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Unemployment, Deservingness and Ideological Apparatuses

A Case Study from Turin, Italy

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From my fieldwork diary, Turin, 6 March 2015:

> In the afternoon I went to Centro Lavoro Torino to attend another open orientation lesson … As before, there were more or less twenty in attendance listening to the tutor, the young being in the minority.
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> The lesson focused on the matter of the job interview as our tutor offered advice on presentation and the best way to answer questions and fill out tests. The teacher – who proved pleasant and rather efficient – informed us that she herself worked as a recruiter for a number of firms.
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> The lesson mainly consisted in advice that to my mind was rather trivial: you should dress appropriately for the interview, be self-confident without being arrogant, you must be honest, pleasant and friendly and you must not speak badly of your previous employers.
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> Towards the end of the lesson there was an interesting verbal exchange. G., a factory worker, said that during his last interview he had been asked why his previous job contract had lasted only a month. A question he found particularly frustrating considering that they were offering him a contract for just a week. The tutor, however, said his reaction was wrong, as even such a brief contract was in any case an opportunity. Then she reproached him, saying he was too critical, adding that for that reason, had she been on the board, she would never have recruited him.

> The participants also included Simone, the husband of Sara, the former secretary I met and interviewed some months ago. When the lesson was over, I asked him what he thought of it. He told me he found it very useful, adding that he intended to bring his wife to the next one.
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> Outside Centro Lavoro's seminar room, I ran into Giuliano, who I had met there some months ago, and I asked him how his job search was going: 'The search isn't going anywhere [pause]; it is shit! The system has bombed, it has collapsed, there is nothing to be found!', he replied.

This ethnographic vignette illustrates rather effectively some of the issues arising from my enquiries on unemployment and unemployment policies in Turin, which are explored further in the following pages. The anthropological description of the courses on 'active job search' offered at the Centro Lavoro Torino – a job centre funded by the municipality – provides us with insights into the wider public management and control of unemployment, eliciting its ideological and symbolic dimensions. This local service is part and an expression of a neoliberal approach to unemployment that offers partial, ideologically connoted and moralistic responses to this structural problem. These policies are, in fact, founded on a moral assessment of joblessness, referring to an ideological model of the 'deserving unemployed', to which every jobless person is expected to conform (Howe 1990, 1994).

The enquiry into Centro Lavoro Torino is just one part of wider research I conducted between 2014 and 2017 on the experience and meaning of unemployment in the peripheries of Turin (Capello 2020). The contradictions of the contemporary Italian economy manifest themselves quite clearly here in these neighbourhoods that used to be working-class communities built up around factory work in the car industry and above all around the Fiat company (Capello 2018). In Italy today, the search for employment is an arduous task due to a post-Fordist and neoliberal economy prone to structural crisis and cyclical recessions (Gallino 2013): the official rate of unemployment has remained at around 10 per cent solidly for years. This quandary is particularly evident in Turin, where the global economic crisis exacerbated a social reality already impaired by deindustrialization (Vanolo 2015), leading to the growth of unemployment. There are a number of jobs – especially manual work and factory jobs – that are becoming increasingly scarce within the local productive horizon; this is what Giuliano was talking about when he said that 'the system has bombed, it has collapsed, there is nothing to be found'.

The larger job market is surely more complex and fluid, but this is my interlocutors' experience of it – made up of mostly unemployed people over the age of forty, who spent considerable time searching for new employment after losing their previous jobs. Furthermore – notwithstanding some exceptions – the unemployed I knew were so-called low-skilled, low-tier workers. Simone, for example, had held the position of warehouseman in many small local firms, while his wife was previously employed as a secretary. Giuliano was a bricklayer and a low-skilled factory worker, although at the time he had been out of work for many years. I focused my research on unemployed low-skilled blue-collar and white-collar workers, because their plight descends directly from the transition of Turin's economic structure from a Fordist industrial economy to a postindustrial one – and also because they are therefore the metonymic symbol of contemporary Turin (Capello 2018).

Centro Lavoro Torino is a prime site for observing the neoliberal governmentalities and ideological practices through which the crisis and great productive transformation are locally managed, on the basis of national and European guidelines (Gallie 2004). These policies are part of the wider transformation of the welfare state through which 'individualization and responsibility have nowadays become the key-words of contemporary social policies' (Dubois 2009: 167; see also Dubois 2008). The problem, in the case of unemployment policies, is that the individualistic logics behind these reforms generate the paradox – especially in Italy – of stimulating activation and autonomy in the search for employment at the very moment in which the labour market is almost totally stuck (Paugam 2013).

The ethnographic analysis shows how these policies are linked to a moralizing discourse, centred on the distinction between the deserving and undeserving unemployed, with a profound ideological meaning. The appeal to deservingness works as an ideological tool to moralize and legitimize inequalities (Streinzer and Tošić, Introduction to this volume), preserving the economic system from critique through a 'reversal of responsibility' that blames the victims for their own predicament. Centro Lavoro Torino is part of a larger apparatus that aims to sustain and transmit this ideological and moralistic view of unemployment as its courses convey the idea that the possibility of finding a job depends purely on the efforts and ability of the jobseeker.

