

## CHAPTER 3

### Work, Wage and Subsidy: Making a Living Between Regulation and Informalization

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#### Goodbye Welfare, the Future is Workfare

A 1997 article in *La Repubblica* hailed the post-welfare turn of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton with the headline “Goodbye Welfare the Future is Workfare.”<sup>1</sup> In that same year, the Italian government was overhauling the country’s labor legislation, which included the first organic systematization of active labor market policies<sup>2</sup> under the banner of “Socially Useful Jobs” (*Lavori Socialmente Utili*, hereafter LSU).<sup>3</sup> The new LSU policies endowed public administrations with special funds to subsidize redundant workers and the long-term unemployed to participate in programs that advanced the “collective utility.” Initially welcomed as Italy’s first experiment in workfare, LSU projects were later criticized for reinstating “assistentialist” policies in Italy’s economically fragile southern regions—Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia—where they were mostly concentrated.

In the mid-2010s, two decades after LSU projects were first implemented in Brindisi, a mid-sized industrial town in the region of Apulia, the uneven trajectories of the early beneficiaries—the “socially useful workers” (hereafter Lsu)—remained a source of contention, echoing broader unrest and collective mobilization in southern Italy. Lsu workers who had been assigned to the outsourced public-school cleaning service in the early 2000s were demanding stable public employment; those in the municipal administration were demanding formal contracts rather than reliance on continuously renewed subsidies. In the

same years (2015 and 2016), regional institutions were experimenting with new workfare measures to tackle the long-term effects of the 2007 financial crisis and the austerity policies that followed in its wake. Unlike the LSU—a national scheme territorially managed by job centers—these short-lived regional experiments involved caseworkers determining the eligibility of participants. Developed by regional governments, they were an outcome of the devolution of welfare responsibilities that had begun in the mid-1990s. Whereas Lsu workers had their subsidies regularly renewed by the National Institute of Social Security until they found employment, participation in these regional schemes, which were limited in time and resources, offered no real prospects for future employment. One of these programs, *Cantieri di Cittadinanza* (“Citizenship in the Making”, hereafter CDC), targeted the long-term unemployed in households suffering from material deprivation, disability or socio-psychological distress.<sup>4</sup> Through six-month apprenticeships, the CDC sought to foster the “employability” and “social inclusion” of its beneficiaries (see Salvati 2017).

This chapter examines how ambiguity, difference and worthiness are tied to “work” in the neoliberal “workfare state” and in its concrete regional rescaling in southern Italy (Peck 2001, 2002). Drawing on my ethnographic study of Lsu workers and CDC care assistant apprentices in Brindisi’s Home Care Assistance Program, I examine how subsidized workers experienced the distinction between *working for a wage* and *working for a subsidy*.

The past decade has witnessed a growing anthropological interest in *time* (Bear 2014; Ringel and Moroşanu 2016), including the emergence of distinct temporal agencies and temporalities during the austerity crisis (Bear 2015; Knight and Stewart 2017; Muehlebach 2016). This chapter is driven by similar concerns about how people relate to the temporal frameworks that structure their livelihoods and how they live with the temporalities of crisis and austerity—the short-term extractive demands and constraints of public debt repayment

and the temporal shrinking of their future-making projects (Stubb 2017). Focusing on two different workfare programs allows me to show the different temporalities entangled in the articulation of the Italian workfare state in the 1990s crisis and in the 2010s austerity crisis. Whereas the two phases of workfare maintain the centrality of the work/employment–citizenship nexus, their different temporalities—the duration of work and income as well as the temporal horizon of participants’ expectations—reveal the changing constraints and prospects for local beneficiaries and the moral worth attached to “being a waged worker.” By focusing on the distinct trajectories of male and female recipients, the chapter also highlights how the gender-based search for social worth is differently enacted by men and women.

I develop my argument by examining the interplay between *regulation* and *informalization* in the trajectories of subsidized workers—two critical aspects of the territorial articulations of state structures and powers in southern Italy (Mingione 1991). Regulation provides a general framework for thinking about both the internationalized tenets of work-for-benefit policies (Peck 2002) and the actual regulatory processes and practices through which they are implemented in specific contexts. As Peck (2001) observes, pure workfare has been more of an ideological program than a historically observable phenomenon. The trajectories of the “subsidized workers” I followed highlight the localization of workfare in contemporary Italy as an emerging regime of mandatory labor, while the regulations enforced by the state for coping with unemployment in Italy’s southern regions relied on, and in turn enhanced, informalization in the bureaucratic and institutional sphere and in the broader life-sustaining practices of the unemployed.

The comparative analysis of workfare programs over two decades sheds light on ongoing strategies to regulate surplus labor. Here my argument revisits past debates on the “crisis of employment” and the role of the state in managing the contradictions inherent in the

accumulation process—between the commodification of social reproduction and the formation of a surplus population of the unemployed and underemployed (Mingione 1985; Collins and Gimenez 1991). Within this framework, I examine workfare as a coping strategy for addressing the social implications of mass unemployment. The state is a central actor for two reasons. First, as both workfare programs studied in this chapter consist of subsidized jobs in the public services, the state has a dual position as subsidy provider and employer. Second, state regulations differentiate between “subsidy receivers” and “wage workers.” Especially for the unemployed, being a *worker* means achieving the social worth attached to “work” (Narotzky 2018).<sup>5</sup> Whether one is a *wage-earner* or a *subsidy-receiver* also has important implications for entitlements and obligations and for how people’s subjectivities are constructed and underpinned by moral frameworks of “autonomy” and “dependency” (Gibson-Graham 2006; Narotzky and Besnier 2014).

