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## Contentious Interaction in *Ultima Generazione (Last Generation)*. A Preliminary Analysis on Radicalization and Spin-off Movements

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**Abstract.** With this article, we attempted to analyze the radicalization process of the Italian environmental movement with a particular focus on the birth and the practices of the group called *Ultima Generazione* (Last Generation). Using a qualitative-quantitative approach that integrated PEA (Protest Event Analysis) and participant observation, we tried to understand how a new insurgent consciousness emerged from the experience of the mobilizations promoted by *Extinction Rebellion*. In this sense, Last Generation is analyzed as a specific case of spin-off movement.

**Keywords:** social movements, climate justice, spin-off movements, ecological class, action repertoires.

### 1. CLIMATE MOVEMENT AND THE “NEW ECOLOGICAL CLASS”

The aim of this work is to offer a preliminary analysis, descriptive for the moment, of the specific case of the “Last Generation” movement as a specific case of a spin-off movement within the broader climate movement that, in recent years, has become central to the international scene. The climate movement is experiencing a paradoxical situation in which both governments and social movements are not addressing the climate crisis seriously and with the right means. Malm uses Lanchester’s paradox to define some of the trends of this historical phase (Malm 2021). John Lanchester is a British novelist and essayist, author of the book *Warmer, Warmer* in which he asks why climate activists have not yet committed “terrorist” actions in light of the catastrophic situation in which the world finds itself. Lanchester’s paradox thus expresses a twofold inability to respond: one coming from the disinterest of governments in addressing the causes of the climate crisis, and the other dictated by the use of protest modes that are inadequate to the seriousness of the situation.

To date, in fact, climate activists have never indulged in violence, much preferring an action repertoire inspired by the American civil rights movement, marked by more assertive and perturbative performances, symbolic and dilemmatic actions that fall under the strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience (Burkett 2016; Dietz and Garrelts 2014; Chenoweth and Stephan 2013).

There has been a shift from a conventional or semi-conventional repertoire typical of environmental movements to a more perturbative one. What we are faced with is a climate movement that has made nonviolent civil disobedience its hallmark and instead sees violence as a strategy that leads social movements to failure rather than achievement (Chenoweth and Stephan 2013). The use of nonviolent methods, as the leading theorists as well as activists of the climate movement, Bill Mckibben and Roger Hallam, have argued, is not the result of a moral and ethical choice but strictly instrumental. A choice, as argued by some scholars, that sanctions the shift from moral to strategic pacifism (Engler and Engler 2017).

The climate movement has so far experienced several cycles of activity, some punctuated by self-education and information campaigns, others by intense to repeated protest. Each of these has spanned a larger scale than the last (see Dietz and Garrelts 2014; Cassegard *et al.* 2017; Cheon and Urpelainen 2018). The first of these cycles crossed Europe between 2006 and 2009, especially Great Britain, where a group of Plane Stupid activists invaded the runways of most of the country's airports, organizing festivals, assemblies, and demonstrations in front of the sites deemed most responsible for climate pollution. The wave then reached Denmark, at Cop15 in Copenhagen.

On that occasion, the climate movement brought more than 100,000 people into the streets but did not get a real response from governments. The second cycle began in 2011, in the United States, when President Barak Obama failed to pass the *Cap and Trade Act* dealing the death blow to the spirit of COP15. Again, thousands of activists took to the streets bringing disarray and anger. Activists later converged on New York City for the People's Climate March in September 2014, where some 400,000 people paraded, tripling the Copenhagen attendance. The third cycle opened with the large cloud over Sweden's sky that led Greta Thunberg to demonstrate at the gates of the Swedish Parliament. Thus began the wave of school strikes known as Fridays for Future that swept across Europe and the rest of the world, including Antarctica. This cycle of mobilization was interrupted by the Coronavirus crisis in 2019 that froze the enthusiasm and energy patiently nurtured over the years. Since then, the climate movement has alternated between large cycles of demobilization and small cycles of re-mobilization. One of these is the one that began between December 2021 and January 2022, inaugurated by a number of protest actions born in the spirit and on the legacy of Extinction Rebellion, such as those carried out by Just Stop Oil in Britain, Dernière Rénovation in France, Letzte Generation in Germany and Ultima Generazione in Italy. These

mobilization projects are part of an international network, the A22 Network, which since April 2022, hence the acronym, has been mobilizing, in a systematic way, more and more activists in various parts of the globe, to try to defend and save current generations and those to come from climate collapse.

As Marwell and Oliver (1984) state, defining a social movement is a theoretical nightmare. The literature is vast and widely differentiated. Some scholars use the phrase "social movement" to cover much or all of the overlapping area between conflict and collective action (Frickel and Gross 2005). Others such as Tilly and Tarrow (2008) define a social movement as a prolonged campaign of claims that makes use of repeated performances to publicize protest that relies on the organizations, networks, traditions and solidarity that can sustain it. Still others see social movements as networked entities that allow actors with different perspectives, interests and visions to mobilize in specific ways by determining their own contribution to the achievement of common goals (Gerlach and Hine 1970; Diani 1992). Marxist thought, on the other hand, places the analysis of capitalism at the center of inquiry as a determining condition to the formation of a social movement (Goodwin and Hetland 2013; Nilsen and Cox 2006; Barker 2013; Berberoglu 2019; Della Porta 2015).

