

Chapter 6

Quiescent or Invisible?

Precarious and Unemployed Movements in Europe

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On 1 May 1991 in Naples, Italy, a group of unemployed citizens, flanked by members of other associations, organised a symbolic march. The demonstration culminated in the occupation of an abandoned building (Baglioni 2012), which became a meeting place and headquarters of the movement, where protesters could coordinate common actions. This is only one among a number of similar actions carried out by unemployed people in Naples, including protest marches, occupations, and other activities aimed at fighting unemployment and its individual and social consequences. They occurred both before and after 1 May, and were mostly organised by local unemployment organisations.

In Magdeburg, Germany, about six hundred people attended a demonstration on 26 July 2004 to protest against a government reform program working towards establishing restrictions in social security, retirement, sickness and disability benefits, as well as rules regarding payment and job assignment for the unemployed (Lahusen 2009). This was just the burgeoning of what was to become a massive wave of protest—involving over a million people in 230 cities during that year—targeting the proposed labour market reform known as *Hartz IV* (Roth 2005). Unemployed people took an active part in the protest.

At least 50,000 people gathered in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on 14 June 1997 for a mass demonstration targeting the European Summit being held there, but more substantially to protest against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion (Chabanet 2008). Over the following couple of years, many other similar events took place across Europe, like the one in Cologne on 3–4 June 1999 specifically targeting the European Summit. These protests, which originated in France, have become known as European Marches against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Social Exclusion, and a transnational coalition of actors gather together at them. These later became part of what is referred to as the global justice movement.

These three examples suggest, firstly, that protest by unemployed people does occur and, secondly, that, in spite of a number of similarities, the manner of protest can take on different forms and be varied in scope: in each of these cases, respectively, a specific and localised protest sustained national opposition to a governmental measure and transnational mobilisation targeting EU institutions and policies. To be sure, in the examples above, as in many other instances of mobilisation, unemployed were not protesting alone, but were part of a broader coalition of discontented people mobilising against unemployment and for job creation. This is especially true in the case of the European Marches against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Social Exclusion. Yet often the unemployed are an important component of such protests, as they were during the 1930s, for example, when an unprecedented period of crisis and turmoil hit Europe and the United States in the wake of the financial crash and subsequent economic crises, arguably when an even more profound and long-lasting social crisis developed across these continents.

However, in spite of these prominent examples—and many others we could think of—the mobilisation of the unemployed has received but scant attention by students of social movements, and the picture is even worse for collective action by precarious people. Part of the explanation rests on the fact that, as Chabanet and Faniel (2011) have pointed out, the mobilisation of the unemployed is a ‘recurrent but relatively invisible phenomenon’. Part of the explanation, however, is also that scholars often argue that unemployed people face a number of important obstacles and problems preventing them to engage in collective action (Faniel 2004; Royall 1997, 2005). In the literature we find a number of explanatory factors for the mobilisation of unemployed people or its absence, which we can broadly summarise in six aspects, that are likely to be interrelated and with a cumulative impact on the political mobilisation of the unemployed (Berclaz et al. 2012). First, political interest and sophistication: an unemployed person might simply not be interested in politics and therefore not have any individual incentives to engage in collective action and protest activities. Second, ‘objective’ conditions: after all, in order to become mobilised as an unemployed person one first needs to be unemployed, and the more people in this condition giving rise to grievances about the situation of the labour market, the more likely it is that we would observe the emergence of a movement of the unemployed. Third, ‘subjective’ conditions: only partly related to the previous factor, for a social movement of unemployed to emerge there must be framing processes at work (see Benford and Snow 2000, Snow 2004 for reviews), that is, a social construction of the ‘problem’ of unemployment as well as the presence of discursive practices regarding actual collective action and its re-

lation with societal issues. Fourth, identity: the emergence of a movement of unemployed also presupposes the formation of a collective identity and some degree of identification of individuals who are unemployed with the movement. Fifth, resources: internal resources are important for any social movement to emerge and perhaps all the more for movements of the unemployed, which often are very poorly equipped in terms of resources and organisational structures. Sixth, opportunities: as is the case of any other movement, the political opportunity structure—in terms of the openness or restrictiveness of the institutionalised political system, stability or instability of political alignments, presence or absence of political allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996)—must be favourable to the emergence of movements of the unemployed.

