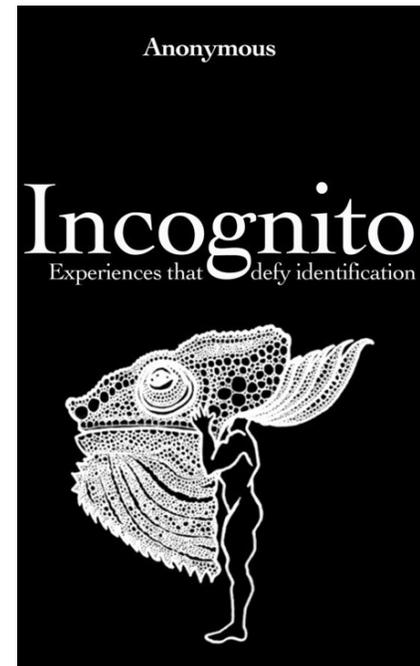


Elephant Archives

Incognito

Experiences that defy identification



Incognito
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London 2008

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Introduction

This book is about living in hiding. It pierces the darkness and leaps into the secrecy of the incognito, a parallel dimension in which even what could be said often is not. Out of excess of tact, fear or because one thinks it is not relevant. Or, in certain milieux and in the worst cases, due to mere political tactics. But, even at a glance, the world of clandestine people is not a desert land; on the contrary it is populated by living beings, experiences and ideas that are very close to ours, in both the most miserable and the most fascinating aspects of our lives, close to our most ardent desires and passionate daydreams.

The following contributions tell of this world. They are the voices of people who have lived or are still living in hiding, voices of different tones and emotions, each bearing their own message. They tell their experience of a clandestine situation, which can derive from personal choice or causes beyond one's will. For some this experience was a result of their revolutionary struggle; for others, the many who, along the road of exploitation and the atrocity of borders have nothing more to lose, not even ID, this experience is a result of their social condition.

If the names of the authors are not to be found in this book it is not out of caution or ideological choice. It is more a question of, let's say, good taste. In fact, we prefer the clandestine experiences to speak for themselves, rather than the identity of those who are talking about them. Nevertheless, as identity is not just a question of personal data, these written lines will inevitably reveal traces leading to the author of the text.

When we decided to write this book we thought that would be the most genuine and direct way to present the uniqueness of the experiences it would contain, rather than a theoretical or historical discussion on living in hiding as intended by revolutionary movements. On the contrary, we chose a form that expressed the most personal aspects of the clandestine dimension in complete freedom: the situations that the authors of the texts had had to face, their reflections and proposals, their practical and theoretical considerations.

With a great effort that often tore at our hearts and penetrated our inner being, we managed to obtain a series of data and emotions that can offer the reader a 'guide', also concerning 'technical' suggestions, in the eventuality that he or she might one day face conditions like the ones described in the pages that follow.

So it is a 'guide'; but it is also a lens through which to look with more sympathetic complicity at the nameless exploited, bandits, refugees, and all agitators who run to ground and who still pursue, in the links of the chain that grasp the planet, desire and the reality of a free life.

that it is possible to formulate a practical critique of religion. The need for communities in a world where the only community is that of consumer goods, is getting stronger and stronger and is easily manipulated by nationalistic and fundamentalist scourges. The invisible people who are surrounded by hatred and indifference, women and men who are faced with an ultimatum are more and more numerous: they are either subjected and forced to integrate or deported. Common grounds for rebellion, created from immediate needs in order to go forward, are far more than solidarity. Our very freedom is at stake because the possibility of social war is very likely to be transformed into the certainty of 'racial' war. It is in the overwhelming chaos of languages and cultures that new desertions and unions need to be experienced...

How is it possible to be invisible to power and its guardians—in other words, how it is possible to defy identification—and at the same time be socially visible? I think this is the main problem that regards all clandestine comrades. I also think that we can begin to talk about our wanderer comrades starting from the condition of wandering on a large scale, so that our comrades are less distant.

If you are clandestine, the power of words is sometimes limited, and this is not only for security reasons. It can happen that you think twice before speaking because what you say risks looking as if you are giving a lesson, because it can't be put into practice (especially where others would be exposing themselves publicly whereas you can't). So you prefer to keep quiet, unless you find a new form of complicity in a common project. After all, you are even freer to act because you have an advantage over the enemy: the latter doesn't know where you are...

A form of punishment is adopted in some still existent primitive communities, which they consider the hardest. It is not physical torture, nor imprisonment or ostracism. When someone commits particularly serious and blameworthy acts, the community react by treating him as if he didn't exist. As they don't look at him, speak to him or about him, the members of the community make him invisible for a length of time. They say it is an unbearable punishment. Our individuality is built up and completed by a continuous game of communication and reciprocal recognition. We are invisible to one another when we each feel guilty by our very presence, rendered awkward and anonymous by the homologation that prevents us from establishing our unions and talking sincerely without mediation.

This is very similar to the condition experienced by millions of clandestine people in the world, mainly the economic refugees of the capitalist massacre. They are invisible and compelled to run like shadows along the walls of metropoli to expiate the guilt of being poor and foreign. Clandestine people frighten us because, through them, we perceive our condition as precarious, uprooted people, submitted to a gigantic productive and technological apparatus beyond our control, and shunted from one material need to another the meaning of which quite escapes us.

I'm glad that this booklet also exposes the experience of someone living in hiding for reasons other than those of many comrades. This doesn't mean that we have to eliminate differences, but that we have to formulate a radical critique of borders and identity papers from a social point of view. Unfortunately, the idea of subverting the categories of dominion (worker / unemployed, citizen / foreigner, legal / illegal, innocent / guilty) was our idea in the first place, and not a real trend. Categories must be destroyed in the struggle; it's not enough to simply claim that they don't exist. The condition of millions of legally inexistent men and women, as a well-known servile Italian political scientist called them, could be a painful yet formidable occasion to destroy all collective and authoritarian identities. Those who are invisible because they have been deprived of words and relationships often look for some collective identity as a form of defence. This is why fundamentalism exists, a speculative product of capital's negation of differences. A discussion on its social causes is urgent, as it is certainly not with intellectual argumentations on the inexistence of god

Let's talk about it

It is terrible when a man has to give up his identity. Living with a good girl, deceiving her day after day and concealing a part of one's life and personality. Sometimes you feel a strong need to open up and search for moral complicity, but you can't do that out of precaution or for fear of not being understood... you feel empty and don't desire anything in particular.

Horst Fantazzini

It is not easy to talk about certain questions. Moreover, the most difficult thing is to start, especially, as far as I am concerned, as I'm not what you'd call a 'story teller', but rather the opposite.

I had already thought of writing something about living in hiding, not so much about my personal experience (I don't like self-celebration), as about the way we see clandestinity in our 'milieu'.

Let's forget any digressions as to the meaning of the word. Up until I experienced this situation, both negative and positive at the same time, I thought it was something that didn't concern me. Then, out of the blue, I found I had plunged into it. That is exactly how it happens. Maybe you imagine it differently, but it's just like that, from one minute to the next you find yourself absolutely alone (even if you are with someone when you first hear the news). Then, if you decide to live in hiding out of choice, methods of struggle or simply bad luck, you suddenly find yourself in a strange situation. A least that was my impression. When I heard there was an arrest warrant out for me, I felt completely lost. Perhaps if we thought about living in hiding as a consequence not so much of our actions and way of life as of pure repression against those who decide to live outside the rules of the System/Capital, things would be much clearer. Those who want to rule our lives know perfectly well how hard it is to find yourself completely alone all of a sudden, how difficult (and frightening) it is to speak to others and the fear and paranoia that other people experience when they mention you. All this should not just be regarded as a repressive measure (such as prison, house arrest, bail, etc.) but as a precise method aimed at cutting off relations between individuals and situations. The difficulties and fear involved in any discussion on the subject in the environment where the individual on the run used to live are extremely damaging to the latter, and extremely advantageous to the enemy, whoever they are. What

I think we should do when a comrade is in the shit is TO TALK ABOUT IT. When someone ends up in jail he can receive mail and visits from lawyers and relatives. This could also be the case for those living in hiding (be it by choice or by necessity), with due precaution and method. But people find it difficult to talk publicly and openly about that. When I had friends living in hiding I was scared to talk about them or even to organise solidarity initiatives. But now that I have experienced that situation myself, I think that it's absolutely vital to start a discussion on the subject, especially so that those living in hiding can feel they are as close as possible to the situation they lived in before. I can assure you that it's not always like that, especially at first.

I don't have the solution to this problem, but I think that proper discussion and analysis (between those who have experienced clandestinity and all those who feel like discussing this repressive measure) could be very useful.

I think, as I've already said, that the System finds it easier to file an arrest warrant and force those who don't want to rot in jail to live in hiding, rather than carry out arrests and then put up with solidarity actions, demonstrations, initiatives, a lot of noise, etc.

Of course the repressors only allow this to happen on certain occasions, according to the moment, but I don't think this hypothesis is unfounded.

I believe this is a very important question because the System only decides to act immediately when it is pressed by the media and public opinion, and it often risks giving shit performances, as we have seen. Moreover, given that the judicial system is making gigantic strides daily with the intent of reaching TOTAL CONTROL, and that its disgusting servants the TV and the press spread whatever news they are told to, the System has plenty of time to control these situations as it likes. This is also possible thanks to the spread of submission and conformity in general (even if, in various contexts, there are faint signs of a reawakening here and there).

If these aspects are taken into account, people living in clandestinity might decide to put an end to it and, for instance, give themselves up because they think this might be better than staying underground. I don't consider this choice to be a cowardly one, as some comrades do.

When you are living in hiding your perception of the situations you lived in before changes, as you are looking at it from the 'outside'. You probably manage to be a bit more rational.

But it is exactly this 'living outside' that makes you feel alone and sometimes unable to face the paranoia that goes with a clandestine situation.

The importance of these few lines doesn't lie in the fact that they fill up a pamphlet but because they remind us of the many people and comrades who, as we are doing our shopping, enjoying a gig or life in general, are compelled to stay away from the people and places they love.

looked at the lights of the towns from the distance of the fugitive. Those who are banned can overturn their condition and become bandits.

One's attention (as regards the territory where one moves, one's looks and behaviour, and unwanted contact with comrades) cannot be improvised because it requires the necessary time and energy. But other comrades with more experience than me can explain this much better.

Living in hiding and being held in prison are very different conditions also as regards the perception of one's identity. I remember having felt a deep and almost euphoric joy when from my cell I started writing to my comrades whom I hadn't been in touch with for a long time. I was writing with 'my' name, I was receiving letters and talking about past experiences and future projects: all this filled my heart and days with joy. Comrades talk about prisoners, organise solidarity initiatives and make public their ideas. Those who live in hiding are even more isolated. Their coherence is proud and difficult as they cannot have an external insight. May the wanderers be remembered.

Living in hiding is an experience of strong relations and complicities, but also of great solitude. The demon of nostalgia often visits you, and brings you memories that you considered buried: a far off childhood friend, the smell of the shop where you used to go as a child, a girl you loved when you were teenager or maybe the beautiful woman who passed in front of you the day before; and then words, places, songs, everything seems to conspire to make you feel nostalgic. Nostalgia is a strange world as it can make even a stupid Sanremo song sound sweet to an anarchist...

Everybody knows the difference between nostalgia and sadness. The former is a black-coloured sensation, but it's a black that gives you something. Have you ever noticed that gloomy people have a distracted and scrupulous kindness of their own? As they are caught by nostalgia for their past, they develop a particular sensibility for unknown people, as if they wanted to fill the emptiness with a promise of happiness. Living in hiding is more or less like that.

Ferré's lyrics, which I quoted at the beginning, have just come back into my mind. Curiously enough, I found them written on a wall with a felt-tip pen. It is singular that anarchists are depicted as nostalgic people, isn't it? 'They have black flags of hope/and melancholy as their dancing partner'... Well, I think that living in hiding has turned me into this: my irreducible optimism has become more melancholic, as though it were accompanied by a gypsy tune.

The homologation of activities and gestures is making all critique more and more inoffensive. We often have the impression that speaking is pointless. Living in hiding and being held in prison were all very different experiences for me from this point of view. In prison I experienced the power of words. To speak to the guards, director and staff in a certain way, or to speak to other prisoners during the 'sociality' time has practical effects. Rebel words are likely to bring about action; therefore they are feared.

I have often woken up suddenly with the fear of not having water (and in such cases it has always been a great pleasure to find a bottle close to my bed); on the contrary, I have hardly ever dreamt about prison.

As for the concept of identity, the condition of being in clandestinity is a remarkable experiment on the subject and can be far more useful than a lot of philosophy books. Coeurderoy said that we should be able to change our name every day. That is also what I said to the cops when they questioned me, and I added that the concept of identity is authoritarian. The not so relaxed reaction of the cops showed me clearly how categories of identity are dominion's pivotal point.

What is identity?

