



ON AFFECTIVE LABOR IN POST-FORDIST ITALY

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History tells us that it is by no means a matter of course for the spectacle of misery to move men to pity.

—Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*

It was mid-2003, and I was attending a volunteer training class offered by the Catholic organization Caritas in an old-age home on the dreary outskirts of the northern Italian city of Milan. A Caritas representative was holding the workshop for about 30 elderly volunteers who spent time with those unfortunate souls who rarely had visitors, feeding them, caressing them, taking them for short walks. At one point, the representative asked the volunteers what they had to offer that was distinct from the services of the professional nursing and doctoral staff. Without hesitation, the group called out, “Love!” The lady sitting next to me tapped me on the arm and pointed toward a nurse sitting in front of us. “See,” she said, “that nurse over there treats the patients very badly—for her this is just a *job*, and she doesn’t care at all.” This class was part of Caritas’s larger attempt to foster a citizenship that claims “responsibility for recogniz[ing] and promot[ing] the dignity of the person through public action.”¹ Good citizenship, it seems, relies not only on the capacity to enunciate one’s interiority in contexts such as that of the training class but also on the ability to engage in specific acts of other-recognition and action.

Two years later, I found myself in the classroom of a high school in Milan, this time watching Michele, the head of a nonprofit organization called Passo dopo

Passo (Step by Step), train a group of students as volunteers. As Michele put it to me later, his organization was dedicated to steering teenagers toward “citizenship and growth.” Michele had the students watch a slideshow of people impoverished, old, lonely, addicted to drugs, hungry, missing limbs. “I want you to watch these images closely,” Michele said. “Watch them with your eyes *and* with your hearts.” He then asked the students to write down their emotional responses and to read their responses out loud. The students spoke of anger, pity, and compassion. Michele posed a central question, which he asked of all classes I watched him teach: “Who do you think should intervene in these situations?” The students almost all mentioned the state. But Michele only partially agreed. “That’s true,” he said, “but at the same time, public authorities should *not* de-responsibilize me.” Some students nodded. “That is why we are here. We want to talk about coresponsibility.”

I witnessed these scenes while conducting research on the highly moralized forms of citizenship that are emerging while the provisioning of social services in Italy is being privatized. These forms of citizenship are generated by what is by now a huge national push toward a “culture of voluntarism” (*cultura del volontariato*), promoted in a particularly avid manner in the region of Lombardy, where Milan is the capital. During the 16 months of fieldwork in which I tracked the production of this *cultura del volontariato*, I was struck by the fact that many of the pedagogical moments I witnessed, including the two sketched here, hinged on the wedding of proper affect and action to good citizenship. The subjecthood promoted was presumed to be animated by a specific internal disposition that would translate into publicly useful activity—specifically, unremunerated labor performed in the social service sector.² Many teachers asked their trainees to demonstrate the capacity to “depart from their innermost being,” as Michele put it to me later, and to participate in the creation of a public that bound strangers to strangers through proper affect and ameliorative action.

This labor regime is heavily mediated by the Italian state, which has begun to redeploy affective labor across public and private domains, shifting responsibility away from women as the sole presumed affective laborers in the domestic sphere toward a summoning of so-called passive populations (in particular, unemployed youth and retirees) as affectively laboring citizens. Since capitalism’s inception, such labor or care work has either been called (by Karl Marx) “non-work” (Hardt and Negri 1994:7–8) or the “perverted” and “parasitical” labor of groups such as “menial servants” who fail to artifactualize their productivity (Smith 1976:351ff.). The fact that the state publicly values and deploys care work today is unusual for a society that has taken such work for granted for years.

I visited the Milanese high school in 2005 because it was a member of the program *Cittadinanza europea attiva e solidale* (CEAS, Active and Solidaristic European Citizenship) initiated by the Agenzia per le Organizzazioni Non Lucrative di Utilità Sociale (Agenzia per le ONLUS; National Agency for Nonprofit Organizations of Social Utility). The school was approached in 2003 by the regional public educational authority, the Ufficio Scolastico per la Lombardia, which asked whether the school would help promote voluntarism. Not only were several teachers trained to obtain the skills to introduce students to the *cultura del volontariato* but students also received course credit for taking volunteer classes and engaging in volunteer activities through the school. The Agenzia per le ONLUS aims to produce nonindifferent citizens (“cittadini non indifferenti”) and a citizenship to be lived with the heart (“una cittadinanza da vivere con il cuore”).³ The Ministry of Labor and Social Politics recently announced that voluntarism, whose primary “services” consist of “listening, support, and moral assistance,” has exploded by 152 percent since 1995 (Osservatorio Nazionale per il Volontariato 2006:4–6).

The affectively laboring public is to a large part wrought out of already available religious-cultural meanings and practices and is steeped in Italy’s long history of the Catholic Church’s (and later Fascism’s) massive solicitation of sacrificial feeling and action in the name of the public good.⁴ But what I want to focus on here is the fact that citizens across the generational spectrum are being summoned into accruing recognition not through waged but through unwaged labor, not through the production and traffic of tangible goods but through the production of good feeling. How are we to understand the emergence of an unwaged labor regime that hinges on the public production and promotion of affect? I argue that such state-mediated intimacy must be situated within the context of new forms of exclusion and dispossession that have come to haunt the Italian body politic. In 2005, President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi called voluntarism a primary citizenship duty (“dovere”) in a televised year-end speech, explaining that a “constructive spirit of civil solidarity” was emerging “spontaneously” in Italy in response to the problems posed by globalization.⁵ I show that compassionate labor operates not as a mitigating force against but as a vehicle for the production and maintenance of a new exclusionary order. This order is reproduced and maintained precisely because it hinges on a fantasy of spontaneously available public feeling.

