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Movements and Militant Memory.
Ethnography and Anti-Asbestos Activism in Brazil

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To those who daily struggle and commit their life

to the movement for an asbestos-free world,

beyond the death and their most painful

experiences of suffering and injustice

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Agradeço a todos os participantes desse estudo.
Fico grata por terem compartilhado comigo uma parte desta caminhada de luta conduzida com dignidade, paixão, compromisso e dedicação.
Obrigada por terem me acolhido com paciência, sorrisos e carinho.
Ficará sempre comigo o que aprendi com vocês.
Agata

I thank all my study participants.
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What I have learned with you will be always with me.
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Talvez seja uma das experiências humanas e animais mais importantes. A de pedir socorro e, por pura bondade e compreensão de outro o socorro ser dado. Talvez valha a pena ter nascido para que um dia mudamente se implore e mudamente se receba (Lispector 1999).
[Perhaps, it is one of the most important human and animal experiences. That of asking help and, just because of simple goodness and understanding of the other, the help is given. Perhaps, it is worth being born just for a day silently imploring and silently receiving].

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I dedicate all the life contained in this thesis ‘despite death and beyond death’ to the memory of my mother who silently taught me the importance of friendship, independency, and tenacity.

Summary

The thesis is based on an ethnographic fieldwork of ten months conducted in Osasco (São Paulo, Brazil) where I researched the practices of activism undertaken by the members of the *Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABREA* [Brazilian Association of Exposed to Asbestos]. The movement for the global asbestos ban, on one hand, and the asbestos market, on the other, transverse multiple transnational trajectories. I followed the one connecting Casale Monferrato in Italy (context of my previous study) and Osasco in Brazil, where I collected the data discussed in this thesis. Both Casale Monferrato and Osasco have been sites of the largest Eternit asbestos-cement plants in Europe and Latin America, respectively. Asbestos minerals are carcinogenic, and exposure to their fibres can cause serious and fatal diseases. In Italy, asbestos has been prohibited since 1992, while in Brazil asbestos extraction and use is still permitted.

From an anthropological perspective focused on the practices and discourses of the body, I consider the relationship between the experiences of the social and individual suffering provoked by the global asbestos market, and the sufferers' engagement with the activism.

My hypothesis is that, in certain contexts, social actors involved in a—bodily—suffering experience can feel the urgency to engage with practices of socio-political actions to cope with the crises triggered by that suffering and that upset one's world (physical, social, and affective). This engagement, motivated by the actor's personal reasons, can have a relevant impact on the socio-political context (local, national, and international), even beyond the actor's awareness and volition. I explored the practices, and discourses characterising the activism performed by the *sufferer-activists*, ABREA members in Osasco. Their stories of life, work, suffering, and activism are illustrative of the processes through which the transnational dynamics of asbestos-related disasters are locally experienced and contested.

Key words: *body, suffering, ethnography, grass-roots activism, occupational health hazards, global health, asbestos, disaster, risk, social justice.*

Summary

(Italiano)

La tesi si basa su un lavoro di campo etnografico di dieci mesi condotto nella città di Osasco (San Paolo, Brasile), dove ho indagato le pratiche di attivismo intraprese dai membri della *Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABREA* [Associazione Brasiliana Esposti Amianto].

Il movimento per la proibizione dell'amianto nel mondo, da un lato, e il mercato dell'amianto, dall'altro, percorrono multiple traiettorie transnazionali. Io ho seguito quella che collega Casale Monferrato in Italia (contesto del mio precedente studio) e Osasco in Brasile, dove ho raccolto i dati discussi in questa tesi. Entrambe le città sono state le sedi dei più grandi cementifici del marchio Eternit in Europa e in America Latina, rispettivamente.

I minerali d'amianto sono cancerogeni e l'esposizione alle loro fibre può causare malattie gravi e mortali. In Italia, l'amianto è stato vietato nel 1992, mentre in Brasile la sua estrazione e uso sono ancora legali nella maggiorparte degli stati.

A partire da una prospettiva antropologica orientata alle pratiche e ai discorsi del corpo, ho considerato la relazione tra le esperienze di sofferenza sociale e privata provocata dall'esposizione all'amianto e l'impegno nell'attivismo.

L'ipotesi di ricerca è che, in alcuni contesti, gli attori sociali coinvolti nell'esperienza (corporea) della sofferenza possano sentire l'urgenza di mobilitarsi per far fronte alle crisi innescate da quella sofferenza la cui esperienza sconvolge il loro mondo (fisico, sociale e affettivo). Tale impegno può avere un impatto rilevante sul contesto locale, nazionale e internazionale, anche al di là della consapevolezza e della volontà dell'attore sociale riguardo alle ripercussioni socio-politiche delle sue azioni. Le pratiche di lotta intraprese dagli attivisti dell'ABREA e le loro storie di vita, di lavoro e sofferenza sono illustrative dei processi attraverso i quali le dinamiche transnazionali dei disastri amianto-correlati sono localmente vissute e contestate.

Summary

(Português)

A dissertação baseia-se em um trabalho de campo etnográfico de dez meses realizado em Osasco (São Paulo, Brasil), onde foram pesquisadas as práticas de ativismo empreendidas pelos membros da Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABREA.

O movimento pela proibição global do amianto, de um lado, e o mercado do amianto, de outro, articulam-se através de múltiplas trajetórias transnacionais. Eu tomei a trajetória que liga a cidade de Casale Monferrato na Itália (contexto do meu estudo anterior) com a cidade de Osasco no Brasil, onde coletei os dados discutidos nesta tese. Ambas as cidades de Casale Monferrato e Osasco foram sedes das maiores fábricas de produtos em cimento amianto da marca Eternit, na Europa e na América Latina respectivamente.

Os minerais de amianto são cancerígenos e a exposição a suas fibras pode causar doenças graves e fatais. Na Itália, o amianto foi proibido em 1992, enquanto no Brasil ainda é permitido extrair e usar esse minério.

De uma perspectiva antropológica focada nas práticas e discursos do corpo, considero a relação entre as experiências de sofrimento social e individual provocadas pelo mercado global do amianto e o envolvimento dos afetados com o ativismo.

Minha hipótese é que, em contextos específicos, os atores sociais envolvidos na experiência (corpórea) de sofrimento podem sentir a urgência de se envolver com práticas de ações sociopolíticas a fim de lidar com as crises relacionadas ao amianto e que perturbam o mundo físico, social e afetivo deles. O compromisso, motivado por razões pessoais, pode ter um impacto relevante no contexto sociopolítico (local, nacional e internacional) no qual o ator social atua, além da consciência e da vontade relativas as repercussões políticas das ações empreendidas. Meu trabalho focou em práticas e discursos que caracterizam o ativismo realizado pelas vítimas e ativistas da ABREA em Osasco. As histórias de vida, trabalho, sofrimento e ativismo deles são ilustrativas dos processos através dos quais as dinâmicas transnacionais dos desastres relacionados ao amianto são vividas e contestadas localmente.

List of Abbreviations

ABREA Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto

AC Asbestos-Cement

ACEO Associação Comercial e Empresarial de Osasco

ACO Ação Católica Operaria

AFeVA Associazione Familiari Vittime Amianto

AR Asbestos Related

ARD(s) Asbestos Related Disease(s)

BEC(s) Base Ecclesial Communities

CEREST Centro de Referência em Saúde do Trabalhador

CGT Confederação Geral do Trabalho

CIPA Comissões Internas de Prevenção de Acidentes

CISSSOR Conselho Intersindical de Saúde e Seguridade Social de Osasco e Região

CUT Central Única dos Trabalhadores

DIESAT Departamento Intersindical de Estudos e Pesquisas de Saúde e dos Ambientes de Trabalho

DIEESE Departamento Intersindical de Estudos Estatísticos e Socioeconômicos

FIOCRUZ Fundação Oswaldo Cruz

FUNDACENTRO Fundação Jorge Duprat Figueiredo de Segurança e Medicina do Trabalho

GIETEA Grupo Interinstitucional de Estudo de Trabalhadores Expostos ao Asbesto

IARC International Agency for Research on Cancer

IBAS International Ban Asbestos Secretariat

LT Liberation Theology

MTC Movimento de Trabalhadores Cristãos

MM Malignant Mesothelioma

MPT Ministério Público do Trabalho

MT Ministério do Trabalho

NGO Non Governmental Organization

OIT Organização Intersindical do Trabalho

PT Partido dos Trabalhadores

SP São Paulo

STF Supremo Tribunal Federal

WHO World Health Organization

Chapter 1: An Introduction

Prologue

Every year, on April 28, the Workers' Memorial Day is celebrated internationally in honour of the victims of occupational accidents and diseases. Among the others, the victims of asbestos exposure are remembered and awareness campaigns about asbestos dangers are organised by victims' associations, trade unions, and public institutions in settings where grassroots activism has made asbestos-related (AR) *disasters* visible and recognised. These visibility and recognition cannot be taken for granted nor has it been easily achieved.

Retrospectively, I consider the Worker's Memorial Day of 2011 as a crucial moment in my academic career and personal life. On that day, I joined a delegation of the victims' association from Bari (Puglia region in southern Italy) in an international conference about the environmental and health effects of asbestos manufacturing in Casale Monferrato (Piedmont region in north-western Italy). The conference was organised by the local victims' association, the AFeVA-*Associazione Familiari e Vittime Amianto* [Association of Relatives and/or Victims from Asbestos] who invited biomedical professionals, social scientists, lawyers, and activists engaged in the transnational anti-asbestos movement. I participated as a recently graduated student in Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at the University of Bologna, where I had presented a master's thesis in Medical Anthropology on AR illness experiences due to environmental and non-occupational exposure to asbestos fibres leaking from an asbestos-cement (AC) plant in Bari, Italy (my hometown).

In Casale Monferrato, I made my first contacts with Brazilian anti-asbestos activists who had been invited to the conference, and with whom I developed my doctoral research, which forms the basis of this thesis and was designed based on a study on AR suffering and activism I conducted in Casale Monferrato in 2012.

Statement of the Problem

The experiences of suffering caused by environmental and/or occupational exposure to asbestos are related to the invisible and silent *disasters* caused by asbestos manufacturing in the global context and experienced locally. The transnational dimension does not characterise only asbestos economics and politics, but rather it concerns the consequences of asbestos pollution in terms of practices of suffering and resistance as well.

The World Health Organization-WHO (2010) declares that 107,000 women and men die every year because of AR diseases (ARDs). In fact, when inhaled, asbestos fibres can cause various diseases such as asbestosis, cancers of the larynx, lung, and ovary, and malignant mesothelioma (MM) (IARC 2012). The latter is a fatal cancer, undoubtedly related to asbestos exposure, whose latency period may last more than 40 years (Marinaccio et al. 2015). Although biomedical studies have demonstrated the carcinogenicity of asbestos fibres since the 1960s (Selikoff et al. 1965), to date, only 59 countries have prohibited all asbestos minerals and their use (manufacturing, extraction and commercialization) in their territories[1].

In most areas where asbestos has been prohibited, this has been achieved after a mobilization of workers and citizens who have been exposed and/or suffered experiences due to asbestos manufacturing (Roselli 2010). In the early 1980s, workers' mobilization in Casale Monferrato led to the approval of the first law prohibiting asbestos in Italy on a municipal level in 1987, which was then used as a model for the national law number 257 passed in 1992 (Rossi 2012:150). In 2009, more than 2,800 injured parties including individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and public institutions (Rossi 2012:19) went to trial against Eternit, an asbestos-cement (AC) multinational corporation. They accused Eternit of environmental disaster manslaughter, and this mobilization in Casale Monferrato became a symbol of tenacity, hope, and struggle for justice (denied) for anti-asbestos activists worldwide. Although the Italian Supreme Court did not uphold the decision of the lower court in the end, the Eternit trial became a strategy duplicated by others in countries afflicted by the health effects of asbestos manufacturing, like Brazil (see Rossi 2012; Altopiedi 2011; Altopiedi and Panelli 2012; Allen and Kazan-Allen 2012).

I was in Rome on November 19, 2014, when the Supreme Court's final verdict was pronounced. I was there with activists I knew from Casale Monferrato and Osasco (São Paulo, Brazil), together with other activists, sufferers, public institutional officers, journalists, biomedical and law professionals from across Italy, Brazil, Japan, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Spain, Argentina, and United States. Once again, I witnessed to the transnational dimensions of asbestos economics and the organised mobilization by sufferers. Social actors from various contexts have followed the Italian lawsuit thanks to the actions promoted by victims' organizations, and journalists, writers, and photographers, whose writings circulated through social networks, blogs, mailing lists, and online magazines.

[1] The list of the countries that have currently prohibited all types of asbestos is available on the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS)'s website http://www.ibasecretariat.org/alpha_ban_list.php (accessed March 20, 2017).

Thus, Casale Monferrato's mobilization, and the Eternit trial became visible and acknowledged as turning point that has inspired an international anti-asbestos movement. Actions undertaken in a local context may have resonance and empower campaigns occurring in multiple cultural, socio-political, and geographical settings. This happens by a process of legitimisation of the actions situated in a shared global scenario of *disasters* and activism. The International Ban Asbestos Secretariat-IBAS based in United Kingdom, was founded in 2000. IBAS promotes and coordinates international actions "to provide a conduit for the exchange of information between groups and individuals working to achieve a global asbestos ban and seeking to alleviate the damage caused by widespread asbestos use"[2].

Dr. Luciano Lima Leivas, prosecutor at the Brazilian *Ministério Publico do Trabalho-MPT* [Public Ministry of Work] and member of the Brazilian delegation, attended the pronunciation of the Italian Supreme Court, which ended the Eternit trial in November 2014.

> *This final sentence was expected to be a pedagogical mark pointing out that asbestos is a well-known carcinogenic substance that has killed and continues to kill many people who are exposed, especially among workers. However, although the physical person, representing the corporation's leadership responsible of asbestos use in Italy, has been acquitted, asbestos was not acquitted. The trial has been clearly showing that thousands of people in Italy died because of asbestos, and the leadership was acquitted only according to an exclusively technical and legal expedient. This is a very important aspect to be considered and clarified in Brazil: the absolution of Stephan Schmidheiny* [Eternit manager in Casale Monferrato] *does not mean asbestos' absolution.*

Dr. Lima Leivas reiterated the impact of Italian lawsuit as inspiring and encouraging the decision by the Brazilian Public Ministry of Work to begin judicial actions against companies using asbestos in Brazil, and to promote draft laws for the prohibition of asbestos. Thus, anti-asbestos activists continue to seek legitimation and collaboration with professionals from public institutions, in a context characterised by contradictory and conflicting attitudes of local, national, and state governments toward asbestos matters. In the global context of asbestos economics, Brazil represents the third largest asbestos-producing country, after Russia and China (US Geological Survey 2017). There is an active asbestos mine in Minaçu (Goiás, Central Brazil), and dozens of asbestos- cement (AC) plants throughout the national territory. To date, eight Brazilian States have prohibited asbestos: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro,

[2] Source: IBAS's website (www.ibasecretariat.org), accessed April 28, 2016.

Amazonas, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso, Santa Catarina, Pará, and Maranhão[3].

According to the data reported by the *Boletim Epidemiológico* [Epidemiological Bulletin] published in 2016 by the Ministry of Health, 1,192 occupational ARDs have been diagnosed in Brazil in 2007-2013 (Ministério da Saúde 2016).

However, according to the allegations raised by activists and supported by a large number of epidemiologists and health professionals these data do not seem to reflect the actual incidence of ARDs and AR deaths. As it usually happens in countries where asbestos use is still allowed, there is frequent underdiagnosis of ARDs that is subtly related to the pressures of asbestos lobbies (Pasetto et al. 2014; Marsili et al. 2016; Cullinan et al. 2017).

In a similar context, Brazilian anti-asbestos activism overtly acts against the economic interests of asbestos companies, and sways the socio-political consensus that legitimates asbestos use. Local practices of mobilization appear particularly critical in regards to the 'structural violence' (Farmer 1996) on which the choice between the opportunity of a salary and the risk of a cancer is based. Brazil (with more than 200 million inhabitants) is still characterised by profound socio-economic inequalities, and almost the 5% of the total population lives in extreme poverty (International Monetary Fund 2015). On one hand, lobbies justify asbestos use by adducing that it represents a source of socio-economic wellbeing for a population. On the other, anti-asbestos activists, based on solid relationships with activists from other contexts (on national and international levels), refer to the experiences, knowledge, and achievements from "outside" to legitimise their local struggles and discourses.

Research objective and questions

In this thesis, I reflect on the practices by which social actors locally experience, conceive, oppose, and divert transnational trajectories defining global asbestos economics and politics (Waldman 2011). In particular, I focus on how these trajectories are diverted and resisted. My main research objective is to explore a case of anti-asbestos activism, from an anthropological perspective centred on the bodily experience of a social suffering.

[3] The list of the Brazilian states that have approved asbestos prohibition and the law projects details are available on the website of the *Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABREA* [Brazilian Association of the Exposed to Asbestos] www.abrea.org.br.

What motivates a sufferer to become an activist? Which processes and contingencies can favour a person's socio-political engagement? Through which practices does one experience activism in daily life and what are the meanings attributed to it? To what extent can the practices undertaken by sufferers facing the effects of asbestos contamination on their own bodies as well as on their world change the socio-political, and moral context in which their suffering is experienced?

While I consider AR *disasters* as processes beyond national borders, time and geographical distance, I draw attention to the connections linking the practices of anti-asbestos activism occurring in multiple contexts by defining them as parts of a transnational movement aiming global asbestos ban and social justice. Based on the contingencies and encounters triggered by my previous studies in Italy, I decided to explore how experiences of suffering and activism related to AR *disasters* are entangled in a global context. In particular, the current study stems from the observation of the historical, political, cultural, and emotional bonds that connect the anti-asbestos activism of Casale Monferrato with the one organised in Osasco, Greater São Paulo, Brazil. Do these bonds influence the strategies of struggle in each context?

While I follow the traces of my personal path from Casale Monferrato to Osasco (and vice versa), I answer to the abovementioned questions by considering that the global dimension of asbestos manufacturing's effects does not concern only AR *disasters*, but also the mobilization of the *disaster*'s victims.

Theoretical framework

In this thesis, I discuss anti-asbestos activism from a perspective focused on the centrality of the body in the elaboration of new meanings and practices. This approach required the consideration of the dynamics that define negotiations and practices by which biomedical knowledge and epidemiological data are elaborated (see Krieger 2003; Scheper-Hughes 1997; Kleinman 1995, 1980; Good 1994), risk is communicated and perceived (see Cappelletto and Merler 2003; Slovic 2010; Di Giulio et al. 2008; Ciccozzi 2013), and suffering is experienced (see Kleinman and Kleinman 1991; Scarry 1985; Cappelletto 2009; Quaranta 1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Pizza 2007). I took into account issues related to disease, death, grieving, and memory as they emerged as crucial elements in the observed experiences of the activists' suffering and struggle.

I refer to the social actors I met with during my fieldwork as *sufferer-activists*[4] who had been variously affected by the impact of asbestos exposure consequences on their live and body. They were former workers with ARDs (mainly asbestosis and pleural plaques), beloved family members of women and men who died because of ARDs (in particular MM), and social actors who were aware of having been exposed to the risk of developing an ARD. I adopted the term *sufferer-activists* in the attempt to save in a label the complex subjectivity of the women and men I encountered, who were undeniably sufferers and victims, but also survivors and activists engaged in a struggle for rights and justice.

I found *memory* playing a crucial role in my fieldwork as it was subtly and deeply linked to practices and discourses of the body, and the body is a 'site of memory' (Fassin 2011). Memories moulded the narratives and the practices elaborated by my research partners, during our encounters. In their bodily struggle, memory became *militant* recalling the past since it represented their resistance to the injustices they continued to embody in the present. The activists' socio-political engagement could not be understood without reference to the memory of past experiences they had had or those of their loved ones who had died, but whose absence was perceived by the survivors as a 'most acute presence' (Crozzoli Aite 2003).

Remembered and 'remembering bodies' (Fassin 2007) represented the main 'tool' of political action in areas of AR *disasters* where I did fieldwork, in Italy (my earlier work) and Brazil (this thesis), and memory appeared to be fundamental in legitimising the activists' struggle. On a private level, the social actors felt an urgency of 'doing something'[5] for those who had already died from ARDs. They wanted to preserve the memory of their loved ones' life stories; this implied an emotional engagement with the past, and with comrades who shared similar experiences of suffering. On a socio-political level, past experiences of mobilization seemed to empower and legitimate the activists' current actions. It was not fortuitous that the anti-asbestos activism I investigated in Casale Monferrato (Italy) and Osasco (Brazil) emerged from a socio-political, and cultural context significantly marked by the history of struggles organised by workers and citizens' organizations, such as unions, and civil committees. In these contexts, sufferers had found organizational and political competencies and community structures favouring one's socio-political engagement in actions addressed to live socially the experience of suffering, and the meanings—the culture—they elaborated

[4] In my elaboration of a category that might save the complexity of my study participants' subjectivities, I was inspired by the studies conducted by Crenshaw (see Crenshaw 1989).
[5] From an interview conducted in Casale Monferrato, June-May 2012.

revealed to be a dialogue between aspirations—imagination—for a change and the tradition representing the sediment of those contexts (Appadurai 2013).

Throughout the thesis, I combined the presentation of ethnographic data with the reflections emerged from their analysis and grounded in the contributions from the literature constituting my theoretical framework. Although the concepts and theories I adopted will be further discussed in the next chapters, in this introductive one I present those that have been key 'instruments' to design my research project, analyse data, and reflect on my fieldwork experience as may be useful coordinates to the reader approaching this work.

'The body as good to think about'

To understand how suffering and activism were experienced and conceived in daily life, the participants to my study, and I found the body as 'good to think about' and act with.

The practices of anti-asbestos activism pivot around the centrality of the body suffering and acting in a transnational scenario crossed by unpredictable movements of people, capital, struggles, and *disasters*. *Sufferer-activists* used the body, or evoked the defeated body of their relatives, friends, and comrades who had died from ARDs, as a tool of political action (Mauss 1973) to 'tear the veil of invisibility' (Quaranta 2016)[6] hiding their suffering.

Social actors I met with experienced and conceived of their AR suffering and activism as based on a toxic agent—asbestos fibre—and its effects on their bodies. I interpreted this contamination causing and/or threatening to cause a fatal disease as the experience of a crisis questioning the taken for granted world and disrupting one's world. Anti-asbestos activism can be triggered by that 'critical event'—the *disaster* (Das 1995)—becoming manifest in the onset of an ARD, awareness of being at risk of developing an AR fatal cancer, and grieving the loss of a loved one who died of asbestos. By reflecting on the potentialities of critique triggered by the suffering condition, the subversive tension intrinsic to the 'afflicted bodies' (Scheper-Hughes 1994) may then flow beyond the individual body and one's private world, and pervade the surrounding context.

The illness experiences (especially those related to a disabling and fatal disease) impose the awareness of the body that cannot longer be taken-for-granted, implicit and axiomatic, because it has become a problem; it is no longer the subject of an unconscious assumption, but becomes the object of a conscious thought (Good 1999:191). From the resulting crisis,

[6] Informal conversation with my supervisor, Professor Quaranta.

new meanings and practices may emerge to reinvent one's being in the world and oppose those dynamics of 'structural violence' (Farmer 1996) that permeate and determine the causes of a suffering that is as intimate and private as social and collective. While investigating the practices and meanings elaborated by the 'body in pain' (Scarry 1985), I particularly referred to the contributions informed by a critical medical anthropological approach (see Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Scheper-Hughes 1990; Lock 1993; Singer and Baer 1995).

Suffering and violence

The experiences of AR diseases are permeated by the dynamics that define social suffering as a condition deriving from "what political, economic, and institutional power does to people, and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems" (Kleinman et al. 1997:ix). At the same time, experiences such as health threatens, diseases, and death (e.g. those provoked by the contamination of one's body from asbestos) affect the most intimate spheres of one's existence and are related to the individual suffering lived by AR disasters survivors. At the same time, the experience of a catastrophic event, such as a serious and debilitating disease, concerns not only the body—and the world—of the contaminated subject, but also the entire social context in which she acts, lives, and dies (see Gordon 1991).

Suffering is as private as social. The traces of asbestos contamination on the bodies of exposed women and men, and their experiences of suffering that destroy much of their worlds, do not represent only a private tragedy caused by an unlucky fate. Rather their bodies reflect a structural violence bore through the embodiment of social, political, cultural, and economic processes (Csordas 1990; Quaranta 2006b, 2012b). My use of the concept of violence refers to the definitions proposed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and has been particularly influenced by the reflections of Farmer (1996), Fassin (2007), and Scheper-Hughes (1992). In particular, from Scheper-Hughes (1992) I took the concept of 'violence in everyday life' she adopted in reference to daily life (and death) in north-eastern Brazilian favelas (shantytowns), where she conducted the fieldwork on which *Death Without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Scheper-Hughes 1992) is based.

According to the definition proposed by Farmer (2005:40), structural violence is

> 'structured' by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire—whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life—to constrain agency. For many choices both large and small are limited by racism, sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty.

Fassin (2011:293-294) reflecting on the concept, argues that 'structural violence' is

> a relatively abstract and elusive concept. It concerns the way historically constituted social structures interfere with people's needs, capabilities, and aspirations. It combines in various ways economic inequality, social injustice, racial discrimination, and diverse forms of denials of human and citizen's rights. It is more difficult to apprehend than political violence […] Its imprint on the body is more profound but less tangible. It has no immediate visibility—but there are also more interests at stake in keeping it invisible, since its systematic unveiling could have *unexpected consequences on the social order* [my emphasis].

I focused on the 'unexpected consequences on the social order' occurring when the 'veil of invisibility' hiding AR *disasters* is torn by the sufferers who engage with the activism.

Movements and activism

We live in a 'world of flows' (Appadurai 1996) that cross each other along unpredictable trajectories defined by "different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies" (Appadurai 2000:5). However, in such a 'world-in-motion' barriers and walls still exist and continue to be erected, and the freedom of movement for all is more than an utopia (Scheper-Hughes 1995). When the trajectories intersect each other, fundamental "problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance" may derive from the resulting 'relations of disjuncture' (Appadurai 2000:5) or frictions (Tsing 2005). I read the movement for the global prohibition of asbestos gathering multiple and various examples of anti-asbestos activism(s) locally performed. They represent creative and 'militant' responses emerged from the intersection of those trajectories determining the conditions not just for inequalities, suffering, and misunderstandings, but also for the empowerment of the struggles of distinct social actors jointly mobilising despite the differences among them (Tsing 2005).

By considering the centrality of the body in the elaboration and in the experience of practices and discourse of anti-asbestos activism, I based on those studies that have investigated social movements by focusing on the pivotal role of the body, emotions and affects in determining one's decision to become socio-politically engaged and persist in the mobilization. In particular, I referred to Jasper (1998); Goodwin et al. (2000, 2001), Gould (2009) Klawiter (2004, 2008); Polletta (1998a, 1998b), and Polletta and Jasper (2001).

I approached the Spinozian concept of *affect* and the philosophy of Deleuze (1988) through the contributions offered by Massumi (2002), Gregg and Seigworth (2010), Biehl and Locke (2010), Athanasiu et al. (2008), Negri and Hardt (1999), and Shouse (2005).

Gould's ethnography (2009) on the AIDS activism in the US has reflected on the roles of affects and emotions in social mobilizations. I quote the evocative words chosen by Gould (2009) to refer to the interconnections among bodies, struggles, affects, emotions, suffering, and politics. Similar entanglements characterised the practices of anti-asbestos activism I accompanied.

> Affect. Being affected, being moved. Emotion. Motion. Movement, from the post-classical Latin movementum, meaning 'motion' and earlier, *movimentum*, meaning 'emotion' and then later, 'rebellion' or 'uprising'. The movement in 'social movements' gestures toward the realm of affect; bodily intensities; emotions, feelings, and passions; and toward uprising (Gould 2009:2-3).

In my fieldwork, in the attempt to grasp the role played by the exchange of affects among the *suffer-activists* in the experiences of daily activism, I focused on the affect as *potential* when I considered the potentialities of the (suffering) body and its capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze 1988). "Movements of feelings" (Massumi 2002) and the "passage of intensities from body to body" (Seigworth and Gregg 2010:3) characterised the daily experiences of activism and circulate among *sufferer-activists* as well as between them and me. These movements influenced my fieldwork experience. I did not ignore the bodily dimension of my being the main research instrument in the field, and I adopted a phenomenological approach in both data collection and analysis as I further discuss in the Methodology section.

Body (and suffering) are never a private affair (Weiss 1999), since "the world inhabits us as much as we inhabit it" (Sullivan 2006 quoted by Mills 2011:596). In anti-asbestos activism, the body becomes the site where truth—as evidence of *disaster*—is sought and acknowledged (Fassin 2011:284). The body is then not only the battlefield with traces of injured suffering, rather it becomes "a human rights arena in which many forces struggle for control" (Mack 2011:xviii).

In the daily performance of activism, *sufferer-activists* lived and interpreted ARDs and suffering as political and social. In line with Fassin (2011), I am not interested in the consciousness of the activism's political dimension, "on the contrary, by highlighting the presence and evidence of the body as the site of violence and resistance, I emphasize not a psychological but a political move" (Fassin 2011:283). Simultaneously, the habits of the activists and the representations of the body and illness experiences lived at the most intimate level of their lives were deeply influenced by the experience of socio-political engagement.

I draw attention to Frankenberg's (1992) words about the body as a 'fertile soil' for new practices and meanings.

> The body is not merely […] a symbolic field to mirror or reproduce dominant values and conceptions; it is also a site for resistance to, and transformations of, imposed meanings. [...] Cultural meanings are not only shared and given, they are fragmented and contested. Social life is divisive as well as cohesive. The body makes, and is made, by, a fractured social world (Frankenberg 1992:xvii in Quaranta 2006b:275).

The suffering body, experiencing the interstitial and pervasive *disasters* caused by asbestos, becomes the site from which new practices and meanings are elaborated.

Anti-asbestos activism might be included among "embodied health social movements" (see Brown et al. 2004; Brown and Zavestosky 2004), gathering social actors who mobilize in the name of justice and who share a 'biosocial condition' (see Fraser 1968; Hobson 2003; Rabinow 1992; Petryna 2002; Fassin and Rechtman 2009). In a similar context of activism, the *sufferer-activists* I met with undertook socio-political actions and mobilised to see their suffering recognised (see Mazzeo 2012, 2013, 2014). In so doing, they entered the processes through which citizenship and rights to health were negotiated, achieved, and established (see Petryna 2002; Rose 2007; Nguyen et al. 2007; Hofrichter 1993, 2003a).

I considered the practices of anti-asbestos activism in terms of paths of *care* hence the term *care-activism* with which I will refer to them throughout the thesis. Such as practices are lived and undertaken by social actors—*sufferer-activists*—exposed to asbestos, suffering from the consequences of that exposure on their lives, and for whom the experience of suffering has represented the—bodily—condition to become engaged in various forms of anti-asbestos activism.

In my understanding of the activism emerged from the experiences of suffering, and from the attempts to care for it, I referred, among others, to Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) theory of fields and I adopted their idea of the margins of indeterminacy that do persist while we embody the structures of power that influence our actions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:18). I considered the interstices left free from such indeterminacy as the places where the practices of *care-activism* relate to the creative power that accompanies the crisis provoked by a suffering—bodily—experience. Although "everything is pre-determined, not everything is determined", since there is a possibility for social actors to act and not just reproduce the structures ruling their individual and social existences (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:18). Embracing the crisis provoked by the catastrophe in their lives, the *sufferer-activists* I met were inventing a new role for them in the power relations ruling the fields where their actions took place. The engagement with the activism gave them the room to perform their victimhood "as agents—and not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects—who were socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they

possessed the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:107).

In line with Bourdieu, I considered the 'crises' triggered by the disaster's experiences as events that can make individuals call into question their preconceived knowledge, and promote change (Bourdieu 1991:131 quoted by Grenfell and Lebaron 2014:55). The *care-activism'* s strength resided in the embezzlement of such potential critique by providing the 'tools' to "uncover the social at the heart of the individual, the impersonal beneath the intimate, the universal buried deep within the most particular" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:44).

Disaster

Based on theory and ethical motivations, I refer to the suffering related to the impact of asbestos market on health and environment in terms of *disasters* that are invisible since they are still not officially recognised in most countries where they continue to occur. I refer to the anthropological definitions and understandings of the concepts and practices of *disaster* considered as a process in which multiple aspects (e.g. cultural, political, economic, and social) are at play (Ligi 2009, 2011a, Ligi 2011b; Benadusi et al. 2011). Benadusi (2015a) offers a detailed overview on the advancements of anthropological studies conducted on *disaster* and in contexts affected by *disasters*. Benadusi draws the attention to how these studies have been characterised by a strong inclination towards the applied and public dimension of anthropological research since the initial phase of the researchers' interest in similar issues, which arose in the US in 1970s-1980s (Benadusi 2015a). I first approached the anthropological literature on disaster through the works conducted by Oliver-Smith (2009), Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (1999), Hoffman and Oliver-Smith (2002), and Ligi (2009). Then, I focused on those studies investigating contexts affected by disasters provoked by chemical and industrial accidents (Petryna 2002; Das 1995; Fortun 2001). In particular, I referred to anthropological studies conducted in communities embodying the consequences of asbestos pollution (Waldman 2007, 2009, 2011; Broun and Kisting 2006; Petrillo 2015), and corporate crimes (Altopiedi 2011; Jobin 2013) at large, in terms of individual and social suffering experiences as well as of *biosocial* activism (see Petryna 2002; Fortun 2001).

I reflected on the *invisibility* and *silence* characterising AR disaster processes (see Petrillo 2015; Broun and Kisting 2006). In this regard, I referred to anthropological and sociological studies on the communication, experience, and politics of risk (see Douglas 1991; Bröer and

Duyvendak 2009, 2012; De Graaff and Bröer 2012; Cappelletto and Merler 2003; Slovic 2010; Ciccozzi 2013). The management of risk communication and the elaboration of a danger into a risk category (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982) have represented crucial aspects to be considered, on one hand, to analyse the disaster (e.g. practices and politics of risk denial). On the other hand, to understand the activism that was opposing and reacting to the disaster by the organization of awareness campaigns and the elaboration of narrations through which new communities emerged (Beandusi 2015b) and the 'right to meaning' was claimed (Quaranta 2012a).

The peculiarities of AR disasters substantiated my decision to define these disasters as *invisible*. The cancer-causing asbestos factors are invisible to human eyes. There is a long latency period of MM to develop, which makes AR disasters happen long after the first exposure. Thus, it can be difficult to recall one's history of contamination. Moreover, considering biomedical knowledge as a cultural system immersed in a specific historical, political and economic context (Kleinman 1995), a particularly conflicting negotiation process still occurs with ARDs. This prevents the establishment of unanimously shared paradigms (Kuhn 1963), particularly about MM and about the carcinogenicity of all asbestos minerals. For instance, a lack of epidemiological evidence of AR deaths and diseases characterise the countries where asbestos use is still legal, and in those settings biomedical studies affirming the possibility of a safe asbestos use are circulating (Pasetto et al. 2014; Marsili et al. 2015; Cullinan et al. 2017). Similar scientific uncertainties prevent the recognition of the disease as AR and the consequent legitimisation of the suffering.

The disasters provoked by the transnational market of asbestos represent global health disasters that have provoked the death of 107,000 persons in the world (WHO 2010; Prüss Ustün et al. 2011), though an increase is expected in the coming years, considering that still 125 million of persons are exposed to asbestos in workplaces (WHO 2010) and the long latency period of MM. I investigated the practices through which the social actors primarily affected by these disasters—the *sufferer-activists*—locally embody and react to them. In this regard, I referred to the studies on social movements mobilising in name of social and environmental justice (see Bullard and Johnson 2000; Taylor 2000; Hofrichter 2003a; Acselrad et al. 2004; Souza et al. 2010; Porto et al. 2013) and to the current debate within critical medical anthropology addressing global health problems and preventable disasters by considering the biosocial processes favouring, preventing, and threatening individual and collective health (see Farmer 2005; Farmer et al. 2013).

Research context

The historical, cultural, political, and economic connections between Casale Monferrato, Italy, and Osasco, Brazil, about AR suffering and activism led me to choose the Brazilian city in the state of São Paulo as the principal setting of my fieldwork. These connections between Casale Monferrato and Osasco represent useful coordinates to relate the practices investigated in Italy and then Brazil that illustrate the transnational dimension of the economics and 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011).

The history of Osasco municipality is deeply intertwined with migration from Piedmont region in Italy at the end of the 19th century. The officially recognised founder of Osasco is Antonio Agù who emigrated to Brazil from Osasco in Piedmont (hence the name of the Brazilian municipality); for his role in Osasco's economic and urban development, Agù is represented as a legendary character by the locally produced historiography (see Sanazar 2000; Collino de Oliveira and Marquetti Rocha Negrelli 1992; Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003). In Osasco as well as in the state of São Paulo, the number of Italian descendants is impressive due to the migratory flows taking place from Italy to São Paulo, in particular, from the second half of the 19th century to the second half of the 20th century (see da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008).

Another connection between Osasco and Casale Monferrato is that they both had the largest AC Eternit plant sites in Latin America and Europe, respectively. In Casale Monferrato, the plant operated from 1907 to 1986 (Altopiedi 2011:42-43), while in Osasco the plant owned by the 'Eternit do Brasil Cimento e Amianto S/A' began production in 1941 and ended in 1993 (Giannasi 2012). Both the plants were demolished, the one in Casale Monferrato in 2007, while the one in Osasco in 1995. The impact of asbestos manufacturing as well as the contamination of women and men working and living in these urban contexts have been relevant in terms of the experienced suffering, and the civil mobilization organised by the victims of asbestos exposure. During my fieldwork in Osasco, I met many former Eternit workers with Italian origins, while in Casale Monferrato, I came to know about life stories of Eternit workers who were originally from Piedmont, but had emigrated to Brazil to work in AC plants. During the crisis affecting Europe after the Second World War, and motivated by the Eternit local managers, about 20 workers moved with their families to Brazil, to work at recently opened AC plants, where specialised labour force was needed, and possibility of earning a decent salary was guaranteed.

With a number of citizens employed in the local Eternit plants, it is not by chance that in both Casale Monferrato and Osasco victims' associations mobilised anti-asbestos efforts. The two groups are the aforementioned AFeVA in Casale Monferrato, and the ABREA-*Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto* [Brazilian Association of Exposed to Asbestos], in Osasco. The two associations are continuing a constant dialogue and have supported each other since the early 2000s. In particular, the Casale Monferrato mobilization over the last thirty years achieving the first municipal law to ban asbestos in Italy in 1987 (Mossano 2010), as well as the first big trial against the Eternit corporation between 2009 and 2014 (Rossi 2012), inspired and influenced the strategies of struggles undertaken by ABREA activists.

The acknowledgment of the above-mentioned connections spurred me to explore the practices of anti-asbestos activism organised by ABREA members, and moulded my impressions, and expectations when I first arrived in Osasco, in August 2014. Today, Osasco counts 700,000 inhabitants and it borders the western area of the megalopolis of São Paulo. Osasco was part of São Paulo until 1962 and was an industrial neighbourhood. It then became a separate municipality by a referendum promoted by "*os autonomistas*", a political movement advocating for administrative and political autonomy from the government of São Paulo (Sanazar 2000). According to the list of the richest Brazilian municipalities published in 2013 by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística-IBGE*[7] [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics], Osasco is the ninth richest district in Brazil. Until the 1990s, Osasco's economics has been based on the industrial sector; the glorious past of industrial development can be still perceived in the city. Examples include the importance of the metallurgic union in the socio-political context, the moral values celebrated by local historiography as well as the traces inscribed in the number of bodies of men and women who have contracted occupational diseases or suffered accidents while working in the numerous factories. During my fieldwork, this last aspect was particularly visible since the majority of my research collaborators were involved in or had contacts with associations, unions, or political parties addressing occupational health issues (e.g. hazards, diseases, and injuries).

In Osasco, industrial, economic, and demographic development boomed in the 1940s. In fact, by the end of 1940s, thanks to a massive flow of immigration, the population increased from 15,000 to 41,000 (ACEO 2003/2006). In the same period, big plants in addition to the Eternit AC plant were settled there, such as the railway "Cobrasma", the "Indústria Eléctrica Brown Boveri S/A", and the iron producing "Indústria de Artefatos de Ferro Cimaf" (ACEO

[7] Data available on line at the website www.ibge.gov.br (accessed March 21, 2017).

2003/2006). These plants were located where industrial development had begun a couple of decades earlier with the settlement of factories dedicated to disparate sectors of industrial production (e.g. ceramic, textile, automotive, and chemical). Furthermore, by the end of 1950s, when then Brazilian government was encouraging international firms to establish factories in the country, several multinational corporations including Osram and Ford moved to Osasco (ACEO 2003/2006)

Considering the crucial role of industrial development in Osasco's growth as municipality, it is not surprising that Osasco is still associated to the words *cidade* [city], and *trabalho* [work] in its official emblem graphically represented by two gears and two hammers[8].

As the industrial sector grew, Osasco became an attractive destination for families looking for better life conditions, and an escape from poverty and starvation in the rural and poor areas of São Paulo State, north-eastern Brazil, and the economically depressed regions of Europe and Japan[9]. Together with foreign capital, men and women from disparate cultural and geographical backgrounds arrived in Osasco where they contributed to a 'mixture' that pervasively characterises the Brazilian society in every aspect (see Ribeiro Corossacz 2005). Along with fervent movement of money and bodies, were circulating ideas, ethical values, and religious beliefs that influenced the cultural, political, and moral context of Osasco.

Osasco's historical processes and social fabric

The socio-political relevance of discourses and practices of trade unions and militant groups active in Osasco, with a particular reference to the resistance they organised during the period of the military dictatorship (1964-1984), is important background for this thesis. In fact, inspired by principles and methods of Freire's pedagogy (1967, 1970, 1980), Liberation Theology (see Gutierréz 1972; Rowland 2007), and political thought behind the European working class struggles of the 1960s (see Giannotti 2007), militants from Osasco organised actions which represented exceptional cases of overt resistance to the military regime at the time (Bauer 2010). In particular, on July 17, 1968, the workers of the largest factories in the city, including the Eternit, organized by the metallurgic union (Antunes and Ridenti 2007), mobilised after months of "hard work of social turmoil and hectic political propaganda to denounce bad working conditions, lowering of wages, and high cost of life" (Bauer 2010). Together with the student movement, and the most radical and leftist currents of a Catholic

[8] See photograph 1 in the Appendix.
[9] São Paulo has the largest Japanese community outside Japan (see da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008).

political movement, *guerrilha* actions were organised in Osasco against the dictatorial regime. These actions were in clear opposition to the populist strategies promulgated by the State's union organization (Bauer 2010), whose representatives were considered "yellow" or *pelegos*, a Portuguese adjective to indicate unionists who defend the State and companies' interests, instead of workers' rights (Antunes and Ridenti 2007: 81).

The novelty of the strikes in Osasco at the end of 1960s lays in the central role of the workers in the resistance at a political, economic, and social level. Examples include the management of the political struggle, occupation of the factories, taking control of production processes (Bauer 2010), and assiduous campaigns of *conscientização* [conscientization i.e. elaboration of a critical thinking][10] organised among the population. The military regime's repression was harsh and included murders, kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, and torture of workers and students who had dared to express their dissent to the dictatorship (Bauer 2010).

The economic dynamics and socio-political processes that represent the history of Osasco and continue to influence it are fundamental coordinates to contextualise the practices that my study is focused on. In fact, it is from the abovementioned scenario of the hectic movement of bodies, capital, and struggles that the practices and actions of the Brazilian anti-asbestos activism emerged. ABREA was founded as an NGO in 1995, when a group of former asbestos workers found themselves contaminated with asbestos after experiencing ARD symptoms, and began to mobilise against the asbestos companies who had never alerted the workers or citizens about the dangers of asbestos. To date, ABREA represents a key reference in the anti-asbestos movement in Brazil as well as in other countries where asbestos is still legal. ABREA coordinates the *Rede Virtual-Cidadã pelo Banimento do Amianto na América Latina* [Virtual-Civil Network for Asbestos Ban in Latin America] and is in a constant dialogue with other anti-asbestos associations and groups internationally. In my study here, special attention is drawn to the relationships between ABREA and other organizations set up by asbestos victims in Brazil and in Italy.

I situate the investigated practices of socio-political engagement in the broader Brazilian context in which ABREA activists primarily act. In fact, Brazil,

> perhaps the most contradictory [of the BRICS, i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa], can be considered, at the same time, a developing country (with socio-economic disparities, widespread poverty, infant mortality, and so on), and an emerging one (with rising public investments, increasing exports, accelerated development of telecommunications and technology, and so on) (Sanna 2013:505).

[10] For a deeper understanding of the concept and practice of *conscientização*, see Freire (1980).

I cannot ignore the profound inequalities that characterize contemporary Brazilian society. They mould the practices and processes through which citizenship is experienced, thwarted, claimed, and negotiated. The profound inequalities that still characterize the Brazilian 'racial democracy' (Ribeiro Corossacz 2005), seem not only be reproductive, but even functional for a model of dizzying economic growth with no concern about the devastation it causes in terms of environmental and social *disasters*.

Methodology

Every practical choice has a theoretical root
(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:35)

The peculiarity of ethnographic research resides in the 'thickness' (Geertz 1973) characterising the data emerged from the encounters between the researcher and her collaborators in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).
In the ethnographic encounters I had in Osasco, Greater São Paulo, Brazil, while 'being there' with the *sufferer-activists*, with my body and emotional background, while approaching, and sharing affects with my research collaborators, I had the opportunity to grasp the nuances of 'non-institutionalised political fields'[11] as they were experienced, and performed in daily life by the activists. The majority of my collaborators were activists 'despite' their being elderly and sick men. They embodied something 'subversive' that I read as a resistance to the dominating moral values concerning aging, body, and life in contemporary Brazil[12]. I reflected on, and then analysed this embodied resistance enacted through gestures, breathes, and postures that I considered as bodily practices of struggle since "as their voices were silenced, it was their bodies that spoke" (Fassin 2011:288).

Study participants

The research participants, to whom in this thesis I refer with the expressions *study participants*, *research partners*, and *research collaborators* (Green and Thorogood 2011; Borland 1998) were mostly activists of the anti-asbestos movement organised in Osasco and

[11] Quote from an informal conversation with my supervisor, Professor Quaranta (2016).
[12] The studies of Schwarcz and Starling (2015), and Botelho and Schwarcz (2009) offer original perspectives on contemporary Brazilian society by considering the historical and cultural processes that have been occurred in Brazil since colonial times.

in other Brazilian cities. The majority of them were former workers exposed to asbestos (workers and miners) and family members (especially widows and children) of workers died of ARDs.

Moreover, I conducted interviews with professionals of biomedical, legal, and political knowledge, and with trade unionists and members of associations of workers exposed to other toxic substances, such as mercury. Aiming to situate the activism occurred in Osasco in the local and national socio-political scenario, I visited and participated with ABREA members in events and awareness campaigns organised in various Brazilian settings marked by the consequences of asbestos market in terms of suffering and activism experiences. However, the main site of my fieldwork has been Osasco and the most numerous participants to my study have been ABREA members living in Osasco, where I conducted 26 in-depth interviews with *sufferer-activists* (nineteen men and seven women) involved in AR suffering and mobilization experiences.

Data collection

I refer to the data emerged from 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork, conducted in two phases. During my fieldwork, I explored the practices through which anti-asbestos activists of ABREA performed their socio-political engagement in daily life. During the first fieldwork phase (August 2014 to October 2014), I established my contacts with ABREA activists, especially with those who later became my gatekeepers. Together we evaluated the research project's feasibility by considering the availability of ABREA members to take part to the project. The first two months spent in Brazil gave me the opportunity to start my own slow, and sometimes emotionally difficult, process to become more familiar with a context I was in for the first time. It was challenging not to become lost in São Paulo and Osasco, with 13 million inhabitants, a language spoken with so many accents, and a sense of time and space that was so different from those I was used to while living in Europe.

The second phase of the fieldwork (February 2015 to October 2015), was crucial for the research project's development. During this phase, I collected the majority of qualitative data discussed here as it emerged from the encounters with my research collaborators and my observations.

I conducted participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews (recorded after receiving formal consent), and focus groups. Situations, gestures, and small details appeared

that I noted as nuances characterising the context in which my research partners and I were immersed[13].

Data collection began with participant observation and informal conversations with ABREA activists. The definition of participant observation proposed by Pigg (2013:132-133) well describes the theoretical background informing my attitude as participant observer.

> We might rename as *mindfulness* [my emphasis] the sensibility that was once invoked as participant-observation. It is a mindfulness of being-in-place (context); mindfulness of voice and tone (socially differentiated points of view); mindfulness of pattern, contradiction, and complexity (social structure); mindfulness of temporality and unfolding (practice); mindfulness of self and other (accountability and intersubjectivity); and mindfulness of shape and process (theoretical propositions). Ethnographic sitting, and the mindful perception and listening it fosters, is part of anthropological practice. Ethnography is both a mode of attentiveness and openness to being taken off course. The capacity to be surprised is the motor that moves ethnography forward into a potential usefulness in the debate of public problems. Ethnography is an intellectual, imaginative, and affective disposition that deliberately holds open a space between research questions formed in anticipation of categories for empirical discovery and the interactions that alert the researcher to the assumptions and limitations entailed by those very questions.

During the first months of fieldwork, I preferred not to plan formal interviews, but rather to just spend time with ABREA members and start the process of our mutual acquaintance. For this reason, I attended all the events the ABREA activists were organising and/or attending in Osasco, São Paulo, and other Brazilian cities. I tried not to miss any occasion to observe and, at the same time, to be observed. I decided to use the first months of fieldwork in this way because I wanted to be confident about my communicational skills in Portuguese (a third language for me) before starting with formal interviews. Later I was able to conduct the interviews in Portuguese alone without the help of an interpreter. This was a fundamental goal to achieve since I did not want to rely on a third person who inevitably would have interfered with her presence in my encounters with my research partners, whose life stories and narratives I wanted understand directly and with all nuances. I developed the ability to conduct and transcribe formal interviews, and have informal conversations in Portuguese during my daily experience of life and study in Brazil. The delicate issue of language, writing, and translation has been largely investigated and discussed in the literature (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). In my personal experience, being able to communicate in Portuguese favoured

[13] In my fieldnotes, I wrote: "I wish my eyes could become a camera, and my ears a recorder" to record every single detail I noticed and that looked significant to my glance. My senses were like in constant alert status, and, to this concern, a sentence Professor Van Der Geest was used to say during his lectures at the Amsterdam Master's in Medical Anthropology I attended in 2012, usually came to my mind: "strangers have big eyes".

my research experience, and facilitated my theoretical and emotional understanding of the context.

Moreover, I thought that we—my research partners and I—all needed some time to get used to each other in the beginning. In fact, I was aware that I represented a markedly visible *otherness* in relation to 'them'. I was afraid that an (ethnographic) encounter could have been seriously compromised by the fact that we embodied completely distinct life stories and distant socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. In the field, I had to consider my gender (female), my age (33 years), my professional life (almost exclusively characterised by intellectual activities) as inexorable dimensions of my being the principal research instrument. On the contrary, the majority of my collaborators were male former workers (average age 65-85 years), with at least one ARD diagnosis, embodying a strong masculine culture, and knowledge acquired by manual professional experiences. I believed it was necessary and prudent not to ignore our differences, but rather to invent strategies to make the *otherness* we embodied in our relationship a possibility of encounter, and not a clash. From a methodological perspective, spending several months participating in ABREA activities before scheduling interviews and entering the intimate space of activists' daily life, turned out to be an effective strategy to favour a mutual knowing, and establish empathic communication that is essential for anthropological research (see Piasere 2002; Wikan 1992). Therefore, in addition to scheduled meetings, and interviews, the data discussed in this thesis emerged from informal conversations during lunches, nightly travels by bus, walks through Osasco, conferences, political events, and ABREA monthly meetings.

My research partners and I arranged the meetings for formal interviews between June and October 2015, and most of them occurred in Osasco (São Paulo), thanks to the contacts I had made during the ABREA monthly meetings. The majority of my research collaborators were *sufferer-activists*, mainly former asbestos workers, and their relatives. I interviewed biomedical professionals (epidemiologists, lung, and occupational health specialists), and lawyers involved in environmental and occupational health issues. All of these professionals were involved in the practices of struggle characterising anti-asbestos activism. I also had the opportunity to have informal conversations, and interviews with social actors involved in AR activism and suffering in other Brazilian contexts. In fact, to implement my research project, I visited and encountered men and women to whom I was introduced by my gatekeepers. These encounters occurred in the States of São Paulo (São Caetano, Santo André, and São Paulo), Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro), Bahia (Salvador, Poções, and Bom Jesus da Serra), Santa Catarina (Florianópolis), Goiás (Goiânia), and Paraná (Londrina).

I tried not to plan more than one interview per day. I soon noticed that after my first interviews, those that followed had a similar pattern. Generally, I proposed to meet at 10 in the morning at my collaborator's home. I left my home around 8/8.30 in the morning, by public transportation (bus and train), which took at least one hour to arrive to the Osasco's train station. From there I reached my collaborator's home by foot or bus. Most collaborators lived in neighbourhoods close to the area where the Eternit plant was situated before being demolished, therefore, most homes were reachable by foot from the train station. However, some interviews were in the most peripheral of Osasco's neighbourhoods, which were also the poorest ones. Then, I needed to take a bus. On average, the interview lasted two hours, but it was usually followed by an invitation for lunch, which I always accepted (except once). For this reason, the whole meeting, arranged on the pretext of the interview lasted five or six hours. As an anthropologist inspired by serendipity as a fruitful attitude to experience the field and by the importance of the empathy in the encounters lived in the field—always defined by the relationships occurring in it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)—those extra, unexpected, and unplanned hours spent with my research partners were most valuable. In fact, with the recorder off, and free from the emotional and practical constraints linked to the interview, I could take notice of more nuances in my collaborators' lives. Thus, I was able to situate the stories I heard during the interviews within the daily world of the narrators. In fact, I soon realised that my research partners probably felt honoured by the visit of an Italian researcher at their home, invited other family members to meet me for lunch or for a *cafezinho*, a cup of coffee. On those occasions, I could gain other perspectives on the experiences of AR suffering and activism as lived within the family's context.

In order to stimulate the narratives with my collaborators, I opened the interviews with 'grand tour' questions (Spradley 1979). Since I was interested in listening to the trajectories, contingencies, and life experiences that determined the narrator's involvement in AR suffering and activism, my collaborators often showed me old documents and photographs of their work at the plant, medical examinations, judicial actions against the firm, and activism. Sometimes I asked for these documents, yet other times they showed them to me on their own initiative. During the narratives, their work at the plant as well as their engagement in anti-asbestos activism were described with constant references to significant episodes in their life (e.g. migration, marriage, birth of children, illness experience, and death of a beloved one because of an ARD).

I formally interviewed my gatekeepers, and a few other collaborators more than once, and I accompanied one of them (diagnosed with asbestosis and pleural plaques), to two of his periodical lung examinations in the hospital.

In addition to oral data, collected through formal interviews and informal conversations, this study is based on visual and written data from ABREA archives and website, as well as my study at Osasco's public library, research institutes, and museums. There, I consulted newspapers articles, and followed Osasco's history through old pictures, and objects of material culture.

A relevant part of data presented in this thesis emerged as well from my own feelings and perceptions, and the emotions I felt during encounters with the research partners. In data collection and analysis phases, the contingencies and the shared affects making each encounter unique were considered not just as possible sources of bias, but as unavoidable and precious aspects of ethnographic research. This consists of encounters in which the emotions of both the researcher and her collaborator(s) matter; reflecting on them is essential to analyse the relational (emotional) knowledge emerged from (and felt in) the field (see Rosaldo 1984; Lutz and White 1986; Kleinman and Copp 1993; Leavitt 1996; Pussetti 2005; Ligi 2011b). I tried to save and transpose in words the evanescent, but incisive presence of those feelings in my fieldnotes written in Italian, my mother tongue. Driven by a sort of urgency to not forget, I usually wrote my notes soon after particularly meaningful interview, informal conversation, or participation in a meeting. I used to write down my notes (depending on the level of crowd in the bus or train) during my daily two-hour journey between Osasco and São Paulo, or between my home and the Faculty of Public Health of the University of São Paulo, to which I was affiliated as visiting student during my stay in Brazil. Night-time was also a favourable moment for writing my notes, when I came back to the place that was my home during fieldwork, and where I could isolate and protect myself from the urban jungle I faced during the day. In fact, my constant feeling while I was living in São Paulo was like being immersed in a vibrating flux of a restless movement through bodies, cars, buildings, and lights. While this made me feel alive and excited, at the same time, it made me feel incredibly tired and sometimes overwhelmed by the pulsating and enormous life around me.