In what follows, we discuss the existing literature on the political mobilisation of precarious and unemployed people, stressing in particular the role that scholars give to grievances, resources and opportunities in the explanation of mobilisation or its absence. These explanatory factors are likely to be interrelated with a cumulative impact on the political mobilisation of the unemployed. Furthermore, they all directly or indirectly relate to three core concepts used by social movement theory: grievances (including how they are framed), resources and opportunities. In the final section, we stress a number of weaknesses that we identify in this literature.

Grievances

Strain and breakdown theories of collective action have recently regained importance in social movement literature (Buechler 2004; Snow et al. 1998; Useem 1998). Research on strain and breakdown were often associated with the concept of 'malintegration', that is, weak networks and diffuse collective identity due to unemployment, family instability and disruptive migration (Useem 1998). Individuals taking part in collective behaviour were not only seen as frustrated but also as isolated or anomic (Kornhauser 1959). Following this research tradition, previous works on the unemployed 'had denied [them] the ability to organise and act collectively, or dismissed their movements as insignificant, ineffective, or dominated by outsider groups or agitators' (Reiss 2013: 1355).

In their seminal study on 'Poor People's Movements', Piven and Cloward (1979) stressed the role of grievances to explain the emergence of protest by the unemployed and unemployed collective action. The authors argue that inequalities are constant, but rebellion is rare. The masses remain quiescent in spite of inequalities of wealth and power because social structures exert

control on individuals. Thus, the authors highlight the importance of perceptions in the emergence of protest: when individuals perceive their situations as 'unjust and mutable', then grievances have the potential to lead to protest. A change in the attribution of power is operating, as rulers lose legitimacy in the eyes of individuals who, at the same time, claim rights and believe in their chances of gaining them. A widespread loss of employment and the related income loss may lead to 'quotidian disruption' as explained by Snow et al. (1998). Their argument concurs with that of Piven and Cloward in that these authors consider framing important: the narratives associated with losses may help to push individuals into collective action. Additionally, 'it is this conjuncture of suddenly imposed deprivations and an uncertain future that gives rise to anger, indignation, and revolt' (Useem 1998: 227). In a recent study of the mobilisation of young unemployed in Morocco, Emperador Badimon (2013) shows that both relative deprivation and framing play a role. The author shows that young post-graduates who mobilise on the issue of unemployment are often not unemployed—they are working in jobs that do not correspond to their aspiration as holders of university degrees—and, most importantly, they perceive employment in the public sector as a right for post-graduates. Hence, they mobilise in order to obtain access to employment in the public sector.

Recent protests in Southern Europe—most notably by the *Indignados* and Occupy movements—have spurred research on the links between the economic crisis, rising unemployment rates, austerity politics and social movements (Castañeda 2012; Della Porta and Andretta 2013). Although the analysis of these recent events is still an on-going process, these studies are worth including in this review as they entail a change in the definition of unemployed social movements. This modification in the definition of unemployed protest activities can be related to the transformation of the labour market. In post-industrial labour markets, concern among citizens and in particular among the younger generations involves not only unemployment but also entrance in the labour market, as well as precarious and flexible employment statuses.

Since the outset of the economic crisis, many social movements in Europe display citizens' mobilisation against austerity politics. These movements involve broad coalitions of workers, students, trade union members and other citizens concerned with cuts in the welfare state and worsening of working conditions and workers' rights. These are not unemployed movements, but rather represent broad coalitions addressing changes in the labour market that reduce quality of work and life for citizens as well as a broader concern related to democracy and how citizens' voices and wishes are taken into account. The framing of these events involves a demand for change in

the political management of the economy, the labour market and the welfare state. Thus, protesters call for more democracy to counter the effects of the crisis (Della Porta and Andretta 2013). As stressed by Piven and Cloward (1979), as the government's legitimacy diminishes, people demand changes and experience a new sense of efficacy.