The task of this article is twofold. First, I show that unlike the affective (or emotional) labor that is today key to capitalist value production (Hochschild 1983; Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000), the affective labor explored here is valued by the state and other social actors because of its presumed capacity to foster

noncommercialized social bonds. Put differently, one might argue that while the flexible wage labor regime relies centrally on sentiments such as fear, opportunism, and cynicism (Virno 1996:13–16), the unwaged labor regime relies on good feeling—trust, reciprocity, magnanimity—which are considered “essential to the social contract” in a “disarticulated” society (Caltabiano 2002:19–21). But a public thus produced is at best a partial one. It unites citizens through the particularities of cosuffering and dutiful response, rather than the universality of rights; through the passions ignited by inequality, rather than presumptions of equality; and through emotions, rather than politics (Arendt 2006:85–87). It thus differs quite profoundly from its Fordist–Keynesian forebear.

At the same time, this public arises not *ex nihilo*, nor can it be understood in terms of a mere mobilization of already available Catholic traditions. Instead, the feelings that animate this public are harvested from emotional sensitivities that were, at least partially, forged during Fordist times. In fact, people’s yearnings for a central aspect of Fordist social belonging—waged labor and the public status thus afforded—are mobilized by the state in the form of an unwaged affective labor regime.⁶ This labor regime is a means for some marginalized members of Italian society to approximate a form of social belonging institutionalized and cultivated during the Fordist era—the capacity to belong and be useful to the world through waged work (Castel 1996). In this approximation, Fordism is both revived and undone. Fordism is thus less helpfully thought of as an era past than as a locus of sensibility and yearning that leaves crucial traces in the neoliberal present. It survives not just in the form of dilapidated industrial ruins that dot the outskirts of cities like Milan but also in the structures of feeling around which social relations and senses of self were organized. A focus on “post-Fordist affect” (Berlant 2007) allows us to move beyond well-worn analyses that conceptualize the neoliberal present in terms of a radical historical break and toward considerations of the present as fundamentally intertwined with and even dependent on sensitivities generated in the past. Fordism, in short, must be examined as both an era past and an era with an afterlife—as a ghostly presence, even as its absence is proclaimed.

There is no question that neoliberalization has fundamentally reworked Fordist–Keynesian infrastructures, social relations, and subjectivities (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). But an analysis of peoples’ affective resilience—their left over feelings, so to speak—indicates that our analytics of rupture must also be accompanied by an awareness of what remains. For Fordism was as much a politicoeconomic and spatiotemporal arrangement

(Brenner 2004; Harvey 1990) as it was an affective form. Not only did this epoch wed strong interventionist nation-states to Keynesian economic and welfare policies but it was also a “mode of living and of thinking and feeling life,” a “psycho-physical nexus” generated out of “the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and a new type of man” (Gramsci 1997:302–305). For Antonio Gramsci, Fordist affect was organized around ascetic self-denial such as Prohibition and heteronormative monogamy. For Robert Castel, it was oriented around the desire for well-being or the feeling of middle classness and futurity that came with new consumption patterns and social insurance (Castel 2003). The Fordist feeling I want to focus on here, however, is yet another one, namely, the Fordist laboring subject’s access to a form of belonging that was public in distinct ways (Castel 1996). This feeling was generated out of the public status that workers were afforded the first time in capitalism’s history; it created a citizenship that was also “an affective state, where attachments take shape” (Berlant 2007:274). This “sense” of a generation or of a period will not quite go away and might in fact often only hover at the “very edge of semantic availability” (Williams 1977:131). It is this sense that is put to work in the post-Fordist affective labor regime today.

This is not to say that Fordism was everywhere the same, especially not in Italy, with its highly differentiated politicoeconomic landscape. In fact, only northwestern Italy was organized around large-scale heavy industry, while the central and northeastern regions were centered on small-scale industrial production (Blim 1990:10). Similarly, while the national projects of social democratic Western European states hinged on classic Fordist policies of full employment and the full utilization of capital resources, Italy’s “economic miracle” of the 1950s and 1960s relied on a mixture of Christian democratic (Van Kersbergen 1995) and *laissez-faire* policies (Lumley 1990), specifically, on the exploitation of impoverished southern Italian peasants who worked in a low-wage, high-unemployment regime actively pursued by leaders preaching a policy of deflation and containment of demand. This regime ended in the 1970s only after an explosion of workers’ strikes led to the consolidation of some of the institutions considered paradigmatic of Fordism, at least in the country’s northern and central regions (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). There, some of the Fordist institutions most mourned by many Italians today—such as strong welfare provisioning and, more important for my purposes here, a stable work regime that wedded work to rights and public status—took hold. It is such affective attachments, arising out of the Fordist coupling of labor and public status, that interest me here. Their lingering existence speaks to the fact that some Fordist

institutions remain forceful as people attempt to recapture and reiterate Fordist forms and feelings of recognition and belonging.

This piece is inspired by others who have insisted that all great transformations “must be affective in order to be effective” (Mazzarella 2009:299; see also Richard and Rudnycky 2009; Rofel 2007; Rutherford 2009; Shever 2008; Stoler 2004). I hope to contribute to this debate by tracking the social life of a particular affective form—the desire to be publicly recognized for one’s work—across two eras and by exploring how this desire is put to work through compassionate modes of citizenship. Compassion is, of course, also an emergent topic in anthropology. Yet compassion is almost always considered as something that bears down on “undesired” noncitizen populations (refugees, immigrants, and the recipients of humanitarian aid), that is, on the bare life that disturbs the tranquil life of the citizens’ polis (Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2006). This article, in contrast, suggests that the polis cannot be understood as a zone protected from the violence of humanitarianism, a sphere where the “happy few” stand in tense relation with the wretched of the earth (Fassin 2005:381). Rather, compassion, intrinsically linked to exclusion, has made its way into the very heart of citizenship making itself.