In addition to my fieldnotes, photographs had a fundamental and unexpected important role in the development of my research, in both my personal experiments of data collection and my research partners' attempts to narrate their stories. I refer to contributions from studies on photography (see Sontag 1990; Bourdieu and Bourdieu 2004), visual anthropology (Chiozzi 1993) and those implementing a phenomenological approach both in my data collection and

analysis (Grenfell and Lebaron 2014), since photography was another method to collect and record what I perceived in the field, but could not be expressed or heard in words.

On one hand, based on the centrality of the body in the experiences of suffering as well as of activism, I tried to capture the traces of asbestos contamination, and trajectories inscribed in the bodies of my research collaborators through a camera. At the same time, I photographed situations that to me were emblematic of the affects and emotions at stake in an individual's engagement in anti-asbestos activism. On the other hand, while elaborating their life stories, my research collaborators often showed me pictures from their youth, marriages, and children to elaborate their narrative, and by doing so they facilitated my entrance to a world to which I could have access only through their memories. Moreover, photographs, especially portraits of relatives, and friends who already died from ARDs, were used as instruments of struggle during awareness campaigns, denunciations, and protests. ABREA activists strategically used a socio-political critique embodied by a suffering (dead) body. Fassin's words are particularly appropriate to describe those practices, "as their voices are silenced, it is their bodies that speak" (Fassin 2011:288), even in the physical absence of the victim who is indeed present in memory practices and discourses.

Managing a constantly evoked past, and the daily remarked upon absence of a loved one, proved to be one of the more emotionally and theoretically challenging aspects of the study.

In the Appendix, I include a few of the photographs I took in Brazil in 2014-2015. They represent ethnographic data meaningful in relation to the purposes of this thesis that is rooted in the life stories of suffering and activism of the men and women I encountered throughout my stay in Osasco and São Paulo, and my travels across Brazil while following the traces of the *disasters* provoked by the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011). Inspired by Eskerod's photographs, constituting an integral part of Biehl's *Vita. Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (2005)[14], and in line with Sassen (2011), in this thesis I present only black and white photographs as they by 'creating distance' and 'unsettling meanings' favour reflection and theorization (Sassen 2001).

[14] To understand biopolitical dynamics and processes in contemporary Brazil, I particularly referred to the studies of Biehl (2005), Biehl and Petryna (2011), Edmonds (2010), Ribeiro Corossacz (2004, 2005), de Camargo Ferreira Adorno (2014).

Data analysis

My research consisted of an exploratory study based on the consideration of experiences and meanings elaborated starting from the embodiment of social and political processes, and in the awareness of the relational dimension of the knowledge emerged from the fieldwork experience (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Grenfell and Lebaron 2014; Starks and Brown Trinidad 2007). Based on these premises, I analysed data following a phenomenological approach. By quoting Professor Remotti (2016)[15], the anthropologist's craft is to identify and establish relations. Accordingly, I first extrapolated data by elaborating codes and identifying recurring themes, then I proceeded to re-contextualise the data in order to identify and investigate the relations appearing meaningful to answer my research questions (Grenfell and Lebaron 2014). In this regard, writing appeared a crucial emotionally, theoretically, and practically challenging step of the analysis phase (see Probyn 2010).

Ethical and practical considerations

I conducted my research as PhD student, funded by a grant, at the Department of History and Cultures of the University of Bologna, Italy. My public funding gave me the possibility to do research without the conflicts of economic and political interests, and to make the main decisions for the project's development. Although this study would not exist without the collaborations, conversations, and encounters with my research partners, I am the only one responsible for its content. Therefore, I assume the ethical, moral, political, and theoretical responsibility of what I write in front of my research collaborators who shared with me a part of their lives.

My research project obtained the approval of the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Public Health of the University of São Paulo. This was essential since without approval I could not have conducted formal interviews[16]. Each formal interview started with a short introduction of myself, with an explanation of the study's purposes, and the submission of the informed consent module. I invited my research partners to read the module (by themselves, with me, or with another social actor present, if there were impairments for solitary reading). Then, I invited the research partner to sign the consent document or to verbally express consent while

[15] *Per un'Antropologia Inattuale* [For a Non-actual Anthropology], seminar held at the University of Bologna, on May 11, 2016.

[16] Any research involving human beings in Brazil has to be authorised by an ethical committee in order to safeguard the subjects involved in the research, regardless of the discipline in which the study occurs.

I was recording, based on the elements (e.g. research purposes and methods, minimal risks, my academic affiliations) I had summarised in the module.

During our encounters, I tried to be as respectful as possible of my research partners' privacy, and suffering. I am aware that accepting to take part of the study and narrating painful and intimate episodes of their lives could have been (and in some cases was visibly) emotionally challenging. At the same time, I was aware that the emotions my research partners felt, and perceived influenced both them and me, while elaborating and interpreting together the narratives of AR suffering and activism during our encounters. I tried to consider and avoid the eventual excess of empathy that could have come from my emotional engagement with the men and women I met in the field.

Anonymity of my research partners was another relevant ethical issue I considered. The majority of the narratives quoted in this thesis are anonymous, even though I agree with Fonseca (2010) who states that anonymity does not necessarily mean to be respectful of researcher's collaborators. While researching practices of activism, I often encountered social actors who considered their participation to the study a political act (see Simonelli 2007), and who explicitly told me that they would have been honoured if their names appeared in a publication about their mobilization. This wish is understandable especially if we consider the kind of struggle—recognition struggle (Hobson 2003)—the *sufferer-activists* I met were conducting. However, in order to safeguard my research partners, I decided to preserve the anonymity of all of them, with the exception of few cases. I will explicitly mention social actors' names only when I will consider it opportune for the scientific purposes of this study, or when to keep them silent would represent a lack of respect of their stories of suffering and activism.

I am aware that I could only have entered the 'world' of Brazilian anti-asbestos activism thanks to the contacts and the knowledge acquired during my previous investigations in Italy. I was a researcher familiar with the study of anti-asbestos activism, and based on my professional and personal engagement, I was easily recognised as a supporter of this movement. However, my political and intellectual commitment to anti-asbestos activism, so visible and public in certain circumstances, sometimes caused practical and emotional difficulties during the fieldwork. For instance, I was not able to include the narratives of asbestos workers who joined associations claiming the safety of asbestos 'controlled use'[17] in this study, nor did I attain permission to visit the currently active asbestos mine, or the largest

[17] For a list of associations and organizations in favour of asbestos use see the website of the *Instituto Brasileiro do Crisotila* [Brazilian Institute of Chrysotile] www.ibcbrasil.org.br.

AC plant in Brazil. I relate these absences to the easiness by which I can be identified as supporter of anti-asbestos activism due to my academic publications available on line, and the frequency of my attendance at the activities of anti-asbestos organizations in Italy as well as in Brazil. Although my focus concerns the practices of anti-asbestos activism, the current study would have been enriched by the inclusion of other perspectives on the experiences of AR unrecognised *disasters*.

Structure of the thesis

The trajectories of AR activism and disasters are presented in this thesis by following the movements of capital, bodies, and struggles across the AC plants, hospitals, streets, homes, and courts where the *sufferer-activists* met in the field led me through their narratives and by accepting my presence in their daily life.

In the first part of the thesis (Chapters Two and Three), I traced the history of asbestos mining and industry in Brazil based on participant observation and on the narratives of workers and miners diagnosed with ARDs contracted because of occupational exposure to asbestos. The exposure occurred decades earlier had left traces of visible/invisible contaminations in the exposed bodies and in the environment, human and natural resources exploited and destroyed.

The chapters that constitute the central part of the thesis (Chapters Four, Five and Six) represent the focus of this dissertation. Chapter Four provides an analysis of Osasco's socio-political fabric, in which are situated the strategies and moral of the activism undertaken by the *sufferer-activists* organized in the ABREA. Chapter Five presents and discusses the experiences of suffering and activism lived by the disaster survivors. On one hand, in these experiences the personal reasons of sufferers engaging with the activism are rooted. On the other hand, the activism has provided the sufferers with the 'words' to 'read' their own suffering as a consequence of injustice, in the name of which it appears necessary to mobilize. Chapter Six explores the politics of anti-asbestos activism through the considerations of the relationships established by ABREA with political interlocutors and representatives of biomedical, technical and legal knowledges. Thanks to the dialogues established since the earliest steps of mobilization, ABREA is actively situated in the local socio-political context, and in the national and transnational contexts of activism; it has been able to enter the negotiation processes of knowledge- and rights-making, addressing issues related to health, environment, and active practices of citizenship.

The third and final part of the thesis explores the trajectories that intersect each other in the transnational AR disasters (Chapter Seven), while Chapter Eight broadens the perspective on these disasters by considering them in terms of global public health issues. It reflects on the movement for the global asbestos prohibition, and on the contribution of anthropology in approaching these health *disasters* that are transnationally intertwined and locally experienced.

PART I

The movements of asbestos, bodies, and capital

Chapter 2: Asbestos Mining

Prologue[18]

On the road. In the bus from Poções to Salvador… São Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos (as the Portuguese colonisers named it). I am the only *gringa* [foreigner] and the only woman travelling alone. I have a headache. These days, I often have headache. Perhaps it is due to exhaustion or to the long journeys by coach. Perhaps it is due to my many thoughts ... or too much life. I do not know.

Outside the window, is a flow of plastic bags caught in the branches of trees, bottles, trash on the roadside, misery, *borracharias* [tire centres], *lanchonetes* [diners], improbable restaurants, and hotels... lives... Lives forgotten by God and by all the saints and the spirits. Men and women living and still suffering from the violence that has lasted for centuries of brutality, oppression and exploitation.

The bus stops at every single tiny village we cross. When it stops, street vendors jump inside to sell drinks and snacks, even roasted skewers. I am upset by seeing so many plastic bags caught in the branches of bushes and trees, everything appears to me as contaminated and dirty. The residues of our presence are everywhere and are so destructive.

The rain, the clouds, the wind, and the asbestos stones to my senses made the places I visited grey and ominous. Anguish and melancholy are accompanying me along this journey through Bahia. I expected the sun and instead I found clouds and rain. Rain was not expected in this season, this should be the dry season. ABREA members from Osasco had told me that I would visit an arid place, and instead it is raining all the time.

Introduction

> *In the proximity of the mine's entrance, there are the church, the school, and some houses which constituted the workers' village. Now everything is abandoned. It is like being in a ghost town. The traces of the ceased activities, the rain, the colours… all increases my feeling of anguish.*

[18] From my fieldnotes written on August 19, 2015.

I wrote the abovementioned words in my fieldnotes, soon after my visit to the abandoned mine of São Felix, in August 2015. Although the mining activities ceased in 1967, they could be still sensed in the area in terms of the impact they produced on the local context, by considering their effects both on the environment and on socio-economic fabric.

The main concern of this chapter is to reflect both on the trajectories situating the exploitation of asbestos minerals in the global mining industry's dynamics and the related practices of activism that have emerged from the social and individual suffering.

Based on ethnographic data collected during a visit to Bom Jesus da Serra (Poções, Bahia), where the socio-political and environmental settings have been deeply marked by the presence of an (abandoned) asbestos mine, I consider the historical and economic processes leading to a massive extraction of asbestos minerals as raw material to be used in various industrial sectors. By relying on my fieldwork as well as on anthropological literature on mining contexts and communities (see Burawoy 1972; Nash 1979; Taussig 2010; Smith 1981; Gillis 1982; Knapp and Pigott 1997; Bridge 2004; Luning 2012; D'Angelo 2012), I discuss the impact of mining on the local social fabric.

Then, I reflect on the traces left by the mining industry on the environment and on the body of former miners and their family members who had been exposed to asbestos. After almost fifty years from the cease of the extraction activities, the contaminated (and contaminating) mine site and the condition of social and bodily suffering in which the men and women I met with lived represented only the most visible traces of injustices bore and embodied throughout centuries of war and peacetime violence in north-eastern Brazil.

A Magical Evil Stone

> *In the morning, when the windows were open and the sunlight entered the plant, you could see many little stars in the air, many little stars. It was asbestos. Once asbestos was reduced in fibres, before being introduced in the production cycles, and being mixed with cement, we put it in the bags with the shovel and with the pitchfork. You can understand that by stirring asbestos in that way, the fibres flew everywhere. They flew in the air and we breathed them. They looked like stars because asbestos shines in the light, it is like a crystal. Therefore, it shimmered, and you could see all those little stars in the air, everywhere in the plant, inside and outside.*

The *little stars* shimmering in the sunlight are the first image remembered by a man from Casale Monferrato when describing the working environment at an asbestos-cement (AC) plant in Rio de Janeiro, where he was employed as electrician during the 1950s. More than once in my fieldwork a worker recalled the image of *little stars* or *little grains* floating in the

air, and shining in the sun, to explain the dustiness of the working place. I will later consider the practices through which a clearly perceived dustiness was not recognised as a source of danger. Rather, the words and tones of voice used by former workers seemed to evoke a certain enchantment.

Known since ancient times, asbestos minerals have been celebrated until the last century as magical due to their physical properties. In fact, asbestos minerals are made up by countless microscopic fibres, which can be easily manipulated and used in numerous ways. At the same time, the fibres are incredibly resistant, especially to fire (Rossi 2008). The Greek etymology άσβεστος [asbestos] means incorruptible, inextinguishable, and eternal (Rossi 2008). For this reason, asbestos was believed to be, using Marco Polo's words (1496), the "salamander's wool", because like the small amphibian the fibres cannot be damaged by fire (Rossi 2008). The first mentions of asbestos appears in the writings of the Greek geographer Strabo (64 BC - 24 AC), who praises asbestos woven textiles that are washable with fire, instead of water (Roselli 2010:33), while in *Historia Naturalis*, Pliny the Elder (AC 23 –AD 79) describes shrouds made with asbestos to safeguard the corpses of kings, and queens (Roselli 2010:33).

Marco Polo's *The Book of the Marvels of the World* (1496) offers one of the first descriptions of asbestos extractive activities.

> The stones, with the agglutinated fibres, were hammered in order to have smaller pieces from which the precious fibres were obtained. Once the fibres were washed, they could be woven like wool. The resulting textiles were not completely white, but they could be whitened in contact with fire. Moreover, every time they became dirty, to clean them it was sufficient leaving them in the fire (Polo 1496 quoted in Roselli 2010:34)[19].

The massive exploitation and industrial use of asbestos minerals began at the of the 19th Century with the discovery of an asbestos mine in Québec in 1877 (Roselli 2010:34), and it boomed in the beginning of the 20th Century. In 1902, the Austrian chemist Ludwig Hatschek patented a mixture of asbestos and cement (asbestos-cement [AC]) in a 1:6 ratio, and named it "Eternit" from the Latin etymology *eternus* [eternal] to emphasise the extraordinary quality of the resulting products. The patent was then sold, and AC-containing products have been (and still are) manufactured worldwide, with huge profits for asbestos industries due to the low cost of the raw materials (Altopiedi 2011).

The principal asbestos mines massively exploited throughout the 20th Century were situated in the former Soviet Union, Canada, South Africa, Zimbabwe, China, Brazil, Italy, and United

[19] I refer to the Spanish edition of Roselli's monography (2010). I personally translated the reported quote from Spanish to English, as, throughout the thesis, I translated all the quotes from Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish into English.

States (Iocca 2011:144). In Europe, the largest asbestos mine was in Balangero (Italy, Piedmont Region) less than 150 kilometres from the largest Eternit plant in Europe that was situated in Casale Monferrato. Balangero's mine was active from the 1920s to the 1990s. In an investigative report for the newspaper "L'Unità", the Italian intellectual, writer, and journalist Italo Calvino (1954) used the following words to describe the quarry's environment:

> At the time in which a new working turn starts, the workers arrive from the forest paths, those of Balangero, those of Coassolo, those of Corio, with their attitude of mountaineers, with their corduroy jackets, big boots, and caps with balaclavas.
> They seem hunters who go for hares or just for mushrooms, as they have no gun.
> But there are not hares in the woods, and mushrooms do not grow on the red soil of chestnut's husks, wheat does not grow in the hard fields of the villages around,
> there is only the grey asbestos dust cloud from the quarry, which, where it arrives, burns leaves, and lungs, there is the quarry, the only one like this in Europe, and their [of miners] lives, and deaths.

To date, the major asbestos producing countries are China (26%), India (25%), Brazil (9%), and Russia (8%)[20]. In Brazil, the all extracted asbestos comes from the Minaçu's quarry, the unique mine currently active on the Brazilian territory that is situated in the State of Goiás (Central Brazil). In the beginning of the industrial use of asbestos in Brazil, the raw material was imported. Brazil began to use and export its own asbestos starting in the 1930s, when the asbestos quarry situated in the *fazenda* [farm] São Felix was discovered in Bom Jesus da Serra (Poções, Bahia). The mining industry in Brazil began with

> the involvement of two multinational corporations: Pont-à-Mousson, to which succeeded the French Brasilit S.A. (currently divided in "Saint-Gobain do Brasil" for industrial products, and "Ltda Divisão Brasilit" for construction), and a subsidiary of the Swiss-Belgian joint venture "Eternit do Brasil Cimento Amianto S.A." (currently, "Eternit S.A.") (Giannasi 2012:65-71).

The French firm began asbestos mining in Brazil before the Eternit group, soon after the São Felix mine was discovered. The French participated in the foundation of the company "S.A. Mineração de Amianto" (SAMA), in 1939 and, soon afterwards, they obtained the authorization for asbestos extraction. On the very same day of the authorization receiving, "SAMA was bought by "S.A. Brasilit", belonging to the French group "Compagnie Pont-à-Mousson", and later changed its name to "Saint-Gobain"" (Giannasi 2012:65-71). The Saint Gobain firm exploited the São Felix mine until 1967, when with the Eternit group (including the Brasilit with the 55% of the shares, and the Eternit with 45%) they transferred the mining activities to Minaçu (Goiás), where the larger Cana Brava mine had been recently discovered.

[20] Percentages related to the global asbestos production (US Geological Survey 2017).

The partnership lasted until 1997, when "Eternit S.A." took control of all the activities and, in so doing inherited the social and environmental responsibilities of the management and abandonment of the area occupied by the São Felix mine in Bahia (Giannasi 2012).

According to the narratives I heard during my fieldwork, the decision to cease activities in São Felix was sudden and based on economic reasoning to gain larger profits from asbestos mining in disregard of the despairing conditions of misery, exacerbated by the contamination of bodies and environment, in which the 'peasant-miners' (Godoy 1985) from Bom Jesus da Serra were left. During fieldwork, my research partners from Osasco solicited my visit to Bom Jesus da Serra because they maintained that my research would be significantly enriched by directly experiencing the ruins of the extraction. Once in Bom Jesus da Serra, *"você vai entender o que é a violência do capital"* [you will understand what capital's violence means], they told me. You should go there to know *"how painful life can be in such an arid region, with nothing but starvation and asbestos stones still everywhere"*[21].

When I had the opportunity, I decided to visit the abandoned mine of São Felix as well, despite my discomfort and fears triggered by the awareness that by doing so I would be surrounded by and exposed to a huge quantity of asbestos. However, I went. It was not a decision driven by courage. During my visit to the mine, I entered a tunnel to reach the canyon dug by the extraction activities. Afterwards, in my fieldnotes, I wrote: *I was terrified by the asbestos, the dark, the claustrophobic space, the bats' sounds, and by my being there completely dependent on another person* [my male gatekeeper/guide] in that unfamiliar place represented by the mine. However, my intellectual curiosity was greater than my fears. I really wanted to know what my gatekeepers were talking about and understand why they thought that it was so important for them that I visited the abandoned mine, the village, and meet the former miners. Therefore, in August 2015, by scrupulously following my gatekeepers' advices to limit my own exposure, I visited a mine that was abandoned in 1967, but whose impact was vivid in the desolate, and deadly landscape I found and in the stories of the suffering of the men and women I met[22].

I quote my fieldnotes written after my first and unique visit to São Felix mine in Bom Jesus da Serra on August 18, 2015.

> *In the tunnel, I tried to focus only on my feet by not looking around and above me to try not to think about the fact that I was in a narrow, closed and dark space and not to fall trapped in my fears. As I walked, I did not realize the presence of bats, probably by unconsciously denying it, although I could hear their screeches and I could see*

[21] From an interview conducted in Osasco (July 2015).
[22] In Appendix, photographs 3-8 were taken during my visit to Bom Jesus da Serra.

their excrement. The mask made me sweat. Rodrigo had told me to take it off if I was not able to breathe because of the lack of oxygen, but I did not want to take it away. It was very hot. When we were approaching the end of the tunnel, the sunshine illuminated the space and I saw a bat. I was frightened and ran to the exit. I was relieved to be finally outside and in an open space. It took a few seconds to realise that I was just in the middle of the canyon. I was in the hub of quarry, surrounded by asbestos stones. In the tunnel, I was afraid of the bats whose presence I might perceive. But, how many asbestos fibres might be floating in the air invisible to my eyes. I was still wearing the mask, but I did not feel safe. To reach the car we had to climb on the mountain walls. In some places, we had no other option than leaning on asbestos rocks. Only when I entered the car, did I take off the mask. I was happy to leave. I wanted to escape from that terrible place. Before visiting the quarry, Rodrigo had taken me to the Branca de Neve [Whiteness of Snow] *cemetery, so called because of the white cloud of dust that rose in that area, when the mine was active. Many of the local inhabitants who had worked at the mine were buried there. White and heavy clouds in the sky. Rodrigo opened the cemetery' gate and we entered. I noticed that I was stepping on numerous stones of various size. I realised that they were asbestos stones, but I did not want to admit it to myself. I asked Rodrigo and he confirmed what I had already suspected. He took one stone from the ground to show me it closely. I told him that it was not necessary. It showed me the headstone of a man who had participated to the documentary we had watched the night before. The headstone was made of asbestos as the other ones present. All of them were very simple. The dates referred to births and deaths that occurred indistinctly in many decades ago or in recent times. I had the impression that time did not exist there and we were like suspended and our voices muffled. We were in another world. In a dark, cloudy, dreadful, and dusty world… of death.*

In Bridge's (2004) literature review, mines are unfamiliar landscapes that can favour feelings of alienation and distrust in a visitor who enters a mine site for the first time. I found this to be true even in the case of my visit to a mine that was no longer operating. My feeling was that I was not in a living world, but in a deadly one (Bridge 2004:243), both for the landscape's desolation where I was, and for the nefarious presence of asbestos stones wherever I looked. In those circumstances, I began to understand why my gatekeepers from Osasco wanted me to visit the abandoned mine, and to have a direct experience of the violence intrinsic to the capitalistic (asbestos) economics. In fact, when the firm decided to suddenly cease the extractive activities in Bom Jesus da Serra in 1967 because of a richer asbestos deposit newly discovered in Minaçu (Goiás), they abandoned the area, careless of the consequences of such a sudden change on the local socio-economic context and of their responsibility concerning the contamination produced by asbestos extraction.

Mining processes and dynamics

The only protection I had was the fôlego de vida [life's breath] *that God had given me, and the strength of my body... I had nothing else*[23].

The ethnographic research conducted by Taussig (2010[24]) and Nash (1979) with Bolivian tin miners represent landmark contributions to a tradition of anthropologic studies focused on the practices, socio-economic impact, and symbolic meaning through which extraction activities are lived and interpreted by social actors involved in mining processes.

The interest on mining contexts became more intense starting from the 1980s, when environmental and economic crises became urgent topics both in academic and public debates (Godoy 1985). According to Godoy (1985:205), some elements such as "the physical and social isolation of mining communities, coupled with the harsh working conditions and the labour requirements of the mining industry, give rise to recurrent patterns of population dynamics, labour recruitment practices, and political organization". By considering these elements, mining contexts have offered important scenarios for multi- and interdisciplinary investigations, including studies in epidemiology, engineering, anthropology, and geography.

Historical analyses have shown that mining economics has been, and still is based on a "labour-intensive operation" making "the procurement of an ample and reliable supply of inexpensive labourers" one of the first and fundamental requirements for mining companies (Godoy 1985: 205). Godoy recalls studies that draw attention to the coercive recruitment of miners (see Burawoy 1976; Johnstone 1976; Wilson 1971), and the role of State in increasing human and natural exploitation in countries with mineral resources, while negotiating the mines' management with often foreign firms (Mamalakis 1977). In most contexts, these negotiations have meant the expropriation of land and violations of indigenous communities' rights. Similar dynamics have occurred in Bom Jesus da Serra according to a research collaborator who was my gatekeeper (I refer to him as Rodrigo here) during the short period of fieldwork spent in Bahia.

Rodrigo, a descendent of the indigenous group of *pataxo*, was born approximately 60 years ago in a hamlet belonging to Bom Jesus da Serra called Bom Filho do Amianto (literally translated "asbestos' good son"). The village's name recalls an analogy drawn by Eliade (1962 quoted by Godoy 1985), who related a mine's generative power to a uterus. In this analogy, extraction is compared to obstetrics, ores to an embryo, shafts to a vagina, and

[23] From an interview conducted in Bom Jesus da Serra/Poções, Bahia (August 2015).
[24] Thirtieth Anniversary Edition.

miners to an obstetrician. Rodrigo is an "asbestos' son" since his life story is deeply intertwined with the story of asbestos extraction, the abandonment of the mine, and the civil mobilization organised in reaction to the impact of mining economics on the environment and social fabric of this Bahian municipality situated in the *sertão* that is a semi-arid region of north-eastern Brazil[25]. I quote the initial lines of the dialogue Rodrigo and I had, when I visited Bom Jesus da Serra.

> *A: How was this mine discovered?*
> *R: We do not know the story exactly, but it is narrated that a plane crashed here. The pilot survived and he spent some time here while trying to fix the plane and leave. During the weeks he spent here he became friends with the natives and during a conversation someone talked to him about the* pedra cabeluda [hairy stone i.e. asbestos]*, a stone that was common to be found in this area. He was intrigued by this story, and wanted to see, in person, the* pedra cabeluda*. Therefore, natives showed him some of those stones on which, since they had been bitten by animals, the* cabelo [hair i.e. asbestos fibres]*, was clearly visible between the interstices on their surfaces. Then the pilot, who was a French geologist, left and after a few months he came back here with other geologists… This is how they discovered the São Felix mine.*

In Rodrigo's narrative, asbestos was referred to as *pedra cabeluda* according to the term locals used to talk about asbestos, before "they", the foreigners, "discovered" the mine.

The above lines show elements recurrent in mining processes, and understanding. For instance, according to Godoy's (1985) literature review, in various contexts where the presence of a mineral field deeply influences the social and ritual life of a community, the mineral can be attributed with human characteristics and symbolised with anthropomorphic images. Taussig (2010) and Nash (1979) described representations and rituals elaborated by the Bolivian tin miners in regards to *el tio* [the uncle], associated with the evil, the deity who controls the tin resources. Minerals are not seen as inanimate objects in any cultural traditions, instead ores can represent 'living substances' (Godoy 1985:209), and they can show 'hair' as asbestos stones do. In Rodrigo's narratives, the 'characters' represented by the French come to play a crucial role. The discovery they made meant the beginning of mineral exploitation within a process of revolutionary change of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics characterising the local context. The peculiarities I found in Bom Jesus da Serra are emblematic of the potential of change that is intrinsic to mining economics. Knapp and Pigott (1997) underlined the role of the mining industry in establishing new social relations between individuals, and in promoting regional interactions beyond community boundaries. As it

[25] The documentary *Amianto. Desinformação Mata* [Asbestos. Disinformation Kills] by the *Comissão de Proteção ao Meio Ambiente – Assembléia Legislativa da Bahia* [Commission for the Protection of the Environment – Legislative Assembly of Bahia] represents a well documented reference to understand the Bahian context of AR disaster and activism.

happened in Bom Jesus da Serra, mining villages were often built rapidly and in pre-existing agricultural villages where soon after the beginning of mining industry, peasants ceased working in agriculture, and became miners, or even better, 'peasant-miners' (Godoy 1985). "The cycles of mining and agriculture in many mining regions suggest that we must concentrate not just on mining as an activity but also—or perhaps instead—on the history of the people who made up the mining community" (Knapp and Pigott 1997:304).

However, the changes produced by mining industry intertwined with pre-existing dynamics and vulnerabilities. The anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro in *O Povo Brasileiro. A Formação e o Sentido do Brasil* [The Brazilian People. The Formation and Meaning of Brazil] (2006) offers a brilliant interpretation of the profound disparities and contradictions still occurring in Brazil by situating them within an historical process of human and environmental exploitation where colonialism, slavery, and dizzy industrialization are manifestations of a violence perpetrated at various levels of the management of a country. I refer to Ribeiro (2006) as well as to more recent contributions from contemporary Brazilian anthropologists and historians such as Schwarcz and Starling (2015) and Botelho and Schwarcz (2009), when I situate the scenario I observed, and the narratives I heard in Bom Jesus da Serra within centuries of peacetime violence perpetrated over vulnerable communities in Brazil. While contextualizing the socio-political and cultural setting where Bom Jesus da Serra was situated, I referred as well to the first chapter of *Death Without Weeping*. *The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, in which the anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes retraced the historical processes leading to the routinization of violence (and suffering) in north-eastern Brazil (Scheper-Hughes 1992).

The following quotation refers not just to the mining's socio-economic impact on a context previously dedicated to agriculture, but also to dynamics of violence, and abuses exacerbated by the launching of the mining industry.

> *A: Did Bom Jesus da Serra exist before the mine's discovery?*
> *R: No, it did not exist. Here there was only the fazenda. After they discovered the mine, the first houses of the village were built. Warehouses, textile shops, a pharmacy, even a restaurant offering a French menu, were opened here and all the social and economic life of the village were concentred around the São Felix mine, situated in the fazenda owned by a local family.*
> *A: Did the French who found the mine buy the land from that family?*
> *R: No, they invaded the land… At that time the* coronéis [colonels] *ruled over the region… they just took the land they wanted despite property rights, they had the total control, they killed who dared resistance to their power… The* coronéis *were powerful, rich, and armed people who controlled everything and who decided who should be killed… There was nothing against them. Everything was in their grip.*
> *A: Were the French linked to these* coronéis*?*

> *R: Possibly yes. Probably they stipulated agreements with the* coroneis *and took, by force, the* fazenda*. Then, the son of the legitimate* fazenda*'s owner worked at the mine and he presumably died from asbestosis in 1987.*

Dispossessions and violations of indigenous communities' rights are recurrent during the first steps of processes of the implementation of a mining industry in a specific context. In this phase, the role of political institutions and administrative organizations can be marginal in safeguarding the rights of citizens and minority groups, and decisive in favouring capital investments from multinational corporations instead (see Godoy 1985). The promises of immediate benefits such as infrastructure, wealth, and the socio-economic and political interests of politicians, governors, and entrepreneurs play a crucial role in overshadowing, or even ignoring the risks connected to an activity with significant social and environmental impact such as mining activities (see Godoy 1985).

> *Here, before their arrival there was just the* sertão [semi-arid rural region]*, then they concentrated all activities close to the* estrada ferrada [railway] *and the city developed with a big market which attracted even people coming from Itabuna, and Salvador to do shopping here. Consider this, Agata: until 1937 money was not circulating here. If I had a bag of beans and he had a bag of rice, we exchanged them. There was a barter system. Only after the SAMA's* [the company "S.A. Mineração de Amianto"] *arrival, money began to circulate in the region.*

Undeniably, the mining industry triggered a revolution in the local social and economic fabric that intertwined the life's trajectories of the men and women I met, and whose narratives spoke about conditions of vulnerability, experienced at various levels and in several periods of their existences. Poverty, illiteracy, and child labour moulded their life stories, and represented the bases of a vulnerability that still characterised their lives as retired workers suffering from the effects of asbestos economics and politics on their bodies and existences.

The company and local institutions' denial of asbestos danger, as well as the uncertainties that still compromised official recognition of AR *disaster* in Bahia (Novello 2012) can be included among the dynamics through which 'structural violence' (Farmer 1996) is perpetrated, and a condition of vulnerability is maintained.

I recall a part from the abovementioned quote: *"then, the son of the legitimate* fazenda*'s owner worked at the mine and he presumably died from asbestosis in 1987".* It continued with the following dialogue.

> *A: Why do you say presumably?*
> *R: Because at that time we did not know anything about asbestos dangers, and the diseases the exposure to it could provoke. Here asbestos used to be considered as a sacred thing that brought progress and wealth to the village.*

These last lines introduce the argument of the next section, where starting from the consideration of asbestos as a 'sacred thing' and of the uncertainty about the causes of a miner's death—*he presumably died from asbestosis*—I discuss the practices through which the disasters related to the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011) occur and are lived. Despite the *silence* and lack of recognition of risk, structural violence is made visible by the traces inscribed on the 'suffering bodies' (see Mazzeo 2012, 2013), and is vivid in the stories of men and women whose embodied memory came to represent a political tool in the local civil mobilization. In this regard, particularly appropriate is the Merleau-Ponty's (1945) quote in Fassin (2007):

> The true mark of history is inscribed in the materiality of the physical and psychic being. The specific past which is our body can only be seized by an individual life because it has never transcended it, because it secretly nurtures it and partly uses its strengths—because it remains its present. *The body is therefore a past embodied in a present* [my emphasis]. It is the tangible trace of time, the mark that brings it up to date (Fassin 2007:177-178).

Embodying the Eternal

Ele ainda está vivo porque fez um tratamento, mas ele tem o minério dentro dele
[He is still alive because he underwent a treatment, but he has the mineral inside].

'Peasant-miners' (Godoy 1985) worked with asbestos on average 10 hours per day, without any protection, in places where *"the amount of dust was unquantifiable"*[26]. The jobs varied, for instance, filling bags with the mineral, hammering, or working in the cutting sector or in the mill. According to my research partners' narratives, there was certain flexibility and the same worker frequently was involved in several activities. This meant that it was common for a worker to move through all areas of the mine, and therefore, be more easily exposed to asbestos. The dustiest workplaces remembered were the *câmaras de poeira* [dust rooms]. The Portuguese expression means 'dust rooms' and it refers to the sectors where asbestos stones were broken to extract the fibres.

> *Sometimes, I asked for extra-hour jobs, and they assigned me to the hardest tasks such as cleaning the cane of the* câmara de poeira, *and similar things. In those circumstances, I literally immersed myself into the dust. I swam through all that dust*[27].

Workers *swam* into the dust in the total absence of safety measures. However, the mining activities did not exposed just the miners, but also their families, and those who lived in the

[26] From an interview conducted in Bom Jesus da Serra/Poções, Bahia (August 2015).
[27] From an interview conducted in Bom Jesus da Serra/Poções, Bahia (August 2015).

recently founded town. I quote two interviews that show that the exposure was not confined to the workplaces where asbestos was manipulated, since asbestos fibres are microscopic, but also because of the practices and social relationships of mining economics.

> *I was eight years old when they closed the mine, but I remember quite well that time. The mining company provided with a small hammer—like those geologists use—workers' children and wives who wanted to collect fibres from the stones which had not been broken. I did it. I collected and broke asbestos stones together with my older brother. When we had filled a bag of some kilos of fibres, we went to the mine's offices, where an employer weighed the bag and gave us back an IOU (informal acknowledgement of a debt) on which he wrote the equivalent of fibres in money. That IOU had commercial value, it was considered as money and we could use it here in Bom Jesus da Serra. The local merchants took that paper and then, on the exact day, they went to the mine to take the money. My brother and I used to prepare* capangas [small cotton bags] *at home, and with them we went to collect fibres. With the earned money we bought candies, fireworks for São João day, and other things. However, we gave the most part of the money to our parents, to help at home.* […]
> *At home, my mum used to put two tablecloths. The bed sheets were also two. In this way, she tried to cover the tablecloth and the bed sheets we used and have them as clean as possible, despite the dust* [that] *was everywhere. The air was full of fibres. Only the engineers' homes had the floor with tiles, ours were just covered by asbestos and cement; we ate food mixed with fibres even at home.*
>
> *My aunt suffered from asthma, one of the most severe. She had so violent asthma attacks that it seemed she had a plastic bag over the head. She never worked at the mine, but she lived in the village nearby.*

The mine was a constant presence in the daily life of workers' families and the village's economic and social activities pivoted around it. At the same time, the potential dangers related to asbestos exposure were pervasive in everyone's experience of the world, and although silent and unrecognised, these dangers affected all exposed bodies and produced disastrous *critical events* (Das 1995), that were lived both privately and collectively.

Most of the expressions used to talk about one's exposure at work as well as at home evoked fibres' inhalation by using the verb *comer* [to eat] followed by the nouns fibres or *pó* [dust] to indicate asbestos. *"We ate food mixed with fibres even at home"* or *"he ate the fibres, as we all did here"* are just two examples of recurrent themes of my research collaborators' narratives[28]. 'Eating the dust' is an effective image to consider the embodiment of the socio-economic and political processes (Csordas 1990; Fassin 2007; Quaranta 2012b), through which AR *disasters* occur. Unlike the idea of unanimated nature and inedibility associated with minerals and investigated by anthropologists (see Taussig 2010; Nash 1979; Godoy

[28] It should be noted that I heard similar expressions not only during the encounters I have had with miners in Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), or with workers in Osasco (São Paulo), but also with exposed citizens and former workers in Casale Monferrato (Italy).

1985), in the narratives I heard, asbestos fibres, an "ordinary presence in daily life", and consequently unworthy of attention (Parkhill et al. 2010), became something that was eaten with food and water while working and living in the daily struggle against poverty, starvation, and death. I quote from my fieldnotes:

> *Rodrigo accompanied me to the home of three former miners still living in Bom Jesus da Serra. Before encountering them, he warned me that they were living in conditions of extreme poverty. The first former miner we visited suffered from asbestosis. The tiny house was made of bricks and had wooden windows that somebody opened from inside as soon as we entered the courtyard by car. Four young boys peeked out the windows and stared at me. Rodrigo knocked the door and an old man opened it with a cane. Rodrigo had told me that the man had serious walking impairments. He was sat on the ground, with his legs crossed, in a room that presumably was used as the kitchen. There was a fire light behind him. Rodrigo had to explain who he was to make the old man recognise him. He seemed to have memory problems and dialogue was not easy. Rodrigo introduced me to him and we had a brief conversation. Before leaving Rodrigo asked me if I wanted to take some pictures. I answered that no, I did not want to. I did not want to violate the intimacy of life of those people who were welcoming me into their homes and make their poverty an aesthetic object through my photographs. I wanted to be as discrete as possible, instead and I felt like a sense of shame for my being a helpless witness before that misery. That visit lasted no more than ten minutes. When we left, it was still raining hard. My shoes were muddy. My bag was wet. Rodrigo was driving through roads that to my foreign eyes appeared all the same, they were flooded and almost impassable. Rodrigo explained that it was complicated to organise meetings with all the former miners still alive because they were all elderly, with enormous difficulties in moving and they were living in areas that were hard to reach.*
>
> *The last former miner I met with in Bom Jesus da Serra received me together with his wife. The house was tiny and the room where I entered was dark. The floor and walls had been paved and they were grey. The couple invited me to sit on a red and worn sofa. I sat beside the former miner. A cat and a dog were entering and going outside through the door left opened to the courtyard. I looked above and I noticed that the roofing was made of Eternit. Rodrigo quickly understood what had attracted my attention and told me that the family had recently managed to buy that roofing. Before that, there was only a straw roofing causing serious problems to the family in the rainy season.*

In the subtle, but crucial, link between the opportunities of the life that working with asbestos could offer in terms of the socio-economic benefits, and the unconscious inhalation of deathly substances resides the peacetime violence perpetrated by asbestos corporations in "a transnational context where under specific circumstances, the daily struggle for living leads to death (Quaranta 2016)[29].

My research partners from both Italy and Brazil, used similar words and images to describe the effects of ARDs on an individual's body. The most frequently used expressions I heard

[29] Informal conversation.

have been *falta de ar* [lack of air] in Portuguese and *mancanza di respiro* [lack of breath] in Italian. My research partners in Italy and Brazil drew attention to how extremely difficult and painful breathing could be for a person diagnosed with asbestosis or MM. Formers miners I met described their respiratory problems in the following terms: *"I feel this* falta de ar*", "I cannot do heavy work, I cannot run, I cannot do anything. It is just this* falta de ar *that really annoys me"* and *"my breath is trapped, it is not free"*. The relatives of people who died from ARDs, in Brazil as in Italy, recalled the most acute episodes of pain: *"it seemed she had a plastic bag over the head"* or *"he spent all night sitting in bed, coughing and wheezing. It was cruel being a powerless testimony of that atrocious pain"*.

Despite the lack of knowledge about ARDs, among miners and their families I met in Bom Jesus da Serra there was the perception that the dusty environment in which they had lived and worked was unhealthy. People could even see the health effects of their exposure or their relatives and friends' exposure, but they had no 'tools' to relate the violence they were experiencing to asbestos toxicity. That awareness came only later and it was deeply intertwined with the anti-asbestos movement organised in the end of the 1990s. While the mine was operative (from 1937 to 1967), being exposed to asbestos and working in dusty places without protection represented 'normal' conditions of work and life for miners and their families. Although they perceived this life as unhealthy, they did not question it. Cappelletto and Merler (2003) conducted a study with former miners at the Wittenoom asbestos mine in Australia. The authors discuss how miners perceived and have an 'experiential knowledge' (see Blume 2017) of the extreme and unhealthy working conditions. Miners could see the effects of asbestos exposure on their own bodies or their colleagues' bodies, but they could not base their perceptions on theoretical knowledge about asbestos.

> There were two reasons for workers' inability to collate such observations into a framework of knowledge that could have guided their behaviour: they could not draw general conclusions from particular instances; and there was a peculiar block in the systems of communication. Workers could not draw general conclusions from particular instances because this would involve precisely the knowledge they lacked (Cappelletto and Merler 2003:1055).

Unlike previous studies on the Wittenoom mine, Cappelletto and Merler's investigation drew attention to the fact that "workers created a kind of awareness for themselves. To a certain degree, they were aware of danger", but, at the same time, miners "had no access to the information that [asbestos] exposure could cause pulmonary tumours, and their own empirical observation could only reveal that exposure was bad for the lungs" (Cappelletto and Merler 2003:1057).

The narratives of former miners I met in Bahia recalled practices similar to those discussed by Cappelletto and Merler (2003).

> *I knew about asbestos dangers only recently. At that time, nobody knew.*
> *We believed that people dying here were dying from* fatiga [fatigue]*... it was asbestosis instead, but we did not know... the dying person wheezed* [the narrator mimics the breathing difficulties]*, but we thought that it was because of the fatigue. I remember the first who died here from* falta de ar*... he was the husband of... he also* comia pó [ate dust]*. He died very quickly from a serious asbestosis ... but nobody related the deaths occurring here to asbestos. Asbestos was considered as a sacred thing here. We all had the greatest respect for the Sama because it brought jobs' opportunities, and people began to earn money. Nobody knew.*

The processes by which knowledge and awareness are elaborated are inextricably intertwined in a relationship of mutual influence. In fact, on one hand, awareness of asbestos carcinogenicity would not have developed without sufferers' engagement in the activism that changed one's understandings and representations of one's own suffering and bodily condition. On the other hand, it is probable that no mobilization would have been organised without the experience of a suffering, whose perceived causes had been 'deciphered' only at a later date and the engagement in the activism gave the sufferers the opportunity to read the history inscribed in their bodies.

> The body is not only the immediate physical presence of an individual in the world; it is also where the past has made its mark. Or rather the body is a presence unto oneself and unto the world, embedded in a history that is both individual and collective: the trajectory of a life and the experience of a group. The mark of time is engraved so deeply as to be imperceptible: when perceiving ordinary objects and when going about one's daily business, in the wear and tear of the physical organism and the exposure to the risk of illness. In other words, it is beyond the separation of culture and nature. Often, however, history is obscured and the body, existing in the here and now, seems to the observer—or to oneself—like a presence without a past. […] But bodies resist the obliteration of the mark left by history. They resist both in the subject's perception and in the objects perceived (Fassin 2007:173).

The 'afflicted body' (Scheper-Hughes 1995) unmasks the relationships between the suffering and socio-political dynamics at play in the world. "The suffering condition is the basis from which new languages and meanings can emerge" (Quaranta 2016)[30]; anti-asbestos mobilization has then addressed those languages into discourses and practices of struggle aiming at social legitimation and rights recognition.

The following quote from an interview with a man involved in anti-asbestos activism organised in Bom Jesus da Serra and Poções, Brazil, is emblematic of the processes through

[30] Informal conversation.

which the causes of the lived suffering can be understood based on the knowledge unwittingly acquired through the direct experience of exposure's effects.

> *A: Did your father know that he was dying because of his exposure to asbestos?*
> *R: No, he never knew. He suspected that he was sick because of the* pó [dust], *but we even disagreed with him and tried to convince him of the contrary. We told him that it was impossible that his sickness was caused by the dust…it was so long that he had stopped working at the mine.*
> *A: Do you have any certificate attesting that your father died from asbestosis?*
> *R: No, but I can say that he died from asbestosis because afterwards I met other workers who died from asbestosis, and I saw that the symptoms were identical to those suffered by my father. Therefore, I assume that he died from asbestosis, but I do not have any document that proves that.*

ARDs can manifest long time after a first exposure. In particular, MM can appear up to more than 40 years after the first exposure (Marinaccio et al. 2015). Exposed men and women embody the 'eternal' asbestos by carrying on the magical evil asbestos fibres along their lives, often unconsciously. When the embodiment of life-threatening substances—and processes—becomes conscious and it is recognised as the consequence of a suffered violence, then practices of mobilization can emerge in name of a justice that is perceived as formerly denied. By starting from the awareness of the social dimension of one's individual suffering, a new conception of one's body and illness can be developed, and represent the base for an activism, performed locally and with international connections. In fact, a transnational dimension does not concern only the dynamics defining asbestos economics and politics, but also the multiple and various cases of anti-asbestos activism.

Space and time then coordinates assume a peculiar meaning in discourses and practices elaborated by *suffer-activists* who renegotiate, and strategically rethink their body and illness in their struggle and suffering experiences.

Mine contexts as contexts of struggle

> *On July 31, 1967, at noon, the SAMA's office based in São Paulo sent a radio message ordering to switch off all the machines here, because from that moment onwards the activities had to be ceased. It was all by surprise, people here was desperate.*

The abandoned mine of São Felix, and the suffering experienced by the 'peasant-miners' there (Godoy 1985) are emblematic of the dynamics defining a disaster's process based on systematic—and legitimate—exploitation of natural resources and human bodies.

I was there, in the middle of the largest asbestos contaminated site in Brazil (see Novello 2012; De Oliveira D'Arede 2009), where there were no signals to alert people to the health risks related to asbestos exposure, and unaware people even swam in the lake produced by the massive extraction which had created an artificial canyon. Coordinates of space and time came to assume an unconventional meaning (Bridge 2004) in that deadly context marked by the mining industry, where subjects involved in AR-suffering experiences were still trying to heal the wounds produced by the violence perpetrated 'in times of war and peace' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) on bodies, environment, and the relationships constituting one's world.

The area including the abandoned mine of São Felix in Bom Jesus da Serra represents the largest *passivo ambiental* [environmental liability] produced by asbestos economics in Brazil (see Milanez et al. 2013:177). In line with Carvalho (1997 quoted by Novello 2012), the so-called *passivos ambientais* [environmental liabilities] occur when, after having seriously damaged the environment by implementing activities such as industrial manufacturing or mining, the 'perpetrators' do not provide any solutions, or reparation for their acts of violence. According to the *Departamento Nacional da Produção Mineraria* [National Department of Mining Production] from the *Ministério de Minas e Energia* [Ministry of Mines and Energy], the *passivos ambientais* caused by asbestos extraction in Brazil, in addition to São Felix, are the inactivated mines of Itaberaba (Bahia), Jaramataia (Alagoas), Itapira (São Paulo), São Domingos do Prata, Virgolândia, Nova Lima (Minas Gerais), Pontalina, and Barro Alto in Goias (Novello 2012). These sites have been abandoned because of the total exploitation, or because of changes in asbestos national and transnational market.

The mining industry's effects in terms of contamination, and conflicts occurring in mining communities have been studied since early 2000s in Brazil by the *Grupo de Trabalho Articulação Mineração e Siderurgia* [Mining and Iron/Steel Industry Joint Working Group], within the *Rede Brasileira de Justiça Ambiental* [Brazilian Net of Environmental Justice].

The investigations have pointed out that the increasing mining activities in Brazil are not just exacerbating historical conflicts and environmental liabilities, but are also generating new cases of environmental injustices by "reinforcing a perverse cycle of socio-economic disparities reproduction" (Milanez et al. 2013:175).

The concept of environmental justice originates from the mobilization that occurred in the United States in the end of the 1970s in name of the environmental racism suffered by the black population (see Bullard and Johnson 2000). The movement found legitimisation in the findings that emerged from studies revealing that black people inhabited, not by chance, the most polluted urban neighbourhoods chosen as sites for highly polluting chemical industries and toxic waste deposits (Milanez et al. 2013:15). By the end of the 1980s, these struggles assumed a global dimension, and broadened their concerns to environmental justice issues including various forms of discrimination and injuries (see Milanez et al. 2013; Acselrad et al. 2004). In the Brazilian academy, the concept of environmental justice began to circulate in the 2000s, first in the area of environmental sociology, and then in public health (Milanez et al. 2013:15). A short definition of environmental justice is the guarantee of equal rights for all people (regardless their social class, the colour, the gender, etc.) to live in a safe and not overly-polluted environment (Acselrad et al. 2004).

In addition to the landscape, the bodies of exposed workers and mining community members represented the first 'site' on which environmental injustices related to the asbestos-mining industry were revealed because of the health effects of exposure. The embodiment of these injustices lived both individually and collectively brought a critique based on the knowledge that had been bodily acquired and socially experienced. From this perspective, the men and women I met in Bom Jesus suffering from a violence that was still visible in their bodies, precariousness of their life conditions, and their narratives were not only undeniable victims of specific dynamics of structural violence, but also embodied resistance to this violence. Based on Godoy's (1985) literature review, mining contexts have been investigated by anthropologists as propitious scenarios for practices of solidarity and socio-political actions undertaken by miners and their families facing hard working and life conditions (see Knapp and Pigott 1997). The fundamental works of Nash (1979), and Taussig (2010) stress the influence of social movements in the "passage from peasants' provincial perspective to global workers' perspective (proletariat)" (Godoy 1985:209-210) in mining contexts, while Ballard and Banks (2003) consider the transnational dimension of dynamics occurring in mine settings in relation to the global market in which mining industry acts.

According to Bridge (2004:216):

> the conditions of the mine working environment have long been a source of socio-political struggle. In 1842, the Royal Commission Report into coal mining practices in England, for example, provided a harrowing account of the physical effects of underground mine work on women, men, and children, leading to the passage of laws banning women and boys under the age of 10 from employment in mines. Over time, however, the definition of social impact has broadened from issues of worker safety (a dominant theme in Europe and the United States in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and occupational health (which emerged to prominence in the period following the Second World War) to questions of community stability, cultural integrity, and indigenous rights.

In Bom Jesus da Serra, the civil mobilization against asbestos mining began decades after all activities were suspended. Once again, the timing appears to be unconventional for mining contexts (Bridge 2004), and indicates an extension of asbestos contamination's effects in terms of the suffering and of activism triggered by it.

I quote one of the most engaged activists of the movement organised in Bom Jesus da Serra and Poções (Bahia). He narrated the first steps of local activism, and the reasons for his personal involvement in the actions against the asbestos firm's management and consequent abandonment of the mine.

> *Mobilization here began in the early 2000s. I was personally unaware of the number of people contaminated because I had no knowledge about asbestos and ARDs, but in 1999 we started to learn more about asbestos. In 1999, some exponents of the mining company came back here to conduct a survey. The firm wanted to know the number of contaminated people. They did not come back to give support to the former miners, they returned just for the survey. By that time, I was living here and I went to talk to them, and asked* [about] *the reasons for the survey. It was in that occasion that we discovered that asbestos was carcinogenic and that we came to hear about ARDs for the first time, while they* [the firm] *already knew asbestos dangers since 1997, at least. At that time, I started to realise that my father was right when he said that he was contaminated by the* pó [dust]. *Based on that, I began with the organization of the first lawsuit against the firm. The first lawyer I contacted hardly believed that a French company, a company from the First World, could have done such a miserable thing here in Bahia. I took picture of the abandoned mine and sent them to him. Some days later he accepted to enter the law with the judicial action. He was upset.*
>
> *By remembering my father's words about the* pó *which contaminated him, by knowing other people with ARDs, and by comparing their experiences to that of my father, I became aware that asbestos, the asbestos present in São Felix mine, whose fibres were carried on by wind everywhere, was really harmful to our health. Based on that consideration, I decided to enter a lawsuit against the firm to force them to retrieve this area. This is the place where I was born and raised. It is here that my father was also born and where he grew up. I wish my children could come to the place where I was born, without running the risk of being contaminated. The firm has to provide us with resources and measures to retrieve our land because I would like that someday my children could come to visit the area where I was born without running any risk.*

The above quotation introduces aspects of asbestos contamination that will be discussed further in the next chapters, since they are specific to anti-asbestos activism investigated in Brazil. Now, I draw attention to the practices triggered by the local population's newly acquired understanding of the dangers of asbestos. On one hand, their new theoretical knowledge legitimised what they already knew experientially, but that they could now reconsider with new interpretive models. On the other hand, this newly acquired knowledge had provided the 'tools' to begin acts of civil mobilization to achieve social and environmental justice. Activism organised in Bom Jesus da Serra can be understood by considering the effects of mining processes on bodies and collectivities in their thick entanglement with the social issues raised by mining industry (Bridge 2004:217).

I refer to D'Angelo (2012), when I situate AR disasters in mining contexts characterised by complex relations linking social, economic, and political dynamics at stake in the "extractive processes [that] are not politically nor ecologically neutral" (D'Angelo 2012:143). The same author, based on his research in the diamond mines of Sierra Leone, defines "mines and extractive places as places of conflict, of identity claims, where many social actors, and stakeholders play" (D'Angelo 2012:143), and mining contexts become lively scenarios for actions and changes.

In my research contexts, actions and changes were triggered by the suffering experiences related to asbestos exposure, and the practices of anti-asbestos activism that I explored in Brazil (as in Italy) implied dynamics, strategies, and discourses pivoting around the centrality of the body. The study conducted by Smith (1981) on the 'black lung movement' has been seminal, and is a fundamental reference for researchers interested in health-based activism. Smith's contribution based on an ethnographic investigation of the mobilization organised by coal miners in West Virginia (USA) in 1968 offers a brilliant analysis of the historical, economic, and social dynamics defining a context of human and natural resources exploitation as well as local practices of struggle. According to Smith (1981), the black lung movement was "not simply a struggle for recognition of an occupational disease. […] It acquired a political definition that grew out of the collective experience of miners and their families" (Smith 1981:343), and black lung

> became a metaphor for the exploitative social relations that had always characterised the coalfields […] The goal of black lung compensation represented, in part, a demand for retribution from the industry for the devastating human effects of its economic transformation (Smith 1981:351).

By referring to Smith's investigation of a health struggle that occurred in a specific mining context, I broaden reflection on the effects of asbestos economics on both the environment and local population's health by considering each step of asbestos industry: mining, manufacturing and handling of products made from asbestos. From this perspective, in the multi-faceted processes defining AR disasters, the practices of activism narrated to me and/or observed during the fieldwork, were moulded by a latent—sometimes unconscious—political force that was reinvented, renegotiated, and embodied by *sufferer-activists* in their daily suffering and activism experiences.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I reflected on asbestos mining by starting from the narratives and data merged during my visit to the abandoned mine of Bom Jesus da Serra in Bahia, Brazil, that have been framed within literature on mining contexts and communities.

My reflection on asbestos mining led to a consideration of the subtle connections existing between political-economic strategies adopted by asbestos lobbies in the global market, the dynamics of 'structural violence' (Farmer 1996) and social suffering (see Kleinman et al. 1997) affecting vulnerable communities, and the *sufferer-activists*' engagement in actions to achieve compensation and reparation for their bore injustices.

