



Introduction

MY PATH INTO THE DUST

May 2009, early one afternoon. Outside, a blue sky, a fresh breeze from the sea, and warm light embracing everything. I am in Bari in Southern Italy, my home town.

I am sitting at a kitchen table, having a conversation. The woman I am talking to is Angela, diagnosed four years earlier with malignant mesothelioma (MM), the cancer provoked by the inhalation of the carcinogenic fibres of asbestos minerals. She developed MM following environmental exposure to asbestos while living near an asbestos-cement factory in Bari.

As one lung was removed in the attempt to treat her cancer surgically, Angela can only breathe with an oxygen tank. Her face is swollen owing to the side effects of chemotherapy. Several pauses interrupt our conversation. Physical pain makes speaking difficult for her. More than once, I tell her that we can stop whenever she wants. She replies that it is fine. She says that she wants to tell her story and that she just needs time and patience, as she can only speak slowly....

Angela died a few months later, in October 2009, aged 55.

This book is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Osasco (São Paulo, Brazil), where I researched local experiences of asbestos-related (AR) disasters and health-based grassroots activism. However, the journey that led me in Osasco in 2014 began in Italy, and more precisely in my home town, Bari, in 2009. Angela was the first person with MM that I ever talked to.

Between then and my fieldwork in Brazil, I conducted research with people with MM, their relatives, exposed men and women with a di-

agnosis of other asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) affecting their respiratory system and thus living with the risk of developing MM, in Bari and two other Italian locations: Casale Monferrato, in Piedmont, and Bologna, where I now live.

Indignation and passion are the two feelings that triggered and continue to motivate my decision to explore from an anthropological perspective the processes of AR disasters, and how they are contested by communities living and working in contaminated sites. The first time I felt indignation in relation to AR disasters and their impact on public health was in 2009. Watching a journalistic inquiry into the scale of asbestos contamination in Italy, I perceived the silence regarding a large, contaminated and, by that time, highly polluting site – the former ‘Fibronit site’ in Bari – as an unjust lack of recognition of an important issue affecting the lives of a number of my fellow citizens, who, in the programme’s narration, simply did not exist. As a citizen of Bari, I knew about the presence of an abandoned factory where asbestos had been processed for decades, and which had provoked diseases and deaths among workers and residents living nearby. However, my knowledge was vague and my understanding of the health dangers of asbestos was very low. It is only through my intellectual and ethical engagement in the anthropological study of AR disasters that I have developed the awareness of my own condition of being an environmentally exposed citizen who had grown up in a neighbourhood bordering the so-called ‘red zone’ of the former ‘Fibronit site’ (Musti et al. 2009).

Watching the journalistic inquiry, I felt a sudden need to know more about an issue that I was starting to consider as something personal, even though at that time I had no direct involvement in the suffering related to asbestos exposure. Only later would I painfully experience the sorrow of losing a relative to MM provoked by domestic exposure to asbestos.

The indignation I felt then combined with the passion that the classes I was taking as a graduate anthropology student at the University of Bologna were nurturing in me in relation to medical anthropology and the anthropological consideration of the body in socio-cultural, political and economic processes. Therefore, thanks to the positive response I received from the Associazione Familiari e Vittime Amianto (AFeVA) [Asbestos Victims and Relatives Association], a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in Bari by sufferers from ARDs, I started walking my own personal ‘path into the dust’ – a journey that, after Bari, led me to Casale Monferrato, a town of 35,000 inhabitants in the Piedmont region.

In Casale Monferrato the largest asbestos-cement (AC) plant owned by the Eternit firm in Italy had been in operation for eighty years, from 1907 to 1986 (Altopiedi 2011). Starting from the early 1980s, the increasing number of people in Casale Monferrato diagnosed with, and dying from, ARDs triggered a workers' and civil mobilization that led to the promulgation in 1987 of the first law prohibiting asbestos-containing products (ACPs) in Italy (Mossano 2010). Over the years, the anti-asbestos movement in Casale Monferrato has reached other important achievements with an impact at local, national and international level. Among their achievements, there is the organization of the first trial – the so-called 'Eternit trial' – of an AC corporation accused of environmental disaster manslaughter. In 2009, more than 2,800 injured parties, including individuals, NGOs and public institutions (Rossi 2012: 19), brought the Eternit corporation to trial. Although in the end the Italian Supreme Court did not uphold the decision of the lower courts, the 'Eternit trial' became a strategy replicated by others in countries affected by the health effects of the toxic market of asbestos, such as Brazil (see Altopiedi 2011; Rossi 2012; Altopiedi and Panelli 2012; Allen and Kazan-Allen 2012).¹

The significance of the narratives presented and discussed in this book can only be grasped if we situate them within the historical processes and the socio-economic dynamics at play in the global context in which we all act our roles. Understanding the connections between local practices and transnational processes presented a theoretical and methodological challenge that I navigated by following the trajectories connecting Italy and Brazil – and, in particular, Casale Monferrato and Osasco. The connections linking the AR grassroots activism and disaster processes in Casale Monferrato and Osasco led me to choose the latter, a city in the state of São Paulo, as the third context of a 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995), which began in Italy in 2009. The first connection concerns the history of the Brazilian city and the Italian migratory flow towards Latin America in the nineteenth century. According to the official historiography, the founder of Osasco was Antonio Agù, who had emigrated to Brazil from Osasco in Piedmont (hence the name of the Brazilian municipality) at the end of the nineteenth century. The Italian emigrant, who left from a rural village situated not far from Casale Monferrato, takes on the traits of a legendary character in the historiographical documents emphasizing his promotion of Osasco's capitalistic and urban development (see Collino de Oliveira and Marquetti Rocha Negrelli 1992; Sanazar 2000; Marquetti Rocha Negrelli and Collino de Oliveira 2003). The second connection concerns the global economics of asbestos. Casale Monferrato (Italy)