RELATIONAL LABOR

The rise of barely remunerated or unremunerated forms of work must be situated within the context of the crisis of work (Le Guidec 1996) as well as the crisis of the state, which today deploys cheap labor in privatizing welfare and care sectors (Brin Hyatt 2001; Kingfisher 2002; Milligan and Conradson 2006). Many authors have commented on the arrival of capitalism without work (Beck 2000; Castel 1996, 2003; Rifkin 1995). For them, the crumbling of Fordist work regimes represents an ontological rather than a mere economic challenge because “labor is more than physical work performed” (Castel 2003:368); it is more than a vehicle for material stability. Instead, previous work regimes created the very conditions for social belonging; they provided a collective identificatory framework that served as a “social coagulant” (Caltabiano 2002:33). What is at stake, then, is the relationship of citizens not only to work but also to the world as such.

In Italy, the specter of a society without work has had a number of Italian sociologists produce a set of reflections infused with both anxiety and utopic promise.⁷ The argument is always the same. Giuseppe Gesano, former director of research at the Italian National Science Foundation, sums it up when he writes that the current “jobless society” remains overly committed to a theory of work as mere “merchandise to be sold on the market” (Gesano 1999:136). Instead, the social

contributions made by new forms of work such as voluntarism “go far beyond paid activity” (Gesano 1999:136) and are in fact “central to the social glue in ways that work proper is not anymore” (Caltabiano 2002:33). Massimo Lori from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) argues that “the inefficiencies of Taylorism” and its “excessive emphasis on rationality” have led scientists to value new kinds of work such as house- and volunteer work (Lori 2002:69). Pierpaolo Donati, a former president of the Associazione Italiana di Sociologia (Italian Association of Sociology), writes in a Catholic vein against “a purely economic and secular conception of productivity” and for forms of productivity more “social” and “sacred.” He adds that the end of modernity will bring “professions where the purely material aspects will be taken over by machines, while the real human activity will be the relationship” (Donati 2001). I found that the public value now bestowed on new forms of work was also reiterated by volunteers, who often referred to their work as “relational labor” (*lavoro relazionale*).

These shifting conceptualizations of labor and value evoke the ghost of Hannah Arendt’s *Human Condition*, which lamented capitalist modernity’s glorification of labor and the loss of the kinds of “action” that used to define what it meant to be human (Arendt 1958). Like Arendt, the scholars writing in this vein aim to rid society of its reliance on vulgar materialist utilitarianism, favoring instead an extraeconomic world of public relationality. Capitalism, the argument goes, has in its crisis produced its very opposite: the possibility of unalienated labor that does not estrange humans from themselves and others but unites them through new modes of relationality. But in contrast to Arendt’s argument that social bonds are best forged by political institutions, rather than by mechanical activity, these sociologists seek not a political but a “relational” public—not the cultivation of the polis but the valuation, even sanctification of the kinds of work that Arendt associated with the private (etymologically related to the term *deprived*) oikos (Arendt 1958:58). It is these acts of care, usually associated with the oikos and its animating sentiments, that have today become a most valued public good.

This utopia of relationality is sketched in the ethnographic scene at the start of the article. The culture of voluntarism, and the kinds of affective capacities it is said to rely on, is key to the making of what neoliberal reformers in Lombardy call (in English) the “welfare (or caring) community.” This is part of a larger European trend toward the privatization of social services through the introduction of nonprofit and voluntary activity (Ascoli and Ranci 2002). The so-called third sector has flourished in Italy,⁸ which today uses 82 percent of its national social service budget to fund nonprofits (Ranci 2001:79). What distinguishes the Italian case is that it relies so

extensively on voluntarism. Almost one-quarter of all nonprofit organizations rely exclusively on this “remarkable social army” (Ranci 2001:75–76).

This massive mobilization of relational labor is achieved through consistent state intervention. Italy is the only country in Europe that grants voluntary organizations a special juridical status by offering tax relief and subsidies difficult to obtain for nonprofits employing paid staff (Ranci 2001:76). Many associations rely on private support in addition to significant amounts of state funding (Ranci 2001; Osservatorio Nazionale per il Volontariato 2006). Passo dopo Passo, for example, was funded in large part by Lombardy’s Directorate General [for the] Family, Conciliation, Integration and Social Solidarity (“Direzione Generale Famiglia, Conciliazione, Integrazione e Solidarietà Sociale”), although it also receives private donations.⁹ Voluntary associations are overseen by numerous national and regional observatories and agencies and have been subject to huge amounts of statistical reporting. Istat is only one of many bodies that have begun to produce numbers, graphs, and typologies of volunteering, all of which are crucial to shaping the ways in which citizens are understood by public authorities and have come to understand themselves. Such interventions are typical of neoliberal governance in that they pair the state’s commitment to privatization, devolution, and the “empowerment” of citizens with the retrenchment of state power through new regulatory mechanisms (Wolin 1989:170). State withdrawal, it seems, requires orchestration, an orchestration that demands state mediation.