Two lines of criticism have been addressed at the role of grievances as presented in 'Poor Peoples Movements'. First, a number of criticisms refer to the importance of resources and, in particular, organisational resources for the unemployed movements in the 1930s. Gamson and Schmeidler (1984) question the role that Piven and Cloward attribute to organisational resources. In their view, unemployed organisations do not only dampen but also spread and sustain insurgency by the unemployed (Gamson and Schmeidler 1984: 573). Moreover, the authors stress that unemployed organisations were able to use resources from their constituencies and hence maintain control over their actions and independence from elites. Thus, the authors criticise Piven and Cloward's rejection of the positive role of organisational resources. The second line of criticism builds not only on the role of resources but also on that of the political opportunities. Valocchi states that 'the early success of the unemployed workers movement was due not to spontaneity and disruptive potential but to a close articulation between the organisational context of protest and political environment' (Valocchi 1990: 198).

Resources

The political quiescence of the unemployed is often associated with their lack of resources (Bagguley 1991, 1992). Schlozman and Verba (1979), for example, focus on the individual resources derived from the socioeconomic status of individuals confronted with unemployment. In this perspective, a lack of voice, but also a lack of a collective identity, is seen as central in understanding the difficulties for unemployed people to unite towards collective action (Demazière and Pignoni 1998; Maurer 2001). Lack of voice is often related to the low socioeconomic status of the majority of the unemployed (Schlozman and Verba 1979). However, studying the lack of collective identity shows that the question is more complex since the lack of collective identity also results from the heterogeneity of the profiles of individuals confronted with unemployment in terms of education and profession, but also age, gender and nationality (Demazière and Pignoni 1998). The experience of unemployment varies across socioeconomic profiles (Schnapper 1999), and the common feature among unemployed persons is the lack of a paid job

and the search for one (Demazière 2006). Hence, the feature that unites unemployed individuals is transitory by nature, since it is related to job search and motivation to leave their current situation.

Research conducted at the individual level of analysis reveals a focus on the lack of resources as an obstacle to participation in collective action by unemployed people. However, recent studies have countered the idea that unemployed persons intrinsically suffer from a lack of resources. Maurer and Pierru (2001) discuss the importance of what they call 'compensatory resources' of three types. The first type of resource is derived from political socialisation, in particular, experiences of engagement in workers' social environments shaped by left-wing or communist thinking as can be found in certain trade unions in France. But this also includes prior involvement in other social movements or what the authors refer to as the 'multi-militants'. A second type of resource is the search for new social ties. Some unemployed individuals, who are more isolated or suffer more from a lack of structure and contacts associated to work, join organisations in order to regain a social affiliation. Lastly, the authors present anger as an expressive resource. Some unemployed individuals, who were not politicised before they joined the movements, knocked at the door to receive assistance and found a place that offered opportunities to express their anger. Additionally, time can be considered a resource for the unemployed. This can be related to the concept of biographical availability (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). Nonetheless, a critical stand should be kept with regards to the idea of the biographical availability of unemployed persons. They may have time, but they may not have the mindset to engage in collective actions.

Certain works have examined how unemployed people may mobilise in spite of their poor internal resources. Thus, Reiss (2013) explains that the unemployed have overcome the limitations arising from their lack of resources not only by using a large repertoire of political action but also by developing cooperation with other social groups. In particular, a number of studies have analysed resources that can be drawn from civil society organisations and trade unions (Baglioni et al. 2008; Chabanet 2008; Cinalli and Füglistner 2008; Faniel 2004; Linders and Kalander 2007; Richards 2009; Royall 2004). In a similar fashion, Bagguley (1992) points at the importance of organisational networks, in particular knowledge of how to organise and mobilise changing constituencies. The high turnover among unemployed persons is a challenge posed to their collective mobilisation. However, it is important to note, with regard to this point, that alliances with trade unions depend on the specific issues at play since the unemployed are not the main constituency of trade unions and unemployment may be a more or less salient issue for other social groups (Faniel 2013).

