namely, the radical political space of Greece had developed a mono-thematic antifascist agenda, in order to confront the rise of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn and the hit-and-run attacks by self-proclaimed extreme-right "assault squads" against migrants, leftists and homosexuals. Then, the more moderate parts of the Left were

pushing forward the creation of social solidarity structures, in an attempt to counter the severe humanitarian crisis Greece was facing. Antifascist patrols, soup-kitchens, social hospitals, pharmacies, self-organized grocery stores and electricians' crews which reconnected the electricity to those who could not afford to pay their bills had taken the place of the mass protests which characterized the Greek political scene of 2010-2012.

Given the unexpected failure of the 48-hour general strike and the (correct) prediction that the European Day of Action, scheduled for just a week later, would be met by potential participants with indifference, if not with scorn, the GSEE leaders were obliged to undermine their own initiative. They made no publicity campaign and, a couple of days before the 14th of November, diminished their 24-hour strike into a mere 3-hour work pause and a demonstration in the center of Athens, where less than 500 people participated. Despite the obvious reasons for the above decisions, the GSEE leadership was harshly criticized by the political opposition for their stance, as their opponents accused them of bringing forward "recipes for mobilization without the masses, which only serve as symbolic moves made by a corrupted bureaucracy" (DEN PLIRONO 2012).

On the contrary, in Italy the protest was rather successful. The strike did not enjoy a large participation, yet some 300,000 people, according to the organizers, took part in the national demonstration of Rome. The Italian Confederation, CGIL, which organized the strike, had perceived the European Day of Action as a good opportunity to take to the streets, without portraying themselves as a major opposition force to the technical government, an act that would outrage their political allies in the co-governing Democratic Party. The European context of this specific protest, thus, was the perfect window of opportunity.

The problem for the CGIL, though, was that *they were not the ones* to constitute the bulk of protesters on that specific date. In Italy, November is the traditional month of student mobilizations. This specific November, high-school students were already mobilizing against a reform proposal for the high-schools governing bodies. On the 14th of November, therefore, rather than trade union members, it was students, social center activists and other elements of the Italian political scene that flocked to the streets of the capital; bringing along, as one would

expect, their own particular movement repertoire. During the violent clashes, which occurred in various parts of Rome, 16 police and some 60 protesters were injured. Property was destroyed and dozens were arrested. The embarrassed CGIL quickly issued a statement condemning "with extreme firmness and maximum intransigence the violent incidents" (Pignatelli 2012) – and has seldom made any reference to the EDA ever since. Today, many describe the event as a "student demonstration"[31], not even mentioning the European character of the protest.

In sum, the coordinative efforts of both Greek and Italian trade unions did not manage to promote the international character of the day, neither to build an argument, in each country's public discourse, with regard to the need for cross-national labor coordination. This may be attributed to two reasons: (a) Large-scale labor action is extremely context-related; failure to properly embed the mobilization's claim agenda, modality and purpose in the broader social movement setting is an unforgivable mistake; (b) none of the attempts managed to properly communicate to their audience – the prospective participants – the benefits of upgrading labor activity in the trans-national level. Whilst in Greece, the GSEE was confronted with a *lose-lose* situation, practically because the Greek society was coping, at that time, with yet another emergency situation, where all other issues were of secondary importance, the Italian CGIL merely utilized the European character of the protest in order to conceal its true objectives, ultimately paying a heavy price.

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[31] See, for example, the following newsreels which account the event as "student demonstration" and "clashes between students and the police", respectively: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8DPT42I6Wc; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeZ9ntWEP2o.

9.4. Precarious workers beyond borders: An attempt to import the anti-precarity struggle in Greece.

The second instance put under scrutiny, is the organized effort of several organizations and activists operating in Greece to introduce an "*a la Italiana*" struggle against precarity.

The apparition of the precarious working population occurred in a similar manner and time frame in both countries. The introduction of flexible labor contracts in the '90s, the traditionally weak welfare state, and the expansion of atypical employment in several productive sectors (including universities, school teachers, immaterial laborers such as designers, architects, etc., the catering and cleaning services sector, telecommunications and call-centers) coincided with a weak presence of the traditional trade unions in most of the workplaces concerned. This explosive mix left, on both sides of the Ionian Sea, a number of employees uncovered in terms of labor rights, access to social security and trade union assistance.

When the first precarious workers' organizational efforts emerged in the early 2000s, this occurred simultaneously in Greece and Italy. Yet, the obvious structural similarities did not result in an, equally similar, organizing pattern in the two countries. In Italy, during this early stage of precarious workers' mobilizations, many protests put an emphasis on the need to construct and reinforce a common sense of *belonging* amongst precarious workers. The importance of constructing common meanings on precarity while respecting the differences amongst the various workers' categories was reflected in the very format of the Mayday Parade against precarity, which took place on May 1st, each year, in Milan; from 2001 – when it was still a national protest event – to 2004, when it was transformed into a transnational day of protest for European precarious workers (Choi & Mattoni 2010). Even the few struggles aiming at improving the working conditions in a specific workplace, e.g. the fight of the *Precari Atesia* collective in the call center *Atesia* that reached its peak in 2005, had strong symbolic elements oriented towards the constitution of a cohesive and aware political subject. In this sense, the emphasis on the symbolic dimension deeply intertwined with the forms of protests that precarious workers deployed in Italy, most of which originated outside the realm of confederate trade unions (Mattoni 2009). In

sum, the anti-precarity campaign was led by political organizations, mostly operating outside the workplace, putting the emphasis on symbolic action and collective identity construction.

As mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, in Greece, the opposite path was followed. The mobilization was spearheaded by grassroots unions operating *directly* in the workplace. This was partly due to the specific characteristics of the Greek trade union system, which has only one and a pluralist, in political terms, private sector workers' confederation – offering a relatively high degree of autonomy to grassroots union formations (such as the productive sector and single-corporation ones) (Kouzis 2007). Contrary to the situation of Italian precarious workers, no visibility campaigns were attempted by their Greek counterparts. The symbolic content that the Greek precarious workers built upon in order to organize their struggle was linked to the specific characteristics of the grassroots trade unions. The discourse developed was linked to traditional labor claim-making procedures (Alice Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou, 2014). As the Greek precarious workers' unions were operating in a working environment consisting both of precarious and non-precarious employees and addressed an equally mixed audience, the obvious choice was to embed the flexible labor-oriented claims and demands into the more general setting of working class struggles.

Both organizational formats soon proved to be delimiting the mobilization potentials. By the mid-2000s, it had become obvious to many Greek anti-precarity activists that the new employment conditions called for a more refined theoretical approach to what precarity is and how it can be tackled. Furthermore, the innovative repertoire employed by their Italian counterparts, the massive "colorful" demonstrations, the co-research attempts by intellectuals close to the movement and the symbolic protests aiming at distorting the positive discourse surrounding flexibility, were deemed as much more suitable to the occasion than the "old school" traditional trade union repertoire of industrial action. The Italians, on the other hand, were eager to export their experience to other European countries, as the mobilization in their home country had reached a peak that was difficult to sustain in the long term.

In this context, the first coordinated efforts of transferring know-how from Italy to Greece took place. The main texts defining precarity were translated into Greek and published in

movement journals and publishing houses (Mimis 2005; Blackout 2006; Mabruki 2007; Kolinko 2003); the Greek activists became familiar with the work of Italian intellectuals such as Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Sergio Bologna, who had written extensively on the subject; Greek activists would visit the big Italian social centers and participate in the main anti-precarity protests. Then, in 2006, the first "Italian-style" activity took place, in Thessaloniki. A group of anarchists close to a big squat of the city organized a fake publicity campaign on behalf of an imaginary human resource management company, called "Adeho"[32]. The campaign would reach its peak at a public event where the supposed Adeho representatives would explain to potential customers and employees the virtue of working without remuneration. This event, a sort of adjusted version of the 2005 Serpica Naro action in Milan, Italy (see A. Mattoni, 2008), sparked a lively and, occasionally bitter, debate among the Greek activists. The organizers were accused by some of "elitism", of "speaking an incomprehensible language" and "ignoring the workers" (a summary of the various arguments expressed can be found in Athens.indymedia, 2006). All in all, this experiment was considered to be a failure and was never repeated. Two years later, a second attempt to import Italian practices was, once again, met with bitter comments. Several precarious workers' unions decided to split from the traditional 1st of May demonstration and carry out their own parade in Athens, following the steps of the Euro-Mayday Parade. The idea was not bad, yet the unions got trapped in the contradictory expectations of their supporters. Many members and militants of these unions come from the anarchist and extreme left political space, which is extremely hostile towards any "colorful" protest, considering it to be more suitable to a carnival than to a political struggle. In order not to alienate this core group of allies, the unions organized a protest that, in its main elements, was absolutely identical to the ones called by the institutional trade unions. In the end, only some 1,000 people showed up for the demonstration – and even during the parade, the participants were criticizing the organizers and predicted that this mistake would never again be repeated. Unsurprisingly, it wasn't.

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[32] A wordplay: "Adeho" means "I can stand it" in Greek, whilst the reference made is to the large multinational Adecco, which had begun operating in Greece a couple of years ago.

Summing up, a number of observations need to be highlighted regarding the failed attempts at establishing a one-way resource route linking the Greek and the Italian precarious workers' experience. The first one is almost self-evident: structural similarities do not guarantee a successful import of know-how and practices from one context to another. In the precarious workers' case, the Greek activists failed to perceive how incomprehensible the refined discourse on precarity that had been developed in Italy would be to the Greek labor force. The second derives from the above. Before any given resource transfer, a careful mapping of the recipient's field needs to be conducted, in order to assure that (a) the recipient does, indeed, need the resources the sender is about to provide, (b) the recipient knows how to handle the resources delivered, and (c) the political projects and practices of all nodes involved in the network are compatible. Finally, the golden rule of repertoire resonance was once more confirmed: inability to properly contextualize the imported practices shall inevitably result in erroneous strategic choices, embarrassing failures and, ultimately, a waste of resources. This final observation is especially relevant in times of harsh socio-economic conditions, such as the ones the two respective labor movements are facing in the post-2008 setting. Mass unemployment and the consecutive fear spread among the most vulnerable of the working population acts as a disincentive towards mobilization, delimiting the (already, scarce) resources the precarious workers' movements may draw upon.

9.5. The occupied factories: Building strong and comprehensive collaboration networks

The third case to be examined has proven, to date, much more productive for the actors involved than those noted above. When, in 2012, the owners of the *VIOME* factory in Thessaloniki, Greece announced the imminent closure of the company and the dismissal of their unpaid employees, no one expected the dramatic events that would follow. Up to then, no example of an occupied *and* self-managed workplace could be found in the country. Both practices had been occasionally employed, but separately and rarely. The Latin American

experience had never been examined with any lens other than the *exotic* one. Yet, when the factory's grassroots union announced that the workers were not willing to abandon their workplace, but intended, instead, to re-launch production as soon as possible under workers' control, various SMOs rushed to express their solidarity and support. The key turning point in the occupied *VIOME*'s activity was the so-called "opening the factory's gates to the society" (*VIOME* Workers' Union, 2013). A series of initiatives were launched in order to add visibility to the project, whilst the social solidarity networks undertook the responsibility of distributing the factory's products, given that the lack of any legal framework could not allow the distribution to take place through the normal market channels.