The utopia of relational labor is largely wrought out of Catholic cultural traditions despite the third sector’s steady secularization (Ranci 2001:77). The two pedagogical scenes sketched earlier, for example, represent attempts to bring inner disposition and intention into harmony with ameliorative public action. Both thus gesture toward the logics of Catholic confession in their alignment of intention with action (Foucault 2003:172–175). Many Italians I met also believe that voluntary labor comes with the capacity to re-create fragile social bonds because it is an expression of the spirit of gifting or *gratuità*, a concept key to Catholic theology. Indeed, a key law (Legge 266/1991) regarding volunteering states that it is “personal,” “spontaneous,” and “free” (*gratuito*).¹⁰ This law has established numerous mechanisms to ensure that volunteer organizations will not merely proclaim but will explicitly operate according to nonprofit motives. The spirit of gifting thus became entrenched not just in the law but in the statutes and everyday practice of volunteer organizations. The concept of “*gratuità*” is also circulated widely in public cultural discourse. The “Charter of Values on Volunteering” (“Carta dei valori del volontariato”) is posted on government Web

sites and those of many voluntary organizations and was studied closely in several volunteer classes I attended. One volunteer trainer asked his trainees to reflect on *gratuità* and to imagine it as “absolute relationality.” I witnessed other attempts to stabilize and entrench the spirit of nonremuneration among volunteers. I, for example, was instructed to sign an oath at the beginning of a class in which I declared that my voluntary activities were gratuito because “volunteering is intrinsically incompatible with any type of remunerative work.” By such gestures, volunteers are asked to articulate and inscribe—through their signatures, for example—their commitment to love, compassion, and the gift.

In short, Italy has seen the rise of a whole range of state-mediated institutions, policies, and pedagogical interventions that attempt to standardize the volunteer as a normative moral subject governed by reliable forms of affect. These interventions have created a regime in which unwaged labor is wedded to intense moralization, even sanctification. Such interventions resonate with Pope John Paul II’s insistence that “society needs to convert to the idea of unselfish giving” and “authentic love” to oppose a world dominated by a “logic motivated exclusively by the pursuit of profit and gain at any price.”¹¹ As policy makers, state reformers, sociologists, and even the pope agree, post-Fordist solidarity should be wrought out of feelings of compassion and care. Affective labor remedies not material poverty but collective relational crisis. It restores not economic wealth but the foundations of public morality. It is the unwaged participation of citizens in affective voluntary action that is considered key to societal stability. And it is unwaged labor that has become an exemplary act of citizenship.

The fantasy that the new laboring utopia is “spontaneously” available because it is already engrained in the hearts of sensitive citizens represents a disavowal crucial to the post-Fordist welfare community, one reproduced as much by Michele as by President Ciampi and by state law as much as by expert sociologists. Feelings appear as fetishes in that many commentators endow them with a life and magic of their own. Even though this labor regime relies on a theory of gifting that its promoters say results in thick human sociality, the theory of gifting promoted here is in fact non-Maussian in that it imagines gifting to be spontaneously willed from within the sovereign subject. It is non-Maussian in that it disembeds exchange from its social context (particularly, violent ones; Marcel Mauss, after all, argued that gifting allowed for the avoidance of war [1990:82]) and presents exchange not only as private, personal, and free but also as moral because animated by feelings such as love and compassion. This disavowal makes relational labor appear as an “inaugural act of generosity, without any past or future” (Bourdieu 1972:171–172). It disembeds

such labor from loss and dispossession and unhinges it from post-Fordist mourning by presenting it as naturally flowing from marginal populations that lack the public status provided by work.

Yet such acts of disavowal are also actively performed by volunteers themselves, who often emphatically deny that what they are doing is work. Even as they call their work *lavoro relazionale*, they insist that it is not work but a “commitment” (“No, non è lavoro, è un impegno!”), propelled by their conscience and sense of duty. “You can always *not* go to work,” as one volunteer, Silvana, puts it, “but with volunteering, you can’t not go!” Volunteers emphasized the intense pleasures and bonds they felt as volunteers. They seldom lingered on the kinds of exclusion that often moved them into these activities in the first place. They thus participated in an erasure crucial to the building of the post-Fordist public, one that allows for the magical translation of the crisis of work and social belonging into what appears as a social opportunity, the sublimation of new forms of exclusion into a fantasy of good feeling. As I will now show, the very citizens summoned into the affective labor regime are in fact newly dispossessed. Their labor is enabled by the privileges of good feeling while simultaneously being grounded in a logic of despair.

MOURNING WORK

Not all citizens are equally summoned into affective labor. Often, marginal populations, particularly unemployed youth, early retirees, and pensioners, bear the burden of providing such labor. Construed as passive in public cultural discourse, many expect these “useless of the world” (Castel 2003:368) to transform their passivity into sacrificial feeling and action. These groups are only precariously linked to the labor market, hovering at the margins of salaried employment, the one activity that used to guarantee membership in the Fordist–Keynesian community. Their insertion into the unwaged labor regime allows them to be established as central to the production of a post-Fordist public and to thus acquire some symbolic social belonging.

Many volunteers gladly, perhaps even gratefully, let themselves be marshaled into relational labor, not because of spontaneously available affective dispositions but because they mourn the absence of work and the kinds of public recognition it afforded. One such group was the Association for the Self-Management of Services and Solidarity (“Associazione per l’Autogestione dei Servizi e la Solidarietà” or AUSER), founded in 1992 by Europe’s largest trade union, Spi-Cgil, the pensioners’ union of the ex-Communist Italian General Confederation of Labor (“Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro” or CGIL).¹² AUSER is, like

Michele's organization, partially funded through regional and municipal funds. It draws on the free labor of about 40 thousand citizens active in more than a thousand neighborhood associations across the country. Many of its volunteers are motivated by a profound sense of loss that emerged directly from the post-Fordist crisis of labor.¹³

The volunteers I worked with were middle-aged women and men who were part of a huge wave of workers left unemployed after many of Milan's factories downsized in the 1990s. They were situated precisely at the cusp of a revolution that shook post-Fordist societies more generally and that saw the waning of waged labor as a foundational vehicle for social recognition and cohesion (Méda 1996). Many workers struggled with their sense of self. As the organization's regional director Sergio Veneziani put it to me, they "spent a lifetime constructing their sense of self through work. All of a sudden, they found themselves without a function. They passed from a model of an active life of relationships to a life of absolute non-usefulness." Existential crises were brought on by financial ones. The fate of these early retirees mirrored the fate of all those outside of protected labor regimes, for they had access to only a defective and discriminatory basic protection (Trifiletti 1998:179) and very few opportunities to reenter the labor market. They found themselves in limbo because pension reforms mandated that retirees under the age of 65 could not qualify for pensions (Ferrara and Gualmini 2004).