and Osasco (Brazil) had the largest AC Eternit plants in Europe and Latin America respectively. In Osasco the plant owned by the Eternit do Brasil Cimento e Amianto S.A. began production in 1941 and closed in 1993 (Giannasi 2012). Both the plants were eventually demolished, the one in Osasco in 1995 and the one in Casale Monferrato in 2007. In both urban contexts, the impact of the asbestos industry on the health of workers and residents living nearby has been profound (see Magnani et al. 1987; Algranti et al. 2001). Moreover, during the socio-economic crisis affecting post-Second World War Europe, workers who were originally employed at the Eternit plant in Casale Monferrato emigrated to Brazil to work at recently opened AC plants, where a specialized workforce was needed and the chance to earn a decent salary was guaranteed. During my fieldwork, I interviewed a couple of people who had emigrated from Casale Monferrato to Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s, together with their families. A similar phenomenon is illustrative of the management of the workforce and plants based on economic strategies transnationally planned by the multinational firm, thus confirming the intertwined nature of the processes of both the disasters and the grassroots activism in the two countries. With a high number of citizens employed at the local Eternit plants, it is not by chance that in both Casale Monferrato and Osasco exposed workers and citizens initiated a grassroots movement and mobilized anti-asbestos efforts. The two NGOs with whom I conducted research in Casale Monferrato and Osasco are the Associazione Familiari e Vittime Amianto – AFeVA [Asbestos Victims and Relatives Association], and the Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto – ABREA [Brazilian Association of Persons Exposed to Asbestos] respectively. The two NGOs are engaged in a constant dialogue, and have supported each other since the early 2000s.

In 2011, in Casale Monferrato on the occasion of an international conference organized through the ‘Eternit trial’, I made my first contact with the Brazilian anti-asbestos activists who would later introduce me to the field in Osasco. Three years later, on the 19 November 2014, I was in Rome when the Supreme Court pronounced the final verdict at the end of the ‘Eternit trial’. I was there with activists I knew from Italy and Brazil, together with other anti-asbestos activists, public health officers, administrators, journalists and lawyers from Japan, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Spain, Argentina and the United States. Social actors from various contexts had followed the Italian lawsuit, thanks to the actions promoted by anti-asbestos NGOs, journalists, writers, video-makers and photographers, whose writings and visual documents had been circulating through social networks,

blogs, mailing lists and online magazines, thus making the ‘Eternit trial’ resonate far beyond the local context.

Dr Luciano Lima Leivas, at that time prosecutor at the Brazilian Ministério Público do Trabalho – MPT [Public Ministry of Labour], together with a delegation of Brazilian anti-asbestos activists in Rome, attended the verdict. Soon afterwards, I talked to Dr Lima Leivas, who commented on the verdict with these words:

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 or have been exposed, especially among workers. Although the physical person representing the corporation’s leadership responsible for asbestos use in Italy has been acquitted tonight, asbestos was not acquitted. The trial has clearly shown that thousands of people in Italy have died because of asbestos, and the leadership was only acquitted according to an exclusively technical and legal expedient. This is a crucial aspect to be considered and clarified in Brazil: the absolution of Stephan Schmidheiny [an Eternit manager in Casale Monferrato] does not mean the absolution of asbestos.

Asbestos had not been absolved, and such an end to the lawsuit profoundly and painfully marked Italian and international grassroots activism for the global prohibition of such carcinogenic minerals.

I attended the Supreme Court’s pronouncement as, at one and the same time, a researcher, a supporter of the anti-asbestos movement, a friend of some of the activists I had met through my research, and an Italian citizen. Surrounded by activists and victims from a number of countries, I could almost physically feel the strength of the global dimension of the toxic market of asbestos and of the grassroots movement organized by those affected by its impact on health. We, the witnesses and the survivors, took the judicial failure to acknowledge an AR disaster in Casale Monferrato as a further act of violence and injustice perpetrated against all of us.

AR health disasters are paradigmatic of the political and economic dynamics in action in our globalized, interconnected world characterized by increasing inequality and double standard management of risk and health hazards (Castleman 1983, 2016). In a similar global context, the above-mentioned connections represented the trajectories that I decided to follow on my personal ‘path into the dust’ and that made me choose Osasco in Brazil as the third context of my research. In this book, I reflect on the practices by which social actors locally experience, conceive, oppose and divert the transnational trajectories producing global health disasters. In particular, I focus on how these trajectories are diverted and resisted. My main research objective has

been to explore a case of health-based activism from an anthropological perspective centred on the bodily experience of disasters and activism.

What motivates a sufferer to become an activist? Which processes and contingencies can favour a person's sociopolitical engagement in a grassroots movement? How does one perform activism in daily life, and what are the meanings attributed to it? To what extent can the practices undertaken by sufferers facing the impact of asbestos contamination on their lives change the sociopolitical and moral context in which they act and live? While I consider AR disasters to be processes occurring beyond national borders, time and geographical distances, I would like to draw attention to the connections linking the practices of anti-asbestos activism occurring in multiple contexts by defining them as part of a transnational movement aimed at the global prohibition of asbestos and at social justice.² By following the traces of my personal 'path into the dust' across Italy and into Brazil, this book shows how a global dimension does not characterize just the processes of AR disasters, but also the mobilization of those suffering from those very same processes.