Soon, the experience of *VIOME* became known beyond the Greek frontiers. The "Solidarity to *VIOME*" assemblies operating in Greece, in collaboration with collectives of Greek migrants all over Europe, translated and diffused audiovisual and textual material concerning the project. In May 2013, the *VIOME* workers were invited to participate in a tour in Italy. Events and debates were to be hosted in various social centers around the country. Upon arrival, the Greeks were surprised to discover that two similar experiments were being prepared in major Italian cities: the *Ri-MaFlow* in Milan and the *ex-RSI* in Rome. The *Ri-MaFlow* were supported by a large number of Milanese social movement organizations, the main hub of which is the social center *CS CANTIERE* in San Siro. The train workers of RSI had only recently occupied their factory (creating the project *Officine Zero*, which we examined in Chapter 7) in collaboration with the neighboring social center *Strike*, which belongs to a large alliance of Roman autonomous collectives, operating under the name *Assemblea Metropolitana* (Metropolitan Assembly). Workers from both Italian factories warmly welcomed their *VIOME* colleagues; a fruitful exchange of experiences, sharing of challenges encountered and solutions proposed took place during the days of the *VIOME* tour.

In September 2013, the *VIOME* visit in Italy was repeated. This time, they were joined by the spokesperson of the *Latin American Occupied Factories Coordination* and a researcher who worked with *FraLib*, an occupied tea factory in Marseilles that was also planning to re-launch production. The network of trans-national collaboration was consolidated, inter-personal contacts were established, and the first elements of a joint project aiming at mutual assistance, which would ensure the various experiments' survival, were brought forward. In January 2014,

delegates from all the above-mentioned factories met in Marseilles and the South European Occupied Factories' Network was officially launched.

The obstacles and difficulties the workers from both sides had to overcome were not few. First and foremost, there was the language barrier – none of the workers spoke anything other than their native language, thus a whole army of translators had to be mobilized in order for the communication to take place. Then, there were the different legislative frameworks of each country, which could not allow for a direct import of practices from one project to the other. Finally, there was a scarcity of resources on all sides, which made them highly dependent on external solidarity networks in order for the encounters to take place.

Yet, these obstacles were soon overcome. The reasons for this are as follows: firstly, the occupied factories' workers discourse was based on a very practical, hands-on manner of dealing with the issues surrounding self-managed production. Contrary to the trade union elites' generic reference to the need for trans-national cooperation, the workers simply enacted it, focusing on practical issues rather than declarations of intentions. Secondly, the resource flow in the case of occupied factories was reciprocal. Contrary to what one would expect, the Greek workers did not merely ask for support from their (more resourceful) Italian counterparts, but embarked on a vivid exchange of know-how and experiences. Thirdly, the "opening the factory gates to the society" argument facilitated the inclusion of other, not necessarily labor-related SMOs in the wide solidarity matrix surrounding the factories. The factory's physical space provided the necessary spatial relevance, which allowed local organizations to participate adding elements of their own agenda to the ongoing activities. Just to mention an example, the *Metropolitan Assembly* of Rome launched, in collaboration with the *ex-RSI* workers and inside their premises, the *Officine Zero* project, which includes student housing facilities, a self-organized restaurant, a co-working space for creative industry employees and artisan laboratories. Through these collateral benefits for the solidarity network, not only is the projects' population constantly renewed as new supporters are invited to join in, but also the societal impact of the collaboration network is enriched and augmented.

9.6. Concluding remarks

The main argument of this chapter is that, indeed, strong transnational solidarity and collaboration networks between the PWUs can be (and are being) formed, even under the harshest of conditions, such as the ones the Southern European labor movement was facing in the post-2008 setting. Yet, one needs to know where to look for them, how to distinguish analytically their characteristics and what sense to make out of the various examples available. Unsurprisingly, among the three cases we examined, the most successful was the one where the formal trade union structures had the least involvement. So, can the examination of the Greek-Italian case provide sufficient data for a general theory on labor solidarity in the 21st century? Definitely not. Yet, it does provide indications about which direction our scholarly lens should turn the focus on, as well as some initial insights on how trans-national labor networks might increase their effectiveness, scope and durability in time.

First of all, it may be argued that collaborative networks, although much more difficult, time-consuming and resource-demanding to construct, may prove more durable in time and more productive than the co-ordination or resource transfer ones. For the occupied factories and their supporters, mistakes of the past had to be avoided and relations had to be built from scratch, in order to overcome the obvious challenges their project entailed. The most crucial characteristic of their network was each hub's commitment to mutual aid and reciprocity, rather than delimiting oneself to a mere resources sender or recipient role. The occupied factories' workers and their supporters prioritized the mutual exchange of know-how, rather than placing the emphasis on material resources flows.

Secondly, as noted above, the cross-national structural similarities should not be considered as a sufficient condition for labor collaboration; the discursive context of each country needs to be taken into account. This does not mean that it would be impossible to create discursive spaces and channels of communication, should initial diversities be noted. A careful and flexible approach is required, however, in order to avoid a simple "import-export" activity; the same goes with regard to the compatibility of political projects. It is rather common for organizations to loosen their political criteria when addressing a spatially distant potential collaborator. This is not

to be considered as a flawed practice in itself, yet some prudence is required, in order to avoid reaching outcomes opposite to the ones desired.