One volunteer, Giuseppe, recalled to me the "terror" of losing his job. Unemployment had been hugely consequential, not just for him but for his entire family. It involved a distinctly post-Fordist amalgamation of financial and existential loss, a painful reshuffling of fiscal and familial obligation as well as the interruption of normative cycles of reproduction. My taped interviews with him are broken by silences, in which Giuseppe choked back furtive tears as he recalled his most difficult years. He was one of the "old guys" (*anzianotti*) who were forced to retire from factory work at the age of 50. He had tried to resist—but failed—because he wanted to continue working until his wife was old enough to receive her pension. Giuseppe seemed to have worked off the books for a friend for a few years—"black work," *lavoro nero*, as Italians call it—but he still recounted not only extraordinary financial difficulties magnified by recent pension reforms (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004:109–115) but also his inability to help his daughter, who also struggled to find work. Italy's youth today faces a harsh flexible labor market and unemployment rates as high as 60 percent in some parts of the country (Blim 2002:138). As first-time job seekers, they have no entitlement to state benefits and rely mostly on dwindling intergenerational financial resources (Ferrara 2000:172; Blim 2002).

Although Giuseppe's daughter was "lucky enough" to have a 16-hour-per-week job while all of her colleagues were hired only on a temporary basis with "no benefits, no 13-month salary, no paid holidays," "she cannot afford to rent an apartment, let alone invest in a house." Giuseppe's terror came from a sense of lack paradigmatic of the post-Fordist affect I want to outline here—lack of work, lack of fiscal security, lack of futurity, lack (on both his and his wife's part) of the means to help their daughter acquire a household and thus social status.

People like Giuseppe felt no less beleaguered once they started receiving their pensions because Italian public cultural discourse frequently represents the elderly as a burden to society and as "devouring economic resources and absorbing social and health services" (AUSER 2001:5). Volunteers are well aware of this discourse. I often encountered volunteers who perceived themselves and their work in precisely such terms. One woman described volunteering as an act of "caring for oneself" and of "not becoming a *debolezza*—a weakness to society." Voluntarism, she continued, laughing nervously, was "good for the government health system, which is kept from spending too much money on us. In fact, our volunteering has quite an economic benefit for society!"

These were the everyday moments in which rights-bearing citizens transformed themselves into the weak links in an already-strained chain. They found themselves not just materially dispossessed but dispossessed of the assurance of dignity in the public realm. An article in a magazine published by *Confindustria*, Italy's employers' union, puts it bluntly, "If older people want to count more, they need to saddle themselves with their corresponding responsibility: of work, learning, volunteering, and so on" (*50&Più* 2003:63). This quid pro quo logic saturates the media landscape and circulates widely in the Italian public cultural sphere (Greenberg and Muehlebach 2007). As Fivol, the Italian Foundation for Voluntary Service, puts it, activities such as volunteering allow pensioners to "*remain* citizens in every respect even as they age" (Fivol 2005:9, emphasis added). Italian retirees, in short, are faced with public exhortation to perform their duties as citizens, rather than to claim their rights. Social inclusion and status hinge on the willingness to commit to relational labor, rather than on the insistence that retirement is an entitlement after a life of work. They "remain" citizens only under the condition that they continue to be "active" and redeem themselves through a continued commitment to some sort of publicly useful activity.

Yet dignity can be redeemed and repossessed, and the elderly are actively invited to engage in these acts of redemptive repossession. The Lombardian municipality of Vimercate, for example, sent out thousands of letters to pensioners,

inviting them “to not remain insensitive to the needs of the weak” and to provide services ranging from transportation to “affection” and “friendship” for the frail, old, disabled, and young. The municipality wanted to involve all those “human resources that were still fully energetic” so as to “*add value to their existence*” (Fivol 2005:29, emphasis added). Today, more than a third of all volunteer organizations that provide health and social services are staffed by people of 50 years of age and older. They represent a “new subject and voice in the market of solidarity” and a “catchment area full of potential” (Fivol 2005:6, 31). This is the curious paradox of affective labor, which revalues dispensable populations as indispensable. Indeed, the dispensability and indispensability of these populations are indistinguishable in this regime; the worthless to the world produce its greatest wealth.

When I visited the volunteers at the local AUSER office in Sesto San Giovanni, a working-class town just outside of Milan, I would always encounter two men, Nullo and Francesco, sitting behind a desk, working at a computer. Nullo, then in his seventies and the president of the organization, always came to the office dressed in a suit and tie. He did much of the public relations work with the town’s government and local businesses and constantly sought out new sources of funding, projects, and partnerships with the local municipality. Francesco, then vice president, was usually involved in the scheduling and management of the sometimes dozens of volunteers who circulated through the office on any given day to staff the phone service (a *telefono amico*) for an afternoon or two, to provide transport to and from the old-age home, or to conduct home visits among or run errands for the elderly living alone somewhere in the neighborhood. I watched many of them tirelessly invest hours, sometimes full days, in the organization, which provided a myriad of services, including those to the very old who lived alone.