A certain image built up with a number of elements comes into play in our daily relations. Our past and what others know about us become quite habitual aspects, and we don't usually give them much thought. When we become intimate with someone, we open up to him or her what is most precious to us, affections and ideas that in themselves have a story. A clandestine person, on the contrary, continuously has to create his or her identity, which has to be coherent in order not to be suspicious. To get used to a name that isn't yours is a very particular experience, which might be impossible for someone (maybe because it is very similar to 'I is another' by a clandestine of poetry called Rimbaud). An interesting and useful aspect of this condition is that it helps you to develop a basic skill, i.e. it teaches you to talk about yourself with extreme sincerity without mentioning any details about your life. It is not so much a capacity for abstraction but rather the ability to transform your experiences into a distillation of thoughts and emotions. A different concept of identity is maybe what is left over from this process of distillation. In the course of this interior alchemy you must throw away something important, which can be painful. For example, owing to my 'character', it was hard for me to renounce to the public aspect of my subversive activity. (I use the inverted comma because I can't forget a sentence of Valery's notebooks in which he said that what we call character is something temporary). Surely, a comrade on the run is always thinking of his identity at risk and how to get involved in other comrades' projects (do they remember me?). In this case coherence, which in social relations is a guarantee of the 'regularity' that shelters us from fear and chaos, and which is often far less obvious than it might seem, assumes a very particular dimension, where the tension between theory and practise is at a more interior level. This coherence can sometimes be reached by paying a high price in the sphere of affections. I chose not to be too rigorous when I had to go clandestine (as proved by the visit police paid me a few months later...). But I can guess how one can open or close oneself by paying constant attention. I understand the comrade who says he knew authentic freedom only as a clandestine, when he traveled incognito through countries and people. I had a little taste of this one night on a hill, as I

Being aware of the problem doesn't mean that we solve it, but it's a good step towards making sure that people in hiding, and all those who might become such, not only live this condition better but are also able to keep on struggling alongside their comrades.

Keeping oneself out the way

I've never had any strong feelings of belonging to one specific country, with its traditions and culture. I've never felt any roots grow inside me to such an extent that that could keep me in one place. I think that this helped when I decided 'to go to earth' and hide from bureaucracy and the law.

The first time my house was searched a cop asked me if I had been expecting it. My answer was yes. I was an anarchist and known to them as such, so I wasn't surprised. Nor was I surprised when I realized that it would be better 'to have a change'. Choices like that are a question of responsibility. When you are fighting an enemy you will also certainly want to escape from it and its repressive grip, even if you have to pay quite a high price and keep away from the places and people you love. This was something that I had taken into account, something I knew might happen to me. So I wasn't surprised when it became real and urgent. But I was pretty confused, both because reality is always different to what you imagine and because I found myself in a situation I had never expected: becoming clandestine, not on my own or with my partner, but with my child. In fact, he was born a few months before, and I was still under 'new-mother shock' when I understood it was not the case to have my life ruined by the bullies of the law. There was no arrest warrant out for me at the time, but they started harassing me after arresting a comrade who was very close to me, and claimed they had identified a 'Roman gang'. I didn't intend to be under pressure every day and so I chose to go to earth. The day after my departure I learned that my house had been searched and that my partner had been harassed, which they kept on doing afterwards, also to my friends and relatives. I realized I had made the right choice.

At first it was very difficult. Even if, as I said, I had pictured that moment so many times, I was not ready either at a practical or psychological level. For example, I had nowhere to go and it wasn't easy to find a suitable place. My comrades were all well known to the cops and that period was not at all calm or favourable. I think that many people were really worried and solidarity, practical and effective solidarity, was not easy to practise and therefore to find. I was really sorry about that, and I am still absolutely convinced that this is something that comrades should discuss carefully in the future. I mean we should try to create the minimal conditions so that comrades are not left alone with their problems and excluded from all their relationships.

prison or in confinement I promised myself I would do many things once my imprisonment was over. Of course it was not so. Life absorbs you and makes you forget the punches you take head on. But I realize that the sense of vacuity I experienced in that wood has penetrated me like a note that secretly accompanies any affirmation I make. If I were to listen to that rocky demon more often, I would talk much less.

Upon those bare rocks where eagles build their nest, I guessed how strong the thought of committing suicide could be. The idea that you can say goodbye to the world at any time makes life wonderful. 'Go ahead, dare further, no one can compel you to live!': through the obstinate voice of that demon we can face any enemy. In fact, all blackmail collapses on the sharp point of this kind of awareness. On the edge of an attractive cliff, in the absolute emptiness where fiction disappears and only what counts really counts, I met unreserved love.

In other words, the optimist prevailed with reasons that reason doesn't know. When one night in the rain a kind of cosmic voice (my personal Mephistopheles) proposed a pact to me, I felt an irrepressible euphoria: 'If you renounce your ideas I will take you out of this wood'. I said euphoria, which is what I felt when I refused the offer. Still rhetorical even when he is delirious, some will say. After all, even our hallucinations reveal who we are.

It might seem strange, but my experience as someone in clandestinity is all there, in the experience I've just told you about. The rest is a series of details. We only really remember what shocks us.

As I listened to my various selfs arguing in the wood, I understood the meaning of Nietzsche's affirmation that what we call 'I' is only an illusion of grammar, our life being just a space which innumerable entities in conflict pass through. After that, I have often found myself thinking about the concept of identity.

What really frightens us is our lack of control over what surrounds us. I am sure that the few days I spent in the woods affected me far more than the months I spent in prison. Everything is, or seems to be, under control in prison, at least it was like that under the conditions that I experienced there. Of course your freedom is taken away and you hate your jailers; but everything repeats itself in the same way, with you on the one side and them on the other, and you can carry out your minimal project. In other words, there is a code. There is a big difference between the prisoner who absorbs this code until he becomes part of the total institution and the one who cannot accept it. But even the most determined rebel uses certain codes. On certain occasions, on the contrary, all codes collapse because nothing, not even our lack of freedom, is sure. I think that lack of all guarantees can lead to insanity. In this sense, I perceived better what a radical critique of psychiatry is.

besides being hungry and very tired I started to feel a strange interior dizziness. At a certain point, the different aspects of my character started arguing with one another as though they were different people. Their discourses were so realistic that every time I woke up after falling asleep with my legs wrapped around a trunk to avoid falling down, I couldn't say if I had really met someone or if I had just been dreaming. Two voices were the most frequent: the pessimistic one and the optimistic one. The former attacked the awkward ingenuity of the latter with arguments that I will never forget. The quarrel was mainly about the relation between man and nature. The optimistic one interpreted the shapes in the wood (branches of trees, paths between the bushes, etc.) as signs of a way out and cheered up. The pessimistic one sneered at this reassuring anthropomorphism as he claimed that a wood didn't give any signs, it just was. But the optimistic one didn't give up; on the contrary he created deities for himself as companions of travel. It was when I slid on a sloping rock dozens of metres up that I really felt as if I was a 'docile fibre in the universe'. Out of the blue I realized that freedom is often no more than a question of... balance. So many desires, projects, and discussions on the power of the individual transforming his life: a few centimetres further and everything was finished. I regretted pathetically that I wouldn't be able to write anything to the world on whose fragile borders I was still advancing hesitantly. I became strongly convinced that words are medicines (the Greeks intended them as both medicine and poison) that keep us apart from the absolutely other that Nature is. Wild nature is not as it is depicted in primitivist-illustrated magazines; on the contrary it is a terrifying place because it is 'mute'—a place of total communion and at the same time of absolute loneliness. Extreme solitude is a medicine too because it is a relation in which others participate in the form of absence. As I was lying on the rocks of that dry river, I found myself thinking of what my comrades would have said about that circumstance, and I laughed heartily. My comrades...

Words as medicine. I experienced my most intense relation with theory the night that I had to light a fire using a book of Hegel. I can't describe my hesitation when I tore out the pages nor can I describe my thoughts around the fire or the light that Hegel's dialectics assumed in the unusual way it was being used. I realized that, not by chance, Heraclitus the obscure used to see in the flames of fire the sensitive expression of things becoming reality.

Kafka says that logic cannot resist against those who want to stay alive. I decided that each time I talked with certainty about the struggle and radical projects I would always remember what I felt when I was on that rock.

Life with its necessary illusions had always taken me away from awareness of my 'docility' towards the world. In fact, I couldn't have done anything had such awareness been alive. What can we destroy and what can we build if we don't know whether we will be there a moment later or not? While I was in

Coming back to my time in hiding, I felt the need to take all the things that made me feel 'at home' with me wherever we went: certain books, tapes and objects (maybe I'm a bit fetishist) that kept me in touch with my previous life. In general, we succeeded in not being noticed wherever we went: I introduced myself to others as a mum taking her baby on holiday to healthy resorts. It was summer and certain places would be healthy for anyone! I played my part very well; I was very careful about what I told anyone about us and tried to be coherent in my role. I also made my attention more acute by focussing it on even the most insignificant details. It must be borne in mind that people (not to mention landlords) are very curious about a new member of their community, and that you cannot always answer the questions (too many questions) they ask evasively, otherwise you would seem strange. You have to be careful because in a 'normal' situation questions like 'where do you live', 'what do you study' and 'what's your job' or even an invitation to dinner that you would rather refuse, could be annoying; and an unfriendly and unsociable answer could cause trouble. When you are in hiding it might be dangerous either to make relationships or to be too reserved. It is quite a delicate situation. As I said, I tried to tell people the same story about myself but I also tried not to give a picture that was too different from what I actually was. I mean that in the long run (I've been in hiding for 6 years) it is impossible to be completely different to what you are. It was okay, for example, to be a mother taking care of her child, but I couldn't give a picture of myself as if that was my only aspiration: just to be a mother! My opinions, considerations and way of being couldn't be completely repressed even if they emerged in a softer and less obvious way. At the beginning this was one of the most difficult aspects to cope with as I was a new mother, a situation that in itself presents a lot of contradictions that are not easy to sort out. Sometimes fear and anxiety were too strong, and I thought that I wouldn't manage to keep on going for long. I often had to suddenly run away from the place where I was staying because of the dirty job of the media (one of the TV programs that made me anxious and angry was 'Chi l'ha visto' ['Who's Seen Her', popular TV programme calling for public participation in the sighting of missing persons] or because my child's father was being followed (who in the meantime was living his normal life and meeting up with me occasionally). My moves, therefore, often occurred out of the blue, without me planning them. I often trusted my sixth sense (which I still do), which is not enough if it is not accompanied with the greatest attention. When I felt it was time to have a change, I prepared my stuff in a great hurry and moved to temporary accommodation until I found a more durable and reliable situation.

In the long run I realized that my first choice, i.e. a period in hiding while understanding what the judiciary wanted, would turn out to be the only one. The game: 'let's see if I can fool them' would go on. My relationship with my child's father deteriorated, pushing us further and further apart. It is impossible

to keep a love affair alive if the parties involved don't both make the choice to live in hiding. The two lives inevitably become different and moments together are burdened with tension because of the risks you are running. So we decided to split up and I decided to make the big step: my child and I would go far away.

At this point I had to consider which place would be most suitable. First of all I took into account the possibility of being able to walk in the streets without running the risk of being immediately recognized as a foreigner and therefore of being stopped by the police. I needed a cosmopolitan town where I could be anonymous as much as possible. I also had to avoid contact with comrades so that I wouldn't be recognised. Furthermore, having a baby would make things much more difficult: sooner or later, be it owing to health problems, school or the need to guarantee him normal social relations, I would risk finding myself in the chains of bureaucracy. I therefore needed a place where structures for non-official residents, the so-called irregulars without stay permits could be found. A place where the minimum social needs of a foreigner could be guaranteed and I could walk around without running the risk of being arbitrarily stopped by the police (i.e. for no valid reason). A place where I could go out without necessarily taking an identity card with me and where it was possible to find a way to survive. I chose the place and asked some friends of friends to put me up for a while, until I acquired knowledge of the environment and the capacity to live on my own. So I decided to venture, and crossed the border without my child who was eventually brought to me. The separation was terrible, and so was the fear of not making it. I crossed the border with a rucksack on my back and snow up to my calves. I remember being very excited at that moment, finding strength and a confidence that I had rarely experienced before. Finally I made it, I was having a cappuccino in a foreign country after crossing that cursed border. I only hoped that my child would join me soon and without difficulty. I stopped for two days at a very dear comrade's place and then I left by train for my final destination. I arrived on a splendid morning in May, warm and comfortable even though I was in the north. This seemed to me to be a good omen; and when my child joined me a week later, I felt safer and more determined because I was also out of Italy. In spite of this, I soon realized that the situation could become dangerously relaxed, which I absolutely had to avoid.

So we started again... I didn't know how long it would last but I did my best to make our freedom last as long as possible. I think that in cases like this you mustn't stay in the same place for a long time even if everything seems to be going well. You cannot avoid leaving traces if you stay in one place (at least in Europe) for too long. You have to move frequently, which I chose not to do. This wasn't due to resignation. As I said before, choices imply taking one's responsibilities and I had also chosen to have a child. I didn't want to involve him in sudden transformations and changes that only concerned me.