However, why and to what extent did my interlocutors accept the individualistic and moralizing view of unemployment? The people I

met were attending the classes on active job search not only because they believed these would be useful in terms of finding work, but also because the lessons allowed them to present themselves as active and deserving jobseekers. From this point of view, the courses are, for them, a sort of rite of passage to a new, more 'positive' status – a rite gifted with a magical meaning, in the sense of de Martino's theory (2015): a symbolic tool that gives the useful illusion of still being able to act in the world. To fully grasp the ritual dimensions of the course on active job searching, we need to consider the particular condition of unemployed people: their liminal state (Newman 1999). However, before diving into these more symbolic aspects of our discourse, it is necessary to briefly investigate the economic and social context of postindustrial Turin.

Turin: A Blocked Transition

Centro Lavoro Torino is located in a part of the city that has strong symbolic value. It can be found in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city, near the Mirafiori plant – the Fiat factory par excellence – the concrete symbol of the industrial and Fordist history of Turin. This is no coincidence, as the Centro Lavoro is part and expression of the policies elaborated by the municipality to cope with the social and economic problems of the peripheries, which have borne the brunt of the global recession.

The global crisis has been particularly severe in Turin, having a big impact on every productive sector – in particular, medium-scale industry and the building sector, which has helped to sustain the local economy since the turn of the century. During the worst period of the recession – from which the city has not yet really emerged – between 2010 and 2014, some 15,000 jobs in the industrial sector and 5,000 in the construction industry were lost (Vanolo 2015). This is one of the reasons why the official rate of unemployment has rocketed since the turn of the century, reaching 12 per cent of the workforce at the time of my fieldwork. Most of the people I met in the field had indeed lost their jobs because of the global crisis, following company failures, closures and mass dismissals caused by the crisis. Furthermore, due to the economic recession, it proved very difficult for them to find new employment and most of them had been waiting for new opportunities for years – yet another reason why we can say that the unemployed are currently the living symbol of contemporary Turin, just as the factory workers were in the 1970s. The plight of my

interlocutors is a metonym for the wider city's predicament. If, as we will see, the unemployed are blocked in a liminal state – because lack of employment implies a loss of social identity (Newman 1999) – Turin is a liminal city: it has left behind its industrial past, only to find itself caught in limbo, in a long and indefinite phase of transition (or liminality) (Capello 2018, 2020). Today the city – like its unemployed – finds itself in a state of suspension, gifted with some degree of resilience (Vanolo 2015), but doubtless full of problems and stuck in a state of pending.

However, if the recession has had such a negative effect on Turin (Revelli 2016), it is because of the many contradictions already rife in the local economic model; it is mainly because of the economic and political decisions that were taken in the late 1980s, associated with the detachment from the previous industrial and Fordist economy. The global crisis has brought simmering tensions to the surface and accelerated processes already at work, further strengthening the dynamics of deindustrialization and the expulsion of the excess workforce.

Turin's current problems are deeply rooted in the past, in the difficult and strained economic transition from an industrial to a postindustrial economy. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Turin was an archetype of the 'Fordist city' (Tranfaglia 1999; Giaccaria 2010; Berta 2011): it was founded on an economic base made up of metal mechanics factories and the automobile complex centred around the Fiat company; the entire social and political life of the city was influenced by the Taylorist factory system, with a sort of functional interaction between the Fordist organization of work and Keynesian political dispositives. Even though Turin was never really a 'one-company town', it developed a symbiotic relation of domination and dependence with Fiat.

However, although the Fordist system deeply influenced the local community, its tenure was rather short-lived. Fordism still haunts the city like a spectral presence (Molé 2012; Muehlebach 2012), but the long economic conversion started as far back as the 1980s. What followed was an indefinite period of uncertainty, with alternate phases of crisis and recovery. An economic and social uncertainty grew throughout the 1990s when the Fiat company started its programmes of productive restructuration and delocalization, clearly signalling the end of the car industry era. It was at this time that Turin truly passed from a Fordist economy to post-Fordism, a passage that the local power elites – following wider hegemonic national and international political lines – no longer tried to control by means of

the loosely Keynesian policies of the 1970s, but through neoliberal policies (Belligni and Ravazzi 2012). Since then, local authorities have invested in the remaking of mobility infrastructure and have tried to promote the development of new sectors of the economy, such as tourism and the leisure industry (Capello and Semi 2018). Moreover, following a hegemonic model that now seems to be the norm worldwide (Semi 2015), Turin was governed as a company, dedicated to the diktat of the market. This neoliberal management, which implied huge public investments in the new economic sectors at the same time as budget cuts for the municipal social welfare sector, reached its apex with the hosting of the Winter Olympic Games in 2006. But, besides the rhetorical celebration of the city 'on the move', the policies merely resulted in a gentrification of the city centre and the abandonment of the peripheries – places that had been strongly hit by the deindustrialization process and subsequently by the global recession. Consequently, the sense of neglect and abandonment felt by a large part of the inhabitants led to the electoral loss of the political coalition that had governed Turin for the previous twenty years, ushering in the victory of the new 'populist' Movimento 5 Stelle during the municipal elections in 2016.

So, as noted above, the great crisis in Turin began well before 2008. It started with a constant decline in local industrial production, epitomized by the fate of the Fiat Mirafiori plant, where the number of employees has shrunk from a high of 60,000 in the 1970s to its current level of fewer than 5,000. This long and difficult industrial decline is the main cause behind the massive drop in employment, the high level of redundancy of factory workers and the negative job market situation in general. The transition to a 'tertiary economy' – centred around services and tourism, and managed through neoliberal pro-market policies – has not brought the city the new resources promised by the hegemonic discourses; on the contrary, for most working-class people, the transition has ushered in a further decline in job opportunities and the end of their social world, which for years had revolved around production work and the factory.[1]

Many of my informants expressed their sense of discomfort with regard to these transformations, stressing that, from their point of view, the partial closing of the Fiat factories was the beginning of the end. Franca, a former domestic worker who had been unemployed for many years, told me 'as Turin is only an industrial town, based on Fiat, if you take Fiat away, what else is there in Turin? Nothing else. There are new jobs, now, but it is difficult to get these new jobs'.