Since the focus of this thesis concerns the practices of anti-asbestos activism, and my visit to the mine was planned with my gatekeepers, activists from Osasco (São Paulo), it should be stressed that the men and women I encountered in Bom Jesus da Serra and Poções (Bahia) were all involved in the anti-asbestos movement. This should be considered when interpreting the narratives elaborated by my research collaborators who were activists aware of asbestos dangers and personally engaged in locally organised mobilization. Their narratives constantly referred to episodes and memories collectively shared by other community members, that revealed a degree of awareness and indignation developed over two decades of struggles and campaigns. Moreover, the ease with which I had had access to the anti-asbestos activists in Bahia due to introduction by my gatekeepers from Osasco (São Paulo) showed me the solid relations on which the Brazilian anti-asbestos movement was based and that the movement overcame regional borders. By starting from the most intimate site where AR *disasters* occur—an individual's body—practices of resistance and struggle took place in a local context where social actors operated in a constant dialogue with *sufferer-activists* from other regions who shared similar, although distinct, stories of suffering and engagement. Thus, anti-

asbestos activism locally fighting against the multiple dynamics in the global scenario of asbestos market created a transnational movement.

Chapter 3: Bodies and Capital's Movements

Meu país
Se você encontrá-lo por aí,
diga-lhe que tenho saudade,
que espero revê-lo
e abraça-lo
algum dia de manhã.
Diga-lhe que quero sentir
o aroma de capim-gordura
e o cheiro da maresia;
que quero ouvir o mar
batendo nas pedras
e o vento embalando
as palmas do coqueiro.
Diga-lhe que tenho saudade
do riso e da inocência,
das rosas e da esperança,
do verde e do azul,
do café fumegando
na chaleira antiga,
nas brasas do fogão.
Diga-lhe que o quero-quero
ainda defende seu ninho
no silêncio do chão
e na brancura da neblina.[31]
(De Souza Martins 2014:42).

[31] My country/ If you meet it out there/tell it that I miss it/that I hope to see it again/and hug it/someday in the morning./Tell it that I want to feel the scent of the *capim-gordura*/and the smell of the sea;/that I want to hear the sea/hitting the rocks/and the wind wrapping/the palms of the coconut tree./Tell it that I miss/the laughter and innocence,/the roses and hope,/the green and blue,/the coffee steaming/in the old kettle,/on the coals of the stove./Tell it that the *quero-quero*/still defends his nest/in the silence of the floor/and in the whiteness of the mist [my translation].

Introduction

A vida é uma história, filha, uma história muito comprida
[Life is a story, my daughter, a very long story]

With these words, Leandro (I use a pseudonym), referred to the experiences and trajectories that have defined his life, begun in a *roça* [rural area] in the inner region of São Paulo state 87 years ago. Together with his family, Leandro moved to Osasco in 1941. In that same year the "Eternit do Cimento-Amianto do Brazil S/A" opened in Osasco the plant that would have been the first AC factory of that firm in Brazil, and the largest in Latin America. Leandro worked at the Eternit in Osasco 32 years, between 1945 and 1977, when he retired. In this chapter, based on Leandro's and other research partners' life stories, I retrace Osasco's urbanization and industrialization processes and I relate them to the transnational dimension of asbestos economics and politics, with a focus on the trajectory that connects asbestos manufacturing at the Eternit plant situated in Casale Monferrato (Italy) and the implementation of AC plants in Brazil.

I situate the population growth that has interested Osasco in a dizzy way, especially between the 1940s and the 1970s (see Sanazar 2000; Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003; Zampolin Coelho and Moreti 2005) within the broader immigration process that has contributed to define São Paulo state as Brazil's industrial and financial hub (see Bernardo 1998; da Cruz and Moura 2008; Ribeiro 2006).

Next, I focus on Osasco's history of urbanization by relying on historiographies and documents that I have consulted in Osasco's public library, research institutes, and archives. I then reflect on the impact of the Eternit plant's opening on the local context.

My approach to Osasco's urbanization and industrialization processes stems from the consideration of which meanings my research collaborators attributed to their settlement in Osasco and work at the Eternit plant. I quote narratives that most illustrated the incisive impact on one's life of the arrival in Osasco from the *roça*, and consequent start of the work in the factory as a turning point, or at least a temporary improvement, of the quality of life of the majority of the participants to my study.

A large basis of the historical reconstruction here proposed is provided by the ethnographic data I collected during the face-to-face encounters I had with my research partners. I interpreted them by referring to Fassin's research on the embodiment of the past(s) (see Fassin 2007, 2008), and ethnographic fieldwork is considered 'irreplaceable' to elaborate

knowledge (Fassin 2007:xiv) and make connections among events, economic dynamics, and socio-political processes (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Grenfell and Lebaron 2014). During my fieldwork, the traces left by the past were made alive in the present of my research partners' lives and bodies, through memories, affects, illness experiences, and narratives. Based on them, I considered the transnational dynamics of asbestos politics and economics as they were lived in Osasco's local context as well as in my research collaborators' worlds made of expectations, departures, hard working conditions, experiences of happiness, and suffering.

People's Movements

Starting from the 1850s, with the prohibition of slaves' trade and abolitionist campaigns supported by laws that gradually were being promulgated[32], the necessity to promote free work in substitution of the slavery was functional to supply the reduction of workforce (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008). Thus the Brazilian Government began to adopt a number of measures to encourage immigration.

Between 1870 and 1949 almost 5 million foreigners arrived in Brazil, and more than the 50% of them were Italian and settled in São Paulo state. Between 1890 and the First World War, the Italians represented ¼ of São Paulo inhabitants. In the beginning of the immigration process, the majority of Italians, with the tickets paid by Brazilian Government moved to the coffee plantations. Those who arrived autonomously stayed in the Capital and looked for jobs there as artisans, workers in the industries, or mechanicals. A group of Italian entrepreneurs founded the first textile industry in São Paulo (Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003).

Focusing on São Paulo context, between 1820 and 1961, approximately 5,600,000 people immigrated to the *Paulista* state. Of them, approximately 3,000,000 were foreigners, while approximately 2,700,000 were Brazilian (*Secretaria da Agricoltura. Departamento de Imigração e Colonização do Estado de São Paulo* [Secretary of Agricolture. São Paulo State Department of Immigration and Colonization] 1962:45 quoted by da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008).

[32] In 1871, the so-called *Lei do Ventre Livre* [Free Belly's Law] was promulgated; it established that slaves' children had to be considered free. The official abolition of slavery in Brazil was pronounced by the *Lei Imperial* [Imperial Law] n. 3.353, known as *Lei Áurea* [Golden Law] in 1888 (Schwarcz and Starling 2015). See Freyre's seminal investigations on slavery in Brazil for a deeper understanding of the processes that led to the abolition of slavery in Brazil (Freyre 1933).

By tracing the history of the *Hospedaria de Imigrantes of São Paulo*[33] [immigrants' shelter], where "around 3,5 million people's dreams, afflictions, and expectations crossed each other between 1887 and 1978" (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008:11). Da Cruz Paiva and Moura (2008) identify four phases of the migration process involving Brazil as the destination country, and São Paulo in particular.

The first phase (1888) runs from the abolition of slavery in Brazil to the Great Clash of 1929. In this period, the majority of immigrants were from Western European countries and Japan. It is worth noting that Brazilian government encouraged more the immigration of white people considered as bearers of valuable cultures, morals, and beliefs than the internal fluxes from the economically poor north-eastern Brazil to the richer South; this encouragement consisted, for instance, in the payment of travel's tickets for European migrants (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008:45). Similar practices and attitudes belong to the process of *branqueamento* [whitening] promoted by Brazilian institutions, and concurred to the realization of the Brazilian 'racial democracy' (Ribeiro Corossacz 2005) where the racism against black people, the majority of whom from north-eastern Brazilian regions, still represents a human rights issue in contemporary Brazil[34]. Da Cruz Paiva and Moura (2008) reflect on the necessity to build on a 'migrant's identity' for São Paulo inhabitants, in particular. Such an identity would have concurred to the development of São Paulo as a cosmopolitan and modern megalopolis by what, at my glance, is a celebration of the 'movement' that still characterises the Brazilian financial capital.

The second phase (1930-1945) runs from the first government of President Getulio Vargas, who promoted a strong nationalistic policy, to the Second World War. In a nationalization process, the government adopted strict measures to reduce the immigration from other countries, and promoted internal fluxes instead. Suddenly "the Brazilian worker became the ideal worker, and did not represent anymore a threat to the Country's social life" (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008:52). This because European unionists, especially communists and

[33] I visited the *Hospedaria de Imigrantes* of São Paulo, during my fieldwork, in 2015. Today part of the building hosts the *Museo da Imigração do Estado de São Paulo* [Museum of Immigration of the State of São Paulo]. The Hospedaria de Imigrantes was built in São Paulo in 1886-1887, in a period when São Paulo was going through a phase of growth and transformation into a modern capital, and cultivation of coffee was being encouraged in the whole state (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008). In this process, the construction of the São Paulo Railway in 1867 and of the *Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil* in 1875 have been crucial, since they facilitated the transportation of wares, on one hand, and of migrants, on the other. In particular, the railway connected São Paulo with Santos, whose port was one of the most important in the migratory fluxes from Europe to Latin America (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008).

[34] The non-governmental organization *Anistia Internacional no Brasil* [Amnesty International in Brazil] denounced that the 77% of the 30,000 young people murdered in Brazil in 2012 was black (Pellegrini 2014). In this regard, *Anistia Internacional no Brasil* launched the campaign *Jovem Negro Vivo* [Black Young Alive]. For further information see the website https://anistia.org.br/campanhas/jovemnegrovivo/.

anarchists from Italy, Spain and Portugal represented a more dangerous threat (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008:52).

The third phase (1947-1968) coincides with the development of the industrial sector in São Paulo state. The increasing need for a specialised workforce on one hand, and the precarious life conditions in European countries Post-Second World War, on the other, made start again the emigration from Europe to the most industrialised Brazilian regions, among whom São Paulo was the driving pole. Da Cruz Paiva and Moura (2008) underline how, during this phase, the internal migratory fluxes did not cease. The co-existence of this two kind of fluxes (internal and external), and working together in the same industries, although with different tasks, favoured the circulation of values and strategies from the European tradition of workers' struggles that played a fundamental role in the elaboration of a Brazilian working class awareness and mobilization. Next, I will return on this aspect that is fundamental to consider in order to understand the peculiar socio-political fabric characterising Osasco's context.

The fourth and last phase (1968-1978) the authors identify concerns the increasing internal migratory flux from the north-eastern regions to São Paulo. Such a flux began to be considered, and consequently managed by political and administrative institutions (under military regime at that time) as a matter of social policy instead of economic (da Cruz Paiva and Moura 2008).

The majority of my research collaborators in Osasco descended from European families who emigrated to Brazil and settled down in inner regions of São Paulo or other states, working as peasants in coffee plantations or, more in general, in the *roça* [rural area]. Of the 26 interviews conducted in Osasco, the majority has been conducted with women and men who were born in Minas Gerais, inner region of São Paulo state, Paraná, Bahia and Maranhão (north-eastern Brazil); only one was born in São Paulo, from Portuguese parents.

Osasco. From a* vila *to a city

From my fieldnotes, written on May 16, 2015:

> *Osasco seems to me a big market, an entire city that has become a mall. As soon as you leave the train, you notice that it is a city with a vibrating economics and everything around you invites you to obsessively consume. Someday, I want to take a picture of Rua Antonio Agù* [Osasco main street] *while standing on the station's escalator and see if I am able to catch up for an instant the constant flux of men and*

> *women moving, walking, buying, selling, advertising special offers, and eating* cachorros quentes [hot dogs]. *At any time, regardless I arrive early in the morning or I left in the afternoon, there is always this constant and pulsating movement of bodies.*

I took some photographs of Rua Antonio Agù before concluding my fieldwork[35]. They were only my experiments to save and remember what I used to see when I arrived in Osasco, around 9 in the morning for the scheduled interviews. The weather generally was cold, misty, and grey. To date, Osasco counts around 700,000 inhabitants and is one of the richest Brazilian municipalities according to the list of the richest Brazilian municipalities published in 2013 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística-IBGE*)[36].

Although its economics now pivots around sales and business activities, until the 1990s Osasco has been one of the most important Brazilian industrial poles, first as the industrial neighbourhood of São Paulo, and then as independent municipality.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, locally produced historiography celebrates the Italian immigrant Antonio Agù, who left Osasco in Piedmont (around 150 kilometres from Casale Monferrato) and arrived in Brazil in 1872 (Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003). Agù, who had available an initial amount of capital, invested his money in lands adjacent to the 'kilometre 16'[37] of the *Estrada de Ferro Sorocabana* [railway Sorocabana], forward-looking the relevance of the railway in the transportation of goods, raw material, and people. These *movements* favoured the transformation of the 'kilometre 16' from a rural area to an industrial city, Osasco. Agù favoured the arrival of Italian immigrants and the investment of capitals from São Paulo agrarian oligarchy, which was making profits and increasing its economic and political power through the cultivation of coffee (Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003).

In 1890, Agù, with Barão Sensaud de Lavaud, another entrepreneur, founded the first factory in the area that later would have been called Osasco. The factory was the "Companhia Cerâmica Industrial de Osasco", a ceramic factory. Afterwards, Agù collaborated in the foundation of other two factories, a paper mill (in 1892), and a textile factory (in 1895). In 1895, Agù financed the construction of the train station. During the opening celebration, when

[35] See photograph 2 in the Appendix.
[36] Data available on line at the website www.ibge.gov.br (accessed March 21, 2017).
[37] So-called because it was distant 16 kilometres from Praça da Sé in São Paulo city centre.

asked which was the name for the station (and consequently of the *vila*, village), refusing to give his own name[38], he answered Osasco, in homage to his hometown in Piedmont (Italy).

Locally produced historiography commemorates Agù as a legendary character who operated for Osasco's growth and established the basis for the city's wealth.

> Until his death in 1909, Agù contributed in making Osasco a place more and more progressive, by favouring the arrival of people working in the industry sector, compatriots (working both in the factories and in business activities), and workers employed in his factories. Gradually, socio-economic transformations began (Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003:25).

According to Agù' s last will, the lands he owned in Osasco were donated for the construction of the "Igreja Matriz" (Osasco's main—Catholic—church devoted to Saint Anthony, Patron Saint, in homage to Antonio Agù), the "Grupo Escolar" (school complex), the "Mercado Municipal" (municipal market), and the "Cemitério" (cemetery) (Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003).

In the meantime, the *vila*, recognised as *distrito* [district] in 1919, was gradually taking the shape of the industrial neighbourhood of São Paulo (see Sanazar 2000). Osasco's inhabitants voted for the 'emancipation' from the Capital first in 1958, but São Paulo government did not recognise the results neither the validity of the law number 5,121 that had been promulgated on December 27, 1958 by Osasco's administration to regulate its autonomy. New elections were organised four years later and this time, in 1962, Osasco became an independent municipality (Zampolin Coelho and Moreti 2005).

Starting from the end of the 1930s, numerous international firms choose to settle their factories in Osasco, because it was well connected to São Paulo, the economic hub of Brazil, and it had a good railway (Collino de Oliveira and Marquetti Rocha Negrelli 1992:81). The acceleration in the industrialization process coincided with a reduction of the immigration from Europe. In fact, in the Vargas Era (1930-1945) characterised by a nationalistic and populist policy (see Ribeiro 2006; Schwarcz and Starling 2015), internal migratory fluxes (especially from north-eastern states, Minas Gerais and inner and rural regions of São Paulo state) were favoured. On the contrary, the arrival of European immigrants, among whom there could be communists, anarchists, and unionists who could represent a threat for the political establishment, was put under restrictions (Zampolin Coelho and Moreti 2005).

Waves of *Nordestinos* [people from Brazilian north-eastern states], *Mineiros* [Minas Gerais inhabitants], and *Paulistas* [São Paulo state inhabitants], escaping from the misery and hard

[38] The name of numerous cities reveal that was a common habit that first settlers who played a relevant role in a city's development gave it their name.

working conditions in the *roças* [rural areas], then moved to Osasco and joined the communities of immigrants previously arrived, especially from mediterranean European Countries and Japan (see Sanazar 2000). If Osasco's population counted 15,258 inhabitants in the 1940s, in the 1950s it was of 41,326 and, in the 1960s, the number was of 114,828 inhabitants (Zampolin Coelho and Moreti 2005:105).

The researchers Zampolin Coelho and Moreti (2005) describe Osasco's peculiar context as different than those of other industrial Brazilian districts. They argue that in Osasco the alienation typical of capitalistic society did not affect the relationships among its inhabitants. A sort of solidarity persisted in a context where the urban and modern profile did not eliminate values and traditions from the rural contexts where a large number of Osasco's inhabitants were from; on this regard, the authors refer to the 'double identity' of Osasco's citizens. Zampolin Coelho and Moreti (2005) consider a second aspect characterising the urbanization process occurred in Osasco. Generally, the workers in Osasco lived in houses of their property. This was an unusual phenomenon in other cities, where workers used to live in houses owned by the firms where they were employed and to which they paid the rent. The authors relate this phenomenon to an urbanization that has been less chaotic than it has been in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. However, similar differences did not mean that in Osasco there were not social conflicts or exploitation. Child labour, long working days, and unhealthy working conditions equated Osasco to other industrial contexts (Zampolin Coelho and Moreti 2005).

In addition to the proximity to São Paulo and the railway, the large availability of workforce was another crucial factor determining the investments of international firms in Osasco, where these actors could have easy access to a cheap and large workforce made of women and men who were desperately looking for the opportunity to improve their life conditions. Often, during the interviews conducted with former asbestos-workers, I heard about a firm's preference to employ young men who were from the *roça*, because they had healthy and strong bodies, were used to hard working conditions, obedient, and did not question anything. In the narratives emerged from our encounters, the participants to my study usually recalled the memories about their arrival in Osasco, and life stories were narrated as the realization (or as the attempts to realize) a project to improve their life conditions and guarantee a wealthier and easier future to their children. The majority of them began working when they were underage (between 12 and 14 years) to help their parents to support their numerous families. The childhood memories of a large number of my research partners evoked starvation, poverty, and lack of means to attend school. I relate such an—embodied—past to a condition

of ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 1996) suffered in their childhood and still in their adulthood, once they arrived in the ‘city’ and became exploitable workforce. They have spent their entire lives as “victims of a social suffering, in the sense that it is socially produced” (Fassin 2007:200). According to Farmer’s (1996) definition of structural violence as it has been recalled by Fassin (2007:200) “the poor are not only more likely to suffer, they are also more likely to have their suffering silenced”. In the following chapters, I discuss how the structural violence suffered by my research partners have been ‘silenced’ by a cognitive and emotional inability to recognise the firm and the dusty working place as sources of dangers and threats to health. In their escape from poverty, working for a company that paid the salary on time and made closer the objective of wealth and social stability, ‘silenced’ the subtle mechanisms through which structural violence was perpetrated against young and healthy men who would have become sick and died decades later their exploitation.

In this context, the “Eternit do Cimento-Amianto do Brazil S/A” opened in Osasco in 1941 and it has been operative until 1993 (Giannasi 2012). Before discussing the movements of capital that characterise the settlement of the Eternit plant in Osasco, I conclude this session with a quote from an interview conducted with a *sufferer-activist* engaged with ABREA. I call her Fatima. Fatima’s life story renders the idea of the extent to which Osasco’s industrialization and urbanization depended on and reinforced a condition of structural violence.

> *When we arrived in São Paulo for the first time, my mother and I arrived at the Luz Station; it is beautiful, isn’t it? We travelled by bus from Minas Gerais. After my father died, my mother decided to move to São Paulo, and join her relatives who were living there. I was a* garotinha [little girl], *12 years old. As soon as we settled in Osasco, I began working as housekeeper and babysitter. I was 17 years old when I met my husband. He was 22 years older than me. I met him one night, after a party at my aunt’s house. I was coming back to the home where I was working at that time. It was dark, and I felt a bit scared by cars and could not decide to cross the road. He offered me his arm, and we crossed together. Then, he asked me if I wanted* fugir com ele [to escape with him, which means spending at least one night together in order to make a marriage necessary to save the girl’s honour]. *I immediately accepted.* Eu fugi mesmo, mas sabe? Valeu a pena. Ele foi um grande marido [I really escaped, but you know? It was worth of it. He has been a good husband] *We escaped in January and got married in March 1975. In 1976, he began working at the Eternit. He was happy. He was the first to buy a colour TV in our neighbourhood. People came to our house to watch TV. We have been happy for 20 years despite people’s rumours about our age difference, and his family prejudice against my colour. I am* preta [black], *while he was an Italian descendant. His mother wanted to save the whiteness of her family. I have four children, two black and two white and blonde-haired, like my mother-in-law. He has been mother and father for me, beyond being my husband. I loved him. I took care for him and he took care for me. When you are alone in the world, when you meet somebody who takes care for you, you love him. He worked at the Eternit from*

1976 to 1983. It was a hard work, but it was very well paid. He received the salary each month, health insurance, and the cesta de Natal [a basket containing food, fruit, and sweeties offered by the Eternit for Christmas]. *We did not have much time to talk. When he came back home, he was tired, he just took a shower, ate and then went to bed. I had the children to look after, and I worked too. I have worked in two factories, at the BIC where I did pens* [she took a BIC pen and showed me the part of the pen she used building], *and at the Danone, where we did yogurt. They were good and well paid jobs. Since I do not know read and write, to take the job, I asked somebody to fill the module for me. Now, it would be impossible. You need at least the high-school diploma to work in similar companies.*

Capital's movements

The Swiss family Schmidheiny has been building its economic empire on asbestos and cement industry starting from the beginning of the 20th Century. The dynasty's forefather was Jacob (1838-1905), father of Ernst (1871-1935), who founded the "Rheintalische Cementfabrik Rüthi AG" in 1906 in the *Sangallese* valley of Reno (Roselli 2010). Four years later, to face a crisis threatening the cement market, Ernst Schmidheiny founded a first cement cartel called "Eingetragene Genossenschaft Portland". Then, in 1920, Ernst, who had entered the 'Eternit Belgique' group, acquired the AC plant 'Eternit AG' in Niederurnen, managed by Jean Baer since the plant's opening in 1903. Soon afterwards, together Baer and Schmidheiny founded the "Amiantus S.A.", a network of asbestos-cement firms, to control the geographic distribution of the industrial group and, in this way, they entered the administrative committees of several AC industries such as the "Belgian Cimenteries & Briqueteries Réunies S.A." (Roselli 2010). Rapidly, dozens of firms and plants began to be intertwined each other in an increasing web of companies. For instance, the Schmidheiny's family managed Eternit plants in 16 Countries, with 23,000 employees in total (Roselli 2010). Moreover, in other 16 Countries, the Schmidheiny joined the Emsens family in the management of the plants belonging to the "Belgian Eternit Group" (Roselli 2010). It is almost impossible to know exactly how the participations were distributed among the shareholders. Reasonably, the Schmidheiny controlled the German speaking countries, Middle East, and Latin America, while the Belgian group controlled plants situated in the Benelux, Africa and Asia (Roselli 2010). In 1929, the asbestos cartel SAIAC was founded in Europe, and asbestos firms from Austria, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, and Switzerland joined it to control the global asbestos market (Roselli 2010).

The Schmidheiny's family shared with Belgian industrial companies participations in plants' management in more than 30 countries. For instance, the Schmidheiny's family was involved

in the management of the "Eternit AG Niederurnen" (Switzerland), "Eternit Ag Berlin" (Germany), "Everite Ltd. Johannesburg" (South Africa), "Ricalit", "APC" and "PPC" (Costa Rica), "Tubovinil" (Guatemala), "Tecno Plásticos" (El Salvador), "Bobicasa" (Honduras), "Saudi Arabian Amiantit Co. Ltd. Dammam" (Saudi Arabia), "Eternit Colombia", "Eternit Venezuela", "Eureka Mexico", "Eternit Ecuatoriana" (Ecuador), "Hondulit" (Honduras), "Duralit Bolivie", "Nicalit Nicaragua", "Eternit SpA Genoa" and "Eternit S/A Brasil" (Roselli 2010). The last two were in the countries where I conducted my studies on asbestos-related suffering and activism, in Italy and Brazil.

Like in Casale Monferrato, local citizenry and administrators in Osasco welcomed the opening of the Eternit plant since it represented an opportunity of socio-economic growth.

I quote two interviews conducted with *sufferer-activists* whose life stories and bodies bore the traces of the socio-economic processes related to the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011) intertwined with Osasco's frantic industrialization. Through these traces (oral and visual), it was possible to reconstruct the curvy trajectories my research partners defined through their *movements* from starvation and poverty towards better life conditions, moved by tenaciousness and relying on the strength of their young and healthy bodies.

The first one is from my first formal interview conducted in Osasco, on May 6, 2015. It occurred at the house of a research collaborator, whom I call Lucas. Lucas' wife and daughter were also present.

> *A cousin of my father worked at the Eternit. I told him that I was looking for a job. I was 32 years old, and I was just arrived in Osasco from Paranà, where I had been working in the* roça [rural area] *until that time.* […] *I was born in Ilha da Madeira in Portugal. Ilha da Madeira is a very tiny island, where there are no streets. Today, it is a touristic place. I have never been back. My family and I arrived in Santos' seaport in 1952.* A gente muda [people moves]. *A relative of us wrote the* carta da chamada [invitation letter[39]] *for us to come and work in the lands he had bought in Paraná; therefore, at our arrival in Brazil, we moved there. Then, my family also bought some lands, but we did not become rich. I do not miss working in the* roça. Tinha muito sofrimento lá [there was much suffering there]. *It was very hard to live and work there. As soon as my relative presented my application, the Eternit employed me. They preferred employing men coming from the* roça, *because we were used to work hard. Except from the offices, the 90% of workers at the Eternit were from the* roça. *Because, especially in the beginning, it was* um trabalho pesado [a hard work], *you needed strong arms, because it was all a manual work, the machines arrived later.* […] *I was in charge of the cleaning activities. I worked on Saturday and Sunday early mornings too. I also had night shifts. I did not like to work in the night. However, working at the Eternit was good. The salary was good and never in late. Everybody*

[39] Immigrants often arrived in Brazil because of the *carta de chamada* [invitation letter] written and sent to them by their relatives who emigrated earlier and were already settled in Brazil. In the *Museo da Imigração* of São Paulo, these letters are permanently exhibited.

liked to work there. They fired me in 1992 [the plant closed in 1993]*; otherwise, I would have continued.*

During our encounter, Lucas showed me his medical examinations records, the payslips, and his ID document. I asked him if he had old photographs from the time he worked at the Eternit (1978-1992). He opened a drawer in the same room where we were (the living room), and took several photo albums. He sat on the floor and started browsing them. I came close to him, sat on the floor as well. His daughter did the same and they began to illustrate the pictures more significant to them. I recognised Lucas in a couple of photographs taken at the Eternit. There were also various photographs of flowers and fruit. Lucas told me that his daughter took them in the terrace above where he had reproduced a little vegetable garden. He asked me if I wanted to have a look at that. At my arrival, while we were still in the car (he had picked me up at the Osasco's train station), he had already proudly indicated it to me. I said that I would like to see his garden. We went upstairs and in front of us an explosion of life and colours appeared. Even four green parrots were standing on the electric wires. The contrast with the grey of the sky and neighbourhood was strong. Salads, white grapes, little strawberries, and chilli peppers. The more delicate and tiny plants had been covered with plastic sheets. He showed me the plants while explaining the amount of water, light, and the blooming season of each of them. Close to the balcony's railing there was a bird feeder hanging. *"That is for the parrots that come to visit me"*, Lucas told me with a smile. When we came back downstairs, I noticed two instruments; I could not understand what they were useful for. Curious, I asked Lucas what they were. He took one, and while miming, he told me that they were used for sowing. He brought them from the *roça* [rural area].

Lucas' house, gestures and care for the garden were concrete expressions of what the researchers Zampolin Coelho and Moreti (2005) defined as the 'double identity' of Osasco's inhabitants. Although, I would say that 'double' is an adjective reductive of the multiple 'worlds', trajectories, languages, and movements which Osasco's inhabitants carry on through their bodies and stories. Nevertheless, the origin of a large number of Osasco's inhabitants from the *roça*, and from the life (and suffering) experiences they had there, has had an unquestionable influence in the processes of Osasco's urbanization and industrialization.

I conclude this session with a quote from the interview conducted with the eldest ABREA member whom I met, and who was 87 years old at the time of our encounter in 2015. I remember the sunshine illuminating his living room and the balcony where he was sat while waiting for me on the day of our appointment. I refer to him as Leandro.

I was born in uma fazenda [a farm] *in the inner area of São Paulo state, then my father bought a small plot of land and we lived and worked there until 1941, when we moved to Osasco. My father did not know how to do anything, and my grandfather never had a house where to live in. I was 12 years old and my father arranged a false ID document for me start working, since the legal minimum age for working was 14. I began working in a matchsticks factory in Osasco. The salary of a 12 years old kid was good enough for paying three months of rent. I worked there three years, until a doctor told my mother that working there was not healthy for a kid.* […] *My father was illiterate; my mother went to school instead. She was from a richer family, but then, after the marriage, with six children… it was a miserable life.* […] *When I began working at the Eternit, the plant was as little as a matchbox. When I ceased working… it was large like a 1,000 litres* caixa d'agua [water reservoir][40]. […] *I saw the factory growing and employing up to 1,700 workers. The Eternit was one of the best factories in Osasco. The salaries were good and paid always in time. Everybody wanted to work there because of the good and slightly higher salary compared to those that you could earn at other factories. For instance, if a carpenter's salary was on average 14* cruzeiros[41] *per hour, at the Eternit it was 17/18* cruzeiros *per hour.* […]
I began working as trainee carpenter. It was quite hard for a teenager. Once, a boss told me that he wanted me being his secretary. I began working in his office, but I did not like that kind of job. Agata, I could not suffer sitting at a desk the all day, I wanted movimentar [being in movement]. *A couple of months later, I told my boss that I wanted to learn the profession of carpenter. I told him:* eu não gosto dessa moleza aqui [I do not like this sluggishness here, in the office]. *You know, I went just three years to school, to a rural school. Then I soon began working in the* roça. *I never went to a vocational school, only after marriage I studied a bit of technical designing by myself.* […] *When I got promotion and I began earning the salary of a carpenter… Agata,* eu fiquei feliz da vida! [I was happy with life]
I have been able to buy my own house, where eu criei[42] a minha familia [I made my family].*When my wife and I got married, we lived ten months without electricity, but for the first time in our life we could take shower, instead of a bath in the tub. I had put an Eternit water reservoir on the roof: we even had hot water during the day!*

Before discussing more in detail the ethnographic data about the Eternit plant situated in Osasco, I want to conclude the reflection of bodies and capital's movements defining the transnational dynamics of asbestos economics by considering one of the trajectories that I explore in this thesis and that connects Italy to Brazil.

[40] The water reservoirs by the Eternit firm are still diffused in Brazil. I had seen them frequently during my fieldwork.
[41] Old Brazilian currency.
[42] The Portuguese verb *criar* is used to mean 'to make a family', but also 'to be raised' as a child.

The case of Italian asbestos workers' emigration from Casale Monferrato to Rio de Janeiro

I designed my doctoral research project based on the connections between Casale Monferrato in Italy and Osasco in Brazil. These connections concern the migratory fluxes from Piedmont to São Paulo in the second half of 19th Century, and are present in the stories of suffering and activism related to the transnational 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011). During my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato in 2012, I conducted an interview with a *sufferer-activist* engaged with AFeVA's activism. In the beginning of the interview, she referred to her childhood in Brazil. I quote some lines of our conversation that I had recorded.

> *My father worked at the Eternit. In 1949, the managers asked him to move to Rio de Janeiro to work and offer training to Brazilian workers at a recently opened AC plant. My father accepted, because after the Second World War in Casale Monferrato, there were not so many opportunities and even the Eternit was in crisis. We left together with other 15/16 families from Casale Monferrato. My brother, who was 18 years old, began working at the same plant in Brazil, as trainee electrician. My brother came back to Italy in 1963, my father, my mother, and I in 1968. […] I was a child, I do not remember a lot. My parents told me that in Brazil we lived in a complex of houses purposely built for the workers. A small wall divided the houses from the plant. I was six or seven years old; in the afternoon, after schoolwork, the other kids and I climbed over the wall and we used to play in the plant's yard by jumping on the asbestos-containing pipes and roofs accumulated there. Now, while talking to you, I remember also that when it did not rain for a couple of days, the plants that surrounded the house became white because of the dust. My father used to water the leaves to clean them.*

Retrospectively, I consider the encounter with that woman, a 66 years old lady whom I call Luisa, crucial for my studies and research interests. Luisa had lost her father from asbestosis, her husband and her brother from MM, and her father-in-law from a lung cancer, likely provoked by exposure to asbestos. All of them had worked at Eternit plants except the husband who had been exposed to asbestos while working in a jewellery laboratory and asbestos-containing filters were used in the welding phase. She was very afraid to contract an AR cancer herself, because of her environmental and domestic exposure to asbestos.

Once I had already began my fieldwork in Osasco (Brazil), I came back to Casale Monferrato a couple of times. In fact, I am still in touch with some of the participants to my study there, and with whom I have become friend during the years. By chance, Luisa's story vividly returned to my mind and acquired more nuances when, thanks to the contacts made during my fieldwork in Brazil, I encountered a man who was a member of another family which had moved to Rio de Janeiro from Casale Monferrato in 1949. His father worked at the Eternit plant in Casale Monferrato, and was asked to move to Rio de Janeiro and work there as

specialised worker, like it happened to Luisa's father. Luisa and the man, 75 years old, whom I call Roberto, travelled by the same ship, the "Francesco Morosini", leaving from Genova's seaport. Roberto's narrative of that travel brought in the present all the enthusiasm, expectations, and dreams of a child who became a young man in a working neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro.

> *We left from Genoa and arrived in Rio after 17 days, it was a cargo and passengers ship. Of course, it was not like a cruise ship, but the journey was quiet. There were two dormitories with all the bunk beds, the men were separated from the women, and the children were with their mothers, obviously. Since I was already 8 years and a half, I was with my dad, in the male dormitory. In the same place, on the floor, there was a grill covered by large tarpaulins. The goods that were being transported to the Americas were placed underneath the grill. I remember that they were transporting garlic that time. To ventilate the environment, they put into action some fans, and then those huge sheets swelled and we children, incredibly fascinated and happy, played there on those tarps. During the evenings, above, on the deck, they showed films like those with Laurel and Hardy, Maciste, and all those movies from that time. It was fun. Then there was the "feast of the Equator", when you crossed the Equator, in that occasion there were many games. I remember that there was someone dressed as King Neptune, and that there was a pipe on the ground, with a shape similar to a snake: people passed in and then when they went out on the other side they were all blacks because soot was put inside the pipe as a joke. We were fine. The journey was quiet. They treated us well, and the food was fine too. For me it was all new. It was beautiful. I remember ... now I will make you laugh! On the departure's day, when we arrived in Genoa, and were boarding the ship, I looked around me, towards the sea. On the horizon, the sea seemed to end and then I asked to my father: "But Daddy, you told me that the sea is large, and instead is small! You see… there it ends, it is almost as small as the Po river!". And my father told me:" No, no, then you will see… it is bigger!". And I: "But how? You were telling me that it was huge, but it is… small!" He told me that we would have gone to America, and I would have seen a lot of water. I was disappointed because I thought that the sea ended at the horizon. It was nothing extraordinary. It was almost like the Po. When we arrived, it was incredibly beautiful. The ship docked in the Guanabara Bay. You could see the Cristo Redentor turned to the ocean. He seemed to be there to greet us with open arms... Everything was beautiful, and touching. There was a band playing, I remember the music when the ship docked in the harbour. They played the anthem of the city of Rio de Janeiro. It was beautiful.*

Roberto's father, born in 1904, began working at the Eternit plant in Casale Monferrato in 1918, soon after the First World War. In 1949, when he was responsible of the roofs production, the Eternit manager of that time, the Engineer Adolfo Mazza, asked him to move to Rio de Janeiro to work and participate in the opening of a new AC plant called "Civilit", property of the Marquise Stefano Cattaneo Adorno from Genoa (Rizzi 2014).

Attracted by the offer of a higher salary, and with the expectations of better life conditions, Roberto's father decided to move to Brazil, together with his family.

The Marquise Cattaneo Adorno paid all the travel costs. When Roberto was 15 years old, began working at the same plant as electrician. He knows well Luisa's family. Roberto's sister married Luisa's brother who died from MM when he was 59.

I asked Roberto news about Luisa. He told me that unfortunately she had been recently diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma (MM). Like her brother and husband. I could not stop thinking about our encounter four years before. I had recently read the transcript of her narrative… and I remembered how she expressed her fears to get sick.

> *Last year I had some respiratory problems. The X-rays of my lungs showed some spots, but the medical doctor* [she named a well-known lung specialist from Casale Monferrato] *reassured me that they are not related to my exposure to asbestos. However, I am still in a constant anxiety because I know very well how it is painful dying from* la polvere [the dust]. *My father died suffocated.*

Luisa's story belongs to the trajectories and dynamics through which asbestos-related (AR) disasters overcome national borders, insinuate private houses, and contaminate bodies. I return on the processes and experiences characterising these silent and invisible *disasters* in Chapter 7. Now, my aim is to keep the attention on the transnational branching of asbestos-cement (AC) firms. Why did the Eternit manager of Casale Monferrato's plant agree to lose some of the best-specialised workers in favour of another and independent firm? The reasons are still not clear.

The Eternit plant in Osasco

Once back to Italy, several months after my fieldwork, I was sat on the sofa in my living room, and I found myself touched and almost crying. I had in my hands a map that a former Eternit worker, I call him Teodoro, drew and gave me as a present during the celebration ABREA members organised for my birthday and imminent end of fieldwork, in September 2015. Teodoro, 79 years old, was one of the eldest research collaborators I had; he has been one of the ABREA founders, and he was recognised by other association's members as 'the person who knows everything about the factory'. When I visited Teodoro at his home for our scheduled interview, he proposed to draw the map of the entire area occupied by the Eternit plant in Osasco, where he had worked 18 years, in 1952-53 and, then, from 1969 to 1986. He said that for him reproducing the plant's map would not be a problem, because he 'had everything in his mind'. He told me that he remembered everything, even the smallest details. Months later, I was looking at the map, sat in my living room, and I began to follow with my finger the black contours on the white sheet of paper where Teodoro had indicated the various

sectors, the offices, the restaurant, the warehouse, and the doctor's room. Teodoro's accuracy for the details, and the erasures of pencil traits revealed the care that he has dedicated to the drawing. That map has been a precious gift to me, since it bore the time devoted to its implementation, and the traces of a past time, inaccessible to me, but saved and shared with me by Teodoro[43].

During my fieldwork, I often reflected on the fact that numerous times I could not have direct experience of the 'worlds' in which my research collaborators had lived and that had been so decisive for their current life. On this regard, it seemed averted the risk of over-contextualization and giving authority to the researcher's interpretations based on the simple statement "I was there, therefore it is true" (Wikan 1992), however it was quite challenging to deal with those 'worlds' that I could access only through my research collaborators' narratives and memories[44]. They asked me: "Have you ever been in a factory?" or "Do you know how this machine works?". To my repeated "no", my research collaborators replied by trying in various ways to get me into the 'world' they were talking about; they made explanations as simple as possible, mimed working processes, or made drawings, like Teodoro did.

Now, accompanied by Teodoro' narrative I would ask the reader to look out the 'world' of the factory, *do trabalho pesado* [of the hard work], of machines and work shifts that from dawn until late in the night uninterruptedly marked the lives of the (former) workers I met.

> *You know, here we are in the Third World. You needed to learn a profession to survive and have a life a little better than others had, otherwise you only could dig holes in the street. I had to study to learn a profession and find a job. As soon as I got the qualification of mechanic, I got a promotion. I liked mechanics. I worked happy all my life.* […] *I was responsible for the plant's workshop; for this reason, I knew every plant's corner and I knew all people working there, from the cleaners to the managers. I knew everything and everybody.* […] *I still have everything in my mind. Every night, I still work at the Eternit!* [His wife, participating in the interview, although in silence most of the time, smiled. Teodoro referred to the dreams he had almost every night]. *Every day I work, until now I did not have a day of rest!* [He smiled]. *It was like a 24 hour work day, because when a machine had any problem or did not work correctly, they called me back to the plant to fix it, even though I was already at home. At any time, during the night or very early in the morning. It was normal. It happened at least twice per week.* […] *Today… I dream my tools or me having a debate with my boss. I see the all plant. In my mind, I see all the machines. I know everything. If you want to know something, I can tell you. If you want, I can draw a map of the plant with everything: the various entrances, the offices, the restaurant, the recruitment centre…*

[43] I include the photograph of the map in the Appendix (photograph 9).

[44] Among others, I refer to the contributions of the Brazilian anthropologist Da Silva Camargo who researched the role of embodied past in the experiences and narratives of the nuclear accident occurred in Goiânia (Goiás, Brazil) in 1987 (see Da Silva Camargo 2001, 2010).

there was even a lake. I used to fish there… [He began drawing; in the background, the dogs' barks and the sounds of some car passing close the house; the silence in the room was just broken by Teodoro's whispers to explain me what he was drawing]. *I am drawing the map of the plant as it was when I began working there. Then, it changed a lot. It enlarged. Now I am drawing the* sessão de acabamento e moldagem [finalization and moulding sector]. *Leandro* [another ABREA's founders, like Teodoro one of the eldest *sufferer-activists* I met] *was the responsible for this session, that was one of the dustiest ones because workers cut the products there. Eliezer* [current ABREA's President] *worked there.* [He continued drawing] *Here, there was the punch clock. Everybody passed by it, the managers, the workers, the cleaners… In this other sector, there were two rotating bridges above.* […] *The plant was very large. In the end, there were five machines. For instance, 'Machine One' was for* telhas e canaletas [roof tiles and pipes]*, while 'Machine Two' was for* telhas e chapas lisas [roof tiles and smooth sheets] [He wrote down the products' dimensions] […]
Have you ever seen one of the Eternit's machines? [He asked me. I answered: 'No, I have not']. *That is a pity! Water, asbestos and cement arrived in the machine. For every 1,500 kilos of cement there was the 12 or 14% of asbestos. In the machine, there was a filter. The material passed through it and became a very thin film.*
It worked more or less in this way [he explained the machine's mechanism]. *The mixture of asbestos and cement fall down on the filter that was made of felt. The dimensions of this filter were around 1mx1m. There was a hole in it, through which the water passed and pushed the mixture below. The mixture then passed under a rotating press… I can draw a machine for you as well. I could have taken a picture! Never thought about that!* […]
Here, there was the carregamento [loading] *sector, with a rotating bridge. From there, the trucks went outside by the entrance number two. While here* [he kept drawing]*, there was the workshop. Besides it, large amounts of asbestos were placed. Here, the* britador [crushing machine], *the* injetora [spraying machine], *the* marcenaria [carpentery]*... every sector was full of dust, even the offices… everybody* comia pó [ate dust] *because everything was so close to each other.* […] *There were barracks close to the plant, the textile factory 'Santista'—I worked there for ten years—was situated where today there is Carrefour, while the Eternit was where today there is WalMart. The all neighbourhood was called Morumbi. Asbestos from Canada, Goiás, and South Africa arrived by trucks, but there was also a railway arriving directly in the factory's site.*

During the encounter with Teodoro like it happened with Leandro, Lucas or Fatima, I entered 'worlds' which I could access only through my research collaborators' memory of a past that was present in their gestures and bodies. The narratives emerged during our encounters and supported by old photographs, documents, and objects illustrative of past events or aspects of their past lives, helped my research partners to express by words the memory they embodied. However, as Fassin (2007:123) poses as a question to promote a reflection:

> how can we infer the existence of a lived link between the past and the present? How can we read the mark left by the events that took place years, decades, even centuries ago in the experience of people today, some of whom confronted them directly, others through what they heard from parents or friends, or yet again imperceptibly or surreptitiously when memories are triggered by images or worlds? Of course, there is

> what people say, but everyone knows that reference to history or memory does not necessarily tell all the truth about what really happened. Conversely, there is what is left unsaid, and we also know that repression allows one to cover up the most painful traces of the past.

Therefore, in the encounters with my research partners, I tried not to "restrict myself to what I was told or ignore what was being kept back" (Fassin 2007:123). Gestures, tones of voice, teary eyes, and changes in the breathing helped me to grasp the meaning or the importance of a past event, a memory, or a lost affect as it was lived and conceived in the present. This because

> the ordeals lived through in one's flesh and blood say more about the social world than the developments reshaped by the mind, because they connect the present to the experience of the past in order to build the future rather than connect the present to the project of the future in order to erase the past. There are things one does not forget (Fassin 2007:169).

The reconstruction of the 'worlds' of my research collaborators' youth and work at the plant—worlds physically inaccessible to me—was elaborated through narratives and bibliographic research. Beyond the importance of an historical contextualization, my concern was being able to read the traces and the resonances left by that past in the present. Accordingly, the thickness of ethnography has been fundamental in both data collection and analysis to grasp and reflect on the affects and meanings shared, lived, and elaborated in the present and triggered by the evocation and experience of the past.

Once again, I found in Fassin's reflections on the fruitful combination of a historiographical approach with an ethnographic one (Fassin 2007:201-201) the theoretical 'tools' to which I referred while conducting my research.

> Historiography and ethnography put the flesh back in the society being investigated. […] My aim is to allow the social configurations to come alive in individual histories. Or yet again, using a classical distinction, to reveal the constraints of structure and the freedom of agency. But perhaps we must go further—not beyond but within the narratives. As we all know, interviews render more or less linear and coherent stories that sketch a life or fragments thereof, thus representing a privileged medium to attain people's experiences. Nevertheless, they are not the whole story. Not only do observations and archives come to complete and elucidate them, but their very materiality must be explored from the point of the speech forms and the interactive situation (Fassin 2007:201-202).

Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed historical and ethnographic data that I framed by referring to the importance of doing an 'historiography-informed ethnography' to understand the socio-political and economic processes inscribed and lived through the bodies of the social actors involved (Fassin 2007:XIV-XV). At the same time, a phenomenological approach has been essential to relate the past to the present lived by my research partners. I retraced the historical processes of migration, urbanization, and industrialization involving São Paulo state and Osasco based on my research partners' narratives and documentation through bibliographic research, visits to museums and archives. The ethnographic encounter has been essential to grasp the implications of the transnational movements of bodies and capital in one's life. On one hand, the face-to-face encounter has facilitated an empathic relationship between me and the participants to my study, thanks to that I collected thick and nuanced 'data'. On the other hand, the multi-sited dimension of my research (begun in Italy in 2009) allowed me to identify and reflect on the transnational connections charactering the political, economic, and social processes at play in the global market of asbestos. These processes were embodied by the *sufferer-activists* living and opposing AR *disasters* in the situatedness of their life.

PART II

Anti-Asbestos Activism

Chapter 4: Osasco. Cidade, Trabalho e Lutas

Operário
- Quem você pensa
que eu sou?
-diz o operário
suado,
cansado,
curvado.
-Vê? Tá 'qui, ó'!
E mostra as mãos
espalmadas para cima,
os calos esbranquiçados
dizendo quem ele é,
e quem não é
nem quer ser.[45]
(De Souza Martins 2014:60)

Introduction

The municipality of Osasco's role in the industrial and economic development of the São Paulo's region has been and still is relevant. The city seal on buses, flags, and public offices buildings is easily visible while walking in the city centre. It evokes the importance of the industrialization with the symbols of two hammers and two gears accompanied by the words *cidade* [city] and *trabalho* [work]. To these two words, I add *lutas* [struggles], because of the Osasco's socio-political and cultural history marked by a significant legacy of civil and workers' mobilizations, actions of guerrilla, and cultural movements through which ideas, values, and practices of citizenship and civil engagement have circulated.

In Osasco's social fabric a group of asbestos workers found interlocutors for a constructive dialogue and structures favouring the formal organization of their mobilization practices in *ABREA-Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto* [Brazilian Association of Exposed to Asbestos]. I refer to *lutas* that are acted at a public level, in the local context, in various historical moments, and those at a private level in men and women's daily struggle for social

[45] Worker/Who do you think I am?/The worker says/ sweaty/tired/curved/Do you see?/It is here/And he shows the hands/Flattened up/The whitish calluses/Telling who he is/And who is not/Nor wants to be [my translation].

rights, recognition of their suffering and efforts against the disruptive effects of asbestos exposure on their bodies and worlds.

In this chapter, I discuss how ABREA's practices and strategies of activism emerged from a specific social fabric in Osasco where in the early 1990s a group of asbestos former workers began to mobilise on the basis of their experiences with asbestos-related diseases (ARDs), in particular asbestosis and pleural plaques. ABREA was founded in 1995, and in two decades of struggles, has engaged in a vigorous dialogue with local entities (e.g. political parties, trade unions, and public institutions). I describe ABREA's historical and social contextualization by following the traces of the socio-political processes embodied by the activists' life stories and their influence on ABREA as a collective social actor.

The impact of Liberation Theology on Osasco's struggles

O trabalhador vai chegar num ponto que ele vai dominar a empresa do padrão
[The worker will reach a point from which he will dominate the boss' firm]
(Father Domingos Barbé, worker-priest in Osasco during the military dictatorship, quoted by a research collaborator during an interview).

My understanding of ABREA's socio-political background and activities has been deeply influenced by the encounters and conversations I have had with the current President, Mr. Eliezer João de Souza. Mr. de Souza has authorised me to use his real name, and so I share his suggestions and interpretations with true 'authorship' (Fonseca 2010) and consider the extent to which his insights have moulded my approach to the research context and my reflections. I read Mr. de Souza's gestures and discourses as expressions of nuances that being a *sufferer-activist* can assume. His *habitus* and life story bore traces of suffered social injustice and structural violence. At the same time, his embodiement of the processes of AR *disasters* emerged from his bodily experience (as a sufferer from ARD) and his resistance to them (as a militant).

I quote one of my gatekeepers who said: *"na ABREA cada um propõe, ninguém manda"* [at the ABREA everybody makes proposals, nobody rules], when I refer to ABREA as an organization characterised by equal division of work and decision-making processes involving all the members of the board. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Mr. de Souza embodied the role of the leader, based on his charisma, knowledge, and engagement. He was one of my gatekeepers to the field and I exchanged reflections, feelings, and thoughts throughout all the research's phases with him. I am aware of the interpretative, political,

emotional, and practical influence he had on my research. I adopted methods and strategies to counterbalance his 'presence' in my research, for instance, by looking for research collaborators with other political opinions, arranging interviews by myself and interviews outside the ABREA offices, and studying material that did not belong to ABREA's archives. However, it is undeniable that during the investigation of practices, discourses, and relations currently undertaken by ABREA, it was Mr. de Souza who accompanied me (and inevitably influenced my research) through his narratives and the encounters he arranged for me when researching Osasco's socio-political background from which anti-asbestos activism emerged. Often, during our conversations, Mr. de Souza referred to his encounter with the worker-priests living in Osasco whose lives were guided by Liberation Theology (LT)[46] as a crucial experience that had influenced all his life and militancy. I could see the influence of his encounter with the worker-priests on his ethics that affected how ABREA's activities were conceived, designed and performed.

The impact of LT, whose principles and methods have been put into practice by worker-priests living in the poorest neighbourhoods of Latin American cities and rural regions, has been relevant in the socio-political processes occurring in Latin America since the end of the 1960s (Rowland 2007). In Brazil, and particularly in Osasco, the activities promoted by worker-priests operating at the *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* [Base Ecclesial Communities-BECs] situated in *favelas* and *bairros operários* [shantytowns and working-class neighbourhoods], have been crucial in moulding the local social fabric while playing a fundamental role in the organization of resistance to the military dictatorship in 1964-1984 (de Jesus 2006).

One morning, a few days before the end of my fieldwork, Eliezer gave me a book as a present, saying that it had been a fundamental reference point for civil struggles in Brazil and that many militants had studied it. The book's title was *Jesus. Sua Terra, Seu Povo, Sua Proposta* [Jesus. His Land, His People, His Proposal], edited by the *Movimento de Trabalhadores Cristãos-MTC* (2001, eight edition). *"Agata, esta luta contra o amianto em Osasco, em São Paulo do Brasil, tem muito a ver com estes movimentos"* [this struggle against asbestos, here in Osasco, in São Paulo, Brazil, is deeply related to these movements], he told me. I quote the conversation that followed during which Mr. de Souza explained the positive effects of the strong relationship between anti-asbestos activism and other social movements in Osasco. These relationships, originating from shared stories of militancy and

[46] That is "a way to understand the grace and salvation of Jesus in the context of the present and from the situation of the poor" (Gutiérrez 2007:19).

civil engagement beyond the specific mobilization against asbestos, were rooted in the historical processes which took place in Osasco—a context distinguished by a vivid movement of people, capital, and ideas (see Chapter 3).

> *Mr. de Souza: Agata, look at the cover. There is the Jesus' profile drawn among workers in protest. This is an historical book; do you know why? This book helped a lot in the democratization of Brazil, at the time of withdrawal, during the military dictatorship here, from 1964 to 1984. Many courses have been organised based on this book, not only for Christian militants, but also for all the leftist militants in Brazil. The Catholic Church in Brazil had an organization through the worker-priests, who were especially from France and Italy. Father Domingos Barbé has been my teacher many years ago and he used this book to deepen the reflection on Christian faith's examples within workers' lives. Many of the militants who studied with workers-priests had been tortured, prisoned, and killed during the dictatorship.* […] *Thiago and Pedro, you interviewed them, were also close to the worker-priests. Now, they collaborate with trade unions and the PT* [Partido dos Trabalhadores-PT, workers' party]*, and they still continue supporting our struggle against asbestos. Our movement here in São Paulo region and Osasco, is connected to trade unions and social movements together,* [and] *to religious groups too. Many support us today because they know and respect our struggle.*
>
> *A: Does not a similar support occur in other cities?*
>
> *Mr. de Souza: No, it does not, not with the same assiduity at least. Here, there is a joint work that is a plural work with different entities. In Osasco, each trade union is represented in the inter-union board, from the largest to the smallest one. ABREA also is represented and there we defend workers' health and support the unions' unity in the workers' joint struggle for health and rights.*

Mr. de Souza, who was 74 years old, was born in Minas Gerais, where he has lived and worked, since he was a child in the *roça* [rural area]. He was approximately 25 when he first arrived in São Paulo and then, in 1968, he began working at the Eternit plant in Osasco, where he joined friends from his hometown, who had emigrated to São Paulo's industrial neighbourhood.

> *They told me to come to Osasco and work with them at the Eternit. The salary was good and many young men were there, it would have been nicer and more enjoyable than continuing working in the construction industry as I was doing, in a very isolated area of São Paulo state.*

In Osasco, Mr. de Souza started living in the *bairro operário* [working class neighbourhood] called Vila Yolanda, where there was a group of worker-priests from France and Italy. Referring to the principles of LT, these ecclesiastics decided to share their daily life with the poorest and most vulnerable Osasco's citizens most of whom had recently arrived from Brazil's north-eastern states and countryside. During the day, the priests worked in the plants, while in the night they promoted the *bairro*'s inhabitants' participation in meetings and educational activities based on the method called *'Ver-Julgar-Agir'* ['See-Judge-Act'] (see

Gutierréz 1972). Based on "ordinary people's everyday experience of poverty", LT "involves a use of Scripture the interpretation of which is closely related to that experience" (Rowland 2007:1). Through the *'Ver-Julgar-Agir'* method, people were incited to reflect on their daily troubles and events occurring around them by referring to the Bible, and main Christian doctrines.

> The stages of seeing and judging thereby pass to a time of action; a time of action in which those empowered within the base ecclesial community immerse themselves within traditionally secular neighbourhood (*bairro*) concerns such as local community centres, women's groups, cooperative ventures, political parties and unions, youth clubs, and *ad hoc* campaigns in the pursuit of a local health clinic, sanitation facilities, school and public transport provisions (Dawson 2007:148).

Conversely, the Scripture was interpreted in light of experiences in daily life that were considered as important sources of knowledge. The activities promoted at the BECs were informed by a focus on this praxis, and were intended to develop a sense of community based on the active role of the community members. In this way, the community became personally engaged in a bottom-up process to achieve better life conditions and social rights (Dawson 2007).