Experiences of banishment

They have black flags of hope
and melancholy is their dancing partner.
They have knives to cut the bread of friendship
and blood to clean the dirt away.

Leo Ferré, *The anarchists*

I have had occasion to experience some kind of banishment for short periods of time: life in hiding, prison, and expulsion. Even if they all are conditions that are imposed by repression, each one is very different from the other. I am going to talk about them, as they are experiments in freedom.

However, I intend to expose the thoughts that these circumstances raised in me rather than describe their practical aspects. I'm going to take into consideration the 'inner' dimension involved, then I'll try to draw some general conclusions. This is the way I prefer. In fact, as concerns the many events I experienced, I tend to remember the ideas and emotional states that characterized them. I'm going to use narrative, articulated discussion and short notes. I'm sometimes going to quote other people's words, but only because these words had a decisive importance for me on these occasions. And only some distant echo in the reader's own experience will allow him to distinguish these notes from a mere literary exercise. My most extreme experience doesn't concern fear or the privation of freedom. In one of his first world war poems, the poet Ungaretti writes that one day he felt as though he was 'docile as a fibre in the universe'. The poet, however, uses this expression to say that he thought he was part of the universe, whereas my experience was shocking and bewildering. I remember Ungaretti's words coming into my mind as the most appropriate (when your heart throbs certain correspondences of the mind push your ideas into a strange universe called intuition). I proudly changed 'docile' into 'fragile' and tried to convince myself that the latter was the word the poet actually wrote. But I didn't only feel as if I was 'fragile', I was also 'docile'. Why?

I had got lost in a wood. While looking for a way out, I fell down a cliff. Luckily my rucksack prevented me from breaking my back, but I was in such pain that I remained motionless on the bed of a dry river for a night and a day. I soon finished my food and water. I spent days trying to climb and find a spot from where to orientate myself, and one night in the rain. The fourth day passed and

still there, the projects and initiatives that were carried out didn't really try to subvert of daily life.

I came back to my window and scouring the horizon, looking for a new spur, a tiny signal to start again. But most of the time the colour I saw in the street was that of the uniforms coming to exact the retorsion.

Meantime I carried on with my small actions, trying to convince myself that my sensitivity and hope weren't clouded by the darkness of my town. In fact, it was a demonstration of resistance, and the proof that things can be done, even if many didn't go any further than that. But in spite of all the messages I spread in the wind, my own voice was the only echo.

It was quite an absurd situation... I was looking for paths to share with others, even if it implied adapting my tension and skills to those of others. In the end there was no answer, only frustration, as I had reduced my aspirations to a dimension that was not mine.

What was I turning into? Maybe a priest looking for good souls, or rather a ghost or shadow that runs up against the wall with others not wanting to come near it. And if I were really resentful I would say I had turned into a plague victim who brought bad luck, as I was a sworn enemy of order. After all, the forces of repression concentrate their efforts on the few who don't give up, given that they don't have many other objectives left. I made a decision. I wouldn't accept the inevitable fact that I was being spied upon, nor would I measure my aspirations and actions according to what the imposed conditions established. Control and coercion disturb our life enough, I found it unacceptable to become my own controller.

So I decided not to let myself be tracked down any longer. I decided that my time, space and experiences didn't deserve to become fodder for my enemy's appetite. When I made this choice I knew it was an adventure that would not necessarily be final, but which could put me in some new, unique and immutable condition in which to nourish my desires and activities. I rather found myself in a parallel dimension that allowed me to look for the completeness and freedom of movement that I lacked: other places, other instruments and other conditions to keep on stressing the ideas that had marked my life for a long time.

Sometimes I come back to the window but I know that my view is going to reach wider horizons than those that I saw in the beginning.

I also experienced periods of acute loneliness. I was afraid of love affairs, as I didn't trust anyone and I couldn't find comrades to share rebel choices with. But I wasn't nostalgic because I had managed to overcome any nostalgia for people and places. I convinced myself that everything would come back to me and that I was living a break of an unlimited duration. This break, however, was worth living intensely. In fact today I miss the people, the places and the moments I experienced during this long and very emotional journey. I can't help saying, not that it was the best time of my life (especially as my life hasn't finished yet!), but that it was certainly the period in which I understood best who I was and how I face life. I also understood that living beyond the rules and normality, with no name, surname, address, and a false number on one's ID card stimulates creativity, imagination, and dignity, and makes you take back what's yours. Time is yours, choosing and overcoming difficulties is yours, the decision to play the cat or the mouse is yours, the moment when you decide to say 'Stop!' is yours.

And all this is also for you... wherever you are.

From setback to a prospect of life

I began living in clandestinity in 1980 and it was a necessity rather than a free choice. At the time it was quite difficult as police informers were springing up like mushrooms in autumn. It was thanks to a couple of these vile disgusting people that I had to leave (not without problems) the house of my parents in the suburbs of the town where I was born. It was not at all the right moment, I had nowhere to go and fear and diffidence reigned between friends and comrades. Many had already received a visit of the police and Carabinieri, many others had already ended up in jail and those who were clean just feared for their own safety... and they were right. If you took someone on the run into your house you risked being charged with 'armed gang' and sentenced to many years in prison. I remember knocking on many comrades' doors and their astonishment and desperation: 'We can't help you'. The worst moment is when you find you don't have anywhere to go at night. Of course you can't go to a hotel like a normal person. At first I spent my days and nights on trains: I took the 17.30 Milan—Reggio Calabria, reached my destination 22 hours later, got off and eventually took another train to Milan. I did that for days on end, it was hard but at least I had a bed and a roof over my head, always moving. It wasn't a solution, however, it was just something temporary (and dangerous, as police often check documents in stations) while waiting to find something better. After all I was not prepared for being on the run.

I had just got out of San Vittore prison where I had been held only six months and released due to a legal time expiry. I secured a simple job as a representative for mechanical tools. I didn't earn much and I used to give all my salary to my parents. So I couldn't save enough money to secure a calm period in clandestinity, which would have been the best thing to do at the time. It wasn't easy to find someone to rent you a flat or to find money to live on. The most difficult thing was not so much finding a suitable landlord, but the money to live as a wanted person, which costs a lot, believe me! A simple salary doesn't allow you to save enough to go to earth in a relaxed way when the time comes. One solution was to rob banks, but when I left home I had no weapons, no documents and very little money in my pocket. You can't stay free for long under such conditions. I could just count on a few armed organisations that I knew. I was lucky, if I can say that. I knew a few comrades who would help me, but under conditions that I couldn't accept, like joining their organisation as a militant serving it. So, after a short break to reflect, I kept on looking des-

strength and courage from the bigger ones and give consistency, concreteness and reality to the latter.

Then, step by step, the mosaic started to fall apart and we began to take a distance from one another. Some also took a distance from themselves, as they were anxious to find a decent place in the world, which in spite of our efforts was not changing.

The situation was collapsing all around us: on the one hand there was the most determined opposition to our demands, on the other there was an unscrupulous use of our actions and ideas that were now being used to renew the wretchedness, to perfect and reproduce it for future generations. We were offered the opportunity to play an active role in this process of developing the existent, i.e. the moderate voice of dissent, and not a few of us accepted it. Of course they were not the first to go over 'to the other side' nor were they the last. It is well known that power and the crumbs it can distribute are attractive to those willing to climb the ladder of success or who simply never really believed in the dreams they used to boast about.

We remained very few, the strong and pure ones. In the long run we were not so strong, and we were no longer pure. On the contrary we were dirty... with impotence, regret, the lack of horizons to exhilarate us... dirty with sad and bad drinking and with human miseries great and small. Someone's body and brain went off with the help of psychoactive mixtures, before they fell into the abyss of doubt and desperation far from the thrill of freedom that once touched them. For the few who remained, the techniques of dissuasion employed by the guardians of order lost both the formalities of the law and the tricks of the cultural-democratic puppet-theatre. As long as juvenile exuberance was recuperated and recycled into quieter spheres of opinion, those who were still on the road of rebellion were simply seen as a question of public safety, a threat to the tranquillity of the little town. Greater power was therefore given to the repressors in order to persecute them.

What was left of our hopes and projects that we thought would illuminate the future?

I could have gone back to my window, waiting for unforeseen events to change the situation. But something still stirred out there, and it was worth moving, even close to my town, to try to open up a glimmer of hope in the darkness that was enveloping me day after day.

So I went away in search of the enthusiasm and engagement that were sadly disappearing around me. In the long run, however, I realized that my expectations concerning the destruction of the existent were not felt with the same passion by those around me. Many of them were happy with a few words, with their sphere of relations that gave them an illusion against the alienating and devastated society. As a consequence, even if ideas, attitudes and practises were

The man at the window

I lived in a little town for many years; a normal life, as they say. School, a job and a lot of time to dedicate to myself, my interests, my passions and enjoyments.

I saw the world through a window, like a film full of images, some sad, others joyful, without it making too much impression on me as though what was happening around me was just the inevitable scenario of life going by.

From my window I looked at other people's lives and saw them as though they were a frame around mine. Let's say I was too busy living my life to bother about that of others.

But I realized something was wrong and that is why I was not indifferent when some protesters passed under my window or when some event in my little town disturbed the monotony of my days. Moreover, this curiosity and the attraction that I felt towards those who wanted to change the scenery of everyday life pushed me into looking for these people, listening to them and sharing experiences with them.

In the end I realized that I must do something to prevent the wretchedness I observed from my window from entering my life irremediably. So I engaged myself along with those I had met, so that the scenery around us became an adventure worth living together without laws, privilege and privileged people.

I started dealing with all kinds of problem and subjects along with the others, who were certainly only a few compared to the population of my town. And we tried to find concrete solutions that erupted into daily life along with our discussions and proposals. We gathered and spread information mainly concerning the most hidden and sliest aspects upon which the collective wretchedness imposed on us was based: we demonstrated in the streets and clashed with those who wanted to prevent us from doing so, we tried to oppose any kind of abuse, or at least we made it clear that not everybody would passively accept what power wanted to impose.

We had very modest means perhaps, but we were armed with our tenacious desires and the firm conviction that something, even if only in our little town, would never be as before or as authority had planned. We shared enthusiasm, ideas and practises for quite a long time, which also gave me the possibility to widen my horizons far beyond the limits of my little town and to meet people and situations similar to those I was experiencing. I realized that big experiences are no more than the sum of the little everyday ones: little rebellions gain

perately for another solution. I didn't want to join any organisation as the one I had belonged to and created along with other comrades, the P.A.C. (Armed Proletarians for Communism), had been dismantled following arrests and the individuation of most members. I didn't feel like joining another one. This situation of instability lasted 6 months. I often found accommodation in comrades' houses but it only lasted two or three days. As a dear comrade of mine used to say: 'guests begin to stink after three days'. So I went around, more and more desperately looking for a hole to live in and helped by old comrades as regards money. Finally, when I least expected it, I found the way not to have to depend on others. This is the essential point: not to depend on anything that is not your own will. You have to prepare to be clandestine before waging war on the System... I don't think I'm exaggerating.

What I have described till now is obviously a particular situation: the condition of clandestinity as a setback that I had to face in a traumatic and sudden way.

But the problem is wider if it is seen in all its aspects: to be compelled to be clandestine, to run off, to refuse to join given organisations whose ideology isn't your own, to look for independence as a way of keeping on the struggle you believe in, to have money, to find the means to achieve all that.

At first I found living in hiding quite hard and pointless as I was in a situation of total uncertainty. But in the long run I found the right balance, i.e. a small group of comrades who had the capacity to carry out big operations and launch strong attacks against the economic and political system with a level of perfection that resembled that of the big organisations. In the Eighties (and today) good results could be reached by small groups of 3-4 comrades who were prepared at a military level and had gathered essential information. Any project of attack would be impossible otherwise.

When you live in clandestinity, be it out of choice or necessity, you are waging war on the State. If you simply walk in the street with a bashed up identity card, you have to make a sudden choice if you are stopped: to run away, give yourself up or react. You can imagine the consequences of the first two possibilities, as for the third, only your ability and experience can save you.

It is not true that wanted people are alone, what is true is that they feel as if they are alone. It is just a temporary sensation, which disappears as soon as you have a document in your pocket that makes you feel safe. The world belongs to us. The advantage of our time is that you can always be well informed about anything, given that moving from one place to another is only a question of hours... providing you have a good document.

The problem is to keep relationships going. It is sure that if you have a partner there's only one choice: either your partner comes with you or you must split up for good.