Finally, transnational action efforts stand a higher chance of producing rich (in terms of content) and durable (in time) networks, when their immediate goals are tangible and rooted in real-life experiences, rather than more generic declarations. As the case of the European Days of Action confirmed, a simple statement of the need to construct a transnational space of debate and collaboration among the labor organizations is not sufficient. A complex and multifaceted set of practices is required, aiming at the macro-level whilst being in direct touch with local organizations, their grievances, agendas and claims. The occupied factories' workers and the solidarity groups standing next to them have achieved the latter; what remains is to examine to what extent the former shall be accomplished.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

10.1. An Introduction to the Conclusions

As we are proceeding towards the end of this thesis, the necessity of summarizing the assumptions and insights presented in the previous pages arises. This chapter is structured in a somewhat different way than the previous ones. Given that its focus is on the *synthesis*, rather than the *analysis* of the findings, I decided to use a bullet-point-like structure of the thesis sections and sub-sections, the emphasis being on a concise and straightforward presentation of the arguments. The purpose this chapter is serving is threefold:

a) Presentation of the main findings' summary.

b) "Promises fulfilled": The extent to which the research questions were provided with a response and a road map on where to locate the empirical data that are related to each response.

c) "Hypotheses revisited": The extent to which each respective hypothesis was confirmed (or falsified) and a road map on where to locate the empirical data that are related to each response.

The chapter is structured as follows. In Section 10.2 issues related to the definition of precarity are examined. The two "founding acts" of the precarious phenomenon are (a) the flexibilization procedure and (b) the inadequate access to the welfare state. Then, the question of collective identity is brought forward (Section 10.2.3). Finally, Guy Standing's assumption that the precariat is a "new dangerous class-in-formation" (Standing 2011) is examined in light of this thesis' findings. In Section 10.3, the determinants that are linked with the trade union system structure in Greece and Italy are highlighted. The (early) divergence between the Greek and the

Italian precarious workers' movement is analyzed, to be followed by a presentation of the re-convergence between the two countries' PWUs. In section 10.4, the focus turns to issues related with each country's labor legislation and the distinction between production-based and contract-based precarity is pointed out and contextualized. Section 10.5 is devoted to examining the claims and proposals of the PWUs with regard to the welfare state. In section 10.6., the super-precarious population categories (those who are subjected to multiple forms of precarity, even beyond the working time and space) are taken into consideration. Section 10.7 reviews the relation between the PWUs and the broader movement setting of each country, whilst 10.8 presents the findings from the examination of the international networks the Greek and Italian PWUs have formed.

Then, in Sections 10.9 and 10.10, the aim is to address broader theoretical issues and suggest steps towards a future research agenda on the Precarious Workers' Unions.

10.2. Defining precarity

10.2.1. Labor market flexibilization as a founding act of precarity.

All over the world, atypical and flexible contracts have become or are becoming available to the employers, through extensive legislative initiatives. These initiatives are taking place at the national level (or supra-national level, in the case of the EU directives on flexicurity), but they are, indeed, very similar from country to country. First, they are indications of a global-scale change in the modes of production. Second, they are the result of the neo-liberal "competitiveness drive". With regard to the Southern Europe labor markets, the flexibilization procedures are very advanced, but the levels of actual implementation of the flexible contracts in the labor market varies from country to country. The flexibilization procedure has created a new type of workforce, which is subjected to the various types of flexible employment and is, consequently, deprived of the various rights and provisions that had characterized the Fordist-era Labor Legislation. The numbers of the flexible workforce are constantly on the rise in Southern Europe, the crisis acting as an accelerator of further actual flexibilization of the labor market (chapters 2 & 3).

10.2.2. Inadequate access to the welfare state as a founding act of precarity.

The welfare state in the EU has not yet been properly modified to match the needs of this new type of worker. Even in cases where the "flexicurity" model has been adopted, there is a series of maladjustments and "black holes" where the flexible workers are seriously deprived of access to welfare state provisions designed for the typical, full-time, open-ended contract employees. Yet, there is a significant diversity to be noted between the South and the North of the EU. In the Northern countries, absolute welfare state deprivation is only to be encountered in specific parts of the population, which are already characterized by their disadvantaged status in the respective societies (e.g., migrants "sans papiers"). In the Southern countries, on the other hand, no measures have been taken in order to compensate for the workplace insecurity and the particular challenges the flexible workers are facing. The outcome of the above is that lack of access to the welfare state is an issue concerning a much larger proportion of the population. This way, the insecurity has expanded far beyond the workplace, directly into the individuals' social life (Chapter 2).

10.2.3. Bringing together the fragments of a collective identity

The flexible workers themselves develop a collective consciousness of their situation. The interpretation of how the working and social environment has changed varies, not only from country to country, but also among the various strata of the population. Yet, a common line that crosses all examples is that the flexibilized workers are acknowledging that their social, economic and employment conditions constitute a totally different configuration than the one encountered in the Fordist era. This common acknowledgment goes beyond the individual feeling of vulnerability and extends into a collective assumption.