I suggest that *collective utility*—an elusive concept encompassing public services ranging from caregiving to administrative tasks—informs a framework of devaluation in which “subsidized work” is saddled with all the attributes that characterize reproductive housework, beginning with its gratuitousness. Despite its implicit utilitarianism, “collective utility” informs a non-economic valuation framework that deems the social worth of this work closer to “voluntary work” (without its unselfish and ethical connotations) than to “true” labor.<sup>6</sup> In sum, whereas subsidized work is part of normal labor processes, its economic value is denied—precisely in the sense captured by the “housewifisation” of labor (Mies 1986, 2014; cf. Vantaggiato 1996).

My understanding of “employment for collective utility” draws on Jane Collins’ study of the battle over public sector downsizing in the US state of Wisconsin, where proponents of

cuts to the public sector pointed to its allegedly “unproductive” role in the economy. In Wisconsin, the “revaluation struggles” of public sector workers invoked long-standing feminist arguments about unpaid reproductive housework, largely invisible to “all the official frameworks that assess economic transactions” (Collins 2017: 7). Building on this line of argument, I suggest that the “collective utility” framework that informs workfare programs institutionalizes uneven relationships between waged and unwaged labor in the broader public sphere of labor surplus regulation, where the moral frameworks of “autonomy” and “dependency” are recast through the difference between wage and subsidy.

### **Workfare Italian Style**

The normative and historical evolution of “socially useful jobs” (Mingione et al. 1999; Saracini 2002) in some ways parallels the international introduction of work-for-benefit programs.<sup>7</sup> Although the use of unemployed workers in activities of “public utility” dates back to the post-World War Two period, it was only after the crises of the 1970s that policies to promote youth employment referred to socially useful jobs (Saracini 2003). Following the closure, privatization and restructuring of public firms, a proper LSU scheme was created in the 1980s for redundant workers receiving unemployment insurance benefits in the deindustrializing regions of southern Italy. In the face of industrial crisis, major jobs losses<sup>8</sup> and rising unemployment in the early 1990s, the scheme was extended to redundant workers nationwide and later to the long-term unemployed. “Socially useful jobs” were part of the broader reform of labor legislation known as *Pacchetto Treu* in 1997, where they were defined as “activities aiming at the realization of works and service provision of collective utility, through the employment of particular categories of subjects.”<sup>9</sup> The *Pacchetto Treu* also

clarifies that “the use” of workers in activities of public utility “does not establish an employment relationship” (art. 8, paragraph 1).

Between 1995 and 1999, the number of LSU beneficiaries grew from 55,413 to 169,307. Reflecting the regional pattern of structural unemployment in Italy (Pugliese and Rebeggiani 2005),<sup>10</sup> more than 80 percent of them were in southern Italy (cf. Mingione et al. 1999). To reverse this growth of Lsu workers, a process of “emptying the historic pool” of beneficiaries was instituted in the early 2000s. While fiscal incentives were offered to private firms to absorb workers, the job stabilization plans were usually implemented in the public sector.<sup>11</sup>

Although the workfare-oriented LSU scheme was lauded in the mid-1990s as a move to overcome passive “assistentialist” welfare, its expansion raised questions about its workfare-orientation and transformation into a mere “assistance scheme” (Fargion 2001: 53). Critics observed how institutional improvements were hampered by the de-centralized management of active labor policies in which “the implementing actors often work[ed] within traditional organisational settings” (Mingione et al. 1999: 17). The de-centralization of public employment services, within the broader devolution of powers to Italy’s regions, marked an important shift in the transfer of responsibilities. The localization of welfare-to-work policies and the proliferation of “socially useful jobs” in areas of chronic mass unemployment were then controversially identified as “workfare Italian style” (*workfare all’italiana*) (Beretta 1999). Criticism of the LSU, which had failed to “activate” the unemployed and push them to re-enter the job market, fueled the stigmatization of LSU beneficiaries as “welfare dependent.” In Brindisi, LSU projects came to be identified with access to public employment, thus orienting “activation” policies towards what they were supposed to overcome: the allegedly “assistentialist” nature of public intervention in southern Italy.

The recurrent renewal of LSU subsidies over the years, with the prospect of formal employment, changed the nature of the measure and expanded its temporal scale, turning short-term goals of labor market activation into long-term collective expectations of public jobs. Two decades after the massive growth of LSU workers, the workfare experiments undertaken during the austerity crisis, though underpinned by the same work-for-benefit principle, were shaped by a different relationship to time which left no room for feasible expectations of stable jobs and income, while fully individualizing labor market insertion strategies.

In the five years following the outbreak of the crisis in 2007, unemployment rates in Italy doubled from 6.1 percent to 12.1 percent. Although indicators of material deprivation were rising rapidly, very few national measures sought to address the rapid deterioration of social welfare (Saraceno 2015: 109–15). Regional differences further underscored the dire situation in southern Italy, where 19.9 percent of the population was suffering from severe material deprivation in 2015 (the corresponding numbers were 7.4 percent for central Italy and 7.1 percent for northern Italy) (ISTAT 2016: 2–3). In response, the Regional Government of Apulia agreed with trade union confederations to develop a “Work of Citizenship” framework to bolster social inclusion through active labor policies and workfare-oriented measures of income support.<sup>12</sup> Within this general framework, the CDC scheme was a conditional cash transfer measure, providing income support through specifically designed job training projects. Shortly after its implementation in 2015–16, it was replaced by a new regional scheme, *Reddito di Dignità* (Dignity Income). These same years also witnessed the launch of the national poverty relief scheme *Sostegno di Inclusione Attiva* (Active Inclusion Support), replaced in 2018 by a new conditional cash transfer scheme, *Reddito di Inclusione* (Inclusion Income). Finally, a new national scheme, *Reddito di Cittadinanza* (Citizenship