Osasco, Brazil

Osasco is a city of 700,000 inhabitants, bordering the western area of the megalopolis of São Paulo. Osasco was the industrial neighbourhood of São Paulo until 1962, when it became a separate municipality in a referendum promoted by '*os autonomistas*', a political movement advocating 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 [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics], Osasco is the ninth richest district in Brazil.³ Up until the 1990s, Osasco's economics had been based on the industrial sector; the glorious past of industrial development can still be perceived in the city. Examples include the importance of the metallurgic union in the local socio-political context, and personalities such as Antonio Agù celebrated by local historiography, as well as the evidence present in the number of bodies of men and women who have contracted occupational diseases or suffered accidents while working in the numerous factories operating in the city. During my fieldwork this last aspect was particularly visible to me, as the majority of the study participants were involved in or were in contact with NGOs, 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. Thanks to a massive flow of immigration, the population had increased from 15,000 to 41,000 by the end of the 1940s (ACEO 2003/2006). In the same period, large plants including the Eternit do Brasil Cimento e Amianto S.A. and the railway industry Cobrasma were set up there, as well as the Indústria Eléctrica Brown Boveri S.A. and the Indústria de Artefatos de Ferro Cimaf, producing electrical and iron products respectively (*ibid.*). These plants were located where industrial development had begun a couple of decades earlier with the setting-up of factories dedicated to various sectors of industrial production (e.g. ceramic, textile, automotive and chemical). Furthermore, by the end of the 1950s, when the Brazilian government was encouraging international firms to establish factories in the country, several multinational corporations including Osram and Ford had moved to Osasco (*ibid.*).

Considering the crucial role of industrial development in Osasco's growth as a municipality, it is not surprising that Osasco is still associated with the words *cidade* (city) and *trabalho* (work) in its official emblem, graphically represented by two cogs and two hammers.

As the industrial sector grew, Osasco became an attractive destination for families looking for better life conditions. It provided an escape from poverty and starvation in the rural and marginal areas of São Paulo State and in the economically depressed regions of Europe and Japan, especially after the Second World War. Together with the influx of foreign capital, people from a variety of cultural and geographical backgrounds arrived in Osasco, where they contributed to a cultural *mistura* (mixture) that still pervades every aspect of Brazilian society. Along with the fervent movement of money and people, ideas, values and religious beliefs were also circulating, and these deeply influenced the city's cultural, political and moral context. In particular, the socio-political relevance of discourses and practices of the trade unions and militant groups active in Osasco during the period of military dictatorship (1964–84) was an important founding background for Brazilian anti-asbestos activism, which started in Osasco in the mid-1990s.

Inspired by the principles and methods of Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire 1967, 1970, 1980, 2005), Liberation Theology (LT) (Gutiérrez 1972, 2007; Rowland 2007) and the political thought behind the European working-class struggles of the 1960s (Giannotti 2007), militants in Osasco organized actions that represented exceptional cases of overt resistance to the military regime at the time (Bauer 2010). Militants found legitimation in Freire's pedagogy and LT, which promoted the active role of oppressed groups in the world in the develop-

ment of critical thinking to emancipate themselves from processes of subordination and exploitation. In a similar cultural context, on 17 July 1968, and organized by the metallurgic union (Antunes and Ridenti 2007), the workers in the city's largest factories mobilized after months of 'hard work of social turmoil and hectic political propaganda to denounce bad working conditions, the lowering of wages and the high cost of living' (Bauer 2010). Together with the student movement and the most radical and left-wing currents of a Catholic political movement, *guerrilha* actions were organized in Osasco against the dictatorial regime. These actions were in clear opposition to the populist strategies promoted by the State's union organization (*ibid.*), whose representatives were considered *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 lay in the central role of workers in the resistance at a political, economic and social level. Examples include the management of the political struggle, occupation of factories, taking control of production processes (Bauer 2010) and assiduous campaigns of *conscientização* (the elaboration of critical thinking) (Freire 1980) organized among the population, especially the poor, marginalized and exploited. The military regime's repression was harsh, and included the murder, kidnapping, arbitrary detention or torture of any workers or students who had dared to express dissent to the dictatorship (Bauer 2010).

The practices and strategies of anti-asbestos activism discussed in this book are rooted in Osasco's historical, socio-cultural, political and economic processes and dynamics. In fact, it is from the above-mentioned scenario of the hectic movement of bodies, capital, ideas and struggles that the practices and actions of the Brazilian anti-asbestos activism emerged in the mid-1990s. By that time, a group of former workers who had found themselves contaminated with ARD symptoms had founded ABREA and begun to mobilize against the asbestos companies who had never alerted the workers or the local citizens to the dangers of asbestos. The majority of my interlocutors in the field were ABREA members and supporters.

ABREA activists operate in a local and national context that is characterized by increasing and profound inequalities. These socio-economic inequalities seem to not only be self-reproducing but also functional for a model of accelerated economic growth, with no concern for the devastation it causes in terms of environmental and social disasters. These inequalities mould the practices and processes through

which the vulnerable and marginalized groups experience, counteract, claim and negotiate their citizenship. In this regard, Brazilian anti-asbestos activism has opened paths of active and critical citizenship claiming social rights and recognition for invisible disasters – paths that I followed in the company of the anti-asbestos activists I encountered during my fieldwork.

Disasters

According to the most recent registered data, 107,000 women and men die every year because of ARDs (Prüss Ustün et al. 2011); however, an increase is expected in the coming years as 125 million people are still exposed to asbestos in workplaces (WHO 2018). On the basis of similar evidence and the knowledge acquired throughout my decennial research into asbestos-contaminated sites, I refer to the impact of the toxic market of asbestos on local communities of exposed workers and residents in terms of global public health disasters. By using the plural ‘disasters’, I want to highlight the multiplicity of the impact of asbestos pollution (on the environment, public health and society at large), and the complexity of transnationally intertwined dynamics lived and conceived of through a variety of practices and discourses rooted in the specificity of each sociocultural context where affected individual and collective social actors play their role in various parts of the world.