It is impossible to see each other in secret from time to time. Apart from the work of grasses and the mistakes you might make, police and Carabinieri manage to find you by systematically following those close to you (including parents and relatives). If you decide to play cat and mouse with them on this issue, you will certainly end up in jail in a short time. Is living in hiding useful? I think it is. In these times of war, the System wants to impose globalisation and one way of thinking on everyone. Repression is growing as well as the militarisation of the entire world. The US empire intends to wage war on all those who, in one way or another, oppose its policy of dominion. The military budget grew 70% in six years during Clinton's presidency. The EU is following in the same direction and has created an army specialised in military operations in order to defend the interests of the European multinationals, including arms dealers that will compel countries to purchase a huge amount of arms. The United States are the main agents of this dynamic, as they know they won't otherwise be able to face their serious economic problems and national debts. Of course they are not willing to pay for their economic crisis and are pushing other countries into a paranoid union held together by the fear that a big front against their worldwide hegemony could be created in the third world (see the post September 11 situation). Let's bear in mind that the western countries' main goal is to create an unstable and explosive situation in order to justify NATO military interventions and destroy any strong State that they can't manipulate. Individuals and peoples who don't submit to the orders of the International Monetary Fund and the CIA will end up in trouble. It is obvious that this strategy for world war has already begun: the USA, backed by the NATO, have come into action in various areas, which is fundamental in this strategy as it represents Washington's military supremacy over its allies.

In this context repression is getting stronger with the full approval of both the left and rightwing political parties (which both win elections), also thanks to media campaigns carried out by the four media agencies that control international politics. The information they spread is already a declaration of war and it is impossible to be neutral. Their information is a lie, and they present repressive laws as an absolute necessity. When I read the press, watch TV or listen to the radio, I can't understand anything of what is happening, and this is very dangerous. The State has acquired new penal codes and new repressive means that match the reality that the system wants to fight. In Spain, for example, the new penal code doesn't consider the terrorism of the State but only that which strikes the State (be it buildings or people). At the same time an impressive number of arrests are inflicted on those who demonstrate, even peacefully, and quite heavy sentences are meted out... for example 10 years imprisonment for burning rubbish skips (like the latest laws concerning teenagers 'offences' approved in the Basque countries). Repression is therefore focusing on groups and individuals that represent rebellion against the System in general. The mes-

I walk along by the river, looking for a spot where I can stop and free myself from the weight on my back and relax. I soon get the chance: there is a large, clear pool of water surrounded by stones and a little further on there is some shade under a few trees. This is the place.

I get rid of my rucksack and soon my lungs fill with air; I take a couple of deep breaths and am full of energy once again. I have a quick look around and I realize that I really am alone.

I get into the water, step by step, without hesitating, and reach the middle of the pool. I plunge in and abandon myself to this embrace with my face pointing to the sky. I am enveloped in a strong sensation of freedom: at the same time I feel I am part of the totality and free from any ties.

Soon my thoughts go to those locked up in jail who can't enjoy any of this.

Of course it is hard for me, but nothing will make me turn back. Moments like this and the sensations they fill me with are sufficient to forget any tiredness, they are the oxygen that keeps me going. I try to fix this moment inside myself, my closed eyes turned towards the sun:

Now, in whatever part of the world, I am free.

If you have the impression that someone suspicious might have followed you and that your place is no longer safe, you will never be at peace until you leave it. In order to keep your place as long as possible you shouldn't do your shopping or attend bars and public places in the surrounding area (sooner or later someone you know will see you going into your house). On the contrary, if you go to places far from your house and someone recognizes you, you will have time to go back home, pack your things and leave. Packing is the activity I've undertaken most in clandestinity, as what you always need to achieve is the certainty that you are the only one who knows your secret. This awareness will give you the serenity to engage in any initiative whatsoever.

If you used to have the impression that you never had enough time to cultivate your interests, when you are clandestine time is the only thing you won't be short of. It is important, however, that you learn to consider the timing and places of your interventions in a different way in order to avoid frustration. I'm saying this because when I chose a specific area of intervention, and decided to act promptly and quickly in events concerning it, I often experienced a sense of impotence. In fact, if you are living in hiding news from your own country and comrades might reach you with months of delay, when it is too late to do anything. Furthermore, when it comes to moving away from somewhere you need time for gathering information about routes and means of transport... you can't just do things at random. I don't mean that you have to forget where you're from, what you have to do is to look at it in a different way, by planning long term projects and paying attention to the details that you didn't have time to do in your previous life, even if you knew they were important. Consider that as a person in hiding you have the chance to intervene rapidly in situations that you didn't even know about before. I realized how deep-rooted my idea of borders between States was before and how little attention I had paid to what happened 'beyond the borders', as I was also busy in the many activities that life offers.

When you change your perception of time, you also change the way you act. If you dedicate hours to a project and get to know all the details involved, then realise it, the time you spent in planning it comes back to you and gives more significance to every minute. Your sensations are amplified by the total tension of your whole being in what you are doing. It is a lucid awareness that keeps you away from the distracting business of the people around you at that time.

I have reached the torrent after hours spent in a train, then walking.
It is hot and I can feel my shirt wet with sweat under my rucksack.

No one followed my steps along the road and through this little valley, which means that still nobody knows who I am, where I am going or what I am doing.

sage of the powerful is clear: put up with it or you'll end up in prison (if not dead) in the worst conditions of isolation.

Given that the struggle in the streets is losing its strength, we will eventually have no choice but to live in hiding and organise in small affinity groups.

Finally, I tell you, I only ever felt really free when I was in hiding.

Travel notes

Discuss ideas, actions and projects of people who want to be free along with others who are free, in time and space, in the endless struggle against the cancer of authority. As it is endless, it changes continually, and faces, tensions, perspectives and possibilities also change.

It's a whirlwind and you are at the centre of the cyclone, on your hands and feet, thrown towards a giant leap, and you try to ward off the blows and hold on to an offensive position, and you improvise along a path that many think is not worth taking. They think it cannot be proposed because too many have attempted it already... and where are the results of so many efforts and attempts?

Maybe those who really took up the challenge of freedom know the answer, in the thread that links the steps of those who were, are or will be enemies of imposed rules and commands.

They have who knows what secret joys and victories. Or maybe just an obstinate desire to carry on and keep on gambling one's self and all the rest. A boost to engaging in this struggle without reserve, and so to finding the courage to propose it to others; this means that the freedom in one's step and motivations has to be moulded and lived in first person, it cannot be put off to some glorious future.

Today, in a world of slaves, banks, laws and chains, my freedom exists. It is on the edge of experience.

Nobody pushes himself so high as the one who ignores his goal.

Cromwell

Traveling can mean many different things during one's life.

There are monotonous journies, endlessly repeated along the tracks of daily survival, taking millions of people to the temples of exploitation.

In the daytime and at night, through the countryside or suburbs darkened by the smoke of the factories and the misery of alienation; thousands of hours and thousands of miles that change nothing... the same disgusted faces, dirty windows, rituals to be repeated until flesh and soul are consumed.

It is the pace of exploitation, it is a world dominated by artificial and deadly needs and ambitions that are sweeping away everything natural and balanced that the human race has conquered for itself through hundreds of years of hard

On the contrary, to sort out the problem of identity with the custodians of order is much easier. For the latter the question is just a matter of looks: you only need to become one of the many, nothing more or less, avoid going around during 'unusual' hours and attending suspicious places, especially regularly.

It is an effort of concentration, as I was saying before, it requires a state of lucidity that must be held for long periods. It is precisely absolute attention that you need in order to avoid enervating paranoia, endless doubts and general stress. You can trust nothing other than your own attention to make sure that everything is okay and the situation is under control. You also need to look to your safety and make sure you are always free.

If you are a person in hiding, a normal event might appear suspicious to your eyes; and it is true that the more you look at people with suspicion and insistence the more you catch their attention. Suddenly it can seem that everybody is looking at you or that someone is following you. Then panic might come, and that is always difficult to cope with. The only way to get over this shocking state of mind, and you must know this very well, is by keeping your mind and nerves cool, sharpening your senses and doubling your attention. Besides this, however, it is recommended that you keep your eyes wide open to what is happening around you. You have to learn to recognize faces, particularly the features of the people around you, in one second flat, to develop a photographic memory that allows you to recognize them at once and so be able to spot a new face that might appear in the usual environment immediately. A clandestine person looks at the present through different eyes to those of people who are not in his/her condition as he/she sees and fixes his/her attention on details that escape those who are not clandestine. One day, as I went into the square of a big town, I noticed two policemen in plain clothes asking a passer-by for his documents in a very discreet manner, almost hiding under an arcade. The square was crammed with people and I realized that no one was aware of what was going on, not even those who were strolling a few steps ahead: I was the only one who saw that it was a police identification and that there were two cops standing there.

As it is hard to keep this kind of tension for long, you need to have a place where you can go to relax. The most important place is undoubtedly that where you spend the night. You must be sure that no one can come and find you there and that you really are alone once you close the door behind you. Then you find yourself with your books, your comments, your proposals, and free from your new identity.

It is best that the people you meet never know the exact location of the place where you live. Your photos might appear in the newspapers next day, and anyway the more people know where you live, the less you will feel safe in that house.

can either throw you into absolute frustration or make you feel dizzy at the thought that you are totally free from any links and able to become anybody or nobody. The choice is up to you. Paradoxically, I often asked myself, what if it were precisely the condition of being clandestine that is the dimension of absolute freedom.

To conclude: you need to be ready to travel light, without your past. You have to be new and wear only your enthusiasm and the promise that you will never look back.

So, someone on the run arrives somewhere. His or her first thought is to create another identity, which doesn't only mean inventing a name with which to introduce oneself. It also means that you need to create a concrete, plausible and legal life in order to be able to make relationships and avoid raising doubts about yourself. You must therefore create a past that can be talked about and a valid and credible reason for being in that place; you also need to respect the time and pace that the latter requires and pay attention to your looks so that they conform to your new identity. It is a real job that requires a good memory, time and energy, and I have to say that it is not at all easy to act a part and get used to answering when you are called by your new name. It is not easy to talk about yourself, about your life and interests, especially when you had always done that, as I used to, with your comrades and didn't need to give many explanations, maybe doing wrong sometimes. It is sad to pass for a collector of dreams when your greatest passion is to subvert the existent and struggle openly against authority and injustice...

So once you have got over doubts and suspicion about your interlocutor, you find yourself talking about yourself by mixing truth and lies, real memories with imagination; and you have to bear in mind that you must remember what you have said and that it has to fit in with your new personality and identity. You must constantly weigh up your words and comments and always hide the reactions that you normally have when you see certain things or hear certain kinds of news. In other words, you have to be extremely lucid all the time and constantly keep the balance between who you are and how you are presenting yourself. I often found myself involved in conversations that left me exhausted from the huge effort I had to make to keep concentrating. In fact, no matter what discussion you get into, it will always reveal a part of you and your way of behaving with others. Moreover when you meet someone particularly interesting and your relationship with him/her grows through time, it will be difficult to manage as you will find it hard to keep on playing your part and avoid being discovered. Obviously you might feel quite uncomfortable at some point, as you know that you are deceiving the person you are dealing with and that the latter will never know you for what you really are. Then you will feel nervous because even a simple invitation to dinner might put your friend in serious trouble.

work and ingeniousness, in its confrontation with the elements and other living beings on the planet, and during hundreds of years of struggle against the inequality that other human beings have imposed on their fellows.

Today, all over the world, what gives a meaning to one's existence is consumerism: consume, consume and consume again. It doesn't matter whether the product is material or intellectual, and it doesn't matter about the quality, what counts is that our purse can afford it. The most important thing is that the economic machinery producing and commercialising goods that are basically useless and harmful, but are tempting in the market and can represent a goal to be achieved, keeps on functioning.

Objects, food, experiences, kilometres, lands and culture are to be consumed in order to make people feel satisfied with the way they spend their days.

It is the same 'spirit' that makes tourism fascinating, even though the distances to be covered and places to be reached are cut out in pre-confectioned packets and the duration, if there are no unforeseen unpleasant events, is known in advance. Moments of recreation from the daily routine with which people hope to find, at least until their next holiday, just enough boost to prevent them packing their suitcases once and for all.

After all, the tourist industry, i.e. the transformation of journeys and the planning of territory, resources and production into commercial goods for this purpose, offers a considerable service to the maintenance and reproduction of the capitalist disaster. On the one hand it creates and spreads the market to places that couldn't otherwise be exploited, be it due to their natural features or particular demographic and human conditions; on the other it guarantees that journeys be protected from the risk of unpredictability and possibly really being able to change one's existence.

And for sedentary people, there is the option of comfortable journeys on the sofa in the emotion of TV or substances, legal or illegal, it makes no difference, to deepen one's dissatisfaction.

And you gain strength
once again
now that a new day is about to start
and who knows what roads you will cover,
what faces, embraces and new escaping adventures
will come to you one after another.
You are at the centre of the storm
and this makes each day and night
the greatest emotion you can follow.

Midnight, 19th-20th February

But there are journeys that shock our habits and certainties. Not only ours, but also those of the whole culture that has inevitably conditioned our way of intending life, from the day we were born to the day we set off.

I want to talk about this kind of journey.

These are journeys with no return, as others told me, because to retrace one's steps or come back to the point where one started off is simply another adventure, another journey.

