CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.0 Transnational perspective

The transnational perspective is a relatively new way of looking at global networks, forces and dynamics, and at the effects these have and the influences they exert on human societies and human affairs (although as with the other 'new histories' of the 1960s and 70s it also has its roots on *Annalistes'* project of conceptualising and interpreting history as a total or global phenomenon). Today it is seen as an invaluable theoretical approach in the social sciences and in history that is used to investigate the nature, internal dimensions, interrelations and implications of such transformative forces. Its focus may be directed towards macro political and macro historical trends themselves, or towards the ways in which these impact on smaller areas and on groups e.g. on centres of power, nations, regions, communities - families and individuals.

As applied to contemporary situations and contexts the transnational perspective is indeed particularly suited to the task of re-contextualising a late Twentieth early Twenty First Century world that is in a perpetual state of advancement and renewal in terms of communication and information technologies; of new and evolving supranational organisations and communities; of shifting national boundaries and reconfigured international spaces; of changing relationships, of emerging and declining spheres of influence. Global and international networks and exchanges examined in this context will include such phenomena as: the media, politics and diplomacy, religion, commerce, tourism, immigration, science and technology etc.

As applied to past situations and contexts and in the field of history the transnational perspective is particularly associated with the sub-disciplines of world history and global history. These take an integrated approach to examining and explaining continuity and change over time as they demonstrate and discuss the links between global phenomena, and / or between global phenomena and their more localised representations. Global forces examined in world history include some of the above-

mentioned categories and other phenomena such as: trade, pilgrimage, disease, empires, intellectual and cultural movements, the printed word, slavery, politics, nation states, religion, ideologies etc. This perspective as applied to historical enquiry is in many ways innovative and experimental and has led to a revisiting and revaluation of notions of globalisation, as pioneer of this approach Chris Bayly states:

> 'The transnational perspective shows how historical trends and sequences of events, which have been treated separately in regional or national histories, can be brought together. This reveals the interconnectedness and interdependence of political and social changes across the world well before the supposed onset of the contemporary phase of ''globalisation'' after 1945,' (Bayly, 2004, p. 1).

This perspective is *inherently comparative* [1] because in looking at human affairs without the interference of physical or conceptual national or international boundaries, or by seeing the 'big picture', replications and deviations are immediately identified. Another major proponent of the universalist approach to history, John Elliot, explains: 'I was very conscious from the beginning of the possibilities of the comparative approach ... native Spanish historians had very much been thinking in terms of the uniqueness of Spain' but 'I was always trying to find parallels between Spanish experiences and the experiences of early modern Britain, early modern France and so on' and this he says had given him: 'a vision of total history ... and the need to combine political, social, economic, cultural history, if possible, in the whole,' (Elliot, pp. 3-4). Interestingly, Bayly discusses the rise of *uniformities* as the broad forces of global change that had the gradual effect of drawing cultures and peoples together on many levels but which also, paradoxically, distinguished them on others: 'As world events became more interconnected and interdependent, so forms of human action adjusted to each other and came to resemble each other across the world .... Yet, at the same time, these connections could also heighten the sense of *difference,* and even antagonism, between people in different societies,' (Bayly, 2004, p.1). 'Uniformity' after all, 'is not the same as homogeneity,' (Bayly, 2004, p. 14).

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[1]   Although not in a 'static' sense of comparing two entities, rather in examining the interaction between them, and the moments of connection in the historical sphere such as the Cold War and decolonisation, which have often been kept separate.

This new perspective arose out of the increasingly evident limitations of traditional paradigms that tended to produce what were essentially multiple national histories. The historical mainstream had at times been guilty of a Eurocentric outlook and could be reductive, revolving around what were essentially geographically defined issues, or focussing on social, cultural or historical themes *per se.* The transnational perspective is different, in that it *takes a universalist approach* to historical questions, and is *inherently relational*, and therefore *intrinsically dynamic*. It reveals the links between the generic and the specific in demonstrating the ways in which macro historical elements affect smaller areas and contexts. However, there is no reason why this analysis should not start from the opposite point. An individual in a small community a long way from a particular capital can still be 'world history', if the experiences and fortunes of that individual are used to analyse the operation of global networks and forces, (What is World History?, 2007, pp. 1-2). Transnational history can be and is often used to complement and contextualise national histories, local histories and micro history. Regional and local histories are decentred after all, not free-floating.