The decision to talk about the health impact of the asbestos market in terms of disasters stems from anthropological literature on disasters and the trajectory of my personal ‘path into the dust’. It was during my fieldwork in Casale Monferrato, Italy, that I began to use the term ‘disaster’ to define the asbestos-contaminated sites of my fieldwork. In Casale Monferrato, the narratives of my interlocutors pivoted around the disaster as a category to make sense of the effects of exposure to asbestos on their community. I was immersed in an environment where collective and individual suffering were being framed and conceived of in terms of a disaster by the local residents, who had appropriated the narratives emerging from the first trial against a corporation profiting from asbestos and accused of environmental disaster manslaughter, and which the local anti-asbestos NGO was frantically disseminating through awareness campaigns.

From an anthropological perspective, a disaster is a process in which multiple aspects (e.g. cultural, political, economic and social) are at play

(Das 1995; Fortun 2001; Da Silva Camargo 2001, 2010; Ligi 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Benadusi, Brambilla and Riccio 2011). The Italian anthropologist Gianluca Ligi, who researched the impact of the Chernobyl disaster on the Sami populations (2009), referred to the definition of disaster proposed by one of the most influential voices in the anthropological debate about disasters, Oliver-Smith. From this perspective, a disaster 'can be described as a combination of potentially disruptive agents deriving from a technological or natural environment which has an impact on a human community held in a condition of vulnerability that is socially or technologically produced' (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002; also cited in Ligi 2011a: 126). Accordingly, the catastrophic event, such as the visible effects of an earthquake, flood or epidemic, represents 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. I found the above-mentioned definition of disaster to be theoretically and ethically appropriate in analysing the experiences of disaster and the practices of activism in the light of a similar anthropological understanding.

Asbestos-related health and social disasters consist of silent and slow processes that escape recognition in most countries where they continue to occur (Pasetto et al. 2014; Petrillo 2015), and the vulnerability characterizing asbestos-contaminated communities resides in what the anthropologist Linda Waldman calls the 'elusiveness of asbestos' (Waldman 2011: 6), while Braun 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 asbestos exporters in the world), Braun and Kisting reflect on the invisibility of the epidemic revealed in the onset of ARDs and deaths among workers and residents of an asbestos mining village (Braun 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 in Avellino (in the region of Campania, southern Italy), and reflected on the 'silence' surrounding AR disaster processes (Petrillo 2015).

In my analysis, I refer to the impact of the asbestos market on the exposed communities and the environment in terms of 'invisible disasters' (Mazzeo 2017a). The invisibility of AR disasters resides in a variety of processes and elements. Firstly, it is related to the microscopic dimension of asbestos fibres and their invisible nestling in a person's lungs for decades. Moreover, the invisibility of AR disasters resides in the workers' lack of means to recognize a dusty environment as a

potential source of fatal danger. Similar ignorance was utilized in specific strategies designed by asbestos lobbies to minimize and deny the health hazards related to asbestos exposure. These efforts have contributed to delays in the perception of AR disasters in numerous and widespread contexts, and extended by decades the suffering of exposed communities hidden by a veil of invisibility. To the above-mentioned dynamics producing the invisibility of AR disasters, I would add the uncertainties about the cause–effect relationship between asbestos exposure and the onset of ARDs, as is supported by certain biomedical discourses, and the lack of epidemiological evidence, especially in those countries where asbestos is still legal (Pasetto et al. 2014; Marsili et al. 2016; Algranti et al. 2019).

Moreover, I situate the invisibility characterizing AR disasters within the processes through which risk categories and scientific knowledge about the effects of asbestos exposure on health are elaborated and communicated. These categories and forms of knowledge are neither objective nor neutral descriptions of the reality (Lupton 1999), but rather represent the results of negotiation processes in which various social actors and forces are involved (cf. Ciccozzi 2013).

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, Thompson and Verweij 2003). Throughout the twentieth century, the concept of risk assumed a negative connotation and came 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: 135–36).

Therefore, in this book, particularly influenced by the contributions of scholars who operate within a global ‘risk and anxiety society’ (Beck 1992) where ‘risk’ seems to coincide exclusively with ‘danger’, the term ‘risk’ assumes connotations that are mainly negative.

Body

I will discuss anti-asbestos activism from a perspective focused on the centrality of the body in the elaboration of new meanings and practices (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Csordas 1990; Lock 1993; Quaranta 2012a). This approach requires the consideration of the dynamics that define negotiations and practices by which biomedical knowledge and epidemiological data are elaborated (Good 1994; Kleinman 1980, 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1997; Krieger 2003), and suffering is experienced (Scarry 1985; Kleinman and Kleinman 1991; Kleinman 1997, 1999, 2006, 2009; Quaranta 1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Pizza 2007; Cappelletto 2009). I will take 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.

As stated by Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, the heart of the social-anthropological approach to extreme events is that disaster is a phenomenon that occurs at the point of connection between society, technology and the environment, and can be interpreted as an extremely exceptional effect caused by the in-depth interaction of these three elements (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002). However, 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 suddenly emerges in people's lives – as a fracture, as a singularity in the fabric of the daily experience of those involved – people who, one by one, face to face, he/she meets in the field. (Ligi 2011b: 63–64)

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

Anti-asbestos activists from Osasco were living in a context of disaster in which the catastrophic event became manifest in the sick, decaying and dying bodies of those exposed to asbestos.