While Franca noticed the effects of a badly managed productive transition, Guido, another unemployed man who used to work as an accountant, stressed the fact that the productive transformation had a negative effect on many ordinary workers: 'Today', he said, 'there are some opportunities, but not in work that can be done by everybody. They don't need that stuff anymore.'

The economic transition has drastically reduced the number of jobs in the factory sector without offering enough opportunities in the service economy. From the standpoint of the workers expelled from the shrinking factory system, this process is perceived as a sort of 'unequal exchange', because their age along with their lack of skills and experience make it practically impossible for them to get into these kinds of jobs.[2]

For all these reasons, it could be said that Turin is stuck in a liminal state, waiting, like the unemployed themselves, for economic opportunities that are late in coming. The policies elaborated over the past twenty years by the local and national governments to manage the transition were designed to convert the deindustrialization process into an opportunity for general economic revival, but they have had a limited effect (Vanolo 2015; Revelli 2016). Above all, these policies – which were aimed at stimulating the third sector of the economy – have failed to provide a solution to the needs of the many people made redundant or marginalized by the productive conversion. The working class – the orphan of the factory – has been neglected or, at best, offered services merging the individualistic logic of neoliberalism with some kind of paternalistic help (Fassin 2004; Muehlebach 2012). It is within this context of economic crisis and neoliberal policies that the Centro Lavoro and its classes on active job searching must be analysed.

Liminality, Undeservingness and Ideological Apparatuses

As we have seen, the experiences of unemployment I encountered during my fieldwork are linked to neoliberal expulsive dynamics (Sassen 2014), through which many workers, and blue-collar workers in particular, are expelled from the active workforce. Some of them have been able to find new jobs and new possibilities, but only after considerable time and effort. But for most of my informants, the wait for new employment seemed endless.

Therefore, we find that Siegfried Kracauer's description of job centres in Berlin during the German recession – despite being written

a century ago – remains more than apt in describing the predicament of jobseekers in Turin today: 'The typical space of the unemployed – the job centre – is not a vital space. It is a passage through which the unemployed should reach a new working existence. Unfortunately, the passage is now very obstructed' (Kracauer 1982 [1930]: 135).

By summoning the insights of the German cultural critic, I primarily mean to point out some structural dimensions of joblessness. Lack of work implies an ambiguous situation – besides the obvious economic problems – it can easily be identified as a 'marginal' or 'liminal' condition (van Gennep 1909; Turner 1982). The unemployed are liminal subjects, because they find themselves awaiting, in transition from their previous occupation to the potential new one and, above all, because as nonworkers they have an uncertain, indeterminate subjectivity (Newman 1999; Spyridakis 2013).[3] Indeterminacy, as an absence of structuration, contaminates the nonworker's entire social existence: the lack of a job affects income, but also the other, "latent" functions of employment (Jahoda 1982; Pappas 1989), conditioning social roles and statuses, social relations and the temporal organization of daily life. In a social reality like Turin, a former industrial and working-class community, employment is in fact one of the main criteria for social recognition. Without income, without status, deprived of their usual routines and of many of their relationships, unemployed people are living a liminal existence.

Kracauer highlights that this marginal condition should be temporary. Still, for many unemployed, this is not the case due to the contradictions and inequality of the job market. For most of my interlocutors, the wait for new employment, and the status associated thereto, could continue indefinitely. Franca, Simone and Giuliano were stuck in the liminal phase of their involuntary rite of passage through nonwork (Spyridakis 2013), not knowing when or whether they would be able to celebrate the postliminal rituals of reaggregation again.

Suspended in liminality, they were living that strained experience of existential immobility that Ghassan Hage (2009) called 'stuckedness' – a stuckedness associated with a process of 'social disqualification' (Paugam 2013). Alongside the loss in status guaranteed by work and a decrease in material resources, the unemployed experience a moral assessment that easily slips into negative prejudice, as Franca noticed in her interview:

> Because unemployment is something you can't understand or trust unless you experience it firsthand. There are people who stare at you wonder-

> ing, how it is possible that you don't get a job? … People think you don't want to work … When they ask why you haven't found a job yet, they're thinking that you're not doing your best. That you aren't searching well enough, or that you are waiting for a permanent place as a council employee. That's not true! In my opinion, it's because they see the unemployed as lazy, someone who is not willing to lift a finger.

In Turin, the general tendency is to judge the unemployed in negative terms, to consider them lazy, too choosy or incapable to find a job – a tendency similar to that described by Leo Howe (1990) in his pioneering research on unemployment in Belfast. Common sense affirms that the unemployed deserve their plight because they do not spend enough time or effort searching for a job or because they do not accept the offers they receive, so they deserve neither respect nor assistance.[4] Consequently, the only way the unemployed could possibly counter this negative assumption is to be constantly on the lookout for work. For my informants, this meant that regular attendance at the lessons on active job search and frequent visits to the Centro Lavoro also became a way to demonstrate that they deserved help or respect. However, by doing so, the unemployed, instead of questioning the stigmatizing representations of their condition, seem to accept it, strengthening the ideological rhetoric of deservingness (Howe 1994).