Day after day, step after step, you find sensations and places, faces and experiences that make you understand who you are and what surrounds you. It is a discovery that transforms your way of being and strengthens and reinforces attitudes that will never leave you, and at the same time it offers you experiences that can shock you and take you beyond these 'certainties'.

A journey where nothing is mapped out in advance and during which all your truths come out and blossom, the truths that you cultivate for yourself and which make you behave and act. Truths that are continuously put in question and become stronger or weaker under the blows of our merciless critique. Intuitions and ideas and firm beliefs that are dealt with, fight with one another and finally go along with other people's truths in a common path. These are the criteria representing the sense of our journey, and show us where to look, where to go, who is on our side and who is our enemy.

I'm talking about the truths that stimulate confrontation and growth far from the monstrous Truth that is the same for everybody, social and ethical dogma imposed in advance that fights and fears the other truths.

Open a door and the world faces you.
In all its usefulness and misery.
But you find yourself wondering whatever
can have shaken this huge quagmire.
How much luck will you have in the race against time.
How many moves do you have left to play.
You ask yourself this and
the answer reveals that the various paths
are all but exhausted.
The next step,
a crossroads,
unexpected slopes
and your road shows itself
with all the evidence and certainty
that allows you to go ahead.
End of October

to the test came to me at a time when I either had to accept it or face the bars of a prison. As for the unknown dimension of living in hiding, at first I only knew that it would allow me to move freely and look at the sky without seeing it through the contours of the prison bars. This thought, strengthened by the practical attention that I had dedicated to it in the past, was sufficient for me to decide to run away.

If I had to say what living in hiding is like in a few words I would say that it is like leaving without knowing your destination, for an unlimited amount of time and with a one way ticket. It is therefore very different from the journeys we are used to: it is not a parenthesis between before and after but is a life spent on the move. As I've always had a passion for nomadic ways of life to such a point that I've always identified life with movement, that doesn't scare me. During my period in hiding I've had the chance to reflect on the different attitudes and characters of human beings according to their sedentary or nomadic ways. When you are on the road you meet travellers like yourself or people who are settled in a given place. I observed that certain friends I made wouldn't be able to go on living if they had to leave their homes. Those who don't like travelling inevitably become creatures of habit, their days are spent in the same framework and they establish strong, deep and permanent relationships as only those that grow throughout the years can be. Their life goes on in a specific place and there it takes form and content, and it would lose its meaning anywhere else. On the contrary, those whose nature is nomadic do not feel tied to one place, they adapt easily and immediately feel, from experience, if the place where they have temporarily settled is all right for them or not. These are quite important aspects for those who are compelled to live in hiding. A clandestine person cannot allow themselves to be identified and knows that everywhere one goes one must make the decision to leave again without any kind of impediment. It is a decision that has to be taken out of the blue because things could go wrong out of the blue as well.

But let's come back to the idea of leaving without forgetting that this kind of departure is an imposition, as we are talking about the condition of being a 'bandit', i.e. someone who cannot come back. What you leave when you run away is a whole life composed of friendships, relationships, beloved landscapes, familiar sounds and smells, and things that you care a lot about: it is therefore everything that contributes to creating your identity, and that's no small thing. The nostalgia for what you've lost can turn into a pain; a continuous pain that can be so deep and lacerating that you cannot accept the present serenely. I felt this pain too, sure I did, but I've always circumscribed it and limited it in time. And I got over it in the pleasure of being free and ready to experience life day by day, and all that was going to happen. After all, as a person in hiding, you carry within yourself the sensation that you have nothing more to seek in your past and no certainty concerning the future. According to your character, this

Nomad for something precious

I've often heard that prison is a setback for revolutionaries because those who are really convinced of the need to change the existent radically and act consequently, will sooner or later face ending up in jail. In fact it's obvious that the enemy reacts by sharpening its knives when it faces a threat to its existence, even if the latter is a mere possibility. Phonetapping, following, intimidation and any other kind of attention that the repression can bring about will become more and more concrete, and the cages of control will surround us. If we reckon that 'getting the situation under control' is not enough to face the 'evil', then we will have to physically separate ourselves from the social context and the danger we think it involves.

I think that, without falling into paranoia, this consideration must be always taken into account by all those who decide to undertake the many roads to their freedom and that of others. I'm convinced that nothing could be worse than finding ourselves quite unprepared when faced with the possible consequences of our actions, as though we were prey to a dream that suddenly crashes against the thick concrete walls of reality leaving us unable to react. I don't mean that it is possible to be ready for everything that might happen to us in advance; but at least we have to think of hypothetical ways to react to certain situations in order to keep on cultivating and arming our desires and practices.

I'm developing this argument because I had already thought about the eventuality of living in hiding before it knocked on my door. Of course I didn't have any precise ideas about it but it was in my mind as a possibility between controlled freedom (the one we experience when we are not locked up) and reclusion. I had consequently prepared myself concerning where to go and how to do it. I've never agreed with comrades who consider living in clandestinity as the worst thing that could ever happen to you; on the contrary I've always instinctively perceived it as a stroke of luck and a chance to be grasped at once. I've never thought that this choice implied hiding oneself somewhere and feeling hunted down and deprived of all dignity or the will to act. And I've never thought that running away means escaping one's responsibilities: in this case it was the judiciary that presented the bill, and I've never drawn up any contract with them. On the contrary I think freedom is something precious that is worth defending at any price.

I didn't consider living in hiding as something you decide without taking into consideration the conditions that go with it. The chance to put this choice

You always need to be ready to face new situations. The reality you deal with is continually changing. Sometimes these changes lead you to paths that, at best, you only ever visited in your imagination.

This can happen to anybody... but especially to those who cultivate a desire to shake rules and regimes and open up their todays and tomorrows to different ways of life, social relations and ways of getting and managing what they need, both as individuals and members of a community. In this case the chance of taking a path that goes beyond the codes of availability and identification grows significantly. This is proved by the experiences of those who have engaged in the struggle for freedom, with all the meanings that these words have taken in space and time.

It is a path along which you can find yourself because it is the only one left. But it can also be a choice made to follow your needs, projects and desires, in your own time.

Today I know that it is hard to break those bridges down,
but it is possible.

It is like a conquest of yourself and
of your abilities;

a conquest that, step by step, strengthens your certainty
and trust in what you think, in what you want to be possible,
in what you create with determination and enthusiasm.

The freedom I breathe today
comes from this silence
and restlessness of being away from my habits.

25th April

There are rules, conventions, pieces of paper, technological innovations that organise the existent according to the needs of production and social management developed by the ruling Power.

There are moments when all this is too suffocating for those who want to blow up this huge prison. Then you need other spaces, abilities and a different dimension in which to learn to move. It is the dimension of secrecy, a series of expedients, relations, projects and actions that allow you to keep your initiative and strengthen your ability of intervention without being identifiable, controllable and therefore locatable. The dimension of secrecy runs parallel to that of the existent as we normally intend it, it penetrates it or moves away from it according to our needs and goals.

13:28

I'm on the train. I left the last shadows that were following me some hundreds of kilometres away, after a quick run between the shelves of a double

exit supermarket and a sudden ride on two buses heading towards the suburbs. Trains also stop in the suburbs and there are fewer cameras that you can easily avoid. Nobody is following me and in my wallet I have documents with details that are not mine. A new haircut, a pair of glasses, some anonymous clothes and it's not me any more. Before catching this train I took one of those bags that it is never convenient to keep in your house. I've got what I need and I know that, thanks to the precautions I took, I don't run the risk of ending up at some dangerous checkpoint, unless something very unfortunate happens. I know my route, even if I'll have to take roads I've never taken before and visit places I've never seen. The journey of someone on the run is not like taking a break from daily routine. Wherever you arrive you immediately have to understand what the space you're in is like. You have to find the conditions that best satisfy your needs in that place. You try to see the dangers as well as characteristics that could be useful. The route you take is a photo album where you put strategic spots, underground passages and one-way streets, houses of friends, discreet bars, hotels where you are not asked for documents and parks where you can camp without anyone noticing you. I'm here now, an unknown person among unknown people and I know very well what I want to do. A false step, a word said at the wrong time, a suspicious look or gesture that attracts too much attention to myself: these are the mistakes that I have to be very careful not to make if I don't want to run any danger. It is important to move now, determined but self-assured, like a fish in water. Here he is. My guide is waiting for me under the clock in the square. He starts walking a few metres ahead, on the other side of the road. I follow him and I know that in the distance I'm watched by other eyes, friends and accomplices. Good, I think that a journey like the one we are about to undertake is more fascinating if it is made in company.

A journey undertaken by someone on the run is not at all carefree. There are insidious passages and you always have to consider the possibility of a forced return to the situation you are escaping from, with all the consequences that this implies.

You learn to live with the possibility of facing death more than you do in other circumstances. Such a possibility is not so unlikely within the context of an unreserved struggle against Power and its guards. It is not paranoia, it is just one of your thoughts, the awareness that death is one of the many possible conclusions of your adventure.

It is not at all easy to face conditions like these, especially as they imply running away from everything that surrounds you, in a more or less drastic way depending on the specific circumstances of your journey. And you might feel lonely without your usual friends and loved ones. It is as if a part of you has been torn away from your inner being. You walk, you have your legs, your arms and your brain but something is missing.

It is a void that it would not be too difficult to give in to.

coffee and cigarettes on their breath when they transmit my details to the police headquarters.

I've got an upset stomach, and sweat is dripping from my chest and armpits. They stare at me for a few minutes, ask for my details then wait for a communication from the headquarters. We are going through an area full of tunnels and there are disturbances. I must keep quiet, I say to myself while looking at the landscape and trying to absorb its colours. I concentrate on the houses made of stone and their characteristic roofs. I am thinking this is the last time I will be able to enjoy a landscape.

I wonder if my partner wrote to me and I also wonder how she'll know that I've been captured.

The youngest cop is not married, whereas the other two are: they have well-ironed shirts. They have given a kiss to their wives before going to work. They are hunters and I'm the prey. When a gazelle feels the lion's teeth sinking into her neck she abandons any attempt at resistance. I'm suddenly wrapped in a strange calmness. I feel like laughing and say to myself: 'After all I knew this moment would arrive sooner or later, it was even too good but now the day of reckoning has come'. Where will they take me? It is the first time since I left that I have been subjected to such a control.

They obviously have problems of communication with the headquarters. The youngest gives me back my document and apologizes. I look at him as though I wanted to say that they know where they can find me and that I've nothing to hide. As they go, I get up to relax and have a cigarette in the corridor. I ask myself whether I should sit down or to get off at the next stop. But the route is still long and I don't have any chance of escape. If they get an answer from the headquarters they will come back to me. I think of the possibilities that are left open to me: pull the emergency brake and jump out of the train, lock myself in the toilet and destroy anything compromising that I have on me.

The old woman was looking at me suspiciously when the cops were trying to identify me, and saw how nervous I was afterwards. When we arrive at .., the old woman gets ready to leave the train with all her luggage. I offer her my help but she firmly refuses, while I notice with great relief that the cops are getting out too. I will be at the border in a few hours.

I resolve not to think about what to do next; I've got the entire day to do that.

There are no cops at the station but I prefer to take a walk. I eat a sandwich and look at the sea and its waves in front of me. The weather is fine here. I enjoy the last spliff I have. It tastes so sweet, like freedom.

A train in the night

It is not recommended that you catch the night train for many reasons. But if you are in a hurry it is the only train that allows you to go through the whole country in one night. It is always full of clandestine people trying to cross the border, people full of hope and desperation like me.

I resolve to catch this train because otherwise I will be obliged to spend the night in the cold or pay for a hostel. It is something past one am when we arrive at .. There are few people on the train tonight and we are three or four in the compartment. As usual, two or three groups of youths get on the train and wander among the seats, clearly with shady intent. As I know the route quite well, I keep my rucksack safely between my legs, whereas my documents and money are next to my body. As I live in the street I'm quite wary. In this no smoking section there is also an old woman with parcels and suitcases well placed between the seats. She has also noticed the strange movements. An hour's journey later I realize that someone, one of the kids, sits down behind me. I'm half asleep, so I wake up and see that another one is sitting in front of me. I look at them without saying anything. The lights are off but I can guess they are looking at me too, in defiance. They must be fourteen or fifteen, but they are already adults with their short hair, their older brother's trousers and ordinary jackets and shoes. I see them getting up and going to the next coach. I take advantage of the passage of the ticket inspector and go to the toilet to have a big spliff that makes me quite stoned. It is very good grass and I have to pay attention not to let the smoke out.

'Cowards': the old woman is cursing the same kids who have tried to threaten her. 'I'm in the street too, shit!'. She looks at me disconsolately and I understand that she doesn't trust me either. The first daylight brightens up the mountains far away. Even if there is a lot of snow, it is going to be a nice day. It is early in the morning when we arrive at ... A group of pupils going on holiday are standing on the platform with their bags. The train starts again; a few more hours and I will be able to get out and eat something.