In Mr. de Souza's narratives, activities promoted by the French worker-priest Domingos Barbé at the Vila Yolanda's BECs have been particularly significant in his life. Barbé professed the importance of 'active non-violence' in Brazilian socio-political struggles (Barbé 1983), and participated as a metallurgic industry worker in the strike of July 17, 1968 organised in Osasco (see next section). For this reason, Barbé was expelled from Brazil. The military regime expelled immigrants they considered as subversive and this practice was especially addressed to unionists and anarchists from European countries who divulgated their ideals and examples of mobilization in Brazil (Giannotti 2007). I found several contact points between the ethics influencing ABREA's practices and LT methods and ideals. I consider these as the signs of historic civil struggles embodied by the collective social actor represented by ABREA and by the activists who make these traces come alive through their actions. LT has provided a frame of principles and morals to which ABREA's members, particularly the most engaged ones, interpreted their activism. The discussion of these aspects is useful to contextualise the Osasco anti-asbestos movement within a specific ethical context and it allows for reflection on starting from an emic perspective.

LT's spread across Latin America is intertwined with the consequences of the accelerated industrialization and urbanization processes that have deeply marked the social and economic contexts of entire regions, like the Greater São Paulo in Brazil (Dawson 2007:140). I refer to

the theological and historical analysis proposed by the *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Rowland (2007) to draw attention to peculiarities of the LT's strong impact on Osasco social context, and relate them to the investigated practices of activism.

> In a situation where hundreds of thousands of peasants were driven off the land their families have farmed for generations, because of international demand for economic growth to service foreign debt, and where many have drifted to the shantytowns which have sprung up on the periphery of large cities, liberation theology has flourished (Rowland 2007:2).

As we saw in Chapter 3, similar processes occurred in Osasco, a city which has occupied a strategic position in the industrialization and migration processes occurring in São Paulo state that have had implications for all Brazil. The economic growth of São Paulo region was intertwined with the emergence of urban populations living in conditions of extreme poverty due to the high unemployment rates caused by the unbalanced relationship between job opportunities and the number of men and women who moved to the industrialising centres with the project to improve their lives. Similar phenomena are not just preventable by capitalistic economics, but they are critical for its being perpetuated, based on the constant availability of workforce allowing for continued low salaries, and consequent increase of private profits (Martins Rodrigues 1974). Rowland quotes the words of one of the most representative exponents and founders of LT, Gustavo Gutiérrez, who said: "the question in Latin America will not be how to speak of God in a world come of age, but rather how to proclaim God as Father in a world that is inhumane. What can it mean to tell a non-person that he or she is God's child?" (Rowland 2007:3).

In a context like Osasco, uncontrolled industrialization and the effects of unplanned urbanization combined with the cultural legacy of colonization and an economic system based on slavery and coffee plantations. Governmental institutions operated to safeguard investors' interests (Brazilian and foreign), and did not hesitate to deploy military and police forces to prevent all protests by workers and disadvantaged groups (Martins Rodrigues 1974). In similar settings across Brazil, displaced men and women, living in conditions of extreme vulnerability due to illiteracy, poverty, and lack of a support network, had no guaranteed rights. As reported by local historiographical monographies, "every social and economic right needed to be conquered" by workers (Pignatari Werner 1981), and the 'weapon' they used most, starting from the early 20th Century has been the strike (Giannotti 2007).

Worker-priests, adhering to the LT, through their activities at the BECs, situated in the poorest neighbourhoods, operated at the margins and occupied those interstices of social life creeping in a violent, individualistic, and competitive context. In those interstices, ideals of

social justice and equity were thought of, elaborated, discussed, and eventually—partly—realised jointly with other social groups. Student-workers organizations and trade unions in particular, that were then declared illegal during the military dictatorship (1964-1984) (Giannotti 2007).

While contextualising Osasco's socio-political situation, I found several parallels between the LT practices that started in the 1960s and anti-asbestos activism now.

First, LT assumed a fundamental role in legitimising and providing a language—the "God's Word"—for the social struggles that emerged from a suffering that was socially experienced and structurally produced. Similarly, anti-asbestos activism has provided sufferers with language—including political, judicial, and biomedical words—to think about their private experiences of exposure, illness, and grieve in terms of injustice and violence. In both cases, these languages made the sufferers "no longer willing to be the passive objects of abuse and exploitation, but now determined to be active subjects, increasingly responsible for the construction of their own history" (Dawson 2007:148).

A second parallel is the reference to the global dimension of the socio-economic injustices produced by capitalistic economics to which both the Brazilian civil struggles over the past decades supported by Christian groups guided by LT, and current anti-asbestos activism have acted by reiterating the necessity of a transnational mobilization. Although commonly associated with the social and historical processes occurring in Latin America beginning in 1968 (year of Medellín's conference in Colombia, which is considered as the official start of LT) (Rowland 2007), "Liberation Theology can be considered as a worldwide movement for human emancipation" (Berryman 1987). In a similar way, anti-asbestos activism is performed in various contexts, aims to achieve a global asbestos ban and operates through transnational activities. The 'universalism' preached by theologians in the name of a suffering Christ struggling together with the poor in *favelas* [shantytowns] across the world, is recalled by anti-asbestos activists in the name of the suffering that affects each person involved in asbestos-related *disasters* throughout the world wherever asbestos pollution has existed and/or still exists.

A third parallel concerns the emergence of *comunidades de destino* [communities of fate] (de Oliveira Rovai 2009) that built on the social relationships triggered by activities promoted by worker-priests through the BECs, on one hand, and by anti-asbestos activists through the association on the other. This parallel is particularly significant in relation to a context characterised by the hectic movement of people who followed the market's demands and found themselves displaced in a new life and working environment. The engagement in socio-

political activities can be seen as a process through which the social actors developed a sense of belonging to the specific context of Osasco, based on new social and emotional relationships instead of familial bonds.

As already mentioned, Christian groups led by worker-priests following LT operated closely with other social groups. In Osasco, during the military dictatorship, social forces mobilised around two main movements: the "Grupo Osasco", linked to student groups involved in the organization of *guerrilha* [guerrilla] actions, and the *Frente Nacional do Trabalho-FNT* [National Work Front] that emerged from the relationships between the *Juventude Operária Católica-JOC* [Catholic Working Youth] and the BECs (de Oliveira Rovai 2014).

Most of the militants were employed at the local metallurgic industries, and the members of clandestine trade union organizations operated here as well only becoming legal on the last days of the military dictatorship. During fieldwork, Mr. de Souza, the current ABREA president and my gatekeeper, helped me to arrange meetings with unionists and activists who supported anti-asbestos activism and whose militant experiences were strongly intertwined with the history of socio-political struggles occurred in Osasco. One of them was Thiago (I use a pseudonym).

I met Thiago on a rainy morning during my last days of fieldwork at the ABREA's office. Thiago was engaged in movements characterising Osasco's political and social life since the 1960s. At that time, he worked at the local railway industry Cobrasma, one of the largest and most important Brazilian factories. I quote him:

> *At the Cobrasma they hired workforce from north-eastern states and countryside. The* Nordestino [the North-eastern] *worker was quite submissive, he was lacking of that political view that European workers had. The* Nordestino *like me could be easily subjected and the managers knew and took advantage of that.*

During the military dictatorship, he was fired because of his militancy in the metallurgic union and in the *Ação Catolica Operaria-ACO* [Worker Catholic Action]. His name was included in a 'black list' of subversive people, and for this reason he spent several years as unemployed since no one would run the risk to hire him and have problems with the military regime. He took the occasion of that forced free time to return to studies, an opportunity he had not had as a child. When Thiago was young he had to work in the *roça* [rural area], and only when he became a teenager did he learn to read and write. His militancy experience, an encounter with Freire's pedagogy, and his involvement in educational activities at the BECs, nurtured his passion for pedagogy and at the end of the dictatorship he entered a university

program in Education. To date, he works as educator, and he is still active in Osasco's socio-political life as a member of the teachers' union and other organizations.

> *I know Eliezer since the sixties; we know our respective stories of militancy and we respect each other. I was born in Bahia, but together with my family, we moved to São Paulo state, and settled in the countryside where all of us worked in the* roça [rural area]. *Until I was 15/16 years old, I did not know write and read. Afterwards, we moved to a bigger city called Presidente Prudente, and, in 1962, I moved alone to São Paulo* em busca de sobrevivência [search for surviving], *and I found a job at the Cobrasma, a railway industry in Osasco. I worked there more or less eight years. When I began, I did not know what a union was and what class struggle meant. By that time, I remember that there already were protests denouncing the unhealthy working conditions in the plant. Once, a co-worker of mine came and asked me if I would have been interested in joining the metallurgic union. I asked some questions about it and then I accepted. In the end of the month, I read that a small percentage of my salary had been given to the union… I even did not know that workers themselves founded the unions! All my knowledge and political consciousness came afterwards, during the militancy, with my 'baptism' in the working class. I learnt to write and read, I got a professional qualification and this helped me significantly, because a non-specialised worker is much more disrespected than a specialised one, the first can be more easily intimidated by the boss. In this way, my* militança [militancy] *began and in that period I met Eliezer, we both lived in the same neighbourhood, called Vila Yolanda. This neighbourhood was very famous by that time; French worker-priests did a great job there. These priests did a lot for the community and taught us to see farther, to understand that problems were not only those in our* bairro [neighbourhood], *in our streets, the problems did not concern only the asphalt, the lack of water, and sanitation. There was a movement of workers' struggles, trade unions, and associations organised by men and women who were mobilising. During the dictatorship, these priests gave support to the militants, even those who had been persecuted. Among these priests, there was Pierre Vauthier. We all called him Pedro in the* bairro, *but his name was Pierre Vauthier. This priest worked as mechanic in a factory here in Osasco.*

Father Vauthier arrived in Brazil in 1963, and was employed as mechanic at the "Braseixos Rockwell S/A" in Osasco (de Jesus 2006). He decided to live in the *bairro operário* [working neighbourhood] Vila Yolanda, working nine/ten hours during the day and promoting educational and social activities at the BECs during the night (de Jesus 2006). Father Vauthier partook in the historical strike organized in Osasco on July 17, 1968 as member of the *Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos* [Metallurgic Union], and for this reason he was arrested and expelled from Brazil (de Jesus 2006).

The impact of LT on Osasco during the military dictatorship (1964-1984), was effective because of the BECs and the activities promoted by worker-priests like Vauthier and Barbé who were recalled in Thiago and Mr. de Souza's narratives. The spirit of LT was still present in discourses and practices of the socio-political scenario in which ABREA's activism was

situated. Anti-asbestos activists whom I talked to interpreted the influence of LT and worker-priests' role based on their experiences of past militancy and current engagement. It is worth considering that the new identities the activists I spoke to were embodying and the unavoidable constraints of our interviews favoured a reflection on specific aspects of Osasco's history. I reflected on how this approach could have influenced the understanding they developed, and the connections they described while narrating their stories to me.

Deep connections and mutual influences among the various social forces that were active in Osasco have existed for many years and are documented by a large local historiography (see de Castro Andrade 1998; Pignatari Werner 1981; de Oliveira Rovai 2009, 2014; de Jesus 2006). By considering their impact on anti-asbestos activism, I focused on the role of social forces whose activities have been undertaken by religious groups inspired by LT and promoted by worker-priests, jointly with trade unions and workers' organizations. They have been sharing commons struggles for the achievement of social and political rights, and in the theological doctrine they found a common language to elaborate and legitimise their claims.

> Upon being opened to the everyday concerns and events of the poor, it is within the formal ecclesial arena that the people find acceptance, resolve and encouragement from the knowledge and experience that God is not only on their side, but also calling for an end to the massively unjust and unacceptable conditions in which so many at the base spend their entire lives (Dawson 2007:148).

In the next section, I discuss the historical role of workers' organizations and trade unions in Osasco in detail, although I am aware that it is impossible to consider the actions they promoted and the impact they have had on the local context as separate from the ones carried out by Catholic groups following LT. I deepen the reflection on the extent to which Osasco's socio-political history and 'main characters' provided ABREA's activism with crucial references in terms of languages, values, and strategies of struggle.

Workers' struggles and trade unions in Osasco

In 1901, a group of workers employed at the "Vidraria Santa Marina", in São Paulo, began to mobilise for better working conditions. Most of them were Italian immigrants with a strong working-class awareness (Pignatari Werner 1981). At that time, São Paulo was becoming one of the most industrialised regions of Brazil; a great demand for specialised labour attracted specialised workers from European countries, particularly Italy, France, and Spain (Pignatari Werner 1981). Soon, the first signs of a conflict emerged between local entrepreneurs with a mentality anchored in slavery, large landed estates, and coffee plantations, wishing to enter

the international market and capitalist bourgeoisie, and the foreign workers with a class awareness rooted in European workers' struggles and political thought, especially anarchism and socialism (Giannotti 2007). As argued by the historian Pignatari Werner (1981), the history of Brazil's industrialization cannot be dissociated from the history of slavery and coffee plantation economics. With the official abolition of slavery in 1871, it became necessary to 'import' a foreign workforce, thus men and women lived and worked in *de facto* slave-like conditions, especially those who worked on plantations or as non-specialised workers.

In early 1900, due to the increasing needs of the flourishing industrial sector, governments and entrepreneurs incentivised the immigration of specialised workers from Europe. This immigration did not produce just economic changes, but also had a relevant impact on the socio-political scenario in regions devoted to plantation economics and the recent industrialising regions like São Paulo. Unlike the new Brazilian one proletariat, European proletariat was politicised. Consequently, "Brazil did not import just workforce, but also ideas. The social movements of the beginning of 20th Century were linked to the anarchist, socialist, and union ideas imported together with specialised work-force" (Pignatari Werner 1981:5).

The "Vidraria Santa Marina" was one of the most prosperous industries in the São Paulo region since it was a glass industry, which was an almost non-existent sector in Brazil, so there was a dependence on imports. Hundreds of workers were employed, most of them Italian, and a large number of minors were also working there (Pignatari Werner 1981).

A first strike was organised at the plant in 1901, when workers mobilised for better job contracts; a second strike, in 1909, was organised by 130 workers (all of them minors) requesting higher salaries (Pignatari Werner 1981). This strike led to a mass firing. However, the workers, who were now unemployed continued to stay in touch with unionists who had supported them during the strike. Particularly incisive was the role played by Edmondo Rossoni, an Italian anarchist and unionist who had been called from Italy and chosen by workers to teach their children (Pignatari Werner 1981). Workers' relationship with the unionists led to the formulation of a project for a glass industry cooperatively managed by workers, who would have become *operários-proprietários* [workers-owners]. The industry was to be called "Cooperativa dos Vidreiros" and the chosen site was Osasco, not by accident. In fact, Osasco's inhabitants, the majority of whom were Italian, welcomed and supported their fellow unemployed compatriots by providing them with food, hospitality and help to find a new job. Antonio Agù, celebrated by local historiography as Osasco's founder and

mythical character, even donated land to the workers where they could build a new glass industry (Pignatari Werner 1981:50-51). It is interesting to note that not only Italian immigrants gave their support, but also other groups, defined by the historian as groups "which adhered to union values and working class identity" (Pignatari Werner 1981:50-51). The building for the new factory was constructed with the highest quality materials and with the support of unionists, workers, and citizens.

This cooperative, where production never started, is evoked by local and national historiography as an emblematic example of Brazilian workers' struggles and it is considered to be the symbolic start of Osasco's tradition of socio-political mobilization (Pignatari Werner 1981:xiv-xv). As the following quote suggests:

> the experience and the memory of all this has been transmitted to the descendants of the Vidraria Santa Marina's glassmakers. They moulded Osasco like it appears today, and more than their ancestors, they [the descendants] have been aware of their structural position, as the events occurred in 1968, when they formed a heroic group of student-workers, have demonstrated (Pignatari Werner 1981:xv).

The strikes organised at the "Vidraria Santa Marina" are emblematic of crucial aspects characterising Osasco, and they help to situate anti-asbestos activism within a broader process of local dynamics and struggles whose traces I found in my research partners' bodies and life stories. These traces were stories of emigration, violent industrialization, chaotic urbanization, child labour, exploitation, and displacements. At the same time, they evoke the ambitions of men and women moved by needs, desires, and passions in their search for better life and working conditions. They recall past struggles during which new social relationships, and socio-political engagement became the basis for building new roots, understandings, and practices that are necessary to consider to understand the nuances of the anti-asbestos activism in Osasco.

ABREA's connections to the world of workers' struggles and unions were palpable on various aspects. ABREA activists were workers outside the world of work since they were retired, because of their age. However, the world of work lived 'inside them' through the embodied practices, knowledge, and decades of asbestos exposure, the latter manifested in their ARDs. Although, most of them did not actively or constantly engage in workers' organizations and unions during their youth, in their elderly age, they were engaged in the struggle, which was deeply connected to the history of struggles of unions, political parties, and groups active in Osasco.

The working-class developed in Brazil in the first twenty years of the 20th Century (Giannotti 2007). Until the 1930s, laws guaranteeing basic rights to workers did not exist, and

governments reacted to workers' claims as matters to be solved by police interventions (Giannotti 2007). Anarcho-syndicalism brought by Spanish and Italian immigrants played a crucial role in accelerating the process through which Brazilian working class awareness developed and mobilizations spread. Anarchism was based on anti-clerical, anti-military, and anti-capitalistic ideals in favour of an international proletariat. It developed especially in southern Europe countries that were less industrialised than the northern countries; workers who emigrated to Brazil were precisely from these countries, especially Spain and Italy (Giannotti 2007:76), and a relevant number of them settled down in São Paulo state.

> From the anarchic perspective, syndicates were the most important form of workers' organizations. The main form of struggle was the 'direct action': spontaneous struggles with the maximum of autonomy for workers' organizations. They [anarchists] refused the idea of any central union organization. They only accepted the idea of confederations, which did not impose their decisions and respected the autonomous decisions of the bases instead. Strike was a lobbying instrument, in addition to other kinds of manifestations and protests. The main instrument of struggle and opposition to the bourgeois class was the general strike (Giannotti 2007:77).

In my analysis, the legacy of this political strategy can be found in the ways the anti-asbestos activism still operated in Osasco, where anarcho-syndicalism together with movements like those inspired by LT concurred in defining the peculiarities of Osasco's context. Some interesting parallelisms I found between the dynamics discussed by Giannotti (2007), and the ones characterising ABREA activism. For instance, from the struggles inspired by anarcho-syndicalism, ABREA seemed to have inherited the unwillingness to have a hierarchical structure. Moreover, ABREA was not based on relationships of dependency with other social groups, but rather privileged relationships of reciprocal support.

Osasco had hectic socio-political and cultural movements since the early years of its urban and industrial development. Beginning in the early decades of 20th Century, union and workers' organizations inspired by anarchism and socialist ideals operated there and gave voice to the claims raised by workers, most of whom were immigrants, illiterate, and minors. Starting from the 1960s, worker-priests following the LT principles promoted educational activities at the BECs that were situated in the most vulnerable *bairros* [neighbourhoods] of the city, and contributed to the development of a sense of community based on bonds of friendship and social justice ideals (de Jesus 2006). Student-workers' groups including workers studying at the evening courses at the *Ginasio Estadual Antonio Raposo Tavares* (which opened in the 1950s) (Pignatari Werner 1981) and students from the University of São Paulo working in the plants joined workers' mobilizations (de Oliveira Rovai 2014). The critical and resistance power held by all these and other social groups culminated in a rare

(and one of the largest) strike overtly against the military dictatorship in July 1968. This was the context in which ABREA's anti-asbestos activism was rooted, and ABREA members' life stories and practices evoked this embodied past.

The last aspect to be considered here is another deep interconnection between ABREA and the social fabric from which it emerged. The link is the strategies of struggle that are based on and moulded by the importance of *conscientização* (see Freire 1980), which literally translated means the act of acquiring knowledge. I draw attention to what I perceived as a living (and constantly reinvented) valid tradition of practices, discourses, and strategies to elaborate and conceive of current strategies for struggle (at a theoretical and moral level), and to put them into the practice (at a practical level). ABREA activists often referred to anti-asbestos activism's practices and purposes in terms of *conscientização* by explicitly referring to the revolutionary potential of education.

Starting in the 1960s, social groups engaged in Osasco's civil mobilizations referred to Freire's pedagogy (see Freire 1980) and found a substantial coincidence between education and revolution (Tassan 2012:139). The combination deeply influenced not only their strategies and ethics of struggle, but also inspired their projects for democratic governmental institutions to be organised after the military regime (Tassan 2012:139). I refer to Semeraro (2007) who offers an interpretation of Brazilian social movements in the light of two key concepts: liberation and hegemony. In particular, the author underlines how Freire's idea of liberation and Gramsci's concept of hegemony (1975) are fundamental references to understand Brazilian mobilizations in 1960-1970 and 1980-1990 (Semeraro 2007). These theoretical and political 'tools' became deeply intertwined and influenced "social movements, political organizations, and Brazilian working class educators whose political-educational practices gave a sort of unity by conferring a peculiar accord of language, theoretical formulations, and socio-political projects" (Semeraro 2007:95). They are still useful 'tools' to understand the struggles currently undertaken by 'oppressed' and 'subaltern' groups, in Brazil and globally (Semeraro 2007). I found these tools to be appropriate concepts to approach ABREA activism investigated in Osasco, which has strong connections to the transnational context of the anti-asbestos global movement.

I draw attention to the aspects that recall in current practices of struggle the strategies and ideals rooted in ideologies, movements, and events, which have defined Osasco's socio-political context. A first aspect is the importance attributed to the *conscientização* activities. Developing knowledge and awareness of socio-political and economic dynamics producing the social and private suffering affecting one's body, worlds, *bairros*, and community is the

first step to "overcome the oppression […] and become protagonist of own history" (Semeraro 2007:97). During my fieldwork, I observed the participative and collaborative dimension of ABREA's meetings favouring discussions, reflections, and proposals for action that may have been feasible in the local context, but with constant recall of social justice's achievements to be pursued in the global context. I read those circumstances as ideally linked to the tradition of civil engagement characterising Osasco's history. The *conscientização* process starts from the involvement of the oppressed, the marginalised, and the sufferer who developes knowledge and therefore acquires the power to act. The following step of *conscientização* means making others acquire knowledge, and in so doing, making one's own oppression—and suffering—visible and recognised, and at the same time, making others aware and alert to specific dynamics producing disparities and vulnerabilities. I relate the category of *sufferer-activist* to that of 'oppressed' because both pivot around the centrality of the social actor living concrete experiences of suffering. The awareness developed through the *conscientização* provides him/her with new 'tools' to understand and experience his/her own suffering, and poses the conditions for the passage from the subjection to the subjectification of the 'victim' (Semeraro 2007). In a similar way, Gramsci's idea of catharsis evokes "the transformation of a passive individual, dominated by economic structures, in an active subject, able to take decisions and carry on a personal project of society" (Semeraro 2007:99). To realise this project, liberation and hegemony's conquests are both necessary and coexist in a complementary relationship.

Between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, the lexicon from Gramsci's political thought was popularised by social movements and academy. According to Gohn (1997) "Gramsci is the author most incisive in the analysis and in the dynamics of struggles and urban grass-root movements occurred in Latin America in the decades of Seventies and Eighties" (Gohn 1997:188 quoted by Semeraro 2007:100). Moreover, Gramsci's concepts have been fundamental in the elaboration and implementation of the new institutions of a democratic State to be erected after two decades of military regime. Gramsci's acknowledgement of the ethical and political dimensions of the State, in line with Hegel and Lenin, legitimised the flow of the numerous socio-political forces that have fought against the dictatorship into the newly State institutions, avoiding the risk that they might disaggregate or disappear (Semeraro 2007).

The peculiar intertwining of Freire's pedagogy and Gramsci' political thought occurred in Brazil and is the last aspect considered in relation to the influences it has had on Osasco's

socio-political and cultural context, and consequently on ABREA activism that emerged from that.

ABREA's first steps

In the mid-1990s, in Osasco, where the socio-political scenario was rooted in the above illustrated processes and dynamics, a group of asbestos workers, experiencing symptoms of a malaise—illnesses—that they could not decipher, began to gather and seek together explanations and 'truth' concerning their health conditions. Many of them had worked at Eternit in Osasco (closed in 1993), but there were also workers of other factories located in São Paulo region, such as the Lonaflex (Osasco) and the Brasilit (São Caetano do Sul). These workers, the majority of whom already retired or unemployed for the closure of the factories, found interlocutors willing to listen to their voices, to start a dialogue and a collaboration lasting until today in public institutions such as the *Ministério Público do Trabalho-MPT* [Public Ministry of Labour], and the research institute *Fundação Jorge Duprat Figueiredo de Segurança e Medicina do Trabalho*-FUNDACENTRO [Jorge Duprat Figueiredo Foundation of Safety and Occupational Health][47]. I return later to these connections that represent crucial aspects of ABREA's activism (see Chapter 6).

In this section, I draw attention to the fact that in the first phase of the anti-asbestos mobilization, social bonds of friendship, work and activism, rooted in Osasco's specific socio-political fabric, were decisive for the ABREA's foundation. The biosocial relationships (Rabinow 1992) emerged from sharing ARDs that were becoming gradually manifest and diagnosed to the workers, and strengthened those bonds.

Based on the ethnographic data I collected, the first reactions of the Eternit firm occurred on a level of the relational dimensions (political, social and affective) characterising the activism. In response to the accusations and mobilization of former workers, the firm tried to weaken and crumble those bonds by proposing alternatives imbued by the paternalistic capitalism that had moulded the plant's policy management[48]. Moreover, the firm reacted to the workers' mobilization on a practical and economic level as well by offering compensations and health insurance.

[47] FUNDACENTRO is a research institute (the major in Latin America about Occupational Health and Security) affiliated to the *Ministério do Trabalho e Previdência Social* [Ministry of Labour and Social Security]. See the institute's website for further information www.fundacentro.gov.br.

[48] In my analysis of the dynamics occurring in the workplace, I referred to historiographical and anthropological contributions concerning work, industry, and worker movement (see Balestrini 1973; Burawoy 1979a, 1979b, 1985; D'Aloisio 2013, 2015).

I conclude this section by quoting an interview conducted with a former Eternit worker who was among the founders of the association.

> *When the workers founded the association, the activities had already ceased, but the firm came back, and opened an office to attend to former workers. They reopened even the club for the former workers, whom they used to refer to as 'collaborators of the Eternit'. There, they organized barbecues and parties to which they invited all of us except those most visibly engaged in the mobilization. Along with this, they began to offer health insurance. When their doctors diagnosed an ARD, they offered compensation. The amount depended on the seriousness of the disease. They offered 15,000 reais for a very serious disease. The majority of former workers who signed the agreement got 10,000 reais on average. They recognised just one or two of the ARDs one can develop because of exposure. For example, they did not recognize* o cansaço do coração [the fatigue of the heart]. *They recognized only asbestosis, a disease that gets worse as the time passes by. They proposed to us that we sign the agreement not to file lawsuits against the firm and not to complain, even in cases where the worker developed a more serious disease in the future. There were many pressures on us, and many accepted and signed the agreement because they needed money.*

Conclusions

In this chapter, I outlined the historical and socio-political profile of Osasco by considering those events, dynamics, and processes that appeared crucial in characterising the background of the activism organised by the ABREA based on my data collection and analysis.

By combining ethnography with historiography (Fassin 2007), I related ABREA's strategies of struggle and moral resistance to the historical and socio-political heritage of the unions' mobilizations, worker-priests' actions, and student-workers' protests that occurred in Osasco and culminated in the resistance against the military dictatorship (1964-1984).

I reflected on the role played by the Liberation Theology (LT) (see Gutierréz 1972), and Freire's pedagogy (see Freire 1967, 1970, 1980) in favouring the elaboration of a critical thinking addressed to a bottom-up revolution undertaken by the oppressed—the 'nobodies' (Galeano 1989) of our world. These theories moulded ABREA's practices and discourses, especially through the role of its current president, Mr. Eliezer João de Souza whose public and private life had been marked by an encounter with the worker-priests living in the poorest neighbourhoods of Osasco, where recently arrived immigrants settled.

At the same time, the frantic industrialization occurred in São Paulo region and involving Osasco municipality favoured the development of a numerous working class which soon organised in trade unions. These workers looked at the working class struggles in Europe organised by anarchists and communists who then through the migratory processes let their knowledge emerge and circulate in Brazil. As I discuss in Chapter 6, the anti-asbestos

activism emerged in this specific context marked and crossed by the movement of people, capital, struggles, and morals where ABREA found its main supporters, interlocutors, and *sufferer-activists*.

Chapter 5: Care-Activism and Memory

The incarnate body (in contrast to the merely biological)
is the living site of a contested hegemony of power.
(Frankenberg 1992: xviii).

Prologue

A time bomb. Often, during my fieldwork in Brazil and Italy, I have heard this expression to describe the existential—bodily—condition of those who have been exposed to asbestos, and had fibres nestled in their bodies for decades.

The fibres, in silence, wound and stiffen membranes covering their vital organs. An inner bodily laceration starts when the besieged body is young and strong and can run fast over long distances and work indefatigably.

Then comes slow unceasing erosion that continues as the body ages, hair whitens and the wrinkles on one's face and hands seem to retrace the map of paths and encounters in a life. Day by day, your breath shortens, you notice you cannot climb stairs and you get tired after just a few steps. You notice you are always coughing now and you have pain behind your shoulder blades. Suddenly, you feel like something is crushing in your chest, close to your heart. Time is about to expire. A bomb is going to explode soon and devastate everything including your body where the *time bomb* has hidden for decades.

Introduction

Asbestos-related (AR) disasters become visible in crumbling bodies and disruption. The embodied past of suffered exploitation, deceit, and violence emerges in bodies that are present while decaying and threaten an irreversible absence. A secret guarded for years is announced and then revealed, understood, and narrated when the body's symptoms are translated in signs making the individual experience of suffering part of a collective disaster. The past is lived and lived again in the multiple crises it causes in the present. The traces left by the trajectories through which the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011) disseminated *time bombs* that become visible in the suffering, flesh and intersubjectively experienced in the present. *Care-activism* makes visible the relationships between individual experiences of suffering and the processes of AR disasters. Mobilization is rooted in and legitimised by the memory guarded and reactivated by the suffering body that represents the 'battlefield' where injustices are

borne, but the body is also the primary *locus* and tool for action from which practices and meanings of struggle emerge.

Based on the narratives of contaminated asbestos workers and the relatives of those who have died from asbestos-related diseases (ARDs), in this chapter, I consider the practices of the *care-activism* undertaken by *sufferer-activists*—survivors—I met. On one hand, practices of activism (connoted by a critique towards the dominant system of knowledge and power which have ceased to appear immutable and natural) are framed by activism strategies and moral practices of care (e.g. biomedical examinations, care for incurable cancers such as MM, and a refusal to abandon sufferers). Activism has come to be seen as necessary and urgent to provoke change. On the other hand, activism consists of practices of care for survivors' suffering.

This chapter pivots around the practices and discourses lived by (and originating from) a—suffering—body, which once again represents the lens through which I read disaster-related processes and activism. The reference to the investigation of a moral dimension of care has been fundamental to elaborate the proposed interpretation (see Kleinman 1997, 2006, 2009, 2012; Kleinman and Van der Geest 2009; Fassin 2006, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Mol 2008; Biehl 2012). In my analysis, I referred to literature that has investigated the role of the emotions and affects within social movements addressing issues of health rights and that have emerged from illness experiences (see Brown and Zavestoski 2004; Brown et al. 2004; Gould 2009; Goodwin et al. 2001). In the following sections, based on my research partners' narratives and my fieldnotes, I first consider the catastrophic impact of AR disasters on one's body and world. Then, I deepen the consideration of the role of the body as a source of knowledge and tool of action. I consider the influence of activism as providing sufferers with the 'instruments' to situate their 'nonsensical' and individual suffering within a collective history of exploitation and injustice. Last, I draw attention to activism as care occurring when the sufferers recognise each other and live affective (and therapeutic) relationships (see Cappelletto 2009; Klawiter 2004, 2008; Fortun 2001; Nguyen et al. 2007; Nguyen 2008), based on their shared *disaster* experiences.

Asbestos-related suffering

Suffering, considered as a cultural practice, is an experience that is as intimate and individual as social and collective. In this section, I quote narratives about the experiences of suffering lived by former asbestos workers and their relatives. The quotations emerged from my

encounters with two widows (Leticia and Beatriz), a daughter (Irene), and two former workers (Pedro and Chico); in all cases, I use pseudonyms.

Leticia/João

I met Leticia at her home in the Vila Yolanda neighbourhood (Osasco) quite far from the city centre. After picking me up at the bus stop, Leticia welcomed me into her house and invited me to enter her living room and sit on the couch where she had collected documents and papers. Before starting the interview, Leticia told me that she had a gift for me. It was a religious book that *"definitely João* [her husband] *would have given* [me], *if he was still alive"*, she said. Leticia and her family were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her husband, João, was an ABREA activist, but he abandoned the association when he began to join his family in Church activities. Leticia was not actively engaged in ABREA activism. I had been given her name as a contact from an occupational health center promoting epidemiological surveillance of women exposed to asbestos in Osasco; most of these women were wives and widows of former workers at the local Eternit plant.

João had died of lung cancer in 2013, aged 83. He had worked for 22 years (1958-1980) at Eternit. Initially, he worked as a servant and was paid 17 *cruzeiros*[49] per hour; then, on the June 3 1966, he was promoted to office assistant, and was paid 198,000 *cruzeiros* per month. When he retired, he was responsible for the warehouse. Leticia highlighted that thanks to her husband's promotions, their family's life conditions had improved. *"Thanks to the work at the Eternit we could build our house,* criar nossos filhos [raise our children], *let all six of them attend college, and guarantee them a good life"*, she said. João and Leticia, both from northeast Brazil, had immigrated to São Paulo in the 1950s to escape poverty. Several times during the interview, Leticia thanked Eternit and once she said that she would never sue the company because it would be as if she was not thankful for the good her family and she had received. João had evidently thought differently and had sued the company. In Chapter 7, based on lawsuit documents that Leticia showed me, I reflect on the abuse of the *uncertainties* characterising ARDs information and experiences by asbestos lobbies and professionals to support their resistance to recognising and accepting the social and individual suffering provoked by asbestos manufacturing.

> *In the last months, João had a horrible pain in the chest. He had been hospitalized and spent his last two months in the hospital. The doctors had told us that he could not*

[49] Old Brazilian currency.

return home, and could not undergo chemotherapy because tudo era já tomado [everything was already taken. I asked Leticia "Did he have cancer?] *He had cancer, I think that in the death certificate, I think, it is written that it was cancer, isn't it?* [she asked me and stood up to take the certificate].
When he started to feel a lot of pain… here, it should be written that it was cancer [she gave me the certificate], *but yes, it was cancer, because I know it was...* [she read] *"malignant neoplasia of the lung". This neoplasia, what would be that?* [she asked me. I answered: "cancer". She repeated "cancer" and she read again "malignant neoplasia of the lung"]. *I remember what the doctor told me: "he cannot back home anymore, and he cannot stand chemotherapy… there is nothing to do. He died in a nursing home. He was very well looked after, but he died alone.* […]
On that day, he called me and told me he wanted a lemonade soda. I could not find it. A girl from the hospital gave me another drink. I told him that I would go to buy whatever he wanted. I came back to Osasco [he was hospitalised in São Paulo], *I bought everything he liked, I went home and washed the fruit I brought for him. I thought to go back to São Paulo, but it was already late and my daughters told me that it would be better to go the next day in the morning, very early in the morning. They told me to rest, therefore I lay down, but I had* uma dor no coração [a pain in the heart]. *When it was almost midnight, the phone rang. At that time, no good news. They said that he had just passed away. For long time afterwards, I felt guilty for not having been with him when he passed away, but many people told me that maybe it has been good not to be together because they say that it is very painful: who has these problems in the lung suffers too much for* falta de ar [lack of air]. *He had already had two crises for* falta de ar *and doctors placed a tube, but they had already warned me that at any time the tube could not solve the crisis anymore. People told me "you do not know, maybe God had a plan for you not to see all that suffering"; people say that is horrible when a person dies from* falta de ar. *It is ok, I know that he went to rest in peace. Even in my prayers, I asked God not to allow him to suffer... because suffering... we are very selfish and want a person we love to stay in a bed suffering, despite we know he would never again get fine. I am not in favour of taking life nor am I in favour of death. Nor is God, we die for the original sin, but we have hope in a new heaven, in a new land, where God will let all the injustices cease... Are you Catholic?* [she asked me the question in a rhetoric way. I felt I could answer anything but yes. I nodded]. *Therefore, you already know that Jesus suffered too; he died while suffering on a cross for us and now is preparing a place for us where there will be no more injustices. This is our hope and solace.* ["Did your husband suffer a lot?" I asked]. *The first three months he suffered a lot. A year before he passed away, I already saw that he was not so fine; I noticed that he was always tired and he was no longer the same person. When he began to feel very bad and could not sleep in the night, I begged him to go to a doctor, but he did not want to go, he thought that if a doctor would treat him, his suffering would last more. He did not want to go to a doctor, although he did not know that there was nothing to do. He did not know and neither did we. One day, I called Mario* [an ABREA activist] *and I told him that my husband was feeling very sick, but that he did not want to go to the doctor. Mario said that it was necessary to take him to the hospital. My son-in-law was already determined to take him to the doctor too, with and without my husband's will. I called Mario and he said that he would come with us. He came and, with my son-in-law, took him to the hospital. My husband was hospitalized and since then his health conditions got worse. The pain he felt was horrible. The nurse gave him sedatives and he slept for a half an hour, but soon the pain began again. In the end, it was necessary to use the oxygen to make him*

breathe, but he violently refused that. I had to hold the tube and prevent him to remove it. Sometimes, he squeezed my arm because he was very angry. A doctor entered the room and I told him that he was mad at me. The doctor explained to me that he was not angry, but that his mind was confused because of the oxygen. ["Did he know that he had cancer?" I asked Leticia]. *We never talked about that, but I think he knew.*

In a corner of the living room, there was a chair. When I stopped recording and noticed it, Leticia told me that João had spent his last year sitting there in 'his' corner. After two years, everything was still left in the same place[50]: the chair, the fan, and João's favourite painting made by his daughter representing *The Last Supper*. In those objects and in the way Leticia and her daughters avoided that corner as if it was a forbidden place surrounded by a kind of sacredness, I felt the strong presence of an absent loved one. That feeling returned and accompanied me during all my encounters and experiences narrated in this chapter.

Beatriz/Carlos (part one)

Through the association [ABREA], *Carlos got to know a lot about ARDs and mesothelioma. He used to say: "thank goodness, I am one of the few ABREA members who has not been reached by asbestos". He always thought that he was a lucky person, since he worked four years there and he was fine. He periodically underwent examinations and everything was fine; however, the fibre was already there and when it appeared, it appeared as an exploding bomb. When he began to feel bad, it was not long before* [his departure]*... he began to feel something ... I noticed that he had a mild cough in September 2007. It was just an annoying little thing, but I asked him: "are not you going to the doctor?". He answered no, and said that he was fine. Actually, he was still feeling good in September/October 2007. He had this very mild cough, but he was fine. He had undergone examinations in July and the results did not show anything. In April 2008, he began to feel very tired. One day, he wanted to go on foot to the bakery nearby our house, but he came back soon and said: "I do not know what I'm feeling; I was not even able to get there. On that same day, he went to talk to a doctor who supports ABREA struggle. The doctor made x-rays of his thorax; the results showed a large pleural effusion. When he saw the radiography, he exclaimed: "Gosh! I got mesothelioma!". He himself made the diagnosis. He did not talk to me soon after the visit. He came back home very nervous, but he did not say anything. He arranged another visit at the hospital, and when he went, I went with him. He did not want me to go, but I did. The doctor asked for the radiographies he had already and drained the liquid; the blood, the pus, everything was already infected. When the results were ready, they did not give a different diagnosis. It was mesothelioma. In the period before the hospitalization, almost one month, he underwent four drains. As soon as the liquid was drained, it reappeared again. Era* muito sofrimento, muita dor [it was a lot of suffering, it was a lot of pain]. *He was hospitalized, but it was… it was so rapid. Doctors told us that surgical treatment was a worthy option to prolong the life expectancy. They could remove the left lung because mesothelioma had affected*

[50] See photograph 10 in the Appendix.

only the left one, but… it did not work... At that time, my youngest daughter was pregnant, he hoped that surgery could allow him to see the granddaughter, but it did not. Era muito dificil (it was very difficult]. *On the last day of his life, he put his hand on my daughter's belly to bless the niece he would never see* [she cried]. *It's too much. I do not want to remember his suffering. Those were very painful days. While he was hospitalized, he was conscious and he saw people dying, he suffered a lot there* [in the hospital]. *He did not want to be intubated at all, but in the end, it was inevitable. He was particularly afraid of the night. During the day, it was fine, but at night, he said, it was terrible.* […]

When he knew... because he saw so many friends fall… Gosh, he shut [himself] *in the room that was his office. He locked himself in and stayed there all the time. Gosh, we suffered a lot, a lot, a lot… because we knew what his illness was. It was very painful to see such a lively person and to know that he was doomed. He felt like that. His only hope was the surgery. He knew that he had very short time, one year / one year and a half at the maximum, but he did not think it was going to be that fast. His hope was surgery to survive a few months more, but... I think that the major suffering for him was to know that he was doomed. He was so aware of his imminent departure that before being hospitalised he wrote on a paper what I would need to do after his death, and he had left this paper and other documents in his room for me to find. When I discovered he had prepared everything... Gosh, it was so painful for me.* [...]

As soon as he felt bad, he understood everything. His last weeks were very sad and painful. He was so aware. He was such a healthy person, so full of life, with so many dreams in his head, who when he received the results he said: "everything has been decided". He knew that he could survive for about six months, a year in the maximum. He was so discouraged. Who would ever imagine a person so full of life, who loved life, entering the room and preparing his funeral? It was painful. How much he cried! He cried there, in his room. Sometimes he closed the door and I let him cry. It was a moment of him, while I ended up crying in another room. What we went through, I believe many families went through the same illness, but they did not have the same knowledge he had. I think they suffered less. He had an in-depth knowledge of the disease because he had friends who were sick; he stayed with them, talked to doctors for them, he accompanied them to the medical examinations. I think that it was more painful for him because of the awareness he had. I think he suffered more [than others with less knowledge about ARDs].

Carlos died in July 2008, aged 66, from malignant mesothelioma (MM) that he had diagnosed himself three months earlier. Through his activism, he had developed the 'tools' (experiential and theoretical knowledge) to translate the symptoms and images of his lungs into signs that he had contracted MM like many of his friends. He knew that the *time bomb* hidden inside him for fifty years was going to explode soon.

Before arranging my appointment with Beatriz for this interview, I had already heard about Carlos from other ABREA members who had told me how engaged he was in anti-asbestos activism at every meeting and activity. ABREA activists recalled how much they missed their *companheiro* [comrade] after his death. Throughout the years, Carlos and his story came to

represent essential references in the narratives collectively elaborated to fund and negotiate the identity of ABREA as a community (de Oliveira Rovai 2014)

Most of the time, Carlos was remembered along with another ABREA activist, Roberto, who had also contracted MM and died in 2009 (one year after Carlos). Roberto and Carlos had become friends through ABREA. One of the first photographs Beatriz showed me during our interview showed the two men sitting in the sun during an anti-asbestos campaign.

Carlos had worked for four years (1964-1968) at Eternit in Osasco, employed in the administrative sector. During his professional career in another factory, he continued his studies and obtained a Master's degree in Law. Before working at Eternit and then in other plants in Osasco as an unspecialised worker, Roberto had worked in the *roça* [rural area], with no opportunity to study. Carlos and Roberto established a friendship based on their shared somatic condition of having been 'exposed' (see Rabinow 1992). In contrast to other disasters wherein the eruption accentuates class differences (see Saitta 2013), AR disasters cross class barriers like the microscopic fibres that pass beyond the factories' walls and gates. These *time bombs* are disseminated not only among the workers, but also among managers, clerks, and residents living and working near an asbestos-polluting source. Eventually, many discover the asbestos disaster through their crumbling and dying bodies.

In some cases, the ABREA members' bonds of friendship began in the factory, while for others, friendships were born in the 'community' (of *sufferer-activists*) emerged from the disaster experiences (Benadusi 2015b). The majority of ABREA members had a working class background, thus differences based on the type of the work done in the plant did not appear to reflect a hierarchy in the relationships in the present. Specialised workers responsible of a working unit in the factory fighting side-by-side with unspecialised workers who were formerly under their supervision. Roberto and Carlos's friendship is an example of how the ties born from sharing a somatic state—asbestos contamination—broke down class differences in the face of their common fragility related to their risk of becoming sick and dying.

Activism has provided those affected by asbestos with a common language to live and situate their illness experiences within a peculiar frame through which the sufferers recognise each other as victims of the same injustice and deception. Even the most intimate experience of suffering that tears the body from inside and exiles the sufferers in impenetrable terrains of anguish, fear, and death reveals its cultural and social dimensions. The paths to give sense to a nonsensical pain or the experience of a—bodily—suffering made more acute and unbearable by the new knowledge (theoretical and experiential) (see Blume 2017) of what is destroying

one's body, are emblematic of the mutual exchange between the body and the surrounding world, maintained by inextricable ties (see Quaranta 2006c, 2012b).

To deepen further the intersubjective and social dimension of suffering, I now refer to the experience lived by Roberto and his family based on the narrative of Roberto's daughter, Irene.

Irene/Roberto

"Look at this!", Irene picked a book from the living room. *"My father used to read this book every single day. There are* os marcos dos dedos dele [the traces of his fingers] *on its pages"*. Irene was showing me her father's book of prayers; specifically, she was indicating pages with yellow traces left by her father's fingers. These pages had morning and evening prayers. *"He used to sit on the sofa and pray. He desperately tried to take strength from God. He did not want to die. Look at the page with the morning's prayer! The trace he left is so visible!"*[51]. Irene delicately turned the book's pages, by lingering on those that guarded the most visible traces of her father's passage. As in Leticia's living room, I felt the strong presence of an absent loved. Roberto came 'alive' through Irene's gestures and memories we shared of those who loved and survived him. As I previously wrote, I had already heard about Roberto many times from ABREA members, and had seen pictures of him. A large portrait of Roberto was always exhibited during asbestos awareness campaigns and events.

Although Roberto's widow and son were also participating in the interview, my main interlocutor was Irene, who unlike her brother, was not actively engaged with ABREA activism. I interpret the low number of women actively participating in the ABREA as the consequence of the low number of women working at Eternit in Osasco where the majority of ABREA members had worked and only a few women were employed in the administrative sector. Other Brazilian anti-asbestos associations with workers from factories where the female presence was higher than Eternit in Osasco had more female members (see D'Acri et al. 2010).

Roberto and his family heard about this diagnosis of mesothelioma when he was 75 and undergoing medical examinations to treat pain provoked by a fall. Roberto had worked at the Osasco Eternit plant for just three and a half years, from 1964-1967. That had been his first job with a regular contract when he was 30. Until then, he had worked in the *roça* [rural area] on coffee and corn plantations in the inner region of the state of São Paulo. Irene said:

[51] See photograph 11 in the Appendix.

Probably, the fall squashed the lung and the heart. To understand why the pain persisted we went to the doctor and afterwards we discovered that the lung was cheio de agua[52] [full of water]. *As soon as the doctors aspirated the liquid, the* agua [water] *reappeared again. When he saw that yellow liquid mixed with blood he said: "Look! They are really removing the dust* [asbestos] *from me. He was really sick; his belly got swollen. Before the fall, he just suffered from* falta de ar [lack of air] *and* cansaço [tiredness]*; after the fall, his health conditions got worse. Deeper examinations revealed the presence of a cancer, close to the heart. When the doctor communicated his diagnosis he became furious, he did not accept that truth, he refused it, he got angry, and he did not want to know anything more. He had many comrades who had already died and he did not want to pass through the same. He was a close friend of Carlos, who was very sick and then died in that period* [2008/2009]. *He said that doctors made a mistake and that the diagnosis was wrong. Because of his poor health conditions, the doctors told us that surgical treatment was not an option; he could undergo just chemo and radiotherapy. The cancer was growing and expanding to the heart, the stomach, which began to swell, and to the prostate. He could not eat anymore. His belly, full of water, hardened. The cancer took all his organs; the doctor said that there was nothing to do. He did not accept it. He was not the same person anymore. After a while, he began to consult spiritualists and to pray a lot. He was really scared by death. He searched for help everywhere, and began to ask for prayers to anybody who came to visit him, regardless the religion, Catholic, spiritualist or evangelical… it did not matter. Before the diagnosis, he used to talk all the time about ABREA and asbestos dangers. He was very active in the association, and he participated in every activity that they organised. He was talkative and very talented in explaining things; therefore, other ABREA members always wanted him to give talks during awareness campaigns. But… with the cancer's onset… everything ceased. He was too weak. The disease consumed him and* acabou com tudo dele [it made everything of him cease]. *When the doctor communicated the diagnosis, the doctor said that he had six/twelve months of life expectancy. The faith helped, because daddy lived one year, but… the last months… he suffered a lot. It was painful standing by him. He did not drink or eat. In the end, he weighed 55 kilos.* […] *When my father received the diagnosis, the doctor asked him if he had ever worked at the Eternit and if he had ever heard about mesothelioma. My dad answered that yes he had worked at the Eternit, although for very few years, and that a dear friend of his had recently died from mesothelioma* [he was referring to Carlos]. *The doctor told him that he had mesothelioma too. My father became sad and* baixou a cabeça [hung the head]. […] *I spent his last night* [the night of Easter 2008] *awake to look after him. At the first hours of the morning, he told me* "Papai, não aguenta mais. Estou dipartindo" [Daddy cannot suffer (the pain) anymore. I am leaving].

Irene was crying, while pronouncing those last words. I was also crying while listening to her. I was not just witnessing and embodying her suffering (Throop 2012), I was suffering with her because Irene's story recalled some of my most painful memories too and made them present in the encounter between the two of us; we were daughters still mourning the loss of a parent. My understanding of Irene's suffering was painfully emotional, more than theoretical.

[52] Expression indicating pleural effusion. I found it to be used by many of my research collaborators in Brazil and during my previous fieldwork in Italy.

Activism gave João, Roberto, and Carlos the 'tools' to translate the symptoms of their diseases into signs of a suffered injustice.

On a public level, they fought, and engaged in awareness campaigns as strategies of struggle. However, on an individual and intimate level, according to the narratives of their survivors, their awareness had caused further suffering and represented the reason for a suffering that was greater and more acute than experienced by people with less knowledge about ARDs. Knowing exactly what they were going to face, having seen their friends die and fall one by one, and knowing that there was no escape, had led João and Roberto not to accept their diagnosis, and Carlos to delay the medical examinations that would have confirmed his suspicions and fears. On the other hand, survivors also suffered as powerless witnesses of the atrocious pain and decay of a loved one. The survivors were disoriented by the loss of reference points in their lives and were forced to continue living and acting in disintegrated worlds.

I met João, Carlos, and Roberto only through the narratives and memories of those who had loved them and suffered with them—survivors and victims of the same disaster. According to a moral and cultural Western perspective to which I inevitably refer, the experience of physical pain is most emblematic of the loneliness that characterises us as human and defines our finitude (Elias 1999). However, the suffering that emerges from an illness experience such as a cancer or a seriously debilitating disease does not necessarily belong to one person, but can be taken over collectively instead (Gordon 1991:137-156).

I conclude this section about the catastrophic impact of AR disasters on one's body and world by quoting Pedro's narrative. Pedro, a former worker at the Eternit plant in Rio de Janeiro who had been engaged in the local anti-asbestos activism, was diagnosed with asbestosis, pleural plaques, and lung nodules, I had known him during events organised in Rio de Janeiro in which ABREA activists from Osasco participated.

Pedro

> *I visited six workers a few days before they died. They told me that the pain they felt* em cima do coração [above the heart] *was unbearable. Many times the pain attacks the heart, but also the liver and kidneys… it is horrible. I have asbestosis and pleural plaques. Last examinations showed the presence of small nodules in the lungs. Now, I have to undergo computerised tomography.*
> A: How did you discover that you had plaques and asbestosis?
> Eu vivia morrendo ao pouco [I was living while dying little by little]. *I came to know that the firm was contacting former workers to undergo medical examinations and eventually proposed to sign the* acordo [transaction]. *I went to the company doctor and I explained how I felt tired all the time, with* falta de ar [lack of air], *and problems in*

walking. To walk a short distance, I had to stop a dozen of times. As soon as the doctor heard me, she called the manager and said: "We have another bomb here, another bomb appeared" [he smiled and emphasised the doctor's inopportune sarcasm]. *I underwent radiography and the results showed that I had asbestosis and pleural plaques.* É muita coisa… [That's a lot of stuff!]. […] *A friend of mine suffered many crises.*
A: Which crises?
The crises due to asbestos, do not you know them?
A: No, I do not.
These crises are awful. Horrible cough. Pain in the legs. Tiredness. You cannot breath, you have headache, pain in the heart, in your shoulders, an horrible tiredness, and a corpo ruim, mas ruim, ruim [a sick body, but really, really sick] parece que a pessoa vai morrer [it looks like the person is going to die] vai cair e morrer [is going to fall and die]. Assim morreram os outros [in this way, the others died].
My friend was losing weight; this was a bad sign. Another friend of mine who lived nearby survived just twenty days with a doença [the disease]. *When these asbestos' crises become more frequent* a gente morre [people die]. *I have already had it* [the crisis] *three times.* Mas ainda não chegou a minha hora de partir, se não você não estaria falando comigo agora [but it did not arrive my departing time yet, otherwise you would not be chatting with me now, he smiled]. […] *Because if you see somebody dying from asbestos… it is horrible… one becomes a 'dressed bamboo tree', it seems that an animal is going to eat him. He becomes skinny. The eyes sink. Everything collapses. The person becomes like a cave. It is horrible. We arrive at that point just to meet God. It is very sad. Once, I visited another* menino [guy], *here in this neighbourhood* [Barros Filho neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro]. *I visited him three days before he died. He was so skinny. He had asbestosis and pleural plaques, with respiratory failure. It was very sad.* […] *I do not know the exact number, but many people already died because it is not just a firm. Beside the Eternit, there are other firms like the Civilit, Brasilit, Teadit that once was called Asberit. The end in "it" is a death's sign for us, a sign that preannounces cancer, mesothelioma, pleural plaques and asbestosis. Well… we talked a lot* [we both were very tired and sad]. *This is what happens to the* infelizes [unhappy/desperate], *who worked with asbestos. Many people have been killed. Many families have been destroyed. Many people have died. Young men and women in their thirties or forties. Only in this neighbourhood, I remember of Dona Rita, Jorge, Caetano, Vladimir, who was working in a school of samba when he retired, Sebastiano, who lived very close to here, and João, a guy who was taking care of a cattle nearby.*

The impact of an exposure that has occurred decades earlier does not exclusively manifest in the onset of diseases like asbestosis or MM, but also in the suffering experienced because of the awareness of being at risk of becoming sick and dying from an ARD. The past exposure then represents an "immediate threat" that comes "at a much more intimate level: within our own bodies" (Kleinman 2006:5) and, from there, reactivates the memory.

The body as a source of knowledge and a tool for action

The body speaks and guards the traces of the paths one undertakes in her life; in particular, according to Kleinman (2006) "the body in pain is a source of memory" and "embodiment—namely, experiencing meaning through bodily process, such as pain—is a means of collective as well as individual memory" (Kleinman 2006:135).

Based on a memory and embodied history, *sufferer-activists* retraced the disasters' processes and the impact they were suffering from as individual and collective actors. On one hand, activism provided the sufferers with the lens to recognise and read the traces of *disasters* on their bodies as proofs of the suffered injustices and exploitation. On the other hand, the allegations advanced by the activists became legitimate in the experiential knowledge rooted in memory, saved and triggered by their 'bodies in pain' (Scarry 1985). By relying on these embodied traces, the *sufferer-activists* I met in Osasco were engaged in practices of activism intended to break the silence about AR disasters, and used their contaminated bodies as a 'political tool' (Mauss 1973) in their struggle to gain asbestos prohibition in Brazil. If the body is, as I believe in line with Scheper-Hughes (1994) "the most immediate, most proximate terrain where social truths are forged and social contradictions played out, as well as the locus of personal resistance, creativity and struggle", the "afflicted body, naturally subversive" body (Scheper-Hughes 1994:232) amplifies the possibilities pertaining to and the contradictions inscribed in a 'normative' body.