These people had all been classic Fordist citizen-subjects, members of the Fordist–Keynesian “salaried society,” in which labor guaranteed rights, benefits, and wider societal participation through consumption, housing, education, and leisure. Labor was the primary vehicle through which social identity and communal integration were achieved (Castel 2003:303–304; Méda 1996:633). Early to midcentury collective bargaining and ensuing labor rights allowed workers to leave the precarious zone of the market, a zone of “no dignity, no social recognition, no political existence” (Castel 1996:617), for a zone of universal public recognition through employment. In Arendt’s terms, the slaves peopling the bare, shadowy, private realm of the oikos came forward into the public as rights-bearing “social citizens” (Donzelot 1993; Marshall 1950; Rose 1996). This move from individual contract to public status was achieved through law—a set of public regulations

that predated and transcended market transactions (Castel 1996:618). Work now ceased to be conceptualized as a mere individual act and instead came to be understood in terms of its abstract social function, “a collective social act that transcends the particular nature of the tasks carried out by individuals” (Castel 1996:619). It was precisely this moment of abstraction that led to the differentiation of waged work from housework and the former’s entry into the public domain. Labor law came to recognize “the generic utility of a worker’s activity in the same way as civil law recognizes a citizen’s generic membership in the community” (Castel 1996:619).

This is not to say that the Fordist era was idyllic. It came, of course, at the cost of workers’ subordination. Work remained a source of alienation and exploitation. Further, work and its concomitant rights and recognition were not accessible to all. The overwhelming majority of Italian women did not work in the “guaranteed labor market.” As housewives, they enjoyed the rights of social citizenship only indirectly, through dependent’s benefits (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004:36; Lewis 1992, 1998), while in some parts of Italy women (and children and retirees) worked illegally in the shadows of an undocumented labor regime of small-scale industrial production (Blim 1990:11).¹⁴ The Fordist public was thus partial in its own way. But work in the guaranteed labor market was also a vehicle for what welfare theorist Esping Anderson calls “decommodification,” that is to say, a means through which less alienated lives could be lived. Basic benefits, such as paid holidays, had the effect of emancipating workers from total market dependency and of “facilitating the de-proletarianization of the workers’ status,” such that their relationship to work “began to approximate what privileged strata had enjoyed for decades and even centuries” (Esping Anderson 1990:45–47).¹⁵ In sum, it is ironic that Arendt’s lamented laboring society was the most decommodified society industrial capitalism ever knew.

Fordist workers’ public dignity had already begun to crumble when AUSER volunteers lost their jobs in the 1990s (Molé 2008). Many volunteers looked back on the end of their working lives with bitterness and shame. One interlocutor said that he hated being treated like “a little piece of waste paper that was simply thrown away” when he lost his job in his late 50s: “I told myself that I still had lots to offer.” Others talked about the emotional toll of feeling “cut off” and described the loss of work as a moment in which they ceased being properly social beings, disembedded from social relations and previous forms of recognition. Indeed, there is a widespread sense in Italy that the loss of work equals social death: a loss as painfully existential as it is economic (Molé 2010).

The mourning this process set in motion was thus not for work *per se* but for the feelings of public status and recognition that Fordist work entailed. And voluntarism helped AUSER members recuperate or at least approximate Fordist feelings of belonging and recognition. Indeed, the fact that unremunerated activity is in Italy legally recognized endows it with a public personality never granted to, for example, housework—and this despite a long history of radical Italian feminism that called for salaried housework (Bono and Kemp 1991:260–272). Indeed, almost all volunteers, male and female, engage both in (publicly recognized) voluntarism and in the hidden work of private care (caring for grandchildren, elderly parents, ailing spouses). But the point is that this latter affective labor has never been recognized by the state, while the former now is.

Further, the legal recognition of voluntarism has come with a basic benefit ordinarily granted only to waged work—insurance. According to Legge 266/1991, all voluntary organizations are obliged to insure their members against accidents and sickness that arise in connection with their activities. Many volunteers pointed out this fact to me with pride. They similarly noted that their contracts with the municipality allowed reimbursement for expenses such as gas. “We know that volunteers are not paid in any way,” Giuseppe said to me, “but there are some costs that should be taken care of.” Like waged labor, affective labor was thereby “dignified” insofar as it became a source of (at least minimal) rights and remuneration (Castel 1996:620).

The public recognition that volunteers accrue derives also from the technocracy of virtue that has sprung up around this phenomenon. AUSER Lombardy, for example, produces reports crowded with numbers and graphs that, for example, calibrate the exact amount of hours its seven thousand volunteers spend providing services (AUSER Lombardia 2003). Such calculations of affective labor are a primary means through which citizen-volunteers present their work as commensurable with other kinds of work.¹⁶ They present themselves as having a place in society, one amenable to calculation and, hence, public valuation.

There are more ways through which affective labor has come to resemble waged labor. Quite apart from the fact that everyone involved in the sector insists that this new labor regime requires skills (hence, the training classes taken by the majority of volunteers), the everyday lives of the volunteers often resemble the working world in rhythm, regularity, and performativity. The labor of these volunteers, for example, had a fixed rhythm (offices are open all year, even over Christmas, which enabled volunteers to überperform their usefulness through almost unlimited office hours) and a professional space (an office that was successively

upgraded between 2003 and 2005 to include an ever-expanding number of new computers and phones). Their activities were also endowed with a gravitas usually reserved for waged labor when people like Nullo came to work in a suit and tie; such gravitas is usually associated with being seen and recognized in public. Voluntarism allowed these people to leave an otherwise entirely private life, for “the privation of privacy,” as Arendt puts it, lies in the fact that “private man [*sic*] does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist.” Indeed, to remain private is “to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality of being seen and heard by others” (Arendt 1958:58).