I hear the doors open behind me, and then I see them. There are three of them with hats, uniforms and the badge on the jacket. While the first asks the old woman for her documents, the other two point to me. There are three passengers in the carriage, and three cops. 'Good morning, passports,' they say with forced courtesy. They have just started their day's work, as I can smell

This strange wayfarer can ease the nostalgia that accompanys him with encounters along the way, soften it with new relations and experiences that he wouldn't otherwise have had the chance to meet. I don't just mean those who are living in the same condition in this open prison without bars, or that he wishes he could meet.

We can say that he finds a new way of facing human reality in its more concrete needs, depressing misery and real joy and sincerity. This condition not only depends on your own new way of making relations (because you need them or because they happen owing to some particular circumstance), but also on the way in which others relate to you and interpret these relations.

As you cannot count on identity, allowing others to recognize you for things you have done in your life or for what people say or think about you, the clandestine rediscovers the very essence of his choices and aspirations. He realizes that the reasons for the obstinate desire for subversion that animates him are deep, clear and meaningful. So he can experience a more authentic and immediate way of communicating and making relations that he maybe never had the opportunity to experience before. And he finds a new language to express the essence of his character and certitudes to others.

EL MELFI

We arrived in the town the night that the local football team won an unlikely victory in the championship. In the bars, disillusioned people gave vent to the habitual rite of hurling abuse and drinking in front of big screens, at times not even allowing one to follow the ball. El Melfi had already arrived and his presence was rife in the laughter that accompanied our night.

El Menfi is a sensation that becomes alive and takes flesh and blood, a way of moving among people, smiling or gazing in a way that hits your face and transforms your muscles and nerves.

If you feel his presence it will never leave you.

El Melfi was on our side in the carefree fun to which we were dedicated in the metropolitan green of the camp where we were guests. And he made us taste, through the voice of memory, the exceptional quality of the few moments we lived together.

El Melfi carries in himself the unique dimension of an individual who has run away from home and is strongly convinced in his heart that if he put everything at stake, and maybe also lost a lot, it was for an overpowering change, not only in his own condition.

He is the sense of coming back to something that you had begun, to a land that loses its shape in recollection and becomes something

ideal and that pushes you to look for it elsewhere, in people and situations that you haven't met so far.

For this reason El Melfi shows himself to the unknown person at the half-open door and the colourful yard full of strong smells of peasant cooking and of men, women and children looking for a future in the chains of an existent that crushes freedom and hope.

For this reason El Melfi runs in the woods and across the rocks to penetrate the heart of oppression and push his knife deep into it.

We know that; we look at each other out of the corner of our eyes, and our thoughts go farther than the half words and curiosity of our companions of the night can go, right there where our freedom meets El Melfi's.

That night we threw our bags in the corner of a mattress, and at dawn for the nth time we left an oasis of temporary convivial tranquillity and lost ourselves in the tangle of thousands of streets and ideas. But we were sure that we would never abandon each other on any account.

But in the end, after all this moving, discussing, shouting and planning, you are alone. You are alone in the face of your responsibilities and your ability, real or imagined, when communicating with others. You are alone in the face of your tenacity and obstinacy, which you have to hold on to in order not to collapse in the slime that surrounds you, in the misery of human relations and perspectives, in the small and great resignations of daily life.

You are alone, but you have something inside you that pushes you into making new relations, plans and struggles.

Living as a clandestine therefore becomes an attitude among the many that can complete your way of being, thinking and acting. It is a journey that gives you a filter to interpret what surrounds you according to criteria that transform the way you see life, the time and space of your movements and the way you settle yourself. I try to reflect... to see what has been done and what not. And I find myself following strategic and improbable choices. Improbable, not because they are not appropriate to the social context in which I find myself or because I made some terrible mistake in understanding the needs that the movement of struggle against authority expresses.

Improbable because they don't take into consideration what I really am, the roads I cover, the gulf that, in the deepest part of myself, stands between me and most of the people I meet.

This gulf cannot be insurmountable, on the contrary it must be overcome. You go through it one way then you come back through it the other. It is a gulf that doesn't prevent you from living common experiences with others... but it

documents. On the contrary they can deport me more easily now because they have my passport and I am more exposed to deportation. I don't need to kill someone to risk this, being sacked is enough. There is also still frustration at the economic level. Of course my daily life has changed for the better because in Algeria an attic like this, where you can live peacefully with your family, is incredibly expensive. Here I've got the attic but the fact of not being able to use a lift produces the same frustration. If I said such things to someone living in Algeria he would say that I'm crazy, but when you face problems like these directly they acquire a new dimension. Compared with living as a clandestine it is still a question of surviving. You are not safe with the stay permit, as you can't get involved in any political projects with others. If I take part in a demonstration, be there clashes or not, I risk double because I'm an immigrant. And what is the result? Well, I can't go on a demo even if I'd like to. It is such a waste of energy not to be able to take part in any actions, be it a demo or anything else. I want to do something but I can't because I'm an immigrant, not because I killed someone or robbed a bank, but due to the mere fact that I'm an immigrant. This is the biggest disappointment for those who are looking for freedom and hope to improve their conditions and those of their family.

Living in clandestinity was a passage in the conditions you had to face, whereas being an immigrant, with all that you left behind in the search for freedom and the fulfilment of your aspirations, is something that never ends and which you can't escape from. It is a status that pushes you into overcoming all difficulties and going ahead to find some improvement that can cancel the immediate frustration. Although you know that you might face more frustration when you find yourself faced with whatever problem. It seemed to me that your condition as an immigrant, more than that of clandestinity, affects your life day after day and the perspectives ahead of you. Being an immigrant affects every aspect of your life, especially as you don't choose to emigrate but you are compelled to. When you have to emigrate you always have the hope that you will improve your situation, but you really just change your problems and frustration. If you are frustrated because you can't live your sentimental life or because you don't even have water to drink you can't calculate the level of your frustration and say that this problem frustrates you more than the other. It is exactly the same thing.

You live as a clandestine in the hope that it will come to an end and you face this condition without going crazy because you have the hope that it will change. When you are no longer clandestine you realize that your problems are still there.

Maybe the only way out as concerns being clandestine is not to get identity papers, which you think will help you, but simply really be yourself and follow your aspirations without the frustration that has always accompanied you.

As you wait for the stay permit you have the illusion that your situation will change, but when you get it new problems and frustrations come as well. At least you have hope when you are waiting for the stay permit.

In the end it is worse owing to the new problems that you have to face. For example, when you have a baby in Italy you can get money for it from the council. But when my daughter was born we were not given anything because we were foreigners.

That is not a minor problem compared with the ones I had had to face before: my daughter has been discriminated against since birth, as she is considered inferior. I'm disgusted by the fact that she also has to face problems that once only concerned me. And I can't do anything because it doesn't depend on me. It is exactly the same as when I was clandestine, that's why I said that the frustration is the same. When I was clandestine I couldn't decide for myself but had to wait for others to decide and give me documents. Even if I knew I had the physical and intellectual skills to improve my situation, I couldn't do anything about it.

I'm experiencing the same problems concerning my daughter even although in a different way.

Another problem is the illusion that you can improve your economic situation. It is true that in Algeria I couldn't even afford to buy a shirt and that made me angry... I woke up at 7am, came back home at 7pm and I got a wage that didn't allow me to afford anything. I felt the same anger when my wife was pregnant and we asked the administrators for permission to use a lift in a part of the building that was close to our flat. We preferred to pay in order for her to use the lift but this was denied us, in spite of the fact that we regularly made written requests. How funny: when I said that if my wife had any problems they would have a weight on their conscience they answered: 'We can't have weights on our conscience because we are catholic'. The fact that my wife had to go up five floors when she could have used a lift made me so angry, especially because I couldn't afford a house with a lift. The problems had changed but they didn't let me sleep at night all the same.

If once I was scared I might be discovered as a clandestine and face deportation, my fears doubled after I had papers. As a clandestine I had to repress myself because I couldn't have a public life or react to the abuse inflicted on me owing to the lack of papers. Actually I am even more controlled now that I have papers, both in my public and private life. I am surrounded by terrible fears. Nobody is pointing a gun at my head, but there is this closure, this invisible encirclement that is the fear of going back to the beginning or even of being deported to Algeria after enduring so much sacrifice. In fact the stay permit is nothing; it is just a way for the authorities to control you. I feel the same fear I had when I lived as a clandestine. I also realize that I was safer when I didn't have any documents because Algeria doesn't accept people without

is a gulf all the same, and when I run inside it I find out what I am and what I have had the chance to know, develop and put into practice in my clandestine journey, be it by chance or by lucid thinking. Only in the awareness of the distances I inevitably covered in my experiences, my abilities and my way of facing life and therefore the struggle, do I feel I can fix my determined eyes on the paths of future journeys.

Running away from the prison society

The repressive system is evolving. Like any sector of the big market that society has become, it is testing new methods to control individuals and subject them to its needs.

New measures of control have been introduced in addition to jail as such, measures that simplify the problem of overcrowded prisons and allow those who govern our destiny to earn a lot of money. House arrest, for example, is a good investment: not only does the prisoner manage his own detention, but an impression of democratic repression is also given. And what about the electronic bracelets that are applied to the ankles as though people were guinea pigs? These bracelets are provided by specialised companies, so new jobs are introduced. Why don't they call them anklecuffs? Maybe the sentence 'You are obliged to wear anklecuffs' doesn't sound good in court.

Prisons exist everywhere in our society and invest all aspects of life. Aren't certain factories and offices where you sell your time to get what you need to keep on suffering and producing, real prisons? Aren't the structures of schools and universities where exploiters and exploited are formed rather than people, real prisons? And what about hospitals, where you go to die of cancer after a stressful meaningless life; what about rehabilitation centres, where new methods of rehabilitation back into the productive system are tested? And what are the concrete cubes called houses, where people swear; what are the slums where people enjoy their recreational hour; what are the supermarkets where you can buy the rubbish that you produce; and what about the streets where people die like flies?

Aren't those who are compelled to work for a miserable wage prisoners? Aren't the idiots who perform in programs like 'Big Brother' their own jailers? Aren't all those who morbidly watch the exasperating monotony of such programs also jailers of themselves? Prisoners in a world where the only freedom is the amount you have in your bank account. By creating more and more efficient networks of control and using more and more sophisticated instruments, dominion has penetrated all intimacy and turned all the places where people are forced to live into prisons.

More than 50,000 people are taken to prison every year in Italy alone, prisons with bars and guards, where torture is constantly practised and beatings are the

of mine who had studied telecommunications, like me, had found jobs in the field. The hope of finding this kind of job kept me going. I did hard work in the hope of finding something else later and so I also did temporary jobs for 15 days while staying at the welcome centre. Unfortunately the time limit for staying in the centre arrived and I didn't know what to do. It was out of the question to go back to my Indian friend. So a friend of mine who had also finished his time in the centre, and I, decided to rent a house. Actually we had no other choice.

It took days and nights... If we answered some advert directly we were denied everything and if we asked some Italian friend to make the telephone call for us, when we arrived on the spot we were told things like: 'My daughter has rented the house to her boyfriend', 'My husband has already rented the house', all excuses not to rent a house to us. The last week before expulsion from the centre a female Moroccan friend found a house and she knew I was looking for one too. The landlord told her that he could rent the house for 3 million liras because he had done some work on it and he would also leave a washing machine. My friend said she would decide with her husband. She was not my wife and this was only an expedient for getting the house. They thought we were married. When we went to see the administrators of the building, my friend wore a veil and I said she couldn't speak Italian. We wanted to avoid falling into contradiction if they asked us any questions. It might seem easy, like a game, but the situation was actually very serious as we risked ending up in the street. My other friend and I agreed to pay 3 million liras per month but obviously we didn't have the money. A friend working in another town, however, sent us some money, so we gave the landlord 1,700,000 liras plus the money for the rent and settled in the attic. One week later my friend found a job with his diploma and his situation improved considerably. Fifteen days later I found a job in a big telecommunications company. We would therefore apply for a loan, which we would repay with our work.

Now I had to keep my word with my girlfriend's father and marry her. As they say in my country, if you make a promise it is like a gunshot that goes out and cannot be taken back. It was also a question of dignity concerning my family and hers. So I went there and got married.

When I was in Algeria I got the money that we had borrowed from the friend who had already helped us to pay the landlord: four million liras, which is quite a large amount in Algeria if you consider that you cannot earn more than 200,000 liras per month there.

As I came back to Italy after getting married, the struggle to bring my wife to Italy began and with it new frustrations arrived. In fact, neither my stay permit nor the job with my diploma could make me feel free. I didn't feel as if I had found what I was looking for. The problems had simply changed.

What are the actual differences and perspectives in passing from illegal to legal immigration status?

had to do especially as I couldn't do that before... I mean, I was afraid to buy a ticket and travel before.

Finally I got a stay permit, a year after I applied for it, and the first thing I did was to buy a ticket to Algeria. Of course I didn't have the money, in fact it was my Indian friend who paid.