In everyday life, activism practices consisted of ensuring that all the members of the association underwent periodical examinations at public health institutions, both in Osasco and São Paulo. On one hand, these controls safeguarded the exposed through a constant monitoring of ARDs already diagnosed. The majority of ABREA activists I met had been diagnosed with asbestosis and pleural plaques. On the other hand, the data resulting from those examinations were recorded and represented the basis on which epidemiological evidence and scientific knowledge emerged and were elaborated. Often, while doing participant observation in the association's office, I was present for phone calls made by ABREA members on their *plantão* [voluntary shift] to other members to make or remind them about appointments, warn them that clinical reports were ready or ask for the availability of someone with a car to accompany a member with mobility problems. Below, I quote the narrative of an ABREA activist, Chico, who periodically underwent medical examinations to evaluate the progression of asbestosis and pleural plaques diagnosed in the early 1990s, after an occupational exposure over 33 years. Chico, aged 79 in 2015, had

worked at the Osasco Eternit plant from 1952 to 1985. He was scheduled to have a periodic examination a month after the interview we had planned at his home. He allowed me to accompany him to the hospital for his exams and meeting with his doctor. In addition to Chico's quotations, I quote the notes I wrote in the hospital's waiting rooms as well.

Chico

> *A friend of mine suddenly got sick. When he died the doctor might certificate that the cause of death had been asbestos, since my friend had asbestosis, but it would take a while to release the body because it would be necessary to do an autopsy. His wife did not want to wait. She did not know what asbestos was and that her husband's death had been caused by asbestos. In the end, the doctor did not declare that death had been provoked by asbestos and released the body. A few days afterwards, I went to the cemetery and met the woman* [his wife]. *She came to know about asbestos and now wanted to sue the company... These cases happen because of the ignorance of relatives and doctors, unfortunately. We came to know* do mal [about the illness] *only when we began to mobilise and founded the association.*

I interviewed Chico on a cloudy morning in June. He lived in 'kilometre 18' neighbourhood (Osasco), so-called because it was 18 kilometres by rail from Praça da Sé, in São Paulo. I met Chico in front of Teodoro Sampaio train station and together we travelled to his home, where the interview would take place. On our way, he showed me a public garden known as *Praça do Samba* [Samba's Square], because it was where the first singers and bands performing the *Musica Popular Brasileira-MPB* [Brazilian Folk Music] used to play. He was visibly proud of the neighbourhood where he had been living since he was a teenager. Chico was one of the few ABREA activists I met who had been born in the city of São Paulo, from Portuguese descendant parents. While we were walking, he told me that when he was a *moleque* [young boy], and he was already working at the Eternit plant, he attended a vocational school in São Paulo. He used to take the Osasco train in Osasco and leave from the Bras station (now a metro station in São Paulo centre). He used to run from the station to the school. He smiled while telling me this. He emphasised his strength. I remembered this story when a couple of hours later he spoke to me about his frustration at not being able to walk long distances because after few steps he was no longer able to breathe.

> *Before I acquired knowledge* [of asbestos], *I did not feel anything, because when it becomes manifest, it begins with plaques. The first illness* que se aloja no pulmão [that nestles in the lung] *are the plaques. When they get large and numerous, they become…* [cancer, he did not pronounce the word]
> A: Before did not you feel anything?

No, I did not feel anything; I even used to run... Gradually, the plaques become larger and the capacity of your lung diminishes. Now, I cannot even run 50 meters, because I have falta de ar [lack the air]. *The doctor advised me to walk, instead of running.* […] *If I think about who I was and who I am today... suffering and sadness do not help me at all. I have to learn to live with the illness I have, but without coming back with my memory to my thoughts all the time, otherwise I would not be able to survive. I have to live with this illness and go forward. I know that I cannot run so I do not run. I know that I am not a kid anymore, but I also know that if my lung had not been injured by asbestos, I could practice sport. I have this* falta de ar [lack of air] *and I know that there are things that I cannot do anymore. I try not to think too much about them, because it is useless to think about them. Thinking makes me feel sad and angry.* Pensar não ajuda em nada. Tenho que viver com o mal que eu tenho [Thinking does not help with anything. I have to live with the damage I have].

In addition to asbestosis and pleural plaques, Chico had serious hearing impairment. During our encounter, he asked me to sit beside him and speak loudly. He related his hearing difficulties to his work at Eternit because the work place was deafening. However, he had not received compensation for his deafness, since it was not recognised as a consequence of his 30 years working in the plant as a carpenter. His three brothers worked at Eternit too. One of them was very active in the ABREA. I had seen some photographs of this brother. He had died a few years earlier, from a disease that had not been diagnosed as related to asbestos exposure, because it was impossible to establish a cause and effect relationship.

The firm did not want to acknowledge that asbestos caused diseases, but they gave us a kit that we [the workers] *used to call* 'kit-morte' ['death-kit'].
A: What was it?
It was a kit including a bottle of oxygen and a hose; they gave you if you had the company's health insurance. When you cannot live anymore by breathing naturally, then you have to apply oxygen in your nostrils and stay with that day and night. We still use the expression 'kit-morte' *to refer to the oxygen, the hose, and, unfortunately, to the wreath of flowers when it arrives at the moment of the burial. For those who retired and did not sue the company, the firm paid for the hospitalization. I do not remember which hospital was, but sometimes I went there* [in a hospital in São Paulo] *to visit some friends. If you got sick and did not sue the firm, you went to talk to the firm's doctor; then, when you were hospitalized, the company paid all the costs. If the conditions got worse, the firm would come in with the* 'kit-morte'. *The firm did not acknowledge that asbestos was killing us, but it knew that it was. This triggered in me a feeling of revulsion. The firm could have alerted us or adopted measures to protect us.* […] *I feel indignation, because no one has the right to damage an other and the firm has injured so many people… the company was 'a wolf dressed with the skin of a lamb'. They had injured and sought to cause harm, while not warning no one. They knew that they were killing people, and that 25/30 years later, people would start dying from ARDs. They were just concerned in profit and money, not in workers' life. Simply, when an employee had health problems and could not work anymore, they fired and substituted him. We have been deceived, no one wants to be deceived; the children themselves when they are deceived, feel indignation. If a friend of mine sues the company, I go to the court to give my testimony, moral support, and strength. Our*

> *hope is that the firm will be condemned and obliged to pay for the harms they provoked. Many have died without knowing anything about asbestos. Many people died with lung problems and never knew. When we organized the week of awareness campaigns in April, you were there with us, there were so many curious people who came to us and, after a short conversation, exclaimed: "so that's why my father, my neighbour, my cousin died... he worked at the Eternit! He felt the same symptoms you are describing! No one talked to him about asbestos! What asbestos is?" I think that 3,000 employees have worked at Eternit, they were three working shifts, it was a lot of people. And there are even more people who never worked at the Eternit, but who had lived nearby, who had lung problems, died and did not even know.* [...] *No one suspected anything. We were very innocent. We were too innocent. No one ever tried to search or to know.* […]
>
> *Every year, I undergo examinations: radiography and spirometry; periodically, I have tomography as well, but radiography is every year. The spirometry is to evaluate the capacity of the lung; it is also called pulmonary function. Radiography and tomography are good, but the function... is very bad, it forces you too much, it requires too much force, you have to blow and reach a certain degree. You have to blow with your mouth open until you cannot suffer more. This examination hurts you a lot, but it is necessary to see how your lungs work. No one likes to undergo spirometry, but we have to. When we* [him and ABREA comrades] *arrive to the hospital, we already prepare ourselves. You have to sit down, and rest; you must be very calm. Among all of us who undergo this examination, nobody likes it because it is too troublesome. You do not have enough breath already, but you have to force yourself and you get exhausted. Generally, I go alone to the hospital, and I take train and bus, but there are friends who cannot reach the hospital alone. In those cases, we always arrange a car. There is always somebody available to give help.* [...]

During our interview and other informal conversations, Chico reiterated several times that he had been betrayed by the firm, and this awareness made him feel furious. He trusted the firm, he loved his work, he *"ficava feliz da vida"* [was happy with life], while ignoring that *"uma doença estava lojada dentro"* [a disease was settled inside] him. While he was showing me his clinical documentation, I noticed that his next examinations had been scheduled for the coming month. I shyly asked him if I could accompany him. I took several minutes and many words to ask him that question. I did not want to appear too intrusive. My tone of voice became lower. I had to repeat my question a couple of times and that made me feel even more embarrassed. In the end, when he got my question, he answered with a large smile that there were no problems and he would be very happy to go to the hospital with me. I felt relieved. He added that usually he went alone to undergo these periodic examinations, and that he had gotten used to them. He told me that it would be important for my study and *"para a luta"* [for the struggle] to go with him and, hopefully, to talk to his doctor. I thanked him, and told him that I would be happy to meet his doctor, but that my main concern would be just to stay with him in the most discrete way possible. I would not enter the medical laboratories, but

rather just stay with him before and after the examinations. He accepted with another smile and we arranged that our next meeting would be in July.

From my fieldnotes, July 7, 2015:

Notes written in the bus, 7.30 a.m.

> *I am reaching Chico. We arranged to meet at 8 a.m. in front of the hospital. I hope to arrive on time, I am anxious. At this time, the bus is slower than usual, because at every single stop there are people boarding. It is very crowded. I am also a bit afraid at the idea that I will soon be sitting in a hospital waiting room, standing by Chico and witnessing his vulnerability. Yesterday, he called me and told that probably it was not necessary that I come and that the next day of examinations scheduled in two weeks would be more interesting to me since there will be the opportunity to talk to doctors. I repeated to him that I would be happy just to accompany him and stay with him, and that I did not need to talk to the doctor today, I could arrange a meeting with the doctor on another day. For a moment, I thought that he had changed his mind and did not want me to go anymore, but then his words and tone of voice reassured me: my presence was not a problem; he was sincerely concerned that accompanying him could be a waste of time for me. I repeated that I had already planned my day based on his examinations and that no, it would not be a waste of time at all.*

Notes written in the waiting room of the pulmonology unit.

> *I arrived on time, even a few minutes before 8 a.m. Chico was waiting for me in front of one of the main hospital entrances. He smiled at me. He told me that he had arrived in advance and that he had had a short walk in the meantime. He was carrying a grey folder containing his clinical documentation. Now, he is undergoing the spirometry; the thoracic radiography is scheduled soon after that. Before he entered the room, we chatted a bit. He told me that he woke up at 5.30 this morning and took two buses to reach the hospital in São Paulo from Osasco. I told him I woke up at six. I asked him if his wife comes with him sometimes to these medical controls. He answered no, that it is not necessary. He explained me that he undergoes these examinations every year. If everything is unchanged, as he hopes, the doctors will tell him to come in one year, otherwise in six months, and they will already schedule the next appointment. The waiting room is crowded. Chico did not sit until two chairs became free for both of us.*

Notes written in the waiting room of the radiology unit.

> *Now Chico is undergoing radiography. I have asked him how the first examination was. He looked tired. He told me that it had been difficult for him. He described me that this examination consisted in blowing in a tube from a sitting posture. He had to breathe and then release air. The nurse asked him to repeat this act several times, because his breathe was too short and she could not measure it. After the examination, his face was flushed and his eyes shiny; I had the impression that he had suddenly became shrunken and unbalanced.*

Notes written in the garden of the Faculty of Public Health (where I went, after the encounter with Chico).

When Chico and I left the hospital, it was heavily raining. I had an umbrella and I proposed to accompany him to the bus stop. We had to be very close to be covered by my tiny umbrella and soon we started to walk arm-in-arm. It was the second time since I knew him that we touched each other. The first time was after the interview I conducted at his home. On that day, when I was leaving, unlikely than when I had arrived and we just shook hands, he gave me two fatherly kisses on my cheeks. Today, when his bus arrived, he thanked and addressed a large smile to me. We greeted by kissing our cheeks again. We both were smiling. We have shared an experience and built a connection based on that. I felt enriched and incredibly alive.

I included the above quotes from my fieldnotes to reflect on the relational and affective dimension of 'data collection' process that influenced my knowledge that emerged from my fieldwork experience.

In AR disasters, the suffering body holds the traces of the cultural, socio-political and economic processes through which structural violence has been perpetrated on vulnerable social actors considered as cheap, easily exploitable, and replaceable 'resources' in the transnational asbestos market. The body is the place where the devastating impact of disaster primarily occurs, but the body is also the place where traces indicating new paths to undertake can emerge among the ruins, 'from the dust' (Petrillo 2015). Activism provides sufferers with the 'lens' and 'words' to read the traces of AR disasters on contaminated bodies, and inform the suffering experiences as cultural practices even before the catastrophic eruption in one's worlds at the moment when the awareness of being at risk of dying from an ARD becomes part of everyday life.

The perception of our finitude produces a crisis. The discovery of having been deceived for decades produces anger and indignation. No resignation seems to be possible (see Benson and Kirsch 2010). Pain, illness, and death then are read as the wounds provoked by a subtle violence suffered in the past and that still exists in the present. In fact, violence continues to be perpetrated every time suffering is not recognised. Disasters remain silent, and a widow is unable to condemn a company because of the good her family had received in exchange of the 'lethal work' (Johnston and McIvor 2000) done by *innocents,* as Chico and Beatriz referred to asbestos workers.

The crisis provoked by the disaster's—bodily—experience reveals the body as an object and, at the same time, as a source of reflection. Even before the onset of a serious disease representing a 'critical event' in one's life (Das 1995), engagement with activism fosters an elaboration of critical thinking toward one's exposed body.

I talk to you honestly and with all my sincerity, Agata. Our struggle is not for myself, for my friends who have already died nor for those who are sick. Our struggle is for

> *the next generations, because, those of us who are contaminated, there is no way, we are going to die soon… the disease can appear even tomorrow. Asbestos is in our bodies, we are all at risk, asbestos cannot be removed from us* (ABREA's president, Osasco, March 2015).

I refer to Kleinman (1997, 2006) when I consider the suffering condition related to the disaster experience as the 'place' where "the lived experience of 'everything that really matters' transforms the ordinary. […] These sociosomatic processes not only connect society and the body-self, they can transform both poles of experience" (Kleinman 1997:331).

The awareness of being at risk of dying and suffering from asbestos makes the suffering of those living at risk more acute and forces them to reflect on contingencies, encounters, and activism in their lives that make them consider what 'really matters' and informs their actions in the world as *sufferer-activists*.

> The things most at stake are clarified, for us and others, by the dangers we encounter. Those dangers, moreover, can and often do remake what matters most, so that what matters and who we are is not what was before, but instead becomes something new and different. […] experiences of life's very real dangers not only are about injury and limitation but also hold the potential of creative and inspiring change. Creative because they open new realities; inspiring because, in the face of pain and death, these experiences change intimate others, offering the possibility that their moral life can also be different. (Kleinman 2006:156)

Activism as care

A morte é a curva da estrada, morrer é só não ser visto.
Se escuto, eu te ouço a passada existir como eu existo.
A terra é feita de céu. A mentira não tem ninho.
Nunca ninguém se perdeu. Tudo é verdade e caminho.
(Pessoa 1942)[53]

Engagement in activism has opened paths to face the crises provoked by the disaster experiences and care for the suffering of those who have been involved in those experiences: the social actors with ARDs, those exposed to the risk of ARDs, and the grievers. Arthur Kleinman's investigations on the moral dimension of care (see Kleinman 1997, 2006, 2009, 2012) have offered me the theoretical tools—and inspiration—to think about the practices of activism in terms of paths of *care*, and to relate the public and collective dimension of the socio-political engagement with the intimate and individual experiences of AR disasters. In

[53] Death is a bend in the road, to die is to slip out of the view/If I listen, I hear your steps to exist as I exist/The earth is made of heaven. The lie has no nest/No one ever got lost. Everything is truth and way [my translation] (Pessoa 1942).

the previous section, Chico's narrative about the story of his own engagement in activism concluded with the following sentences.

> *My life changed as I knew about the injury I had. I did not know anything before. Then, I began to go to the doctors, to undergo examinations... and the doctor talked to me. The change began in that moment and I began to live differently. As I told you, I know that I cannot run or speed up. I had to learn to live again with the injury I have. When I began to join the ABREA, I thought it was a good thing, because in the association I would be together with others with the same problems. You see that it is not just you to have this problem; a friend has it too. We strengthen each other, because we see that we are not alone, we can share what we feel. When we know that a friend of ours is dying, we visit him to give support and a solace's word to the family. We share a sad experience, but, in that moment, a word pronounced by a friend can bring comfort.*

Chico highlighted the role of the association as a 'place' where contaminated workers like him could intersubjectively live the suffering provoked by the impact of asbestos exposure on their flesh. Chico's words remind me the expression an oncologist used to describe the role of activism in Casale Monferrato (Italy); she referred to the 'therapeutic power' of the mobilization, and to the 'protective hug' the association gave to workers and citizens affected by disaster[54].

ABREA provided the activists with the 'tools' to make sense and take care of their suffering. On one hand, the reconstruction of a collective history of injustices opened new scenarios of sense (and care) because "there is not any single over-determined meaning to disease; rather, the experience of serious illness offers a means of understanding in a particularly deep and powerful way what personal and collective moral experience is about" (Kleinman 2006:156). On the other hand, everyday engagement in activism consisted of practices of care for those who were "living by slowly dying", as Pedro described his existential condition.

In ABREA's refusal to abandon those who were doomed to a painful and unavoidable death, I discovered what defines *care*, because the encounter and communication with the *other* are essential moments of the process of care. I refer to the Italian anthropologist Francesca Cappelletto, who left us a touching ethnography about her own cancer experience.

> both an individual and a social group, by expressing their own pain, can find a sense of protection and freedom from the anxiety and despair that often accompany the suffering condition. Such a necessity to 'speak' can be linked to the traumatic nature of disease: the traumatised persons narrate and re-narrate the past-present event, which becomes an object of narrative memory (Cappelletto 2009:217).

[54] From an interview conducted during my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato (May-June 2012).

In activism narrating is, simultaneously, a practice of care and a strategy of struggle. Leticia, Beatriz, and Irene's narratives quoted in the first section show the extent to which mesothelioma has destroyed them and their beloved ones, although in disparate ways. Suffering together with a loved one can be not just painful, but it can also provoke a real destruction/revolution in one's existence, and trigger the urgency to act and elaborate new practices and discourses to make disintegrated worlds meaningful again.

Based on what I have observed and felt during my fieldwork, the practices that defined the everyday experiences of activism were motivated by purposes of caring as well as intimate and individual reasons. In line with Fassin (2011), I am not concerned in the psychological analysis of someone's decision to take part in a social movement, nor do I consider the practices of activism I investigated as less political because of the lack or the minimal influence of one's awareness of the socio-political relevance of their actions. Rather, I want to pay attention to the role played by activism as an exchange of affects, to feel and share emotions, when I consider someone's decision to participate in the anti-asbestos mobilization, which I interpreted as a set of practices along the pathway of individual and collective care.

> *I do it because it makes me remember of my father (Casale M., May-June 2012).*
>
> *Every time I can, I go to the association to meet my friends (Casale M., May-June 2012).*
>
> *At my age, I would never imagined that I could live such a wonderful experience (Casale M., May-June 2012).*
>
> *I join the ABREA because my husband deserves it; I do it for him (Osasco, June 2015).*
>
> *The struggle is not for us, we know that asbestos is inside us and we are at risk to die from it… even tomorrow. We fight for the younger and next generations (Osasco, March 2015).*
>
> *We share a sad experience, but in that moment a word pronounced by a friend can console (Osasco, May 2015).*
>
> *I do it to help others, because from my wife's experience I learned so much that it would be unjust not to share the knowledge I acquired (Bari, April 2012).*
>
> *I am not able to explain what I felt when I heard his name pronounced with so many different accents by all those activists… I knew that in that moment he was being gratified (Osasco, June 2015).*

I intentionally present the above short quotes from interviews conducted with *sufferer-activists* from the three contexts where I have done fieldwork until now. Although my focus in this thesis is on activism in Osasco (Brazil), I recall data collected in Bari and Casale

Monferrato (Italy) to reiterate the transnational dimension of AR disasters and activism. In particular, in this section, these connections have helped me to reflect on the role of emotions in the investigated disease-based movement addressing issues of environmental and social justice (see Cable and Benson 1993; Bullard and Johnson 2000; Souza Bravo et al 2010; Acselrad et al. 2004; Porto et al. 2013). Emotions and emotional dynamics have roles of similar relevance in the three contexts, although distinct cultures and incomparable subjectivities have informed and experienced them. Considering activism's emotional dimension opened new pathways of investigation. I choose to follow the moral pathway, which leads me to understand the practices of activism as practices of care.

Beatriz/Carlos (part two)

> *He was everything to us. He was a father who gave everything to us and saved nothing for him* [self]. *Outside the family, there was only the ABREA for him and I respected that. If we had to go to a wedding and on that day, it happened that he had a meeting at the ABREA, we would not go to the church, but just to the party. In this way, he could go to the meeting. I understood that he was so dedicated to ABREA, and I never impeded his involvement. It seems like it was already planned that in the future I would join the ABREA too.* […]
> *On the day of his wake, the first person I saw was Roberto. He was upset. Like my husband, he knew very well about ARDs. He came to me and said: "I have mesothelioma too! Like Carlos". I perceived his words as a desperate request for help. It was like he was asking me, please, please, help me, for God's sake!". I heard a request for help in his voice. I said: "No, you are going to be fine, you are alive, you are going to get out of this, try to be calm". He could not even speak, but I saw his despair. When I arrived in the chapel, Roberto was already there and came to hug and talk to me. That encounter was so painful* [she cries]. *The firm is responsible for the suffering of all of us. There is no way that one tells that the firm gave so many benefits to people. There is no way to say that. They could have given protections, warnings or changed the production system; they could alerted that asbestos was dangerous, that workers needed to be careful, and take measures not to inhale the fibres. They could have given at least a warning communication, in that way someone could decide to take the risk or not, because there can be someone who says: "well, anyway, I am going to die someday!". No, they did nothing. They exposed poor innocents at risk, and, the firm made profit at the expenses of these innocents. Where did workers get sick? Why did they die of asbestos? The firm knew that asbestos was dangerous. My husband died very early in relation to his family, his grandmother and his parents, for instance, all died very old, over 80/90 years old, while him… he died when he was 66 years; he still had a life in front of him.* […]
> *He was totally dedicated to the association as the current president is. What he needed to do, he did. After he passed away and realised the importance of the ABREA in his life, I began to join the association. Before, I just went to the parties they organised in the end of the year, but I did not pay much attention to their struggle. My participation now is a sort of contribution, a way to thank ABREA because it was so good for him; it is also a way to help, do something to prevent that in the future other families like*

mine will pass through the same suffering we passed through and asbestos will be prohibited. ABREA is part of this fight and helps families not to pass through what we have suffered. […]
I went to Paris in 2012 to attend an international meeting organised by the French anti-asbestos movement. I had to carry something of him for a manifestation. [She shows me a white T-shirt with a photograph of her husband]. *I asked my daughter to cut the photo you saw in the living room where he is sat with Roberto and made it print on the T-shirt I would bring with me to Paris. On the day of the manifestation, it was very cold and rainy, I could not wear the T-shirt; I had to wear a coat because it was too cold, but I held the T-shirt with his photograph on my chest, for the whole walking... many people from various countries took a picture of him. When we went to Casale Monferrato in 2014, I brought the T-shirt with me again. It has been photographed again and it even appeared on an Italian newspaper. Now, I want to make another T-shirt, with his photograph together with the photographs of other Brazilian victims from asbestos, because it was not only him who died. He represents all the victims. To put a picture of him alone may seem like an act of selfishness... how many people died? On that day in Paris, I cried a lot. The organizers called a couple of Brazilian activists on the stage and they talked about my husband. Soon, all the people in the square began to call my husband's name as a sign of tribute. It was so emotional. I felt like a vibration. I knew that in that moment he was being gratified. I felt that. I do not even know how to explain that feeling. Since then, I join the ABREA, and I do what I can do* [for the anti-asbestos struggle]. *He was a good father and a good husband. I think he deserves it* [her engagement]. *God willing, someday we will see our country free of asbestos.* [...]
That picture in the banner… I think it had been taken when somebody from the ABREA went to visit him in the hospital, in his last days. I think he asked someone to take that photograph, which is very sad for me. I do not have it here at home. With that picture, he wanted to show to the world how dangerous asbestos is and that it is a matter of life and death to prohibit it. He was very dedicated to ABREA and he asked for the photo be shown in any possible occasion, so now when there is an event or a manifestation ABREA exhibits that photo. I cannot prevent that, although for me it is very painful and difficult. I cannot ask ABREA not to show it. It would be my cowardice, because if he asked to take and show to the world that picture, I cannot say: "No, I do not want to. I have freed the use, and I said: "The will of him, who fought so hard with the ABREA, is done".

Illnesses experiences such as the one lived by Beatriz and Carlos can "open eyes, break down doors, and encourage active engagement with real threats and their societal causes" according to Kleinman (2006:157). I referred to the intuitions exposed by the author of *What Really Matters. Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger* (2006) and of *A Passion for Society. How we Think about Human Suffering*, together with Wilkinson (2016), when I consider—bodily— suffering as a condition from which sufferers can reinvent their role in the world as sufferers and, at the same time, promote changes with a socio-political relevance as activists. "Moral experience, especially the moral experience of suffering, holds the potential for remaking our lives and those of others" (Kleinman 2006:157).

On one hand, I read Carlos' request for being photographed while confined in a bed, skinny, attached to the oxygen tank, and fiercely looking at the camera as his extreme contribution for remaking the world where younger generations, including his grand-daughter, would live, while he soon departed from that same world. On the other hand, through activism, Beatriz was caring for her suffering triggered by the loss that had destroyed her world, and by relating her individual story to *disasters* affecting entire communities of workers and citizens she became involved in a transnational movement. Rebuilding and reinventing disintegrated worlds implied the moral responsibility of sufferers like Beatriz for "ensuring that others understand the social injustice our worlds routinely create" and for doing something to subvert those processes through which justice has been denied (Kleinman 2006:24).

As I previously discussed, reading the traces of the suffered injustices inscribed in the bodies has been possible thanks to the 'lens' and 'words' provided by activism, through which the embodied history has become a 'tool' of struggle in its providing legitimacy to the activists' allegations. Moreover, referring to a shared history has given to individuals—bodies—in pain the possibility to recognise each other and gather in a community. In these paths of *care-activism*, individual and collective acts of memory have played a crucial role. Remembering has been a practice of care for those grieving for an irreversible loss, and a practice of political action. Memory reactivates the past suffering and feelings of despair, angriness, and indignation returned by making the separation between past and present permeable. The past violently emerges from the ruins left by the disaster, and it remerges each time a new diagnosis is pronounced and a new death occurs. However, despite the past-present pain, on occasions of collective rituals of commemoration, *sufferer-activists* have found the motivations for *nunca desistir* [never giving up]. On these occasions, absence is not a constant and anguishing affirmation of an irremediable loss anymore, but becomes a reassuring presence instead. The traces left by the disaster, for a moment, cease to be lacerating wounds, but become scars mending multiple stories through the threads of affects and memory.

During one of our numerous informal conversations, the current ABREA's president, Mr. Eliezer João de Souza, told me something that deeply influenced my understanding of ABREA' s activism. He was describing the day on which the law project about asbestos prohibition in São Paulo state was eventually approved in 2007, after many years of negotiation, campaigns, and boycotts by asbestos lobbies. He told me *"os defuntos da ABREA nos ajudaram"* [the ABREA's dead members helped us]. He explained why.

> *The approval took three days. The debates lasted from early in the mornings to very late in the night. On the last day, we went in seven/eight, no more. When we arrived,*

> *there were more than 200 asbestos workers with their employers protesting against asbestos prohibition. We had brought the banners with the portraits of our comrades who had died, and we put them on the chairs: one chair one portrait of a victim from asbestos. It was a very touching and meaningful moment. On that day, the project was approved.*

Just as the photograph printed on the T-shirt held by Beatriz during the manifestation in Paris and the banner with the photograph of Carlos in a hospital bed, the portraits exposed during that decisive event for the anti-asbestos mobilization (the approval of the law project) made absent comrades intensely 'present'.

During my fieldwork in Osasco, I had the opportunity to participate in a commemorative ceremony organised by ABREA activists. I quote from my fieldnotes:

> *April 26 was Sunday. It was sunny and warm. I arrived in Osasco before nine in the morning. The ABREA's President and his son were waiting for me behind the train station. We had an appointment to go together to Praça Aquilino dos Santos* - Vítima do Amianto [Asbestos Victim] *in Vila Nova neighbourhood, where the* Ato Ecumênico [religious ceremony] *would take place. The square, dedicated to the first worker died after ABREA's foundation in 1995, was small and hidden in the maze of tangled roads and houses. ABREA members thought that it could be difficult for me to find the place. For this reason, they proposed to have someone pick me up at the train station. On our way to the square, we stopped to pick up Teodoro* [an ABREA activist I have already mentioned, by the same pseudonym, in Chapter 3]. *Teodoro was waiting for us in the street. Praça Aquilino dos Santos was a very small square indeed, and it was situated at the corner between two streets. There were large trees under whose shadow other ABREA members and friends were standing in a circle. There was a small wall delimiting the square that was circular and in the middle was a stone-table, on which a burning candle, informative brochures about asbestos toxicity, and sheets with the texts of the hymns to be sang had been neatly arranged; everything reminded me the sacredness of an altar*[55].

All around the gathered group, large portraits of activists who had died from ARDs were hanging from the trees; they had been placed there earlier, on that day and quiet morning. They were the same posters that had been shown in Rua Antonio Agù, during the event *Proteção Contra o Amianto* [Protection against Asbestos], a week of awareness campaigns organised by ABREA every year in April. On the last day of the event, ABREA activists commemorate their departed comrades with an *Ato Ecumênico*, a religious ceremony. In the year of my fieldwork (2015), ABREA activists had invited three spiritual guides to administrate the ceremony: one Catholic, one Evangelic Pentecostal, and one Spiritualist in order to represent the main religious beliefs of the association's members. Although this event was organised in occasion of the awareness activities addressed to the general citizenry,

[55] See photographs 12-13 in the Appendix.

ABREA' activists seemed not to be keen to make it 'really' public. My impression was that by not advertising it too much they preferred to live that moment as an occasion to remember loved ones and comrades, among a few intimate friends, relatives, and supporters of their struggle. During the ceremony, I felt like I was witnessing (and participating in) a sacred ceremony. I was particularly struck by the photographs of the activists who had died whose portraits were exhibited and hanging just behind their survivors. The glances of those men and women about whom I had heard form their loved ones' narratives seemed to assert their presence and participation beyond their physical and irreversible absence. Part of the ceremony was dedicated to the commemoration by spontaneous sharing memories and feelings: everybody could speak and say something about a friend or a relative who had died.

The acts of memory, collectively performed on the occasion of the *Ato Ecumenico* or the exhibition of photographs—casts of a presence that has been here (Barthes 1980)—were practices of activism and care for the survivors who were mourning the loss of their friends and loved ones, as well as their own decay and preannounced death. Suffering was not overcome, but it was made 'meaningful' by a "fate's or affective community" (Halbwachs 2006 quoted by de Oliveira Rovai 2014) whose relational identity was rooted in a shared narrated memory. Remembering was painful, but was conceived as necessary and felt as a moral and political commitment. The subversive tension intrinsic to those acts of memory dissolving past/present fracture, and which were indeed practices of a prolonged individual and collective mourning, reminded me the words adopted by Zhang (2012) to talk about mourning in terms of protesting. In particular,

> the refusal to end mourning becomes a political action of protest against the social injustice responsible for the loss of life. In this light, death is no longer accepted as the end of a life, but is scrutinised as the beginning of the pursuit for justice. The gravity of mourning moved away from death toward life along the axis of moral responsibility for the loss (Zhang 2012:271).

In the refusal to break the bonds with a past that continues in the present in the painful traces it leaves, survivors made sense of their suffering. Survivors were living beyond life (and death), and by mourning they were affirming life because "survival is the most intense life possible" (Derrida 2004 in Fassin 2014a:45).

Mourning primarily concerns life, as Zhang states:

> it is not new to argue that mourning is about the dead but about the living […] However, it is entirely new to say that mourning is not about death but about life, because to elaborate on Butler's argument, grievability—the eligibility to mourn in public—is about the worthiness of life—for the dead as well for living (Zhang 2012:277).

Practices of mourning are practices of *care-activism* aiming to acknowledge of the 'worthiness of life' of those who have already passed away, those who are still suffering and those who, someday, will live in a world free from asbestos thanks to the men and women who mobilise against injustice and violence.

I conclude this section with some of the last words publicly pronounced by the philosopher Derrida and quoted by Fassin (2014a). They express what I perceive to be a vibrating impulse or the will of *sufferer-activists*—survivors—who did not leave the struggle despite the disaster (and death) in their lives.

> [Derrida's quote] "Surviving is to still be fully alive and living after death. It is the 'unconditional affirmation' of life and of the pleasure of life, it is the hope to 'survive' through the traces left to the living". I believe that in this revelation there is much more than the last testimony of a philosopher, who has certainly not made us used to clarity and simplicity. I consider it an ethical gesture through which life is restored to its most obvious and ordinary dimension—life that has death as horizon, but that is not separate from life as a social form, inscribed in a story, a culture, an experience (Fassin 2014a:45).

Conclusions

The practices characterising ABREA's activism, on one hand, were practices of care to the extent that an intersubjective relationship strengthened the possibility of a care process (Taussig 1980 quoted by Cappelletto 2009:217). On the other hand, they were practices of activism to the extent that reading and narrating the history inscribed in the 'bodies in pain' (Scarry 1985) represented the occasion to relate the intimate aspects of the suffering experience, with the social and political dynamics of a process of disaster(s).

Acts and meanings of memory constantly return in one's engagement with the anti-asbestos movement. Reading and narrating the memory inscribed in the contaminated bodies reflected fundamental practices of *care-activism* to mobilise, negotiate rights, and promote changes (see Petryna 2002; Brown et al. 2004), to invent new roles in the world as individual and collective actors (see Polletta and Jasper 2001), to establish an affective contact and live 'therapeutic' encounters (see Cappelletto 2009; Goodwin et al. 2001).

Chapter 6: The Politics of Anti-asbestos Activism

Injustice experienced in the flesh, in deeply wounded flesh,
is the stuff out of which change explodes
(Mead 1972:98).

Introduction

The title of this chapter 'The Politics of Anti-asbestos Activism' is inspired by Fassin and Rechtman (2009) who investigated the "politics of reparation, of testimony, and of proof that trauma makes possible and in their appropriation and diversion by the so-called victims" and published their findings in *Empire of Trauma. An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

I refer to Fassin and Rechtman's reconstruction of the 'moral genealogy of trauma' in an attempt to understand the activism of the *sufferer-activists* whom I met. I do not adopt the concept of *trauma* to refer to the suffering lived by the social actors involved in AR-illness experiences and who were contaminated with asbestos. Rather, I opt for a broader concept of *suffering* (see Chapter 1) and the anthropological definition of *disaster* (see Chapter 7), in the awareness that asbestos-exposed communities may live experiences of individual and collective trauma, as demonstrated in the psychological surveys conducted by Granieri in Casale Monferrato (Italy) (Granieri 2008).

In my interpretation, the inner scars left by asbestos in a person's lungs and the practices of *care-activism* that pivot around the (embodied) memory of suffering and painful events lived in the past and so vivid in the present, are aligned with experiences of trauma that deserve further attention. In this chapter, I investigate the politics of anti-asbestos activism undertaken by ABREA members and in particular I refer to Fassin and Rechtman's reflections on the politics of trauma, its political uses, the role of the victims as political actors and social changes deriving from the recognition of victimhood. I interpret the practices and discourses of my study participants by referring to anthropological and sociological literature on 'recognition struggles' (Hobson 2003), embodied health social movements (see Brown et al 2004), and forms of activism and citizenships that have emerged from the acknowledgment of a biosocial condition (see Rabinow 1992; Petryna 2002; Brown and Zavestoski 2004; Brown et al. 2004; Nguyen et al. 2007; Nguyen 2008).

Since its foundation in 1995, ABREA has been in dialogue with individual and collective actors in Osasco, São Paulo and in national and international contexts of the anti-asbestos

movement to legitimise its allegations and empower its struggle. I first consider ABREA's relationships with political actors operating in Osasco. ABREA's connections with these actors are based on mutual support and recognition established since the 1980s. *Sufferer-activists* have found supportive interlocutors principally among unionists and politicians whose ethical and political backgrounds are rooted in the specific socio-political context of the city (see Chapter 4). These interlocutors have been actively involved in resistance against to the dictatorial regime (1964-1984), and then the Brazilian democratization process, and count among the ranks of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores-PT* [Workers' Party].

In the second section, I reflect on the dialogue between ABREA and biomedical professionals from public hospitals and occupational health research institutes who are specialised in lung diseases and epidemiology. In the initial stages of the activism, workers who have noticed the *disaster*'s effects on their bodies have sought medical examinations and diagnoses from doctors outside the asbestos firms, and thus they 'gained' the words to name what was afflicting their bodies. On one hand, it has been crucial for legitimising their activism to relate their illness experiences to occupational exposure to asbestos, which has also triggered feelings of deception that have motivated workers to take action against asbestos in name of the suffered injustice. On the other hand, *suffer-activists* by using their contaminated bodies as proof have entered the processes of knowledge and epidemiological evidence making. Starting from this premise, politicians engaged in anti-asbestos activism have elaborated and supported legal efforts to prohibit asbestos in Osasco municipality and São Paulo state.

In the third section, I retrace the processes that led to the approval of these legal efforts based on the narrative of the politician Marcos Martins (PT), who has represented one of the main ABREA interlocutors in the local political setting.

In the fourth section, I take into account the role of an interlocutor who has accompanied and supported ABREA's mobilization since the beginning, Fernanda Giannasi. Ms. Giannasi is internationally known as the symbol of anti-asbestos activism in Brazil. During her career at *Ministério do Trabalho-MT* [Ministry of Work], Engineer Giannasi inspected a large number of factories where workers were exposed to toxic agents, including asbestos, and examined working conditions and safety measures. Technical and experiential knowledge combined with a political and ethical commitment have favoured Giannasi' s engagement with workers' struggles in the name of social and environmental justice. I pay particular attention to Giannasi's decisive role in making ABREA a reference point in the national and transnational context of the anti-asbestos movement by broadening connections with other engaged stakeholders through the strategic use of media, the Internet, and social networks.

In the last section, I consider the judicial paths ABREA members have undertaken as specific paths of activism—*care-activism*—aimed at the recognition and reparation of a social and private suffering provoked by the effects of the global asbestos market on their worlds and bodies.

Throughout this chapter, I refer to the narratives and documents from my encounters with anti-asbestos activists, unionists, biomedical professionals (lung and occupational health specialists), politicians, and lawyers. All of them maintain that the global prohibition of asbestos is the safest and most effective measure to stop the silent *disasters* provoked by the global asbestos market.

The politics of anti-asbestos activism

Elia, unionist from the *Conselho Intersindical de Saúde e Seguridade Social de Osasco e Região-CISSSOR* [Inter-union Counsel of Health and Social Security of Osasco and Region], told me at the beginning of our interview *"aqui formou-se uma legião de trabalhadores lesionados"* [here, an army of injured workers set up], on a stormy afternoon in early September 2015. The frantic process of industrialization that had begun in the 1940s and boomed through the 1950s-1960s, moulded Osasco's profile (see Chapter 3). The creation of a large number of factories provided job opportunities for the numerous immigrants arriving in Osasco to escape poverty and starvation, but also produced an increasing 'army' of men and women who were injured by accidents and illnesses contracted in these work environments.

> *The Eternit arrived in Osasco in an epoch when the local government was offering twenty-year tax exemptions to those firms who would decide to settle their plants here. Brazilian and foreign companies were obviously attracted; similar legislations were adopted in other municipalities and states as well. Because of these policies, Brazil became* a lixeira do mundo [the world's dump].

Later in this thesis (Chapter 7), I discuss the processes of AR *disasters* in more detail, and I deepen the consideration of the dynamics exacerbating the 'side effects' of a raving industrialization in relation to asbestos manufacturing. Now, my concern is to draw attention to another 'consequence' of Osasco's massive industrialization, the formation of a large working class and union organizations, among which ABREA found interlocutors, supporters, and *sufferer-activists* who embody the negative sides of Brazil's 'economic miracle'[56].

[56] For a historiographical reconstruction of industrialization processes in Brazil, see Ribeiro (2006), and Schwarcz and Starling (2015).

ABREA's president encouraged my encounters with local unionists and politicians representing organizations and public institutions engaged with anti-asbestos activism. It was enriching to have the opportunity to reconstruct ABREA's struggle based on the narratives of actors who were close to the organization, but at the same time, external to the association. The actors I met had been supporters of ABREA's activism since the beginning, and they shared their memories, stories, and political and moral views on asbestos issues in particular and workers' rights in general. Based on those encounters, I added more nuances and voices to the historical, relational, and emotional knowledge that was emerging from my fieldwork. Elia and Daniel (pseudonyms) exponents, of the above-mentioned CISSSOR and of the *Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região* [Metalworkers' Union - Osasco and Region] respectively, helped me to better understand ABREA's links to two of the major union organizations in Osasco.

CISSSOR, founded in 1992, includes local union organizations plus two associations, ABREA and the *União dos Aposentados e Pensionistas de Osasco-UAPO* [Union of Retirees and Pensioners of Osasco]. According to Elia, it was founded to address "*the enormous number of accidents occurring in workplaces that were not recognised or communicated to social security"*. Bridging the gap between workers and public institutions charged with safeguarding workers' rights was intended to provide those suffering from occupational accidents and diseases with a support network and strategies to achieve social and economic rights. In the pursuit of similar objectives (workers' dignity and safety), ABREA established contacts with the CISSSOR and was admitted even though it was not a union organization, but rather an association. It is worth noting that although ABREA members are mainly elderly men who have already retired and are outside the job market, their 'embodied past' strongly connotes the association as a group of workers. The vivid and constant presence of the 'factory world' in their activism and suffering experiences has influenced the association's identity as negotiated by the members and as perceived by external actors.

Elia confirmed what my research partners had already told me. The majority of ABREA members had never joined a labour union while working at Eternit. Based on my research partners' narratives this happened for two reasons: managers adopted anti-union strategies and put pressure (e.g. threats of being fired) on workers to prevent protests inside the plant. Outside, contact with unions other than those controlled by the Ministry of Work, which operated clandestinely under the military dictatorship, was also prevented[57]. The Eternit

[57] For the role of workers' organizations in the local socio-political context, especially in the resistance to the dictatorial regime organised in Osasco in the 1960s-1970s, see Chapter 4.

workers whom I talked to remembered having no reason for protesting; they had their salary always on time and they liked the good climate in the plant. There, they were truly *"felizes da vida"* [happy for life]. In these terms, with a smile and shining eyes, the *sufferer-activists* I met described their work at the Eternit, especially those who had had the opportunity to advance their careers and had work they liked.

Elia believed that the lack of risk awareness had worsened the effects of asbestos manufacturing on the environment and health of the workers. "*We* [unionists] *understood that if this* [anti-asbestos] *movement had been organised earlier, there would have been fewer injuries. Today, we are talking about occupational risks for workers that happened decades ago"*. Elia recalled a crucial aspect of AR activism and disasters—the time discrepancy between risk exposure and the onset of catastrophic effects as well as the mobilization of the asbestos workers.

Like Elia, Daniel (from the Metalworkers' Union) highlighted the absence of Eternit workers in protests organised in Osasco; in particular, he referred to events organised at the end of the 1970s, which saw the active protests of workers who had been exposed to asbestos in other factories. After Eternit, the largest plant where asbestos was used in Osasco was Lonaflex, a brake industry, that had operated from 1958 to 1994 (Pignatari Werner 1981). Although the protests in the 1970s were not centred on denouncing specific dangers of asbestos exposure, asbestos was included among other toxic agents to which workers had been exposed, such as silica and mercury. Striving for better working conditions and the right to work in a healthy environment represented an embryonic phase of the anti-asbestos movement that would develop throughout the following years.

The Metallurgic Union has an archive of materials regarding the anti-asbestos movement in Osasco and I had access to these materials thanks to Daniel. Folders contained hundreds of newspaper articles, informative materials, books, and even a miniature of a water reservoir (that was used in awareness campaigns as an example of an asbestos containing product especially used in *favelas* [shantytowns] and low-income houses)[58].

On a bulletin's cover, dated 1979, there was a drawing of a worker spraying a dusty black monster, and in capital letters, it was written *"AQUI, Ó, POEIRA!"* [Hey, here is dust!]. In the same bulletin, there were vignettes and short sentences about the dangers of asbestos and silica exposures. One vignette represented a worker laying on a gurney and receiving a coin from a cashier who said: *"Tome! Seu adicional de insalubridade!"* [Take it! Your

[58] According to my gatekeepers, asbestos-cement plants have recently stopped production of water reservoirs made with asbestos.

compensation for insalubrity!], and below the drawing, in capital letters, *"SAÚDE NÃO SE TROCA COM DINHEIRO"* [health is not exchangeable with money].

There were also numerous newspaper articles from the mid-1980s reporting workers and unionists' allegations that at the Cobrasma (railway industry, one of the largest factories in Osasco) and Lonaflex, workers could have been contaminated with a cancer-causing substance called asbestos. In an article dated March 27, 1985, it was clearly mentioned that MM could be related to asbestos exposure. In a book published by the union and entitled *Uma História sem Heróis* [A History without Heroes] about working conditions and struggles in Brazil (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região 2011), an ironic vignette about 'asbestos uses in Brazil' listed the main uses for asbestos with respective percentages: civil construction 89%, automotive (canvas and brakes) 7%, and other uses 4%. 'Other uses' included 'appetizer' and a man dressed in a suit was eating asbestos and talking to the waiter—a skeleton. The man was assuring the waiter, "You can eat it safely, there is no danger!".

The waiter agreed, "It even contains fibres!" (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região 2011:63). Daniel explained me that the vignette referred to a real episode that had occurred during an *Udiência Pública* [Public Hearing][59] about asbestos, when a technician, an asbestos lobby expert, ate asbestos to show that it was safe.

Training programs and events had a crucial role in workers' mobilization. Daniel's narrative recalled individual experiences of training conducted abroad to broaden his knowledge about the dangers of asbestos and establish contacts with foreign trade unions, especially with Italian ones. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the massive migration of Italian workers to Brazil, in the beginning of 20th century, brought the heritage of European workers' struggles. Brazilian unionists and workers found inspiration and input for realizing their own mobilizations and these workers and this background was the basis on which current relationships were built. In particular, the contacts with the Italian union organizations and the translations in Portuguese of seminal contributions regarding occupational health and the social determinants of health have played a fundamental role in the elaboration of strategies of struggles and public health policies in Brazil (Barca 2102). I recall *Ambiente di Lavoro* [Work Environment], the booklet edited by Oddone (1969) and published in Brazil in 1986 (Oddone et al. 1986), Berlinguer's *Medicina e Politica* [Medicine and Politics] (1973), published in

[59] The *Audiências Públicas* (Public Hearings), as provided in the Constitution of 1988, are public hearings where exponents of governmental institutions (e.g. ministers and deputies) and civil society (e.g. stakeholders, professionals, and experts) debate issues of social and public relevance. Definition from the http://www.prsp.mpf.mp.br/sala-de-imprensa/nucleo-de-eventos/audiencia-publica (accessed March 23, 2017).

Brazil in 1978, and *Che Cos'è l'ecologia? Capitale, Lavoro, Ambiente* [What is Ecology? Capital, Work, Environment] (Conti 1977) published in Brazil in 1986 (Conti 1986).

The *mapa de risco* [risk map] represented one of the 'tools' borrowed from the experiences of the Italian working movements of the 1960s. During fieldwork, my gatekeepers had often highlighted the relevance of this concept/practice in anti-asbestos activism, because in this way workers became active authors of an effective instrument to legitimise their allegations and protests. 'Risk maps' based on the experiential knowledge of the workers, and the assumption that he/she knows best the risks faced in everyday work life (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região 1992a:83). A 'risk map' is a drawing of a map of a plant in which workers identify the risks in exactly place where they are occurring. This 'tool' makes risks visible, induces a reflection on the everyday workplace, and favours workers' recognition of the risks by visualization (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região 1992a:83). Based on this elaboration of their perceptions, workers can advocate for better working conditions and the elimination or at least reduction of risks. 'Risk mapping' was adopted and promoted by Osasco's unions and public institutions engaged in occupational health issues. Some of the ABREA members (including the current President) were members of the *Comissões Internas de Prevenção de Acidentes-CIPA* [Internal Committees of Accidents' Prevention], which (according to the law[60]) were allowed in the Eternit factory and other plants[61]. CIPAs consisted of groups of plant workers who were not necessarily affiliated with a trade union; their members were charged with map drawing and the resulting maps had to be exhibited in each analysed plant sector. The employers were then obliged to adopt measures to eliminate, in a reasonable time, the denounced risky conditions (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região 1992b:11). However, when workers began to adopt this strategy, employers began to put pressure on the workers and persecuted *cipeiros* [members of CIPA] who had been democratically elected by their co-workers (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco e Região 1992b:11). My gatekeepers referred to the 'risk map' as a tool for political struggle, and not just to achieve technical improvements. The effectiveness of these maps implied a change in existing laws and working conditions; thus, workers elaborated the awareness of the risks—and injustices—to which they had been exposed daily. Although it was difficult to localise the risks related to asbestos exposure, since they overcame sectors, walls, and barriers, my gatekeepers included risk mapping among the

[60] CIPAs are regulated by the law number 3,214 (June 8, 1978) and by the law number 247 (July 12, 2011). The texts are available on line at the websites http://www.camara.gov.br/sileg/integras/839945.pdf and http://redsang.ial.sp.gov.br/site/docs_leis/st/st15.pdf (accessed March 23, 2017).

practices of struggle of anti-asbestos activism. By favouring workers' visualization of the dustiest places in a plant and their reflection on working environments, risk mapping as a practice of struggle undertaken by workers in Osasco was part of ABREA's socio-political background.

The peculiarities of AR *disasters*, informed by the slow onset of their impact and the practices of subtle violence characterising the 'paternalistic capitalism' of the factory management (see Burawoy 1979b), determined the delay in Eternit workers joining worker struggles organised in Osasco. Workers actively engaged with union organizations only when they had retired and the plant had been closed and demolished. I relate this aspect to the eruption of the occupational exposure *disaster* in their lives decades later and to the freedom derived from being outside the job market. The workers now had more time and freedom from the socio-economic constraints linking them to their employers.

The convergence of the union movement and anti-asbestos activism characterised Osasco's context and differentiated ABREA's struggle from the mobilizations carried on by other Brazilian anti-asbestos associations in settings where a similar relationship with union organizations did not exist. ABREA could count on practical support from local unions in the organization of awareness campaigns and events or funding campaigns to allow ABREA members to attend national and international conferences. On the other hand, union organizations could count on ABREA's presence in events and protests. It was important to collaborate and participate in respective activities *"para fortalecer a luta"* [to empower the struggle] as the ABREA president used to tell me when I accompanied him and other ABREA activists to protests and events organised by the CUT or the Metallurgic Union. At the time of my fieldwork, relationships among ABREA and local union organizations were characterised by mutual support and recognition as actors struggling in the name of common objectives *"of public health, respect for life, social justice and citizenship"*, as Elia stated. I refer to Bourdieu and Wacquant's definition of social capital[62], when I consider the relationships woven by ABREA with collective and individual actors operating in Osasco.

> Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119).

[62] I considered more appropriate to my study referring to Bourdieu and Wacquant's definition (1992), than to refer to Putnam's definition of social capital (see Putnam 1993).

In the next section, I consider the dialogues and practices through which *sufferer-activists* entered the knowledge- and epidemiological evidence-making processes related to the biomedical understanding of AR suffering.

Anti-asbestos activism through biomedical paths

> *There were not diseases, because there was not an investigation. There was no place for medical controls: a sick worker with respiratory problems was treated as if he had tuberculosis. We know about several metallurgic workers contaminated with silica or asbestos, who were diagnosed with tuberculosis instead. The two diseases are completely different, but there was no diagnosis for ARDs. The concept of a relationship between work and disease simply did not exist*[63].

In the early 1990s, studies conducted by professionals of the *Fundação Jorge Duprat Figueiredo de Segurança e Medicina do Trabalho-FUNDACENTRO* [Jorge Duprat Figueiredo Foundation of Safety and Occupational Health], began to provide epidemiological evidence of asbestos's carcinogenicity in Brazil. Data were emerging from medical examinations of asbestos workers, the majority of whom had worked at the Eternit plant in Osasco and would later become ABREA members.

In the collective history reconstructed by my study participants, ABREA's mobilization began with a specific episode emblematic of how an individual story of vulnerability was part of a *disaster*'s process affecting an entire community of exposed workers.

> *A former Eternit worker*[64] *remained unemployed and spent several months unsuccessfully looking for a new job. One day, a medical doctor who was visiting him during a selection process for a position in another factory, told him that the reason why nobody would employ him was due to the bad conditions of his lungs. The worker underwent further examinations that revealed that his lungs were seriously contaminated with asbestos. He began to search for his former co-workers to warn them about the possibility of being themselves contaminated; in the meantime, he made the first contacts with professionals of the Ministry of Work deputed to the surveillance of safety measures in workplaces, who put him in contact with biomedical doctors specialised in lung diseases and occupational health.*

The FUNDACENTRO and the *Centro de Referência em Saúde do Trabalhador-CEREST* [Reference Centre in Occupational Health] of the Freguesia do Ó in São Paulo were among the first public institutions contacted by asbestos workers who were beginning to critically think about their bodies and their occupational experiences. In this section, I refer to the

[63] From the interview conducted with Daniel (see previous section).
[64] I save the anonymity because the worker died and, during my fieldwork, I was not able to contact his family to ask the permission to divulgate the name.

interviews conducted with five biomedical doctors I met with in Osasco, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Among them, anti-asbestos activists from ABREA and other Brazilian associations found interlocutors, supporters, and biomedical professionals who cared for their individual and social suffering.

> *The first contacts date back to 1995; they* [asbestos workers] *began to come to our centres asking to be visited. At that time, there was no occupational health centre in Osasco yet; therefore, they had to come to São Paulo, and this could represent a mobility problem. Generally, a worker informed a co-worker about the opportunity of undergoing examinations to detect the presence of asbestos in the lungs.*

AR-illness diagnoses were made by a group of four biomedical doctors from various public health institutions gathered in a *Grupo Interinstitucional de Estudo de Trabalhadores Expostos ao Asbesto – GIETEA* [Interinstitutional Group of Study of Asbestos Exposed Workers]. The institutions were: FUNDACENTRO/*Divisão de Medicina do Trabalho* [Occupational Health Unit], *CEREST da Freguesia do Ó* (São Paulo), *Instituto do Coração-InCor/Hospital das Clínicas, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de São Paulo-HCFMUSP* [Cardiology Institute/ Das Clínicas Hospital, Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo], and *Área de Saúde Ocupacional-ASO, Universidade de Campinas-UNICAMP* [Occupational Health Department, University of Campinas]. Over the years, the composition of the group, changed and the *Rede Nacional de Atenção Integral à Saúde do Trabalhador-RENAST, Regional Osasco* [National Network of Comprehensive Care of Occupational Health, Osasco Region] that had been founded in the meantime, took the place of InCor.

> *It was important to carry on a collaborative work, especially in the beginning. At that time, we* [biomedical doctors] *could have doubts and make mistakes since we did not rely on a deep knowledge of ARDs. Thus, we periodically met to discuss the tests' results and together we assigned the diagnoses. The involvement of professionals from four important public institutions conferred a great reliability to the certificates we assigned together, after having collectively studied each case. It has been a significant learning process for us. We examined hundreds of workers; the majority of them had been employed at the Eternit plant in Osasco. From 1995 to 1998 there was a large number of workers contacting us through the ABREA. The basic examinations were X-rays and spirometry. The results of our first investigations were shocking: seven workers out of ten were diagnosed with ARDs, especially pleural plaques and asbestosis.*

The biomedical doctors I met were engaged in anti-asbestos activism and had spent part of their study and training experiences abroad. The relationships linking them to Italian researchers (especially epidemiologists and public health professionals) and institutions like the *Istituto Superiore di Sanità* [Superior Institute of Health] in Rome were still intense in 2015. The majority of these connections represented the continuation of dialogues and

collaborations begun in the 1980s, a time of crucial reforms in health policy in Italy, which deeply influenced the elaboration of the *Sistema Único de Saúde-SUS* [Unified Health System], the Brazilian public health system ruled by the post-dictatorship Constitution of 1988 (see Berlinguer et al. 1988; Paim 2008). Brazil's democratization phase and policies addressing the active participation of civil society favourably influenced ABREA's role in biomedical knowledge and epidemiological evidence making processes. ABREA served as collective actor representing a community of 'afflicted bodies' (Scheper-Hughes 1994), and undertook (institutional) biomedical paths to find interlocutors and supporters of its struggle in democratic public institutions.