Very broad definitions, however, make it difficult not only to analyze the transitions between different forms of conflict, but also to compare the foundations on which contentious politics develops and the campaigns that promote it, stifling the work of identifying the mechanisms and processes useful for describing and explaining the rise and decline of a social movement. Therefore, in the following sections, we will adopt an approach more suitable for analyzing these processes and mechanisms in their internal dynamics. First, to understand along what conflicting lines what we might call the "family" of the climate movement has emerged and is developing, we must necessarily refer to capitalism and its internal contradictions. For the moment, it seems that it is the immense diversity of conflicts that prevents us from giving these struggles a coherent definition. However, some scholars, such as Latour and Schultz (2019) in a recent paper, have spoken of an "ecological class", referring to those who, with varying intensity, and beyond internal composition, are taking up the issue of the habitability of the planet.

The climate movement has used this discourse as its main means of social appropriation in an attempt to incorporate already pre-existing political actors into other movements, networks or groups and at the same time, convert actors who are not yet politicized or far

from the cause. What is emerging is a multiplicity of conscious leadership elements that, through conflict, begin to find a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world, stepping outside “popular science” and common sense (Guha 2008). From this point of view, there is a conflict that is strictly materialist in the sense that these movements define themselves in relation to the material conditions of their existence. It is certainly not the same materiality within which the old labor movement was born, but it is closely associated with that kind of materiality. Survival and reproduction, according to the Marxian tradition, are the first principle of all societies and their history. According to Latour and Schultz (2019), today we find ourselves in a social configuration in which production alone no longer defines our horizon. To be materialist today means to consider, in addition to the material conditions favorable to human reproduction, the socio-ecological conditions of habitability of the planet. We must shift our attention from the traditional crisis generated by the contradictions between productive forces and relations of production, to the crises generated within capitalist relations of production and the very conditions of capitalist production, that is, the capitalist relations and forces of social reproduction (O’Connor 1998). It is not only James O’Connor who directs attention to the so-called second contradiction of capitalism, but also other authors such as Karl Polanyi (1974). In *The Great Transformation*, the scholar analyzes the tendency of capitalism to economize social and environmental conditions in order to increase the volume of trade in the capitalist market and thus the accumulation of profit. Nancy Fraser (2022) also argued in a recent paper that capitalism drives global warming not accidentally but by virtue of its very structure. This is not to say that ecological crises occur and have occurred only in capitalist society, but that the ways of organizing production, circulation, exchange, and the conditions of production contain within them an ingrained tendency toward ecological crisis. In other words, some crises are general and not specific to the capitalist system, while others are typical and peculiar to that model of wealth production and accumulation.

Marx identified three types of conditions of production: i) external physical conditions; ii) labor power; iii) communal and general conditions of social production. As O’Connor (1998) argues, in a nutshell, external physical conditions are analyzed in terms of the vitality of ecosystems; labor force is analyzed in terms of the physical and mental well-being of workers as productive social forces and biological organisms in general; and finally, community conditions are analyzed in terms of social actors, infra-

structure, communications, more generally the relationship between individuals and the environment.

From this perspective, the social relations of reproduction of the conditions of production become the target of social transformation and thus probable lines along which conflict arises. The protagonists of this transformation are the social movements engaged in the internal struggles in the production process of health, occupational safety, environmental protection, pollution, toxic waste production, personal care and conditions of habitability of the planet. When the effects of “ecological contradictions”, to use the term used by Nancy Fraser, become so obvious and insistent that they cannot be mitigated, hidden or ignored, the organization of the relationship between the system of production and nature appears dysfunctional, unjust, unsustainable and thus becomes the object of contestation. The effect is to activate what Gramsci called “terrains of struggle”, or others have called “contested terrains”, “arenas of strategic action”, or “fields of strategic action” (Edwards 1979; Fligstein, McAdam 2011; Jasper 2011). As Manski (2019) states, the analytical utility of these terms, beyond individual nuances of meaning, lies in the fact that they describe the practice of activists as they engage in conflict. Just as physical terrains involve multiple types of features -geological, climatic, biological - social terrains of conflict can be understood as meta-structures that emerge from sets of organizations, institutions, cultures, geographies, etc. Who defines these terrains of struggle? Who is struggling? What are they struggling against and how do they interpret this struggle? These questions lead us to identify the conceptions of actors engaged in struggle about the dimensions of their struggles. Those who are mobilizing to defend the habitable conditions of the planet have developed an awareness, still in the making and not fully unified, of the dimensions of the struggle in which they operate, and these dimensions become the elemental claims that are shaping the movement’s trajectories. Thus, we are faced with a climate movement family that shares ideas and claims with respect to the end of the planet and its defense, but still contains within it fragmented and disordered elements that probably distinguish a class, but not consciousness about it. So, before speaking of an ecological class, it would be necessary to study the “spontaneous” and “elemental” passions of these movements, as well as the social practices and representations that invest this nascent subjectivity that is defined in a plurality of hybrid, mobile, “pre-diasporic” relations and affiliations (Gramsci 1975; Hall 2019). In any case, this crisis and the struggles that are characterizing it are deeply intertwined with other kinds of crises and struggles, also rooted in the structural con-

traditions of the capitalist system. The new struggles tend to subsume the old ones. Today there are struggles against environmental racism, for environmental justice, eco-feminist struggles that fully cut across issues of ecological destruction, class, race, and gender (Fraser and Jaeggy 2018; Fraser 2022; O'Connor 1997).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper combines various empirical materials: from the collection of newspaper articles and social media releases, to the analysis of testimonies and impressions reported on field notes obtained through participant observation. In fact, a qualitative-quantitative approach combining participant observation and Protest Event Analysis was used. The role of participant observer underwent different nuances between July and December 2022. According to the ethnographic methodological literature, the participant observer can assume different roles and this depends on two essential factors: the epistemological approach and the initial research question (Balsiger and Lambelet 2014). This role may change during the course of the research. According to Watt and Scott (2010), the different roles the observer can assume are as follows: “full observer”, who merely observes from the outside; “observer as participant”, who observes for short periods of time and then complements the research with interviews or other techniques; “observer who participates”, building a relationship that oscillates between militancy and neutrality; and “full participant observer”, who is completely absorbed in his or her research object. These roles are not well defined and often the boundaries tend to overlap and sometimes disappear.