Although the rhetoric of deservingness – and the moral condemnation of jobless people that it conveys – is older than the current neoliberal hegemony, it is quite clear that contemporary policies are strictly linked thereto (Dubois 2009; Paugam 2013; Streinzer and Tošić, Introduction to this volume). In fact, the connection is quite clear if we consider the current Italian system of unemployment benefits. At the time of my research, there were three kinds of benefits: 'mobility' benefits, 'Naspi' and 'mini-Naspi', granting a share of any previous salary only to ex-workers and only for a limited time. The motivation behind these limited benefits is evidently that only those who have already worked for a certain period in the past deserve to be assisted by the state, and that in any case said assistance must be brief, as the unemployed must find a new job as soon as they can.

The recent introduction in Italy of the so-called 'citizenship income' in 2018 has led to no concrete change. On the contrary, far from being a truly guaranteed basic income, the new benefit is merely the implementation – quite late in comparison to other European countries (Paugam 2013) – of those workfare policies that offer support only in exchange for the 'activation' of nonworking people.[5]

Nevertheless, the reform provoked huge public debate. While critics of the 'citizenship income' maintain that it discourages people from looking for work, its supporters describe it as a means to push people to enter the job market, pointing to the contract stipulated between the subject receiving the benefit and the municipal job centres – in a way that is not dissimilar from the analogous benefit systems in Germany and the United Kingdom. However, from both perspectives, active job search – instead of citizens' needs or their right to a good life – is the yardstick to use when measuring and evaluating whether or not a person deserves to be assisted by the public welfare system.

Therefore, the courses on active job search analysed here are an expression of the ideology of deservingness, operating as neoliberal governmentality dispositives and ideological apparatuses. While simply presented as practical tools that aspire to better one's chances of finding a new job, the lessons themselves are anthropotechniques aimed at transforming an unemployed person into a deserving jobseeker, following the neoliberal model of 'entrepreneur of him/herself': ready to invest their 'human capital' to obtain new job opportunities. Herein we find one of the main distinctive traits of neoliberalism that distinguishes this ideology from classic liberalism (Foucault 2008): the idea that the cherished model of the 'rational actor' has to be taught to and imposed on subjects by means of a panoply of technologies of the self and a thorough 'conduction of the conductions' (Dardot and Laval 2013).

In fact, what is most striking concerning the lessons on active job searching was their explicit ideological dimension, the open valorization of the model of the entrepreneur and the naturalization of the labour market. An explicit neoliberal representation was taught and prescribed during the lessons. I argue, then, that the Centro Lavoro corresponds to an 'Ideological State Apparatus' in Althusser's terms (1971). Indeed, for the Marxist philosopher, what characterizes this kind of dispositives, distinguishing them from the repressive apparatus, is that they do not work by the use of force or by means of disciplinary techniques, but rather through and for ideology, by means of rituals and practices of subjectivation that are, at the same time, practices of subjection.

Subjectivation processes – which are at the core of both Foucault's approach to technologies of power and Althusser's theory of ideology (Butler 1997; Macherey 2014), and above all the latter's insistence on the ritual dimension – are crucial in fully understanding active job search classes and activation policies at large. The unemployed

are drawn to the classes not only because they are looking for a job, but also because – as liminal subjects – they long for a more deserving status than that of jobless people. In this sense, as we will see, the courses also become a sort of ritual: a rite of passage to become deserving jobseekers as well as a magical rite promising to quickly win back the job and identity they lost.

Centro Lavoro Torino: What It Is and How It Works

How does Centro Lavoro Torino, this small but meaningful apparatus, work?[6] Centro Lavoro is a public facility that hosts free services to help people in finding a job; it is clearly distinct, in its organization as well in its agenda, from local job centres. The latter are founded and managed by the metropolitan district government, while the Centro is founded by the city council and managed by independent social cooperatives whose staff are composed of educators and human resources experts. Centro Lavoro offers computers, faxes and phones for the use of people looking for work, as well as a number of other services, such as individual courses in career change and reorientation, a help desk for assistance in writing CVs, a help desk for psychological issues and, above all, open lessons on active job searching that people can attend, or leave, at will.

The staff members I spoke to assigned considerable value to their work and took great pride in offering a free service that seemed to receive such a positive public response. In particular, they stressed that they were there to respond to a real need. One person in charge of the service, for example, told me:

> Actually, we are the only service open to everybody, so we have become a general place for people's needs, desires and problems. I'm aware that people coming here for the interview process – that's exactly what I do here, the first interview – do so because they need to talk about their lives, and they need someone to listen to them. What they say is: 'I'm searching for a job, but nobody wants to listen to me.' In my opinion, this is the only place left where people can say: 'I can go there and find someone who really listens to me.'

The importance of listening to people's grievances reported by the operators and some of the users themselves, and of the help offered to people in need, is an example of a more general phenomenon already noted by Didier Fassin (2004) in France and by Andrea Muehlebach (2012) in Italy. Both scholars show how the market ideology is often

interlinked with a politics of compassion, a 'moral neoliberal' that responds to the social problems generated by neoliberalism with personal sympathy, piety and charity.

However, Centro Lavoro's first mission is to help people find a job or, better, teach them how to be autonomous in their search. Therefore, training courses on job seeking and open lessons are at the core of the service.