In the experience of both AR disasters and activism, the body then assumes a crucial role and, at the same time, represents an effective lens through which to interpret the sociocultural and political phenomena considered as sets of bodily practices (Csordas 1990). Starting from this theoretical premise, and adopting a phenomenological approach to the analysis of the dynamics characterizing the global context of the toxic market of asbestos and its effects on public health, I will focus on the

experiences of illness, risk and grief related to environmental and occupational exposure to asbestos. I consider these experiences as ones of disasters lived and occurring primarily through the contaminated, suffering and decaying body of the exposed person, which becomes the site of a catastrophic event (Ligi 2011a) and represents the crucial fragment of a scattered disaster.

Experiences of illness (especially those related to a disabling or fatal disease such as MM) impose an awareness that the body can no longer be taken for granted; the body 'is no longer the subject of an unconscious assumption, but becomes the object of a conscious thought' (Good 1999: 191). The suffering body is conscious and, by unveiling hidden wounds, urges action. The afflicted body then becomes a tool of resistance and triggers changes in the sociopolitical context. I draw attention to Frankenberg's words about the body as 'fertile soil' for new practices and meanings:

The body is not merely ... a symbolic field to mirror or reproduce dominant values and concepts; 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, and cited 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. In this regard, by offering their body to be scrutinized, asbestos-contaminated men and women enter the processes by which biomedical knowledge and epidemiological evidence are elaborated.

By sharing disaster experiences, anti-asbestos activists mobilize and partake in a grassroots movement that could be included among the 'embodied health social movements' (Brown et al. 2004; Brown and Zavestosky 2004). In the name of social justice and by sharing a 'bio-social condition' (Rabinow 1992; Petryna 2002; Fassin and Rechtman 2009), they undertake sociopolitical actions, and mobilize to see their suffering recognized (Fraser 1968; Hobson 2003). In so doing, they enter the processes through which citizenship and rights to health are negotiated, achieved and established (Hofrichter 1993, 2003a; Petryna 2002; Rose 2007; Nguyen et al. 2007). In similar practices of grassroots activism, emotions and affects play a crucial role in determining one's decision to become sociopolitically engaged and persist in such activism (cf. Jasper 1998; Polletta 1998a, 1998b; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2000, 2001; Klawiter 2004, 2008; Gould 2009).

In my fieldwork, in the attempt to grasp the affective dimension of the practices of activism, I focused on affect as potential when I reflected on the potentialities of the (suffering) body and its capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze 1988). I approached the Spinozian concept of affect and the philosophy of Deleuze through the contributions offered by Massumi (2002), Gregg and Seigworth (2010), Biehl and Locke (2010), Athanasiu, Hantzaroula and Yannakopoulos (2008), Negri and Hardt (1999), and Shouse (2005). ‘Movements of feelings’ (Massumi 2002) and the ‘passage of intensities from body to body’ (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 3) characterized the daily experiences of activism and circulated among anti-asbestos activists, as well as between them and me. These movements influenced my fieldwork experience. I did not ignore them, adopting a phenomenological approach to them in both data collection and analysis, as I will later discuss.

To sum up, the practices of anti-asbestos activism pivot around the centrality of the body suffering, feeling and acting in a local context linked to a global world crossed by unpredictable movements of people, capital, struggles, passions and disasters. In this context, those affected by AR disasters play a crucial role as activists, and use their body, or evoke the defeated body of their relatives, friends and comrades who have died from ARDs, as a tool (Mauss 1973) of political action to tear the veil of invisibility hiding their suffering.

Memory, Care and Activism

Memory played 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 study participants during our encounters. In their bodily struggle their memories became militant, as recalling the past represented an act of resistance to the injustices that the disaster survivors continued to suffer in the present (Mazzeo 2017b). The activists’ sociopolitical engagement could not be understood without reference to the memory of past experiences that they or their loved ones who had died had lived through.

Remembered and ‘remembering bodies’ (Fassin 2007) represented the main tools of political action in the areas of AR disasters where I did fieldwork, both in Italy (my earlier work) and Brazil (this book). Memory appeared to be fundamental in legitimizing the disaster survivors’ struggle in the name of justice and recognition for their suffering. On a private level, the social actors felt the ‘urgency of doing

something' for those who had already died from ARDs, as a study participant once told me. 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 disaster (Halbwachs 1987; Assmann 2002). On a sociopolitical level, past experiences of mobilization in the local context seemed to empower and legitimize the activism in the present. It was not by chance that the anti-asbestos activism I investigated in Osasco (Brazil) emerged from a socio-political and cultural context significantly marked by the struggles undertaken by workers and citizens' organizations, such as unions and civil committees, in the previous decades. In Osasco, AR sufferers found favourable conditions to experience their suffering socially and form a community. The new knowledge and meanings they were elaborating were revealed to be the results of an ongoing dialogue between their imagined future, charged with aspirations for change, and the past, representing the sediment for their struggles in the present (Appadurai 2013).

Our memories compose the indefinite puzzle of our present and forge our future. We are living history, and our past breathes through our body and beats under our skin. Anti-asbestos activism emerges as a grassroots movement triggered by social and bodily experiences of suffering, and from the attempts to care for it. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue, the embodiment of the structures of power that influence our actions leaves room for margins of indeterminacy. 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 (*ibid.*: 18). The interstices left free by such indeterminacy are the places where the practices of activism and care relate to the creative power that accompanies the crisis provoked by a suffering experience. Embracing the crisis provoked by the catastrophe in their lives, anti-asbestos activists invent a new role for themselves in the power relations ruling the social fields where their actions take place. Engagement with activism gives them the space to perform their victimhood 'as agents ... who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field' (*ibid.*: 107).