The channels of entry within Last Generation (UG) are fluid and reflect the kind of attitude that Pizzorno called “surplus participation” and that Bosi and Zamponi consider typical of the current era, in which participation in collective networks of a directly political stamp is experiencing a marked crisis (Andretta and Mosca 2008; Bosi and Zamponi 2019). A type of participation, then, that responds, in most cases, to the need to do something for others and the need to do things to make sense of one’s life (Bosi and Zamponi 2019). In light of this, the barriers to entry are not insurmountable, even for those interested in participating on an individual, occasional basis and without particular political-ideological connotations. Therefore, it was not difficult to carve out a role within the movement. Over the course of the ethnographic experience, the role of the observer underwent several developments in line with the needs of an observational practice concentrated in a limited

time frame: from mere “curious” to “interested observers”, from “helpers in organizing individual events” to “activists”. Each type of role, however, was a means of becoming more familiar with the object of study. Thus, participant observation, from this point of view, is not to be understood as the determining part of the study, but it served to understand the mechanisms, processes and internal dynamics of the movement and to integrate qualitative data with quantitative data collected through PEA. The latter technique served to reconstruct the event history of the protest and to be able to identify the different repertoires of conflict used in protest campaigns, through a comparison with the other movement we are considering, Extinction Rebellion (XR). Thus, we identified the point at which the “initiator” movement generated the “derivative” one or the *spin-off*.

PEA is a technique that turns words into numbers (Franzosi 2004; Krippendorff 2004) and thus makes them analyzable through multiple statistical tools. Through the collection of newspaper articles, leaflets, archival material, press releases, and sources derived from social media, we were able to produce a longitudinal analysis capable of reconstructing waves of protest in space and time, their changes based on their interaction with the environment in which they emerged, and their relationships with other movements or groups (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002; Hutter 2014; Fillieule 1996). This approach has served to make sense of the persistence of protest, the degree of disruption, the difference in individual conflict performances, and finally the radicalization of protest dynamics. It is important to point out that there is a media selection bias toward protest events, as only a portion of them gain visibility (Hutter 2014). However, the importance of this bias as argued by some scholars is strongly contested (e.g. Hocke 1998; Portos 2021; Earl *et al.* 2004). In this regard, the reported portion of events will never be a representative sample, much less a random one, but by necessity, influenced by media logic (Della Porta 2014).

## 3. EXTINCTION REBELLION AND ULTIMA GENERAZIONE (LAST GENERATION)

According to Gramsci, an organic crisis opens when certain social groups break away from their traditional political affiliations, no longer recognizing in those forms and ruling classes the political expression of their needs and necessities (Gramsci 1975). In other words, the reasons for organic crises originate from those oppositions and fractures that fail to be integrated within the limits defined and selected by the ruling



classes and tend to fuel the entry of hitherto passive social groups, which to a certain extent, can then converge in campaigns and movement projects (Della Porta 2017; Cox and Nielsen 2013). *Extinction Rebellion Italy* (from now XR Italy) and *Ultima Generazione* (from now UG) are the manifestation of one of these steps and present themselves on the stage of history as alternative and oppositional forces to the inadequacy on the part of the ruling class to address not only old debates, such as those related to strictly economic aspects of daily life, but also on other issues, such as those of the climate crisis and the habitability of the planet. While in the previous section we tried to identify the new terrains of contestation on which new political subjectivities are taking shape, we will now try to show the processes of internal transformation that these movements are facing in order to cope with the climate crisis.

### 3.1. *Extinction rebellion*

“We are heading for extinction, let’s rebel!” this is the slogan that appears upon opening the website of XR Italy. XR is a decentralized international nonpartisan movement that bases its strategy on nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience. The movement was born on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018 in London during a day of protest in Parliament Square to denounce the British government’s immobility in the face of the climate and ecological crisis. From that day on, there were a series of “rebellion” days in the United Kingdom, in which activists from across the United Kingdom and beyond sought, through various forms of protest, to draw government and public attention to the climate issue. The “call to rebellion” quickly became global, and various “rebel” groups were formed around the world. Currently, the movement is extensive on a global scale. In Italy, XR Italy was founded in November 2018 and is mainly rooted in Turin, Bologna, Milan, Venice, Palermo and Rome.

Underlying XR’s strategic action principles is the choice to adopt a nonnegotiable form of nonviolent protest.

According to the literature, action repertoires play a key role in the process of spreading protest, acting both outside the movement and within it (Della Porta and Diani 2020). On the one hand, they serve to activate public and government attention to specific issues; on the other, they are the means through which shared identities and solidaristic bonds are created and transmitted (Pizzorno 1993; Rochon 1998). In this way, XR activists have used, sometimes emulating, often innovating, the earlier forms of action used in the cycles of nonviolent mobilization inspired by Gandhi in India and Luther King in the United States, as a “crystal seed” for

building new patterns of cyclical mobilization and new collective identities (McAdam 1995). The choice of using this type of nonviolent action not only shows how forms of action used in previous campaigns can be reused in new ones and thus the reproduction not only in space but also in time of the repertoires of protest, but also shows a choice of symbolic proximity with previous movements (Tilly 1978, 1986, 1995, 2002; Rochon 1988). The literature tells us that emulating and/or innovating forms of action that belonged to other movements can also serve to legitimize the protest itself by referring to the myths and heroes of the past (Whittier 2004; Rochon 1988). From the data processed through PEA with reference to the month of December 2022, XR Italy has been involved in 65 conflict episodes using a repertoire of conventional protest as shown in Table 1.