I acted this way because I had another big problem: my girlfriend was in my country, which might seem nothing, but it wasn't because she wasn't doing so well in Algeria either. The main difficulty was that her parents knew about our engagement, which was unusual in that country, it's not like here where you can invite your fiancée home. It was like a word of honour... and I couldn't ignore it on any account because my father and a series of social factors were also involved. We have been together for ten years and during the three years I spent here I didn't see her at all, which was another cause of suffering, for both me and mostly her. So I bought that ticket and a week later I was in Algeria. I saw her and my friends again and stayed there for a month and a half. On my way back to Italy I wondered where I would go, given that I couldn't go back to that centre. Once again it was my Indian friend to invite me to his house as he had to go to India and said I could stay with his wife and children. I went there until I said to myself: 'Stop it now, I've got a stay permit, I went to Algeria and saw my girlfriend and friends, what am I doing still in this house?'. My Indian friend suggested I take my time as it was not at all easy but I couldn't keep going on like that.

I enrolled in a council centre and got a room with another six people. It was a terrible experience that deepened my disappointment in my search for freedom. For example I had never imagined having to experience things such as concealing drinking some wine. To drink wine is a risk in Algeria too, but why was not I allowed to drink wine in Italy, a European democratic country? In that centre drinking wine was forbidden and I had also to leave the place at 7am. Anyone who goes to a place like that is forced to do so because they have no money for rent or cannot rent for other reasons. At 7am, therefore, even in winter when it is 10 C below zero, a woman who works inside as a guard tells the people to get out. At 9.30pm all the lights are off and you have to sleep. A terrible disappointment to me, heavy treatment: wine cannot be drunk because 'Moroccans make trouble' and discipline must be respected. A real disaster! At the age of 30 I have to be told what to do because they want me to be the way they like: what rage, what frustration...

Then although I had a stay permit I had to work in agriculture again. Actually the stay permit didn't change my economic situation much. I also did temporary work, for example in factories, where I was even injured. As I said before, I had never imagined this kind of situation. I still hoped to get a job in Italy where I could use my diploma. I was really confident in my skills and that I would be able to do this job in Italy or elsewhere, especially as some friends

normal procedure. Prisoners submitted to 41bis regime in Italy and the FIES regime in Spain know all about that. Most prisoners have committed crimes against property or related to drug trafficking. Most are immigrants from lands where western colonisation has left nothing but misery. *'Laws are made by the rich in order to exploit those who cannot respect them owing to brutal necessity'* (B. Brecht).

I will never have any respect for a society whose aims are profit and war, and that locks up those who don't accept it. When I heard that they wanted to lock me up I had no doubts: in the face of the certitude of reclusion I preferred to run away. It was an instinctive choice; a choice that implied being taken away from what my life had been until then but also the satisfaction of not being caught by the inquisitors. The life of a fugitive is like that of an incognito prisoner inside the big prison that is society. I can't say whether running away is better than being in an official prison or worse than being in the prison-society. I've never been in jail but I know the alienation and mediocrity of life when you are exploited very well. They are different aspects of the same problem: that of not being free. I will never be free so long as exploitation, prisons, and all kinds of property and authority exist, as they are the main causes of social inequality.

Far be it from me to idealise the condition of clandestinity as a winning formula for insurrection, but I cannot help pointing out its positive aspects. If you must face a prison cell, it is worth trying this adventure, which will also give you the possibility of discovering the chances that life as fugitive can offer and the importance that this experience can have in a revolutionary perspective. It is also a question of principle. Your character and tensions play the most important role when it comes to making such a decision. In fact, it is better to stay at home and wait for events to overcome you rather than become a prisoner of fear and of yourself. For me this is a journey on the fringes of society during which I've tried, not always successfully, to hide myself the least possible and to keep my own individualism/identity even if I had to hide my story and my past. I'm not scared about not knowing where I'm going to put my sleeping bag tomorrow. I've always had a nomadic spirit and traveling was my school, and the journey I'm making now is by far the most interesting and authentic one. It is the journey that has taught me how to find new equilibriums even if I had to keep moving. And, although with great difficulty, it has taught me to remain an individual who struggles and not become a shadow hugging a wall. The choice of being a fugitive implies that you have to leave all public life, all relations with friends and relatives forever and adopt a continuous tension and attention in what you say and do. It is a choice that should be considered carefully before being undertaken, a choice that brings thousands of contradictions in itself but, if faced with awareness and without falling into paranoia, it can keep your senses well alive and strengthen your capacity to adapt to any circumstances. You start looking at the country in a different way,

you discover a new world when you pick up a map in your hands, geography becomes a science that leads you to consider territory as something global, to think beyond borders, to look beyond forced passages and find ancient ones. It is a choice that transforms your relations with others and with your daily life, often in a disagreeable way. For example, when you meet someone you know, you risk putting him/her in trouble, and when you ask him/her a favour you have the impression that you are putting him/her up against the wall. By contrast, solid relations, the deep ones in which complicity is spontaneous, become more concrete and passionate.

Making friends without telling the truth is not easy. It is your attitude and need for communication that will decide. To live on the run is not easy. Your way of speaking, strange behaviour and the lies you have to tell surround you with an air of mystery that could be interpreted negatively. Everyone has a dear friend whom they trust completely, and that way everybody gets to know everything. Discretion is a virtue that is getting more and more rare.

I think that the safest way is to keep moving continuously so that your enemy has very little chance of locating you. You absolutely must avoid telephone calls to relatives and friends, visits and letters addressed to known places. In fact, investigators turn their attention precisely on to these people because they know that you will naturally feel like listening to the voice of a loved one and letting him/her know that you are all right. You have to bear in mind that there are at least two cops on all long distance trains and that there are police stations in all the big railway stations. You have also to know that if you are too untidily or too flashily dressed you will attract attention. The total militarization of the country compels you to find spots where you can move about, the weak links of the net through which you can pass unobserved, to see which hours of the day are more convenient and which are the most convenient places to spend the night. It is not at all nice to be hunted down, and it is even worse to know that the repression also and mainly concerns the people you love.

Living in hiding, however, even if done with dignity, is still only one side of the coin. The other, the thought of your imprisoned comrades being submitted to humiliation and violence, cannot be forgotten.

Living in hiding is a challenge, an occasion to test your ideas out, a choice that leads you into a life full of emotions, a reckless life that can be very sad at times, as all choices are. Living in hiding is like making a gamble, day after day, a gamble on your present because your future is a dark cloud, a series of miserable dates in your diary. At first you dream of cops and escapes, then you dream of visiting friends and turning up in your usual bar. In particular, I have to say that my dreams have changed and become terribly real. I often ask myself if running away is still reasonable, then I realize that I will never want to enter a prison. I'll keep on running, as this is my nature, and I'll keep on cursing those who persecute me.

order to get a stay permit. How can a person without documents get a tenancy agreement? That's absurd!

Thanks to my Indian friend, an Egyptian sorted my accommodation problem out. As for the work contract, my friend employed me as a member of the household staff. In the end he managed to put together the dossier that would allow me to make a request for a stay permit. I had come back from France in September but I was not given anything until May. I just got a document stating that I was waiting for a stay permit. At least I couldn't be arrested, so I started moving around looking for something to do. I went to a big town, which was a great change for me, as I could finally get out of the village! I found a job giving out fliers, but I still had the problem of where to sleep. I was paid 30,000 liras a day and had to travel in order to reach the town where I worked. The most important thing, however, was that I could move, and even if my wages were nothing I had the chance to know the town, its people and places, not the monuments of course. The documents, however, didn't arrive and at a certain point I felt I was a burden on the family that gave me hospitality, and I said to myself that I had to get the thing sorted out as soon as possible. I had already caused a quarrel between husband and wife as I was still in her house along with their children. And if I got a stay permit, what would change? I realized that my situation was related not only to a stay permit but also to the dreams I wanted to realise.

For example, I had the chance to attend a welcome centre, which was something I'd never imagined encountering in Europe or anywhere else in my life. I couldn't imagine that there were people compelled to experience the situation I was enduring day after day.

To go there and ask for hospitality involved a total lack of dignity for me, as I'm in good health and, most importantly, my father spent money to allow me to study. I found it unacceptable to be in a situation like that. So I went into the centre run by the church in the town suburbs, where I slept with people of other communities, Albanians, Tunisians, Moroccans... but my stay permit still didn't arrive and there was also a time limit for staying at the centre, you can't stay there for long and need to find another one after a while.

What kind of document did you have to be able to move around while waiting for the stay permit?

I had a receipt while waiting for an answer to my request. So I stayed in the centre that's run by the church and kept on working giving out fliers. But I didn't have enough money as I got 30,000 liras per day and sometimes I only worked one to three days a week. So I decided to work in agriculture again. I called someone in the village where I had already worked, he told me there was a vacancy and I started working in the village again while still sleeping at the centre. It meant that I had to travel (the village was 60 kilometres from the town), work all day long and come back at 11pm. I felt it was something I

was offended and said he wanted to be formally denounced so that he could denounce the guards. In the end they let us go. The French customs was one hundred metres further on. My friend decided to get out of the car and talk to the guards. He said we were very late and that we had already been controlled by the Italian guards, and everything was all right. So we arrived in France, we slept in a hotel and the morning after I went to my sister's.

In France I found far more problems than I had experienced in Italy. Even if I knew I was able to maintain myself I could do nothing, which made me suffer once again. To want to do something but not be able to is a condition that leads you to madness.

From a situation of solitude or even of troubled relations with the people you worked with, you arrived at a place where you would certainly find more people of your country and also your relatives. What was this experience like, which in a sense reminded you of your country?

Relations with relatives are quite obvious. My sister knew I was clandestine and she didn't mind. The problem was in myself. In the morning my sister woke up, got her children dressed and went to work. Her husband did the same whereas I stayed there doing nothing. This was not good at all. My relationship with the people of my country was quite particular because there was a big problem: I absolutely didn't want my parents to know about my conditions. I couldn't cope with the idea that they knew how I lived. So I obviously never told anyone how things were going and that I was compelled to call on someone and ask for a place to sleep. The other Algerians didn't tell me about their problems either, so our relationship was quite superficial. We met, had a chat and a drink together and then everyone went back home.

I also made many friends there who were clandestine and had exactly the same problems as me. They were immigrants who, like me, had emigrated during the second wave of migration, in the Nineties, to escape terrorism. A special decree was issued by the French government for all these Algerians, who were thousands. French intellectuals and a certain political class pushed the government into adopting this solution, which is a kind of asylum similar to political asylum. It allows you to stay in the country and wait but you don't have the right to work, actually you don't have any rights, you just have to wait. I still know people who have been waiting for 4 years.

In the end 8 months passed in France, whereas I had planned to sort out my situation in two months. Then the Napolitano decree was issued in Italy, a kind of amnesty. My Indian friend called me one day and offered to help me regulate my situation. I was very happy because I had wanted to stop living as a clandestine for many years. There was still the border to be crossed but I was able to make it thanks to him. As soon as I was back in Italy I applied for documents and had to wait ages. You need a job and accommodation in

It is a choice that radically changes your way of life, your vision of life, your judgements about things and your feelings.

You become a bit hard and you can only express yourself freely on the rare occasions that you meet friends, but then time is always too short to discuss what's going on and what has changed. You have to content yourself with a reality seen through the eyes of others. I think that I could have many more possibilities if there had been a solidarity network and widespread discussion on the question of living in hiding. To offer space for discussion and real possibilities of surviving to those who are compelled to hide is in my opinion an essential part of any revolutionary experience. I think that the life of fugitives would be easier if reference points existed, as they are indispensable in order to keep in touch concerning any needs: information, legal questions, solidarity, money. I don't intend to put forward a proposal for the creation of any formal structure with fixed responsibilities in the long term, I am just thinking of a co-ordination of individuals and groups that want to show their solidarity, or who already do that, to those who are hit by repression. I think that such a coordination could open gaps in the walls they are building around us, a coordination that takes into account relatives and friends of the persecuted, who are also hit by repression. And if the latter are sensitive to certain subjects, discussions could be suggested to help them understand repressive mechanisms better and get in touch with others in similar conditions and maybe create their 'own' way of organising solidarity. If you hide yourself too much, break off all contacts and disappear not only physically but also from your projects, then you definitely contribute to your own isolation. In this way you would be playing the same game as those who want to get rid of us. For this reason it is extremely important that if you are compelled to run away you keep on living with dignity and don't lose your chance to act or intervene in discussions. As you have always done.

Getting rid of frustration

Why did you decide to leave your community and a situation that was quite well known to you, even if it was also difficult and dramatic? What did you expect and what did you actually find?