In line with Bourdieu, I consider the crises triggered by the disaster experiences as events that can make individuals call into question their preconceived knowledge and promote change (Bourdieu 1991: 131; and cited in Grenfell and Lebaron 2014: 55). Anti-asbestos activism's strength resides in the appropriation of such potential critique by

providing the tools and words 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).

The experiences of AR disasters 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, Das and Lock 1997: ix). At the same time, experiences such as health threats and diseases (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. Simultaneously, 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 he/she acts, lives and dies (Gordon 1991).

Suffering is as private as it is social. The traces of asbestos contamination in the bodies of exposed women and men, and their experiences of suffering, which destroy much of their world, do not only represent a private tragedy caused by an unlucky fate. Rather their bodies reflect violence and injustices through their embodiment of socio-cultural, political and economic processes (Csordas 1990; Quaranta 2006b, 2012b). The usurped body preserves the proof of ‘corporate crimes’ (Altopiedi 2011). In anti-asbestos activism, the body then becomes the site where the evidence of disaster is sought and acknowledged (Fassin 2011: 284), the ‘human rights arena in which many forces struggle for control’ (Mack 2011: xviii).

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) and Fassin (2007). According to the definition proposed by Farmer, 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. (Farmer 2005: 40)

Fassin, 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. In various ways, it combines economic inequality, social injustice, racial discrimination and diverse forms of denial of human and citizens’ rights. It is more difficult to apprehend than political vio-

lence ... 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]. (Fassin 2011: 293–94)

I focus on the ‘unexpected consequences on the social order’ that occur when the veil of invisibility hiding AR disasters is torn by the sufferers who engage with activism.

We live in a ‘world of flows’ (Appadurai 1996) which 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 a utopia (Scheper-Hughes 1995). When the trajectories intersect, 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 interpreted the movement for the global prohibition of asbestos by gathering multiple and various examples of anti-asbestos activism(s) performed locally. They are creative, militant responses emerging from the intersection of those trajectories, determining the conditions not just for inequalities, suffering and misunderstanding, but also for the empowerment of the struggles of distinct social actors mobilizing together, despite the differences between them (Tsing 2005).

The investigated anti-asbestos activism can be situated in the broader scene of social movements in contemporary Latin America (Negri and Cocco 2006; Holston 2008), transnational grassroots activism (Della Porta et al. 2006), and contemporary social movements at large (Koensler and Rossi 2012).

Methods

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

In the ethnographic encounters I had in Osasco, São Paulo, Brazil, being there both physically and with my background, while approaching and sharing affects with my interlocutors, I had the opportunity to grasp the nuances of non-institutionalized political fields as they were experienced and performed in daily life by the activists. The majority of the study participants were activists, despite being sick, elderly

men. They embodied something subversive that I read as a resistance to the dominating moral values concerning ageing, the body and life in contemporary Brazil. I reflected on, and then analysed, this embodied resistance enacted through gestures and postures that I considered to be bodily signs of struggle since, 'as their voices were silenced, it was their bodies that spoke' (Fassin 2011: 288).

The methodological choices I made were based on my aim of deepening my knowledge of precisely the processes of disaster and activism that my interlocutors embodied and carried forward.

The peculiarity of ethnographic research resides in the 'thickness' (Geertz 1973) characterizing the data produced by the encounter between the researcher and her collaborators in the field. My interlocutors were mostly activists in the anti-asbestos movement in Osasco and other Brazilian cities. The majority of them were former workers (employees and miners who had been exposed to asbestos) and family members (especially widows and children of workers who had died of ARDs). To broaden my understanding of AR suffering and activism and to get distinct perspectives on them as processes of disaster and health-based grassroots mobilization, I conducted interviews with professionals in the field of public health (biomedical doctors, epidemiologists and lung specialists), lawyers, trade unionists and members of NGOs and associations of workers who had been exposed to other toxic substances, such as mercury.

Aiming to collocate the activism occurring in Osasco within the local and national sociopolitical context, I visited and participated with ABREA members at events and in awareness campaigns in various Brazilian settings impacted by the toxic market of asbestos. My field trips took place in the states of São Paulo (São Caetano, Santo André and São Paulo), Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro), Bahia (Salvador, Poçoões and Bom Jesus da Serra), Santa Catarina (Florianópolis), Goiás (Goiânia) and Paraná (Londrina). However, the main site of my fieldwork was Osasco, and the majority of the participants in my study were ABREA members living in Osasco, where I conducted twenty-six in-depth interviews with nineteen men and seven women involved in AR disasters and activism.

This book is grounded in ten months of ethnographic fieldwork, conducted in two phases. During the first phase (August 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 willingness of ABREA members to take part in the project. These first two months spent in Brazil allowed me to start my own slow, and sometimes emotionally difficult, process of becoming more familiar with a context I was en-

countering for the first time. It was challenging not to become lost in São Paulo and Osasco, with their 13 million inhabitants, a language spoken with so many local accents, and a sense of time and space that was so different from what I was accustomed to while living in Europe.