In order to boost this collective identification process, the precarious workers and their collectives invested a serious amount of resources and effort in order to reconstruct what could be a joint agenda going beyond the obvious interest differentiations amongst them. In Italy, this procedure required moving away from a mere labor rights discourse, into broader fields where the individual and collective social existence is defined. In Greece, where – initially – the

precarious workers' unions were focused on more traditional labor issues, opening to the broader aspects of the individual's life was an outcome of the economic crisis and the need for new social solidarity, workers' mutualism and self-management projects to be brought forward (chapters 2, 3, 6-8).

Furthermore, eventful protests such as the 'December Riots' provided us with a sturdy empirical presentation on how the framing process of a precarious worker's identity is completed, through the participation in broader movement procedures. What the precarious worker would normally perceive as an *individual's* lifestyle, employment type, feeling of insecurity or instability, proved, in the case of the Athenian street protests during December '08, to be a *collective* experience, worth being analyzed, narrated, shared, and most importantly, worth "doing something about it" (Chapter 8).

10.2.4. Definition of the Precarious Worker

In the theoretical scheme employed in this thesis, one may speak about *precarity and precarious workers* when the three above conditions are fulfilled.

Therefore, the Precarious Worker is defined as the dependent employee who is subject to flexible labor relations, lacks or has inadequate access to welfare state provisions and has the consciousness of belonging to a social group, the social and employment conditions of which are not, and shall never again be structured in accordance with the Fordist era standards (Chapter 2).

10.2.5. The *precariat*: A "class-in-formation"?

The above definition signifies that precarity, as a term, does not describe a particular class with uniform interests and living conditions. A precarious worker might be an illegal migrant working as a cleaner, or a PhD holder working as freelance programmer or University researcher. The mobilizations of the first period of anti-precarity struggle showed clearly the limits of the potential alliances to be made, as well as the disconnection between means and ends when

searching for innovative ways to tackle the issues of how a precarious mobilization should look, and what should be its claims.

Guy Standing's perception of the precariat is a major breakthrough in the theorizing attempts made by social scientists. He terms the precariat as a "class-in-formation", a distinct social group consisting of people who lack several forms of labor-related security (Standing 2011). He rightfully argues that precarity is a complex phenomenon encompassing aspects of labor security, welfare state coverage, access to solidarity networks in the family, neighborhood and societal level, as well as the common sense of belonging to a group of workers whose life and career is by default unstable and insecure. Precarity in Greece and Italy proved to be *transversal* across the various social strata. Precarity could, indeed, be referring to a contingent, "shadow" workforce – the members of which are constantly feeling the threat of insecurity, poverty, and instability both in their workplace and outside it; at the same time, though, it delineates the young, highly skilled middle-class of labor, who enjoy the flexibility of their working schedule and their social, spatial and temporal mobility, regardless of the fact that tomorrow they might be found in an equally unstable and materially deprived position as their more unfortunate colleagues (Chapter 2).

10.3. Determinants related with the trade union systems' structure

When it comes to the trade union system structure, a significant difference needs to be noted with regard to the two countries under scrutiny. Italy has a multi-confederation trade union structure, each confederation adopting a fixed political line and strategy. The (political) rigidness of the Italian confederal system made it more difficult for the anti-precarity activists to work in a successful manner when in the institutional unions' ranks. Unsurprisingly, the initial PWUs were formed outside the formal trade union system. In Greece, one may find only *one*, pluralist in political terms, confederation for the workers of the private sector. This pluralism leaves open the path to the primary union entities in order to develop a relative political autonomy from the Confederation. For this reason, the Greek unions are almost never obliged to choose between

moderating their political discourse, stance and activity and fully engaging in collective bargaining. A union of any sort – which meets the general criteria of representativeness, as described by the labor law – cannot be excluded from the signing of a collective agreement (Chapter 5).

Secondly, in the Greek case, the political representation's fragmentation at the top levels of the organizational structure tends to reflect a similar process at the grassroots level; in Italy, one encounters the exact contrary. Members of political collectives, parties (mainly of the Left) and the numerous organizations that constitute the constellation of the left-wing political spectrum, compete on a daily basis to formulate a majoritarian approval of their ideas inside the union in which they participate. Yet, both the Italian and the Greek PWUs have inherited from their respective trade union system a rationale and a *modus operandi* with regard to the *limits* of the political debate taking place inside their apparatuses. Whilst the Italian organizations present a more concrete internal ideological position, the Greek ones are more prone to political pluralism and internal debate, notwithstanding the problems that arise from this stance. Interestingly, the grassroots unions seem to have inherited the political tradition of their trade union system, despite the fierce criticism their members and leaders are addressing to the Confederations. This may, on the one hand, be attributed to the fact that specific structures facilitate the circulation of specific ideas on how an assembly should be conducted or a union be operated. On the other hand, this inheritance is an indicator that even the unions which are most alienated from the formal, institutionalized trade union system, are somehow carrying along (both in time and in space) the basic ideas upon which each respective country's trade union movement was built (chapters 5 & 6).

In any case, both countries' PWUs, partly due to their members and leaders' criticism towards the union elites, partly because of the fact that the inefficiency of the trade union strategies in tackling precarity and other major social issues was perceived by the PWU members, distanced themselves from the confederations since their very appearance in each country's labor movement scene (chapters 3 and 5).

Examining empirically the precarious workers' struggle in Greece and Italy, we noted a point of (early) divergence and a point of (late) convergence. Whilst in the late '90s and until the middle of the 2000s, the Greek and Italian PWUs followed a very diverse course (the Greeks focusing their efforts on the workplace, the Italians on identity-building through political organizations), by the end of the 2000s in Italy a strong criticism was raised against the absence of PWUs from the physical space of labor, whilst in Greece, the overtly traditional discourse developed by the PWUs was – rightfully – considered as a limit that should be exceeded.