Snow et al. (1998) have tried to reconcile research in breakdown theory and resource mobilisation theory in their study of homeless people. They argue that 'quotidian disruption' leading to social movements does not imply that the individuals are isolated. Quite to the contrary, disrupting everyday routines may take place within groups of individuals who are embedded in interpersonal or organisational networks. Thus, in this view, breakdown and solidarity are not mutually exclusive and should not be opposed. Indeed, a recent study of the protest activities of young unemployed (Giugni and Lorenzini (2013) seems to confirm this idea, as the authors find that, while economic exclusion fosters protest activities among long-term unemployed youth, social exclusion hinders them.

Opportunities

Research and thinking on social movements and protest activities in the past thirty years or so have been heavily influenced by the political process model (McAdam 2011) and more specifically through the use of its main analytical tool, namely the concept of political opportunity structure. In spite of recent criticisms (Goodwin and Jasper 2004), the concept of political opportunities remains central, although not necessarily in its structural version nor with its original focus on formal political institutions. Work dealing with precarious and unemployed movements has also been conducted along these lines. An early example is provided in a study by Piven and Cloward (1979) which also considers the importance of opportunities, in particular electoral timing and citizens' support for the protesters. They 'distinguish between occasions when electoral instability favours those who protest and when it does not' (Lefkowitz 2003: 722).

In the 1930s, the unemployed engaged in repertoires of protest activities that included various forms of action such as demonstrations, rallies and sit-ins (Valocchi 1990: 195). Historical research on unemployed movements in the 1930s shows that these repertoires of contention included forms of protest used exclusively by the unemployed and which allowed unemployed movements to avoid state hostility in an attempt to transform contextual constraints into opportunities (Perry 2013). According to Piven and Cloward (1979), the success of the protests by the unemployed derived from their capacity to disrupt institutional routines. However, Valocchi (1990) contends that their success was related to the alliances and political relay that they were able to build. Contacts with authorities facilitated lobbying activities by the unemployed movements. This analysis lends support to the political opportunity argument, stressing in particular the role of a division among

the elites, which is one of the main components of the political opportunity structure for the mobilisation of social movements (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 2011). Similarly, Della Porta (2008) has looked at protest on unemployment (not strictly by the unemployed) in Europe and stressed, among other aspects, the importance of political opportunities for the emergence and development of protest in this field, including the role played by the alliances which the various actors establish among each other.

The political opportunity approach lends itself to comparative analyses, across space or time. To be sure, most existing analyses of the mobilisation of the unemployed are focused on specific local or national situations. However, we also find some valuable cross-national comparisons. For example, Baglioni et al. (2008) have compared the mobilisation of the unemployed in France, Germany and Italy. They show how their mobilisation depends on the existence of favourable windows of opportunities and, more specifically, how the unemployed benefited from external developments that produced changes in potential mobilising resources and created new allies and political entrepreneurs. The authors also stress that such opportunities were actively seized and produced by contentious actors, including the unemployed themselves. This is an important point, as criticisms of the political opportunity approach have often highlighted the structural bias inherent in this approach, leaving little room for agency (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). Similarly, Faniel (2004) compared the movement of the French unemployed of 1997–98 and the Belgian unemployed who mobilised against home visits. While not directly focusing on political opportunities, the author shows both the similarities between the two movements, but also their divergences arising from different institutional, social and political contexts. In particular, he shows the importance of the different implication of unions on the form of the mobilisations.