The staff declared that the individual training courses were the service they valued the most. Following a preliminary interview on previous work experience and personal 'proactivity', proving the concrete desire to follow the courses and find work, users can access the course free of charge. Subsequently, users are offered some proposals for professional requalification and a certain number of one-on-one active job search lessons, followed by collective training sessions on job hunting attended by small groups of users.

As shown by individual training courses, the service's aim is to stimulate the 'activation' of unemployed people. The founding assumption of the aforementioned practices is that most of the difficulties in finding a new job derive from the passivity of the subjects themselves or, at least, from wrong or inefficient methods. Anna, one of the operators, was quite clear about that:

> CARLO: So, in your opinion, these active job search activities are useful, aren't they?
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> ANNA: They are if the person has the will to carry them out. If the person is really motivated.
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> CARLO: What do you mean?
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> ANNA: I mean that we can do all that is deemed necessary, but if the person is not really looking for a job, and is not active and autonomous, it's hard to achieve results. In fact, there are some people here who are simply 'parked', because their idea of looking for work is like, every fifteen days I take a look at the ads you gave me, I wait for you to send an application concerning the two offers I'm interested in, then I wait for the next meeting.

Francesca, another staff member, was even more explicit in drawing the line between active and passive search, and thus in tracing a moral distinction between the deserving unemployed and the undeserving ones:

> There's a passive form of job searching and an active one, the one that leads you to success [pause]; the passive search [pause], imagine all the

> discouraged people who stay at home and wait, they don't move, don't actually do anything concrete to find a job. Consider that out of six million unemployed people, only three million are actively in search, while the remaining three million are not.

Besides the more structured and personalized training courses, Centro Lavoro organized open lessons on active job search. During the time of my fieldwork, five lessons were offered regularly: one focused on the bases of the active search, one on writing CVs, one on the use of the internet in looking for employment, one on LinkedIn and the last one on job interviews. The open lessons were mainly a mix of ideological assertions and more or less original advice. The lesson on how to use LinkedIn and other social media for job hunting was quite emblematic in this regard. The teacher began affirming how useful LinkedIn is for the contemporary job market, then simply opened up her account and projected it onto a widescreen. Then she went on to explain how to create an account and how to write an apt résumé. Finally, she explained that you have to look for the profiles of entrepreneurs, managers and human resources employees at the firms and companies you are interested in working with and ask them to be in contact. After having attended some of the lessons, Paolo, a former high-tech worker, raised many doubts about their usefulness:

> Personally, some of the things proposed at Centro Lavoro made me smile. I mean, at the beginning it's like they are talking about something exceptional, then you go to the European Community's online page about CVs and you read word for word what they are saying. They're not saying anything new. They're simply stating the directives received from above. As I said, it's good that they provide this service, but everything depends on who is on the other side.

Indeed, the main point of the classes is less about giving practical advice than about stimulating autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit among the participants. That is the reason why I see them as a ritual, aiming to mould the subject to conform to the neoliberal model of the active and deserving jobseeker. Every lesson started by stressing that the aim of the courses is to render the unemployed autonomous and active, as Francesca told me:

> We help them and support them towards this aim, because the goal of the educator – of the person working in a service like ours – is to teach people how to become autonomous. We give them the tools so they can go off and do what they please; when I teach them what to do, I give them tools, I teach techniques – this is already a great response, although not so concrete.

Among the lessons observed, the one on CVs was the most explicit in this regard. In a class of around twenty people, the teacher started by presenting the seminar: 'It's a lesson in which I explain the best ways to write a CV [pause], so that you may have the tools to do so on your own. Here [at Centro Lavoro] we give you all the useful things we can. Of course, not an actual job, but we help you search for it and be autonomous in it.'

In these propositions, we can detect the influence of the typical liberal notion according to which the ideal subjectivity is an autonomous and independent agent – even in a predicament like unemployment. At the same time, the propositions can be more precisely labelled as 'neoliberal', since what distinguishes neoliberal ideology from classic liberalism is the idea that the subject is not spontaneously autonomous and rational, so that autonomy and instrumental rationality have to be taught and imposed (Dardot and Laval 2013). Francesca went on to say that 'this refers to what I said before on autonomy: that not every active person is autonomous. Autonomy is a matter of a person's indoctrination, the acquisition of a method'.

The construction of this 'ideal, deserving subject' through indoctrination is strictly connected to a naturalization of the labour market and the valorization of work flexibility, as highlighted in these examples heard during the lesson on CVs: 'When thinking about your CV, you should think of a commercial. It's a metaphor. I say so because once a man was annoyed by the term. When we're looking for a job, we are a product. So, what is the employer? The consumer! And what is the CV? It's nothing other than the advertisement of ourselves! Or basically our brand!'[7]

The commodification of the workers is not only taken for granted; it is also presented as something positive. More than that, commodification, it is said, should be emphasized through self-branding as the best means of finding a job. As many scholars have noted (Dunk 2002; van Oort 2015; Boland 2016; Gershon 2016), the purpose of every course on job searching is to teach people how to sell themselves better, passively accepting their subaltern position with reference to the market and employers.

During the first lesson on the fundamentals of active searching, the educator stressed the necessity for workers to adapt: 'You need to be flexible, yes. [Pause] Some years ago, frequent change in employment was seen as negative; nowadays, everybody knows it's common. Actually, it's even predicted that over our working life we will change between at least five sectors. We must be conscious of this and be

flexible.' Furthermore, being in search of employment is presented as an opportunity: 'He who seeks, shall find. And if you find a job you enjoy, you add five days to your week!'