Transnational history looks at questions of causality [2] (or rather at co-relations and explanations) but it should not be understood as determinist. By definition, transnational history looks at forces and at structures, but it nevertheless admits and even embraces the principle of human agency. In this way it can be understood as constructionist:

> 'The birth of the modern world' is something that should seen 'not as something which some people or some regions did to others less favourable or deserving, but as a series of transformations in which most peoples of the world participated, and to which most of them contributed, not simply as the objects or victims of the successes of others, but actively, independently and creatively,' (Moore in Bayly, 2004, p. xxi).

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[2] A perspective akin to that of Hume on causality i.e. not as a necessary phenomenon, but as a sense we derive from observed repetition and association of ideas. Contiguity, succession, recognition of phenomena provides us with as sense of coherence – we provide the rest (Hampshire-Monk, 1992, pp. 117-52).

In La Seyne and Toulon, Monfalcone and Gorizia in 1956, macrohistorical trends such as, for example, Soviet foreign policy, were directly linked to the daily lives of ordinary communists at the most basic levels. Of that there is no question. That link could be developmental such as the changes in perceptions, suspended evaluations or the progressive entrenchment of ideas on the part of ordinary Party members over the course of months resulting from a series of events and / or particular trends. It could be procedural e.g. in relation to a national Communist Party leadership strategy decision on official party line regarding a specific issue; a directive from received by a Communist Party Federation concerning that decision requiring discussion, action, intervention at the regional level; a subsequent directive (mediated at federation level or not) received by the Secretary of a local section - and so on down to the individual. That procedural link *could* work in the opposite direction i.e. from the local and regional to the national (see Chapter 7.6). The link could equally be immediate in the form of headlines featured on a newspaper stand one morning requiring hasty conferral with comrades and a ready response for detractors; or via an angry exchange between communist and non-communist co-workers in relation to developments in the Soviet Bloc; or in the form of a telephone call informing a comrade he was needed urgently to join others in protecting party premises as a result of international events; or by a breakdown in family relations as a result of differences of opinion regarding Soviet actions, and the like. Surely all history is transnational history viewed in this light?

3.1 Local / regional perspectives

One of the reasons for looking at the immediate contexts of La Seyne and Monfalcone within their respective regional frameworks was because both in terms of Communist Party structures (the Federation / Regional Committee) and the national governmental administrative frameworks (the Regional or County Council) these are the points at which national agendas and strategies, which are informed by international factors, meet with and are often translated into regional and local applications and policies according to regional and local conditions and requirements - and not only of a practical nature. Regions in themselves are political, social,

cultural, economic, territorial entities that evolve (usually) from shared historical experience (and when they are superimposed these underlying histories are no less relevant) and have very much to do with questions of identities, allegiances and particular perspectives. Our two case-locations had distinct regional identities within their national contexts. In the French example, the Var region as a whole has historically been 'independent' or 'wayward' [3] in the national political context; far removed from the capital and essentially left-leaning. In the Italian example, the Venezia-Giulia border region was multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, contested territory and as such had a distinct yet porous identity, seen by the national government as being culturally 'different' and politically 'problematic'. [4] One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether and to what extents any regional perspectives and exigencies affected communist communities and / or Communist Party Federations.

With regard to Communist Party structure the Regional Federation is, in principle, simply a component of a national (and international) apparatus; one that supports, facilitates and furthers an overarching architecture of thought and common purpose:

> Article 22
> The Regional Committee
> The Regional Committee is composed of a Regional Secretary
> nominated by the Party leadership, of Secretaries of Sections in the

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[3] The Var region has historically been known as resistant towards authority emanating from Paris (State government or Party). *Le Var Rouge* or the Red Var (more general historical reference is also made to *Le Midi Rouge*) alludes to the insurrection against the *coup d'état* by Napoleon Bonaparte 3rd in 1851 and consequent left-wing identity of the region. In particular, this refers to the insurrection of the working classes across the region, rather than in the town of Toulon itself, which, as France's major naval base, has always had an important right-wing element / identity (together with a strong left-wing element in the naval dockyard). The term 'red' here denotes socialist tendencies linked to the revolutions of 1848, however as a more general political reference in the region it has come to have either socialist or communist connotations depending on interpretation and associations attributed to it. (Girault 1995).

[4] The difference between our two case-locations was that in La Seyne and Toulon, informants also felt themselves to be intrinsically (and 'truly') French and therefore internationalist at the same time. The Jacobin centralism of their party facilitated and underscored this holistic conception of self. The party *was* their national identity, and this over-rode regional identities. Whereas in Monfalcone and Gorizia, most informants had little or no sentiment of being 'Italian' *per se* (why should they?), this notion was a political expedient post 1947, directly linked to the PCI's post-war strategy of creating a mass consensus *throughout* modern Italian society. The Italian party was a horizontal rather than vertical institution. Therefore for communists in the Gorizian Province their distinct regional identity did not get in the way of politics or perceptions of self as political actors, it was perfectly appropriate. The party *was* their national identity, but in a very different way to the French example.

region and other comrades chosen by the Secretaries who fulfil important functions in the region.