At the same time, biomedical professionals had the opportunity to investigate ARDs contracted by a large number of asbestos workers; this opportunity favoured local advancements in biomedical knowledge about the carcinogenicity of asbestos fibres. In my analysis, I read this aspect as emblematic of the processual dimension that characterises biomedical knowledge as a system of power rooted in paradigms that are 'absolute' and 'true' until they are substituted by new paradigms achieving consensus from the expert community (Kuhn 1963). In my analysis of the social impact of the elaboration of new paradigms of biomedical knowledge and treatment of a 'socially produced epidemic' (Broun and Kisting 2006), I referred to Fassin (2007) who argues:

> Epidemics are moments of truth when both knowledge and power are put to the test. Doctors test their theories, and citizens expect concrete results from the authorities. This well-known and often recorded fact, along with the transformations it brings about in the field of science and the destabilising effect it has on the current government, has led to interpreting epidemics as factors of social change. It would be close to reality, however, to regard them as factors that reveal states of the world that are already there but could just as well never materialise. They are revealing in the sense of unveiling. […] The epidemics thus invents nothing; it uncovers. It is a biological phenomenon that shakes or strengthens the existing social structures and representations but does not create them ex nihilo. (Fassin 2007:32)

And the author continues:

> The evolution of knowledge, at the heart of scientific activity is what will guide the normative changes. When new discoveries are made, the norm changes. Seen this way, biomedicine is always right. At the time when it makes a definitive statement—and to the extent that it has mobilised all the scientific resources immediately at its disposal—it is speaking the truth, even when it declares the contrary of what it had asserted previously. […] But, compared to biology, for instance, the specific nature of biomedicine comes from the fact that it is also medicine. It has effects on person and on society, through diagnoses and treatments, through individual counselling and collective pronouncements, through the production of norms that in the end turns doctors into 'moral entrepreneurs'. Thus, contrary to science, when biomedicine

> speaks the truth it also speaks morals and, in so doing, becomes socially vulnerable. Though it can always claim it has done its best at any given moment, it is accountable to the public in the long term. And though it may forget, the public will remember. (Fassin 2007:84)

A lung specialist with whom I conducted a formal interview recalled several times that Italian reformed health policies informed his career and decision to work in a public hospital. He had studied in Italy in the 1980s and that specific socio-political context had marked his biomedical knowledge and practices. I quote:

> *It is a sensitive matter. We care for workers who do not trust medical doctors anymore, since they have been deceived for many years. We know about workers who did not accept or did not believe in the diagnoses we gave them. Some workers are suspicious; they still have a lot of doubts and ask numerous questions. Many of them undergo tests both at the public hospitals and at the private medical ambulatories contracted by the firm; in this way they can compare the results. I do not judge this behaviour. It is their choice and their right, since by law the firm is obliged to guarantee periodic medical examinations to exposed workers. We should always keep in mind that contaminated workers are vulnerable actors. They are poor, elderly, and sick. They have to face a number of practical and emotional difficulties. Those who have pleural plaques and asbestosis live at a higher risk to contract lung cancer and MM. They suffer from this awareness; many of them have troubles in sleeping.* […] *We give lectures and train new generations of medical doctors, but they* [ABREA activists] *have an irreplaceable role. They build a network, mobilise, and through awareness campaigns involve exposed workers and citizens who until that moment did not know anything about the dangers of asbestos. In those cases, ABREA puts them in contact with us. In general, periodic examinations are scheduled once per year; but in case of necessity, they know that they are free to come and talk to us when the ambulatory is opened* [one day per week] *without appointment. Since they suffer from chronic diseases that upset their lives and their families, the* acompanhamento [follow-up] *is fundamental and it is important that* eles se sentam acompanhados [they feel they are accompanied, meaning cared and not abandoned].

As discussed in Chapter 5, the practices of *care-activism* undertaken by ABREA members largely consisted of collaboration with biomedical professionals in public research institutes whose knowledge and expertise had contributed in a significant way to improve and increase. As stated in an academic article published in 2001 that reported the first results of a survey conducted with ABREA *sufferer-activists* in Brazil, epidemiological data about effects of occupational asbestos exposure on health were almost inexistent throughout the 1990s (Algranti et al. 2001) and only a few investigations were mentioned including Nogueira et al. (1975), Costa (1983), and Amancio et al. (1988).

In the same article, the essential role of ABREA in the development of the epidemiological survey that enrolled 868 workers between June 1995 and August 1999 was acknowledged.

The study's results showed that the 8,9% of workers had asbestosis, while 29,7% had pleural thickening.

> During this process [of investigation], a non-governmental organisation (NGO) called *Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABREA* [Brazilian Association of Exposed to Asbestos] was founded by former workers with the creation of a central registry. This organization took over the task of identifying and referring former workers. The principal objective of the project was to investigate the respiratory morbidity due to asbestos exposure. […] Former workers were approached by ABREA and invited to participate in a cross-sectional evaluation and longitudinal follow-up (Algranti et al. 2001:241).

ABREA activists collaborated with biomedical doctors in the elaboration of the epidemiological evidence of the suffering that they and their families were living everyday; they were living 'archives' of that suffering, and had counted numerous deaths among their comrades. Leandro, one of the eldest ABREA members with whom I conducted an interview (see Chapter 3), had written a long list of names of ABREA members *falecidos* [deceased], including his comrades who had died up until 2003. Then, he had updated the list by crossing out all years up to 2014. The list included 109 names.

In ABREA's office, another 'informal register' was represented by a package of the yellow membership's records called '*falecidos*'. The register was on a desk with the records of the current members and those who had abandoned the association. Each record included the member's portrait, date of birth, and the name of the workplace.

The membership cards belonging to current members had been placed beside those who had died. I found that the way the documents had been ordered showed the presence of the absent, a continuity between past and present, and the traces of lives marked by suffering and struggling experiences kept 'alive' by the *militant* memory of survivors[65].

Reflecting on biomedical paths as paths of activism leads to the consideration of the cultural dimension of scientific knowledge, whose *truths* are not absolute or neutral paradigms of a monolithic institution (see Kuhn 1963), but rather the product of a permeable and fluid system of power. The practices of *care-activism* undertaken by ABREA members pivoted around the recognition of the *truth* about the carcinogenicity of asbestos that had been denied to them for decades, and the demonstration of that same *truth* inscribed in their bodies that was the cause of their suffering. However, the biomedical reading of the traces inscribed in former workers' bodies, especially in the beginning of ABREA mobilization and throughout the 1990s, led to the enunciation of '*truths'* and the elaboration of evidences, which were often conflicting with

[65] See photograph 14 in Appendix.

each other. On the one hand, asbestos companies based the legitimacy of a 'safe asbestos use' theory (see Terracini and Mirabelli 2016; Cullinan et al. 2017). On the other hand, contaminated workers denounced the lack of recognition of their suffering by biomedical professionals as a form of injustice. In this regard, I refer to João's experience (I already referred to him and his wife in Chapter 5). João had died of lung cancer in 2013; after working 22 years at the Eternit plant in Osasco. He was a smoker too. On his death certificate, there was no mention of occupational exposure to asbestos, despite the fact that in April 1997, GIETEA had diagnosed him with asbestosis and pleural plaques, which are AR pathologies (Prüss-Ustün et al. 2011). The family did not ask for an autopsy that might have proved the presence of asbestos fibres in his lungs. The medical doctor who signed the certificate did not affirm the presence of ARDs since there was no examination of tissues or organs.

In 1997, João filed a lawsuit against the company because of the discrepancy he found between the results of his GIETEA medical test, and those from the company medical doctors who had examined him during his *pós demissional* [post dismissal] control, few months before his GIETEA exam. Moreover, he found there was a discrepancy between the certificate stating his ability to work and his health condition. At that time, João suffered from constant *cansaço* [tiredness], *falta de ar* [lack of air] and depressed mood.

By comparing the documents that Leticia (João's widow) showed me during our interview, I noticed that although João had had the same tests (radiography, spirometry, and computerised tomography) by both the company doctors and GIETEA, the exams revealed a conflicting *truth*. The GIETEA had found evidence of asbestosis and pleural plaques, while the company medical doctors did not find evidence of occupational or AR disease and declared that João at age 66 years was able to work.

The judges for João's legal action also requested a medical survey and that did not attest the presence of ARDs either. The lawsuit's documents stated that "the presence of asbestos in the lungs [as it was evident from the images], might not be read as a disease in itself; moreover, the symptoms of tiredness and *falta de ar* might be related to a pulmonary emphysema, most likely due to the worker's habit of smoking".

The judges' medical report repeatedly stated that the dangers of asbestos exposure depended on the individual's reaction to exposure and on a high dose-time relationship, meaning that the larger the number of inhaled fibres and the duration of exposure duration, the higher the risk of contracting an ARD.

It also stated that the former worker did not run the risk of contracting asbestosis in later years. However, João's "mild depression, sadness, *desânimo* [gloom], *mágoa* [bitterness], and tendency to isolate himself from family and friends] were mentioned.

The results of epidemiological surveys have proven the carcinogenicity of asbestos fibres since the 1960s (Selikoff et al. 1965). Notwithstanding, the international community of health professional experts in AR issues is still involved in a debate around the so-called 'asbestos controlled use' (see Terracini and Mirabelli 2016), based on which national and multinational corporations that are legitimately allowed to continue using asbestos (see Chapter 7). In the literature, the debate continues with authors maintaining that the cause-effect relationship between exposure to asbestos chrysotile and MM onset cannot be established with certainty (see Assis and Isoldi 2014) and those stating that to determine a safety threshold in asbestos fibres exposure is impossible regardless of the kind of asbestos minerals involved (see Marsili et al. 2016). The discussion takes place in comments and letters published in academic journals such as Algranti's comments (2014) on Assis and Isoldi's review (2014), statements of international research institutes and institutions (see Collegium Ramazzini 2015, 2010, 1999) as well as in the everyday life of health professionals and researchers operating in contexts marked by negotiations (and conflicts) intrinsic to the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011).

During my fieldwork in Brazil, the negotiations and conflicts informing the practices and knowledge by which AR suffering is approached were accentuated and evident. They led to apparently contradictory (almost paradoxical in my eyes) circumstances wherein health professionals and researchers engaged with anti-asbestos activism or supporting campaigns addressing asbestos prohibition worked in the same units or departments as professionals sustaining the possibility of safe exposure to asbestos arguing that establishing a 'zero risk' condition was impossible for any activity. I was not able to conduct formal interviews with health professionals, researchers and other social actors (e.g. workers and unionists) against asbestos prohibition in Brazil. Instead, I rely on the above mentioned literature, public speeches, documentation collected through the Internet[66], and informal conversations conducted with occupational health professionals operating in Goiás, a Brazilian state where an asbestos mine continue to operate. There I had a tense experience characterising the debate about AR issues in verbal and emotional aggression I suffered because of the topic of my research.

[66] In particular, I referred to documents and publications available on line at the *Instituto Brasileiro do Crisotila-IBC* [Brazilian Institute of Chrysotile]'s website http://www.ibcbrasil.org.br.

Asbestos prohibition in Osasco and São Paulo

The results of biomedical examinations have substantiated workers' allegations; the diagnoses they were receiving for the first time in their lives made the deaths of an increasing number of friends, the inner wounds on their lungs, their *falta de ar* [lack of air] and cough the indisputable proof of asbestos toxicity. Their struggle through a biomedical journey acquired legitimacy as they lobbied for asbestos prohibition through political and administrative paths as well. ABREA found supporters and interlocutors among those individual and collective social actors whose civil conduct was rooted in the blazing socio-political scenario of Osasco in the 1960s/1980s (see Chapter 4). In this section, I refer to an interview I conducted with Marcos Martins, *Partido dos Trabalhadores-PT* [Workers Party] state deputy, who has been engaged with anti-asbestos activism since the beginning of his political career. With the current ABREA president, Mr. Eliezer João de Souza, the two men shared their militant experiences among the worker-priests operating in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Osasco, inspired by the Liberation Theology (LT) (see Gutierréz 1972), and the emancipatory potential of education as theorised by Freire (1967, 1970, 1980). I had met Deputy Martins for the first time in April 2011, in Casale Monferrato (Italy), where he was invited to an international conference organised by the local anti-asbestos association. He is renown in the transnational context of anti-asbestos activism for having supported the law prohibiting asbestos use in Osasco (Complementary Law 90/2000, ruled by the Decree-Law 8,983/2001) and for writing the São Paulo state law banning asbestos (Law 2,684/2007). Both were fundamental achievements in Brazilian mobilization. The municipal law prohibited the use of asbestos-containing material of any kind in public/private construction and it established the annual public funding for ABREA awareness campaigns in April, the month internationally dedicated to occupational health issues. The state law prohibited the use of asbestos-containing material and products in the entire state. The laws included all kinds of asbestos, including chrysotile, which was (and still is) extracted and used in Brazil. On November 23, 2016, the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court discussed the *Açães Diretas de Incostitucionalidade-ADI* [Direct Actions of Unconstitutionality] undertaken by the *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Indústria-CNTI* [National Confederation of Industrial Workers] against the laws approved by the São Paulo state and municipality concerning asbestos prohibition. The discussion was about the laws' alleged unconstitutionality, and non-conformity with the federal law allowing asbestos use. These actions are symptomatic of the conflict—and violence—intrinsic to a debate in which the

right to live and work in a safe environment appears to be negotiable and secondary to the rules governing global asbestos market. As the third largest asbestos producer in the world, Brazil's anti-asbestos activists have faced numerous difficulties over more than twenty years of mobilization.

During the earliest stages of the Brazilian workers' mobilization, Eternit responded by trying to silence the denunciations and weaken the movement by attacking the social and emotional bonds among the workers, which represented a crucial binding force of ABREA's *care-activism*. Several years after the Eternit's factory's demolition, in the mid-1990s, Eternit reactivated the *Associação Recreativa dos Colaboradores Eternit-ARCE* [Recreational Association of Eternit Collaborators]. In the association's magazines, periodically sent to the *ex-colaboradores* [former collaborators], the firm celebrated the 'old good times' by recalling the friendships born in the plant, and emphasised the enthusiasm and commitment of its 'collaborators'. Moreover, during interviews, my research partners often showed me the invitation letters they used to receive from the company to participate to *churrascos* [barbecues], Christmas parties with donations of baskets of food, and activities of *confraternização* [fraternization]. Moreover, in 1997, a series of meetings were inaugurated entitled *Conversas com a Eternit* [Conversations with the Eternit] consisting of 'delightful and relaxed reunions' intended to build a "friendly relationships of *confiança mútua e permanente* [mutual and permanent trust]". At the same time, former workers received invitations to reflect on the transactions proposed by the company, and reminders of the opportunity to undergo the periodic biomedical examinations at the medical labs contracted by the firm, as guaranteed by law.

The texts of these letters contained numerous recalls of the importance of participation, fraternization, and the opportunity of meeting old friends.

The public debate on asbestos prohibition was still characterised by a conflict and at the time of my fieldwork this was the background of the Deputy's narrative about the prohibition of asbestos in Osasco.

> *The collaboration with the FUNDACENTRO and then with the CEREST here in Osasco was important to empower the workers' struggle and to care for them since in these centres workers could undergo medical examinations and be followed up* [in their chronic illness experiences]. *As* vereador [city councillor]*, I brought workers' instances into the municipality government's debates. Together with workers and professionals* [biomedical doctors and technicians from the public institutions supporting workers' mobilization]*, we invented a project for the prohibition of asbestos use in Osasco, a project that I signed and proposed to the local government. We made a very concise project asking just for the prohibition, since there had been a precedent of a broader project that had been rejected at the state level because it had*

> *been considered unconstitutional. However, despite our precautions, our project was rejected too. It was a very hard moment for the struggle, with many pressures put on us. Even medical doctors* [members of the municipality government] *voted against asbestos prohibition. We designed another project, although we could not be confident that this second one would not be rejected either. A relevant number of councillors continued to vote for the refusal. In the meantime* [in 2000], *ABREA organised an international seminar and delegations from more than thirty countries came to Osasco. On that occasion, a councillor of a party different than mine publicly assumed the commitment to propose a new project for asbestos use prohibition. His project would have more chances to be approved since the councillor's party was part of the government, while I was in the opposition at that time. Therefore, I decided to retire my project* [with fewer chances to be voted] *and support the new project, although it had been proposed by a rival political party. I made that decision because asbestos does not distinguish based on political opinion, colour or gender… asbestos is carcinogenic for everybody. We needed that public health prevailed on political divisions. Eventually, the project was approved, but our struggle did not cease. I took every occasion of public assembly to denounce the dangers of asbestos and the deaths occurring among contaminated workers. At that time, there was a sort of invisibility surrounding asbestos matters even in the media, which never mentioned anything about asbestos carcinogenicity or ABREA's struggle.*

I want to draw attention to two aspects introduced by Deputy Marcos Martins in his narrative that I consider in more detail in the next section. On one hand, the importance of situating activism and locally experienced injustice in the transnational context of the anti-asbestos movement and AR *disasters*; in this regard, the international seminar organised in Osasco in 2000 (see next section) accelerated the approval of asbestos prohibition law and represented a successful strategy of struggle. On the other hand, Deputy Martins highlighted how the lack of communication and visibility in the media has exacerbated AR suffering. In the next section, I discuss the *sufferer-activists*' empowerment coming from occasions and opportunities to communicate and make their AR suffering *visible.*

'Uma mulher de combate' ***and the transnational anti-asbestos movement***

> *Para mim é como se ela não tivesse gênero. Ela está em cima de tudo. Ela é uma lutadora, companheira, amiga, irmã, uma técnica, uma máxima experta sobre o amianto.*
> *Eu tenho uma confiança total nela.*
> [To me it is as if she does not have gender. She is above everything. She is a fighter, a comrade, a friend, a sister, a technician, a great expert of asbestos matters. I totally trust her].

The current ABREA president, Mr. Eliezer João de Souza, used the words above to refer to Fernanda Giannasi, who the popular Brazilian magazine "Época" had defined as *uma mulher*

de combate [a fighter woman] and the "Erin Brockovich of Brazil" in 2001, when a special number dedicated to AR suffering and activism was published. Internationally renowned as the *"Pasionaria"* [Passionate], Engineer Fernanda Giannasi has been engaged with anti-asbestos activism over the last 32 years and she contributed to the situating of the locally performed ABREA struggle in the national and transnational movement of asbestos prohibition in Brazil and globally. I met her for the first time in Casale Monferrato (Italy) in 2011 (on the same occasion when I met with Deputy Marcos Martins), at a time when I had not imagined that I would base my doctoral research on the activism that has emerged from the suffering afflicting her compatriots.

Upon my arrival in Osasco, Fernanda Giannasi acted as one of my gatekeepers and introduced me to ABREA members whose struggle she had joined as militant, professional, and supporter. Being introduced by her undeniably facilitated my approach to the field, where I then acted autonomously. In the beginning of my stay in Osasco/São Paulo, Ms. Giannasi voiced her concerns about the difficulties I might face for being a woman among a community of elderly men imbued by a strong masculine culture. She interpreted the activists' acceptance of her leading role in activism to the fact that the acknowledgment of her professionalism and ethical commitment made the activists 'like forget that she was a woman' or think of her as a 'fighter without gender' as the ABREA President used to say. In this dissertation, my focus was not on the dynamics of power relationships and identity negotiations of gender issues, although these would represent stimulating input for further investigations. In data analysis and thesis writing, my reflection on gender issues had concerned the negotiation of my own position in the field and the extent to which the practices of activism and suffering as well as those of recognition and exclusion within the association were informed by the masculine culture to which the majority of my research partners referred. The cover of the "Época" magazine, with Fernanda Giannasi's half-length photograph before the numerous close-up portraits of asbestos workers, expressed Fernanda Giannasi's role in the activism in a direct and strong manner. As I observed during my fieldwork, in 2015, Fernanda continued to represent a fundamental point of reference for the *sufferer-activists* who still conferred upon her the ethical and professional authority to represent their voices.

During the numerous informal conversations and formal interviews we had, Fernanda Giannasi mentioned her participation in the Global Forum held in Rio de Janeiro in occasion of the Earth Summit of 1992 several times as a turning point experience in her professional and private life. I quote one conversation I recorded with her consent.

> *For the first time, I got in touch with environmentalist groups. I had been working with the CUT, I had studied the history of working struggles, and the Italian movement, but in the debates held in "Rio 1992" there was a pressing attention to environmental issues related to industrial policies that I have never seen before. "Rio 1992" let me discover the world of the environment-based social movements, and I began to reflect on occupational issues and safety in working places from a different perspective.*

In this section, I consider Fernanda Giannasi's crucial role in making anti-asbestos activism and the multi-faceted *disasters* caused by the global asbestos market *visible*. She contributed in making ABREA a collective social actor operating in the national and transnational movements to prohibit asbestos and gain social justice against human exploitation and environmental racism. Giannasi' s 'social capital' and skills had supported ABREA in establishing contacts with external interlocutors and improving the communication strategies implemented through various channels (from awareness campaigns in public gardens to the use of social networks). Maintaining contacts with national and international organizations was part of the activists' everyday lives, and Fernanda Giannasi's role was fundamental in mediating communication with English or Italian speaking actors. She has had a long-lasting correspondence beginning in the 1990s with some of these actors. Thus, I draw attention to the relationship between ABREA and the *Associazione Familiari Vittime Amianto-AFeVA* [Association of Relatives and/or Victims of Asbestos] of Casale Monferrato, from that time. Next, I situate this relationship within the broader scenario of the anti-asbestos movement.

On November 17, 1995, Engineer Fernanda Giannasi sent a fax to the Italian activists she had met two years earlier at the seminar 'Bastamianto' [meaning 'Stop Asbestos'] organised by the *Associazione Italiana Esposti Amianto-AIEA* [Italian Association of Exposed to Asbestos] in Milan (Italy). The fax was published in the Italian association's newsletter, and I found a copy of it in ABREA's archives. Giannasi's letter addressed some of the issues considered in this chapter. It highlighted the importance of establishing a transnational collaboration to empower the locally organised mobilizations. In particular, connections linking Casale Monferrato and Osasco were mentioned. Based on a similar history of exploitation and contamination, the wish was expressed that the Italian and Brazilian activists combine their efforts to achieve justice. Moreover, there was an explicit reference to the conflicts and difficulties faced by Brazilian activists and sufferers. In particular, Fernanda Giannasi invited medical doctors who had investigated the community of contaminated workers and citizens in Casale Monferrato to join efforts in Brazil. Giannasi suggested that the Italian biomedical professionals might offer a training workshop to their Brazilian colleagues, who did not yet

have deep knowledge of ARDs. The lack of training determined the under-diagnosis of ARDs in Brazil a that was (and still is) frequent in countries where asbestos was (and is) legal according to investigations conducted in various settings by public health researchers (see Marsili et al. 2016, Cullinan et al. 2017).

The letter was written at the time of the demolition of the Eternit plant. The US multinational Walmart had bought the 150,000m^2 of land formerly occupied by the factory and began demolition without first having remediating asbestos from the area. In the total absence of safety measures for workers and the neighbourhood's inhabitants (as recalled in Giannasi's letter), as inspector of the Ministry of Labour Giannasi had prescribed a 15-day suspension of the demolition. The episode was then highlighted by the US media thanks to local social actors engaged in anti-asbestos activism in contact with the Brazilian activists. Rising protests in the US forced Walmart to take measures to improve the working conditions in Osasco. The visibility of the sanction in the media favoured dialogue among former workers, local administrators, public health institutions, and the Ministry of Labour. Engineer Giannasi was one of the exponents most engaged in the anti-asbestos struggle.

After my fieldwork in Brazil, I spent a few days in Casale Monferrato to meet with some of the research partners who had participated in my study in 2012. We discussed about the developments of my study with the ABREA activists and we organised a visit to Osasco in Piedmont region. I had the idea to visit the tiny town where Antonio Agù had emigrated from at the end of the 19th century when he 'founded' Osasco in Brazil. I was looking for traces of the historical connections I had read about and was keen to know if and how those bonds were being kept alive in the present. Somehow, I found the traces I was looking for in the Mayor's description of the current relationship between the 'two Osascos', including cultural exchanges and mutual visits of official delegations as well as the names of the streets, and in the library sections dedicated to Brazil. My short stay in Casale Monferrato in 2016 offered me the occasion to reflect on the connections linking the Italian and Brazilian activism conducted by the AFeVA and the ABREA respectively. In particular, the road trip to Osasco with three AFeVA members including Bruno Pesce (who had had a key role in the local mobilization), represented an opportunity to share experiences and reflections with the social actors directly involved in the relationships and trajectories on which I designed my doctoral project. On our way back to Casale Monferrato, I asked Bruno Pesce to narrate how contacts with the ABREA had begun.

> *Fernanda came to Casale Monferrato for the first time in 1994. We had met her one year before, in Milan, at the conference 'Bastamianto'.*

A delegation of Brazilian unionists from Osasco visited Casale Monferrato. At that time, the role of union organizations was very strong in our mobilization and had been decisive in the approval of law number 257 by which Italy prohibited asbestos in 1992. The activists and unionists from Osasco wanted to know as much as possible about our struggle and achievements, they wanted to discuss with us the advancements in biomedical knowledge and judicial actions. The results of a survey conducted in Casale Monferrato by a team of biomedical doctors and epidemiologists made clear in the 1980s that it was impossible to talk about 'asbestos controlled use' as was propagandised by asbestos lobbies in Brazil. Based on that study, we had organised the first penal lawsuit in the world against an asbestos-cement corporation. In the end, although there was not a favourable verdict for the victims, the lawsuit set an important precedent to be used in support of the anti-asbestos movement. Moreover, the Italian law was one of the most complete laws prohibiting asbestos in the 1990s; therefore, it could be taken as example to edit similar laws in other countries as it actually happened. Our contacts with the ABREA date back to that epoch. We went to Osasco in Brazil in 1996 for the first time and then again in 2000 to attend the largest international conference that was ever organised until that moment. The contacts with the Brazilian activists together with those organizations operating in other countries have been important for us too. All of us have learnt and are still learning from each other. For instance, our efforts for the national prohibition in 1992 or our attention to the recovery of contaminated sites have inspired other organizations. We got inspiration, for instance, from the French fund for asbestos victims and from the progressive Brazilian judicial procedures for labour justice.

The conference held in Milan represented one of the first crucial steps in the internationalization of the anti-asbestos mobilization. In the early 1990s, collective social actors organising anti-asbestos campaigns and actions in Europe began to establish connections. In 1991 the Ban Asbestos Network was founded in occasion of the first meeting organised by Yves Frémion from the French Green Party, together with the AIEA, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg (Kazan-Allen 2003:188). Two years later in Milan, the 'federation of international groups' as the network was defined by Patrick Herman (a French anti-asbestos activist who had contributed to the network's foundation), included the participation of activists from extra-European settings. Engineer Fernanda Giannasi participated and brought the Brazilian case as emblematic of the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011) and its effects on health to the attention of the international audience. Giannasi's participation in a meeting that was defined by Herman as "an important movement in the construction of an international social movement against asbestos" (Kazan-Allen 2003:188) was decisive to situate Brazilian activism within the international scenario of the anti-asbestos movement and empowered ABREA to dialogue with local political and administrative interlocutors. As one of the first consequences of the connections established with international actors, a seminar was organised in São Paulo, in 1994, by the union

organizations *Central Única dos Trabalhadores-CUT* [Unified Workers' Central], the *Confederaçao Geral do Trabalho-CGT* [General Confederation of Work], and the *Força Sindical* [Union Force] in collaboration with the FUNDACENTRO. The seminar, entitled *'Asbestos: controlled use or banishment?'*, represented an important occasion of discussion and training among biomedical professionals, experts and activists from various contexts gathered in a country that was (and still is) one of the major actors in the global asbestos market. On that occasion, the Global Ban Asbestos Network was founded and the participants wrote the Declaration of São Paulo. Based on the Declaration, the 'worldwide information network' was established and articulated in regional networks (Herman 1997 in Kazan-Allen 2003:188); Fernanda Giannasi was nominated to be the coordinator of the *Rede Virtual-Cidadã pelo Banimento do Amianto na América Latina* [Virtual-Civil Network for Asbestos Prohibition in Latin America], defined by Giannasi as a 'virtual citizenship network' (Kazan-Allen 2003:188). At the seminar of São Paulo:

> Three hundred delegates heard presentations and participated in roundtables focused on three main themes:
> chrysotile: the carcinogenic properties of chrysotile were analysed, calls for less scientific denial and more epidemiologic data were made;
> asbestos victims: urgent action was needed to obtain compensation and medical treatment for asbestos victims;
> global action: the struggle to achieve safety at work and a global ban on asbestos could be achieved only with international cooperation. (Kazan-Allen 2003:188).

The engagement with the transnational anti-asbestos movement led to the organization of another important event in Brazil in 2000, this time in Osasco. The International Ban Asbestos Secretariat-IBAS, established in 1999 by BAN members in agreement with other activists, gave a crucial support in the organization.

> Working closely with members of BAN and national groups such as ABREA in Brazil, IBAS has also emerged as a potent means to facilitate international activities.
> One of the first products of this collaboration was the 'The Global Asbestos Congress—Past, Present and Future', a landmark event held in Brazil in September 2000. One hundred international and more than 300 Brazilian delegates gathered in Osasco for three days of plenary, workshop, and roundtable sessions. The significance of the conference was reinforced by the participation of the International Labour Organization, international and national trade unions, victim-support groups, and occupational and environmental health associations (Kazan-Allen 2003:190).

At the end of the Congress, the Declaration of Osasco addressing the global prohibition of asbestos was approved by the delegations of the associations and institutions from 32 countries (Giannasi 2017).

In my first days of fieldwork, before arranging formal interviews I was 'just' spending time with ABREA activists. I was with current ABREA President, Mr. Eliezer João de Souza, who took a white photograph album from a metallic cupboard and gave it to me. I opened the album (I was very curious) and he came to sit beside me and narrate the story of the most important international event that ABREA had ever organised in Osasco, the international seminar held in 2000. Mr. de Souza remembered the difficulties related to the organization which had taken eight months to arrange and collect the necessary funding to invite activists from more than 30 countries. I quote from my fieldnotes:

> *Eliezer talked about the seminar as a paramount event. He indicated the various 'characters' portrayed in photographs to me; I recognised some of them, whom I had seen in Rome and in Casale Monferrato, but I had never met many of them. I recognised Eliezer and Fernanda, 15 years younger, with glowing skin and no wrinkles on their faces, Eliezer with black hair and beard. Eliezer had indicated a pathologist, who used to do the autopsy of workers* [and ABREA members] *who died of ARDs. He said that the autopsy was very important, because by that it was possible to obtain a reliable certificate of the presence of an ARD, and, at the same time, the doctor might increase his knowledge and experience.*

The narrative of the event's organization intertwined with Mr. de Souza's story of his own AR illness and suffering. A few days before the conference, he had undergone the surgical removal of a lung nodule, which everyone, including the doctors who were caring for him, suspected could be malignant.

In 2003, Fernanda Giannasi organised the workshop 'Another World Asbestos-Free is Possible' at the World Social Forum-WSF in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil). On that occasion, thousands of activists including environmentalists, health professionals and unionists signed a petition for asbestos prohibition in Brazil (Kazan-Allen 2003). The petition was addressed to the recently elected President Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva (PT), who since the 1980s had been leading workers' struggles as secretary of the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema, two of the most industrialised Brazilian cities and like Osasco, situated in São Paulo state.

In October 2016, an international conference entitled *Seminário Internacional: uma abordagem sociojurídica* [International Congress: A socio-juridical approach] was held in Campinas (São Paulo). I had the opportunity to participate and present my work there. The conference was founded with the fines paid by companies that had substituted or committed to substitute asbestos minerals in their production. The companies had signed the *Termos de Ajustamento de Conduta-TACS* [Agreements of Conduct Adjustments] with the *Ministério Público do Trabalho-MPT* [Public Ministry of Work], for which financial compensation for

damages caused to society by asbestos manufacturing were based (Giannasi 2017). With the participation of Brazilian and foreign (the Italian delegation was the most numerous) judges, prosecutors, medical doctors, public health experts, lawyers, and trade unionists, the congress addressed the legal proceedings under way in Brazil, the Italian lawsuit against the Eternit corporation, the latest data on global asbestos production, and biomedical research on ARDs in general, and MM in particular. The legislative situation in Brazil, characterised by specific peculiarities and contradictions of Brazil as one of the largest asbestos producers in the world was widely discussed.

> Unfortunately, the legislative development, had not been accompanied by other political and administrative actions ensuring full compliance. Thus, it happens that even in the states that had prohibited the carcinogenic mineral, asbestos-containing products are freely marketed and even manufactured; often [this situation] is guaranteed by *liminares* [injunctions designed to safeguard the jurisdiction in the implementation of a new law] granted by the Judiciary (Giannasi 2017:14).

The congress was followed by the *Encontro Nacional de Familiares and Vítimas do Amianto* [National Meeting of Relatives and Victims of Asbestos]. For the first time, over 300 *sufferer-activists* from various Brazilian states and anti-asbestos associations gathered in a national assembly.

After the meeting, the participating delegations approved the *Carta de Campinas* [Campinas' document] whereby they reaffirmed the objectives of anti-asbestos mobilization declared in 2000 in Osasco, set out new strategies and addressed new topics.

In particular, I draw the attention to the following points that concern issues particularly related to the practices of *care-activism* I investigated with ABREA.

I quote some of the 12 points listed in the document:

> 4. Promoting solidarity among anti-asbestos activists, organizing new groups of victims, and supporting other organizations in the struggle aiming at asbestos prohibition and justice for the victims;
> 6. Disseminating in our regions to the population at large, and to the relatives and victims of asbestos in particular, information about asbestos, including the latest legal and judicial decisions, biomedical research and treatment, new legislations, and other topics of interest;
> 7. Visiting those affected by the tragedy provoked by asbestos (patients and their relatives), providing them with all the necessary solidarity;
> 9. Engaging with social networks to be periodically updated, as well as actively participating in WhatsApp groups (and others), which allow the rapid exchange of information and the organization of mobilizations and activities in favour of asbestos prohibition and justice for victims (Giannasi 2017:11-16).

The abovementioned points refer to aspects such as the role of communication and the encounter with the other, which both play a fundamental role in ABREA's *care-activism* and health activism in general (see Cappelletto 2009; Fassin 2006; Polletta 1998a, 1998b).

Participation in international events, contacts and mutual support with foreign organizations empowered ABREA's anti-asbestos activism. At a national level, this empowerment led to found other associations[67], to establish a dialogue with new groups and movements that dealt with themes related to health, environment and labour. On another level, ABREA's dialogue and collaboration with health professionals, politicians and administrators allowed ABREA to enter as an autonomous social and political actor the negotiation processes through which rights were acquired, knowledge elaborated, and asbestos prohibition declared in an increasing number of Brazilian states[68]. Fernanda Giannasi's role had been crucial due to her contribution to broaden ABREA's action and communication. While *care-activism* practices of communication represented strategies of caring and political action (as discussed in Chapter 5), in AR *disaster* processes, the control and absence of communication together with the elaboration of discourses and knowledge denying asbestos carcinogenicity allowed AR disasters to occur and be subjected to a veil of *silence* and *invisibility.* The "Época" magazine's cover, with its special number published in 2001, represented a turning point in anti-asbestos activism since it suddenly increased the number of potential ABREA's interlocutors by bringing national attention for the first time to the mobilization and suffering experienced by asbestos workers. Starting from that particular event, ABREA began a dialogue with one of the major law firms concerned with workers' rights, occupational health and environmental issues in Latin America, whose lawyers began to assist ABREA *pro bono*. That collaboration has opened new paths of activism (judicial), which I discuss next.

[67] In addition to the ABREA in Osasco, there are ABREA's branch sites in São Caetano do Sul and Vale do Paraíba (São Paulo). Moreover, other anti-asbestos organizations are: the ABREA of Rio de Janeiro, ABREA of Londrina, the *Associação Baiana dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABEA* [Bahian Association of Exposed to Asbestos] in Poções and Simões Filho (Bahia), the *Associação Pernambucana dos Expostos ao Amianto-APEA* in Recife (Pernambuco), the *Associação Paranaense dos Expostos ao Amianto-APREA* in São José dos Pinhais (Paraná), and a new ABREA in Pedro Leopoldo (Minas Gerais) is setting up (source www.abrea.org.br, accessed March 23, 2017).

[68] The Brazilian states that have prohibited asbestos are: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Amazonas, Maranhão, Pará, and, since December 2016, Santa Catarina. Moreover, 45 municipalities in various states of the Federation have prohibited asbestos as well (source www.abrea.org.br, accessed March 23, 2017).

Activism through judicial paths

During my fieldwork, my gatekeepers asked me if I would be available to conduct interviews with a dozen of ABREA activists (among the eldest ones), about their working experiences. A camera operator (militant in the PT party) had made himself available to record interviews free of charge. The ABREA Directory believed that it was very important to record the testimonies of the eldest members while they were still alive and able to remember and narrate. In this way, their memory could be saved and turned into an important resource for the anti-asbestos mobilization. For instance, the recordings could be used as proof in legal proceedings aimed at obtaining compensation and protection for access to care and medical assistance[69]. I accepted. My task was to ask a list of questions I had written based on the directions received from the association's Directory. The questions had to be more concise and direct than those I asked during interviews conducted for my research purposes, which were 'grand tour questions' (Spradley 1979). My earlier questions had been designed to elicit a narrative and to allow me to grasp nuanced subjective dimensions from the narrated memories narrated and from the body 'speaking' through the *sufferer-activists'* teary eyes, silences, and shortness of breath. Now instead, the purpose of the interviews was to ask for and receive 'objective' testimonies about the working conditions in the factory, the safety measures adopted by the company, the risk awareness among workers, and the workers' own ARD(s). Before starting the recordings, the association's Directory stressed that that meeting was not to be considered as an assembly of ABREA members, but rather as a reunion of former workers at the Eternit plant in Osasco. Personal opinions and feelings towards the firm should be left out. It was recommended to always tell the truth, and only the *truth*.

That admonition made me remember when a couple of ABREA activists had shown me papers written by hand and kept in their wallets. On those papers, they had carefully copied out the biomedical terms indicating their ARDs, and the key dates of their occupational and illness experiences. When I asked them the reason for those papers, they answered that at any time they were prepared to say without hesitations or looking doubtful the *truth* about what asbestos exposure had done to them. I interpreted that practice too as a practice of everyday struggle intended to prove their biosocial condition of victimhood, whose recognition might guarantee them the access to social and health rights.

[69] Brodeur's *Outrageous Misconduct. The Asbestos Industry on Trial* (1985) represents a seminal contribution to understand the anti-asbestos activism undertaking legal pathways.

On the day of the ABREA 'interviews', we were all embarrassed—me for asking questions that would be recorded and heard by others, and the ABREA member (former workers) for answering, while facing the camera, holding the microphone and with lights directed on their faces. I quote from my fieldnotes.

> *Interviewing Chico* [I referred to him in Chapter 5] *particularly touched me. He was the last one to give testimony. He had asked to sit next to me in order to hear the questions better* [Chico had a hearing impairment caused by the noisy working environment in the plant], *but for the shoot we could not be seated next to each other. I put my chair as close as possible to him, and I spoke aloud, slowly pronouncing the words. Nevertheless, he could not clearly get the questions. His eyes became frightened, his hands began to writhe and the legs to wobble. The breathlessness accentuated. He seemed to be visibly shrinking.*

I had the same feeling when I accompanied Chico to his periodic medical examinations, and saw him visibly tried getting out from the lab where he had undergone spirometry (see Chapter 5).

For *sufferer-activists*, commitment to the anti-asbestos mobilization consisted of making their own (embodied) memory an objective proof of their suffering, and, in doing so, an instrument to purse justice, be recognised as victims, and practice new forms of citizenship (see Petryna 2002; Fassin 2007; Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

In everyday experiences of activism, the (militant) acts of memory were practiced for example, in the availability ABREA activists—former workers—to be heard as witnesses in the collective and individual legal actions taken against AC companies.

> *How do you lobby and fight for your rights when you are a worker? By striking. Asbestos victims cannot adopt that strategy anymore; the factory where they had been exposed does not exist anymore either. Therefore, what can they do in political terms? They organise manifestations and lobby politicians, but it is like… do these actions really bring a result for them? Not always. The lawsuit does. The political action gives visibility to your suffering that thus becomes acknowledged and respected, but at an individual level, the victims may say "okay, we attend the assemblies and participate in the events, we dedicate time and energies to the association, but how do these efforts improve our life in practical terms?" How does their engagement support them in facing their everyday needs such as buying medicines? Suing the firm represents a possibility to find a certain kind of relief. They* [the victims] *have concrete difficulties to face. This is the main issue. They are sick and cannot work anymore, the majority of them are retired, but many are not yet. How can they survive with all these limitations? Compensation may represent a relief and offer protection to them. They live in a condition of social exclusion; it is necessary to understand the universe of those who suffer from ARDs. Losing a job and not being able to find another one because of the disease represents a suffering condition; in low-income families, unemployment and diseases mean a catastrophe.*

The above quotation is from an informal conversation with one of my gatekeepers engaged with ABREA activism as an external supporter who made a lucid and clear analysis of the reasons why the judicial actions undertaken by *suffer-activists* were actions of struggle indeed. What struck me about the words chosen about ABREA's actions were the constant reference to the world of the factory and work in general, which, although in the past, continued to inform and represented the framework within which the actions and meanings of the activism as well as of the suffering were lived. The link with the factory was no longer dependent on employment contracts, but on the diagnosis received and the suffering lived. The asbestos workers continued to be workers although they were by then excluded from the labour market due to age and disabilities. At the same time, the demolished factory continued to exist in the contaminated bodies, discourses and relationships lived in the activism. The judicial actions were understood as the possibility to make visible the bonds to a factory (and the dynamics of AR *disasters* occurred there, as I discuss in Chapter 7) that continued to exist in the contaminated bodies of workers and in their suffering that was inter-subjectively experienced. In that same place of death and disruption—the plant, *sufferer-activists* could eventually see their claims accepted, conquer rights previously denied and gain access to new forms of citizenship. My gatekeeper's analysis highlighted the condition of vulnerability characterising the life of the *sufferer-activists*. With their young and strong bodies, their dreams and ambitions, they had been the main actors of the Brazilian economic miracle of the 1940s-1970s, when they entered the labour world as cheap and exploitable 'resources' then 'abandoned' once they had been totally spoiled.

My gatekeeper's discourse concluded with the following lines:

> *I noticed that a* justiça trabalhista [the labour justice] *is giving some interesting answers; it is attentive to workers' needs, it is a justice that may be defined as* cidadã [civil], *caring for issues of social relevance. By now, I hardly see other similarly effective ways to ensure that the workers' rights are respected or at least that they receive a compensation higher that the offensive one established by the agreement with the firm, that usually ranged from 5,000 to 15,000 reais. Giving the victims this possibility to have competent and zealous lawyers means giving them the chance to enter the justice and be able to speak as equal to equal to the companies.*

In the early 1990s, when former workers were beginning to mobilise and organise to bring judicial actions in the courts, the Eternit company began to contact and propose an *acordo extrajudicial* [transaction]; money and/or health insurance as compensation. The value depended on the seriousness of the ARD diagnosed in the workers. The majority of my research partners mentioned that the value varied between 5,000 and 15,000 reais (today equivalent to approximately 1,500 and 4,500 US dollars). According to my gatekeepers, more

than 4,000 workers signed the transaction and in doing so they agreed not to sue the firm. However, in current judicial actions the possibility has been considered for workers to sue the firm, even though they signed the transaction, since the transaction concerned issues of life and death which cannot be negotiated.

At the time of my fieldwork, ABREA and the Public Ministry of Labour were involved in two public civil actions in the name of the former workers at the Eternit plant of Osasco. In February 2016, the first judgement was pronounced and the firm was ordered to pay 100 million reais for collective damages. The money will constitute a fund to support research and awareness campaigns on asbestos risks. Moreover, order included 300,000 reais for those diagnosed with an ARD (or their heirs) for moral damages, and 90,000 reais for moral existential damage provoked by the impact of an ARD diagnosis on a worker's life. Other innovative aspects of the order obliged the company to provide lifetime medical care for all the exposed workers and to use mass media channels to inform formers workers and/or their relatives about their right to compensation so that they might claim the benefits established by the Court's decision, pronounced in the first grade of the lawsuit (Almeida 2016). This order, although not definitive, represented an important achievement after many years of struggle, which had seen ABREA collaborating and establishing a dialogue with various interlocutors including lawyers. Based on my research partners' narratives, in the initial phase of mobilization, asbestos workers sued the firm individually and had been attended by various local law firms and individual lawyers, of which the majority did not have deep knowledge of occupational health issues and ARDs. Those circumstances compromised the outcome of many of the lawsuits. In 2001, thanks to the visibility achieved after the publication of the "Época" magazine, ABREA widened its contacts and initiated a dialogue with the current law firm working for ABREA members, which is well known for its engagement in safeguarding workers' rights. According to the articles of the association (*statuto*), ABREA is a national organization, unlikely associations founded in other Brazilian settings, which have a regional identity. Therefore, ABREA can represent any victim of asbestos exposure in lawsuits undertaken in national territory. However, since ABREA is not a union, in collective actions it can represent only its members, and does not automatically represent the whole group of asbestos workers. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to interview a lawyer who attended ABREA members. He explained to me how the former workers came to be in touch with the law firm he represented.

> *Workers come to the office because they first have had a contact with ABREA. Never does a worker look for the office first. Generally, they contact ABREA because they*

> *have been diagnosed with an ARD and they want to know which procedures they should follow to claim compensation. ABREA sends them to our office. In the first meeting, we explain to the worker what documentation is needed and we ask for medical certificates attesting to the presence of an ARD. It is also important to know when the diagnosis has been made, since here in Brazil, people can only file an action in the judiciary up to two years after a diagnosis. Often, the workers who contact us do not have a reliable documentation* [medical reports] *proving that they have been contaminated with asbestos. In these cases, we advise them to undergo medical examinations, so then they contact ABREA, which arranges for them to visit the public health centres with which ABREA has been collaborating for decades.*

Good documentation proving contamination is an essential element since only reliable certificates and proof of an occupational and illness experiences can give the sufferer the possibility to take action and claim his/her rights for compensation, meaning access to health care and relief while facing basic needs and everyday difficulties.

I related the importance of the *words* allowing the translation of the symptoms of a social and individual suffering into readable and communicable signs to the dynamics characterising the politics of anti-asbestos activism discussed throughout this chapter.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have reflected on the role of ABREA in negotiating rights and elaborating knowledge through a dialogue maintained since the 1990s with interlocutors from the local political and administrative setting, public health institutions, the transnational movement for the global asbestos prohibition, and judicial arenas.

In the strategies put into practice by the *suffer-activists*, it has been fundamental to give voice to the sufferers and make the disasters *visible* through languages that rely on authority (from biomedicine), visibility (from media and communication practices), legitimacy (from law), and a broad field of action (from the transnational scenario of activism).

The dialogue and the relationships built over 20 years of mobilization allowed the workers' experiential knowledge of asbestos dangers and critical thinking (triggered by the suffering body—no more an object, but a subject of a conscious reflection) (Good 1999), to find channels, tools and words to become the basis of an 'unescapable engagement' (Mazzeo 2013, 2014). Simultaneously, the activists' commitment to their actions of tracing the cultural, socio-political, and economic processes visible on the bodies of those exposed to asbestos moulds the suffering experiences of the survivors and transforms the context wherein they act and live despite death.

PART III

Transnational disasters and movements

Chapter 7: Risk and Vulnerability in Asbestos-Related Disasters

There is no natural death: nothing of what happens to human beings is ever natural since their presence questions the world. All human beings are mortal, but for each of them the death is a fortuitous case that, although recognised and accepted, is an undue violence (de Beauvoir 2015:96).

Prologue[70]

It was ten past nine in the evening; many activists had already left. In the afternoon, the news was circulated that the judgement would not be pronounced that day; therefore, many had gone back home. However, eventually, the sentence was pronounced late that evening, when just a few of us remained including the activists from Casale Monferrato and the foreign delegations, among whom the Brazilians were the most numerous.

It took just one minute to destroy the expectations of justice built through decades of mobilization including meetings, manifestations, practices of collective and individual mourning by the survivors, including the elderly men and women who had attended all the hearings at the Court of Turin for more than two years. As an activist once told me, by their physical presence, *sufferer-activists* had shown the lawyers of the accused that they knew exactly the causes and names of those responsible of the suffering and deaths of their loved ones.

"In the name of the Italian people, the Supreme Court […] *annuls the contested judgement without indictment* […] *the accused Stephan Schmidheiny is acquitted from the crime defined by the article 434 of the penal code".* I felt a sense of vertigo, the words overlapped. I remembered the speech made by the Prosecutor[71] in the afternoon. His statement *"justice and law do not coincide, and in case of doubt, the judge has to opt for the law"* echoed in my mind; the doubt concerned interpretative issues about the appropriateness of defining and consequently judging the crime as manslaughter by disaster. *"The unnamed disaster is a disaster without typicality; therefore, it finds its typicality only if it presents the same characteristics of the named disasters. Accordingly, it must have the same characteristics of a*

[70] Based on my fieldnotes written in Rome, on November 19, 2014.
[71] Prosecutor F. M. Iacoviello.

building's collapse: instantaneousness and violence on things to provoke danger for people…" the Prosecutor said. He continued by saying that the violence could be found in the introduction of asbestos fibres in the air, thus provoking a change in the environment and representing a danger for people, but it was hard to talk about 'instantaneousness' for disasters that remain silent for decades… He stated that an epidemic disaster is not a disaster.

> *What is an epidemic? It is a relevant number of deaths and diseases… but a disaster-event does not coincide with a disease/death event… The epidemic cannot be considered as an additional event to the massive (and violent) introduction of fibres in the environment, it is a characteristic of that event, instead. The epidemic represents an aspect of a disaster event, not the disaster itself.*

Accordingly, if a disaster occurred, it occurred in concomitance with the fibres' leaking, therefore, it ceased when the production ceased, in the 1980s.

"The crime is extinguished because the prescription occurred before the first judgement had been pronounced… The public hearing is concluded".

Shouts and whistles arose from the audience who had listened to every single word in a very disciplined way until that moment. *"Shame on you! Shame on you! Your conscience is black and you cannot wash it anymore! You have killed the justice tonight!"*

I was speechless and incredulous. An activist, aged about 80, with whom I had become a friend throughout the years, came to me and talked as if she wanted to give me solace. I felt like I did not have the same right as she did to feel outraged and offended, but still, I was. She had travelled by bus from Casale Monferrato to Rome to honour the memory of her brother and sister-in-law. They had died from MM, and in a moment of deep sadness and frustration, she was taking care of me! *"We already knew"*, she said in a disillusioned tone of voice. *"The TV and radio journals had already spread the news at 8 p.m." "How had it been possible that journalists knew it before the judgement was pronounced?"* I asked. *"It always works like that… we are always the last to know"*, she answered. A younger activist passed close to us and looked into my teary eyes. I felt outraged and embarrassed in front of the suffering and further violence perpetrated against the sufferers whose struggle I have been accompanying since 2009. I felt like they were being physically beaten in front of my eyes and I could not do anything. *"Why this reaction? Did you still believe in the justice?"* The younger activist asked. My elderly friend answered before I could utter anything, *"No, I never believed in it".*

Introduction

The decision to talk about the social and individual suffering related to the economics and 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011) in terms of *disasters*[72] stems from anthropological literature on disasters and my personal research experience. It was during my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato, Italy, that I began to use the term *disaster* to define both Casale Monferrato and Bari, retrospectively (the latter is where I first investigated AR issues from an anthropological perspective). All the *sufferer-activists* I met in Casale Monferrato in 2012 were engaged in a lawsuit against the Eternit Corporation as AFeVA members. The company was being sued for environmental disaster-related manslaughter. It was the first time that one of the most powerful AC corporations was being prosecuted for that crime. The *sufferer-activists'* engagement consisted of attending weekly hearings, updating the association's members on the court's decisions, and liaising with the media to raise attention and awareness of people not personally involved in AR suffering experiences. The practices and narratives of my research collaborators, which pivoted around the concept, seriousness, and effects of the *disaster* in their lives influenced my understanding of the context. I was immersed in an environment where the suffering affecting an entire community (emerged from the disaster) was being framed and conceived of in terms of a *disaster* by the local social actors, who had appropriated the knowledge and the discourses emerging from the lawsuit and that were being disseminated by the AFeVA through frantic awareness campaigns. My decision to systematically adopt the concept of *disaster* to refer to the social and individual suffering lived by communities of exposed workers and citizens has undoubtedly been influenced by my personal research experience conducted in Casale Monferrato. I found it ethically and theoretically appropriate to refer to the third setting of the 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995) I had begun in Italy in 2009 as a context affected by a disaster, in spite of the lack of a judicial acknowledgment in Casale Monferrato.

Contrary to what was stated by the Supreme Court of Rome, in my analysis, the *disaster* event coincides with the death/disease event, and the epidemic disaster is the disaster, not just an aspect of it. In contexts affected by asbestos pollution, contaminated bodies are the first places where the disaster occurs. Asbestos slowly begins to erode worlds from inside, and then erupts outside the body with a disruptive force after decades of silence (see Petrillo 2015).

[72] By referring to Quarantelli (1978), Ligi (2009) describes the term *disaster* as a 'sponge word' that includes the complexity of an experience, but whose meaning is difficult to conceptualise (Ligi 2009:7).

In this chapter, I propose a reflection on the disaster experiences lived by my research partners in Osasco, Brazil. I refer to the anthropological literature on disaster and suffering and I present my research partners' narratives to demonstrate how the disaster processes occurred and exacerbated the seriousness of the effects of asbestos exposure and related suffering in their lives. Then, I consider the practices of risk denial adopted by asbestos corporations to impede the spread of risk awareness among exposed workers and citizens as crucial dynamics in the processes of AR disasters. Last, I discuss the practices of anti-asbestos activism that pivoted around the communication of risk and awareness campaigns about the dangerous effects of asbestos exposure on health. By this action, *sufferer-activists* make AR disasters *visible.*

Why disasters?

The disasters provoked by asbestos manufacturing occur through the bodies of exposed citizens and workers whose world(s) are threatened and destroyed by the explosion of the asbestos *time bomb* in their life. The body has assumed a crucial role in the practices observed and, at the same time, has represented an effective lens to interpret the cultural and political phenomena considered as sets of bodily practices (Csordas 1990). Starting from this theoretical premise, and adopting a phenomenological approach to analyse the processes characterising the global asbestos market, I focused on the experiences of illness, risk and grief related to environmental and/or occupational exposure to asbestos, and I considered them as experiences of (AR) *disasters*.

The Italian anthropologist Gianluca Ligi, who researched the Chernobyl disaster in terms of its impact on a Saami population in Lapland (Finland) (see Ligi 2009), reflected on the silence that characterises the places affected by a disaster.

> Places upset by a disaster, but even those just transformed by wicked construction projects, environmental planning, or abandoned to the negligence for decades, become strangers and silent faces for those who live there. This is the silence of the progressive loss of the territorial and community memory, but it is also the silence coming from an erroneous eco-systemic and social analysis; therefore, the disaster is often generated by a total inability to listen to what the intimate nature of the places says. This is particularly true for environmental disasters such as floods, landslides, and earthquakes. The disaster experience paralyses the words; nevertheless, the words need to be reactivated because they represent an essential possibility to overcome the crisis. In many kinds of disaster the impact agents—for instance the notion of radioactivity—or, the environmental risk factors are invisible and unperceivable. However, sometimes, the silence is a deeper symptom of radical cognitive invisibility (Ligi 2011a:125).