Comparisons can also be done across time. In this respect, Bagguley (1992) has compared the emergence of collective action by the unemployed in the 1930s and the quiescence of unemployed in the 1980s in Britain. The author emphasises the importance of the structure of the state (centralised or decentralised) and the provision of services to the unemployed through state-financed agencies. In the 1930s the local authorities had some power over unemployment benefits and could be influenced locally through protest activities, while in the 1980s the centralised welfare state would not waiver. Richards (2009) has made a similar cross-time comparison in his historical analysis of union behaviour towards the unemployed in Britain in the 1920s–30s and in the 1980s, two periods of high unemployment. His argument, however, focuses on internal resources rather than on the existence of political opportunities for mobilisation. He links the emergence of a movement in the former period and the lack thereof in the latter period

to the different levels of resources received by the unemployed. He also pinpoints the ambiguous, if not hostile, behaviour that unions often display vis-à-vis the unemployed. Linders and Kalander (2010) also point out this ambiguous relationship between unions and the unemployed movements.

A recent strand of research adopts a revised political opportunity approach to inquire into the role of specific opportunities for social movement mobilisation (Berclaz and Giugni 2005). In this perspective, political opportunities for mobilisation do not stem primarily from the general features of the institutionalised system, but from more specific aspects related to the political field and the issues addressed by the movement, in this case the political field of unemployment. A six-country comparison following this approach has shown the importance of such specific opportunity structures for the mobilisation of the unemployed (Giugni 2008). In this study, political opportunities are defined not only in terms of general institutional features such as the degree of openness or restrictiveness of the political system or the presence or absence of institutional allies, but above all as opportunities stemming from the ways in which the political field of unemployment is collectively defined. This approach has the advantage of bridging political opportunity theory and framing theory. The analysis, however, only provides partial support to the hypotheses and the proposed theoretical framework.

Other studies show that political opportunities—both general and specific—shape contention around unemployment and precariousness through both unemployment and labour market regulations. For example, historical research on unemployed mobilisations during the 1930s show the importance of the emergence of the concept of unemployed and the support of Communist parties (Pierru 2007). More recently, during the 2000s, situations of precarious employment have multiplied and reduced unemployment in particular among youth, women and migrants. In these contexts, the mobilisation of precarious people has emerged at the regional and national levels, in particular in Italy (Choi and Mattoni 2010; Mattoni 2009) and France (Boumaza and Hamman 2007), where they are sometimes subsumed under the term '*mouvements des sans*' (Dunezat 2011; Mouchard 2002), but also at the transnational level, for example through the Euro Mayday Parade organised simultaneously in nineteen cities in 2006 (Mattoni 2009).

The Future of Research on Precarious and Unemployed Movements

In spite of the overall consensus on the perceived and existing limitations for the mobilisation of the unemployed, the fact is that the unemployed do

mobilise, as confirmed by a number of case studies and comparative research presented in this chapter. The rekindled interest in unemployed movements may be related to rising unemployment across the world. However, this interest was not initiated by political or social scientists, but rather by historians who revealed the importance of unemployed movements since the 1930s not only in Britain, the United States or Germany but also in France (Perry 2007; Reiss and Perry 2011; Richards 2009). In addition, the scholarly literature on precarious and unemployed movements is heavily biased in favour of the latter. Studies focusing on precarious people appear much less frequently (Abdelnour et al. 2009; Boumaza and Hamman 2007; Boumaza and Pierru 2007; Collovald and Mathieu 2009). Exceptions to those who focus primarily on unemployed movements include students of social movements and collective actions who, when they did examine the mobilisation of precarious people, often looked in particular at precarious youth (Mattoni 2009; Okas 2007; Sinigaglia 2007). Indeed, work on the mobilisation of unemployed people cannot be defined as a 'growth industry'. Nonetheless, there is a growing interest in this subject matter, as suggested by some recent collective endeavours (Chabanet and Faniel 2011, 2012; Giugni 2008; *Labour History Review* 2008; *Mobilization* 2008). And, in view of the current situation concerning unemployment levels across Europe and especially in Southern Europe, one may expect research in this field to grow in the near future. Also, works focusing on precarious people should be conducted more systematically.