The Regional Committee nominates at its heart a Secretariat composed normally of three comrades.

The Regional Committee, in its objective of realising the Party's objectives, takes all political and organisational initiative that concerns the region and to that end co-ordinates and controls the activity of the Federation. (PCI Statuto, 1951).

Nonetheless, in practice, these *articulation points* were usually sites of transverse processes i.e. points at which national party and regional and local interests and positions were negotiated. Because of the ethos, organisation and modes of functioning of all Communist Parties at the time, the Federation Secretaries and other individuals who made-up the regional party leadership bodies hailed in the vast majority of cases from the very localities they served, were rooted in them, had fought in the local Resistance along with their comrades, had risen through the ranks of party militants in those localities to assume those roles and maintained a constant connection with that base. Therefore, both in terms of political procedures and grounded perspectives, the regional level is highly interesting in its own right, and extremely pertinent in the context of this project. One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether these median points were effectively fixed conduits in a top-down organisational model i.e. the Communist Party, or whether there was room to manoeuvre (see Chapter 7, 8).

The regional as well as local focus was also advantageous in allowing an examination of *diverse roles* at diverse levels of the regional party structures. One of the key objectives of this project was to ascertain whether reactions to events on the part of those at the base of the Parties had been different to those of intermediary cadres as secretaries of cells and sections, or to those of senior cadres at Regional Federation levels. Was there in fact 'unity of thought' that prevailed in the autumn of 1956 or were there disconnects across the Party apparatuses and if so where, when, why and to what extents? This regional / local / comparative focus has provided answers to such questions as: Did those at the base of the parties oppose the Soviet interventions in Budapest more readily, more vocally, more militantly as images of Red Army

tanks firing on what appeared to be ordinary communists were beamed around the world? Did the 'chains of office' weigh heavily on the bearer? That is, did secretaries of cells, sections and members of Regional Federation Committees feel less able to oppose the national party positions of support for the Soviet actions? To the same extents? Were all party cadres following national directives? Did these individuals know more than the rank and file? Was their position the more ambiguous as a result? Or, indeed, was the distinction between rank and file, intermediary and senior cadre a false distinction in terms of willingness to question party line? Did anyone? Were there defections from the parties in the regions in question subsequent to this episode, and if so what was the distribution of these instances in relation to these individuals' role within the party structures?

Another key objective of this study was to ascertain *whether there was a disproportionally higher incidence of opposition to (or indeed support for) the Soviet interventions in the highly concentrated industrial centres* i.e. the shipyards, ports, feeder industries of La Seyne and Monfalcone than in other parts of the regions; or whether the influence of communist reactions in these centres was determinant across the regions in that they set the militant agenda by example. [5] These towns were the 'Jewels in the Crowns' of their respective Party Federations in terms of Party membership numbers and the well-known levels of militancy of those members. The Parties were by far the strongest influences in both shipyards, ports, and factories, and their affiliated Unions CGT / CGIL by far the most subscribed. Were Party members in these environments more militant than those of members engaged in other sectors of the regional economy? Which in turn begged the question: what did 'militant' mean in this instance? Would that be radical opposition to Soviet tanks firing on fellow communists or militant support of the Soviet Union's rightly stepping-in at the request of the Hungarian government to put down a CIA agitated Horthyist counter-revolution that posed a distinct threat not only to a satellite state but to the communist world?

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[5]   The shipyards in La Seyne and the naval shipyard eight kilometres away in Toulon are taken as the local industrial environment as many of the informants lived or worked in one of the two. In Gorizia however, although there were pockets of light industry on the outskirts of the town, the centre of industrial activity in the province was Monfalcone.

3.2 Internal logic of the study

The study's internal logic connects the empirical data to the project's initial research questions, and ultimately to its conclusions. Yin identifies six fundamental elements of all case studies (single and composite models alike (Yin, 2003, pp. 21-6).

- the cases themselves or vehicles of enquiry; chosen for their commonality but which suggest areas of contrast and which in this instance constitute communities of Communist Party members / former Communist Party members in La Seyne and Toulon, and Monfalcone and Gorizia

- the project's questions; which in this instance are aimed at uncovering the nature of the reactions of people in these groups to an historical event e.g.
    - do you remember when you first became aware of the first Soviet invasion that autumn?
    - do you remember when it was first discussed in the party section? ……….. etc.