10.3.1. Early divergence

Despite the fact that the structural conditions (starting point) of precarity were the same in Greece and Italy, the respective movements developed in different paths. Whilst the Italian precarious workers developed a theoretically refined, common identity building approach, the Greek workers pointed directly at the labor rights' issue, failing to modernize their discourse in order to match the contemporary condition. This diversity had significant consequences on both sides of the Ionian Sea and soon enough proved to be a restraining factor, for different reasons in each case. In Greece, the precarious workers' movement evolved *inside* the workplace, with the founding of grassroots unions either in the business, or the productive sector level. The latter undertook traditional labor action inside the workplace. In Italy, the struggle was mostly conducted *outside* the workplace, with politically oriented organizations taking the lead. Their movement activity was directed more towards national and regional protests and campaigns, renewing the traditional protest repertoire of actions. The small-scale mobilizations of the Greeks produced some (temporary) gains for the workers involved, but the large-scale impact of the campaigns was inexistent. In Italy, the large-scale mobilization of political collectives altered the public discourse, imposing the notion of precarity in the mainstream debate and public sphere; there was a significant lack of concrete results, though, in what concerns the workplace and the welfare of precarious labor (Chapter 4).

10.3.2. Late convergence

Despite the fact that the cross-national diversification was important for the first steps of precarious organizing, it seems to lose its strength as time goes by. A new point of convergence has risen, which is the mixed inside-outside the workplace level of intervention, the development of mutual aid and social solidarity structures and the inability (lack of access rather than *unwillingness*) of the Precarious Workers Unions to be integrated, playing thus a significant role, inside the institutional trade union system. This diversification of both the movement repertoire and the organizational pattern the PWUs are taking need to be considered as an evolution of the previous mono-thematic forms of activity and constitute another empirical confirmation of the multi-faceted character of precarity. It could be attributed, at least partly, to the delimitations that a solely-inside or – outside the workplace intervention entails, as well as the changing socio-political field and the rise of new challenges the unions had to cope with (chapters 5, 6 and 7).

The re-convergence process coincided with and was accelerated by the weakening of the EuroMayDay protest in Italy (after 2006) and the austerity tempest in Greece (after 2008). Both countries' organizations widened their scope of activities, introducing innovative organizational formats and actions, on the one hand, being confronted, on the other, with the painful dilemma of accepting a higher degree of institutionalization. Both options (institutionalizing or placing oneself at the margins of the system) would entail risks and sacrifices, the lack of any widely accepted innovative idea further fragmenting the various entities' response. Our empirical data confirm that the institutionalization question is tightly linked with the PWUs' willingness and capacity of offering a variety of services to their members. The latest developments, in Greece and Italy, are clearly depicting the unions' commitment in extending their array of services, even in fields which were previously unexplored. The way this extension shall be performed remains an open issue (chapters 5 & 7).

10.4. Determinants related with the flexibility types prevalent in each country

The flexibilization of the labor market in Greece and Italy, although commencing from different structural starting points, followed a similar course and took place in a the same temporal frame, which extends during the whole range of the 1990s and 2000s. The flexibilization procedures in both countries had as an explicit scope the introduction of employment contract types that had not been available previously. Both processes left untouched the working conditions of open-ended contract workers. Due to Italy's specific context-related labor market characteristics, the generational gap between the "old" and the "new" workers was much more evident than in Greece.

A distinction that was pointed out by the interviewees is between the contract-based and the production-based precarity. The latter is a direct result of changes in the modes of production and/or the construction of new professions employed in high-technology productive sectors. The former is a simple abusive use, on behalf of the employer, of the recruitment and hiring options offered to him by the legislative framework. Those subjected to contract-based precarity are struggling to reverse it (adhering to a traditional labor rights discourse), whilst the production-based ones tend to follow an innovation-oriented approach with regard to their mobilization agenda. The above assumption, which is relevant to both country cases, offers an explanatory path towards the dynamic development of the anti-precarity protest (Chapter 5).

10.5. The PWUs' claims and proposals with regard to the welfare state.

The PWUs developed a set of proposals directed at institutional actors – as well as a set of actions characterized by their self-organized nature and the overcoming of the State as the sole reference concerning the welfare. The former, which includes proposals such as the Basic Income and the Minimum European Wage, brought to the table – albeit in an indirect way – the issue of the political balance of power. The latter have the advantage that they are immediately "constructible". It is no coincidence that this duality reflects two large strands of post-2008 crisis

political theory, namely: (a) Zizek's call to the people to take the power back from the financial and corporate capital (see, for example, Zizek 2013) and (b) the Occupy movement's proposal (as expressed by Graeber) to build the "new world" inside the old one, in a way as to render the latter an "empty shell" (Graeber 2004).

Concerning the self-organized projects, many self-managed experiments of mutualism and social solidarity have sprung up lately in both countries, such as the legal and practical aid to precarious workers, the founding of co-operatives and other associations and the call to workers' self-management. In Greece, a series of projects, which I have termed as *experimental laboratories*, are being founded and populated by precarious workers. The most interesting characteristic of the latter is that, instead of debating whether one or the other trade union activity is more suitable to the emergency situation in which the Greek society has found itself, they seem to re-negotiate *as a whole* the content of trade unionism – questioning, for example, self-evident notions such as the workplace or the power relations inside it, as well as proposing radical transformations of the *workers' organization* format and content. (Chapter 7).