Income) was passed in January 2019.<sup>13</sup> All of these measures have in common their short duration and a strong workfarist approach. Despite variations in rules of access and the resources earmarked for each scheme, they all converge in their emphasis on work that advances the “collective utility.” Taken together, these “austerity schemes” differ from the earlier LSU on a significant point: whereas the LSU was conceived as a labor activation policy, the former conflate labor policies with anti-poverty measures, implying the double moralization of beneficiaries as “unemployed” and “poor”—a difference further conveyed through the symbolic packaging of policies with terms such as “dignity,” “inclusion” and “citizenship.”

All of these schemes can be read along a continuum defined by the different temporalities that construct beneficiaries as workers or non-workers. While the LSU set the stage for long-term collective mobilization and negotiations around “work” and “citizenship,” short-term measures such as the CDC more clearly reveal that the tensions between needs and aspirations has become individualized and confined to the sphere of personal responsibility. In the following section, I describe how workfare was localized in Brindisi.

### **Locating Workfare in Brindisi**

The two main groups of Lsu—redundant workers and the long-term unemployed—reflect the extended phase of industrial restructuring in the 1980s and chronically high rates of unemployment (see Table 3.1). The job center selected the beneficiaries employed by the municipal administration in specifically designed projects. Some 130 redundant workers—most of them male and drawn from the “mobility list”—were admitted in 1995–6. Another 120 long-term unemployed persons were admitted in 1998 and initially employed in a biennial waste recycling promotion project. Many in this group were women.

The first group of Lsu (the redundant workers) reflected the national restructuring and downsizing of the petrochemical sector in the 1980s, which hit the large-scale state-sponsored project of heavy industrialization in Brindisi that had begun in the early 1960s (Ginsborg 1990: 229–31). In a period of four years between 1978 and 1982, 1,500 out of 7,500 workers were laid off while investments in labor saving technologies further reduced future employment opportunities (Greco 2002). To compensate for the loss of industrial employment, public authorities in the early 1980s agreed to locate a new ENEL (the public electricity company) power plant in Brindisi. Its construction was completed in the early 1990s; the Lsu redundant workers came from this laid-off construction workforce. Lsu from this group, both blue- and white-collar workers (e.g. accountants), were hired by the municipal administration in 2001. A larger group of about a hundred workers were attached to the outsourced public-school cleaning service, to be employed by the successful contractor in 2001.

The second group of Lsu beneficiaries (the long-term unemployed) reflected the prevailing situation in the south of Italy: high rates of female unemployment (see Table 3.1) including for women with secondary education,<sup>14</sup> historically precarious and discontinuous work in the construction sector, and the large informal sector in which many “unemployed” workers earned their livelihoods (Mingione 1991: 380–414).<sup>15</sup> Within this group, a large majority of the women had secondary education and came from single-income families where the husband was the sole wage-earner. Marta (54), married with two children, was typical; she had worked on and off with short-term contracts in the public administration. Most men, in contrast, lacked secondary education and combined informal employment, temporary jobs and other welfare provisions. Francesco (61) had held numerous jobs (gravedigger, butcher, caretaker, etc.) following a short period of work in Turin. Living with his wife in a council

house, he eventually obtained a small disability pension due to an accident at work. Many male beneficiaries were also involved in cigarette smuggling, prominent in Brindisi in the 1980s and 1990s until its final dismantling with a massive police operation in 2000. Official reports estimated that more than 5,000 households in the province earned their livelihoods through cigarette smuggling.<sup>16</sup>

In this second group (the long-term unemployed), only a small number of beneficiaries were selected for training and assigned to the outsourced tax collection service in 2002. Following the end of the waste recycling project in 2001, the remaining Lsu were distributed in different branches of the municipal administration without changes to their status. Since then, they have been performing a variety of tasks—from administrative work to cleaning, gardening and maintenance, most of the time filling personnel gaps in the administration. They continued receiving the subsidy (580 euros per month for 80 hours of work) from Social Security, which was renewed on a six-month or yearly basis. They could earn more (up to 1,000 euros) only when funds from the municipal budget were earmarked for supplementary hours, which fluctuated with the demands of the administration (e.g. employees' vacation schedules or an increase in workload).

The *Cantieri di Cittadinanza* scheme targeted a specific segment of the unemployed already known to the municipal welfare services. Under the supervision of case managers, recipients were enrolled in a six-month apprenticeship (20 hours per week) for a monthly stipend of 500 euros, getting paid only for the actual hours spent in the apprenticeship. But according to the local coordinator, the lack of information provided to potential private partners and the poor coordination between institutions jeopardized the program's local implementation.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the only projects submitted were those by the municipal social services.<sup>18</sup>

The care assistant apprenticeship project in the municipal Home Care Assistance Program was also the only case of a public–private partnership, run by a cooperative contracted to deliver care to people with special needs. The apprentices (*tirocinanti*) were five women and a man who asked to join the project. The man, Mario (42), was single and lived in a council house with his aged mother, whose pension (380 euros) was their only regular income, supplemented by the little he earned as an occasional house painter. Out of the five women in the program, four had experience with informal paid care work.<sup>19</sup> The youngest woman in the group, a 26-year-old single mother, was disappointed by her assignment. She had grown up in Cremona in northern Italy, where her family moved in the early 2000s, and returned to Brindisi after quitting her job in a beauty salon. After splitting up with her partner, she could not afford to raise her children alone. She lived in a council house with her father, who received a disability pension.