- its propositions; which 'direct attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the project' (Yin, 2003, p. 22) and which reflect theoretical positions e.g.
    - there was less consensus regarding our events in Monfalcone and Gorizia than in La Seyne and Toulon [6]
    - the theoretical position here being that the more societal or national orientation of Italian communism at this point as opposed to the more teleological or Eastward looking character of French communism made for a more flexible and less sectarian approach to the handling of this episode on the part of the PCI in Monfalcone

- the units of analysis; which in this instance were individual members of cells, sections, Federal Committees who are questioned in relation to the propositions

- the correlation of data; which ultimately answers the project's questions via a process of 'pattern-matching' and which in this instance may or may not

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[6] The propositions of an inductive project, in contrast to the hard hypotheses of deductive models, are not made to be proved or disproved in a reductive sense but serve to highlight potentially fruitful areas of enquiry.

refute the proposition that the informants in Monfalcone were any more critical of the Soviet actions than their French counterparts (Yin, 2003).

3.3 Research strategy

This research project is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, in that it is very much concerned with language rather than with data collected in large numbers of short answer questionnaires; it endeavours to explain rather than predict; and it embraces the subjective dimensions of human experience by placing the emphasis firmly on the perspective of the participant. Its ultimate aim is to link findings to theoretical positions rather than to link them by simple extension to wider populations themselves (case studies are not designed to do this). It entailed the detailed and intensive analyses of two single case studies of relatively small groups of people sharing certain characteristic for the purposes of comparison across a multiple sample (Bryman, 2004, p. 275). [7] Its epistemological position is inductivist rather than deductivist, as it seeks to identify concepts and generate theory from research findings and not vice versa; and its ontological position is constructionist rather than objectivist, as it sees social phenomena and their meanings as social constructs rather than as existing independently of social actors (see Chapter 8.2).

3.4 Data collection / assessment / analysis

The principle data for *Reactions ....* is oral testimony supported by local and regional documentary evidence in addition to that of a more general nature, collected on three field trips of approximately one month duration in each location - that is to say six months in all - between October 2008 and June 2010. Data collection methods were identical in each case. A series of recorded interviews was conducted in each of the two localities. Informants were drawn from a population of remaining Communist Party members in each location who were a) men and women engaged at the time in party activity at various levels of the regional party structures and include rank and file communists, those fulfilling semi-official roles within the party structures at cell and section levels, those in salaried positions across the party

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[7] For a discussion of multi-strategy approaches see Bryman (2004, pp. 451-65).

apparatus, members of Regional Federation Committees and Secretariats and b) living and / or working in the towns, its surrounding areas or in the regional capitals c) in various occupations d) were at least eighteen at the time e) or those with close familial ties with such people and who were also in close contact with them at the time. [8]

Written evidence used includes existing local, regional and national Communist Party documents, items featured in the regional and national communist press, the mainstream press, documents that pertain to municipal and departmental or provincial matters, national and regional police records of various types, local and national trade union documentation and personal archive materials and artefacts ranging from handwritten notes to official documents, notes to Congresses, missives, and photographs. These written sources were not exploited merely for triangulation purposes, but in order to supplement and complement the oral testimonies. This cross-referencing of oral and archival evidence engendered its own dynamic: documents, and most especially localised sources were used along with other sources as *aide memoires* to facilitate participants' recollections and illuminate new routes of enquiry in personal interviews (ensuring however, that local / regional related documents selected for such use did not bear the names of individuals); whilst the new information and insights gained from personal interviews often informed archival searches and resulted in some written evidence being reviewed with new purpose and focus.

The samples for this multiple case-study did not need to be large-scale because 'depth rather than breadth is the preoccupation in qualitative research,' but they needed to be extensive enough to allow the illumination of wider themes from detailed information gathered and / or links to be made from the empirical evidence

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[8]   These participants represent the 'core sample' in each case-study i.e. 19 in the French and 22 in the Italian study. There were also 'extended' samples in each study, of participants that did not meet these criteria in the exact sense but who were nevertheless able to provide valuable information in the form of historical context: 7 in the French study and 5 in the Italian. The choice to include the input of these individuals in the study was endorsed and / or actively encouraged by the intermediaries and other key informants in each case-location, and the reactions of these individuals to our events were not factored into the findings.

to theory, (Bryman, 2004, p. 275). They also needed to be as representative as possible of the communist communities in the two case-locations in 1956, in order not only to ensure minimum bias in each case of the evidence provided, but to allow the identification of sameness and difference across the extended sample. The stratification process consequently needed to reflect the composition of those communities at the time as far as possible, but it also needed to be realistic given the age of the surviving populations and the unlikelihood therefore of obtaining unlimited numbers of participants. The samples were stratified according to a set number of variables that would allow a functional correspondence between each of the categories across the two samples (see Data Collection). Further variables such as when individuals had joined the party, whether other family members were also communists, and ethnicity where appropriate, were treated in context and discussed in relation to findings.