The second phase of the fieldwork (February to October 2015) was crucial for the research project's development. It was during this phase that the encounters emerged from which the majority of the narratives presented in this book took place. I conducted participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews (recorded after receiving formal consent) and focus groups. Data collection began with participant observation and informal conversations with ABREA activists. The definition of participant observation proposed by Pigg (2013: 132–33) gives an accurate description of 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 an openness to being taken off course. The capacity to be surprised is the motor that moves ethnography forward into a potential usefulness in the debating 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 embodied in 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 organizing 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 communication 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, as I did not want to rely on a third person who would inevitably have interfered during the encounters with study participants whose life stories and narratives

I wanted to understand directly, with all their nuances. I developed the ability to conduct and transcribe formal interviews and have informal conversations in Portuguese during my daily life and study in Brazil. The delicate issue of language, writing and translation has been widely investigated and discussed in the literature (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986). I found that being able to communicate in Portuguese favoured my research experience and facilitated my theoretical and emotional understanding of the context.

Moreover, I thought that we – my interlocutors and I – all needed some time in the beginning to get used to each other. 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 in 2015), my professional life (almost exclusively characterized by intellectual activities) and my own environmental exposure to asbestos as inexorable dimensions of my being the principal research instrument. On the contrary, the majority of my collaborators were former workers, male⁴ (age range 65–85), with at least one ARD diagnosis, embodying a strong masculine culture, with knowledge acquired by manual professional experience. I believed it was both 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, rather than a clash. From a methodological point of view, spending several months participating in ABREA activities before scheduling interviews and entering the intimate space of activists’ daily lives turned out to be an effective strategy to favour mutual knowledge and to establish the empathic communication that is essential for anthropological research (cf. Wikan 1992; Piasere 2002). Therefore, in addition to scheduled meetings and interviews, the narratives in this book emerged from informal conversations during lunches, nightly travels by bus across Brazil, walks through Osasco, conferences, political events and ABREA monthly meetings.

In Osasco, I tried not to plan more than one scheduled 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 AM at my interlocutor’s home. During this fieldwork, I lived in São Paulo, in a neighbourhood bordering Osasco. I usually left my home soon after 8 AM, travelling by public transport (bus and train), which took at least one hour to arrive at Osasco’s train station. From there I reached

my interlocutor's home on foot or by bus. Most study participants lived in neighbourhoods close to the area where the Eternit plant had been situated before being demolished, so most homes were reachable on foot from the train station. However, some interviews took place in the most peripheral of Osasco's neighbourhoods, which were also the poorest ones, and then I needed to take a bus. On average, the interviews lasted two hours, but they were usually followed by an invitation to lunch, which I always accepted (except once). For this reason, the whole meeting, arranged on the pretext of the interview, could last five or six hours. As an anthropologist inspired by serendipity as a fruitful attitude to experience the field, and by the importance of empathy in the encounters in the field – always defined by the relationships occurring in it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) – those extra unplanned hours spent with my research partners were highly 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 interlocutors' lives. Thus, I was able to situate the stories I heard during the interviews within a world closer to the daily lives of the narrators. I soon realized that my research partners probably felt honoured by the visit of an Italian researcher to their home, as they often 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 disasters and activism, as lived within the family's context.

In order to stimulate the narratives from study participants, I opened the interviews with 'grand tour questions' (Spradley 1979). Because I was interested in listening to the trajectories, contingencies and life experiences that determined the narrator's involvement in AR suffering and activism, my interlocutors often showed me old documents and photographs of their work at the plant, medical examinations, judicial actions against the firm, and experiences of activism. Sometimes I asked for these documents, yet at 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, was described with constant references to significant episodes in their lives (e.g. migration, marriage, birth of children, illness experience, and death of a loved one due to an ARD).

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

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

The narration taking shape through the pages of this book is grounded in my field experience, and in my own feelings, perceptions and emotions that I felt during the encounters with those I met. In the phases of data collection and analysis, I considered the contingencies and shared affects that made each encounter unique, 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 interlocutor(s) matter; reflecting on them is essential in analysing the relational (emotional) knowledge produced by those encounters (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 not to forget, I usually wrote my notes soon after any interview, informal conversation or meeting. I used to write down my notes (depending on how crowded the bus or train was) during my daily two-hour journey from Osasco back to São Paulo, or between my home and the Faculty of Public Health of the University of São Paulo, to which I was affiliated as a visiting PhD student during my stay in Brazil. Night-time was also favourable for elaborating my notes and writing my diary when I came back to the place that was my home during the fieldwork, and where I could isolate and protect myself from the urban jungle I had faced during the day. In fact, my constant feeling while I was living in São Paulo was of being immersed in a vibrating flux of 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 enormity of the life around me.

In addition to my fieldnotes, photographs played a fundamental and unexpectedly important role in the development of my research, in both my personal experiments of data collection and my interlocutors' narration of their stories. I refer to contributions from studies on photography (Sontag 1990; Bourdieu and Bourdieu 2004), visual anthropology (Chiozzi 1993) and those implementing a phenomenological approach in both data collection and analysis (Grenfell and Lebaron 2014), as photography was another method to collect and record what I had perceived in the field, but which could not be expressed or heard in words.

On the one hand, basing my research on the centrality of the body in the disaster and activism experiences, I tried to capture the traces of asbestos contamination inscribed in the bodies of the ‘sufferer-activists’⁵ (Mazzeo 2017b) I met through a camera. On the other hand, while sharing their life stories, my interlocutors often showed me pictures of their youth, marriages and children to elaborate their narrative, and in doing so, they facilitated my entrance into a world that I otherwise could only access through their memories. Moreover, photographs, especially portraits of relatives and friends who had already died from ARDs, were used as instruments of struggle during awareness campaigns, denunciations and protests. ABREA activists strategically used the potentiality of critique of the ‘suffering body’, even in the physical absence of the victim who was remembered and indeed present in the practices of activism, which were at the same time practices of struggle, memory and care (Mazzeo 2017b, 2018c, 2019).