The valorization of autonomy and the pro-market ideology carry with them a moral evaluation of the unemployed that distinguishes between the active jobseekers – deserving help and respect notwithstanding their misfortune – and the passive one, who deserves their own state of joblessness. This moral assessment depends in part on the fact that, according to the logics of the lessons, searching for a job is a job in itself – one that must be carried out with diligence and constancy. Therefore, from the staff members' point of view, or rather from the perspective of the ideological position that they fill, passive and inefficient searching is a symptom of undeservingness:

> ANNA: Because the passive search category includes the voluntary unemployed as well as the nonvoluntary one who suffers from psychological problems, discouragement, little proactivity or a proclivity towards withdrawal. And then there is the voluntary unemployed, the one who stays at home, at ease, claiming to be unemployed while not actually looking for a job.
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> CARLO: But why? Because they're disappointed or because they're naïve?
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> ANNA: Well, it depends. Also because they don't actually need it, because there are some people who if they don't need to work, they don't work! In this country [pause], this country is very generous with jobseekers' benefits. There are some who need subsidies to get to the end of the month and it is right, of course, but there are others that happily live on the dole.

All the neoliberal doctrine's traits are presented in the lessons as axioms and tools to find a job. It is possible to note here a fundamental assumption, common to all the active job search policies, which states that if you accept the neoliberal rules, if you assimilate the neoliberal subjectivity, you will find a job. 'He who seeks, shall find', as the teacher said. Accordingly, this assumption is linked to the idea that if people cannot find a job, it is because they are not motivated enough or are unable to sell themselves on the market. Joblessness is constructed, within this apparatus, as an individual trouble (Mills 1959) that depends on the unemployed person. The individualization process leads to a more or less explicit blaming of the unemployed, who are depicted as lazy and idle, because they lack proactivity or

because they are dependent on social welfare benefits. The sentence quoted above, 'he who seeks, shall find', is the meaningful expression of the perspective that belies the national and European transformations of the public welfare system, meant to render jobless people less dependent on subsidies and public help (Gallie 2004; Dubois 2009; Brodkin and Marston 2013; Paugam 2013).

Also regarding unemployment, behind these neoliberal policies and reforms we can find 'a radical individualization according to which all social crises are perceived as individual crises, and all inequalities are put in relation with individual responsibility' (Dardot and Laval 2013: 440–41). There are basically two kinds of explanation for the phenomenon of unemployment, which are present both in public culture and in the political arena (Sharone 2013): structural explanations that stress economic factors and the systemic flaws, on the one hand, and individualistic ones, which instead reduce the problem of finding a job to personal qualities and individual flaws, on the other hand. At the risk of simplifying a complex matter, we can say that while Keynesian and social-democratic policies were premised on the structural vision, contemporary hegemonic approaches refer more and more to the individualistic interpretation. Courses on active job search are a part of the dispositives transmitting the latter, the ideological function of which is quite clear. With their emphasis on activation, autonomy and personal efforts, these courses lead jobless people to believe that it is somehow their fault if they are unable to find a job. The rhetoric of deservingness operates as an ideological tool that 'reverses the responsibility' from the 'flawed system' to the 'flawed self' (Sharone 2013), blaming the unemployed themselves while concealing the structural contradictions of the job market in a late-industrial economy.

But how do the unemployed respond to the message conveyed by the courses? Generally, the participants in my research referred to the structural explanation of unemployment, always ready to point to the effects of the global financial crisis or to the worsening local economy. Indeed, they experienced the inequity of the job market on a daily basis. Moreover, the structural interpretation allows a reduction in the stigma and guilt associated with their liminal situation (Newman 1999; Sharone 2013). However, as we will see in the next section, I detected a different trend among the unemployed who attended Centro Lavoro. In their anxious search for work and respect, they seemed to end up accepting the individualistic vision of unemployment and the moral judgement it implies.

A Symbolic Efficacy?

Since Centro Lavoro Torino sees a fair number of users every day, it is not easy to depict a typical user. However, during my fieldwork, I noted that most of them were people over the age of forty. On the basis of my observations, I can say that they were men and women who had lost their jobs due to the economic depression and had been looking for a new one for a long time. On the other hand, the open lessons were also attended by young men and women. However, only a fraction of the regular users attended the individual job-seeking training course or the open lessons, since many of them went to Centro Lavoro to access the computers, the internet and the job ads board in the main hall. Finally, a few seemed to use the site simply as a stable and secure place to wait until they found a new job. If we put aside the latter aspect, most of the users can be seen as searching for a job in an active way, without any obvious success. At the Centro Lavoro, for example, I often met and talked with Pietro, a fifty-year-old bartender who, in 2013, had been laid off from the company where he had worked for twenty years. He used to go to Centro Lavoro every other day to look for job ads and to print his CVs or to send them via the internet. Once he told me that, since becoming unemployed, he had sent more than seven hundred CVs and requests, without response. Although he tried to follow the advice provided by the Centro Lavoro, and notwithstanding his strenuous efforts, he had been looking for a new job for over two years.