Interviews

Because the research is qualitative, hermeneutic, in that the objective is a) to access subjective experiences in relation to a particular episode and b) to understand, interpret and explain the testimony given from that individual perspective, the interview format was semi-structured and premised on:

- multiple mixed format sessions i.e. a number of interviews with an informant and preferably at least one session conducted with one or two other informants
- sessions of an average duration of an hour and a half
- a flexible interview model that permits degrees of digression and expansion on the part of the informants
- a core of general research questions put to both cohorts that bring into immediate relief similarities and differences of context, conditions and responses where they occur
- location specific informed questions put to each cohort that focus on particular contexts, and conditions, and that account for similarities and / or differences by examining influences, effects, exigencies etc.

- individual specific questions that account for age, gender, role in the Party at the time etc.
- short, open, neutral questions that put the emphasis on and safeguard the integrity of the interviewees' contribution

and is conducive to:

- recovering the informants' own perspectives and subjective experiences in as comfortable and 'natural' an environment as possible
- informants being able to add to testimonies as they recall additional factors
- the interviewer's being able to ask further questions in response to newly acquired information both during and subsequent to the interview
- the follow-up on the part of the interviewer of informants' digressions or expansions where relevant
- the collection of context-rich, in-depth and detailed information
- the identification of similarities and differences in responses across the multiple sample.

This framework is designed to provide informants with both a sense of security and the freedom to explore their own experiences and express feelings and interpretations in their own ways. At the same time, it allows the interviewer to maintain the momentum, focus and pace of the discussions; to intervene where appropriate in order, for example, to encourage or probe recollections without leading the informants; and to accommodate any deviations, spontaneous contributions and / or silences that may occur - in the interests of obtaining new information, understandings and insights.

It was considered preferable to interview all of the informants more than once in order to benefit firstly from a natural process of progressive remembering on their part over the course of the research project, and be able to revisit key themes and issues in different ways, from different directions over the multiple sessions, because in this way any inconsistencies in their evidence would come to light as part of the

process of internal triangulation. It was explained to the informants that the interviews could be conducted on a one-to-one basis or if desired and if practical, in the company of another person of their choice such as a family member (which in the event was only ever a spouse), friend or work colleague (several of the informants were still in part time employment) or other informants. This was firstly to reassure them and secondly, because it was envisaged correctly that the group interview method would aid and stimulated memory processes by different informants filling-in gaps, correcting inaccuracies, developing a theme etc. and thirdly, as envisaged, it invariably constituted in itself a pleasant social experience for the informants and thus consolidated all-round rapport, and finally, it provided the opportunity to interview informants in diverse situations, under diverse circumstances and in accordance with different set of dynamics, which contributes to the process of triangulation across a case set.

Data Assessment

In order to establish and evaluate the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research, the criteria used is that set out by Lincoln & Guba cited in Bryman for assessing qualitative studies, which were 'credibility', 'transferability' and 'dependability'. According to these writers, the *credibility* of a study is achieved by a) ensuring that the project is designed and conducted according to rigorous methodological principles and procedures (set out in this section), by b) 'respondent validation' or checking with the participants in the study that the researcher's understandings of the social reality are sound, by c) triangulation of oral, documentary, other evidence provided, (Lincoln & Guba in Bryman, 2007, pp. 273-6). With regard to oral testimony the triangulation process consisted of checking for internal consistency i.e. cross-referencing the evidence of an informant across several interviews with that informant; checking for norm consistency when an informant's evidence is checked against that given by others in the same sample; external triangulation of oral evidence with that of as many other types as possible. With regard to written evidence, four criteria set out by John Scott cited in Bryman were applied 1) authenticity i.e. was it genuine? was it whole? 2) credibility i.e. its communicative

purpose: was there distortion or error in its message? 3) representativeness: how representative was it of its type? 4) meaning: was the evidence clear and comprehensible? (Scott in Bryman, 2004, pp. 381-5).