Managing a constantly evoked past and the daily remarked-upon absence of a loved one proved to be one of the more emotionally and challenging aspects of my research. I include a few of the photographs I took in Brazil in this book, which is rooted in the life stories of the men and women I encountered throughout my fieldwork, while following the transnational trajectories of disaster and grassroots activism connecting Casale Monferrato (the site of my previous research in Italy) and Osasco in Brazil.

In conclusion, I wish to draw attention to a relevant ethical issue that I had to consider while writing this book: it concerns the study participants’ anonymity. Throughout this ethnography, I use pseudonyms to refer to the majority of my interlocutors in the field, even though I agree with Fonseca (2010), who states that anonymity does not necessarily mean being respectful of researchers’ interlocutors. While researching practices of anti-asbestos activism, I often encountered social actors who considered their participation in my study as a political act, and who explicitly told me that they would be honoured for their names to appear in a publication about their struggle. This wish is understandable, especially if we consider the kind of social movement – revolving around recognition (Hobson 2003) – in which the participants in my study were engaged. However, in order to safeguard my research partners, I decided to preserve the anonymity of nearly all of them. I only explicitly mention study participants’ real names when keeping them anonymous would represent a lack of respect for the true authorship of narratives and original insights that had made essential contributions to the knowledge that my interlocutors and I co-produced in the course of our encounters.

Structure of the Book

This book is a polyphonic historically rooted ethnography revolving around the life stories of those suffering from the impact of the toxic market of asbestos on their existences, and who decided to engage in grassroots health-based activism. My understanding is grounded in the practices and meanings performed and elaborated locally by the anti-asbestos activists I met, and my aim is to save the bodily, dynamic and concrete dimension of the processes of AR health disasters (which often persist in invisibility) in the textual transposition of my research experience and data interpretation.

The chapters that follow aim to acknowledge and understand the role of the social actors who embody, contest and divert those same processes affecting their lives. To this end, ample space is given to the sufferers' and activists' narratives, which are extensively quoted throughout the book. Besides scientific purposes, the decision to include extensive quotations from the interviews conducted during fieldwork was taken upon the ethical commitment to listening to the too-often-silenced voices of those primarily affected by invisible disasters, and who promote change from below in the name of social justice. Beyond the particular/universal, local/global, individual/collective and private/social dichotomies, the life stories recalled in this book represent the sap of intricate transnational processes, and allow us to sense the fleshly, daily-life dimension of dynamics that would otherwise remain evocated as invisible forces.

Chapter 1 retraces the historical processes and economic dynamics moulding the global market of asbestos, and focuses on the impact of asbestos exposure on global public health. Chapter 2 delves into the historical and sociocultural context of the Brazilian city of Osasco, where the practices and strategies of anti-asbestos activism discussed in the book emerged. Chapter 3 moves further into everyday experiences of AR disasters; sufferers' narratives and memories accompany the reader through the unpredictable and painful trajectories of illness, contamination and grief experiences. Chapter 4 focuses on the practices and strategies of anti-asbestos activism observed in Osasco during my fieldwork with the ABREA members. Lastly, Chapter 5 expands its scope to reconnect the meanings and practices of this anti-asbestos activism with the global context of the health movement, which is global public health (Farmer et al. 2013). It discusses the moral commitments behind health-based activism and research, and shows the contribution that anthropology might offer to a transdisciplinary understanding and tackling of global public health issues.

Notes

1. The so-called ‘Eternit trial’ started in 2009 and ended in November 2014. Stephan Schmidheiny and Louis de Cartier de Marchienne (deceased in 2013) were the parties accused of the crimes of environmental disaster, manslaughter and voluntary omission of accident prevention precautions in relation to their responsibilities in the management of the Eternit plants in Italy at Casale Monferrato, Cavagnolo, Bagnoli and Rubiera. Ultimately, in November 2014, the Supreme Court did not recognize the crimes, declaring them to be prescribed, contrary to what had been established by the previous judgments pronounced in First and Second Degree by the Court of Turin. Afterwards, a second judicial action, the so-called ‘Eternit bis’, started. This time, Stephan Schmidheiny is the only party accused of voluntary homicide for the deaths of 258 exposed workers and residents who had died from MM between 1989 and 2014. The first hearing will take place in November 2020.
2. Throughout the book, I use the expression ‘social justice’ (Rawls 1971) in line with Hofrichter’s reflections on social justice and global public health (Hofrichter 2003b). According to Hofrichter (*ibid.*: 12), ‘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’. For a deeper understanding of social movements in the name of social and environmental justice, compare with Cable and Benson 1993 and Nixon 2011; for a focus on the Brazilian context, compare with Acselrad, Herculano and Pádua 2004; Souza Bravo, D’Acri and Bilate Martins 2010; Milanez et al. 2013; and Porto Pacheco and Leroy 2013.
3. Data available online at www.ibge.gov.br (last accessed 21 March 2017).
4. I interpret the low number of women actively participating in ABREA as the consequence of the low number of women working at the Eternit plant in Osasco, where the majority of ABREA members had worked and where only a few women were employed in the administrative sector. Other Brazilian anti-asbestos NGOs with workers from factories where the female presence was higher than at the Eternit in Osasco had more female members (see D’Acri, Marques dos Santos and de Souza 2010).
5. I consider the complex subjectivities of study participants whose lives suffer from the impact of AR disasters, and who, at the same time, are activists mobilizing in the name of social justice. Inspired by the seminal reflections on intersectionality by Crenshaw (1989), I often refer to anti-asbestos activists by the intersectional term ‘sufferer-activists’ (see also Mazzeo 2017b, 2018a, 2018c).