Similar arrangements were common among the women. Manuela (40), married with a child, occasionally worked as a seamstress to supplement the meager household income. When her husband lost his job in a service company, they moved into her mother’s house, unable to pay rent on their own. The household income was made up of different subsidies, casual jobs, charity assistance and her mother’s pension. Giuliana (58) lived with two children and a disabled brother, whose pension was the only regular income in the household. She ran a small cleaning service firm, which she eventually closed due to distress caused by family events. While serving the apprenticeship, she received a three-year rent subsidy and daily meals from a soup kitchen. She earned some additional money by recycling clothing and children’s toys that she sold to a second-hand shop.

The importance of participating in the CDC apprenticeship was twofold. First, it ensured a stable income, relieving chronic material insecurity for at least several months.

Second, it gave grounds for hope that job training would eventually improve one's "employability," not least by providing visibility and recognition to one's care work. But as the program approached its end, its participants were left disappointed. In the following three sections, I illustrate how struggles for recognition, social worth and material security interact with the ambiguous boundaries between work, wage and subsidy.

### **A Wage, Not a Subsidy**

In July 2015, the ex-Lsu-Ata—the ex-Lsu workers now formally employed by the firm cleaning the schools—were demonstrating throughout Apulia against the decision of the contracting company to temporarily lay them off until a new tranche of public funds was confirmed. In Brindisi, workers were clashing with their employer, a subcontracting cooperative, due to a reversal in the mechanism of "hours banking" (*banca ore*). Rather than accumulating extra work hours—to be used as time off rather than as paid overtime—workers were accumulating "non-worked hours" and becoming "indebted" to their employer. This happened when, for lack of proper planning, some workers were "left at home" (*lasciati a casa*) with their wages docked accordingly. But while some workers were losing hours, others were being pressured to increase their productivity, to clean more square meters per hour to the detriment of quality. The "time debt" (*debito orario*) was denounced by unions nationwide and was a recurrent source of friction between workers and employers—mainly subcontracting cooperatives (USB 2012). Workers and unions contended that the "hours banking" system transferred to workers the negative consequences of firms underbidding each other to win public contracts. In the face of continuous tensions, payment delays, the uncertainty of public fund transfers and exhausting negotiations, unions and workers asked for the cancellation of all accumulated negative hours. The fact that some workers were left at

home while others were not was also having a divisive effect on the workers themselves. The same happened when a group of cleaners were selected to form a team of “decorators”—a differentiation that implied privileged treatment.

In the following months, I started following a small group of “decorators” in a local school. Although they were by contract “cleaners,” they worked as decorators in an extraordinary building maintenance plan funded by the national government in 2014 to settle a conflict between workers and their contracting company over the reduction of working hours. They were among the selected group of specifically trained workers who hoped to become a permanent team of decorators for the local public-school network. Their actual situation, however, was not as positive as they had hoped since they still did not know whether new projects were scheduled or whether they were running the risk of being “left at home.” Bitter and disappointed, they did not feel “encouraged to do good work.” As *ex-Lsu-Ata* “cleaners,” they worked either part-time or on 35-hour week contracts, earning a salary of 900 euros or less. Until the crisis reduced opportunities in the informal labor market, most of them had second jobs<sup>20</sup> which many enjoyed more than working as “cleaners.” Cosimo’s (48) story illustrates a common trajectory. In the mid-1980s, he started working in a mechanical workshop in the petrochemical sector. From 1987 to 1992, he was employed in the power station construction works. Laid off and registered in the mobility lists for two years, he was then admitted to the LSU scheme. In the meantime, married with two children, Cosimo managed to supplement the family income through informal jobs (e.g. paper collector) and even cigarette smuggling—“like everyone here in Brindisi.”

A closer look at the terminology—*ex-Lsu-Ata*—can help us disentangle the ambiguities surrounding their condition as wagedworkers and how their “temporal agency” is constrained by the moralization of their occupational trajectories. The social implications of

this specific denomination suggest how the allusion to “subsidized jobs” continues to affect their categorization as “workers,” even when they are regularly employed, and how regulation and informalization intersect to affect their incomes as well as how work identities are made socially meaningful. Whereas *ex-Lsu* tracks their previous status as subsidy receivers, the acronym *Ata* (Administrative, Technical and Auxiliary personnel employed in public schools) describes what they do (cleaning and maintenance work), but not what they are. *Ata* workers are in fact public employees, while the *ex-Lsu-Ata* are a “protected” category of workers employed through public tendering by private firms contracted for taking over the outsourced cleaning services previously done by *Ata* personnel. In their “liminal” denomination—“*ex-Lsu*” but “not-yet-*Ata*”—their connection to the LSU prevails even in the ways they are implicitly categorized in workplaces as “welfare dependent.” For example, Cosimo and his colleagues complained that public school employees called them *cassintegrati* (workers on redundancy payment), which they considered disrespectful, a way of diminishing their dignity as workers (*la dignità di lavoratori*).