The *transferability* of a qualitative study should not be understood as the extent to which an experiment can be replicated because 'qualitative findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the social world being studied' (Lincoln & Guba in Bryman, 2007, p. 275). They deal in non-linear concepts such as nuance, misgivings, convictions, torn loyalties, denial etc. that in effect, *cannot be measured twice*. The transferability referred to here lies in what Clifford Geertz in Bryman (2004) has termed 'thick description' or 'rich accounts of the details of a culture' that provide other researchers with 'a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieu,' (Bryman, 2004, p. 275).

Dependability they argue lies in the 'auditing approach' that requires a) complete, thorough and accessible records to be kept of all the phases of and materials relative to the research process e.g. field notes, screening methods for informants, interview transcripts etc. and b) the checking of this by a recommended number of three peers. (Lincoln & Guba in Bryman, 2007, p. 275)

Data Analysis
The main approach adopted for the close reading of the oral data collected was discourse rather than conversation analysis. This is because although there are overlaps between the two techniques, conversation analysis looks essentially at 'talk as it occurs in interaction in naturally occurring situations' and the research interview, however 'semi-structured', is hardly that, (Bryman, 2004, p. 365). Furthermore, the focus in conversation analysis is on 'uncovering the underlying structures of *talk interaction'* with the intention of 'locating understanding in *the sequences of talk*,' (my emphasis), but the meanings, significances and implications that are the subject matter of this project are not limited to utterances. In this research, the analysis moves outside the immediate and self-referential sphere of talk

to take into account contributing factors, causal dimensions, power relationships 'that are responsible for the occasioning of those discourses,' (Bryman, 2004, pp. 177-8). Discourse analysis has a wider remit, is more suited to interview-based research and is arguably less reductive. With regard to the analysis of written documents see points 1 – 4 of Scott, above.

3.5 Procedural issues

The reason that this research project was able to go ahead at all, was because two members of the supervisory team had firm links with a key intermediary in each of the two locations: one of whom is a linguist and the son of a prominent communist mayor of La Seyne during the period 1947 – 1969; and the other an historian who has long-standing ties with the local communist community, who has published extensively on the geopolitics of the region and who has often used oral history methods as a research tool. These intermediaries were therefore well known across these communities and trusted by the informants - and this paved the way for the research. Once *au fait* with the objectives of the research the intermediaries made introductions to number of strategic informants i.e. people who are themselves trusted and respected in those communities and who had usually fulfilled prominent roles such as Party militants, cadres and / or had been Resistance fighters, via whom it was possible to establish contact other suitable informants. [9] Contact with suitable informants (who, in the event, had often already been suggested by others) was also facilitated by a number of historical foundations, organisations, institutes etc.

The importance of having such first contacts i.e. the key intermediaries, cannot be underestimated, and without their help the process of collecting the crucial oral data for this project (plus the many artefacts and documents given by informants from personal collections) would have been infinitely more problematic and inordinately time consuming. The alternative would have entailed advertising locally for

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[9]   As the study progressed, and once distinct but not entirely consistent patterns in the various types of empirical data became visible, attempts were made to find additional informants to ensure that every possible opportunity to obtain representative samples of Communist Party members in these localities in 1956 had been taken (see Chapter 8.1).

informants and in this way running the risks of a) and by far the most probable - not obtaining a sufficient number or indeed any qualified respondents due to the *prima facie* problematic nature of the research topic, and to an understandable reticence on the part of former communists born of historical experience that has often included misrepresentation and betrayal on the part of anti-communist interests b) having to invest a prohibitive amount of time vetting any prospective informants that did come forward, in order to ascertain their reliability in the context of the research. What is more, without the intermediaries the project would certainly have lacked the fundamental point of reference a trusted and accepted third party provides - even if that point of reference remains notional after first introductions.

Because of the age of the informants for this project at the time of writing, the initial concern was that it would prove difficult to locate sufficient numbers of people who fitted the criteria, and who were able to participate in the project - although in the event, this was not a problem, and a representative sample was obtained for each case-study (see Chapter 8.1). All of the informants made further introductions to at least one other such person, and although this snowball effect can give rise to problems such as the 'received responses' of association and of shared experiences (however innocent and unconscious any such responses may be) a number of *a priori* considerations augured well. The fact that in both cases, although all of the people in each sample knew at least one other person in that sample, not all of the people knew each other, or knew each other well or had had contact with the others - sometimes for several years and in some cases decades. There had been, after all, approximately 5.000 Communist Party members dispersed across the 20 / 25 sections of the respective regional Federations in 1956. Added to which, for most of the post-war period, long working hours left very little time and opportunity for anything other than local Party activity for the majority of the informants.