Voluntarism allows volunteers to stage what appears to be a nostalgic scene of social usefulness and public utility, one that uncannily approximates Fordist work in its public recognition, legal sanctioning, insurance, and rhythm and regularity. In these moments, Fordism survived—in the everyday gestures of those who wear their suits as they go to work and carefully note down the exact times they spend while “on the job.” And yet, the channeling of the Fordist desire for public status into unwaged activity undoes the very equation on which the Fordist social contract hinged. For those populations hovering on the margins of the labor market, affect and affective labor are a currency through which they acquired some belonging and social utility. Affect and affective labor become a means to traffic in feeling in exchange for the “approximat[ion of a] feeling of belonging to a world that doesn’t . . . exist reliably anymore” (Berlant 2007:277). Instead of purchasing rights through work, as under Fordist work regimes, post-Fordist volunteers acquired some sense of social belonging and public dignity with their unwaged labor; they are citizens included in the partial public through the state’s recognition of their labor.

POST-FORDIST COMPASSION

The great irony unfolding here is that the desire for work and public recognition propels volunteers into the production of a public that is partial at best. As Arendt puts it, forms of human sociality that hinge on compassion are nonpolitical and nonpublic because the common good is founded on nothing more than individuals’ willingness to feel and act on feeling. Such socialities enjoin people in an immediate, intense space of cosuffering and affective communion, and they encompass these people in a relationship not based on universalistic rights but on particularistic, voluntaristic, face-to-face action—not on politics but on emotions (Arendt 2006:86–87). Indeed, the post-Fordist public depends on the collapse of private and public, the flooding of the public with private emotion. Such emotions are by definition incapable of transcending individual will and predilection (Berlant

2004; Rutherford 2009:7); they therefore produce a public that is particular rather than universalist, voluntaristic rather than structured around legally guaranteed rights. In contrast to Fordist–Keynesian social citizenship, the post-Fordist public assumes bonds between citizens not because they are equal in status or because they inhabit the same public as irreducibly social citizens. Rather, the public is built out of cosuffering and citizens’ acting on suffering. It is thus built out of relations between parties that are, by definition, unequal.

The compassionate public also relies on a particular laboring subject, one that desires and takes pleasure in working for nothing, for free. This public thus weds hyperexploitation to intense moralization, nonremuneration to a public fetishization of sacrifice. Jacques Donzelot detects a shift in the way European states have tried to change peoples’ relationship to work—from “pleasure through work” to “pleasure in work”; from Fordist–Keynesian work as drudgery and yet also a means for pleasure (free time, paid holidays), toward post-Fordist, neoliberal work “as a good in itself: a means towards self-realization rather than as an opportunity for self-transcendence” (Donzelot 1991:251). The partial public I describe here relies precisely on such a subject, one that desires and seeks pleasure in unwaged labor. In Italy, one can read this neoliberal conflation of toil and redemption in distinctly Catholic terms. Pope John Paul II writes in a 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* that “man” who endures toil “in union with Christ” “collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity.” Work is a good thing for humanity, the encyclical states, because “through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being.”¹⁷

Yet, in conclusion, I don’t want to leave the reader with the sense that this good-faith economy works only to conceal the despair on which it is built. These are not just myriad acts of collective misrecognition that repress “objective” exploitative truths (Bourdieu 1972:171–172). The economy of good feeling is more than an ideological smoke screen or a psychological palliative. Rather, it is a profoundly indeterminate space of both love and loss, pleasure and pain, compassion and exclusion. Feminists have in their focus on care work long insisted on treating feeling not as epiphenomenal to larger questions of economy and society. Instead, they have taken seriously the simultaneity, reality, and social efficacy of both (Balbo 1982; Bono and Kemp 1991). I want to end this article with this simultaneity and with the statements made by people like Silvana, who said about volunteerism, “You can’t not go!” The emotional ties built through voluntarism have a potency that should not be underestimated. The fact that the public produced through these acts is partial does not make the acts themselves so. Dismissing volunteer work

as such trivializes the enormous energy volunteers expend toward weaving often very tight networks of sociality and intimacy between themselves and those in need. Affective labor exists as a curious double. Like wage labor, it is a complex composite of exploitation and salvation, exclusion and utopia, alienation and new forms of sociality.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the role that compassion plays in the building of a post-Fordist laboring public in Italy. By exploring how the state has made compassion productive through new regimes of voluntary labor, this piece shows that compassion operates not as a mitigating force against, but as a vehicle for the production and maintenance of a new exclusionary order precisely because it allows for the emergence of a fantasy of spontaneously available public emotion. Affective labor is a desired form of activity for marginalized members of Italian society because it allows them to approximate the form of social belonging that was centrally institutionalized and cultivated within Fordist societies—that of the capacity to belong to and be publicly recognized by the world through waged work. Fordism thus appears not as an era past, but as an object of desire and mourning that still retains much social force as people attempt to recapture or at least approximate Fordist forms and feelings of stability and belonging.