As Table 1 shows, activists have never used violent forms of protest, preferring a repertoire exclusively consisting of conventional and semi-conventional actions. According to the model developed by Tilly and Tarrow, we can distinguish conflict performance into three broad categories: conventional, disruptive/perturbative, and violent (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). The degree of disruption, threat, surprise and even lawlessness changes as each category is passed. XR Italy in this case made almost exclusive use of a repertoire consisting of demonstrations in front of specific sites and symbols of climate pollution, marches, public assemblies, and garrisons, and then switched to a slightly more perturbative repertoire through practices such as hunger strikes, chainings, sit-ins, and flash mobs.

In 16 cases, however, it preferred to use a more perturbative repertoire of conflict, not characterized by violence but by the use of particular symbolic resources to arouse surprise, tension, and willingness to react. Specifically, in 10 cases activists decided to sit in the middle of a street to block traffic, and in 8 cases they decided to daub the headquarters and offices of those they held most responsible for the climate crisis with colored paint. Figure 1 shows the number of conventional, semi-conventional, perturbative, and violent episodes, and we can see how XR Italy preferred to use an almost exclu-

**Table 1.** Repertoire of protest (XR).

<i>Repertoire</i>	<i>n. contentious episodes</i>
Conventional	40
Semi-conventional	9
Perturbative	16
Violent	0
Tot	65

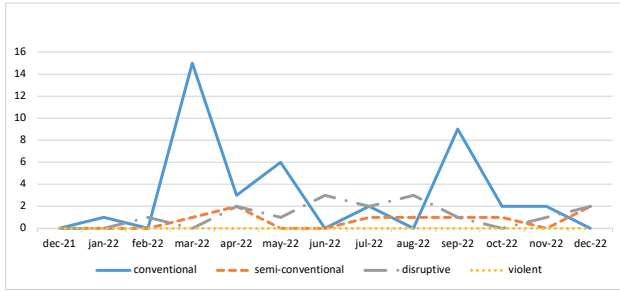


Figure 1. XR Italy repertoire of protest.

sively conventional repertoire throughout the mobilization cycle.

As Table 2 shows, in the vast majority of cases, 36 times, protests took place in public squares and places of public passage, seeking to engage and bring to the attention of the citizenry the gravity of the climate crisis. In 9 cases, activists chose to focus their protest action by targeting road traffic, choosing to disrupt and/or obstruct ordinary and high-speed roads such as ring roads, highways, and provincial roads. In 7 cases, on the other hand, targets were chosen that referred to the institutional and governmental world without ever going beyond the regional dimension.

Regarding the area of diffusion of the protest, as seen in Figure 2 the city most involved was Turin, a place where, evidently, the XR Italy group is much more structured and manages to mobilize activists in a more systematic way. Next, we find Venice, Milan and Rome, which helps shift the center of gravity and spread of the protest. The big absentee is the South, the only cities involved by XR Italy in the mobilization were Palermo in two cases, then Naples, Bari in one case, but closely related to the participation of small groups of XR Italy in the climate strikes promoted by the Fridays for Future movement.

Table 2. Targets chosen by XR Italia.

Targets	n. episodes
Square and/or large public place	36
Municipal road	4
Provincial road, ring road, GRA, highway	5
School, University	2
Local or Regional Institution	7
Office and/or private company headquarters	4
Sports event, music, entertainment	5
Natural place	2
tot.	65

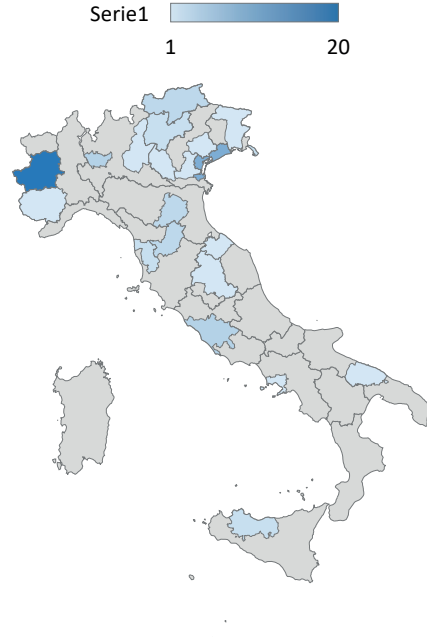


Figure 2. Major areas involved in the XR Italy contention.

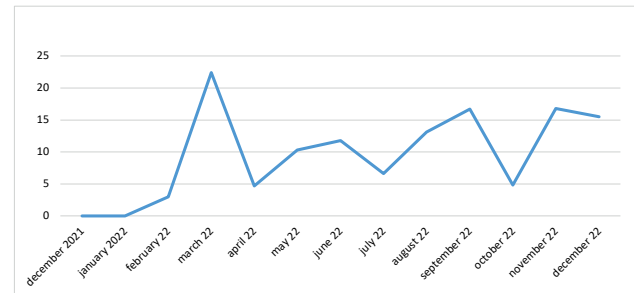


Figure 3. Number of XR Italy activists per protest episode.

A final figure considered was the number of activists, obtained by calculating the average number of participants for each protest episode, according to the configuration shown in Figure 3.

From data processing, the average number of activists that XR Italy involved in the mobilization cycle is less than 11.