Another reassuring factor in terms of the potential credibility of the oral evidence provided, was that although a small percentage of the informants had been interviewed before, this had been in connection with the parts they had played in WW2 Resistance, and therefore this lessened the likelihood of rehearsed responses in

relation to the current topic. [10] What it meant in practical terms was that this was virgin territory for the informants, in that had not been the subject of any sort of formal discussion or analysis before this project. The spontaneous nature of the informants' responses, even when discussing the complexities of their own feelings at the time, along with the absence of clearly replicated responses across the set, are other salient features of the interviews that, it is felt, reflect the integrity of the evidence provided. Finally, of course, it is the data assessment process as a whole that has underpinned the findings of this research.

3.6 Ethics

The question of ethics is a cornerstone of contemporary research in the humanities and social sciences. Because this study involves human subjects, and relies heavily on primary sources evidence in the form of personal testimonies, it was vital that the research be conducted according to specific and standard legal and ethical guidelines as set out in the *Framework for Research Ethics* (Economic & Social Research Council [ESRC] 2011), and in the *Copyright & Ethics* document (Oral History Society [OHS] 2011), in order that the findings may be place in comparative context alongside those of similar studies and thereby facilitate further research. Ensuring such conditions entailed:

- establishing a rapport of trust with the informants
  - the project is predicated on interviewing members / former members of the PCF / PCI, who are of advancing years, or interviewing their close family members, in an attempt to access their feelings and opinions on what was a controversial episode in their past
  - the first consideration in a qualitative research project such as this is that the informants need to have faith in the project, and for this to be the case they need to be a) informed about its purpose and objectives and b) they need to trust the interviewer, the organisational body commissioning the

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10   Another factor that pertained to the French case was that although this episode had obviously been highly significant for informants on personal and community levels, numerous times informants asked 'Why 1956?' i.e. why had this episode been chosen as a reference point in the history of the French communism? This factor is directly related to the findings of the research with regard to the French informants' understanding of and relation to history (see Chapter 8).

project as well as the processes, techniques and organisational context in which the project is being conducted

- providing information in the form of a FAQ leaflet explaining / concerning / featuring:
- the reason for the research
- the body that is funding the research
- the sponsoring institution i.e. that the project is being carried out under the auspices of a renowned university in the field and according to widely applied ethical guidelines set out by leading sociological societies
- the method of data collection to be used i.e. recorded interviews
- at a location acceptable to and convenient for them
- list of standard questions, on which, it was explained, they would expand as they wished etc.
- the full contact details of the interviewer in my capacity as university researcher in relation to the project is possible at all times. (ESRC, 2011, pp. 28-30)

A separate consent form for this study was obtained securing the informed consent of the interviewees in accordance with copyright law, on an oral history recording agreement that also explained: the purpose of the interviews

- the arrangements made for the preservation and conservation of the interviews
- the place/s of deposit of the interviews i.e. university department archive
- the possible range of future uses to which it might be put e.g. availability for consultation by researchers, dissemination in different types of media, etc. (OHS, 2011, p. 15).

Tenor of working relationship / positioning

When an introduction was not made by the intermediary in person, contact with the informants was made by telephone. It was felt that spoken communication was appropriate in context, and preferable to written forms that are by definition register

bound - formal in this case - and lacking in immediate context. A first meeting with the prospective informants would be arranged in a place of their choosing, which was usually in the person's home (OHS, 2007, p. 15). At this meeting, introductions would be made, all information regarding the project would be provided in verbal and written form, questions were invited and answered in full, and interviewees assured that any further questions they may have would be answered as and when raised at a later date (OHS, 2007, p. 15). The informants would then be 'situated' in relation to the research in order to ensure their suitability as participants, and so that in the event a list of tailored questions could be compiled to supplement the standard questions put to all informants. This first meeting was informal, but it was necessary from the start to convey a sense a professionalism regarding the project itself and the organisation commissioning it, and as a sign of respect to the participants involved and to the subject matter at hand. It was nevertheless easy to be on informal terms with these participants. After their initial curiosity or reserve had been satisfied or dispelled as to why an Anglo-Saxon non-communist would be interested in communist history at all, the tenor of the working relationship slipped easily and invariably to one between *camarades / compagni.*

It was obvious that the informants had an intrinsic regard for scholarly endeavour and for history in particular, as they effectively shared the constructivist, voluntarist view of history as intrinsically 'political'. This is not surprising given the high levels of politicisation of Communist Party members - not only as a point of departure, but also due to the fact that the political life and work of the Parties / affiliated union bodies, in which all had been, by definition, permanently engaged, was a 'school' in itself. Furthermore, the Parties put a special emphasis on the 'education' of all their members, and even the busiest rank and file Party member was expected to read the Party press every day. Over and above this, pedagogic activities addressing economic and political theory were available to all members of the Parties regardless of role, and special training programmes or cadres schools available to those selected. [11]