In contexts affected by AR disasters, places of silence are not just the industrial neighbourhoods or illegal landfills of toxic material. The bodies of the contaminated workers and citizens are the 'places' where the silence primarily occurs because of MM's long latency period during which the *disaster* can remain invisible for decades. The silence is then exacerbated by the crisis of a person's presence—and relationship with—in the world (De Martino 1977) provoked by the experience of a fatal cancer that disintegrates the person's world (see Kleinman 2006; Becker 1997), and the lack of institutional recognition (i.e. biomedical and judicial) of the social and individual suffering provoked by AR *disasters*.

I refer to Ligi again, when I consider the disruptive impact that a disaster has on the victims' worlds and "the gravity of a catastrophe manifest in those invisible earthquakes that occur within the survivors" (Ligi 2011a:124). The author considers the multiple crises that a disaster victim may experience when

> the social, affective, economic, political, and familial microcosm, made of gestures and daily places, explodes by causing a radical turmoil, a catastrophe of huge proportions in which the culture itself shows how much it is fragile and precarious. The same cognitive categories, and symbolic structures through which a community perceives and understands the world by making it thinkable, seem to lose their own meaning in the moment when one would need them most (Ligi 2011a:124).

The *sufferer-activists* I met were facing 'invisible earthquakes' in the most intimate spheres of their existences, and were threatened and upset by their MM experiences.

Ligi referred to the definition of disaster proposed by Oliver-Smith (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002), one of the most influential voices in the anthropological debate about disasters. I found it theoretically and ethically appropriate to analyse the practices of suffering and activism in the light of this anthropological understanding. From this perspective, a disaster "can be described as a combination of potentially disruptive agents deriving from a technological or natural environment which have impact on a human community grabbed in a condition of vulnerability that is socially or technologically produced" (Ligi 2011a:126). Accordingly, the catastrophic event such as the visible effects of an earthquake, a flood or an epidemic represent just a phase of a complex process that in certain circumstances, can be very slow and remain unperceived for decades, while the condition of vulnerability to specific hazards is being determined.

> As stated by Oliver-Smith, the heart of the social-anthropological approach to extreme events is that the disaster is a phenomenon that occurs in the point of connection between society, technology and environment and can be interpreted as a very exceptional effect caused by in depth interaction of these three elements (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002). But, in anthropology, this critical point of connection between society, technology and environment is not studied in an abstract way […]. For the

> anthropologist the critical point emerges in people's lives, it suddenly emerges as a fracture, as a singularity in the fabric of daily experience of people involved, which, one by one, face to face, he meets in the field (Ligi 2011b:63-64).

In AR disasters, a 'critical point of connection' primarily concerns and resides in the body of the exposed. The fracture in the relationship with the surrounding world is lived in the flesh and it is provoked by the experiences of disabling and serious diseases such asbestosis and MM. The latter, as a life-threatening cancer, can alone represent a catastrophe that destroys "our sense that we are in control of our fate" (Kleinman 2006:4).

Sufferer-activists from Osasco were living in a context of disaster wherein the catastrophic event was represented by and continued to occur through the deaths, diseases, and suffering provoked by asbestos contamination. Vulnerability was a result, and at the same time a strategy of the transnational management of the global asbestos market.

The vulnerability characterising asbestos-contaminated communities resides in what the anthropologist Linda Waldman calls the "elusiveness of asbestos" (Waldman 2011:6), while Broun and Kisting (2006) speak of a "social production of an invisible epidemic". Based on research conducted in South Africa (which before asbestos prohibition was among the major global asbestos exporters), Broun and Kisting reflected on the invisibility of the epidemic represented by the onset of ARDs and deaths among workers and residents of an asbestos mining village (Broun and Kisting 2006). In Italy, a team of researchers conducted a qualitative study on the effects of the legal/illegal recovery of railway carriages containing asbestos at the "Isochimica" plant of Avellino (Campania region) by reflecting on the *silence* surrounding AR disaster processes (Petrillo 2015). In my analysis, I refer to the effects of asbestos manufacturing on bodies and the environment in terms of *invisible* disasters. The *invisibility* resides in the microscopic dimension of asbestos fibres and in their invisible nestling in a person's lungs for decades. The invisibility of AR disasters resides in the workers' lack of means to recognise a dusty environment as a potential source of fatal danger. As I discuss later in this chapter, a similar ignorance was the result of specific strategies designed by asbestos lobbies to minimise and deny the health hazards related to asbestos exposure. These efforts have contributed to delays in the perception of AR disasters in numerous and desperate contexts, and maintained the individual and social suffering lived by the exposed communities 'hidden' by a veil of *invisibility* for decades. To the above mentioned dynamics, I add the lack of acknowledgement, transmitted by certain biomedical and judicial discourses, of the cause-effect relationship between asbestos exposure and ARDs epidemic in terms of serious global public health issues—*disasters*.

Denying risk (and disasters)

> *In Brazil, does asbestos chrysotile cause cancer?*
> *Like any other mineral, the chrysotile is considered harmful when it is used without criteria.*
> *That is, in unsafe occupational environments (mining or industry) high concentrations of chrysotile fibres suspended in the air can attack workers' lungs and cause health hazards. Chrysotile does not offer a measurable risk to human health at levels of exposure below 1 fibre/ml. Only in these places, the quantity of fibres in suspension would reach amounts considered to be of risk; moreover, only in these places, one (the worker) would be daily exposed to high concentrations, for a long period of his life; that would produce the possibility of diseases*[73].

I situate the *invisibility* characterising AR disasters within the processes through which risk categories and scientific knowledge about the effects of asbestos exposure on health are elaborated. These categories and forms of knowledge are not objective and neutral descriptions of the reality, but rather represent the results of negotiation processes in which various social actors act, moved by distinct reasons and interests. In my analysis of the processes of knowledge (and power) making, among others, I referred to Foucault (1980, 1997a; Burchell et al. 2008), Kuhn (1963), Kleinman (1995), and Lock and Nguyen (2010). Moreover, my consideration of the cultural, socio-political, and economic dynamics and the role of various social actors at play in the elaboration and communication of risk relies on the contributions of Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), Kasperson et al. (1988), Kasperson (2014), Petryna (2002), Oreskes and Conway (2010), Di Giulio et al. (2008), Granjo (1998, 2004), Ciccozzi (2013), and Petrillo (2015). In this respect, the quote I choose to open this section is emblematic of the role of cultural and economic forces in moulding, elaborating, and communicating risk categories and knowledge. The quote is taken from the website of the *Instituto Brasileiro do Crisotila-IBC* [Brazilian Institute of Chrysotile], a non-profit institution representing governments, firms, and workers founded in 2002 in Goiânia (Goiás, Brazil)[74], the state where the asbestos chrysotile mine of Cana Brava, in Minaçu is currently active.

The workers are represented, among others organizations, by the *Comissão Nacional dos Trabalhadores do Amianto-CNTA* [National Commission of Asbestos Workers], the most representative workers' organization in favour of asbestos use; it gathers workers employed at

[73] Source *Instituto Brasileiro do Crisotila-IBC* [Brazilian Institute of Chrysotile]'s website http://www.ibcbrasil.org.br/perguntas-frequentes/pagina/2, accessed February 4, 2017.
[74] Information taken from the website http://www.ibcbrasil.org.br/quem-somos-institucional, accessed on February 5 2017.

the mine and AC factories currently in operation. The Government is represented by the *Departamento Nacional de Produção Mineral* [National Department of Mineral Production] of the *Ministério de Minas e Energia* [Ministry of Mines and Energy], and by the governments of Goiás and Minaçu. Among the partner companies, the major Brazilian AC firms are listed including Eternit, Confibra, Infibra/Permatex, Casalit, Multilit, Isdralit, and SAMA S.A Minerações Associadas (the firm managing the mining activity)[75].

The 'mission' of the institution is described in the following terms: "continuously, seeking the safe use of asbestos chrysotile and contributing to the dissemination and expansion of the sustainable Brazilian model of extraction of the mineral fibres, and industrial production of tiles and other products of quality"[76].

Based on the analysis of the texts and scientific articles available on the IBC's website, the discourse elaborated by social actors supporting the asbestos market appears to reiterate the level of safety and sustainability reached by Brazilian asbestos industry and mine and the 'safe use of asbestos'. The quality of Brazilian asbestos chrysotile is also emphasised. It is not the purpose of this section to express my personal concerns about the seriousness of similar statements, therefore I do not. What I do pay attention to is the way in which risk communication and knowledge of the carcinogenicity of asbestos are elaborated and divulged by those who have an explicit interest in supporting a certain 'paradigm' (Kuhn 1963). Reflecting on this aspect favours a critical observation of the situated and negotiated nature of knowledge, and how it is communicated. In this regard, another quote from the IBC's site offers a further example of how the invisibility of AR disasters, in this case the uncertainties and difficulties behind the underdiagnosis phenomenon of ARDs (see Cullinan et al. 2017; Marsili et al. 2016), is used in support of a pro-asbestos discourse.

> *Does a survey exist on the number of workers who contracted diseases from exposure to asbestos chrysotile?*
> *There are no reliable statistics about the number of workers exposed to chrysotile fibres, who contracted pulmonary diseases in Brazil. Therefore, since there may be unidentified cases—a very difficult situation indeed, because of the media attention—the projections made may be overestimated. There is a tendency to relate to chrysotile pulmonary pathologies whenever the patient had a contact with the fibres. However, a large number of diagnoses proved to be wrong during a most accurate examination.*[77]

[75] Information taken from the website http://www.ibcbrasil.org.br/quem-somos-institucional, accessed on February 5 2017.
[76] *Idem*.
[77] Source: http://www.ibcbrasil.org.br/perguntas-frequentes/pagina/2, accessed on February 5, 2017.

Around the world, asbestos lobbies have adopted and continue to adopt denial strategies that have made the dangers related to asbestos exposure *invisible*, thus worsening and prolonging the contamination of entire communities (see Broun and Kisting 2006; Waldman 2011). The Italian lawsuit (by which the victims of asbestos contamination in Casale Monferrato accused the Eternit firm represented by Stephan Schmidheiny and Luis de Cartier de Marchienne), made crucial documents proving that the debate on AR health hazards was already underway among asbestos lobbies since the 1970s public and internationally accessible. In this regard, the acts of the congress held in Neuss (Germany) in 1976 are emblematic, and came to represents important proof that the transnational anti-asbestos movement can now refer to as support for its allegations.

The congress of Neuss (Germany) was organised by the agency "Amiantus - Protection of Work and Environment", an institution established in 1976 to face "practical and political problems" destabilising the asbestos market, as written in the congress report. I had the opportunity to analyse the document thanks to a lawyer supporting the anti-asbestos movement, who gave me a copy. Among listed political problems, were the relationships with trade unions, journalists, mass media, and competitors. The 'problems' with the latter had to be solved with the "elimination of competitors producing asbestos-free products". However, the Neuss' congress was not focused on political problems, but rather on practical ones and their 'solutions' (e.g. promoting the use of masks, moistening the asbestos material before proceeding with disposal, and washing work clothes in the factories). Projects designed to deepen knowledge on 'asbestos and health' were discussed together with the necessity to adequately divulge that knowledge and adopt technical measures in the plants, while taking local differences into account.

The congress, titled "Safeguard of Work and Environment", took place in June 1976 and was informative. In the report's introduction, the history of biomedical studies investigating and demonstrating the carcinogenicity of asbestos fibres was documented, by referring to crucial steps in the advancement of biomedical knowledge and prohibition of asbestos. Among the others, surveys conducted by Dr. Selikoff in South Africa in the 1960s were mentioned. In 1968, the *Societé Associé d'Industries Amianteciment-SAIAC* [Associated Society of Asbestos-Cement Industries] (see Chapter 3) debated the health hazards related to asbestos exposure. A WHO congress organised in Lion (France) in 1972 with the participation of renowned experts on the health effects of asbestos debated the worldwide prohibition of asbestos crocidolite (so-called blue asbestos), and the process leading to the prohibition of all kinds of asbestos in Sweden, which started in 1977. It was clearly stated that the congress

participants (managers of the major AC factories in the world, and Herman Straub representing the Eternit Brazil) agreed to adopt strategies to manage the 'problem of asbestos', meaning the health hazards linked to asbestos exposure. The lobbies' position toward the 'problem' could be inferred throughout the report, but particularly from the conclusions of Stephan Schmidheiny. Schmidheiny summarised discourses explicitly and primarily oriented them to safeguarding companies' economic profits, "competitors will do everything, legally and illegally to disturb AC industry" it was written in the first pages of the report. I quote from Schmidheiny's conclusions:

> *Hundreds of people are engaged full-time with the problem 'asbestos and health'. They operate in: government offices, companies, unions, competitor firms, mass media, medicine, groups interested in the protection of environment. Considerable means are in motion against asbestos and such means take advantage of the fact that the public is eager for sensations.*
> *The industry is not prepared for an attack of this level, and it is not organized collectively. A defensive action does not produce anything sensational. The problem 'asbestos and health' will become more difficult, heavy and urgent in the coming months.*
> *The critical point focuses on the fact that asbestos is accused of being a dangerous substance and competitors take advantage of this.*

In the report, there was also an explicit reference to the contributions of biomedical professionals, and in particular Dr. Robock[78] who had been invited and participated in the congress. Biomedical studies were cited to support the possibility of establishing a safe threshold of asbestos exposure. "The responsibility [to cause pathologies] only resides in fibres longer than 5μ and with the diameter shorter than 3μ. Asbestos considered as simple material is by no means dangerous". Asbestosis, lung cancer, and MM were listed as ARDs; the "pleural plaques are not considered as pathology in the majority of countries worldwide", it was reported. When the policy adopted by the group of the congress participants was announced, it was introduced as follows:

> *Since the 1960s, we follow scientific studies about asbestos with the utmost attention. The rarity of diseases among workers makes us think that the security measures taken to date have been valid. However, the latest knowledge required measures that are more cautious.*

The congressional acts, together with the broader documentation of archive material, clinical reports, and testimonies among others, made public by the Italian lawsuit, revealed the intentions behind the strategies to deny and/or minimise the dangers related to asbestos exposure. This criminal management of asbestos market (Altopiedi 2011) was designed to

[78] Dr. Robock was a member of the executive committee of the Asbestos International Association (Altopiedi and Panelli 2012).

prevent exposed workers and citizens from framing their own experiences of danger into risk categories. I quote again from Schmidheiny's conclusions:

> *We have to live with this problem. Today, we acknowledge that asbestos is a potentially dangerous material, if it is not manipulated correctly.* […]
> *It is very important that we do not fall into forms of panic. The technical directors were shocked by what they have learned during these three days. It must not happen the same with the workers.*
> *The struggle against dust must take place in each plant in a natural way and without fuss.*

Schmidheiny concluded by affirming the impossibility of adopting a standard procedure in all plants, because the management conditions varied in each country. In particular, Central America had standards that differed from Europe and South Africa, and union organizations used asbestos and health issues to advance other claims. For this reason, AC companies were warned and invited to be cautious. The workers' low level of education, smoking habits and un-willingness to use masks were all mentioned as eventual obstacles to effectively implementing new safety measures as designed in the congress. I read these last considerations as indicative of strategies of paternalistic capitalism intended to transfer 'blameable' behaviours (e.g. smoking or incorrect use of the masks) and the responsibility of having contracted ARDs to the workers. The measures, transnationally elaborated and negotiated, were then put into practice locally, by considering the characteristics of each context. Through similar dynamics, the transnational dimension of the 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011) came to define both the AR market and disasters.

During my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato (Italy), I interviewed former Eternit workers and/or their relatives. In their narratives, they often referred to the practices of risk denial adopted by the plant's managers.

I quote an interview conducted in Casale Monferrato, with a retired worker suffering from asbestosis.

> *I worked at the Eternit almost 27 years, until the year when they closed the plant.*
> *From 1960 to 1975, more or less, the working conditions were disastrous. You could see the dust [79] everywhere, and you even knew that people died suffocated by that dust, but, at that time, we did not know that even a small percentage of dust could provoke this awful cancer called mesothelioma.*
> *Sometimes, in my pay slip I found a flyer alerting about the health risks related to smoke. Frequently, the managers and the doctors employed by the firm advised us [the workers] to stop smoking, and they told us that cigarettes were much more dangerous than asbestos. Later, a doctor during a workers' meeting explained us that the combination of smoke with asbestos was very dangerous, so I decided to stop smoking.*

[79] In Casale Monferrato, people generally refer to asbestos with the word *polvere*, which means dust.

> *They knew that the dust was dangerous, they even used to pay extra compensation to the workers who were more exposed to dust, but we did not know to which extent the dust was dangerous. We did not know that it caused cancers.*

The lack of knowledge about the carcinogenicity of asbestos made workers take risks that seemed acceptable and less dangerous than other risks. Moreover, brainwashing the workers with the idea that smoking was more dangerous than breathing asbestos transferred the firm's responsibility to the workers' blameable behaviours.

In Osasco (Brazil), among the strategies adopted to deny and minimise the health hazards represented by asbestos exposure, managers of AC factories elaborated discourses and practices to brainwash workers, particularly about issues concerning health and environment. I refer to the ABREA's archival documents including the periodicals *Telhadinho* [Small tile] *Orgão Informativo e de Congraçamento dos Colaboradores Eternit* [Informative and Reconciliation Institute of Eternit Collaborators], edited and distributed to the workers by the firm in the 1980s. During one of the numerous afternoons spent together with my research partners at the ABREA office, we read these periodicals, and even made jokes about their covers and contents. The cover of the number 70 (Christmas 1982) in particular made us laugh bitterly; it showed the Virgin Mary holding an Eternit water reservoir as if it was a cradle. A text in one of these periodicals, number 68 (Christmas 1981), was written in collaboration with Dr. Wagner (a company medical doctor) and titled *A sua participação no ciclo da vida* [Your participation in life's cycle], with a section dedicated to explain pollution. I quote this section, because it represents a sample of the kinds of discourses on environmental issues elaborated by the firm and addressed to the workers or 'collaborators' as workers used to be called by the company.

> *What is pollution?*
> *It is a matter of alterations introduced by humankind in the environment and provoking imbalances or, better, leading to new equilibria different from those previously existing , and we call pollutants the agents that cause these changes. These changes may occur in the air, water or soil, and can be produced by solid, liquid or gaseous substances. Pollution is relative. For example, an antibiotic is beneficial for man but it is a pollutant for the bacterium causing the infection.*
> *Nowadays, much has been said and heard about pollution. News accusing industries to pollute the environment by throwing their debris in the rivers and causing contamination, are common.* […]
> *The problem exists and the reality is that government authorities are already worrying about pollution control. Regulations and laws have already been elaborated for this purpose, and many others will appear in the near future.*
> *Aware of the problem, Eternit has invested millions of* cruzeiros *in de-polluting equipment (e.g. aspirations and filters) for the well-being and comfort not only of its community of collaborators, but also of the surrounding inhabitants. Today we can*

> *say that the water that Eternit throws in the streams is free of pollutants, the dust remains trapped in the filters and is not being released in the air, and that the aspiration system in the workplaces allows a trabalho* limpo e saudável [clean and healthy work].
> *But, unfortunately, the environmental pollution control does not depend exclusively on the Eternit. We all have our part of responsibility. The aspiration equipment provided by the Eternit is useless if it is not used properly.*
> *Collaborator!*
> *Try to work in the respect of the rules, by correctly using the equipment and machineries. Contribute with your part to combat pollution by keeping in good conditions of cleanness your workplace, by throwing garbage in the appropriate containers and cleaning the machines you use. Keep your work tools in order and in the right places, because order and cleanliness are signs of culture and civilization and we all have our part of responsibility.*
> *If we all work on this venture, we will be able to win the battle against pollution. Otherwise, we will be fatally marching towards a roaring defeat. Together we can save the life of the fish, the gentle singing of the bird, and the fertility of the land. Will is power and you can...*

The absence of a perception of risk (and consequently, disaster) was exacerbated by the trust that workers had towards the AC firm, which they believed would never have acted against the community of workers and their families. A similar feeling characterised the narratives of my Brazilian research partners, regardless of whether or not they were actively involved in the anti-asbestos mobilization. *"Eu falo verdade, era uma dita que nunca maltratou os trabalhadores"*. [I speak the truth, that company never mistreated the workers], one of the eldest ABREA members who had been engaged in the mobilization since the beginning once told me. Another activist, during an informal conversation, told me that he had had two families: Eternit and ABREA. I interpreted a similar emotional attachment to the company as a consequence of the paternalistic capitalism informing the policies adopted by the firm. Local governments in Osasco and in the two Italian contexts investigated during my previous research (Bari and Casale Monferrato) had welcomed the establishment of AC industries in their region. By emphasising the social and economic benefits that asbestos manufacturing would bring, the decisions made within local policies contributed to a consensus and trust among the general population towards the firms. This attitude provoked the removal of risk both at a public (e.g. in institutional discourses), and private levels. Working for AC firms was considered to be a great opportunity in one's life, like a privilege, and it was a common habit to invite one's relatives to apply for positions in the same plant. In my fieldwork, the narratives of one's *disaster* experience often interlaced with the story of suffering lived by a son, a brother, or an uncle. These habits and feelings of trust increased the vulnerability of the

community of exposed workers and citizens. AR disasters also became *invisible* because of similar logic and dynamics.

Living risk (and disasters)

> *A veil of dust covered the cars parked and the trees situated around the plant.* [Could you see that? I asked] *Yes, the dust was visible, especially on those trees situated close to the machinery, the sector dedicated to tube production was the worst, it was awfully dusty*.[80]

AR disaster processes are characterised by dynamics of the invisibility of risk (see Waldman 2011; Petrillo 2015), and peculiar experiences of space and time (see Chapter 2 and 3). Asbestos fibres are microscopic cancer-causing factors that can be inhaled in the absence of perception. Thus, I refer to them as *invisible*. Furthermore, as I discussed in the previous section, asbestos lobbies have promoted strategies to prevent the spread of risk awareness among exposed workers. Consequently, a risky situation became an invisible danger since it was not perceived by the workers (Di Giulio et al. 2015; Slovic 2010). Moreover, fibres leaking beyond the industrial sites contaminated citizens who had never entered an AC plant or even heard about asbestos until the moment they became sick. Based on my research partners' narratives, in some circumstances, not even a death caused by an undiagnosed ARD allowed the sufferers to relate a person's death with asbestos exposure. MM's long latency period is a further aspect influencing the experience of a risk/danger that is 'visible' only when its effects become manifest decades after the exposure, when the polluting source can be distant in time and space, or it may not even exist anymore. In addition, the workers' trust towards the employing AC firms favoured the removal of risk while living and working in environments whose visible dustiness, although perceived and experienced, was not recognised as a source of fatal danger.

Risk as an objective reality does not exist; it is always a culturally and historically produced cognitive category through which the correlation between real events can be represented and consequently managed (Boholm 2003). By referring to the contribution of Douglas and Wildawski (1982), Boholm reflects on the relationship between risk and culture, and the role played by various forces (political, economic, and cultural) in defining a risk category (Boholm 2003). Moreover, the subjective experience and perception of risk are influenced by other factors that concern the emotional, affective, and bodily spheres of an exposed social

[80] From an interview conducted with an Eternit former worker in Osasco in 2015.

actor, as the phenomenological approach to risk theory emphasizes (Di Giulio et al. 2015; Renn 2008). In this respect, Tulloch and Lupton (2003) argue that Beck's seminal work on a risk society (Beck 1992) would be greatly enriched by a deeper investigation of the experiences of risk in everyday life. The authors' contribution presented in *Risk and Everyday Life* (Tulloch and Lupton 2003) discusses the data collected from a group of Britons and Australians by in-depth interviews (in total 134), based on the necessity to ground risk categories and theory in the 'risk biographies' of the social actors exposed to risk throughout their life.

Systems of power create their own categories of risk and approach the situations of danger that they themselves produce, by elaborating various definitions and strategies (Douglas et al. 2003). Throughout the 20th century, the concept of risk has assumed a negative connotation and has come to be identified with danger: "now the word risk means danger, great risk means too much danger" (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). However, in the past, the concept of risk had a neutral, if not positive, meaning and 'taking a risk' could lead to the improvement of a life situation (Boholm 2003). This positive meaning can be found in the etymology of the word 'risk', about whose origins various hypotheses have been advanced. For some scholars, the etymology of risk is the Latin word *risicum*, derived from the ancient Spanish 'rock', referring to a source of danger for ships. Others believe that the etymology can be found in the Greek word *rizicon*, with reference to the concept of destiny. Still other scholars relate the etymology of risk to the Arabic word *rizq*, meaning 'what comes from God', or to the Latin word *resecar* alluding to 'cutting the waves', dangerously and courageously (Ligi 2009:135-136). In a capitalistic 'risk and anxiety society' (Beck 1992), where individuals address energies and efforts to avoid risk/danger at any cost, Tulloch and Lupton's investigation (2003) of voluntary risk-taking and its pleasures represents an original and counter-trend contribution. However, in this thesis, written by a 'daughter' of a risk society, risk means danger.

According to Boholm (2003), reflecting on the cultural dimension of categories and discourses related to a risk does not mean denying the objectivity of a particular situation of danger. I agree with Parkhill et al. (2010) who argue that "while many environmental threats (e.g. air pollution, ionising radiation, and climate change) hold very real consequences for both people and ecosystems, our knowledge and understanding of them can only ever be viewed as socially constructed" (Parkhill et al. 2010:40). However, in AR disasters I found that the severity of the hazards may increase because of a non-existent risk perception or discourses that tend to deny or minimise risk (see Terracini and Mirabelli 2016; Cappelletto

and Merler 2003; Waldman 2011). Based on the cultural theory of risk, the conceptual category of risk is necessary to manage what is indefinable, unusual, uncertain, unclassifiable, and threatens an established order (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Boholm 2003). In AR disasters, which can remain *invisible* for decades, there is procrastination when managing the 'critical event' (Das 1995). The seriousness of disasters is exacerbated by the fact that the danger resides in familiar environments, where there were no elements of 'extraordinariness' to make the exposed notice or think about an eventual risk situation (Parkhill et al. 2010). In similar circumstances, the risks remained unperceived and, for this reason, became more dangerous (see Ligi 2009; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Douglas 1991).

The dynamics at stake in one's elaboration of risk perception have been investigated by a number of scholars from various disciplines (e.g. sociology, anthropology, and psychology). Cappelletto and Merler (2003), whose study with the Italian miners at the Australian asbestos mine of Wittenoom offers a significant contribution to the understanding of these dynamics, combining anthropological and epidemiological approaches. The authors showed the extent to which the lack of knowledge about asbestos dangers prevented miners from transforming their own perception of the unhealthy working conditions into a perception of risk of asbestos danger (Cappelletto and Merler 2003).

In the Eternit plant in Osasco, there were no obligations (at least until the end of the 1970s) for taking showers and removing work clothes before leaving the plant to prevent workers becoming potential sources of contamination through their dusty bodies and clothes, outside the factory, in the city and their homes. The majority of the workers I conducted interviews with said that they used come home still wearing their dusty yellow or brown coveralls, the colour depended on their assigned task within the plant. The wives then washed their coveralls, without taking measures to protect themselves.

I quote an interview conducted with a research collaborator already introduced in Chapter 5, Fatima. Her husband had worked at the Eternit in Osasco from 1973 to 1986 and he died in 1995 from a pathology not diagnosed as asbestos-related. Nevertheless, Fatima was actively engaged in ABREA activism.

> *He came home, changed clothes and drank hot milk because they said that it was good* para tirar aquele pó [to doff that dust]*, he used to drink a lot of milk. Then he went to bed and slept. The day after, the same. When he was sleeping, I washed his clothes. I left them to soak. There was no soap powder at that time, I used bar soap. Well, there was already soap powder, but we could not afford it. It was expensive, and just* as pessoas que pudiam [only people who could afford it] *bought it. Since clothes never dried out because of the humidity, I had to iron them. In this way, he might use clean clothes.*

> *He worked also in the night. At that time, it was never sunny here, but there was* neblina só [just mist]*, it was rainy all the time, we never saw the sun. Then, the weather changed, but at that time, when he worked at the Eternit* [1980s]*, it was rainy and cold all the time. When he came back with dirty boots and clothes, I washed them, but they could not dry out. I washed them by hand, since we did not have a washing machine then. I put the clothes in a tank and I threw away the dust, which in the meantime had become stiff, with a broom. The clothes were very dirty. Now* [after three decades]*, my hands itch, and I do not know why. He worked in the production of roofing and water reservoirs. He had bought those same products for our house, and they are still here. It was cheaper to buy Eternit products than others because we bought them directly from the shops in agreement with the firm and paid for them by monthly payments deducted from the salary. At that time, we lived here, but there were just the kitchen and one bedroom* [at the time of the interview, more rooms had been built, and Fatima's children had built their houses and lived with their families on the same land occupied by Fatima's house].
> *He did not use to talk much. He liked working at the Eternit. He earned a good salary, he had health insurance, and we received the Christmas basket every year. He used to say that he would never leave that firm, and I still do not know why they fired him. Maybe, because of his health problems. He suffered from high pressure, and back pain. The work was heavy. He came back home, had shower, drank milk, and went to sleep. We did not have time for having a conversation. I was very busy as well with four children to look after, and I did not give him much attention. Our life was just eating, sleeping, and working hard. He never missed a day of work.*

Drinking milk to reduce the toxic effects of the *dust* was a common practice among workers in Bari and Casale Monferrato (Italy) as well. In Casale Monferrato, during an interview, a former Eternit worker told me that he used to receive milk every week from the company, but brought it home and gave it to his children (see Mazzeo 2012).

The disaster processes in Casale Monferrato and Osasco shared another practice, which was the donation or low cost sale of waste AC products and asbestos dust (called *polverino*, 'thin dust' in Casale Monferrato) to citizens and workers who asked for these materials for construction and paving their homes, public streets and other places. This practice contributed to creating risk/danger situations beyond the factory and in the long term has worsened and expanded the disaster's extent by making a larger community of social actors vulnerable to the health hazard related to asbestos exposure (see Mazzeo 2012). I quote an interview conducted with a former Eternit worker in Osasco.

> *The waste material containing asbestos was ground in order to be re-used. Everything was ground: pieces of tubes, roofing, and water reservoirs. There were men who spent their all life working in that incredibly dusty sector. The* pó [dust, meaning asbestos] *in excess and that cannot be used anymore in the production was given free to the workers who asked for it to make the flooring in their homes or gardens, for instance.* [Did you also take it? I asked him] *No, never. I used to bring home just the residuals of felt filters so that my wife could make small carpets from them. She beat and washed them; those filters were full of asbestos dust.*

> *That* pó *was used also in public spaces, for instance in the neighbourhoods where the streets had not been paved yet. You could see in the city trucks transporting the residual dust containing asbestos. People came in front of the plant asking for the dust to make the streets in their neighbourhoods and the firm gave it them free.*

The last aspect to which I want to draw attention in this section concerns the experiences of disasters and dangers made invisible because of peculiar practices and dynamics of the routine medical examinations workers had in the workplace. In my analysis, these tests and encounters with biomedical doctors can be included in the processes through which disasters caused by asbestos economics have occurred and continue to occur. Based on my research partners' narratives (from both Casale Monferrato and Osasco) those medical encounters could have represented an occasion to break the silence surrounding the dangers related to asbestos exposure. Instead, the doctors contributed to making the veil of invisibility of risk more impenetrable, since even in cases of visible respiratory problems asbestos contamination was always denied.

Asbestos workers I met in Osasco and Casale Monferrato said that they used to undergo periodic examinations by the company's medical doctors. My research partners did not remember being given a diagnosis or their colleagues being given one even in the presence of lung pathologies that were later read as symptoms of ARDs thanks to their engagement in activism.

I want to draw attention to an aspect that emerged as particularly meaningful when I analysed the practices of risk (and disaster) communication in Osasco. Test' results were never delivered to the workers, who were only verbally informed about their health conditions; in fact, only the employers received and saved the certificates from medical doctors. In this regard, I quote an interview conducted with an ABREA activist, suffering from asbestosis and pleural plaques.

> *We underwent periodic examinations provided by the company medical doctors, but no worker ever received the diagnosis of any ARDs, even in the presence of cough and* falta de ar [lack of air]. *They told us that smoking was very dangerous, especially for us who worked with asbestos, but they did not say why. Anyway, I followed that advice and one day I decided to stop smoking. I remember, I was having a break in the plant's yard and a guy came to me asking for a cigarette. I gave him the all packet and, in that very moment, I decided that I would never smoke again. I do not smoke since that day.* […]
> *Nobody ever talked to me about asbestosis or told me that I had asbestos in my lungs. I knew only later, when I underwent examinations at the FUNDACENTRO.*

The gap in communication increased the employers' power to control and delay the spread of risk perception among workers. Numerous times, I heard ABREA activists advising new

members and reminding older ones that it was their right to ask for the certificates resulting from their medical tests, regardless of whether they had taken place in public health centres or in private ambulatories in agreement with the firm[81].

Workers' experiential knowledge of the unhealthy environment where they were daily exposed to asbestos turned out to be a political tool only decades later, when engagement in activism provided the words that had been denied to them until that moment. The sufferer's awareness of being at risk of becoming sick and dying from asbestos represented a further cause of suffering. However, not being recognised as contaminated *victims* led to another, albeit distinct, experience of violence related to the *invisibility* determined by "the processes of neutralization of truth and denial of cause-effect relationship" in ARDs (Ferraro 2015:123-159). In the next section, I discuss risk communication practices as they emerged as fundamental strategies of the *care-activism* (see Chapter 5) undertaken by ABREA members to tear the veil of invisibility that had covered their experiences of risk, disaster, and suffering for decades.

Risk communication as activism

As largely discussed throughout the thesis, AR disasters caused by asbestos follow transnational trajectories, as does the activism organized by AR disaster victims that is characterized by intertwined dynamics with a transnational resonance. Risk communication and awareness campaigns to increase the perception of health hazards are strategies put into practice by grassroots movements addressing environmental and health issues at a local and global level (see Zoller 2005). Practices and policies of risk communication are part of the negotiation processes to develop a risk category, to recognise a risk situation, legitimise the suffering caused by the exposure to a given risk, and take action in order to manage a peculiar risk situation. I base the elaboration, perception and communication of risk on the data that emerged from my fieldwork (in Italy and Brazil) as well as anthropological and sociological literature on risk (see Beck 1992; Boholm 2003; Hannigan 1995; Douglas et al. 2003; Douglas e Wildavsky 1982; Di Giulio et. al. 2015; Di Giulio et al. 2008; Slovic 2010; Lupton 1999; Kasperson et al. 1988; Kasperson 2014; Henwood et al. 2008; De Graaff e Bröer 2012; Parkhill et al. 2010).

[81] In Brazil, AC companies are obliged by law to guarantee periodic medical examinations to former workers who have been exposed to asbestos.

During my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato (2012), I interviewed a medical doctor who had been engaged in local anti-asbestos activism since the initial steps of the mobilization, when the major AC plant in the city was still operative, and asbestos use had not yet been prohibited in Italy. The main objective pursued by the activists, which they believed was the most urgent, consisted of informing the largest number of workers and citizens about the risks related to asbestos exposure. Communication was understood as a fundamental strategy of struggle.

> *We went everywhere, even in the tiniest parishes. A room and few chairs were enough. We did not miss any opportunity for alerting people, even if there was just a couple of elderly men listening to us. In the cold mornings, we went in front of the plants, to talk to the workers and give them the informative fliers. Many of them did not agree with us, they were afraid of losing their job because of our denunciations. […] We were young and passionate. We spent hours and hours talking about asbestos so that we jokingly said each other that we would be transformed in long asbestos fibres ourselves since we always talked about the fibres!*

In Chapter 5, I discussed how communication practices play a crucial role as practices of care and activism. Distributing informative fliers, organising seminars, narrating one's own story of suffering, showing photographs of bodies afflicted by ARDs were practices of care for the disaster survivors and, at the same time, strategies of mobilization warning citizens and workers about the dangers of asbestos, and aimed at asbestos prohibition. In this section, I focus on ABREA communication of risk through the Internet, social network, and media. Based on studies on the role of technological devices and the experiences and practices of social movements in our time (see Thomsen et al. 1998; Di Feliciantonio and De Rosa 2013), the use of the Internet and social networks has significantly increased the speed and facilitated the relationships among activists in the global context. They mobilize in desperate settings, but their commitment pursues similar objectives and is triggered by a suffering experience provoked by the common dynamics of the same disaster.

In Osasco, the majority of ABREA members had no familiarity with technological devices; just a few owned a computer at home. During the monthly assemblies, the few activists skilled in the use of the computer and the Internet encouraged their comrades to ask for their younger relatives (e.g. children and nephews) to teach them the basic notions to access the Internet, read the news published on the association's website, and follow the association's pages and profiles opened on the most popular social networks[82]. The communication through these channels relied on the contributions of external supporters (e.g. unionists, militants of

[82] The association's website is www.abrea.org.br, the Facebook page is 'Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto-ABREA'.

local political parties, and members of other associations) who voluntarily offered their skills to broaden ABREA's communication, and in so doing, to empower anti-asbestos activism. This fundamental contribution to the *luta* [struggle] was made possible by the solid network representing ABREA's social capital.

Among risk communication practices as strategies of activism, I include the contacts that ABREA had been establishing with media throughout the years. TV and radio journalists, directors, photographers, and bloggers are just a few communication professionals with whom I met while doing my 10-months fieldwork with ABREA members.

In their strategic use of media, *sufferer-activists* freed themselves from the constraining role of being a passive audience uncritically absorbing information that reproduced and legitimised established systems of power (Hannigan 1995:79-93; Renn 2008; Kasperson 2014). ABREA activists used the media's potential to amplify their voices and disseminate their stories as seeds to increase the public's awareness of asbestos dangers and the indignation for the injustices they had suffered.

Considering that in the media industry, the parameters establishing what good news is responds to audience numbers rather than to the social utility of communication (Hannigan 1995:79-93), the *suffer-activists'* use of media to make anti-asbestos mobilization stronger appeared even more emblematic of the subversive tension that accompanied the crisis provoked by the disaster in their lives. Entering media represented a further path of struggle since when communication occurs, it opens multiple possibilities of *care-activism* (see Chapter 5 and 6). The sufferers then have the opportunity to express their embodied knowledge—power—codified through activism's language and, in so doing, break the silence surrounding AR disasters (and suffering).

The last aspect to which I want to pay attention in this section concerns my own position in the field and the expectations ABREA activists had about my work. As a 'research instrument', I was also a 'communication instrument'. I have often been invited to give short speeches and presentations about my study in Brazil and Italy, during seminars and association meetings. I have also been interviewed by local journalists because of my knowledge of AR issues. Generally, activists have asked me if I was available for being interviewed or intervening with a contribution in public events. I understood that the voice of a foreign researcher could contribute in legitimising their struggle and raising the audience's attention. In the majority of cases, I made the decision to accept speaking invitations since I did not consider that my active participation in those occasions would negatively influence my research. On the contrary, having the possibility to discuss and share my interpretations

from my previous studies in Italy and the ones that were emerging from my fieldwork in Brazil helped me to identify the most salient aspects addressed by my research hypothesis, and gave me the opportunity to support their activism by making my findings public (see Scheper-Hughes 1995; Borofsky 2000; Simonelli 2007).

Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed aspects characterising the dynamics through which AR disasters occur, are lived and denied, and both how they are surrounded by silence or communicated. The discrepancy between the space and time of exposure, and the onset of deleterious health, influence the experiences of these disasters as well as the individual, public, institutional, and biomedical discourses. The risk/danger experiences represent a phase of the disaster processes, which may begin in faraway countries and decades before the first onset of destructive impact on a person's life.

AR disasters are transnational because of the economic and politics behind them, and transitional because the places where their disruptive force becomes manifest is the victims' bodies.

I discussed how specific strategies adopted by AC companies prevented workers from developing a theoretical knowledge to spread their experiential knowledge of the danger into risk categories, which worsened and prolonged the disaster's impact on the exposed community of workers and citizens.

Communication practices played a fundamental role in influencing risk perception, making the dangers (and disasters) *invisible* or, on the contrary, making them recognisable and *visible*, despite denial strategies and lack of acknowledgement in discourses pronounced by exponents of biomedical, judicial, economic, and political power.

Relying on their embodied knowledge expressed through the 'words' provided by the activism, the disaster victims—*sufferer-activists*—have entered negotiation processes that have conditioned their own existence by communicating the risks/dangers related to asbestos exposure and the suffering they have lived.

Chapter 8: Global Ethnography, Public Health and Activism

The inequality of lives, biological and political, local and global, is perhaps the greatest violence with which anthropologists are confronted in the field, as they daily prove the truly existential and vital distance that separates them from the men and women whose histories and lives they encounter (Fassin 2007:270).

Prologue[83]

On my way back home after five to six-hour interviews with research participants, I had an espresso and *pão de queijo* [bread of cheese] in the café where I'd to stop and cheer myself up before tackling the 1-2 hour crowded rush-hour ride from Osasco. I had been lucky on that day; I found a free seat on the train. That meant that I might better enjoy my 'goodbye' to Osasco by looking out of the window. It was a cold afternoon, with a low hanging sky.

I used to take the train to Pinheiros station, one of the largest train and metro stations in São Paulo, with a constant flow of people frantically moving across the capital from one side to another. Being a daily commuter between São Paulo and Osasco and taking public transportation influenced my perception of the space I daily crossed as a boundless pulsating living creature, whose movements and limits were out of my control and imagination. I had the feeling that I had no other option but to be part of that movement.

Numerous huts made of bricks, wooden boards, and Eternit roofing uninterruptedly flew by the window along the tracks connecting Osasco to São Paulo. Every time I saw them I remembered a novel I had read as a teenager, entitled *La Casa Tra i Binari* [The House Among the Trucks] (Bitossi 1983), narrating the Fascist dictatorship in Italy through the eyes of a young boy.

Small details of those precarious homes captured my attention; there I might see the dignity of the lives conducted in those poor conditions. All around there was filth, waste materials, squalor, and no visible sign of beauty except for the majestic and gnarled trees whose roots seemed to claim the defrauded earth by remerging in the surface. I had the impression that the fresh smell of the clean clothes hung out to dry in that toxic environment might reach my nares. The curtains on the windows and the gleaming aluminium doors gave me a pleasant feeling of care and dignity. It was as if there was somebody trying to make room for shelter in

[83] Based on my fieldnotes written on the day of my last visit to Osasco, in October 2016.

those homes built in the midst of the frenzied movement crossing the megalopolis where people could find protection and a bit of peace.

During my stay in Osasco and São Paulo, I had ambivalent feelings towards the environment surrounding me. I felt a strong sense of repulsion and distance, but also of attraction and closeness. That pulsating twist of lights, bodies, and lives, each traced by unique experiences, dreams and nightmares scared and overwhelmed me, but at the same time filled me with a thrilling love and curiosity for life. At times I felt unbearably lonely, but more often I felt that I was not alone. I had the feeling that we all were participating as vulnerable and minuscule pawns in the same *movement*, despite all the differences among us. Undoubtedly, since the first days of my fieldwork—from my privileged position of being white, European, and an educated woman with a salary (from my scholarship)—I realized that I was immersed in a context dramatically marked by a history of exploitations and brutalities committed by local and foreign perpetrators throughout centuries of 'violence in war and peace' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). There, a huge number of men and women, children and elderly people, might take part in the same movement in which I too was immersed, but only from a condition of chronic vulnerability with crucial and structural differences from the vulnerability that I felt by living and moving side by side with them.

Introduction

The *disasters* provoked by the transnational asbestos market represent global health disasters. The applied 'double standard' management of asbestos and epidemiological evidence of AR *disasters* (see Terracini 2006; Terracini et al. 2015; Murlidhar and Kanhere 2005; Castleman 1983, 2016) calls into question issues related to *equity* in the distribution of risk and suffering (see Farmer 2005; Farmer et al. 2013), the management's effects of AR-risk and suffering experiences, access to care, and knowledge about asbestos carcinogenicity. These *disasters* relate as well to issues of *social justice* (Rawls 1971) when considered in terms of processes through which victimhood and the right to live and work in safe environments are recognised or denied (see Hofrichter 2003a; Lovell 2007). Moreover, the effects *disasters* have on vulnerable communities of exposed workers and citizens may be read as the consequences of an *environmental injustice* determining the exportation of toxic activities and the settlement of polluting industrial sites in countries with emerging economics, and in socially marginal and economically peripheral areas (see Acselrad et al. 2003; Porto et al. 2013). The movement in name of environmental justice emerged in the United States in the 1980s-1990s, when civil

protests and biomedical surveys led to the awareness that "people of colour and low-income persons have borne greater environmental and health risks than the society at large in their neighbourhoods, workplace, and playgrounds" (Bullard and Johnson 2000:555). Included in the struggles carried within this movement are protests against environmental racism that refer to "any environmental policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or colour" (Bullard and Johnson 2000:559). In this thesis, I refer to the equation between environmentalism and social justice expressed by Bullard and Johnson (2000).

AR ―global health―*disasters* are not confined to a neighbourhood, country, or continent. These *disasters* primarily occur through and in the bodies of the exposed and affected 'victims'. Air contamination by asbestos dust overcomes the factories' gates and walls, and the microscopic fibres fly beyond the mining sites. They move through the contaminated bodies of the exposed workers who undertake unpredictable paths in the world. In their movements, 'naturally subversive' and 'afflicted' (Scheper-Hughes 1994), contaminated bodies trace the *disaster* map. At the same time, asbestos containing materials and products represent secondary contamination sources when they begin to deteriorate and release carcinogenic fibres in the environment, wherever they are located. A 'multi-situated' (Marcus 1995) and 'global' (Burawoy et al. 2000) ethnographic approach to these *movements* and processes may contribute to identify the intricate connections among the socio-political and economic dynamics at play in this global scenario of *disaster* by grounding the local experience―embodiment―of these transnational phenomena in the life stories of social actors.

In this last chapter, I situate AR experiences of suffering and activism I investigated by accompanying the *sufferer-activists* engaged in the anti-asbestos mobilization and organized by ABREA in Osasco within the global context of AR health *disasters*, and the transnational movement for asbestos prohibition. I discuss data on the current scenario of epidemiological and biomedical knowledge about AR health hazards and impact, and the position undertaken by international public health international research institutes about the 'controlled use of asbestos' (see Castleman 2003). This consideration calls into question the political and ethical role of institutionalised forms of knowledge (and power) and attendant professional practitioners. I conclude with a reflection on the contributions that anthropology as a public and 'resocialising discipline' (Farmer et al. 2013) may offer for understanding and acting in this global and complex scenario of suffering in which we all live. Engaging with ethnography, both theory and method (Peirano 2014), and promoting engaged ethnography

(Scheper-Hughes 1995) offer unique opportunities to act and investigate (in-depth) the transnational socio-political, economic, and cultural processes informing global health disasters, their politics, understanding, experiences and knowledge of how the 'victims' locally embody, contrast, and make these *disasters* meaningful in the situatedness of their lives.

Global Health disasters

> Health is a product of many social, political, and economic forces and institutions outside of health that produce risks for health and illness (Hofrichter 2003b:33)

According to global estimates of deaths related to occupational lung cancers reported by Cullinan et al. (2017), the number of global AR deaths was 33,610 in 2010, and ARDs represent "the commonest causes of mortality and morbidity of workers exposed to occupational hazards worldwide" (Cullinan et al. 2017:2). Nevertheless, it has been largely demonstrated that despite the carcinogenicity of all asbestos minerals (as largely discussed in the previous chapters), only 59 countries have prohibited asbestos [84] and to date it is estimated that approximately 125 million people are still exposed to asbestos in their workplace (WHO 2010; Cullinan et al. 2017:2). Considering ARDs' long latency period and the level of asbestos-containing materials still present environmentally (even where asbestos manufacturing and extraction has ceased) (Cullinan et al. 2017:2), the burden of AR diseases and deaths represents a global health disaster—a silent catastrophe begun in the past—affecting the present, and threatening the future.

In the preface to *Reimagining Global Health. An Introduction* (Farmer et al. 2013), Farmer reiterates that the issues making global health "a collection of problems rather than a discipline" pivot around the "quest for *equity*" (Farmer 2013:xiii). The anthropologist who grounded the concept of 'structural violence' in his experience of being a physician "at the service of the destitute sick" (Farmer 2005), points to the "just and equitable distribution of the risk of suffering and of the tools to lessen or prevent it" as crucial aspects in practicing, thinking, and 'reimagining' global health (Farmer 2013:xiii).

[84] The list of the countries that have currently prohibited all types of asbestos is available on the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat-IBAS's website http://www.ibasecretariat.org/alpha_ban_list.php (accessed March 20, 2017).

In health disasters provoked by asbestos manufacturing, the risks of suffering are unequally distributed; on the other hand, these risks have been (and still are) silenced through precise structural dynamics (see Petrillo 2015; Broun 2008). Asbestos contamination involves in a spiral of suffering the affected and afflicted actors, regardless of their socio-economic status and beyond their physical and historical proximity to the polluting sites and activities. However, existing literature and epidemiological surveys document asbestos exposure, effects on people's health in desperate contexts (to which I add the ethnographic data emerged from my fieldwork in Italy and Brazil), and the workers and residents of areas neighbouring toxic sites who all represent the numerous vulnerable communities of the exposed (see Magnani et al. 1987; Marinaccio et al. 2015; Musti et al. 2009; Park et al. 2011; Goldberg and Luce 2009; Pasetto et al. 2014; Zona et al. 2016). I read a similar differential of risk and suffering as well as the excess of preventable and avoidable deaths and diseases as the 'symptoms' of the 'pathologies of power' (Farmer 2005) afflicting the most vulnerable members of our unique, globalised, and interconnected world (Fassin 2007), becoming increasingly unequal.

I refer to the remarkable contributions reported by Hofrichter (2003a) and Farmer et al. (2013) when I consider inequity as a fundamental determinant of health, and I recall Farmer's definition of public health as "not an impartial government technology; [instead] it is an integral part of a social and political history" (Fassin 2007:129). Both individual and population health are intertwined with cultural, historical, and socio-economic processes determining environmental pollution and the exploitation of men, women, children, and young adults considered as disposable resources.

At the end of my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato (Italy, June 2012), when I noticed that the experiences of AR suffering were locally lived and conceived of as part of a *disaster* affecting an entire community of exposed workers and citizens[85], I expressed a sad hypothesis during an informal conversation with an activist. The hypothesis was a thought that I initially tried to ignore because it seemed to be the result of reasoning that was too cynical, which had begun to insinuate and upset me, while influencing my understanding of local activism. This hypothesis had emerged from what I learned from the narratives and newspaper articles about the first steps of local mobilization, when the activists' claims could not rely on a consensus while the citizenry at large disagreed with them. In 2012, at the time of my fieldwork, only a minority of local social actors were overtly against the anti-asbestos mobilization and accused

[85] For a discussion on the processes through which in Casale Monferrato a vast number of workers and citizens recognised themselves as members of a community sharing experiences of suffering provoked by the same cause, see Mazzeo (2012). References are also present in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

the activists of preventing the development of tourism in Casale Monferrato because their struggles had transformed the city in a symbol, internationally recognised, of the disasters provoked by asbestos manufacturing. According to the rumours I heard and newspapers I read, the visibility of the disaster had injured the image of the city.

> *Do you think that such a large number of citizens, public institutions, local administrators, and biomedical professionals would have equally supported the mobilization, if the disaster had remained confined to the factory? I fear that if the asbestos exposure had continued to cause deaths only among workers, the disaster would not have had such a visibility*.

I asked the above hypothesis (question) to the activist, who answered that probably (and unfortunately) I was right.

The eruption of the *disaster* outside the factory, which had overcome both the plant walls and social classes, had contaminated and indiscriminately killed people who had been unconsciously exposed to life threatening substances in familiar places perceived as safe, such as own homes or neighbourhoods (Parkhill et al. 2010). Many of them had developed ARDs without having ever worked with asbestos, and sometimes without ever having heard of asbestos prior to their diagnosis. The spread of the contamination's effects on the health of the local population triggered a collective indignation. Throughout the years, a high number of deaths were registered locally[86], and each one represented a 'critical event' upsetting the lives of an increasing number of people, which exacerbated their indignation. Thanks to the 'words' shared by activists, many citizens related the death of a family member, a lover, a friend, or a neighbour to asbestos manufacturing, and began to recognise themselves as members of a community of victims of the same disaster (see Benadusi 2015b). What would happen if, on the contrary, the contamination had threatened only workers' lives? Would a similar mobilization and a similar indignation have occurred? Would the workers' voices be listened to or would they be silenced because in the end the risk of developing a disease was part of a job freely chosen, voluntarily practiced, and well paid? In our world, individualism transfers the total responsibility of their actions, successes, and failures to individuals. In this regard, I recall the accusations of the plant managers addressed to workers who adopted reprehensible behaviours like smoking or were non-compliant about the correct use of the protection equipment provided by the firm. In the narratives elaborated by the corporations similar behaviours triggered the onset of respiratory problems and represented a threat even more dangerous than asbestos exposure.

[86] According to the data reported by Mossano (2010), 2,200 AR deaths and diseases have been registered in Casale Monferrato until 2010 (Mossano 2010:128).

> By transforming public issues into private matters of lifestyles, self-empowerment, and assertiveness, individualism precludes organised efforts to spur social changes. It fits perfectly with a declining welfare state and also influences responses to health inequities. From this perspective, each person is self-interested and possessed of a fixed, competitive human nature. […] individualism presumes that individuals exist in parallel with society instead of being formed by society (Hofrichter 2003b:28).

On the contrary, "a key principle of public health ethic is the focus on the identification and control of the hazards of this world rather than a focus on the behavioural defects of those individuals damaged by these hazards" (Beauchamp 2003:273).

ABREA activism may be considered as health activism and this was revolutionary to the extent that its main tool of struggle was reacting to sovereign individualism by favouring the establishment of new (bio)social and affective relationships. Moreover, activists' struggles were addressed to demystify fatalistic explanations of workers' deaths and diseases and, in so doing, were overtly set against a fatalistic approach to death nurtured by capitalistic discourses (Beauchamp 2003:269).

My questions remain unanswered. However, based on what I have witnessed throughout the last eight years, the suffering of too many victims of legitimate and rational corporative crimes (Altopiedi 2011; Jobin 2013) makes me believe that my cynical and sad hypotheses are correct. I might expect to hear explanations of workers' acceptance of hard working conditions and not questioning about the dustiness of their workplace as a free choice. However, I recognize in myself, the loss of innocence bitterly declared by Farmer in the conclusions of *Pathologies of Power. Health, Human Rights, and the War on the Poor* (Farmer 2005).

Notwithstanding, how difficult and painful these questions may be, they are necessary because these questions stimulate a critical reflection on the processes that led to viewing a large number of deaths and diseases—an unquantifiable amount of suffering—as a public health disaster. They induce an interrogation about the forces and discourses at play in the processes through which *invisible* disasters become visible, and sufferers enter the negotiation processes by which their rights and knowledge concerning their life and death are elaborated, and their suffering is recognised. One of the most valuable and original contributions anthropology may offer to the multidisciplinary dialogue on global public health comes precisely from the depth of ethnographic fieldwork and analysis, reflexive attitude, ability to ask uneasy questions and questioning of a taken-for-granted world.

The dynamics characterising the disasters caused by the asbestos market offer much input for critical thinking about the processes by which scientific truths, and epidemiological data are

elaborated and to the extent to which their communication (or denial) produces effects on one's life as well as health policies and practices. I want to draw attention to aspects concerning AR disasters that challenge taking for granted assumptions on health and are emblematic of the necessity to approach global public health issues from a critical perspective. For instance, as Amartya Sen noted, joblessness is a crucial determinant of health since "poverty might keep individuals from accessing health services because [for instance] they have no means of transport to a hospital or because the opportunity cost of leaving their family is too high" (Sen 2000 cited by Suri et al. 2013:258-259). However, in AR disasters, jobs represent the main source of danger and threat to life.

In all three contexts of my multi-sited ethnography, AC corporations have decided to settle their plants in settings where local communities were living in conditions of vulnerability related to poverty (in Italy and Brazil), and the difficulties triggered by the migratory process determining one's lack of familial and affective support (in Osasco). In relation to the vulnerable conditions within which the majority of ABREA members live, it is worth considering that, despite the awareness of the presence of asbestos in roofing and water reservoirs in their homes, they cannot afford the costs of substituting them. The majority of ABREA members are retired men who live and contribute to the maintenance of their families by relying only on a pension that is roughly equivalent to the amount of a minimum wage, i.e. a little more than 900 reais[87] (280 US dollars).