Finding a synthesis from the perspective of the contentious repertoire, XR Italy is a movement that does not follow the “logic of numbers”, much less the “logic of damage” since it never resorts to violent protest (DeNardo 1985). The strength of the movement, in fact, does not depend on the large number of its supporters, but on their proverbial commitment and the attempt to show through their presence, their bodies and the continuous reiteration and repetition of nonviolent forms of protest,

the presence of a vital problem for the fate of society and the planet. Therefore, the logic underlying the choices employed by XR Italy Rebellion is that of “testimony”, and the goal, or rather the attempt, is to change individual consciences through symbolic action with high emotional content, so as to get as much visibility as possible in the public debate in order to increase the degree of political possibilities (Jasper 2013).

In terms of internal organization, XR Italy presents itself as a movement based on autonomy and decentralization, reproducing XR’s international organization. Barriers to entry are very easy to overcome even for those interested in participating only occasionally. One of XR’s goals is to create real communities of rebels, and to do this it uses local groups rooted on a territorial basis without, however, being exclusively localist. In fact, joining the group does not require formal membership or a fee; it is enough to identify with certain principles, such as that of nonviolent civil disobedience. Local groups come together to create, through aggregative, solidaristic processes, a sense of belonging, sociality, relationships, and identity in a local territorial area, building support and acting in accordance with the aims and demands defined by XR.

Each local group, in turn, has both key figures such as coordinators, who act as a transmission belt between the movement’s grassroots and the center, and other subgroups, the working groups that plan activities and promote community creation, growth and outreach. These groups have wide degrees of freedom, establishing goals, missions and tasks in autonomous decision-making. They deal with issues related to internal organization, planning events with the outside world, retrieving resources and materials, managing media relations, and training, involvement and support activities. It is, therefore, a hybrid system based on internal differentiation and the integration of horizontal and vertical elements of coordination (Kriesi 1996). There are also structures that work at the trans-regional level: XR Support Italy aims to facilitate cooperation between individual XR Italy groups and XR groups around the world.

Actions are again organized by specific groups that may or may not involve other activists. Under the principles of autonomy and decentralization, any local group can organize actions without seeking permission from XR’s decision-making bodies, the only discriminating factor being the type of action, which must always remain nonviolent. When planning the action, the local group also decides on the “level of legal risk” they may incur, and each activist is made aware of the risks and dangers through the guidance provided by the legal support group. During the planning process, individual

roles are established through specific pre-action (briefing) and post-action (debriefing) assemblies. At these times, activists exchange information, mentally review the action to be taken, mistakes made, goals achieved, and emotions felt during the interaction in order to cement the bond between each individual activist and to help de-escalate emotional shocks.

### 3.2. *Ultima Generazione* (Last Generation)

‘We are concerned about an impending social collapse that threatens Italy due to the climate crisis and the destruction of ecosystems. We are ordinary people who have left our jobs to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience as a strategy to achieve greater democratic participation» (XR Italy).

This is the statement issued by XR Italy activists on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 once they were taken away by law enforcement after blocking the GRA (Grande Raccordo Anulare) in Rome for two hours. The blockade created a four-kilometer queue and saw the participation of 12 activists. The banners attributed responsibility as follows: “Climate and Ecological Emergency – Now Citizen Assemblies! – Last Generation – Extinction Rebellion”. The statement issued a few hours later by the same activists carried the following words, “With this action the campaign to the bitter end began. Last Generation – City Assemblies Now! Extinction Rebellion”.

This document is extremely important for at least two reasons: first, it helps us to precisely place the start date of the protest campaign; second, it returns a key piece of data useful for reconstructing the entire cycle of the protest, but more importantly, it helps us to bring into focus the processes and mechanisms that move the dynamics of the protest. As emerges from the statement, UG began as a movement campaign only to break away from it and become a movement itself with a recognizable symbol and identity, a repertoire that differs from that of XR, an internal organization that mimics that of XR, but above all a new resource to be employed in the protest, what Tarrow and McAdam call “the lessons of the early risers” (Tarrow 1994; McAdam 1995).

We can distinguish two major classes of social movements: initiator movements, which distinctly mark the widespread and recognizable beginning of a protest cycle, and a second class that includes the so-called spin-off movements, which in different aspects and degrees draw inspiration and impetus from the initiator movements. According to McAdam (1982), to understand how a spin-off movement emerges, one must not look for causes within the movement itself, but at the whole process of the protest cycle. The previous section attempted

to highlight how the last cycle of mobilization of the climate movement was frozen and depowered by the arrival of Covid-19, specifically by the measures of social distancing and confinement that effectively suspended much of the political action associated with the protest.

As several scholars assert, the assessment actors make about living in exceptional times can result in the disruption of daily routines and their rethinking, opening or closing new spaces for political participation (McAdam 1982; Della Porta 2018). The pandemic crisis was certainly an exceptional event. The structure of daily life was totally reconfigured, millions of people lived in conditions of social and economic deprivation, and institutions did not always succeed in coping, regulating and managing the emergency. In other words, we have moved toward what disorganization theorists call the “regulatory incapacity of institutions” (see Ash 1972; Hobsbawm 1963; Kornhauser 1959; Moore 1969). These situations lead people to break the ties that bind them to what Edelman calls the “comforting banalities” of everyday life and escape social control and the multiplicity of secondary associations and connections that normally control political behavior by erupting into protest (Piven and Cloward 1979). But for a protest movement to arise from these upheavals in daily life, it is necessary for subjects to perceive the state of deprivation and disorganization they are experiencing as both unjust and subject to change. With the end of social containment and distancing measures, protest has once again emerged, and the social order that was usually perceived as just and unchanging has begun to appear increasingly unjust and susceptible to change.