To understand the relationship between jobseekers like Pietro, Paolo and Simone on the one side, and Centro Lavoro as a dispositive on the other, it is necessary to take a number of factors into account. It must be stressed, in the first place, that many of the services are quite useful for the unemployed, because at Centro Lavoro they can use the internet, consult job offers and ads, and use a public phone and a fax to respond to job offers. Furthermore, it is important not to underestimate the value of the listening service, of the psychological support desk and of the reorientation courses. As noted by Fassin (2004) in his research on the Centres d'écoutes in France, identifying the ideological and disciplinary nature of these kinds of services does not automatically mean declaring them to be useless. Indeed, for example, many users are not able to write an efficient CV. More significantly, many of them are no longer accustomed to navigating the labour market and need to find someone to simply listen to their problems, fears and anxieties. Fabio, a forty-year-old unemployed

man who lost his job when the firm he worked for as a salesman went bankrupt in 2013, told me that the centre was very important for him for the following reason:

> FABIO: By a stroke of luck, I found Centro Lavoro, where the staff sort of indoctrinates you to search for a different job. On Tuesday I'll be meeting this [pause] doctor, this professional who will give me some advice on how to start a new career. He'll have a look at my experience, my work skills and he'll help me apply to some firms and businesses.[8]
>
> CARLO: And is it useful, in your opinion?
>
> FABIO: In my opinion it's very useful. I've described Centro Lavoro to some friends as the heaven of the unemployed. It doesn't seem true that there is a centre where you can find educators and lessons on job seeking. For example, on Monday there is a very interesting seminar on LinkedIn. On Tuesday, as mentioned, I will be meeting the educator to talk about how to start a new career. All this is very useful because there are many services at your disposal, including the internet, as I no longer have it at home.

Fabio and the other users have many different needs. As mentioned above, they suffer not only from lack of income, but also because they miss the latent functions of work, such as the organization of their daily routine and the formation of social relationships outside the family. Going to Centro Lavoro partially responds to these needs, since it gives them the opportunity to meet other people and provides structure and meaning to their day.

All this explains, in part, why people like Fabio seem to agree to being 'indoctrinated'. We have to consider that, from his point of view, accepting the proposed model of the active and deserving jobseeker is part of his 'job to find a job' – an expression he himself used to describe his situation. Moreover, as we have seen, the liminal condition of the unemployed – their lack of status and recognition – leaves them prone to the subjectivization process. However, this does not mean that the jobseeker model as self-entrepreneur is accepted unquestioningly. On the contrary, there was always some ambivalence towards this ideological discourse. During the classes, the participants' comments and questions wavered between enthusiasm deriving from finally being assisted and doubts regarding what seemed to be an abstract and unreal representation of the unemployment experience. During one lesson in March 2015, the teacher was talking about the importance of looking for and choosing the ideal job, when a woman interrupted her, saying: 'But we aren't single

beings, are we? We're always linked to someone else, husband or children, so what can we do? We don't live alone, and we can't choose on our own, can we?' Listening to such an abstract and ideological assertion about free choice, the woman could not help but react by pointing out some of the burdens and constrictions any jobseeker has to deal with.

To give just one further example, the presentation of the psychological support service was interrupted many times by Mauro, a former warehouseman aged about fifty. Mauro insisted – against the opinion of the in-house psychologist – that although it was true that most of them were depressed, the cause of their illness was patently the lack of work; in fact, he continued, they were there to try to solve this practical problem, not their personal psychological condition. When I interviewed him, Mauro referred to a structural explanation for his prolonged lack of employment: 'What the newspapers say is not true, the crisis is not over. You can't find anything. In a year, I have only had two job interviews.' Like most of the people I talked to, he linked his personal difficulties to the stuck condition of the labour market after the global recession.

On the contrary, as seen above, the neoliberal discourse that supports the active job search courses tries to minimize the importance of the economic structure for understanding unemployment. This ideology simply affirms that where job opportunities are scarce, people are required to compete more and more in order to seize the few remaining resources. Indeed, the practical purpose of the courses is to teach workers the best strategies to use when competing in a weak market (van Oort 2015; Boland 2016; Gershon 2016). The doctrinal core of neoliberalism is, in fact, the valorization of competition, which is always presented as a positive factor from both an economic and a personal viewpoint (Harvey 2005). Since neoliberal doctrine is not interested in solving the social issue of unemployment, which is considered normal and natural, its only proposal consists in boosting competition among jobless people (Kwon and Lane 2016).

How did the individualistic and meritocratic discourse – emphasizing competition and personal effort – affect my interlocutors? Among them, one of the most enthusiastic was Francesco, a factory worker aged about forty who had been out of work for over two years. He told me that he liked the services offered at Centro Lavoro: 'Because I can see that they are very active … they oversee me, I mean, thanks to them now I know how to behave during a job interview.' Then he said he agreed with the logic of the courses because 'the effort must come from me'.

Above all, Francesco appreciated the practical suggestions concerning CVs and job interviews, but he also appreciated the ideological discourse of Centro Lavoro. Talking about another long-term unemployed friend of his, he told me: 'but you know, he isn't really looking for … [Pause] He's got a brother who is helping him [pause] so he's not active; he is not like me.' At least in part, by accepting the individualistic logic of the active job search, unemployed people implicitly also accept the assumption that it is their fault that they find themselves in this predicament.

Paolo, the ex-white-collar worker we met earlier in the chapter, expressed a similar view on Centro Lavoro's courses:

> Their purpose is to push a little because they know that most of the people don't have the ability to actively search for a job. In fact, I have also seen this; unfortunately, there are many people who say: eh, there's no work. But you have to search for it through the right connections and you have to move around; you can't just wait for a job to fall into your lap.