Another important characteristic of the self-managed projects is the way the PWUs attempt to renegotiate the use of space, through buildings' occupations, might they be direct action-style actions, or the re-appropriation of their working space itself, such as in the case of the VIOME, in Thessaloniki, Greece, and the Officine Zero, Rome, Italy. In these cases, a contentious performance – the occupation of abandoned buildings – was instrumental for precarious workers in the cultural industry that could have a working space attempting at the same time to produce an income for themselves and to defend a common good available to all, cultural production (chapters 7 & 9).

A rupture with the past with regard to the PWUs activity (when compared with the more traditional union entities and the way the latter raised issues in the Fordist era) is that even the demands addressed to institutional actors require a radical shift in the current political balance of power, in order to be implemented. This *radical shift* promise, inherent in the PWUs demands, is not only related to the way these entities are being organized or act in the precarious labor field, it also constitutes part of the collective identity construction procedure for the precarious

workers (see point 10.2.3.). Things are also different, in the sense that the self-organized and self-managed experiments constitute "*images coming from the future*" [Interview with N.A., 2012], either obliged to eternally remain in the margins of the current societal configuration – or, eventually, prevail, transforming themselves into a revolutionary potential.

10.6. The "super-precarious".

The insufficiencies of the welfare state adjustments have created broad sub-categories of the labor population. Among these one may find the migrant precarious workers who, in addition to labor flexibility, are obliged to confront the difficulties that derive from the linguistic gap and their doubtful position in South European societies and labor markets, which are hostile to providing residence permits and regularizing their eligibility to work. Furthermore, the female precarious workers are obliged to cope with the patriarchal South European family structure, as well as a persistently gender unequal labor market. The simultaneous presence of multiple precarity layers on the labor population – deriving from ethnicity, cultural diversity and gender – further complicates the PWUs' efforts to mobilize an, already deeply fragmented, workforce. The dynamic of the precarity phenomenon is reversed – or better said, becomes two-way: whereas in the case of a white, male, native precarious worker precarity expands *from* the workplace *to* the rest of his life, in the case of the disadvantaged individual, it is also the difficulties encountered outside the workplace that render practically impossible the stabilization of his/her professional conditions. In other words, this is an ideal type of a vicious circle, from which no (individual) escape is possible, unless preceded by an extensive transformation of what is considered today as the welfare state.

In recent times, and despite the obvious difficulties, this *super-precarious* workforce of Italy and Greece has contributed to instances of collective action where "multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants" (Vertovec 2007) played a key role in launching and sustaining a labor-related mobilization in urban and countryside settings (Chapter 7). On the other hand, the scarce empirical data available are

confirming the hypothesis that the precarious condition does not reverse (or smoothen) the pre-existing inequalities that disadvantaged societal subgroups are facing (female workers, migrants, etc.). The participation of migrants in PWUs is equally low as in the traditional unions. With regard to women, the hypothesis raised by several feminist groups at the beginning of the previous decade, that precarity could prove an opportunity to break the bonds of the patriarchal society, does not seem to be confirmed in any of the cases examined. The Italian PWUs are more aware of these issues and have responded to them either by developing mixed agendas (e.g. precarious feminist groups) or through intensive networking with the respective thematic groups which tackle social inequality. The Greek PWUs have not developed a specific strategy on that issue, maintaining a more traditional discourse and action-planning (Chapter 7).

10.7. The PWUs position in the broader social movement setting

The uniform structural conditions in the various countries of Southern Europe are not sufficient to explain in full either the phenomenon of precarity, or the mobilization developed against it. We are also pointed in the direction of introducing the social movement tools in examining the PWUs, rather than merely considering the PWUs as prototypes of traditional trade union organizations. The reason for this assessment is that the empirical data clearly portrayed that the PWUs are heavily influenced by their respective movement environment – at least, much more than the traditional labor union entities. A viewpoint which proved very useful in examining the characteristics of the PWUs is studying their relation with what has been termed as "eventful protests" (della Porta 2008a). The Greek PWUs exploited the potentials created during the eventful protests of December 2008, in order to increase their numbers both in terms of collectives and in terms of member recruitment. The eventful protest was rightfully perceived as a self-reproducing resource and utilized as such (Chapter 8)

To some of the anti-precarity activists, the events produced initiatives and incentives for getting to know their politically active colleagues, and sharing their common problems, grievances and every-day life challenges. They discovered they needed the rebellion to "go on",

to have a "perspective", and the way to accomplish this was through the point where their commonalities met: a union, dealing with the workplace problems. To some PWUs, the eventful protests produced movement resources they were able to harvest in order to intensify their activities. The price that had to be paid was that the organizations themselves were obliged to adapt to the new environment: they added new tactics to their movement repertoire, brought forward more direct-democratic decision-making schemes in order to respond to their members' pressure for participation, and engaged in intensive and extensive networking activity to more efficiently support their claims (Chapter 8).

The PWUs tend to associate themselves more extensively with other (non-labor related) SMOs than the traditional unions. I had attributed this fact to the relatively weak position of the flexible workers' unions, due to the extra challenges their members are facing: the unions would seek alliances and external support to compensate for this weakness. It's not only an issue of usefulness for the collective: the *individual* precarious worker also tends to closely associate with the Movement as a whole, forming extensive inter-personal networks, in an attempt to transform his personal experience into a collective one; in an attempt to create a *precarious worker identity* (see also section 10.2.3).