Our hypothesis is that the pandemic, while at first acting as a soporific agent for protest, at a later stage helped to accelerate and radicalize an ongoing process and trend. The process is both cognitive and cultural, and it is the process of “cognitive liberation” (McAdam 1988) that has seen the convergence in the public squares as a sign that change is possible precisely through collective action (Della Porta 2018). The trend associated with this process, on the other hand, is more strictly political and organizational and consists of the escalation provoked by a new insurgent consciousness. The latecomers of the climate movement have in fact seen how insufficient the strategies and tactics used by the first arrivals (initiators) of the climate movement have been at least from the perspective of governmental response to the climate crisis. Learning this “lesson” from earlier cycles of mobilization, they began a decidedly more perturbative and radical protest campaign to attract media coverage, attention, tension, and willingness to react on the part of the public and the authorities

(Lispky 1965; Rochon 1988, Gitlin 1980). One can read these two mechanisms in the words of these activists:

*When I attended a UG presentation, I was asked some questions, like, how do you feel? How could you help? My answer was: I feel displaced. To the second question I answered: I have to help. But displaced by what? Bewildered by realizing that all my environmental awareness, all my action was not reckoning with the changing weather, therefore, bewildered by realizing how in fact I was a climate denier, all my work up to that time was aimed at making sure that our living was more sustainable, even in comparison to what had happened to us a year earlier with the pandemic, but it was not reckoning with the emergency and the fact that our governments were rowing against us. (Field Note 1)*

*Many people who see our actions think that it takes a lot of courage to act in these terms, however, I do not consider myself a courageous person at all and rather believe that what drives us to act is a sense of truth, a sense of deeply accepting the situation in which we find ourselves. To accept that as citizens we have responsibilities for our own future, for the people around us and future generations. Once you accept, once you look at the situation, we find ourselves in, it becomes impossible for me not to do everything in our power to try to change things. (Field Note 2)*

*I believe that for everyone, truth is an important concept. We ask this of our children. We ask that truth be a value above everything, because we cannot have anything based on lies, on deception. Societies are based on truth, the coexistence of human beings is based on truth. But instead we are being told a bunch of lies. That of Denialism is a concept that we are all well aware of, we are well aware of Trump's denialism, which we put at a very high rung of denialism; then we have somewhat softer denialism, such as that of Merkel, Obama, and other heads of state who dig the hole to plant saplings. (Field Note 3)*

These three statements highlight the frames that structured the formation of a new insurgent consciousness. From this point of view, at least two quite obvious frames emerge, that of agency, of having to act to do something, of having to change a dangerous situation for the next generations, and that what has been done up to that point is no longer enough, more needs to be done. Another frame is that of injustice, of the fact that governments do not seriously consider the demands of their citizens and indeed “row against” them. If the latter is the master frame, inherited from previous struggles, from the climate movement that began to mobilize between 2006 and 2007, what is emerging is a new master frame, that of agency, which moves through a precise repertoire of conflict, that of nonviolent civil disobedience, more perturbative and challenging.



Figure 4 shows a higher number of semi-conventional and perturbative contentious episodes in the period from December 2021 to mid-March 2022, which coincides with the launch of the UG campaign. The two peaks essentially indicate the formation of a new insurgent consciousness and the subsequent creation of a new coordination that would be the one to convey UG out of XR Italy as will be seen even better in Figure 5.

In Figure 5 we have disaggregated the number of contentious episodes claimed by XR Italy as an autonomous movement, UG as a campaign of XR Italy, and UG as a spin-off movement. It can be seen that at the end of March, there were no more contentious episodes claimed by XR Italy, but the number of episodes by UG as an autonomous movement begin to increase.

In Figure 6 we note the escalation process undertaken by UG, leading the movement to gain its own recognizability through the repertoire of protest used.

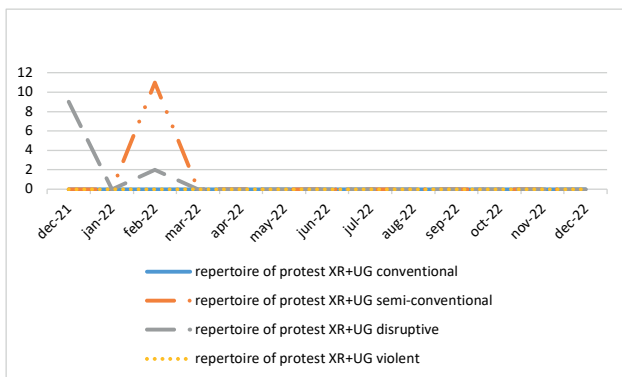
Aggregating the protest repertoire data, as seen in Figure 7, we clearly notice the difference between the two movements from the significantly higher number of perturbative episodes in UG compared to XR Italy and

the near absence of conventional repertoire within UG, which is very present in XR Italy.

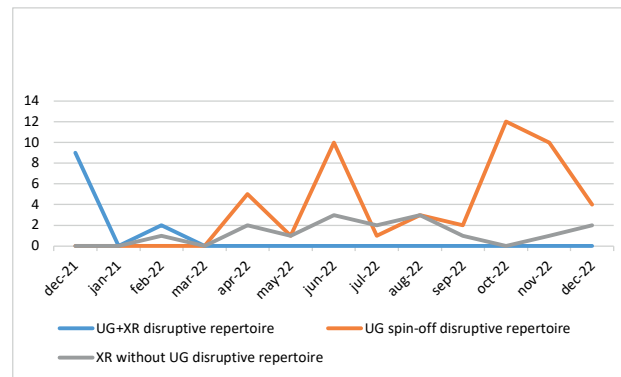
What also changes are the targets of the protest identified by UG and how the protest affects the targets. As shown in Table 3, activists identify new terrain of conflict, seeking visibility by daubing orange/yellow paint on the headquarters of government institutions,