In order to understand why Francesco and Fabio accept – at least partially – this individualistic discourse, we must first reflect on dispositives and ideological apparatuses, which follow the logic of interpellation (Althusser 1971). In other words, ideology works through processes of subjectivation that are, at the same time, dynamics of subjection (Butler 1997). Ideology and its apparatuses offer individuals a role, an identity, a subjectivity. In our case, the ideological apparatus offers liminal, statusless subjects a more positive perception of themselves, since they seem to move from the negative, undeserving role of jobless people to the more positive one of jobseekers. Although it in no way guarantees that they will find a new job and then a new real status, the active search dispositive offers at least a more positive subject position. Following the courses and the advice taught there, people like Fabio and Francesco were given the impression of being real jobseekers, active in their search for work and therefore deserving of help, recognition and, moreover, employment.

From an anthropological perspective, one of the most noteworthy of Althusser's (1971) insights can be found in his assertion that ideological apparatuses mould subjectivities by means of rituals that generate practices. In this sense, the active job search courses can be seen as 'rites of passage': becoming an active, deserving jobseeker was, for my interlocutors, the first step towards completing the transition. Clearly, the users' ultimate purpose is to leave the liminal state of unemployment by finding a job, not just to remain jobseekers.

However, the dispositive is useful and effective in offering them the illusion – a typical neoliberal one – that the result depends only on their will and dedication to look for a job. After all, ideology has always to do with deception, since it is founded on an imaginary relationship between the subject and their real world (Althusser 1971) – in this case, the delusion consists in underestimating the structural nature of mass unemployment to overemphasize individual action.

Furthermore, the illusory dimension points to the other ritual side of the lessons on active job search: their magical meaning. Sophie Divay (2001), in an article on services for the unemployed in France, suggests that educators can be compared to 'witch doctors', since they give hope to jobseekers thanks to their charisma and by means of the collective faith in the efficacy of the dispositive itself. However, more than charisma, I think that in our case, the intermingling between illusion and hope is the crucial point. The structural interpretation of unemployment, although more realistic and closer to the lived experience of my interlocutors, can lead to a fatalistic position (Sharone 2013; Strauss 2016) that intensifies the 'unemployment trap', comprising depression and self-retreat (Reyneri 2011). On the contrary, although illusory, the individualistic view seems to give the unemployed more hope and motivation.

In anthropological terms, we can say that unemployment can imply a 'crisis of the presence', what Ernesto de Martino (2015) defined as the feeling of being acted upon by larger and uncontrollable forces, such as – in this case – the strictures and contradictions of a job market no unemployed can control. Instead, by giving the unemployed an active and deserving subjectivity as real jobseekers, the courses offer them – just as magic-religious rites do in de Martino's theory – the illusory but perhaps necessary feeling of still acting in the world. As Paolo said, 'yes, I believe, however, that it is a matter of personal illusion … These job centres, I don't believe in them 100 per cent, but if you look at the situation [pause], it is not such a bad thing'.

Conclusion

The main question behind this chapter reflects what Leo Howe (1994) wondered about in his ethnographic essay on the ideology of deservingness: why do many unemployed people accept an individualistic and moralizing view of unemployment that then blames them as bearing full responsibility for not having a job?

As we have seen, Centro Lavoro and the classes taught there are a small local instance of larger neoliberal policies, which are founded on a simplistic view of unemployment while resorting to the rhetoric of personal effort and deservingness to receive legitimization. All the services offered at Centro Lavoro imply the assumption that looking for a job is a job in itself that requires constant effort. This leads to a moralistic distinction between active jobseekers – deserving respect and help – and the passive unemployed, who, in one way or another, are seen as deserving of their predicament because they are judged to be lazy or unwilling to work.

Centro Lavoro and its classes are then part of the ideological state apparatus that sustains and transmits this moralistic view of unemployment, whose function is to deflect critique from the system by blaming the victims for its contradictions. As an ideological apparatus, it works through rituals and practices to mould subjectivities. As I have argued, my interlocutors accepted the logic of deservingness that lies behind the active job search classes because of the ritual dimension of these courses, which seemed to offer them the more positive status of active jobseeker as well as the illusion of easily finding a job through personal effort.

It is not easy to understand how and why an ideological discourse, like that of deservingness, which is currently so pervasive, spreads out and takes hold in public culture. But, as I hope I have shown, following Althusser's suggestion to have a closer look at ideological apparatuses is a good starting point for an ethnographic answer.

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Notes

1. For a comparison, see – among many other cases – the volume edited by Narotzky and Goddard (2017), as well as the ethnographic research by Mollona (2009) on the fate of the steel industry in Sheffield.

2. See Walley (2013) for a similar interpretation of the consequences of deindustrialization in Chicago and the United States at large.
3. But see Lane (2016) for a critical stance on the use of the trope of liminality with regard to unemployment.
4. It must be underlined that the unemployed are not always and necessarily condemned from a moral point of view, as Serge Paugam demonstrated in his comparative work (2013). While a social disqualification of joblessness and poverty prevails within European societies, there are also many instances of 'integrated poverty' – typical of countries and regions where lack of work is common and widespread – in which unemployment is not stigmatized.
5. For an anthropological analysis of the various forms of basic income and their social consequences, see Ferguson (2015).
6. It must be stressed that, despite the fact that I am using a sort of 'ethnographic present' to describe it, some aspects of the service have changed since the time of the research.
7. On the teaching of self-branding techniques aimed at unemployed people in the United States, see the noteworthy research by Ilana Gershon (2016).
8. It must be noted that the Italian verb *indottrinare* used by Fabio – as well as by Francesca (see above) – carries the same negative connotations as in English.

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