In the previous chapters, I discussed the processes preventing the discourse of awareness of the dangers of asbestos among workers who might have perceived the workplace as unhealthy, but did not have the 'instruments' to recognise the *dust* as a life threatening substance. My concern in this section is not about the crucial implications of that awareness, but about the workers' freely made decision to work in that unhealthy environment. I refer to Beauchamp (2003) when I consider the freedom of choice of vulnerable social actors and communities accepting a job or the settlement of polluting industries offering the opportunity of a decent salary, and quality of life improvement as false. Instead, I propose that 'free choice' discourse is rooted in the subtle perpetration of structural violence.

Needless to say that in a context of the 'terrorism of money' (Galeano 1989) in which we all live, a condition of vulnerability has been exacerbated by the bodies and environmental contamination due to a toxic production, not only metaphorically, suffocating the 'nobodies'

[87] According to the website http://www.salariominimo.net.br/ accessed on March 5, 2017.

(Galeano 1989), in the 'poverty traps' (Suri et al. 2013:273) where the victims of this terrorism are captured.

> Poverty traps prevent people from accumulating sufficient resources to invest—a foundation of economic growth—because they are stuck in a hand-to-mouth struggle for survival. But a growing body of evidence suggests that such traps can be broken by strengthening health and education systems and by safeguarding other basic human rights. Healthy, educated individuals are more likely to find reliable jobs with decent pay; they can then save, invest, and begin to lift their families out of poverty. Complementary investments in human rights work, when pursued together, can help break the cycle of poverty and disease and lay the groundwork for economic development (Suri et al. 2013:273).

I refer to the historical and economic processes informing the contexts of my research. Having done 'anthropology at home' (Boonzaier 1998) in Italy, I understand the suffering affecting my hometown, Bari (the capital town of Puglia) as an experience of social, environmental, and health disasters. Bari is situated in the economically depressed and socially marginal southern Italy, where the hegemonic discourses and policies have legitimised human and environmental exploitation as well as culturally dominated the oppressed population. Bari was the site of my first anthropological study of mesothelioma experiences related to environmental asbestos exposure. In the same region, the city of Taranto is afflicted by a disastrous excess of risks and cases of preventable deaths provoked by the exposure to toxic substances, many of them provoked by the inhalation of asbestos fibres (see Comba et al. 2012). In this case, the health disaster is related to the industrial activities at the largest Mediterranean steel mill, and at one the largest shipyards in the world. Both were settled there to modernise an 'underdeveloped' region and have created a class of *metalmezzadri* [metal-peasants].

In my analysis of the processes by which AR disasters occur, I based my research on the nostalgic narratives of the former miners I met in 2015 in Poções (Bahia, Brasil). Trapped in conditions of extreme poverty and 'social abandonment' (Biehl 2005), they regretted the epoch when the capitalistic transformation (and exploitation) of the local context brought them ephemeral economic and social benefits.

While trying to understand the conflicted positions about asbestos prohibition in Brazil, I asked myself to what extent asbestos workers who were against asbestos prohibition were free while protesting at the public debates on the legal efforts to ban asbestos in the states of Bahia (Salvador, August 2015) and Santa Catarina (Florianopolis, September 2014)[88]. Seated next to

[88] See photograph 15 in the Appendix.

their employers, the workers were wearing T-shirts and raising banners stating that unemployment was more dangerous than asbestos or that anti-asbestos activists were more irresponsible than those in favour of the controlled use of asbestos chrysotile, which is extracted and manipulated in Brazil, and exported abroad.

In Brazil, according to the data reported by the *Boletim Epidemiológico* [Epidemiological Bulletin] published by the *Secretaria de Vigilância em Saúde* [Secretary of Vigilance in Health] of the Ministry of Health, 1.192 ARDs have been diagnosed from 2007 to 2013. The 90,4% of the identified cases have been registered by public health institutions in the municipality of Campinas (São Paulo) (Ministério da Saúde 2016). This information is relevant for two aspects. First, the concentration of diagnoses is in the most industrialised and populated region of Brazil, where anti-asbestos mobilization began. Second, are documented difficulties of obtaining an ARD diagnosis in settings where the awareness of asbestos effects on health does not inform the illness experiences. This last aspect is related to the phenomenon of underdiagnosis particularly frequent in countries where asbestos use is still legal (see Cullinan et al. 2017; Marsili etal. 2016; Terracini et al. 2015). Moreover, the data reported in the *Boletim Epidemiológico* published in 2016 refer exclusively to ARDs diagnosed in workers exposed to asbestos. The survey did not consider the cases of diseases developed as a consequence of environmental and/or domestic exposure, workers with irregular job contracts, or those whose traces have been lost in the frantic worker turnover charactering Brazilian industrial economics of the past decades. These unrecognised 'cases' substantiated the moral and scientific commitment to refer to the effects of asbestos market on health in terms of *invisible disasters*. In this regard, the role of anthropology is crucial in drawing and proposing new paths to 'reimagine global health' (Farmer et al. 2013), and to take into account "elusive data" and "unmask the culture of silence" (Scheper-Hughes 1997:203).

Considering AR suffering as global health (invisible) *disasters* means reflecting on the contribution that anthropology can offer to understanding and tackling global health issues as I discuss in the next sections of this chapter.

I adopted a critically interpretative approach (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1990) to epidemiological data related to AR diseases and deaths.

> In critical interpretative approach what matters most are the means through which research data are acquired, the various and complex meanings these findings might have, and the relations between the kinds of knowledge generated and the maintenance of powerful ideologies and forms of dominance, both social/political and biomedical/scientific. […] Reductionist science is reappraised as a product of its

> historical and cultural contexts. […] There is often a striking lack of awareness of the ways in which the culture of their science [epidemiology and/or demography] structures the questions asked and overdetermines the findings (Scheper-Hughes 1997:202-203).

By analysing statistics about the incidence of AR deaths and diseases, I found that Fassin's argument about the necessity of ethnography "to obtain a realistic view of the epidemiological landscape" was true (Fassin 2007:192). In Fassin's words, ethnography "allows one to apprehend the diversity and complexity of the mechanisms through which social factors insinuate themselves into the body. […] This means renouncing simplistic determinisms and statistical reasoning" (Fassin 2007:192).

In the next section, I discuss the morals, necessity, and relevance of practicing global health by engaging with a 'transdisciplinary' dialogue

> combining anthropology, sociology, history, political economy, and other 'resocialising disciplines' with fields like epidemiology, demography, clinical practice, molecular biology, and economics allow[ing] us to build a coherent new field that might better be termed 'global health equity'. It is this multidisciplinary approach, which leads us from the large-scale to the local and from the social to the molecular, that permits us to take a properly biosocial approach to what are, without exception, biosocial problems (Farmer 2013:xiv).

Moral Practices of Global Health and the movement for global asbestos prohibition

A major obstacle to achieving equality in health status is a belief in its impossibility, based on a deeper belief that progressive social change is impossible. It is not. The contemporary system of political power is the result of struggle, not a natural order (Hofrichter 2003b:38).

The *care-activism* organised by ABREA in Osasco was part of the transnational movement aimed at the global prohibition of asbestos and actualised in local moral experiences of suffering, care, and activism. Considering the moral practices and discourses characterising health activism emerging from the suffering related to the global market of asbestos, and engaging various individual and collective social actors worldwide, offers stimulating input to reflect and 'reimagine' definitions, practices, and policies of individual and collective, local and global health, and how to guarantee and take care of it.

Moral reasoning motivates one's engagement and plays a fundamental role in the actions promoting and characterising both global health work and mobilization for the global prohibition of asbestos. I found numerous points of contacts between the moral frame of anti-asbestos activism and global public health as analysed and discussed by Suri et al. (2013). The authors reflect on the moral values that may shape Global Health policies and practices.

They stress the necessity to "unpack motivations and morals" (Kleinman and Hanna 2011 cited by Suri et al. 2013:247) to which global health practitioners refer, because:

> global health work is extremely difficult. It requires a hard look at preventable suffering and death, global inequalities of disturbing proportions, and many other failures of modernity; these problems lack simple solutions. […] Critical self-reflection—honestly examining one's values, motivations, accomplishments, failures—can help practitioners face the anguish and moral crisis that are often inherent in global health work without resorting to cynicism or despair (Suri et al 2013:247).

In Chapter 4, I considered the influence of Liberation Theology (LT) on the organization of the struggles and practices of resistance spreading across Latin America at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. I reflected on the influence LT had in moulding the particular Osasco's socio-political fabric from which ABREA activism emerged. Suri et al. (2013) highlight the potentialities of critique brought by LT to Global Health trying to understand and tackle the 'pathogenic effects of inequity' (Farmer 2005) on health.

> LT draws attention to the large-scale social forces that pattern risk among populations rich and poor; it thus offers an implicit critique of, and complement to, human rights theory, which has often obscured the structural roots of violence, poverty, disease, and inequality (Suri et al 2013:282).

The human rights discourse considering health as a human right presents meaningful affinities with the objectives pursued by the anti-asbestos activism (e.g. all human beings' right to health and living/working in a safe environment). However, in my analysis, I interpreted the practices undertaken to reach similar goals by predominantly referring to a social justice frame. I would adopt a human rights frame only critically and cautiously. I agree with Marxist critics arguing that public health issues should be tackled by focusing on *species-beings* based on the fact that "individuals are inexorable members of a community" while "human rights discourse is grounded in political liberalism focused on protecting individuals as they are separate from society" (Suri et al. 2013:274). Nevertheless, in line with Suri et al. (2013), I recognise that the "belief that health is a human right offers a powerful rationale for global health equity: everyone should have access to decent health services by virtue of being human" (Suri et al. 2013:263). There is a revolutionary potential in the abovementioned statement, that I read as a call for action "reimagining health as a human right, and implementing an ambitious equity agenda capable of realising that vision, could strengthen other development priorities, too" (Suri et al. 2013:273).

In this section, I draw particular attention to the influence of theories referring to social justice theory on both the strategies of struggle undertaken by the *suffer-activists* I met and the morals shaping the understanding of global health problems.

> The particular macro-level pathways by which health inequities link to specific exposures are intricate. Establishing how given social contexts interact with multidimensional biological and psychological pathways to cause disease with any quantifiable certainty remains a challenge. These pathways are often tied to the way production and investment decisions, labour market policies, neighbourhood and workplace conditions, and racism and sexism connect with individual histories. Essentially, social injustices become embodied in the individuals as disease (Hofrichter 2003b:4).

In my understanding, anti-asbestos activism is part of a transnational health movement addressing social and environmental injustices. I refer to Fraser's definition of justice as essentially coincident with "the social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction" (Fraser 2007:20). Through their engagement in activism, *sufferers* who locally experience the health disasters provoked by the asbestos market enter the processes negotiating the knowledge and rights that surround their lives and deaths.

Considering the interconnectedness and complexity of the globalised world where we all live (and health disasters occur), Fraser proposes a three-dimensional theory of justice and suggests that the social justice theory should be renamed (and reimagined) as "a theory of post-Westphalian democratic justice" (Fraser 2007:19). By rethinking her previous double-dimension definition of justice as a dynamic and processual system moulded by claims for economic *redistribution* and cultural *recognition*, Fraser adds a third, specifically political, dimension of *representation* that incorporates both. The representation element is political since it concerns one's inclusion/exclusion from fair distribution and mutual recognition. While Fraser refers to representation in terms of 'social belonging' (Fraser 2007), I might use '*biosocial belonging*' to refer to the representation sought by and shaping anti-asbestos activism. Fraser considers the inadequacy of discourses on justice that reiterate (but not question) the supremacy of the modern territorial states and that consider the citizens of these states as the unique legitimate recipients of justice achievements. A similar limitation would condemn to a 'non-person status in front of the justice' (Fraser 2007) an increasing number of victims of the 'pathogenic effects of inequity' (Farmer 2005), affecting vulnerable actors

regardless their nationality, although with a 'preferential option for the poor' of the world (Hofrichter 2003a).

> Thanks to heightened awareness of globalization, many observe that the social processes shaping their lives routinely overflow territorial borders. They note, for example, that decisions taken in one territorial state often impact the lives of those outside it, as do the actions of transnational corporations, international currency speculators, and large institutional investors. Many also note the growing salience of supranational and international organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, and of transnational public opinion, which flows with supreme disregard for borders through global mass media and cybertechnology. The result is a new sense of vulnerability to transnational forces (Fraser 2007:18).

By quoting Castells (1996:440-460), Fraser argues that similar transnational forces determining injustice throughout our interconnected world belong not to 'the space of places', but rather to 'the space of flows' (Fraser 2007:25). Again, I found it particularly appropriate to refer to Fraser's contributions to reflect on the peculiarities of anti-asbestos activism.

> What turns a collection of people into fellow subjects of justice is not geographical proximity, but their co-imbrication in a common structural or institutional framework, which sets the ground rules that govern their social interaction, thereby shaping their respective life possibilities, in patterns of advantage and disadvantage (Fraser 2007:25).

Anti-asbestos activists are 'fellow subjects of justice', or better of 'struggle for justice', as well as 'fellow victims' of disasters provoked by the same cause, the asbestos market.

As Hofrichter notes, "social justice is not a thing but rather an ongoing series of relationships that permeate everyday life. Social justice concerns the systematic treatment of people as members of a definable group" (Hofrichter 2003b:12).

The transnational movement for the global prohibition of asbestos is made of *sufferer-activists* taking action, suffering, and dying because of the eruption of AR disasters in their physical, social, and affective worlds. They are members of a community of victims of a structural violence that in desperate socio-political and geographical settings has been perpetrated on vulnerable actors, and the environment. To mobilise in name of social justice means to oppose, divert, and change the discourses and practices through which the 'perpetrators' legitimately act (Hofrichter 2003b:14). As I discussed in this thesis, during my fieldwork in Brazil (and previously in Italy), I have had the opportunity to observe and participate to the mobilization of the victims of asbestos market. Each *sufferer-activist* I met had her own personal reason to engage in activism. In the micro-political scenario of their everyday life of suffering and struggle, they revolutionised the social context in which they acted. Their afflicted bodies were a radical and subversive critique of the status quo and the

injustices they embodied challenged institutionalised forms of knowledge (and power). Their actions led to important achievements of social justice. Investigating and engaging with anti-asbestos activism has offered stimulating inputs to reflect on global public health as a 'health movement' (Beauchamp 2003:278).

Hofrichter (2003b) refers to a 'modal suffering' afflicting the vulnerable of the world. This suffering is provoked by a structural violence that is perpetrated systematically and rationally; the afflictions "are not caused by accidents of forces majeure, they are the consequences, direct or indirect, of human agency" (Hofricheter 2003b:40). Opposing the 'fatalism of death' emphasised by the individualism imbuing our capitalistic society, and favouring one's awareness of the processes provoking her own suffering, disease, and death represent the basic practices of resistance and objectives of anti-asbestos mobilization (Hofrichter 2003b).

> The individualist perspective frames issues as personal and disconnected from larger social factors. Yet the oppressions that afflict people are collective and systematic, based in a large array of institutions. Social change simply does not occur through sequential individual actions. The danger of nuclear waste or farms with contaminated cows transcends the world of individual risk. A necessary step is to reformulate and make salient the conditions for health and politicise its meaning more thoroughly in order to reveal that what appears as objective and neutral is in fact subjective and political. Recognising health as a social concern and not only a human one is an important objective (Hofrichter 2003b:40).

In the struggle for social justice undertaken by anti-asbestos activists, there is a neat accusation of specific socio-political and economic dynamics embodied by the sufferers affected by the *disaster*. Taking action to break that silence and tear the veil of invisibility suffocating their voices is fundamental to cease with dynamics that threaten and disrupt their worlds. Moreover, by mobilising in name of the justice, *sufferer-activists* prompt the moral engagement of those interlocutors whose participation would empower their struggle. These interlocutors are found among academics, biomedical professionals, engineers, lawyers, researchers of international institutions, and have the knowledge (and power) to tackle and prevent health disasters, and make the principle of health (and justice) effective for all.

On this concern, I draw attention to the role of research institutes and biomedical and social scientists who have combined a vocation for their professions with an ethical commitment to public health in general[89], and the anti-asbestos movement in particular (see the contributions and reflections from I refer to the settings I know best, Italy and Brazil). In Casale Monferrato, the anti-asbestos mobilization found legitimacy in the results of the first

[89] In this regard, see the reflections of Soskolne (2016) on the ethical aspects of epidemiology and Krieger (2003) on social epidemiology.

epidemiological surveys conducted among citizens and workers in the early 1980s (see Mazzeo 2012). I refer to a seminal work conducted by a team of biomedical doctors from local biomedical institutions who examined the clinical reports of patients diagnosed with mesothelioma in Casale Monferrato between 1973 and 1983 (Mossano 2010). The shocking results (50 out of 70 cases were related to environmental, non-occupational exposure to asbestos) triggered a second study called *Progetto Cemento Amianto* [Asbestos-Cement Project] that was conducted by a larger team including oncologists, epidemiologists, lung specialists, and occupational physicians (Mossano 2010). Among them, were the epidemiologists Benedetto Terracini and Corrado Magnani whose works have become internationally renowned references to understand AR health hazards (see Magnani et al. 1987; Terracini and Mirabelli 2016; Marsili et al. 2016; Terracini et al. 2015; Terracini 2005, 2006).

In Brazil, the investigation conducted by the lung specialist Jefferson Benedito Pires de Freitas (Freitas 2001) on pleural diseases among asbestos workers has had relevant repercussions on the outcomes of numerous lawsuits recently filed. These lawsuits are based on asbestos-contaminated workers who received a compensation for the pleural plaques that had been diagnosed and were previously not considered to be a disabling disease. This is just an example of the contribution from the work of biomedical and health professionals operating in Brazil, whose studies I have referred to throughout my research (see Algranti et al. 2001; de Castro et al. 2003; D'Acri et al. 2009; Giannasi and Thébaud-Mony 1997; Novello and de Castro 2010; Raile 2008; Raile and Markowitz 2011).

In the transnational health movement in favour of the global prohibition of asbestos, health professionals and research institutes have offered remarkable contributions.

I agree with Beauchamp (2003), who argues:

> challenging medical [and I would add, economic] dominance could go a long way toward reclaiming health as a public concern and an issue of social justice. Challenging these centres of power in order to incarnate the priority of human life requires not only a new ethic but a supporting base of power. I believe that while professional prestige is an important attribute in the modern-day public policy process, public health is ultimately better understood as a broad social movement (Beauchamp 2003:278).

Among the 'actions' that have stood out in the global public debate and health policies on asbestos issues, I recall the Collegium Ramazzini Statements (Collegium Ramazzini 1999,

2010, 2015), the investigations conducted by Arthur Frank[90] (see Frank 2013; Frank and Joshi 2014; Ladou et al. 2010), Barry Castleman (see Castelman and Navarro 1987; Castleman 1979, 1983, 2003, 2005, 2016), as well as the studies promoted by public and occupational health research institutes such as the Italian *Istituto Superiore di Sanità-ISS*[91] [Superior Health Institute] (see Zona et al. 2016), the Brazilian *Fundação Jorge Duprat Figueiredo de Segurança e Medicina do Trabalho-FUNDACENTRO*[92] [Jorge Duprat Figueiredo Occupational Safety and Medicine Foundation] (FUNDACENTRO 2015), and *Fundação Oswaldo Cruz-FIOCRUZ*[93] [Oswaldo Cruz Foundation] (see FIOCRUZ 2008).

A similar transnational and transdisciplinary engagement is necessary to ensure a just distribution of risk and suffering based on the consideration that "there are powerful actors/groups/institutions that have an unequal responsibility to bear the costs of reducing death and disability since their actions have far greater impact than those of individual citizens" (Beauchamp 2003:275).

In the next section, I discuss the role of anthropology in the multidisciplinary approach needed to understand and face global health problems further detail since,

> explaining the distribution of suffering requires many minds and resources. Case studies of individuals reveal suffering, they tell us what happens to one or many people; but to explain suffering, one must embed individual biography in the larger matrix of culture, history, and political economy (Hofrichter 2003b:41).

In this regard, the theoretical and methodological 'instruments' of anthropology add a meaningful contribution to critically reflect on and 'reimagine' global health.

I conclude this section by reiterating the role of a transnational grassroots movement emerging from the suffering related to AR disasters and including non-governmental organizations, disease-based associations, environmentalist and union groups in addressing health disparities and analysing the social conditions affecting health by "articulating bold visions, innovative theoretical perspectives, and strategies for action" (Hofrichter 2003b:5-6).

> The supporters of global health equity do not need to hold official positions of power to make a significant impact. Students, health workers, lawyers, people living with HIV [and other diseases], and other grassroots activists have changed global health policy through effective advocacy; their tactics are available to anyone with passion for equity (Basilico et al. 2013:347).

[90] A.L. Frank received the *Ramazzini Award 2016* "for his distinguished record of occupational health and safety research as well as his advocacy and service in the promotion of better occupational safety and health in developing countries and in the international fight to ban the use of asbestos" (source: http://www.collegiumramazzini.org/ramazziniaward.asp, accessed March 25, 2017).
[91] See the institute's website: www.iss.it
[92] See the institute's website www.fundacentro.gov.br
[93] See the institute's website www.portal.fiocruz.br

By conducting ethnographic research with anti-asbestos activists in Italy and Brazil, I found what Basilico et al. (2013) affirmed in the abovementioned quote to be true. The *sufferer-activists* I met were putting into practice (see Chapter 5) all the tools listed by Basilico et al. (2013) as the most useful and accessible tools employed by global health activists. They are: "engaging in critical self-reflection, finding good partners, knowing the issues, starting a dialogue with policymakers, highlighting key issues, organising a public demonstration, build a coalition, and be the change" (Basilico et al. 2013:347-349). The *sufferer-activists* from Bari, Casale Monferrato, and Osasco[94] in their everyday lives were struggling for the change they wanted to assure for next generation. At the same time, they were painfully embodying the irreversible change of the eruption of disaster in their bodies and lives.

Engaging ethnography, activism, and Global Health

Responsibility cannot be acquired intellectually, but only through experience (Freire 2005:212).

Several times, I have been asked why I chose Brazil to conduct my doctoral research on anti-asbestos activism, and why I decided to focus on a struggle that evidently appeared to my interlocutors marginal and less interesting, probably less exotic, than other social movements spreading in Brazil that might be considered more urgent. I already referred to the encounters and research experiences that led me to design my doctoral project based on an ethnographic fieldwork in Osasco during which I would accompany ABREA members in their everyday life of suffering and activism. By living in São Paulo for almost one year, I recognised the relevance and necessity of the actions promoted and organised by other social movements[95]. I refer, for instance, to the mobilizations of students and teachers of public schools studying and working in precarious conditions, and to the movements against the genocide of the

[94] These are the settings I know best due to my studies and relationships built there. However, I would have no hesitation to recognise the 'change' promoted and embodied by *sufferer-activists* from other settings afflicted by AR disasters in Italy, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Colombia, Mexico, the United States, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, and Australia just to mention a few.

[95] In my consideration of the role of anti-asbestos activism in the broader scene of social movements in contemporary Latin America, I referred to Negri and Cocco (2006), while I referred to Holston (2008) for the particular Brazilian context and to Della Porta et al. (2006) for the consideration of the transnational dimension of the anti-asbestos movement. I relied as well on the contributions by Boni (2012), Koensler (2012), and Montagna (2012) in the volume edited by Koensler and Rossi (2012) as they offered useful theoretical coordinates to understand social movements theories and practices.

black, poor, and peripheral population[96], I had friends and fellow students engaged in feminist groups and movements against the discrimination of minority communities. Moreover, the coup d'état that occurred in 2016 and was promoted by political parties particularly close to ultra-conservativism and Evangelical Pentecostalism (see Morel 2016), determined the end of the Presidency of Dilma Rousseff, who had been democratically elected in 2014, and generated a severe political crisis, exacerbated by an economic one. A similar climate seemed to threaten the tendency toward a more equal society[97] and reinvigorated the Brazilian socio-political scene with new waves of protests and public demonstrations, which were often violently repressed by the military police[98]. I lived in São Paulo and Osasco and witnessed every day to the significant socio-economic disparities that violently confined a tremendously high number of men and women, children and elderly people to a condition of poverty, despair, and 'non-person' status. Thus, I might have been tempted to ask myself: why am I here? Does it make sense to focus my study, energies, and time in investigating the practices and the experiences of a disaster whose risks and effects might be less dangerous and atrocious than those to which millions of people are daily exposed for their entire lives?

Similar thoughts came to my mind when feelings of powerlessness and sadness surprised me, especially during my lonely and daily journeys between São Paulo and Osasco. This happened particularly when I came back home at night through the working-class neighbourhoods I crossed, confined within shantytowns that had lost their vivid colours shining in the daylight, and when the darkness pervaded all, including me.

I noticed that when somebody asked me about how my research and life experience in Brazil was going on, my answer referred to a schizophrenic combination of feelings and memories of encounters, places and circumstances, beauty and horror, that had frequently left me speechless. Often, I told my interlocutors that what upset me most was the violence I felt and came to know in my daily life. This violence did not consist only of homicides, shootings, and *assaltos* [robberies] of which I was informed on a daily basis, but rather it was like a palpable feeling of terror and anguish. Usually, my interlocutors found it difficult to understand what I

[96] In this regard, the NGO *Anistia Internacional no Brasil* [Amnesty International in Brazil] launched the campaign *Jovem Negro Vivo* [Black Young Alive]. For further information see the website https://anistia.org.br/campanhas/jovemnegrovivo.

[97] The social and economic policies promoted during the two presidencies of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva were addressed to reduce poverty and favour the democratic participation of all citizenry to the socio-political life of the country. In 2004, the program *Bolsa Família* was launched and, in 2013, guaranteed a minimal salary to 50 million people living in poverty/extremely poverty conditions, representing the 26% of Brazilian population (Schwarcz and Starling 2015:503).

[98] The Facebook pages *Mães de Maio* [The Mothers of May], edited by the movement emerged after the violence outbreak in São Paulo state in 2016, and *Observatório do Povo da Rua* [Observatory of Street Population], on a daily basis, divulge news about violent police actions occurring in Brazil.

wanted to convey; they were surprised, and told me that they imagined a similar scenario in places afflicted by wars. A quote from Chomsky (1985) and reported by Scheper-Hughes in *Death Without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Scheper-Hughes 1992:230) is particularly opportune to explain the kind of violence I was referring to. The quote was cited in relation to the 'peacetime crimes' (Basaglia and Basaglia Ongaro 1975) and 'violence in war and peace' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) Scheper-Hughes had witnessed throughout approximately 20 years of fieldwork (1960s-1980s) in north-eastern Brazil.

> "You gringos", a Salvadorian peasant told an American visitor, "are always worried about violence done with machine guns and machetes. But there is another kind of violence that you should be aware of, too. I used to work on a hacienda. My job was to take care of the dueño's dogs. I gave them meat and bowls of milk, food that I couldn't give my own family. When the dogs were sick, I took them to the veterinarian. When my children were sick, the dueño gave me his sympathy, but no medicine as they died" (Chomsky 1985:6 quoted by Scheper-Hughes 1992:230).

Although I conducted my fieldwork in the same country, *Death Without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Scheper-Hughes 1992) refers to an epoch and a scenario historically and socio-politically distant from the one I encountered. However, the absurd and unjustifiable violence plaguing the settings in which I was immersed upset me in a similar way, and I related that violence to the 'horror' about which Scheper-Hughes wrote when referring to Captain Kurtz' words in *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1987). This violence was "the routinization of human suffering" and the "normal violence of everyday life" (Scheper-Hughes 1992:16).

The landmark work of Loïc Wacquant on the criminalization of poverty (see Wacquant 1993, 1994, 1999, 2008), reflected on the 'omnipresence of violence' and 'climate of terror' as peculiar aspects that made the 'dictatorship over the poor' in Brazil as well as other settings cruelly effective. Wacquant calls 'Brazilianization' the "protracted process of societal fission and ramification of inequalities and insecurities of the metropolis of Europe and North America" (Wacquant 1994)

Focusing on the 'climate of terror' that is breathable in Brazil, Wacquant wrote:

> Since 1989, lethal crime has been Brazil's leading cause of mortality, with homicide earning the title of 'great villain of public health' for the 1980s, during which decade the national rate doubled to pass 20 per 100,000—twice the U.S. peak of the early 1990s, and about 15 times the level of the societies of Western Europe (Souza 1994; on the steep rise of murderous violence in cities throughout the continent, see Neapolitan 1994). The incidence of murders in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Recife now exceeds 60 per 100,000 people, a rate approaching those for the most violent metropolises in the Americas in recent years (New Orleans, Detroit, and Washington in the North and Caracas, Lima, and Medellin in the South sported rates above 80 in

> the early 1990s), and far higher than anything Brazilian urbanites had previously experienced (Wacquant 2008:59).

The "close spatial propinquity of rich and poor in Brazilian urban settings" (Wacquant 2008) by no means attenuated the existing disparities; it exacerbated and made them concretely visible, with the maniacal edification of 'fortress cities' instead (Low 1997).

> Middle-class streets and upper-class residences have been turned into fortified enclaves secured by iron grates, intercoms, attack dogs, armed guards in watchbooths or manning roadblocks after dark, while 'gated communities' cordoned off from the city by high walls and advanced surveillance technologies have mushroomed and become a coveted ingredient of elite status (Caldeira 1996). A huge private security industry has grown to provide proximate protection to apartment buildings, businesses, and social clubs as well as wealthy individuals and their families (Wacquant 2008:59).

Undoubtedly and significantly, breathing that 'climate of terror' in my daily life and finding myself limited in living the public spaces in the way I was used to, affected my fieldwork experience as well as my understanding of the practices of *care-activism* undertaken by ABREA members. Immersed in a context marked by violence and suffering perpetrated and caused by human actions that had been motivated by specific logic and that were parts of processes begun centuries before, a sense of despair gripped me and made stagger my hypotheses and interpretations. Might I really refer to the knowledge emerged from the suffering endured by the activists and triggered by the irruption of disaster in one's life in terms of power? Did it make sense? Did the 'words' provided by one's engagement in the activism to 'read' the symptoms of ARDs as traces of injustices represent 'tools' for a real change? What might be the impact of the, although relevant, changes promoted and goals achieved by the activists, in relation to a context so deeply corrupted, devastated, and fragmented? By tackling these upsetting questions and trying not to fall into anguish and get lost, I looked for direction and solace in what I retrospectively read as the answers that the *sufferer-activists* offered me, often without my explicit questioning. The ability to grasp, at least partly, those answers was based on the analysis of the countless informal conversations I had had with my gatekeepers and Brazilian friends.

A conversation was particularly incisive during the process through which I elaborated my interpretation and perception of the field.

> *Agata, I do not want to get used to the brutality that surrounds me. This violence and this misery must continue to trouble and upset me. Only if do not get used to all this, I can be in peace with myself. If you become indifferent, it is the end. I must continue to behave according to what I think it is normal and just, I cannot resign myself to such violence and consider normal the suffering around me.*

This conversation was crucial to grasp from an emic perspective since it revealed the revolutionary repercussions of anti-asbestos mobilization. A severe critique, revolutionary practices and discourses emerged from the experiential knowledge of the disaster, and from the narration in political, legal, and biomedical terms of the social and individual suffering lived by those who had been affected by the impact of asbestos exposure in their lives.

The 'power of the suffering bodies' (see Mazzeo 2012), canalised in the paths designed by the activism the sufferers themselves had drawn, was changing a system that seemed immutable, firm in shaky certainties, and supported by the fears and threats which this power itself had established.

The mobilization had produced effects that were publicly recognised. For instance, it achieved the approval of laws prohibiting asbestos in eight states of the federative republic that, in 2011, still represented the third largest producer of asbestos in the world according to the *Departamento Nacional de Produção Mineral-DNPM* [National Department of Mineral Production] (Ministério da Saúde 2016). A revolution was lived by *sufferer-activists* in their everyday experiences of illness and grief, aging and disability. The relationships they had built represented a critique and a resistance to the ruthless individualism celebrated and nurtured by capitalism.

Considering the ethical and moral dimensions of similar acts of resistance was the next step in my path of analysis and reflection. In particular, I referred to the contributions of Kleinman (1997, 1999, 2006, 2010; Kleinman and Hanna 2011; Stewart et al. 2010), Fassin (2012, 2014b), and Scheper-Hughes (1995) to reflect on the practices of anti-asbestos activism in Osasco (Brazil), and, retrospectively, those investigated in Bari and Casale Monferrato (Italy). I tried to grasp the moral reasons of men and women engaged in a movement that went beyond national borders and highlighted the economics and 'politics of asbestos' (Waldman 2011), while also criticising and taking action against the perverse logic of capitalist system and attendant violence.

At the same time, I reflected on my own role in the field, and the contribution that anthropology could offer to address health disasters that are recognised as global health catastrophes and those that remain *invisible* because of precise dynamics and human actions. By proposing a brilliant analysis of the contribution of anthropology to global health, Pigg (2013) adopts the concept of invisibility to refer to anthropologists' methodological and theoretical tools for questioning taken-for-granted practices and discourses, and identifying invisible problems.

> An ethnography of global health listens in the spaces that are rendered invisible (or at least off to the side) by the very practices most valued as 'getting things done'. Methodologically, an ethnographer of global health has to be agnostic, asking first, "What is going on?" before asking whether or why it is good or bad (in what ways and for whom). The relationship that activities convened for global health problem-solving set up between the visible/valued/known and the invisible/ignored/uncertain is especially diagnostic. The concept of invisibility can be useful because it is inherently perspectival and situational: that which is overlooked, camouflaged, hidden, not known, or not particularly noticed still exists. […] We can keep in mind that invisible work, marginalized perspectives, forgotten realities, and indeterminacy are very much part of the empirical social realities being built by global health activities. We have ways of theorizing such processes. They are not unanalysable (Pigg 2013:133).

To this concern, the invisible health disasters provoked by the asbestos market may be considered as paradigmatic of the processes that define how a global health disaster occurs and is defined, how to address it, and how to prevent it.

> Whereas global public-health policy looks to ethnography solely as a source of information, pertinent to its goals, ethnographers see their task quite differently, holding that the purpose of patient ethnography is to listen and to be in situ, a practice that opens up a space for the questioning of received certainties through a responsiveness to multiple viewpoints and contested perspectives. We call this critical reflexivity. […]
> The anthropology of global health proceeds from the premise that there may be important things happening in the social arenas created by global-health activities other than those already accounted for by the medical and public health frameworks that define problems and structure solutions. The improvisational praxis of ethnographic attentiveness is especially suited to discovering what these other important things might be.
> (Pigg 2013:127-128).

The 'imperative of responsibility' (Jonas 1985) is largely motivating and lived by *sufferer-activists* in their daily struggle and should be felt as well as by those who have the knowledge (and power) and operate in the conditions to act in favour of global public health. An ethical commitment is more urgent than ever and "inaction is not a real option, but rather an illusion, one maintained with difficulty in even the tallest ivory towers or most gated retreats" (Farmer et al 2013:xxiii). As an anthropologist, I positively respond to the call "for the primacy of the ethical and a more morally engaged anthropology" (Scheper-Hughes 1995). I am not an activist, nor I consider myself to be an activist. Despite the fact that ABREA members in Osasco used to call me *"a companheira nossa"* [our comrade], I hardly recognise myself as the 'anthropologist-*companheira*' as Scheper-Hughes referred to the role she assumed while doing research in north-eastern Brazil (Scheper-Hughes 1995:411).

I did not become member of any of the three associations that I accompanied over the eight years of my research. However, I am constantly in touch with their members, and became close friends with some of them. I participated in numerous activities and awareness campaigns, although my role never shifted from researcher to activist. I let myself be 'affected by the events' (Foucault 1997b) and encounters I lived, but I do not pretend nor do I have the hypocritical ingenuity to equate the social contribution that might derive from my study and the legitimacy I give to the activism through my work, to the actions resulting from the commitment practiced by *sufferer-activists* in their daily lives. I do, however, recognise and act to increase the socio-political repercussions that my ethnographic investigation may have in support of the movement. I recognise my role as the role of a 'moral actor', and the anthropological experience as a form of 'moral commitment to the world' (Fassin 2007:202-203).

Based on an "ethical orientation to *the other*" as demanded by anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1995:418), this dissertation is grounded in the memories the participants of my study shared, narrated, and built together with me during our encounters, the interviews and experiences we lived together. By pursuing a public use of the knowledge that emerged from my studies, my wish and commitment is to situate those memories within an anthropological debate, inside and outside of the academia. Only in this way can my ethnography (and my memory) be considered *militant*.

I addressed and conceived of my work according to Scheper-Hughes' definition of 'witnessing' as a form of militancy, linking anthropology to moral philosophy (Scheper-Hughes 1995)

> Witnessing, the anthropologist as *companheira*, is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will 'take sides' and make judgments, though this flies in the face of the anthropological non-engagement with either ethics or politics. Of course, non-involvement was, in itself, an 'ethical' and moral position (Scheper-Hughes 1995:418).

As the embodied memory of the *sufferer-activists* I met preserved the traces of the injustices they bore, my writing and actions aim to preserve the traces of the suffering and activism I witnessed and that were lived by those who were afflicted by preventable health disasters. To this extent, my anthropological study aims to be *militant* by advancing a constructive critique towards the processes and practices determining and addressing these disasters.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I situated anti-asbestos activism within the global public health scenario considered as a broad health social movement addressing equity and social justice (Hofrichter 2003a; Lovell 2007; Farmer et al. 2013).

As discussed, individual and collective health are deeply intertwined with social, economic, political, and cultural processes and dynamics. AR disasters offer paradigmatic and dramatic examples of similar entanglements, while the anti-asbestos movement and the practices of *care-activism* locally performed offer paths to rethink global health issues that make us reflect on the necessity of a multidisciplinary dialogue and action. The contribution of anthropology is crucial to raise uneasy questions, to tear the veil of invisibility that hides *silent* disasters, and question taken-for-granted assumptions and *truths*. Above all, the anthropological glance on global health issues (see Biehl 2011) and the ethnographer's 'mindful participation' (Pigg 2013) are essential to grasp the invisible disasters suffered in everyday lives by millions of 'nobodies' (Galeano 1989) and to listen to their voices. This does not mean making the anthropologist's voice an echo of the men and women encountered in the field (Simonelli 2007), but rather it is the response to anthropology's demand for an ethical—*militant*—commitment to the other (Scheper-Hughes 1995). A similar commitment should represent the basis of all scientific research involving human beings and the environment, and it is essential to tackle global health (visible and invisible) *disasters*.

Conclusions

Deixamos algo de nós para trás ao deixar um lugar.
Permanecemos lá, apesar de termos partido.
E há coisa em nós que só reencontraremos ao voltar.
Viajamos ao nosso encontro,
quando vamos a um lugar,
onde vivemos parte de nossa vida.
Por mais breve que tenha sido.[99]
(Mercier 2015:234)

From my fieldnotes written in October 2016, when I visited Osasco one year after my fieldwork:

> *Bus, train, stations of Vila Lobos-Jaguaré, Presidente Altino, Osasco... people are going to work. I arrive in Osasco at 8.40 a.m. Rua Antonio Agù does not pullulate with people at this time. The* cachorro quente [hot dog] *kiosks are not crowded.*
> *It is grey and cold. I wear my jacket and a scarf, but after the numerous climbs of the city, I am sweating. I do not remember how tiring it is to face all these climbs to reach the ABREA office in Avenida Santo Antonio. There, other steep stairs to climb.*
> *As soon as I enter the entrance hall of the building, I hear the shrill and loud voice of Eliezer. I smile. It is lovely to meet him again and to find myself here, where I feel as if I came back home.*
> *I go upstairs. I soon understand that he is talking by phone. I think that would be better to wait for the phone call ends, but the desire to let Eliezer know that I am arrived is stronger.*
> *I let him see me. Another ABREA member is working at the computer and does not notice me. Eliezer touches his arm and indicates him to turn around, while he is still engaged in the phone call that he is hastening to conclude. Eliezer's eyes are smiling. The other ABREA member gets up and greets me while saying in a whisper that I had not made any noise by entering the room. I leave my bag on a black chair and I take off my coat. I am sweaty. I am almost breathless. Meanwhile, Eliezer ends the call and comes close to me for a hug. He hugs me so strongly that for a moment I cannot breathe, and he kisses my hair, then he hugs me again. He is sincerely happy to see me and so I am. While hugging him, for the first time, I touch his shoulders. They are strong, muscled, and gnarled. His body seems to have the strength and solidity of a tree of fine, smooth and dark wood, with light streaks.*

This thesis contains what I felt, thought about, noticed, discussed, read, and observed during the encounters I lived in the field, some of which were emotionally intense for both my research partners and me. The discussed data emerged from my reflections during lonely

[99] We left some of us behind when we leave a place./We remain there although we have left./And there is something in us that we will find again only when we will be back./We travel toward the encounter with ourselves,/when we go to a place,/where we have lived a part of our life/ for brief it might have been [my translation].

journeys, countless occasions in which I felt disoriented, lost, and my certainties teetered. On one hand, this thesis is the written expression of solitary work of analysis and writing conducted in Italy and during which I felt powerless and repeatedly lived again anger, indignation, and sorrow for the silent *disasters*, injustices, and acts of 'violence in war and peace' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) I had witnessed to in Brazil. On the other hand, the knowledge contained in this thesis is moulded by the connections I identified and established during eight years of a multi-situated ethnography (Marcus 1995) (begun in Italy), by the trajectories I travelled from Bari to Casale Monferrato (Italy), and then Osasco (Brazil), and 'displacements' between Europe and Latin America. The *movements* I retraced are the movements of bodies and struggles, capital and disasters, and myself as simultaneously acting as researcher and research instrument with my body, background, hypotheses and expectations.

Throughout this thesis, no doubt a deeply personal and unavoidably partial work (Scheper-Hughes 1995), I tried not to fall into a solipsistic monologue, but rather to offer input and raise questions triggering reflection and multiple dialogues. The decision to include extended quotes from my fieldnotes was motivated by a methodological rigour on which I made evident and clear my voice and position in relation to my research partners' voices and position in the field. At the same time, I wish there to be a public and social use of the relational knowledge—words—contained in this work as a basis for engaging in further dialogues within anthropology and among anthropology and other disciplines addressing public health and issues of social justice. I borrow the following words from Scheper-Hughes (1995:419) who states:

> In the act of writing culture what emerges is always a highly subjective, partial, and fragmentary but also deeply personal record of human lives based on eyewitness accounts and testimony. […] If 'observation' links anthropology to the natural sciences, 'witnessing' links anthropology to moral philosophy.

On one hand, by defining the memories contained, discussed, and transmitted through this thesis as *militant*, I express the wish that my study may have social resonance in favour of the transnational movement for the global prohibition of asbestos. On the other hand, the *sufferer-activists* I met made a *militant* use of the past inscribed in their bodies and that was affecting their present. The acts of memory they performed individually and collectively were acts of militancy to the extent that the past-present they remembered, narrated, and from which could not escape became the proof of the injustices they bore and were used to legitimise their allegations and empower their struggle.

The motivations triggering one's decision to take socio-political actions against asbestos are clasped in the lacerated and blooding flesh of the breathless workers with asbestos-related diseases (ARDs), and trapped in the ruins of the disrupted worlds of the survivors. These motivations reside in the life pulsating in the few interstices spared by the asbestos fibres meandering through the membranes covering vital organs and catching the lungs in a grip. The decision to become involved in activism originates from a life and life affirmation because, despite death and beyond. Statistical data and calculations cannot contain 'all that life' and suffering. The quantitative transposition into anonymous cases and numbers neutralises the potentialities of critique carried by the afflicted (and dying) body and often ignores the politics at play in the determination and struggle against that affliction.

A contribution of this study and from an investigation informed by an 'anthropology-*pé-no-chão*' [with a foot on the floor] (Scheper-Hughes 1995) at large does not consist of unveiling and scrutinising the psychology and the most intimate reasons behind one's decision to mobilise (Fassin 2011). Rather, it resides in the investigation of the socio-political, economic, and cultural processes that inform that decision, mould a suffering experience and determine a disaster. The experiences of suffering and the practices of *care-activism* discussed in this thesis shed light on the politics in our innards, on the social dimension of cancer, the economics of a risk category, and the negotiable dimension of scientific truths. In this regard, this thesis offers an occasion to reflect on and 'reimagine' what institutionalised forms of knowledge (and power) consider as a global health issue, how they tackle it, and why their concern on that issue emerges.

Anthropology has to be ethically and politically committed to recognise and let others see the *invisible* suffering afflicting the 'nobodies' (Galeano 1989) of our world and take action based on the 'instruments' and competencies that define anthropology as one of the most 'socialising' discipline and whose contribution in the definition of global public health policies and practices is crucial (Farmer et al. 2013).

In this thesis, by drawing the attention to the *invisible* and *silent disasters* provoked by the transnational market of asbestos, I posed problems that I hope will trigger a critical reflection and a constructive dialogue within anthropology and between anthropology and other disciplines. I firmly believe in the importance of anthropology in individuating problems and collaborating with 'less socialising' disciplines in the ideation and realization of studies and projects regarding public health issues such as the epidemiological mapping of a disaster or the communication of risks concerning health hazards.

I adopted the category *sufferer-activists* in the attempt to save the complexity of the subjectivities of my study participants who were simultaneously victims and activists. Rooted in Osasco's historical/cultural tradition and socio-political scenario, ABREA's struggle found the conditions to make the suffering of hundreds of contaminated workers and their family members the basis for a socio-political engagement that has produced revolutionary changes on multiple levels. Living and understanding the *disaster* through the languages and morals of activism produced a revolution in the individual experiences of illness, risk, and grieving. In the local context, based on biosocial—deeply political—relationships, *sufferer-activists* have become a community and have established an emotional and practical support network assuring *care* for the afflicted and survivors.

Moreover, ABREA has been able to enter the law and biomedical knowledge-making processes and their respective institutions (e.g. hospitals, health research institutes, and courts) with the power to negotiate rights and *truths* as a collective and respectable social actor. In the national context, the connections established by the ABREA (Osasco) with other organizations of asbestos exposed empowered the anti-asbestos movement in Brazil and led to the approval of the mineral's prohibition in eight states of the country that remains the third largest asbestos producer in the world (US Geological Survey 2017). In this transnational scenario, I discussed the role assumed by ABREA in the movement for the global prohibition of asbestos, and I focused on the dialogue ABREA has been carrying on for more than 20 years with the AFeVA in Casale Monferrato (Italy, where I conducted my previous study).

From my fieldwork and data analysis, aspects that deserve further investigation emerged and they concern the activism of women, young generations, and people involved in asbestos-related (AR) suffering because of an environmental (not occupational) exposure to asbestos. In Osasco, the majority of ABREA members were male and retired asbestos workers because the majority of them had worked at the Eternit plant in Osasco where only a few women worked in the administrative sector[100]. The majority of my research partners' wives did not participate in ABREA activities nor did they undergo periodic medical examinations, although they had been exposed to asbestos at home because of the *dust* (i.e. asbestos) carried by their husbands through their clothes and bodies. Moreover, as discussed throughout the thesis, the strong links to the 'world of the factory' embodied by ABREA members and informing their experiences of activism seemed to preclude the participation of family members as well as of residents environmentally exposed to asbestos, those living nearby the

[100] Another situation characterises the ABREA in Rio de Janeiro, where both women employed as workers in textile industries and men working in asbestos-cement plants are gathered.

Eternit when the plant was operative (1943-1993). Researching the reasons of the scarce presence of these social actors would offer a more nuanced understanding of the impact of asbestos contamination over a broader population. On one hand, a similar consideration might improve the biomedical knowledge of disaster, the definition of public health policies, and trigger new strategies of struggle designed to incentivise the participation of social actors currently not engaged nor aware of asbestos dangers and therefore representing a particularly vulnerable 'risk group' because of its *invisibility.*

On the other hand, the engagement of younger generations (e.g. members' children and nephews) would be crucial to preserve the lessons learned by ABREA activists during more than 20 years of mobilization and to maintain the *militant* memory alive through new and younger members. Once again ABREA and AFeVA (Casale Monferrato, Italy) are exchanging experiences and ideas. In particular, the educational projects promoted in public schools and the organization of an interactive laboratory designed as a 'black box' of AR disaster and mobilization's memory in Casale Monferrato[101] are raising a great interest from ABREA. The connections I identified and investigated while exploring the suffering and activism experiences in both contexts might be used by the (Italian and Brazilian) activists in the ideation of new projects addressed to the *conscientização* [conscientization i.e. critical consciousness] (Freire 1980) of young generations. Similar strategies of struggle acquire a specific meaning in relation to the activism triggered by AR *disasters* whose delayed and displaced disruptive impact forces a reflection on time (and space) in relation to one's life story and unpredictable movements in the world.

AR *disasters* and anti-asbestos activism are paradigmatic of manifold crucial issues afflicting and occurring in our world, those that should not happen and should be contrasted and those that, on the contrary, should be supported. The contributions brought by this thesis to knowledge on the subject are not restricted to the dynamics and experiences related to asbestos and its politics, rather they broaden the reflection and shed light on other *invisible disasters*, suffering experiences, and practices of everyday struggle. I refer, for instance, to the role of other *sufferer-activists* mobilising in the name of social and environmental justice as well as processes determining (and increasing) a population's vulnerability to specific health hazards, e.g. disasters provoked by industrial activities, and people contamination with toxic substances.

[101] See the website www.amiantoasbesto.it for an overview of the laboratory and further details.

By concluding this work, it would be ethically and theoretically impossible to me to consider my involvement in this study ceased and the research field(s)'s investigation as saturated. Instead of an *end*, I see the occasion for renewing a personal commitment and opening new pathways of *militant* practices and discourses.

APPENDIX

Photographs from the field

1) City seal drawn in a graffiti, Osasco 2015.

2) Rua Antonio Agù, Osasco 2015.

3) Branca de Neve cemetery, Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), August 2015.

4) Branca de Neve cemetery, Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), August 2015.

5) Abandoned house in the abandoned village of São Felix mine, Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), August 2015.

6) Tunnel in the São Felix abandoned mine,

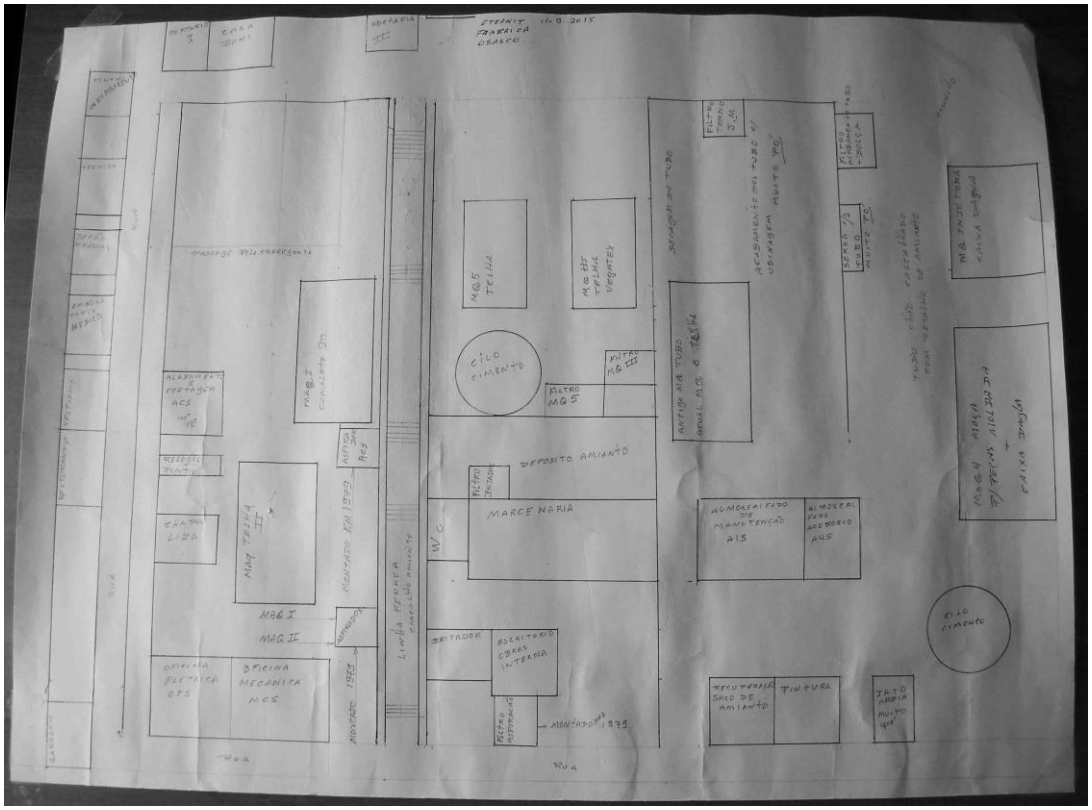
Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), August 2015.

7) Asbestos stone. São Felix abandoned mine,

Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), August 2015.

8) São Felix abandoned mine,

Bom Jesus da Serra (Bahia), August 2015.

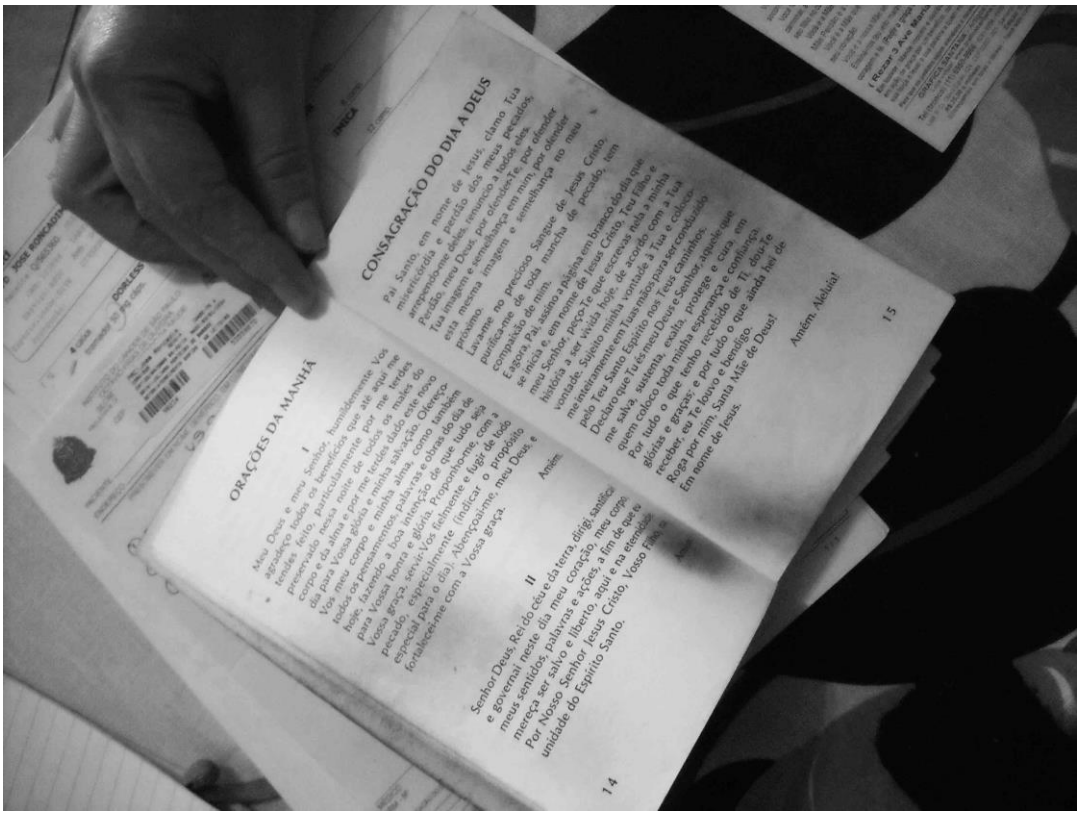


9) Map of the Eternit plant in Osasco (demolished in 1993), drawn by a research collaborator in September 2015.

10) 'Absence-presence' of an ABREA activist

who died of lung cancer in 2013,

Osasco 2015.



11) 'Absence-presence' of an ABREA activist who died of malignant mesothelioma in 2009, Osasco, 2015.

12) Ato Ecumênico, Praça Aquilino dos Santos – Vítima do Amianto

Osasco, April 26, 2015.

13) Ato Ecumênico, Praça Aquilino dos Santos – Vítima do Amianto

Osasco, April 26, 2015.

14) ABREA membership cards,

Osasco 2015.

15) Audiência Pública,

Salvador (Bahia), August 2015.

On the left, a worker's T-shirt stating that

"responsibility is wearing a T-shirt in name of

asbestos chrysotile safe use".

On the right, an anti-asbestos activist's T-shirt stating

"asbestos, disinformation kills'.

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