Maybe that is precisely the point. A situation can be known to such an extent that there are no aspects to be changed, there is no will to change your life or even to keep on living. Life is continuously threatened and you can be killed from one moment to the next. But it was not always like that. The threat of being killed has been hanging over all Algerians, not only me, for the last few years, since the Nineties. Before reaching this situation where your life is threatened, it was already dangerous. When I was at university I was involved in a union, I was an extreme leftwing activist. When the terrorism started, therefore, politically active people were its main targets, I realized that I had to become clandestine in order to act because I couldn't do it openly any longer. As long as the risk was that of being physically attacked, both me and my friends and relatives, I could carry on. But when death came to threaten the whole family, including the children on their way to school, the only solution for me was to leave the country. To leave doesn't mean to surrender and go, no way. There existed a kind of fork: on the one hand the Algerian secret services, on the other the terrorists. At the time I was working for an Algerian public company, the only telecommunications company in the country. We received letters inviting us to stop working for the State. But if you stopped work the police would come to your house claiming you were a terrorist; so if you escaped from the terrorists, you had to face the police. I was disposed to risk physical aggression for that before, but when the concrete risk of being killed came I had only one choice: to enlist against the terrorists or become a terrorist myself. I was not interested in either of these options as it was not my struggle. The situation was forcing people to take a position for one side or the other. The price was not only having your house burnt or losing your job but also risking your life and that of your relatives. This is the main reason that pushed me to leave the country. Economic reasons are also involved in such choice of course, but in my case I had a well paid job that allowed me to survive. After the fundamentalist parties took power, however, and religion became politics and society was subjected to moral rules, freedom was no longer possible. The simple fact of going out with your girlfriend carried the certitude that you would be assaulted. A girl is not allowed to go around wearing the clothes she likes and

I made an agreement with my new boss: I would be paid one million liras per month and he wouldn't declare I was a worker. Of course nobody in the village, including him, knew that I was clandestine... it would be trouble! He told me he wouldn't declare I was his worker in order to avoid paying a lot of tax and I accepted because I had no other choice. I knew that my wage was a misery when compared with the working hours and in addition I had no insurance. So we decided I wouldn't work every day and would stay at home when there was not much to do. I worked for him for 6 months sometimes from 5am till midnight, and then I decided to take a 5-day holiday to go and see my Indian friend. But the boss was not happy and called me to ask me to come back to work. I came back, talked with him and defended the agreement we had made. Everything seemed to be ok; I worked for another two months without stopping and then resolved to have a rest. This time he threatened he would sack me if I didn't turn up. That would be a tragedy for me but I didn't intend to accept his threat. I wanted him to pay me 10,000 liras per hour because I was angry about his threats. He was scared that I would denounce him and vice-versa. In the end he paid me not exactly the amount I had asked but neither the misery he wanted to give me. So I went away. I did a few days work here and there and sometimes I stayed at home. Then the end of the season arrived and so did a very bad time. Meantime my friend who had come with a student's permit got a stay permit for legal reasons. He left the village and I was left alone with the other friend whom I had argued with. There was nothing to do from October until March, just snow outside and us quarrelling inside. Once again he said that he wanted to leave the house and I was left with no choice but to get in touch with my Indian friend. He gave me hospitality for another three months and tried to help me find a job and a house, but it was useless. He had to go to India for 2 months and I didn't want to stay in his house with his wife and children. I had nothing to do, which was terrible and really destroyed me. I've got a sister who lives in France, where she is regularly married. My friend offered to take me to her and a female friend of his agreed to come with us. We left one night and tried to pass the border, which was not at all easy owing to the controls. We tried to find a mountain pass but it was December, a real disaster. We had to turn back but my friend was determined to go through customs. He was always dressed smart, with suit and tie, and was convinced we'd make it. On the contrary I was about to give up and told him I wanted to go back to Algeria. In the end we tried. It was terribly cold, it was 1am and there was nobody on guard. As the friend who was driving saw that there was nobody there, she accelerated and soon the guards appeared. She didn't know she had to slow down and wait for them to call; they already saw us as people on the run. They stopped and questioned us. I gave them the details of a friend of mine who had got a stay permit and the guards had confirmation from the police headquarters. Then they accused my friend of being involved in smuggling illegal immigrants. He

ferent from the corruption and the tricks that characterize power in Algeria: the same way of ruling and the same structure of government, parties and unions. I can even say that they are complementary because one cannot exist without the other.

We stayed in the village a little longer. The last friend to arrive in Italy got a 6-month student visa and requested a stay permit. A couple of months later he went to take his permit but was given a deportation order instead. He had to leave the country within 15 days. At that point his situation was worse than mine as he had a deportation order, so we remained in the village. Problems soon arose between us. We were always stuck at home and didn't go out because there was nobody around. Maybe people peeped at us from their windows to check that we were not stealing anything. Moreover we were afraid we might meet some Carabinieri, who would certainly arrest us in those conditions if they found us alone in the street. Once a car of the finance police stopped us. We spoke in our language even if we could speak a little Italian, but it was better to pretend we didn't understand. They told us we had to go to the police headquarters to get stay permits but we knew that we would be given expulsion orders. For this reason we didn't go out and it wasn't easy to get on together. My friend who was here before I arrived had regular documents and he wanted to leave the house, which of course was rented in his name. The situation was very difficult: I couldn't go back to Algeria or sleep rough. I didn't want to accept the fact of having to sleep rough; it was something I had never considered in my life. I mean sleeping outside not because you don't have any money but because you don't exist, don't have documents and can't go to a hotel. Nobody would say: you can sleep at my place tonight. I didn't want to accept this situation. So I decided to call a friend of mine who is now in America but used to live in Italy. I told him I wasn't ok and he gave me the number of a friend who spoke French. I called him and found out that he was Indian, married to an Italian woman and had children. I told him I was living with a friend who had to leave and that I didn't have documents. He invited me to go and stay with him in his house. When I spoke to him, there was a female friend of his there. Even if I spoke poor Italian, I understood that she was telling him he would be fined or risked going to jail if he gave me hospitality. But he said he would risk going to prison to help me. So I moved into his home and lived there for two months. He even tried to find a job for me in another town but he didn't find anything.

Then the work season in the village started again and I didn't want to disturb them further. I was living with a family and sometimes there were arguments between them, which is normal, but I felt uncomfortable even if my friend kept on saying there was no problem. I found another boss who could give me accommodation and I came back to work in the countryside, especially as I didn't have any perspectives there, I could only wait. But for what? I had to move.

she is compelled to cover herself with a veil. It is precisely personal freedom of choice that is totally threatened. It is a social problem because all aggressions remain unpunished. For example, gangs of fundamentalist students patrol the campuses and if they see a couple they will certainly beat them up.

Who can resist and risk every single day?

Economic concerns were not relevant for me as I earned one million dinari in Algeria, 100 euros more or less, you can live on this, as prices are not so high there. Over the last few years, however, owing to terrorism, economic reforms, sabotage of factories (they say perpetrated by terrorists, but the Algerian State is clearly involved as it can sell off factories for a dime), life has become much harder from the economic point of view, and buying power is diminishing at a hectic pace even if you have average wages. Prices have gone up 10%, 20% with the excuse of terrorism. Once upon a time the State gave its support and covered the price of basic needs (flour, bread, milk, etc) up to 80% so that people were actually paying only 20%. All this ended with the advent of terrorism. Deep economic reforms were introduced so that my salary was no longer enough to lead a dignified life. Besides this there stands a dream, a dream of Europe where you can live in freedom, and I've always had this dream.

You have often mentioned terrorism. Can you explain what you mean with this word? What is the situation in your country?

The terrorism I am talking about is that of certain students' or local organisations. The leader is the Imam of the mosque and his aim is to impose moral rules on society: women cannot wear miniskirts or drive a car; men cannot let them go out alone, and if they do both of them will be punished; it is absolutely forbidden to drink wine to a such a point that fundamentalists went around smashing coffee-shops in the towns. The police, who controlled this movement, left them to do their job. When the latter won the elections in Algeria the military stopped the elections and jailed the leaders of the fundamentalist parties. The reaction of the most hardcore militants was to take up arms and carry out massacres.

Once upon a time you could fight them with ideas, make propaganda against them and resist their threats. Now they don't limit themselves to burning your house or throwing acid on women, they also kill you and put bombs on buses. For example, when I worked we had to go out of the building at least five times a day as they claimed there was a bomb on the second floor, and all of us ran off. They sowed terror: 200,000 people died in Algeria between 1992 and 2002. They were harmless people, people who couldn't escape abroad or take up arms against terrorists or defend themselves against the Algerian secret services. Algerian security agents and the military infiltrate the terrorist movement and have no intention of defending citizens against massacres, on the contrary. If you stay there you have to kill, as you have no hope of surviving or fighting back. I don't want to kill anybody; I don't want to be a terrorist. There was

a massacre one night in Algiers, I was working there at the time, 400 people were killed in one night, shot or butchered. The people who managed to escape from the village went to the nearest military barracks, not police headquarters, you know, when you are in danger you think that the authorities will help you, well, the military shot these people and killed them. This is terrorism. Terrorists have killed common people, poor people who couldn't react, they have killed farmers. Many farmers have been killed in isolated spots over recent years with the complicity of the State. This didn't happen by chance: there is no private land in Algeria as all the land is cultivated by communities and by people from the villages and it doesn't belong to anybody. Now the land is being sold thanks to a process of privatisation that is bringing a lot of money to the State and the army. But there are farmers who don't want to leave, and it is exactly there that people are being killed, from the eldest down to five months old. Businessmen coming from abroad also want to buy in Algeria. I say terrorism because it is not known who kills who, any of us can die but we don't know why, we don't know who is going to kill us, we don't know what is going to happen next. If there is any sacrifice to be made for a cause, that's ok. But here the cause is incomprehensible and uncontrollable and it is pointless to be killed under these conditions.

So you tried to emigrate...

I expected to find freedom here, individual and collective freedom. I was completely wrong as concerns individual freedom, as for collective freedom I realized that it is not so simple: as we ignore reality, we are seduced by the western media that give us a false image of it. And then emigrants coming back on holidays don't talk about the real situation. As I said before, it is a moral question: in a society where nobody tells others their problems, emigrants who live a very hard life abroad say that they are ok in the foreign country, that they can do this and that. On the contrary for me it was different.

The first place I arrived at was a little village in the north of Italy, where a friend of mine had come one year earlier. I used to talk to him on the phone and it seemed that it was ok for him; he never talked about his problems even if I can imagine what they were like. I used to say to myself: no matter what problems I find in Italy they will never be like the ones I face here... mind you, there are Algerians who emigrate to Nigeria! As life is at risk in Algeria people also experience social frustration: there is no freedom of expression because of both the morals of society and the rigidity of the political system. You cannot fail to be terrorised when you see the head of a friend or a relative of yours hanging on a village signpost. And when you are terrorised and you agree neither with the military or the fundamentalists you have no choice but to leave the village.

When I arrived in Italy, I found this friend of mine who was an agricultural worker and lived alone. He tried to get a job for me too. In fact, as soon as you arrive you need to survive. I started working in a vineyard and there I

experienced everything I would never do to others. What do I mean? I mean that I worked from 7am till sunset or even 10pm and got 6,000 liras per hour. At first I was happy with that, the important thing was not to starve. I kept on working hard and I experienced things that I would never have imagined. I didn't know that such things existed; they don't exist even in Algeria. At the vineyard everybody cut bunches of grapes whereas my friend and I had to carry baskets along the line, very hard work indeed. I remember it was very hot and I told the woman boss that I needed to rest and asked to cut bunches instead. She didn't accept, as she wanted us to do the hardest job. Then we were paid half what the others were, who were all Italian. I found disgusting discrimination, which shouldn't be possible in Europe, the land of human rights. We were not even allowed to stop and have a cigarette. I was very angry and thought of looking for another job, but the village was small, I knew only one Algerian and didn't find anything else. So I kept that job, as I had to pay the rent.

Before finding a house to rent, we lived in an abandoned uninhabitable house with an unsafe roof, which was given to us by another boss. We lived there for two months, and then we rented a house in the village. I kept on working there: it was ok to endure physical suffering, even if it was not easy to adapt myself, but I could keep my dignity and pay the rent. Physical suffering can be overcome, I repeated to myself, this is just a passing moment. When the grape harvest finished and also the job I felt alone. I didn't know anybody and the people of the village were scared and didn't trust us. Not only ignorant people but also leftwing militants were unwilling to open up to us. People considered me inferior because I was from an 'underdeveloped' country. So I said to myself: I must absolutely leave this place now.

Meantime another friend arrived and in three we rented quite a big house in the village that was not so expensive. We stayed fifteen days in the house thinking about what could be done, and we decided to get out of the village and see what there was outside. We decided that it was not what we wanted and maybe it wasn't the same everywhere. So we decided to go to a bigger town and approach some organisation, certainly not the Northern League. We looked for the premises of the communist party, we went there and talked about ourselves and said that we were Algerians and wanted to meet local leftwing militants. Even if our Italian was quite bad, we managed to make ourselves understood. They sent us to the CGIL union as they said there was a member of the communist party who spoke French and maybe he could help us. We talked to him for hours, and then came back home. What for? Clearly that man was not in the least touched by our problems, frustrations and the message we wanted to communicate. We needed to find someone who could understand us and do something, but we didn't find anyone.

It was quite disappointing to find out what the western political world was like. Political parties and the so 'enviable' western democracy are not any dif-