The “misrecognition” (Fraser 2000) implied in the tendency to bind workers to their former status as “subsidy receivers” also explains the social meaning of usually informal “second jobs.” In addition to their economic value, second jobs can be a source of social legitimacy for male breadwinners, for unlike “socially useful jobs,” they are not branded with negative connotations of welfare dependency. The friction between the ambiguity of institutional normative frameworks and the legitimacy of informal social norms suggests how meanings of work are produced as well as how “difference” (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014) weighs on workers’ subjectivities and creates effective hierarchies among workers. The struggle for direct employment in the public sector shaped the collective agency of *ex-Lsu-Ata* workers. Internal conflicts and short-term livelihood arrangements had to be carefully—

and often with difficulty—balanced with long-term collective expectations of stable work and income as well as social and moral recognition.

### **A Subsidy, Not a Wage**

Lsu workers in the municipal administration faced a more institutionalized form of misrecognition (Fraser 2000). While they shared the precarious situation of the ex-Lsu-Ata—living through payment delays, last-minute renewals, etc.—unlike them, they technically remained “subsidy-receivers.” This formal difference had substantial implications for labor relations, for their lack of bargaining power and thus subordination. They were not entitled to the benefits of the wage relationship, for example pension contributions, labor protection, productivity bonuses or performance-related pay, which could only be allocated after an informal agreement among employees to renounce their own shares. After 18 years of back-to-back subsidies, they were still hoping to achieve permanent positions. In 2015, new national legislation to reform public administration (L. 124/2015) set the framework for definitive Lsu “stabilization” in the administrations where they were employed.

In the early summer of 2016, a union assembly was summoned in the town hall to discuss the job stabilization plan elaborated by the human resources executive. The triennial plan outlined that workers could be hired as A (the lowest rank) or B, according to financial resources and organizational demands. The proposal was received with tepid enthusiasm by Lsu as previous expectations of job stabilization had been repeatedly frustrated.<sup>21</sup> Mistrust and disappointment had come to prevail over time, undermining solidarity. In 2014, Lsu workers had decided to undertake a 15-day work-to-rule action (*sciopero bianco*). As their tasks had never been specified, their plan was to do nothing. Anna (50), a committed union member, explained that “they say we abstained from work, but I have been working now for 14 years

in the General Records Office, and I have never seen my tasks written down anywhere.” The action demonstrated how important they had become for the regular functioning of the administrative machine. When Anna returned to work, she found piles of unregistered mail on her desk. But the action was ineffective; those who joined (90 percent) had their allowances cut in half. Despite being able to undertake collective action, Lsu realized the predicament of the unions in dealing with their case: “the Lsu situation,” Anna explained, “is so ‘messy’ (*ingarbugliata*) that even for the unions it is a real pain to understand what it implies... it’s a matter of legal frameworks... in terms of representativeness, it is not about ‘workers’ (*lavoratori*).”

At the union assembly, several women quarreled about who was going to get the A or B rank. Filomena, complaining that she had not even been “entitled to a writing desk,” was suspicious that another woman was receiving special help thanks to her connections in the administrative hierarchy. Maria (52), a Lsu worker in the municipal housing service, told me that “those who didn’t manage to get a desk” were the ones who “did not want to work.” “I have never said no, bring the paper and I went, bring that... and I went, do that... and I have always done it... It is by doing so that I earned the desk because I have shown that I deserve it.” During the assembly, male Lsu stayed silent. Maria stated that “since they have their [second] jobs, they are fine just getting the regular subsidy.” Competitive concerns about “worthiness” and “deservingness” were more common among women who committed themselves to learning administrative jobs and who sought to be acknowledged for it.

Such was the case for Anna. She had married young to a man employed in the military arsenal, with whom she had two children. Theirs was a common single-income family—a breadwinning father and “a full-time mother,” as she put it. Once the children had grown up, she applied to the LSU, which she saw as “an opportunity to start doing something.” When

her project (1998–2000) ended, Anna was sent to the mayor’s office as an informal “administrative collaborator” and eventually to the General Records Office. Thanks to basic computing skills acquired by attending a regional training course for the unemployed, she supervised the transition to the digital records. In 2016 she was in charge of controlling and verifying the General Records Office, basically checking all the incoming and outgoing mail. Yet she remained “invisible.” When she complained to the executive officer about the excessive workload for a Lsu, he responded in a patronizing way: “Shall I send you with the cleaners? You should be grateful for us letting you do a job that gives you dignity (*un lavoro che ti da dignità*).” Anna remained speechless. She told me: “you can’t say anything, you can’t do anything, you’re nothing! Meanwhile, you sign resolutions; they bring you tender documentation, legal documents... though, who am I? Nothing!”

This episode and the quarrel during the union assembly reveal the gender dynamics among Lsu workers in the municipal administration. Like the ex-Lsu-Ata, male Lsu continued to have informal “second” jobs which brought them additional income and augmented their worth as breadwinners. Women often explained how their male co-workers showed little interest in claiming supplementary hours (funded by the municipal budget) since they “have a profession” (*hanno il mestiere*) and do not need more LSU work hours. While male workers associated the LSU subsidy with dependency and informal self-employment with autonomy, for women, their “informal activities” consisted of unpaid domestic housework, which implied financial dependency on their husbands. It was thus in the sphere of state regulation that their struggle for recognition and autonomy could be waged. At the same time, they experienced “working without a wage” as a double form of misrecognition and subordination, exemplified by the combination of unpaid domestic labor (reproductive work) and “working for a subsidy” (socially useful work). While the lens of gender throws into sharp relief how

men and women must make a living between regulation and informalization—and how “worthiness” is differently pursued in their livelihood strategies—the burden of inequality weighs more heavily on some women (care assistant apprentices in the Home Care Assistance Program) than others (Lsu workers). In the following section, I illustrate how the interaction between informalization and regulation underlies the temporality of workfare in the era of austerity.