10.8. International networks of solidarity among the PWUs of Greece and Italy

In Chapter 4, it had been assumed that the PWUs are expected to use external support through networks of alliances and affiliations. These networks come from three directions: the union founders/leaders' personal prior political activity, the inter-organizational alliances and the international networks of workers' solidarity, the way they have developed in recent years. Not only are organizational patterns and collective action repertoire directly influenced by the PWU's network, this characteristic increases the social movement environment influence as well (chapters 8 & 9).

In Chapter 9 we examined the strong transnational solidarity and collaboration networks being formed between the PWUs, even under the harshest of conditions, such as the ones the Southern European labor movement is facing in the post-2008 setting. Yet, one needs to know where to look for them, how to distinguish analytically their characteristics and what sense to make out of the various examples available. Unsurprisingly, among the three cases that were examined, the most successful was the one where the formal trade union structures had the least involvement. The projects put under scrutiny provide indications as to which direction our scholarly lens should turn the focus on, as well as some initial insights on how trans-national labor networks might increase their effectiveness, scope and durability in time (Chapter 9).

The collaborative networks, although much more difficult, time-consuming, and resource-demanding to construct, may prove more durable in time and more productive than the co-ordination or resource transfer ones. The most crucial characteristic of the occupied factories and their supporters' network (which was a collaborative one) was each hub's commitment to mutual aid and reciprocity, rather than delimiting oneself to a mere resources sender or recipient role. The occupied factories' workers and their supporters prioritized the mutual exchange of know-how, rather than placing the emphasis on material resources flows.

Then, as was also noted in Section 10.7, the cross-national structural similarities should not be considered as a sufficient condition for labor collaboration; the discursive context of each country needs to be taken into account. This does not mean that it would be impossible to create discursive spaces and channels of communication, should initial diversities be noted. However, a careful and flexible approach is required in order to avoid a simple "import-export" relationship.

Finally, transnational action networking efforts stand a higher chance of producing networks that are rich (in terms of content) and durable (in time) when their immediate goals are tangible and rooted in real-life experiences, rather than more generic declarations. When a complex and multifaceted set of practices is employed, aiming at the macro-level whilst being in direct touch with local organizations, their grievances, agendas and claims, the chances of success increase dramatically.

10.9. Late convergence [revisited]

10.9.1. Limited usefulness of the two axes

In our initial hypotheses, we had assumed that the PWUs should move closer to the *organizing* edge of the "organizing-servicing" axis and closer to the *militant* edge of the "militant-moderate" one. This is partly true, in the sense that all PWUs are adopting social movement unionist strategies and opt for direct democracy rather than hierarchical forms of representation. Yet, whilst the PWUs inclination towards a militant and direct democratic way of organizing and operating is evident, a strong tendency is to be noted lately, in both countries, towards the provision of a wide(r) array of services to their members. The combined dual movement towards opposite directions in the "militant-moderate" and "servicing-organizing" axes, does not allow the confirmation of the initial hypothesis that the PWUs would prove more *militant* and more *organizing* than the traditional trade unions, at least when it comes to low-wage work. A reconstruction of the model is needed, where on the one side one may encounter the traditional or *two-dimensional* trade unions operating in a specific level of the social life and employing a, more or less, traditional repertoire of industrial action, and on the other, the *multi-dimensional* unions which function simultaneously in many levels and utilize a diverse arsenal of social practices to achieve their goals. Alternatively, one might consider examining the physical locations where the anti-precarity struggle emerges. As was depicted in Chapter 5, during the initial stages of the anti-precarity mobilization, significant cross-national variation was noted with respect to whether the activities were mostly focused inside the workplace or outside it, addressing the broader political system. Although, at a later stage, both countries' PWUs worked in the direction of intervening both inside and outside, the initial divergence left its mark on their organizational formats and their action repertoire.

10.9.2. Re-negotiation of the "union" term.

The PWUs seem to re-negotiate from the beginning all the aspects of their existence, from the claim-making procedures to the actual modes of resistance, in a way that reminds us the

proto-union structures which were prevalent in the mid- and late-19th century. Of course, the dramatically different structural conditions, both in what concerns the productive paradigm as well as the general configuration of the political, social, and economic life, do not allow the drawing of direct equivalences. We may only interpret these findings as signs of a radical transformation of the unionizing procedure as a whole, which one may assume will expand in the near future, as the flexible labor relations become prevalent in the labor markets of the developed world.

10.10. Future research: Measuring the crisis' impact on the PWUs

A first and urgent task of our future research endeavors should be to provide an accurate and coherent model of contemporary trade unions, one that takes into account the organizational characteristics that emerge alongside the precarious workers' population in developed capitalist countries. In the section above, the limited usefulness of the dual axis, "militant-moderate" and "servicing-organizing", was highlighted. A multi-dimensional approach was instead suggested; the physical location where the anti-precarity struggle takes place might be worth being taken into consideration. This would require, though, not only the researcher's persistence to a dynamic, cross-temporal examination, but also the introduction of a more extensive country-case sample, which shall expand beyond the limited scope of a Southern Europe-specific investigation, such as the one of this thesis.

I have argued that the precarious workers' unions are not only challenging the notion of *precarity* as we perceived it up to date, but also the very idea of what a *union* is and how it is supposed to operate. What makes it difficult to predict their evolution is not just that the process described in the course of this thesis is still under way, but also the external conditions: regarding the Southern European countries, it is unclear whether the crisis will prove to be an *accelerator* of pre-existing tendencies, an *obstacle*, or a *diversion* that will lead the PWUs to new, unexplored territories. Future research should focus on these issues, not only in order to explain the evolution of PWUs, but also to understand what will be the content of trade unionism in the 21st century.

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