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[11]   As a global approach Communist Party members were expected to participate on a day to day basis in the class struggle (which in effect would be led according to the contextual interpretations of the PCF and the PCI), which was considered to be an educative process in itself; attend all Party

Informants displayed knowledge of and an automatic respect for the historic contribution made by prominent intellectuals to the international Communist movement, the PCF and the PCI, as well as, understandably, a high regard for the contributions intellectuals from their own communities (in both locations, this should be understood as 'professional' individuals such as medical doctors, journalist etc.) had made to the cause. In addition to this, there had clearly been, and still existed, a wholly democratic relationship between these local intellectuals and Party members at all levels of the regional Party structure. [12] It should be noted nonetheless, that on a purely practical level at the regional and local levels, there existed levels of scepticism as regards intellectuals fulfilling cadre roles within the Party structures (see Chapters 5, 6, 7).

The informants saw the current research as a professional historical project, and conveyed their trust that personal histories would be documented with integrity and competence, in order that the project could make a contribution to communist history. They were also disposed to aiding the research in locating and / or producing sources, including documents and artefacts in personal collections. There was a palpable sense that the research was a collaborative project. Another reason for this, it is felt, was that because the interviews were being conducted by non-native speaker of French or Italian (in the purist sense of the term of a person's not having spent

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and Union reunions at which ideological, strategic and policy issues would be discussed, participate in Party schools and courses that were designed to produce cadres but were open by definition to all members of the Party; and commit on an individual level to the collective project of Marxist-Leninism, (Bellassi, 1999, p. 88).

[12] As regards the way in which the informants in both case-locations viewed intellectuals there was an intrinsic appreciation shown of the theoretical contribution and the specific type of political engagement to the cause these individuals could make and particularly those of a national stature. On a practical level, they could not easily be imprisoned for example, and because of their high profile Party political issues could gain instant exposure. They were also respected for their critical input (especially because in continental Europe the views of this sector of the population are generally taken more seriously in mainstream politics and society than they are in Anglo-Saxon countries). Nonetheless it must be stressed that the informants regard for intellectuals was advised, and there was also a degree of reticence conveyed as to an intellectual's basic understanding of the proletarian struggle itself. This view was based on a conscious, Bolshevist (*ouvriériste / operaismo*) informed reading of the problem.

significant amounts of time in those countries' schools systems), [13] the informants' involvement was immediately necessary, for example in clarifying certain items of vocabulary, with local dialect issues, and in double checking understanding of the context described or evidence given as part of the on-going 'respondent validation' process, (Bryman, 2004, pp. 274-5). The fact that these languages were 'acquired' on the part of the person conducting the interviews and therefore imperfect, drew the informants automatically into the project as co-workers – and to a certain extent co-authors. [14]

The political consciousness of the interviewees was still very much in evidence. Customarily during interview sessions they would speak about current issues such as the French teachers' strike in 2009, the situation in Afghanistan, liberal economic policies, globalisation etc. Indeed some of the informants were still employed in the Party apparatuses e.g. in the CGIL / CGT, whilst others were still actively involved in distributing tracts, participating in demonstrations and in WW2 commemorations etc. (in fact on more than one occasion, an interview would be arranged around such activities, or postponed because of them). It is perhaps due to this constant engagement with the political process that what could be imagined to have been for many of the informants a 'difficult' history to confront, was instead an singularly problematic moment in their personal and Parties' histories discussed in a direct, pragmatic and realistic manner - and one that included blunt auto-critic (see Chapter 8). These communities, used as they were to overcoming adversity of all types, were made of sterner stuff.

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[13] Once trust had been established, the fact that the interviewer was not a French or Italian national may also have provided a sense in which the informants felt that they were able to express themselves more freely, more openly, with more detachment, than might have been the case had the interviewer been of that same nationality. That cannot be known. It should be noted however, that this was not felt to be the case on the part of the interviewer. Rather, the impression was that the productive rapport that was invariably established between interviewer and interviewee/s, was due to the informants' recognising the professional engagement on the part of the former.

[14] Here Valerie Yow talks of 'the collaborative process in the interview': '... in oral history research, members of the community, who are experts on their own experience, are natural resources for planning the topics to be covered. In the ideal collaborative process everybody contributes, knowledge and everybody learns something,' (Yow, 2005, p.190).