### **Working Citizenship**

In March 2016, a union officer introduced me to Rosaria (52) who, at the time, had not yet been informed of her admission to the *Cantieri di Cittadinanza* program. Rosaria lived with her son (21) and daughter (18). While waiting for council housing, she was receiving a three-year rent subsidy. Although she had separated from her husband in the late 1990s, she only obtained child support many years afterwards. In the meantime, she struggled to make ends meet by taking on all possible jobs and receiving support from relatives, institutions and charities. She cared for a disabled woman for four hours per day, for which she received 10 euros. Several times per month, she cleaned offices and private homes. When called, she washed dishes in restaurants, usually on weekends or on special occasions. As she could only get jobs in the black labor market (*lavoro a nero*), Rosaria saw the CDC as a chance to come out of the shadow of informal labor and have a recognized position. As she explained: “I have worked a lot, everywhere, but it does not appear anywhere; this [CDC] would give me the chance of having my name written somewhere... finally I will have a job... I don’t know, [a job which is] not illegal.”

Thanks to an extended network of friends and acquaintances, Rosaria could rely on horizontal relationships of mutual aid as well as vertical relationships of the patron–client

type. Through the former, she often received used clothes, food and help, including information about possible jobs. Through the patron–client relationship, she hoped to climb the social housing waiting list in exchange for actively supporting a council candidate during mayoral elections. Toiling day after day to make ends meet, Rosaria also had to cope with indebtedness as she had secured several small bank loans when she started receiving child support. Even after starting her CDC apprenticeship, she continued to clean offices and private houses. On her only free mornings, on Saturdays and Sundays, she began caring for an old lady. And despite being embittered by the treatment she received, she continued her four hours of care work each evening. Rosaria never complained: “I have to stay silent and do whatever they say because I need the money.”

Rosaria’s situation was common to all of the CDC recipients I met. They had applied to the program with high hopes. Participation in the CDC provided an important supplement to their meagre family incomes and held the promise of making their care work “visible.” Most had worked, or continued to work, informally as caregivers; they saw the apprenticeship as a chance to become professionally recognized as such. Informal caregiving generally entails exploitative working conditions (e.g. low pay and lack of social protection) which weighed on the precarious livelihoods of the (mostly female) workers. Obtaining formal employment in the local service cooperatives was thus an important goal. But “citizenship” came in the shape of a low salary in the subcontracting chain of caregiving, while official recognition would entail fitting into one of the professional categories set by the regional planning of social services. Another option was to be included in the upcoming Income of Dignity scheme, which was planned to last for one year, though with a lower stipend and strict control over recipients’ use of money.

Despite the intentions of the CDC scheme to provide the basis for “active inclusion,” most of the subjects involved—from social workers to recipients, union officers to the cooperative’s employees—were skeptical of the program’s efficacy. While all were positive about the underlying idea and framework, many were disappointed by the manner of its implementation, especially the lack of coordination, limited funding and scarce publicity. In the end, all recognized that recipients earned some badly needed money. But when CDC participants realized that the apprenticeship was “real” work, some tried to blow the whistle on its exploitative practices. Before the end of the six-month apprenticeship, a “spontaneous committee of CDC unemployed,” supported by the COBAS (Confederazione dei Comitati di Base) rank and file union, issued a statement in which no particular demands were made. It was a generic request for help against exploitation, with their experiences qualified as “modern slavery.”<sup>22</sup>

In the end, participating in *Citizenship in the Making* underlined workfare recipients’ own uncertain citizenship, as though citizenship was a process always in the making—and continuously postponed. Their experience was further shaped by the tension between two co-existing temporalities: the temporary relief of the monthly stipend and the long-term expectation of being able to pursue their life projects.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a diachronic comparison of workfare schemes in southern Italy, with the aim of highlighting how ambiguity, personal worth and difference are variously entangled in the articulations of work, wage and subsidy. In this concluding section, I return to the main points raised at the chapter’s outset: “collective utility” as the framework for rephrasing the unequal relationship between waged and unwaged work in the public sphere;

the pursuit of livelihood and “worthiness” in the interaction of regulation and informalization; and the tension between shifting temporalities of crisis and the temporal horizon of workfare recipients’ expectations.

I have addressed the local implications of categorizing workers as *wage-earning* or *subsidy-receiving*. Although the LSU framework sought to tackle unemployment by implementing “active” labor policies, in the long run it led to the growing precariousness and segmentation of the public sector labor force, along the cleavages of intra-national territorial inequality. The regional devolution of workfare policies and the process of differentiation this implied created spaces of conflict in which claims, obligations and entitlements were ambiguously produced in the interaction between regulation and informalization. The moral designation of “collective utility” underlying the categorization of “socially useful workers” rescaled the issue of care in the public sphere by exposing the ambiguous boundaries between “working for a wage” and “working for a subsidy.” The experience of the CDC caregiver apprentices was even bitterer since participation in the program replicated the exploitative conditions of caregiving in informal settings. Inevitably, “public utility” was held responsible for the burden of inequality they had come to experience in their everyday pursuit of livelihood. “Public utility” jobs can therefore be seen as an experimental moment in reconfiguring the regulatory role of the state in scaling-up the uneven relationship of waged and unwaged labor in the macro-process of social reproduction.