**Table 3.** UG Targets.

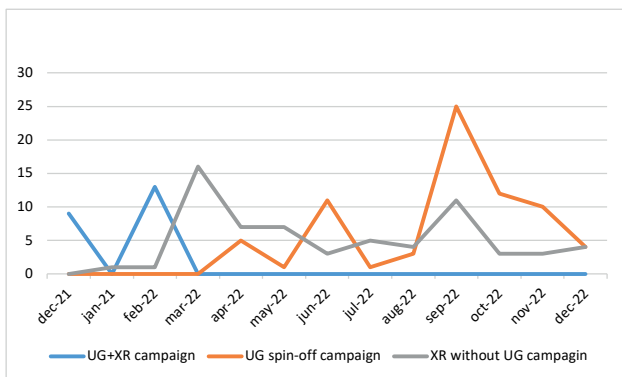
Target	n. episodes
large public squares and places	1
municipal roads	12
provincial road, ring road, GRA, highway	18
museum, art gallery, theater	10
School, university	1
Trade union or party headquarter	4
National government institution	22
office and/or private company headquarters	4
tot.	72



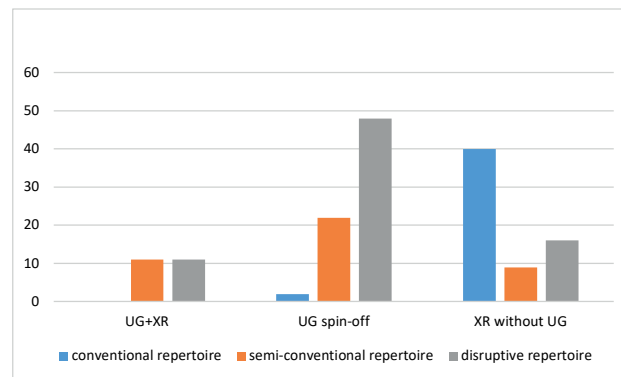
**Figure 4.** “UG campaign” of protest within XR Italy.



**Figure 6.** UG protest escalation by number of disruptive episodes.



**Figure 5.** UG genesis as a spin-off movement.



**Figure 7.** Comparison of each repertoire of protest.

**Table 4.** UG Contentious performance.

Performance	n. episodes
Rally, march	3
Roadblock	30
hunger strike, chaining	23
Building defacement (or similar)	16
tot.	72

important streets and art galleries. It is an unprecedented terrain of conflict.

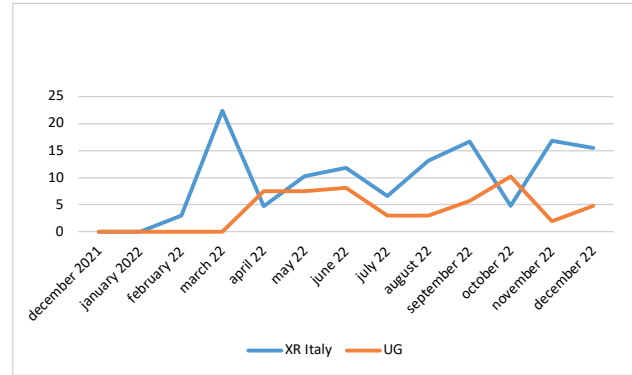
Disaggregating the data collected for each individual conflict performance, we note that road blockade, along with defilement and hunger strike are the favorite repertoires of actions by UG activists.

UG like XR Italy also followed the logic of testimony rather than that of number. Figure 8 compares the data for UG and XR Italy and shows how the two curves often intersect. The average value that emerged from data processing for UG is 6.1 and is equivalent to a minimum of 5 activists to a maximum of 10 activists per protest, slightly lower than that of XR Italy, which ranged from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 15. As is evident from the words of an activist from UG.

*Now, after some also quite strong actions that we have done we are not experiencing repression, though we know that it will come, because it has come for example in England and Germany. However, even when we begin to experience it we are prepared to go all the way. Each of our actions is associated with concepts of sacrifice and willingness to go all the way to the end of all legal consequences, including the possibility of arrest and imprisonment.* (Field Note 4)

In the case of UG we cannot speak of a logic of damage, but certainly the activists used a decidedly more perturbative repertoire than XR, which in some cases created annoyance, controversy, discussion, and a willingness to react, as in the actions of defacement in art galleries or the prolonged blockades in major thoroughfares. Rather than the logic of damage, we can speak of a “dilemmatic” logic, which leads precisely to the opening of a quasi-binary reasoning within public opinion, in which the observer can judge the protest acceptable and therefore support it, or unacceptable and therefore reject it totally.

One fact that clearly differentiates UG and XR Italy is that of the spread of the protest. UG unlike XR Italy has concentrated its forces on Rome. In fact, as seen in Figure 9, almost all the protests took place in the Italian capital. This does not reflect UG’s rootedness in that spe-



**Figure 8.** Average number of activists per XR Italy and UG single protest



**Figure 9.** Major areas involved in the UG contentio.

cific area but a strategic choice, to channel all the forces into a single city, where most Italian institutions reside.

In addition to the radicalization process of the contentious repertoire, another process was activated that led to the emergence of UG as a spin-off movement of XR Italy, a process that is less manifest but equally important. The activists who created UG are not only the bearers of a new insurgent consciousness, they have not only treasured the lessons learned from previous

cycles of mobilization, but they are also those disillusioned by some of the mechanisms underlying XR Italia. This is clear from some of the testimonies.