Keywords: unwaged labor, post-Fordism, compassion, exclusion

NOTES

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1. See <http://www.caritas.it/15/29/chisiamo.asp>, accessed June 29, 2010.
2. The Italian state only recently deemed social service sector jobs, including voluntary labor, “socially useful work.” See the Decreto Legislativo No. 468/1997, entitled “Work of Public Utility” (*Lavori Socialmente Utili*). I refer to this work as “labor” in that it results not in material artifacts, but in seemingly more ephemeral social forms and relations that are most paradigmatically found in the social reproductive activities of the private oikos (Arendt 1958).
3. The conceptualization of citizenship as heartfelt comes from the title of a conference held by the Agency in Milan on December 4, 2004. See <http://www.famiglia.regione.lombardia.it/cnv/041205.asp>. Last accessed May 9, 2004.
4. See Victoria De Grazia’s (1992) account of the Fascist mobilization of sacrificial feeling and action. Fascism drew on an already existing rich Catholic heritage of charitable institutions that the post-Fascist welfare state also went on to depend on. The nonprofit sector continues to be dominated by religious organizations; Catholic groups operate 70 percent of Italy’s old age homes, 50 percent of its private hospitals, and 60 percent of its vocational training centers (Ranci 2001:76). It is this Catholic spirit of voluntarism (as well as, increasingly, leftist

- institutions of social solidarity such as unions [see Muehlebach 2009]) that the neoliberal state draws on.
5. The speech is available online at http://www.quirinale.it/qnrw/statico/ex-presidenti/Ciampi/cia_a_fineanno.htm. Accessed June 29, 2010.
 6. I use the phrase “unwaged labor regime” because many social actors increasingly recognize unwaged labor as publicly valuable, and because this labor is systematically extracted by the state—that is to say, fostered, encouraged, and marshaled into social service provisioning.
 7. In Italy, social science is generally regarded to be a highly politicized process. Social scientists are “a major part of the political landscape” in that they are expected to conduct research that will benefit a particular cause (Kertzer 1980:21). The sociologists mentioned here all have close ties to the Italian policy world, which is also heavily invested in translating the crisis of work into social opportunity.
 8. The idea of a middle-of-the-road “Third Way” between the savage market and the excessive state has become a crucial metaphor for western European states as they engage in the often-controversial task of privatizing their social service apparatuses. Third Wayism has allowed for privatization to appear as a benign move as public social services are privatized onto what is, correspondingly, called the Third or Tertiary Sector—that is, the nonprofit and volunteer sector. The shift toward the nonprofit and volunteer sectors is often considered to be a “soft version of privatization” because policy makers represent nonprofits as social actors willing to take into account considerations about the quality of services they provide (Ascoli and Ranci 2002:15).
 9. Michele’s organization—as well as Michele as one of two paid staff members—are thus not easily identified as representing either the public or private domain. This is not a new phenomenon in the Italian context, where the provisioning of welfare has always been marked by profound collusions between public and private actors (Ferrera 2000:170).
 10. See Article 2 of the “Legge quadro sul volontariato” (Legge 266/1991). Available at http://www.fondazionepromozionesociale.it/L266_91.html. Accessed July 1, 2010.
 11. John Paul II, *Osservatore romano*, February 13, 2002, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2002/documents/hf_jpii_aud_20020213_en.html.
 12. I have written elsewhere about how these leftists felt that voluntarism allowed them to reanimate Communist “passions” and to participate in the production of a nonalienated public amid neoliberal reform (Muehlebach 2009).
 13. In 2005, the state initiated a yearlong volunteer national civil service for youth between the ages of 18 and 28. It advertised this civil service as a vehicle toward citizenship responsibility and personal growth. But the message hovering between the lines of this initiative is that it fits neatly into another problem plaguing the body politic. Italy has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the industrialized world. As first time job seekers, they have no entitlement to support and rely mostly on intrafamilial financial help (Blim 2002; Ferrera 2000:172). For them, the service offers a chance to earn a small sum of money while participating in what is ambivalently framed as educational experience and solidaristic citizenship duty, training and quasiwork. State offices were created to help young volunteers find jobs in the nonprofit sector after their yearlong engagement. Yet many fear that these youths will enter a vast pool of part-time, low-wage service jobs that they will have difficulties transitioning out from. I would thus argue that the sense of loss I document for an older generation is not unknown to the younger generation at all. Having been plunged into an increasingly precarious labor market, Italy’s young are daily confronted with a two-tiered labor force where an ever shrinking number of privileged (often older male) workers with safe-guarded contracts work in the same workplace as short-term workers (Molé 2010:42). They are thus daily, directly confronted with Fordist work forms that they themselves have no access to. One might thus argue that the senses of loss documented here exist in multiple variations across generations. They get cultivated and reproduced through public forms of collective memorialization and mourning (see, e.g., the “Quando Scadi” campaign in Molé 2010). Although post-Fordist affect may take on many forms because different groups are differentially marginalized, in this case is always directed toward a desired Fordist object—the stable work regime and the forms of security and recognition it entailed.

14. See also Silvana Patriarca (1998) on the problematic nature of Italian occupational statistics.
15. Gosta Esping Anderson describes “de-commodification” as the guiding principle and goal of mid- to late-20th-century western European social democracies and labor movements (1990:44).
16. As the authors of one report note, the free labor provided by “organized solidarity” (i.e., voluntarism) in Lombardy equals that of 16,500 full-time employees (Fivol 2005:1).
17. The encyclical can be accessed online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html.

Editors' Notes: *Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of articles on affect, including Danilyn Rutherford's “Sympathy, State Building and the Experience of Empire” (2009), Joseph Masco's “‘Survival Is Your Business’: Engineering Ruins and Affect in Nuclear America” (2008), and Didier Fassin's “The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” (2008).

Cultural Anthropology has also published articles on post-Fordism. See, for example, Melissa W. Wright's “Desire and Prosthetics of Supervision: A Case of Maquiladora Flexibility” (2001), Anne Allison's “Cyborg Violence: Bursting Borders and Bodies with Queer Machines” (2001), and Diane M. Nelson's “Stumped Identities: Body Image, Bodies Politics, and the Mujer Maya as Prosthetic” (2001).

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