My analysis has identified the twofold dynamic of regulation and informalization as fundamental to understanding the production of differences, ambiguities and worthiness. Regulation and informalization are inter-related dynamics that cannot be disentangled in the workfarist perspective of “getting people back to work.” As the Lsu struggles for recognition showed, the informalization of labor is implied in the state’s regulation of “socially useful

jobs” as work-out-of-employment. At the same time, the regulatory framework that brought ex-Lsu-Ata under the controversial system of outsourcing and sub-contracting public services entailed a devaluation of labor, counterbalanced by the social worth of informal jobs. Finally, the dynamics operating in the CDC scheme expose labor devaluation as a necessary condition of “citizenship” while reinforcing labor informalization in its exploitative form. The “collective utility” framework here appears as a moralizing force operating through a set of oppositions (wage/subsidy, productive/unproductive, market/state, autonomy/dependency) which eventually erodes the employment–citizenship nexus. Only non-remunerated work of “collective utility” (e.g. voluntary work) with unselfish ethical content can serve as an alternative basis for citizenship (Muehlebach 2012).

The comparison of workfare schemes implemented in two distinct phases of crisis and mass unemployment—in the 1990s and in the post-2008 era—show how the temporalities of livelihood incorporate essential shifts in the temporalities of the state, which provided the grounds for different possibilities of conflict, struggle, (gendered) individual and collective expectations. While the early LSU could still be understood within a national Keynesian framework (Barbu 2013) with the long-term goal of “formal employment,” the CDC more clearly exemplifies the shift towards a territorially fragmented and temporally limited workfare—a shift that reveals the state’s attempts to shape socio-economic relations in order to manage a contradiction inherent in the accumulation process. On the one hand, the state enhances its extractive functions by cutting public services; on the other, the state finds it increasingly difficult to deal with a growing surplus population through the creation of jobs and minimum welfare provisions. The temporally limited workfarist mobilization of the surplus population is thus enabled by the interaction of regulation and informalization, where people’s search for social worth—underpinned by socially defined and gender-based

expectations of “work”—plays a central role. Paradoxically, this workfare state functions only because of the large-scale informalization of the livelihoods of the surplus population, which sets the ground for disciplining the boundaries of “citizenship” through “work” and “non-work.”

Different temporalities and orientations towards the future are reflected in workers’ capacity and possibilities to build horizontal and vertical alliances. The Lsu workers, and especially the ex-Lsu-Ata workers when talking about quitting their uncertain jobs as cleaners, emphasized two key points: collective strength—“together we are 20,000”—and temporal horizons, with real public employment as the goal. CDC recipients, in contrast, experienced the contradiction between piecemeal workfare and the rhetoric of individual activation which underpinned a more immediate, individualized temporality. Finally, whereas the two main phases of workfare in Italy reveal how the work/employment–citizenship nexus remains central, they also show essential differences of temporal scale, revealing fundamental shifts in the constraints and prospects of local beneficiaries and their capacity to imagine long-term collective engagements.

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**Table 3.1**

		1991	2001	2011		
		Brindisi	Brindisi	Brindisi	Apulia	Italy
<b>Labor force participation</b>	<b>Total</b>	47.5	42.7	45.7	45.4	50.8
	<b>Male</b>	67.5	57.6	58.4	58.3	60.7
	<b>Female</b>	29.3	29.3	34.4	33.5	41.8
<b>Employed</b>	<b>Total</b>	33	33.1	36.5	37.5	45
	<b>Male</b>	50.2	48.1	49.3	50.2	54.8
	<b>Female</b>	17.3	19.5	25	25.8	36.1
	<b>Youth</b>	20.9	24.3	28.1	29.9	36.3
	<b>Agriculture</b>	7.5	5.4	6.7	12.1	5.5
	<b>Industry</b>	29.6	28.6	23.2	22.4	27.1
	<b>Service</b>	63	66	70.1	65.6	67.4
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Total</b>	30.5	22.5	20.2	17.3	11.4
	<b>Male</b>	25.6	16.5	15.6	13.9	9.8
	<b>Female</b>	40.9	33.3	27.3	22.8	13.6
	<b>Youth</b>	73.4	56.1	52.1	43.1	34.7

Source: ISTAT – National Institute of Statistics, National Census

<<http://ottomilacensus.istat.it/comune/074/074001/>> (last accessed April 2019).