*I was considering how important it is to integrate diversity. Like going to work with the emarginated, figuring out how you can be more open to integrating more diverse people with each other. With XR, I always saw some difficulty. Even in going and getting people who were kind of on the margins, because initially in XR there were people who thought differently, and instead of integrating them we went and fished for people who were more conformist. So I saw the difficulty in breaking these patterns and trying to bring in people who were a little bit different. (Field Note 5)*

*With XR we used to go to other people's initiatives, they used to come to ours, and that was it. Simply participating in other people's activities didn't make sense, because then we never really understood what we wanted to share and the points on which we wanted to unite with other movements. It was obviously frustrating and that was the moment when I said, I have to take a break from XR because this thing is not working. I think now the advantage that UG has is that it stands on its own, there is a notoriety and a strong identity, recognizable aspects to focus on. (Field Note 6)*

*I'm in UG for several reasons, certainly to fight against climate disruption. In 2019 I was in XR but my participation in XR has been quite up and down because I find it a bit of a cumbersome movement, a bit inconclusive. A couple of months ago I approached UG, where I find very clear ideas, determination, very well-organized activities, and I also did a participation in a couple of actions as a support. (Field Note 7)*

*I also read the strategy document for the next iteration, and it really moved me. How did I experience it? I was busy with so many things, however, I really went wow! Something new is happening and you could see that something new had happened, that there was a quantum leap from XR. Here you really feel like you're a protagonist, you see the things you do being filmed on TV. (Field Note 8)*

Most of UG's activists come from past experiences in XR Italy, some of them disappointing, especially from the point of view of the degree of internal organization and the degree of individual participation within the movement, highlighting the existence of a fracture or weakening between the fringes of the movement, the grassroots and the top, the leadership. Indeed, it was the fringes of XR Italy that gave rise to UG. These critical issues were problematized, reworked and resolved within UG. The latter, in fact, is characterized as a movement that makes the personalization of protest the means through which to recruit new activists and attract media coverage. In other words, UG has succeeded in orient-

ing the kind of participation that distinguishes contemporary, surplus participation – the individual's desire to do something for others and at the same time do something to make sense of his or her own life – into collective action and more or less shared ideals, such as, in this case, safeguarding the planet from the climate crisis (Burnham 2001; Flinders and Buller 2006; Bosi and Zamponi 2019; Marsh and Akram 2015).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In this article we described the genesis of *Ultima Generazione* to which we assigned the label of spin-off movement from the original group called Extinction Rebellion. The UG activists have found new effectiveness through an obvious radicalization of action repertoire showing a strong ability to organize and construct new cultural significations.

The discourse on the cultural meanings of social movements includes two aspects that are often overlooked, although they have attracted the attention of sociologists of participation in recent years. We refer to conflict performances and emotions. Some scholars view collective claims as performances that link actors to the goals of the claims (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). According to Tilly, contentious performances are the ways in which each social movement advances certain claims on specific issues (Tilly 2008). From this point of view, he argues that every social movement presupposes a certain degree of WUNC (Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, Commitment), thus having to work on the public reputation of the movement, its compactness, its size, and the level of activist commitment. The greater the WUNC a movement can bring to bear, the greater the chances of success (Tilly 2006: 53).

Performances are thus strategic tools of social movements; through them, activists connect to prior cultural knowledge derived from previous repertoires of meaning (Alexander 2006: 32). At the same time, they enrich performances with new meanings that will become a cultural background for future movements. Each movement is in fact a system of cultural experimentation with new languages and practices. For example, the musical repertoire of social movements is crucial, as it becomes the soundtrack for confrontational performances, often combining different generations of activists (Eyerman and Jamison 1998). Thus, movements are not only fluid organizational formulas, but also forms of public action in which activists, participating in a performance, play roles and parts as in a play. By manifesting social discomfort, they contribute to cultural transformation and

the elaboration of new systems of meaning that they aim to disseminate in the society in which they operate.

Everything within the activists' cultural styles is part of this project of constructing new semantics. Life-styles, rituals, arts, bodies, clothing, music and dance become a cultural component of performances, conditioning the expressive and emotional dimensions of movements. UG activists, disillusioned by past experiences have therefore fielded new forms of experimentation through new performances and more radical and perturbative action repertoires, gaining greater media visibility, proposing highly divisive actions that have animated public debate and mobilized emotions.

The issue of emotions is very important. They are central to all political processes, influenced by expectations, rules, individual personalities and usually conditioned by traditions, cultural patterns and collective learning processes (Goodwin *et al.* 2001). Love, hatred, anger, trust, and respect are emotions embodied in political action and can be short-lived, like fear or a panic attack, or long-lived, conditioning the entire course of action, as in the case of anger and indignation, two key feelings in conflict performances. Of course, emotions embody every activist action, but that does not mean they determine them. Conflict practices are not the outcome of emotions, but of specific worldviews. The emotional dimension is very important in the ascendant phase of a movement and in the phase of recruiting new activists. Anxiety, anger, hatred, but also hope, are all pre-political emotions that motivate political action after being politicized. Anger and hatred of an injustice, when charged with political meaning, become moral indignation, which is the predominant feeling in any confrontational political action (Gamson 1991; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Jasper 1997).

Emotions also come into play in the growth phase of a social movement in which enthusiasm and joy prevail, as well as in the waning phase in which disappointment and frustration over perceived failure become the emotions that all activists must face. Indeed, the decline of a movement brings out envy, jealousy, distrust, all feelings that generate fragmentation. It is still too early to determine whether the new strategic course of the climate movement in Italy will be successful. For the time being, we have limited ourselves to describing its genesis with particular regard to the performative capacity and confrontational practices expressed by *Ultima Generazione*.

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