The relatively sparse literature on the mobilisation of unemployed, and even more so that of precarious, people is perhaps explained, at least in part, by the fact that these movements have sometimes tended to be subsumed under other movements, hence denying them autonomous status. For example, studies of the global justice movement (Della Porta 2007), the *Indignados* (*Current Sociology* 2013) or the Occupy movement (Gamson and Sifry 2013; *Social Movement Studies* 2012) are indeed also studies of when and how unemployed and precarious people engage in collective action, as much as they are studies of when and how youth engage in collective action. As a result, the mobilisation of the precarious and unemployed is underestimated to the extent that they have been considered as part of other, broader movements. This is partly also due to the changing structure of the labour market, insofar as unemployment increasingly tends to be related to other statuses of outsiders with regard to the labour market rather than the more traditional status of unemployed. This underestimating also relates to the issue of how social movements are framed and more specifically to the difficulty of creating a collective identity around the social categories of the unemployed and the precarious. In this perspective, certain studies analyse and distinguish

their struggle from that of people mobilising on behalf of them (Dunezat 1998, 2009).

Notwithstanding the growth of the related literature, movements of the unemployed are a rare commodity. Yet, in some countries they are even rarer than in others. This calls for cross-national analyses of their mobilisation. However, truly comparative studies are few and far between. The literature has developed mostly, if not entirely, as country-specific analyses—in particular in countries such as France, Germany and Italy, but in other contexts as well—hence overlooking the differences and commonalities among unemployed movements internationally. Indeed, here we find indirect comparisons aimed at singling out the peculiarities of specific national or local cases by comparing them with other cases, which sometimes take the form of collections of national case studies (Chabanet and Faniel 2012). However, only rarely have scholars engaged in genuine cross-national comparisons (Baglioni et al. 2008; Faniel 2004; Giugni 2008). The EU framework programmes of research funding can be of much help in this regard. Such a cross-national comparison occurred, for example, in an EU-funded project on the ‘contentious politics of unemployment in Europe’ (Giugni 2010), where an international team of researchers was able to study, among other things, the forms and levels of mobilisation of the unemployed in six different European countries. Comparative analyses of this kind elucidate the role of contextual factors—in particular, those concerning the political-institutional context—as well as the interplay between internal and contextual factors in explaining the conditions under which unemployed people are effectively able to mobilise. In addition, they enable empirical generalisations beyond a specific case study. In our view, efforts at comparing precarious and unemployed movements in different contexts, not only national ones, should be multiplied in future research.

The lack of comparisons problem is exacerbated by the fact that the existing comparative studies almost entirely focus on the Western context (Europe and the United States). This holds for research on social movements in general and also more specifically for works on precarious and unemployed movements. In both cases, our knowledge would be enhanced by comparing the conditions, determinants and dynamics of the mobilisation of precarious and unemployed movements in contexts which are relatively homogenous, such as Western countries, with contexts that are both culturally and institutionally very different, such as Eastern Europe or even more so the Middle East. In this regard, it could be greatly advantageous to study the recent protests occurring in the Arab world.

A related issue concerns the methods of analysis. While a wealth of different methodologies has been used to study precarious and unemployed

movements, ranging from ethnographic studies and qualitative case studies to systematic quantitative analyses, most existing works focus on the unemployed once they are mobilised, that is, once they have succeeded in some way to pull their resources together, and for the purposes of a social movement. In other words, research looks at '1' case without examining '0' cases. This prevents the researcher from disentangling the factors enabling precarious and unemployed people to engage in collective action. Comparative analyses might help inasmuch as they provide variation in the degree of mobilisation and different potential explanatory factors. However, a more systematic analysis of 'positive' and 'negative' cases might yield new insights into the conditions, determinants and dynamics leading to the political mobilisation of precarious and unemployed people. Some have done so by comparing the unemployed who have participated with those who have not become involved (Maurer 2001). We think that this is a fruitful avenue for future research in this field.

Future research should also dig deeper into the motivations and reasons leading precarious and unemployed people to engage in collective action. This analysis would greatly benefit from systematically comparing precarious and unemployed people with people who have a regular job in order to ascertain whether the status of *precarious* and *unemployed* matters. In this way, studies conducted at the individual level complement well-researched studies on precarious and unemployed movements. Most importantly, the linkages between these two levels of analysis should be further investigated.

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