### <sup>1</sup>Notes to Chapter Three

1. “Welfare addio il future è del workfare,” *La Repubblica*, June 15, 1997. On the “geopolitical etymology” of workfare, see Peck (2001: 83–122).
2. See “European Semester: Thematic factsheet—Active labour market policies—2017,” November 16, 2016: <[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester\\_thematic-factsheet\\_active-labour-market-policies\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester_thematic-factsheet_active-labour-market-policies_en.pdf)> (last accessed March 2019).
3. I use the acronym LSU, in capital letters, to refer to the scheme, and Lsu (*Lavoratori socialmente utili*) to refer to its beneficiaries, the “socially useful workers.” LSU are sometimes called LPU (Lavori di Pubblica Utilità)—jobs of public utility. Lsu are divided into two general categories. The *transitoristi* depend on ministerial funds and are targeted by special measures for stable employment in the public or private sector. This category includes beneficiaries from the late 1990s who are conventionally referred to as the “historic pool” (*platea storica*). The *autofinanziati* (literally “self-funded”) are directly subsidized by local administrations and are excluded from special measures for stable employment. See: <<https://www.inps.it/nuovoportaleinps/default.aspx?itemdir=46860>> (last accessed February 2019). This chapter refers only to the first category of Lsu workers.
4. See <<http://www.sistema.puglia.it/SistemaPuglia/cantieridicittadinanza>> (last accessed March 2019). A parallel program, *Lavoro Minimo di Cittadinanza* (Minimum Work of Citizenship), targeted redundant workers receiving unemployment benefits; it received far fewer applications than the CDC.
5. In the Italian language there is a single word for work, labor or jobs, *lavoro*, which generally conveys the meaning of “paid employment” or “salaried work.” In Brindisi, the word used in the local dialect is *fatia*, the meaning of which is closer to “toil.”
6. In the 1990s a group of Italian economists debated “socially useful jobs” (not the workfare program) as a possible solution to mass unemployment, aiming to satisfy “unmet social needs” such as underdeveloped or neglected public services (Lunghini et al. 1995). The tricky question was how such jobs were to be understood in relation to the market and the wage relationship.
7. For a chronological reconstruction of the introduction of compulsory work-for-benefit programs, see Lødemel and Trickey (2001). In France, the Travaux d’Utilité Collective was a short-lived work-based insertion program targeting young people in the mid-1980s.
8. The scheme exclusively targeted redundant workers registered on “mobility lists”—workers dismissed from industrial firms or recipients of extraordinary unemployment insurance benefits.
9. Legislative Decree December 1, 1997, n. 468. The financed projects covered a wide range of activities in the public services from gardening, waste recycling, activities in museums and home care assistance to tasks in public administration, ranging from administrative support to cleaning and maintenance.
10. Unemployment rates in the south of Italy more than doubled from 8 percent in 1977 to 17.2 percent in 2012. The center and north of the country recorded more modest increases (from 5.5 percent to 9.5 percent and from 5.8 percent to 7.4 percent). For an overview of employment and unemployment trends from 1977 to 2012 see: <[https://www.istat.it/it/files//2013/04/Report-serie-storiche\\_Occupati-e-disoccupati2.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files//2013/04/Report-serie-storiche_Occupati-e-disoccupati2.pdf)> (last accessed February 2019). For a broader temporal perspective on unemployment in Italy and its statistical treatment, see Alberti (2016).
11. Following the approval of the special measures (Legislative Decree 81/2000 and art. 50 of Finance Bill, 2003), their numbers dropped to 69,268 in 2003 and to 19,984 in 2010. According to the National Institute of Social Security, there were around 15,000 beneficiaries in 2015. See: <<https://www.inps.it/nuovoportaleinps/default.aspx?itemdir=46860>> (last accessed February 2019).
12. “Il Piano straordinario per il lavoro—Per un lavoro di cittadinanza” <[http://cgilpuglia.it/archive/news/documenti/1146\\_PQ62D.pdf](http://cgilpuglia.it/archive/news/documenti/1146_PQ62D.pdf)> (last accessed February 2019).
13. The decree was passed in January 2019. See: <[https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2019/01/17/news/reddito\\_di\\_cittadinanza-216790041/](https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2019/01/17/news/reddito_di_cittadinanza-216790041/)> (last accessed April 2019). For a critical appraisal, see Saraceno (2018).
14. This can be explained by the prominence of women with secondary education on the public job center’s unemployment lists. Women with only compulsory education are less present, meaning they are not even registered among the “active population” in the unemployment lists (see Mingione et al. 1999: 15). This aspect of inequality and misrecognition within the female population is not addressed in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup>. In the early 1990s, unemployment increased to 30.5 percent of the labor force, with even higher rates for women (40.9 percent) and youth (73.4 percent)—corresponding to employment rates of 17.3 percent and 20.9 percent respectively (see Table 3.1). Between 2015 and 2006, the job centers recorded that 30 percent of the active population was in search of employment.

<sup>16</sup>. Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, *Relazione sul fenomeno criminale del contrabbando di tabacchi lavorati esteri in Italia e in Europa*, March 6, 2001, p. 58. See also “La seconda vita dei contrabbandieri,” *La Repubblica*, April 4, 2005.

<sup>17</sup>. Brindisian residents could only apply to the projects submitted to their sub-provincial unit (called *ambito*), which included the urban area plus a nearby town, with a total population of almost 110,000.

<sup>18</sup>. The projects were: public administration (archive digitalization); urban green maintenance; network for social inclusion (Home Care Assistance Program), preservation and fruition of environmental heritage.

<sup>19</sup>. According to ISTAT (2018), service jobs (including caregiving, mostly done by immigrant female workers) accounted for the largest share of estimated irregular employment (47.2 percent) in 2016. CENSIS/Confcooperative (2018) estimates an 8.3 percent increase in irregular employment during the crisis years (2012–15), with higher incidence in southern Italy. In 2015, paid domestic labor and caregiving accounted for 58.3 percent of estimated irregular employment.

<sup>20</sup>. Households would save money by doing house repairs on their own or by postponing regular maintenance work. One interlocutor also stressed that the availability of cheap materials and online do-it-yourself tutorials had further reduced the informal market for house repairs and maintenance.

<sup>21</sup>. The job stabilization plan was eventually approved and implemented in two phases in 2018, leading to the formal hiring of all workers on part-time contracts. The situation of the Lsu workers described in this chapter, based on research carried out in 2015 and 2016, is common to all subsidized workers who remain employed in public administrations. In 2017 the national public broadcasting company RAI addressed the issue with a dedicated reportage with the telling title “Socially humiliated” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3q7MjniZrs>> (last accessed March 2019).

<sup>22</sup>. <<http://www.brindisitime.it/nasce-con-i-cobas-un-comitato-spontaneo-dei-disoccupati-del-cantieri-di-cittadinanza/>> (last accessed February 2019).